

Kalin's True Stories

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A Wes Craven Romance - Robo Tripping

- Sunday, February 28, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/wes-craven-romance-rob-tripping/>

Sometime in 1998 I drank a four ounce bottle of Robitussin Maximum Strength and smoked a bunch of weed. This combination gives a person a high that is as powerful as mushrooms, acid or ecstasy, but with its own unique psychoactive flavor.

About an hour into my trip, my roommate, who had not joined me in my drug use this night, asked me if I wanted to go see *Scream 2* with a few other friends. I jumped on the idea, as I wanted to get out of the apartment.

However, *Scream* was not the kind of movie I would normally see, and the idea that I would be seeing it tonight had never crossed my mind, so my thoughts had no frame of reference to hold on to.

My Robo-mind didn't feel like seeing a horror movie. I wanted to see a romance. To my forward reasoning, it wasn't that I didn't want to see a horror movie, it was that I didn't realize that horror movies even existed. The idea was absurd. Why would anyone enjoy watching people get killed? So even though I could remember enjoying horror movies when I was a kid, the idea was foreign and I went to the theater having no idea what to expect.

When the movie got moving I immediately latched on to the sub-plot of the reporter woman played by Courtney Cox and the deputy played by David Arquette who have a budding romance. There was actually only a little time devoted to this plot, but I decided that this was the center of the movie, and was what the director had intended everyone to focus on.

There was all this killing going on in the background, and people who were scared, and all worried and distracted by the killing. If I had been on mushrooms or acid I probably would have been disgusted and horrified and had to walk out, but Robo is a little different and for me isn't as likely to accentuate negative emotions.

All the killing didn't affect me one way or the other. I found it boring more than anything else, and just wanted to get back to the dialogue between Dewey and the reporter lady. However, I understood the importance of the killing as background. It was painting a picture of a society of murder. I didn't realize the characters weren't used to this kind of thing. I thought Wes Craven was portraying a whole society gone horribly wrong where everyone's killing each other.

So at the core of *Scream 2*, as I saw it, was the story of this new love, trying to grow in the midst of all this horror, and even though they have their lives and their friend's lives to worry about, they still stop and risk death so they can steal a kiss and take time for what's really important. The whole point was to show the power of love and that no matter how torn apart and psychotic our society becomes, love will always find a way to survive. I had to shake my head at the genius of it and at the end of the movie, I couldn't understand why people weren't standing and cheering.

After I sobered up I laughed and reminded myself that it was a horror movie, not a romance.

Over a decade later (September 20th, 2009 to be exact) I saw Courtney Cox on *Late Night with Conan O'brian*, and she mentioned that she had played the reporter on *Scream* and that she had married someone from that movie. I had never known nor cared who had played those roles until that night, so I got on the internet and discovered that the reporter and the sheriff from my romance delusion had been married ever since they did *Scream 2*.

[Robitussin High](#) - my blog post about this story

Alekson

- Saturday, November 13, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/alekson/>

My roommate, Aleks, burst from his room one afternoon in 1998 as I sat on the couch in the living room. “Do you feel that?” he asked.

“Feel what?”

“That evil...”

“You feel an evil presence?”

“Yeah... a demon... an evil force just descended on us.”

“I don't feel anything.” I looked up to see his face clenched, red with anger.

“I'm telling you, something evil is here. Someone is casting an evil spell or something...”

I sighed. “That's called your imagination, Dude.”

“I can't believe you don't feel that...”

An abrupt knock on the door made Aleks freeze. His lip curled back. No doubt he would use this as evidence that he had some kind of psychic connection, despite the fact that random visitors were quite common at our apartment.

Aleks ran to the door and looked through the peephole. “Fucking bitch,” he said, and threw the door open.

Our ninety-five pound little friend Allison stood in the doorway in her bright, flowery hippie dress, ornate woven purse slung over her shoulder and a latte in hand. Allison was a 20 year old single-mother of a two year old son, who I presumed was at her parents house.

Aleks and Allison had been friends for a few years. Both were into magic, and both on several occasions had told me that they shared some kind of spiritual bond. Lately, however, Allison had been getting into areas of magic of which Aleks did not approve.

“You evil fucking bitch!” Aleks shouted. “That was you just now!”

“Well nice to see you too,” Allison replied. “What are you talking about?”

“You were casting spells on me from the parking lot. You were directing them straight at me! What did you do to me? What spells did you cast on me just now?”

“I didn't do anything,” she said as she pushed through the door.

“No, you're not coming in here!” He moved to block her.

“Calm down there, Buddy,” she said as she slipped past him. “I'm not gonna hurt you. You don't really have the authority to kick me out anyway since your name's not on the lease.”

So Aleks looked at me. “Please Dude, kick her out. You don't want this evil presence here—you don't know what kind of spells she's casting.”

“Gimme a break, Dude,” I replied.

“Yeah, magic doesn't work on him,” Allison said. “He's immune or something.”

“Yeah, I bet you've tried all kinds of sick shit on him, like you did to Josh.” (Aleks was referring to an incident where Allison had gone to our friend Josh's house in the middle of the night with a can of gasoline, burned a symbol in his lawn and covered it with flower petals in an unsuccessful attempt to get him to fall in love with her. Unfortunately I never did get the whole story behind that.)

“If you were feeling any kind of evil presence it was your own,” Allison said. “I've been shielding myself from you lately. You're kind of a whirlwind of psychic activity, and some of it scares me. If you felt anything it was yourself bounced back at you.”

“Bullshit! After some of the twisted shit you've been doing lately, you expect me to believe that evil power was all in my mind?” He looked at me. “Kalin, I pay half the rent around here.”

“Just go hide in your room, Aleks,” Allison suggested. “I promise I won't do anything.”

“This is my house!”

“You bring home people I don't like,” I said. “...like when I'm trying to sleep. Gimme a break. It's Allison. She's harmless, Dude.”

“You don't know the evil she's capable of!” Aleks paced frantically and panted as he shouted.

“Aleks, there's not a shred of me that believes any of this.”

“At least you're not as crazy as this guy,” Allison said, pointing toward me.

“You heard me say she was casting spells before she ever knocked!” he said.

“All you said was 'evil presence' and you talk like that all the time,” I said. “She parked her car right in front of your window. You probably heard it subconsciously... or it could just be a coincidence. Either way I'm not kicking her out, Dude. Just calm down and be cool, Man. You're not gonna help the situation with this attitude.”

For the most part Aleks was a kind and generous person, willing to jump up to help a friend, even if it meant sacrificing the better part of his day, and always seemed eager to share anything he owned with anyone who needed it. But some days he would simply go crazy like this and I kept thinking there should be some way to bring him back verbally. Unfortunately I had never found the right combination of words.

Allison laughed. “Aleks suddenly came within my shield and had to deal with his own demons that he tries to force on everyone else.”

“Get the fuck out you fucking bitch!”

“Come on Aleks, you clearly don't have proper control over your energy. Quit trying to blame it on everyone else and find your center.”

Aleks began stomping about and screaming obscenities. Allison closed her eyes and shook her head. “You're acting like such a baby right now.”

Aleks stomped off to the kitchen.

Allison turned to me. “What's his problem?”

“I don't know,” I said. “This came out of left field.”

There was a rustling in the kitchen and the clank of the silverware drawer.

“What's he doing?” Allison said with a tilt of the head.

A moment later Aleks was back in the living room with my big chef's knife in hand. This knife had originally belonged to the restaurant where I worked, but one of the cooks left it too close to the grill, melting the handle. It was still perfectly usable for me, since I hold my knives close to the blade, so I had taken it home.

Allison gave a playfully fearful gasp and a chuckle. “What're you gonna do with that?”

I rolled my eyes and sighed. “Aleks...” Before I could finish, he was already moving around the couch.

“Are you out of your mind?” said Allison just before he jumped forward to grab her by the hair, forcing her into her seat.



The actual knife. I still use it for chopping meats and vegetables.

He put the knife to her throat. “I fucking warned you! I told you get the fuck out of my house! I'm only gonna tell you one more time! Get the fuck out!”

Allison laughed. “Oh, yeah, sure...”

Aleks curled his lips as he screamed, his voice crackling with the frantic force. “Get the fuck out! Get out you evil fucking witch!”

Allison's expression darkened slightly. “Oh, my God, you're serious. You're serious right now...”

I froze, wanting to jump forward and push him away, but the coffee table was a big enough obstacle that Aleks would see me coming, having just enough time to make one very poor decision. I knew Aleks well enough to know that he had no intention of actually going through with something like this, but I couldn't trust his split-second reactions, so any move I made would increase Allison's chances of being cut.

“Yeah I'm fucking serious!” he screamed, bending down to blast her in the face with his breath. “Get out now! Get the fuck out!”

“Or what?” she said. “Are you gonna cut me, Aleks, because you thought I was sending you bad vibes? You gonna kill me? Give me a break.”

Aleks seemed to struggle for a moment to calm himself, the sound of his breath whistling between his teeth. "Look, just get up and leave and I'll put the knife away... no harm done, okay. I promise you, just get out and take your evil spells with you and I swear I won't hurt you."

"Nah," Allison replied, raising a questioning eyebrow, but otherwise remaining motionless. "I don't think so."

Aleks paused for a quick moment before losing his composure again. The knuckles gripping her hair tightened and he pushed her further back into the seat. "You fucking crazy bitch, you don't know what I'll do!"

"Oh, yeah, I'm the crazy one here. Try looking at yourself. Besides, I know exactly what you're gonna do... probably better than you."

Aleks screamed for another long moment, calling her names and accusing her of more witchcraft, as I sat frozen in silent terror, watching his face grow tighter and redder with every passing moment. His hand, still holding the blade cleanly against her neck, began trembling. Allison sat motionless with a simple, questioning smirk on her face, as though Aleks were playing some stupid practical joke she knew would backfire.

"Aleks!" I shouted. "Put the knife away. Take a look at yourself. Please, Man. Just look at what you're doing right now. We're all friends here, Man."

"Why can't you tell her to get out? You better hope I don't kill her! Just tell her to get the fuck out or I swear to God--"

"Kalin isn't gonna kick me out," Allison said. "He knows better than that--"

"Well maybe you should just--"

"No," Allison cut me off. "If I give in to this, it's just going to teach him that using violence can help you get what you want... I don't want to find out that Aleks learned from this experience and robbed some bank. I will not be reinforcing that kind of behavior. You're gonna need to make a choice. You can kill me and suffer the consequences or you can go hide in your room."

"I swear to God, Aleks, you will get no help from me," I said. "You do anything, I'm calling the cops and I'm not gonna help you in any way shape or form, lets get that clear right now."

Aleks started screaming again, mostly babbling the same order to get out, and telling her she was an evil presence.

Allison waited patiently for him to finish, her eyes trained on his, but he just continued on and on, screaming inches from her face and stomping his feet.

I could think of nothing more to say than, "Please put the knife down!" I started shaking and began glancing around the room for a weapon. I debated telling her to leave, as I knew I could end all this with a few simple words, but as much as I wanted to, I was forced to agree with Allison that it would not be the right thing to do. Unless you support terrorism, you shouldn't reward it.

"Okay, this has gone far enough," Allison said. "This is pathetic. You have no intention of doing anything. You're not that stupid. I know people who would cut your throat and have no problem getting away with it. How long would you last in prison, Aleks... huh? You can't even take care of yourself in the real world. We know you won't put yourself in that situation, so you're out of your mind if you think you're gonna scare me with your little attempt at acting tough."

Aleks shouted, trying to drown her out, bobbed his head and stomped his feet, but kept the knife against her throat. "This is my house! I have a right to peace in my house! I don't come into your home, cast spells at you and refuse to leave when I'm not welcome!"

"Aleks, please," I said. "I invited her in. She's perfectly welcome here."

"You're a spoiled child," Allison said. "Desperate for any kind of control, so you throw a baby's tantrum, and no one cares."

Even when you go off the deep end you still can't affect people. Think about that. All this rage and insanity and you're still a pathetic joke. You thought I'd be all teary eyed and beg for my life, but all I feel is sorry for you... truly, truly sorry for you."

Aleks screamed incoherently for a quick moment before shouting, "What is wrong with you! All I want is for you to leave! That's all!"

"I won't reinforce childish behavior. If you want to control others, you must first learn to control yourself." She glared up at him, focused and scolding. "It's time for you to make a decision. You wanna be a big boy... pretend to be a big man... then make a decision. Either kill me and suffer the consequences--" She laughed briefly. "--most of which you know you can't handle. Or you can put the knife down and go cry in your room and think about your decision-making strategies." She paused for a response. "We all know what you're gonna do. Me leaving is not up for negotiation so you've got two choices."

He shouted but she cut him off, calmly but very loudly, "Make your choice! You're just drawing out your own humiliation. The longer you stand here the more you look like an idiot. I mean, seriously, take a look at yourself right now."

He tried to shout again but she immediately cut him off. "Make your damn choice. I'm getting sick of this."

They went back and forth in a loud exchange, Aleks shouting about his personal space and Allison simply repeating, "Make your choice."

Finally Aleks simply screamed, bent down to bump foreheads with her and shouted, "Fucking bitch!" He took a step back, turned and stormed around the couch and back toward his bedroom and slammed the door.

I sat in shock, my jaw most likely agape and mouth dry, though I can't remember as my eyes were trained on Allison, expecting her to break down and whimper in terror or run to the phone and call the police as though her whole persona had been an act. Instead she simply stared into the hall for several long seconds with a curious tilt to the head. After a moment she turned back to me and chuckled. "Well... that was certainly different. I don't even know what to say to that... talk about going off the deep end..." She settled back into the couch, fixed her hair and took a sip of coffee.

Allison stuck around for an hour or two while Aleks hid in his room and we talked about a number of things, though most in some way related to the incident.

"So, you're not going to call the cops on him or anything, are you?" I asked. "I honestly think that would just make him worse."

"Yeah, I agree. That would just be vengeance, and I won't stoop to his level. Besides, I'm still more scared of cops than I am of Aleks. He couldn't sense me reading his mind earlier. He kept telling me he would never hurt me and he had no idea. It's like our souls are bonded and he recognizes it but has no clue how it works. You must have sensed something, didn't you? Couldn't you feel the psychic energy? I mean, I could almost see it... wow, that was such a trip..."

"That's just adrenaline and a bunch of emotions..." I replied. "Aleks went psycho because he believes in witches."

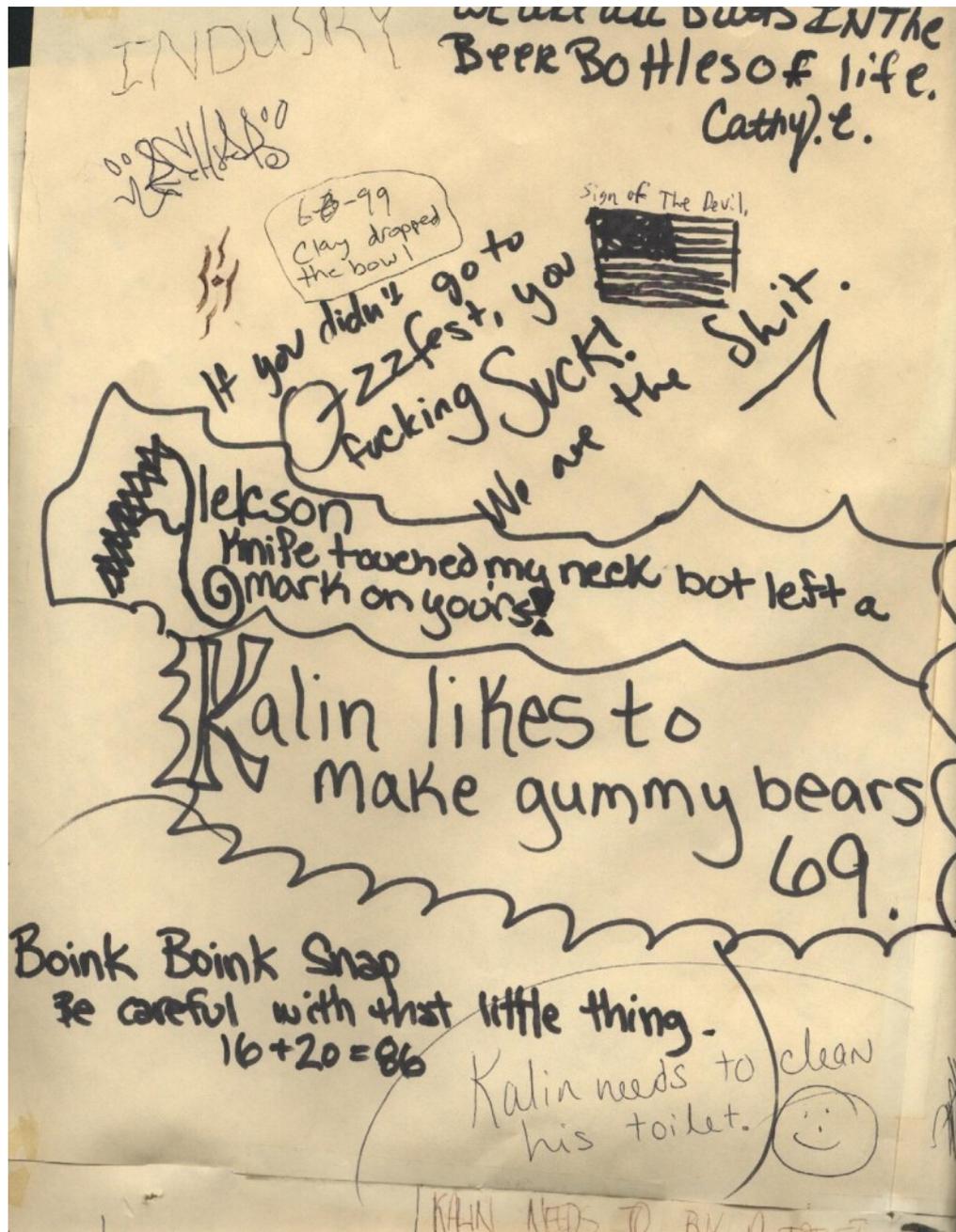
"You still don't believe in any of this? Even after what you just saw?"

"Uh... no... what I just saw makes me even more certain it's just imagination. If you guys have such an inside knowledge on how the universe works how come neither of you can hold a job?" But I still thought she was hiding some trauma and didn't want to push her too hard. And I wondered what our world would be like if every victim reacted like Allison. If even a small percentage of victims had her courage, society could put an end to threat-related crime. Without the victim mentality that threat-crimes rely on, they would be powerless, so I had no choice but to have deep respect for Allison for caring more about society and Aleks than for herself, even in the midst of such a situation.

So I simply said, "All this psychic power stuff... it's just your emotions running wild."

She rolled her eyes. "Oh Kalin... you're crazy."

A few days later Allison came back to visit, but called first so that I would have time to warn Aleks. She sat down in my hallway and wrote a phrase on my collective graffiti-board that I had taped to the wall: "Alekson: Knife touched my neck, but left a mark on yours."



A scan of one page of my "wall"

Amtrak Weed

- Friday, February 04, 2011

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/amtrak-weed/>

I was riding the Amtrak from Chicago Illinois to Seattle Washington, going home after visiting relatives and on the second day decided to get drunk. Normally I'm more of a pot smoker, but figured I couldn't get away with it on a train in the middle of the day. I went to the café car, which was downstairs from the observation deck, at 4:00 PM when happy hour started. I ordered six cans of margarita and tequila sunrises and sat down to play poker with an older group sitting at one of the booths. I played for several hours before they left for the diner car and I moved to the back of the café to play poker with some more rowdy individuals.

The leader of this group of drinkers was a guy who called himself Arkansas, a large college age man, who seemed like the type who would have been a football playing jock if not for his love of alcohol and parties. Arkansas was very loud, excited, and clearly enjoying his trip.

When I came back and introduced myself, Arkansas informed me that he had recently declared that everyone in the café car should be referred to by the state they were from. I introduced myself as Washington. We also had Idaho, an elderly lady who also enjoyed her alcohol and was sure to let me know that even though her name was Idaho, she was not a ho. I believe a man was named Ottawa (we nicknamed him Canada) but I don't remember much about him. There was also California, a guy who liked to party, but wouldn't drink with us at that time, because his eight year old son, California Junior was also hanging out with us.

California Junior had a strange toy laptop that had dozens of educational games that he had clearly played many times before. He sat for hours punching buttons on that thing, playing game after game, getting nearly perfect scores every time. The games however, were not easy to understand and the rest of us tried to look over his shoulder and simply could not understand what he was doing or what the game wanted him to do. Some of us tried to play it and all but California were baffled by it. Apparently this kid had studied the instructions or something.

For happy hour we had all gotten cups of pretzels, crackers and cheetos, and we used these snacks as poker chips, in honor of the old Roseanne sitcom.

Idaho had snuck some hard liquor onboard, and for a reason I don't recall had transferred it into a wine bottle instead of sneaking it on in something less suspicious. We took a few shots when the café attendant wasn't looking.

As the hours passed, there were several others who came to drink and play poker for shorter periods so there was always four or five players passing snacks back and forth.

Arkansas continued drinking, along with the rest of us, while California looked longingly at the alcohol. Arkansas continued insisting that everyone call themselves by their state, and eventually started getting up to introduce himself to everyone who came into the café car and explain the naming convention. We all continued getting drunker as the night wore on, but Arkansas was still the leader of our pack of total strangers and was definitely the loudest, drunkest, and seemed to be having the most fun.

Eventually California Junior went to bed and California finally started drinking a little after midnight. He had a couple beers as the café car started clearing out. But soon the café attendant decided to close the alcohol sales for the night since he had been putting up with about eight hours of rowdiness and the only people who wanted alcohol were in our group.

Idaho got off somewhere in Idaho after chugging the last of her private stash, and it was just Arkansas, California and I left in the car. Arkansas expressed his admiration of Idaho and her ability to still be an alcoholic that far into old age.

But California did not seem happy and was complaining that he was still sober.

The attendant closed up the little snack stand at the end of the car and left to go to bed.

At this point we had finally given up on poker and had cleaned up all the snack mix and the rest of our garbage from the evening. I grossed them out by eating a few crackers before throwing them away.

I sat down in a booth facing Arkansas. California sat in the booth behind me, and we chatted, though I don't remember the subject.

Suddenly, practically mid-sentence, Arkansas got up and said, "I'm going to bed," and marched off, up the stairs to the observation deck which connected to the passenger cars.

California came around to sit in the same booth with me and started complaining about how Arkansas had gotten him cut off and went on about how responsible he had been for not drinking in front of his son, and how it was so unfair. I gave him the rest of my last beer which seemed to brighten his mood a little.

But several moments later a couple Amtrak employees came down and came up to California. "We heard a rumor that you have a weapon on board," one of them said.

California looked shocked. "No, of course not. Who said that?"

"A woman said she overheard someone talking about it. It's probably just a misunderstanding, but we need to double check whenever anybody even jokes about it. You didn't threaten anyone with a knife, or say that you had one?"

California shook his head.

"You understand that even if you don't have a knife, just threatening someone or even joking about it can get you kicked off. We can stop the train anywhere over any kind of threat."

"Yeah, that seems fair," said California. "But I don't have any weapons and I never said anything like that."

"Okay, well you need to come with us so we can get this straightened out."

"Sure, no problem."

And they left.

I was then left in the café car with another Amtrak employee who was eyeing me very suspiciously. I took the remnants of my last beer and finished it.

After a few minutes I went upstairs to sit by myself in the more comfortable seats and stare out the observation lounge windows at the scenery passing by. The employee followed me up and wandered away.

I spaced out for about ten minutes before Arkansas came through the door from another car. He walked rapidly, head down. He stopped when he saw me. "Hey," he said. "What are you doing up? I'm just heading back to my seat before the shit goes down."

"What shit?" I asked.

He cocked his head. "The psycho... that one guy... I don't know his name... we were calling him California." And suddenly, Arkansas didn't seem to be having fun any more. "Do you not remember that? Did he not seem like a psychopath to you?"

I shrugged. "A little whiny cuz he couldn't drink," I said.

"Yeah; no shit. And I thought I was a problem drinker... Did you not see him pull the knife? You were sitting right between us."

The door to the next car opened and California walked in. Arkansas turned around and threw up his hands. "Dude, I don't

want no trouble.”

“You son of a bitch narced me off,” California said, pointing at Arkansas.

“I told one girl!” Arkansas replied. “She was the one who ratted you out.”

“Bullshit!”

“Did you not see me lying for you?”

“Only because you know I’d fucking kill you if you didn’t.”

“Dude!” Arkansas said. “Chill out! We need to make nice or we’re all getting kicked off. I just want to go to bed now, okay?”

“You don’t care about anyone but yourself,” California said. “You just acted like a jackass all night and just didn’t care that I got fucked over.”

Arkansas gave a frustrated sigh. “I’m sorry, alright! Can I just go to bed now?”

“So go.”

“You’re standing in my way.”

“So just walk past me.”

And they stared at each other.

“You afraid I’ll stab ya?” California asked. “You afraid of me?”

“Yeah,” Arkansas replied. “I thought we’d established that. You pulled a knife on me and I lied to the conductor for you. Give me a fucking break, dude. I’m sorry I got you cut off, now chill out.”

And California seemed to calm down a bit and looked over at me. “Washington! What’re you doin’?”

“Just watchin’ the drama,” I said. “It’s like 90210.”

And they got a mild chuckle, but still California stood threateningly, blocking Arkansas’ route back to his seat.

“So you threatened him with a knife?” I asked California. “While we were downstairs and you were sitting in the booth behind me.”

California didn’t respond.

“Yeah, exactly,” Arkansas said.

“So why didn’t you warn me instead of leaving me with someone pulling knives on you?”

“Because he only cares about himself,” California said.

“Dude, can you please just step aside and let me go back to my seat,” Arkansas said. “Seriously... I don’t want to do this anymore.”

“Wow,” I said. “You guys are serious... I thought you were pulling one over on me... I was gonna ask if you guys wanted to go smoke some weed, but I guess that’s a bad idea now.”

And they both looked at me. "You have pot?" asked Arkansas. "For real?"

"Yeah." I shrugged. "Got like a half ounce."

They both seemed shocked. "You're fuckin' crazy bringin' that shit on the train," California said.

"You're the one pulling out knives," I replied. "But we're obviously not getting along here so I think we should all just go back to our seats and sleep this off."

"Is it good weed?" Arkansas asked. "Don't you guys get BC hydro up there?"

I nodded. "It's better than what you can get in Arkansas; that's for sure."

"Well..." Arkansas said. "I'd kinda like to smoke... I haven't smoked since the east coast."

"Yeah," California said. "I could go for a bowl." He held out his hand to Arkansas. "I'm sorry I pulled the knife on you, bro... I didn't mean it like a real threat... but it was totally out of line..."

"Okay, cool," Arkansas replied, shaking his hand. "I'm sorry for being such a jackass all night."

And they looked at me. "So how the hell are we going to get away with smoking on a train?"

"Just smoke in the smoking car," I said.

"Oh, hell no," California said. "If anyone came in we'd be busted instantly."

"It's two in the morning. I've been here for half an hour and haven't seen anyone. Even if someone did come in, we could hide the weed. You guys both smoke cigarettes, so light up cigarettes to cover the smell. Most people don't know what weed smells like, and if they do, they're usually cool with it."

"No way," California said. "What we need to do is go downstairs, right next to the smoking room and open the emergency window and blow the smoke outside."

"Are you crazy dude?" I asked.

"There's no alarm on it," he said. "It's just a window. You can just pop it off and on. I've done it before."

"No way," I said. "If we get caught fucking with their emergency systems they'll kick us off for sure. Most people don't care if you smoke a little weed."

California laughed. "Oh, yeah, like we're endangering people's lives..."

"I'd like to think that Amtrak cares more about the safety of their passengers than they do about catching a couple pot smokers. If we remove the emergency window, then we're fucking with their emergency systems, and we're smoking weed... plus we're smoking outside of the smoking room! Arkansas, back me up here!"

Arkansas put his head in his hands. "Please, God, I just don't want to argue anymore. Let's just open the emergency exit and get it over with."

I shook my head. "No. You're both freakin' crazy. You're making this way more complicated than you need to. All we need to do is act cool. It's my weed, my pipe, and my lighter, and I say we're not opening a fucking emergency exit to smoke a bowl."

They both looked at each other and sighed nervously. "Okay," said California. "It'll probably be okay... this train seems deserted now anyway."

"Okay," I said. "Wait here and I'll grab my weed from my suitcase." But just as I took the first step, the door on the far end of

the car opened and the conductor came jogging toward us, followed by two other Amtrak employees.

"I just got word that you said something about a gun," he said to California.

"What!" California replied. "Why are people always accusing me of things?"

The conductor looked at Arkansas. "And I've talked with another individual who claims to have overheard you telling the story of this gentleman pulling a knife. Are you sure he didn't threaten you?"

Arkansas looked shocked. "Nah, dude," he said. "We're buddies." He gave California a playful jab to the shoulder. "I wouldn't protect someone who pulls a knife on me... I'm not retarded."

"But now we have a third person claiming that you made a comment about having a gun or shooting someone." the conductor said. "You're gonna need to come with us. Now."

And he led California off.

One of the two employees stayed behind and asked us repeatedly if we'd seen any evidence of California's weapons. We both just shook our heads.

"I suggest the two of you head to bed now," he said.

"That sounds like a great idea," Arkansas said, turning toward the door. "Have a nice life, Washington."

I went back to my seat and tried to sleep. About ten minutes later the train stopped at a random location for about a minute, then started up again.

Attack of the Crows

- Sunday, January 31, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/attack-crows/>

One day I walked a couple blocks to a little barbeque restaurant called Speakeasy's. I purchased a pulled pork sandwich with a side of herb and garlic mashed potatoes, a fresh corn muffin, and some spicy pepper coleslaw. Normally I would eat in the restaurant, but today I got my meal to go.

On the walk home, I passed a KFC. Along the power lines crows would congregate to scavenge the parking lot. Today they were out in full force and greeted me with a sudden barrage of cawing as I walked into their midst.

Their cries became louder quite rapidly and a couple more showed up nearby, landing just above me in the trees or power lines. I didn't pay them much attention until a black streak crossed in front of me and I felt the wind from the bird's wings. Stunned, my eyes followed him, but just before he landed, another movement caught my eye and I turned just in time to see another crow pulling out of a dive to skim just over my head.

I ducked, putting my free hand over my head as another crow dove at me, then another and another, each pulling back at the last second, getting bolder with every drop until I could swear I felt feathers brushing against my arms and my eyes sealed shut in fear of being ripped out by hungry talons.

I knew immediately what they wanted, the smell of my barbeque and mashed potatoes smothered in garlic, butter and herbs overwhelming even that of KFC.

But I wasn't about to give it up, so I kept my head down and tried to keep my arm above my head and pushed forward. There were four or five crows that kept at it for a block and a half, each diving at a nice rhythm, the next one starting his dive just as the previous one was pulling up to land. While not in flight they would caw without break, their screams overwhelming any other sounds in the neighborhood.

Finally I just stood up tall, knowing that these animals wouldn't willingly crash into my face and just tried to ignore them as the black streaks whipped across my vision, too fast and close to make out details. Finally within a block of my house, they gave up and retreated back to their home base at KFC.

So when I ate my barbeque dinner, it was especially delicious, but there had been a few points where my subconscious had wanted to just drop it and let them have it, and I imagined a six year old girl with a chicken wing being harassed by a bunch of hungry crows. They didn't get my food that day, but no doubt they had developed a successful and entertaining strategy and I had to give them props for that.

Beer Smokers

- Sunday, January 31, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/beer-smokers/>

I went to a park at the beach with two friends, Aleks, and his girlfriend, Jeneca. It was late night, probably after midnight and we had walked a couple miles to get here, just to hang out and smoke weed.

We sat down on a park bench that faced out to the ocean and loaded a bowl and started smoking. Halfway through the bowl, Aleks suddenly stopped and put away the pipe. "People are coming," he said, and motioned up the path toward three people walking toward us.

They were three males about college-age who looked like the type who had played football in high school, then joined a frat and became professional partiers. I shrugged to Aleks. "I wouldn't worry about them," I said.

But Aleks refused to bring the pipe back out. "You never know who you can trust," he said.

The three gentlemen approached us, and the biggest guy in front said, "Hey, you guys smoking weed?"

I was just about to answer an affirmative, because at first glance they seemed like nice guys, but Aleks blurted, "No! We're just looking at the ocean. We don't do that shit."

"Oh," the big guy replied. He paused. "Good. I fucking hate pot smokers... that's why we're down here... cuz hippies hang out here all the time so we're out looking to crack some skulls... I tell ya, there's nothing I like more than bashing in the faces of stupid pot smoking hippies." And he slapped his fist. "If you see any of those faggot potheads, you let us know and we'll take care of 'em."

"Okay, sure," Aleks said. "We haven't seen any tonight."

"Maybe we scared them all away," said one of the other guys on the path, and the three laughed.

"Let's go," said the third one.

"Have a nice evening guys," said the first guy, and the three turned and walked on down the path.

After they had turned the corner I looked at Aleks and he just grinned. "What did I say?" he asked. "I told you, some people are just psychos. You can't just trust random people you meet."

The ironic thing was that Aleks was normally very open about his pot smoking, and in fact this was one of the few times I can remember him being afraid to tell people he smoked pot.

"How could you tell?" I asked.

"Something about them," he replied. "They just had bad vibes."

We waited half an hour or forty-five minutes before going back to smoking our weed. We watched the three guys from a distance wandering out of the park, and finally finished our bowl after they had completely gone. Feeling more comfortable now, we continued wandering around the park, and the three of us walked out to the end of a long floating dock. We started smoking another bowl, and eventually let our guard down.

Halfway through our smoke, we all looked up to see the three guys walking down the dock toward us. I stuffed the pipe in my pocket as quickly as I could but clearly they had already seen what we were doing. It's not hard to see a lighter flickering in the darkness, even from a distance.

The leader of the three guys walked down the narrow dock with what looked in the darkness to be a simple, blank stare. I looked at Aleks and Jeneca and we all looked around, our gazes pausing on the water. It would be a cold swim, I thought, but we wouldn't die, and these dumb jocks probably wouldn't chase us through the cold, mercury infested bay. We backed up to the edge of the dock. Fortunately there was no railing to block our escape.

And the big guy came out into the larger portion of the dock that floated directly on the water and opened up his jacket, like people do in the movies when going for a gun, and I prepared myself to dive into the water as soon as I confirmed that he had a weapon.

But what he pulled out of his inside coat pocket was a huge blown glass pipe that would have cost sixty or a hundred bucks in a head shop. "Hey you guys wanna smoke some weed?" he asked.

And we simply stared back silently.

With his other hand he pulled a glass stash jar out of his pocket and popped the cork.

Immediately I got a whiff of his weed and could tell without even looking at it that he had some chronic. He loaded the pipe and offered it to Aleks who waved it away. "Why don't you start it," Aleks said.

The guy shrugged. "Oh, I see, you guys are nervous about us." He took a toke. "Sorry about that. We thought you guys were smokin' weed before, but then you were all like 'hell no', so I got scared... some people are just psychos... dumbasses who are all like 'We're only beer smokers around here.' I've met people who actually do go around finding hippies to beat up, and when you told me you weren't smoking weed... you just kinda had that narc vibe about you, and I got nervous... you never know who you can trust, you know..."

Blind For An Hour

- Sunday, January 31, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/blind-hour/>

I once lived with an individual named Aleks, who was... well... overly emotional about certain things... he also liked to drink. We both liked to drink.

One night we had a small party and started rapidly drinking our Poncho Villa tequila with my girlfriend Becca, Aleks' girlfriend Jeneca, our friend Jeremy, and a half dozen others.

Soon Aleks' glasses went missing and he began having a little flip-out session as he searched for them, complaining louder and louder of his inability to see. With every passing moment, he became more angry and insistent that everyone else stop what they were doing to help him search. For the most part, everyone was helping look, but still, Aleks became more and more upset, concluding that someone had stolen them out of hatred, to humiliate him.

But as his roommate, I wanted to calm him down, so that he wouldn't anger any neighbors or break up our party. I tried to convince him that he would be capable of dealing with a little difficulty seeing for an evening. Even if his glasses were permanently gone, it wouldn't be the end of the world. But he just shouted about how I couldn't understand what it's like to have such difficulty seeing or how hurtful it is that someone would put him in that situation.

On a whim I told him that I would close my eyes, and keep them closed until he found his glasses. For a few moments this calmed him down and he seemed to relax, but as he went back to searching for his glasses, I realized that now I needed to keep my eyes closed, possibly for the rest of the party.

So I felt my way back into the living room, explained my promise to my guests and had someone make me a drink, sitting down on the couch with my eyes tightly closed. Soon I realized the foolishness of what I had promised, because now I could not help search for the glasses. But instead I wandered carefully around my apartment, being the blind party host, directing others to change the music and mix the drinks and asking for updates on the glasses search.

After a time I resolved myself to keeping my eyes closed for the whole rest of the night, and wondered if Aleks still hadn't found his glasses by the time we went to bed, would I be able to remember to not open my eyes when I woke up?

But after nearly an hour, I heard the voice of our friend Jeremy behind me. "Hey, what's this?" he said, and I felt a hand on my back, slipping into my sweater pocket. "Hey, it's Aleks' glasses. Hey look Dude, I found your glasses. Kalin, what were they doing in your pocket?" But something didn't sound right to me, like he was holding back laughter.

"What?" I asked, still keeping my eyes closed, assuming he was joking. "You serious?"

A moment later Aleks confirmed, "Yeah those are my glasses."

"You're sure?" I asked, not wanting to accidentally break my promise if it turned out he was wrong.

"Yeah," Aleks replied happily. "I can see again!"

I opened my eyes and saw Jeremy staring at me, very concerned. "Where did you find those?" I shouted.

"They were in your pocket," he replied. "I saw them hanging out. Why the fuck would you do that to him?"

And suddenly everyone seemed to be glaring at me and I looked back at Jeremy, somehow seeing a falseness to him that I was certain of. "You son of a bitch," I said, and in my drunken anger, threw the only real punch I've ever thrown. He blocked some of my momentum but I still connected with the side of his head.

Fortunately Jeremy's a bit of a pacifist most of the time, so he simply backed up, waved his arms and shouted, "Dude, I didn't do anything!"

"You fucking did this to Aleks and then tried to frame me!" I shouted.

"Dude! I wouldn't do that."

"You're saying I did?" I asked.

"I don't know," he replied. "All I know is his glasses were in your pocket." He asked some of the others to confirm and they all nodded, that yes, they had seen him pull the glasses straight from my pocket.

But now that Aleks could see, he was even more angry than before, not knowing who he could trust, and both Jeremy and I spent some time trying to convince him that we were innocent as he stared suspiciously at everyone at the party.

An uncomfortable air hung over the gathering for a time after that, but still people stayed and continued drinking, and the only topic of conversation was the glasses fiasco.

After nearly an hour of suspicious finger-pointing from all sides, I found a moment alone with my girlfriend where she admitted that she had slipped the glasses in to my pocket, not recognizing what an issue it would become. "Jeneca took them and gave them to me because Aleks wasn't paying enough attention to her," she told me.

So I immediately got up and told Aleks who quickly started yelling at Jeneca who simply shouted back about how she was his girlfriend and he owed her a certain amount of attention and consideration and if he wasn't going to give it to her voluntarily, she had every right to take it.

Their fight continued for half an hour or so until finally she became so angry that she left, vowing to walk home, which was across town, what we figured would be about a five hour walk. Aleks seemed glad to see her go, and was finally able to calm down a little bit.

About half an hour later, Jeneca's older sister Julissa showed up and the drama started all over again when she found out we had let her sixteen year old sister walk across town alone after midnight. Almost immediately she demanded that Jeremy and Aleks pile into the back of her pickup truck to go looking for her.

So I was left at home with Becca and a few other friends. Thirty or forty minutes later, Julissa returned, followed closely by Jeneca.

"Have you guys seen Aleks or Jeremy?" asked Julissa.

"No, we thought they were with you." we replied.

"Shit," she replied. "We need to go back out looking for them."

"What did you do with them?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said. "I wasn't really paying attention. They were in the back of the truck most of the way, then I looked back and they weren't there any more."

So Julissa and Jeneca turned around and drove off again looking for them.

Twenty minutes later, Jeremy and Aleks came through the front door, both limping dramatically, and both with bloody scrapes across their hands and arms. They told a story of Aleks daring Jeremy to stand up in the back of the truck, Jeremy telling him he was a fool, and Aleks grabbing him to drag him to his feet, just as Julissa buzzed through a stop sign and turned a sharp corner. They both had tumbled out of the truck, fortunately just a few blocks from the house. They had tried to wave Julissa down, but she hadn't been paying attention, so they had limped slowly home.

By the time they were done washing their wounds, Julissa and Jeneca returned, relieved to see Jeremy and Aleks alive.

Then we sat down, took a few shots of Poncho Villa, and all was forgiven.

Cops have no Morals

- Sunday, October 30, 2011

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/cops-have-no-morals/>

This is a conversation I had with a police officer that dramatically changed my life and perception of society. I haven't told this story to too many people and like all of my stories, I'm pulling it from memory as best I can so the dialogue certainly is not verbatim.

In 1998 I was arrested for selling a few ounces of pot to an undercover cop. At the time I still believed that the police were the good guys. I already believed that marijuana and mushrooms were a huge benefit to society and believed that police and lawmakers simply didn't understand this and didn't realize people felt this way. I thought they were trying to make the world a better place and were just confused about certain details. In other words I somehow, despite being a drug dealer, still trusted the police to do the right thing. I wound up giving in to their pressure to join them and work with them, like a fool, buying their promises of immunity and safety.

But I still tried to talk to them... or at least the one officer I was working with. I had been pestering him for a while about his morals and rarely got a straight answer beyond his favorite phrase, "You've got to look out for number one." But I kept trying, kept pushing.

As we were on our way to a dealer's house for me to make my first purchase, I asked the officer about the ethics of arresting someone who is merely along for the ride on a drug deal, like a random passenger in the vehicle, not having anything to do with the actual deal.

"It doesn't matter. They know what they're doing. They know it's illegal."

"But they have no reason to believe there's anything wrong with it. You expect them to call the cops for something they know isn't wrong?"

"Well of course," he said. "It's illegal. It doesn't matter what their opinions are."

"But don't you think it's wrong?" I said. "Don't you think it's wrong to destroy people's lives over--"

And finally he seemed to be done with my moral pressure, and shouted the words that have echoed through my brain almost every day for over a decade. "Let me explain something to you, Kalin: cops don't care about right and wrong. How could we? We wouldn't be able to do our jobs if we did."

"No," I replied. "Everyone has some sense of what's right--"

"No!" he said. "You're wrong. What's important is legal and illegal. That's what holds our society together. I mean, when I'm at home with my family, yes, I try to do the right thing and I care about ethics, but when I have this badge on I shut all of that out, just like all police. I mean stop and think about it for a second, Kalin. What kind of fantasy world are you living in where you think everyone is working for the common good? How do you think we'd be able to do our jobs if we cared about right and wrong? Stop and imagine us going into someone's house to arrest them--a bank robbery suspect even--and I go in there with my guns and there's a four year old little girl screaming 'why are you taking my daddy?' and an old lady crying 'Boo hoo, whose gonna take care of me? I'm gonna die without my son.' The only way you can deal with that is to shut off all human compassion, forget about right and wrong and trust that the public made the right decision in building this system. You just gotta do your job."

"So you're a monster?" I asked.

"Label me whatever you want, but at the end of the day, society wants me like this and at the end of the day, they see me as the good guy and you as the bad guy, regardless of what's actually true. I'll admit to you that many of the people I've put in prison

were more ethical and noble than myself, but you know what? They're sitting in prison right now and I'm out here enjoying life. And yes, I sleep perfectly well at night. So if you think you can make me feel guilty by using a few moral or ethical arguments, you are sadly mistaken."

"Well, I refuse to let go of my sense of right and wrong," I said. (Even though by working with the police I kind of already had.)

"Then you're a fool," he replied. "I'm sorry if that's offensive, but you need to grow up. The world doesn't work the way your school teachers said it did. Everyone is in it for themselves. Do you really think the CEOs of all those companies really care about right and wrong? Do you think an insurance salesman cares, or anyone marketing their crap to the masses? What about politicians? Do you seriously think there's any politicians who would sacrifice their careers for the common good? If there are, I'll tell you they aren't going to make it very far. Do you really think anyone got to be a millionaire by being humble and doing the right thing? That's the secret, Kalin. That's the secret successful people don't want you to know. The secret to success in America is to stop caring about right and wrong. You've got to look out for number one. Yeah it's hard, but you can train your mind to shut out all those moral values that prevent you from getting anywhere in life. Nobody's ever gonna give you a prize for being a good person. You need to learn how to focus on number one, to manipulate and climb your way up instead of focusing on trying to make the world a better place. That's what all the successful people in our corporate America are doing. None of them are working toward the common good, Kalin. None of them."

I don't recall exactly what I said in response, though I know I was shocked. It was probably something cliché about the human soul or 'love will conquer all' kind of thing. Or maybe I was simply silent.

"I'm telling you," he said. "If you continue making decisions based on right and wrong, you will never get anywhere in life. Certainly not in America."

That was one of the most life-changing conversations I've ever had. I discuss this in [this blog post](#).

Cops on Ice

- Wednesday, August 04, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/cops-ice/>

The ground was covered in snow and the roads in ice one morning at 11:45 AM around 2005. I didn't like driving in this weather because we only had snow once every couple years. Normally I would simply walk everywhere during this kind of weather, but today I needed to get a couple videos back to Blockbuster before noon.

I turned onto the main road and slowly headed out toward the strip mall a couple miles away. Immediately a police car pulled up behind me and began following dangerously close. I was driving at about half the speed limit, but still felt that there was so much ice on the road I wouldn't be able to stop if someone stepped out in front of me, so I continued at the same pace.

As I drove on, I saw the officer becoming more and more agitated in my rear-view mirror. He would look to the other lane frequently, as though considering passing me, and as the minutes passed, his car came steadily closer to mine until I couldn't see his bumper in my mirror. I wanted to pull over and let him pass, but I was afraid he would hit me if I put my breaks on and that I would get stuck in the snow if I tried to pull off the road, so I simply continued on at the same speed, assuming he would flip his lights on if it was a real emergency.

Then I thought, wouldn't it be funny if he was going to the same place and is all agitated because he thinks he won't get his videos back on time. "Chill Dude!" I shouted. "We've got fifteen minutes till noon!" I laughed, but the idea passed quickly.

However, several minutes later when I arrived at the strip mall, the cop was still following me. I pulled into the parking lot and took a right to find a parking space. I could have pulled directly up to the curb in front of Blockbuster, but I never did, perhaps worrying that I'd wind up getting in someone's way.

The officer, however, drove past me and did just that: pulled up to the Blockbuster curb and hopped out.

As I walked toward the movie store with my three DVDs in hand, I watched the officer, also with three DVDs, march quickly to the slot and drop them in. He returned to his car as I started crossing the road, and I noticed that I would be passing immediately behind him to make a straight line to the drop box. I also noticed the K-9 decals on the side of the car. Fortunately today I wasn't carrying anything illegal, but even so, my fears and imagination run wild when I'm around cops.

Then I thought, wouldn't it be funny if he ran me over?

I didn't take the idea seriously, of course, so I passed immediately behind the car just as I heard the engine start up. However, the thought was on my mind, so when the car lurched backward and the bumper connected with my knee, I was ready for it. My hands slapped down on the top of the trunk and I leaned forward, thinking I could jump up onto the car to avoid being run over. Instead, the ground was so icy that my feet simply slid backwards and I was able to remain standing, letting the vehicle push me backward about a foot.

In the back seat, the dog popped into view, cocking his head at me.

Then the car came to a sudden stop and I turned to continue on my way to the drop box. The driver's door opened and the officer popped his head out. "Hey! Are you okay? Sorry about that. You just kinda came out of nowhere there buddy."

Here's my short little [blog post](#) about this story.

Delusional Shoplifting

- Sunday, January 31, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/delusional-shoplifting/>

So this one time when I was about 13 I went into a hardware store to buy a cd rack for my music collection. I stood in line at the checkout for about 5 minutes as two or three people had purchases to make before me. I paid for my cd rack and told the cashier that I didn't need a bag since it was only one item, and I also didn't need the receipt because I'd just throw it away on the way out anyway, so she threw the receipt in the garbage and started helping the next person in line.

I left and got more than halfway across the parking lot before I heard someone yelling behind me. I turned and saw a security guard racing toward me. "You! Kid! Stop!" he yelled. "Get back here!" He seemed to be getting more and more angry.

I stopped and just watched him, still wondering if he was even talking to me, figuring he'd run right past me toward someone else that I hadn't seen. But no, he stopped as he came closer. "You just stole that!" he accused. "You can't just walk out of there without paying! What, do you think I'm blind?"

"Huh?" I said, just feeling nothing but intimidation as this big man pointed a big round finger in my face.

"You just walked right past the register, without paying," he yelled. "I was standing right there and watched you grab it off the shelf and just walk right past the register. You think you can just get away with that? Come on; you're coming back into the store."

And all I could think to say was, "Huh?" But I started walking back to the store as the security guard stuck right close to me.

Am I going insane? I wondered. Am I like one of those multiple personality klepto maniacs?

But I tried to tell the man that I had stood in line for a good five minutes, and had paid for my purchase with like seven bucks cash.

"Yeah, sure," he said. "I'll believe that when I see the receipt. If you didn't steal that, then tell me, why didn't you grab a receipt? Why don't you have a bag?"

"ugghk", was all I could reply before gathering my thoughts. "I didn't need those things," I said.

And he scoffed and fell quiet as we walked back to the hardware store.

The walk seemed to take forever, and I kept thinking that we would get back to the register and I would recognize the same woman cashier but she would have no recollection of me. I would go to jail, and it would take some time for me to convince them that I had no recollection of stealing, and they'd force me through intense psychological evaluations and finally realize that I had a mental disorder that caused me to do horrible things and block them out of my mind. I would be institutionalized for ever and ever after that.

It felt like a dream.

We went back inside and there were still three or four people standing in line and the same woman, working by herself at the checkout. I walked up to her and the security guard followed, rolling his eyes, as though to humor me as I tried to fake my way out of the blame.

"Did this kid just buy this?" asked the security guard.

And for a moment I thought for sure the woman wouldn't remember me, but she took a quick look at me and said quickly, "Yeah, he was here like two minutes ago," and turned back to the next person in line.

“Did he pay for this?” asked the security guard.

The cashier turned back and rolled her head. “Yes, of course!” she snapped.

“Does he have a receipt?”

The cashier grunted, “It’s in the garbage, right there.” She pointed at the trash.

The security guard looked down, at that moment actually being closer to the garbage than the cashier. “Do you think you could find it for me?”

“You want me to go through the garbage for a seven dollar receipt?”

“Could you?” asked the security guard, suddenly speaking far more politely.

And the cashier muttered under her breath, turning away from her customer to dig through the garbage, “You have got to be kidding me,” she said, barely loud enough to be heard.

But fortunately she found it quickly as it was still sitting on top. The security guard looked at it for no more than five seconds, and set it back on the counter. “Okay, cool,” he said. “Sorry ‘bout that,” he said, like someone might say when they brush against you on the bus. He then promptly turned and walked away, and before even taking two steps he started whistling.

That was what I remember most about the story: that he started whistling to himself immediately afterward. He had just had a full-on delusion. He had *Stood there and watched me walk right past the cash register*. There’s no way to confuse something like that. But somehow he found these delusions so normal and acceptable that he could walk away whistling afterward.

At the time, being about 13, I did not realize it was a common strategy to lie to a suspect to trick them into admitting something. The idea that he had made up the story as an intimidation technique never crossed my mind.

And I stared at the back of the security guard as he walked away whistling happily, bobbing his head slightly to the tune playing in his mind. It took me a few seconds before I could move, and the other customers had to shuffle around me. I came out of my daze when I saw the cashier grabbing the receipt to throw it back in the garbage.

“No!” I stopped her, grabbing the paper before she could drop it. “I wanna hang onto that.”

Drunken Couch Surfing

- Sunday, January 31, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/drunken-couch-surfing/>

One night I went to a party and got rather drunk. It snowed that night, which was an extreme rarity, and we all went out and threw snowballs and walked through the park, soaking our feet.

I made it home a little after 3:00 AM, ready to hit the bed so I could be up again and off to work by 10:00. But at the end of the hall, next to the door to my tiny, one-room apartment, lay a man under a newspaper, curled tightly against the wall.

My landlord had warned me that homeless people might try to sleep there, as it was at the end of a dark hall and had a nice little open space. He'd asked me to kick them out or call him to kick them out, but I wasn't interested in doing that on a night when it was snowing. He looked like he was shivering a little and I debated for a moment giving him an old blanket from my closet.

But as I came closer, his orange sweatshirt looked rather familiar. "Jeremy?" I asked, peering over top to see if it was my old alcoholic roommate.

"Jeremy!" I said again. "Wake up. You wanna sleep on the couch?"

"Meh," he replied, and curled up tighter against the wall.

"Hey Jeremy... what're you doin', man?"

"Fuck off," he slurred.

I laughed. "You just wanna sleep out here all night?"

"Fuck off," he repeated. "I know what you're doing... trying to trick me... You're not real."

"Ha! No, I'm real—"

"Kalin!" he called. "You're never coming home! Oh God I just wait and wait and wait and you never ever come home!"

"I'm home now," I said.

"No!" he shouted. "You're not real." His voice turned into a low whine. "You're never coming home!"

"Dude! Come on! I'm right here. I'm home. Get up you drunk-ass."

"Fuck off!"

"Alright, whatever Dude," I said. "I'll leave the door unlocked if you change your mind."

I went inside, leaving the door hanging open, and dug into my closet to find an old blanket to throw on top of him, but as I returned I met him at the door. He stumbled through, holding himself up against the wall and finally fell onto my couch.

"Were you out partying?" he asked.

"Yup."

"Yeah, me too," he said.

“Yeah, I can tell.”

He pulled out his pipe. “Wanna smoke some weed?”

So we sat for about an hour and smoked some pot and chatted, then we both went to sleep.

In the morning my alarm went off, but Jeremy didn't stir from his place on the couch. I left for work and just left him there on the couch to sleep it off. When I came home that evening, Jeremy was gone and everything was as I'd left it.

A few days later Jeremy called me and started off slowly and carefully. “Um... I wanted to talk to you... and apologize to you... about something... so... I have a question... I woke up in your house the other day and I don't know how I got there. I looked at all the windows and I couldn't find anything broken... the door still worked and everything... but... did I break into your apartment the other night?”

Field of Dead Bodies

- Sunday, April 17, 2011

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/field-of-dead-bodies/>

Around 1998 I began experimenting with a wide variety of the safer, more natural recreational drugs like marijuana and psilocybin mushrooms. Shortly thereafter my drug use led me to experiment with religion, spirits and prayer (so technically marijuana *was* a gateway drug into something much more dangerous).

One day I took a dose of mushrooms with a couple friends and after the trip, we found ourselves in a little park overlooking the docks, filled with sail boats. I remembered years earlier, a friend's mom had won a little cruise and I'd gone down there with them and some guy took us out on a little evening harbor tour. I wished I could take one of those boats out now.

As I looked out on the rows and rows of boats, I suddenly realized that there was not a single empty space along the docks. There was row upon row of boats, possibly more than a thousand boats packed into this little space, and not a single one of them was actually in use. I imagined how many hours of work and how many millions of dollars worth of materials had gone into these boats simply to have them sit, tied to a dock and ignored.

I started feeling the mushrooms again as I stared at the boats, and reality suddenly began to distort into something twisted and evil. The water turned to blood, and the boats turned to bodies.

I heard a little girl screaming for her father, "Why? Why did you have to go?" Along the shore I saw small children crying, and I somehow knew they were sobbing because their fathers were not there. The dead bodies in the water were those men, but I knew they were not real. They were representations of the time that had been lost. Those children were not crying because their fathers were dead, they were crying because they were off building sailboats. It didn't matter if they weren't actually dead. All that mattered was that they couldn't be with their families.

I looked up at the sky, which seemed to be rapidly adjusting color to a deep, burning red, and a voice from above seemed to speak to me, though not in words. The voice came in mental concepts, or to be more specific, mathematics, beamed directly into my mind.

I saw the math laid out in front of me. Thousands upon thousands of hours that people had spent building these vessels, toiling day in and day out, away from their families, away from the things that actually meant something. Those hours added up to days, added up to months, years, and finally, they added up to people's lives. A 90 year old man has lived about 789,000 hours, so every 789,000 hours or so equals a person's life.

Things we do in life require work, so we all must make this sacrifice of life, but the question is, what do we do with those lives that are given to us? Do we use it to benefit the community or do we use it get ourselves a sailboat that we let sit at a dock where no one else could use it, and we don't even bother using it ourselves?

The voice from above forced me to look at this, to see our society and our wastefulness, selfishness, and these numbers... these sacred, larger-than-life numbers we call money and finances that we use to justify death, destruction, and loosely veiled slavery.

Free Drugs

- Friday, April 22, 2011

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/free-drugs/>

One day around '98, I was hanging out in my apartment with my roommate when our friend Geri showed up to hang out and smoke some weed.

“The craziest thing happened to me on the way over here. Check this out.” And Geri pulled out a condom, tied at the top, filled with about twelve little pills. “I was walking through the strip-mall at the bottom of the hill and passed this guy and he held out his hand as to give me a high-five. I didn't want to be rude so I gave the guy a quick high-five as I was walking and he just slipped this into my hand. I'd never seen the guy before in my life. So I just kept on walking. I didn't want to stop and ask, cuz I thought maybe the cops were watching him or something and he wanted to get rid of it... but I don't know... what if he thought I was somebody else... he could be a dealer who just gave them to the wrong person... or maybe he's just a nice guy who decided to give me some free drugs.”

So my roommate Kasper, and our other buddy Jean, immediately suggested that we start taking some and see what they are.

“We should just have one person take one,” I suggested. “Just in case there's something nasty in them.”

So Jean and Kasper both laughed at my paranoia. “What do you think the guy poisoned them or something – put some PCP in there?”

“You never know; there's nothing stopping them from doing something to those pills—“

“If you go through the drive-through, do you worry that your hamburger was poisoned?”

And I did see their point. If someone wanted to do something nasty like that they'd find a less expected way to do it. And I also wanted to try the drugs. Maybe they were something good...

But I had to leave to go to my mom's house, for a reason I do not recall, so I could not partake. Instead I watched my three friends each take a single pill. They wanted to pop another one, but I insisted that they stick to one each in case they were really potent or something.

So I took off on my motor-scooter to visit my mom. When I got there, I obviously didn't mention the condom-pills, but for some reason she decided to launch into a speech about my drug use. I found her lecture kind of ridiculous because she kept giving examples of problems associated with drugs that I'd never even tried. I had no interest in coke or heroin or meth or any of those things. I just wanted to smoke pot, maybe take a few mushrooms here and there and maybe occasionally have some fun with some prescription pain-killers or something, but no matter what I said, I couldn't seem to convince her that I was not rapidly destroying my life.

She insisted everyone who smokes pot eventually becomes a heroin or meth addict. I tried to argue, but she just kept insisting that you can't just stick with the soft drugs.

So I finally said, “Well, we'll have to wait and see. In ten years when I'm still smoking pot and doing just fine for myself, you'll see that you have no idea what you're talking about.”

“You'll be dead in less than a year,” she said.

“What?” I asked. “You really believe that?”

“Of course,” she replied. “There's no way anyone can survive the way you're going. You think you can survive ten years as a pot smoker?” She put her head in her hands. “You're absolutely out of your mind if you think you can survive like this...”

It was quite painful to see her that fearful, and I must admit that I understand why most people don't tell their parents about their drug use because they don't want to cause this kind of irrational panic.

Now, as a side note I should mention that this happened over ten years ago, and I have been smoking pot regularly ever since and have not changed my drug-use nor risk-taking policies. I'm now a programmer whose built web-applications that have been seen by millions of people, and I've written a few novels. I'm not dead in a ditch, and I'm still smoking pot.

So I left not too long after arriving, went home and got an update on the mystery-pills. "Here," Kasper said. "Take three."

And Geri and Jean both agreed that I needed to take three.

"It's only been like forty-five minutes," I said. "You've already taken three each?"

"Yeah, they weren't doing nothing."

"How do you know they don't take a long time to kick in?"

"Bah! They're fine. Three is good and fun, but one or two, you're just not going to feel it. What do you really think is gonna happen?"

And I just tried to think about it logically for a second. Almost every day I would go to a restaurant and get food from someone I had never met. When you go to McDonald's you never watch the food preparation. You have no way to know they haven't slipped something malicious into your burger, but you trust that they won't because there's just no reason for them to do it.

And I thought about riding my motor scooter through traffic. At any moment I could have been caught by a mirror and thrown in front of a truck and died, yet I hadn't given the danger a second thought.

And I realized that yes, there was a chance these drugs were tainted or something, but the chances of dying in a car accident on a Tuesday afternoon were far greater. And I didn't want to live like my mom, terrified that a demon would pop out of my drugs and change my personality.

So I popped three pills. Forty-five minutes later I started feeling very relaxed and comfortable, and felt funny, pleasurable sensations throughout my body, which lasted into the night. We hung out, laughed, watched TV, cooked some dinner, and ultimately had a very pleasant evening.

And that was it. End of story.

Sorry if you wanted a big dramatic vomit-filled hang-over, or a baby crawling on the ceiling or the vision of bugs all over my flesh. Nope. None of that happened. We simply had a nice, fun, relaxing evening.

Free Pepsi At Dennys

- Sunday, January 31, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/free-pepsi-at-dennys/>

One day when I was about 17, I went to Denny's with my girlfriend for lunch. Our waitress was an interesting lady, but brought us a satisfying meal of cheese sticks and coffee. After our meal we headed to the checkout counter to pay up.

At the edge of the counter, occupying the last barstool was an older man who appeared homeless, wearing old grungy clothes, with a collection of beat up bags and clothing scattered around him.

When we all arrived at the cash register, for some reason our waitress just stood there, holding our ticket, but didn't seem interested in touching the register.

Then the homeless man waved at me and said, "Hi, buddy, do you like Pepsi?"

And by chance, I did like Pepsi, in fact at the time I was buying a 16 ounce Pepsi almost every day, so I replied, "Sure I do."

"Great," he replied, pulling a hand out of his pocket to show me a handful of Pepsi bottle-caps. "You want some free 16 ounce's?"

"Those are all winners?" I counted eight caps in his hand.

He showed the inside of the caps and sure enough, they were all winners. "Here you go," he said. "Take em. They're yours."

"No, no," I replied, not wanting to take handouts from a homeless person and not wanting to pay for them either.

"Here," he insisted. "Take em. You drink Pepsi don't you?"

And I stuttered. I knew I would use the caps and they'd save me a few bucks, but I still lived with my parents but had a decent job so I had a lot of extra spending money and felt bad, as though this guy didn't realize that I wasn't down on my luck as he was.

But as I tried to refuse his offer, our waitress leaned over the counter, raised her voice dramatically, and in almost a shout she said, "Do you know why I hate snakes?"

I turned my attention back to our waitress to find her staring at me with a strange, frantic intensity.

"It's because they're icky and slimy and gross," she continued. "They're all long and scaly - I have a friend who has a snake - I just can't understand why someone would want one - you have to be crazy - there's people who hold them and pet them - you couldn't *pay* me to hold a snake - what kind of a person would do that? - you've got to be absolutely out of your mind." And she paused for only a split second. "I held a snake once - it was at my friend's house and he tried to crawl down my shirt and I was like 'aaaahhh get it away!'"

And as she spoke, I felt the man next to me take hold of my wrist, pry my hand open, and one by one, shove the winning bottle caps into my hand, careful not to let any drop.

Finally when our waitress' snake speech had ended I turned back to the man, trying to give the bottle caps back, but he simply folded his arms and turned away. "Take!" he said.

So I put them in my pocket, said thanks and turned back to the waitress, who was now just staring silently at me. "What's up?" she asked.

“Could I pay for my food?” I asked.

“Oh yeah!” she said. “I knew there was a reason I was here.”

Just a Coincidence

- Friday, March 11, 2011

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/just-a-coincidence/>

A knock came at the door next to me as I sat on my couch, chatting with my friend Ken. I reached over my shoulder and had the door open within a few seconds of the initial knock.

But I looked out the door and saw no one. I got up from the couch to take a closer look and saw a small package sitting at my doorstep.

The delivery man was nowhere in sight. I looked around, but couldn't see him hiding anywhere, which I found strange. It seemed like he would have had to sprint away from the door the moment he knocked, but even then he shouldn't have been able to get to the parking lot before I had the door open.

I shook off the strangeness of it and picked up my package, recognizing it as the new hard-drive I had ordered for my computer. I heard a truck starting up from the other side of the apartment building, assuming it was the delivery man, fleeing the scene.

Then I suddenly had this strange sensation as I held the box in my hand, as though it were evil or something, like I was never meant to have this hard drive.

So I popped it out of the box and opened up the side of my computer. "Keep your fingers crossed that this will work," I said to Ken.

"Um... okay..." he replied. Switching out a hard drive is one of the simplest things you can do in computer maintenance, so he obviously didn't think I should need much luck.

But I plugged the hard drive in, started up the machine, and immediately got an error message, stating that the hard drive was password protected.

Now why would a brand new hard drive be password protected? I pulled it out and put it back in a couple times, but every time it asked me for a volume password.

Ken had to leave for work at this point, so he left me to my hard drive. I fiddled with it a bit more, tried guessing the password, and finally decided to put my old drive back in, then get on the internet and see if I couldn't research the problem.

So my computer started up okay on my old hard drive, but when I hit the internet, I received a page cannot be found error. I had been browsing less than an hour earlier, but now, all of a sudden, I couldn't connect to anything.

So how could a new hard drive be password protected and somehow screw up my network connectivity?

So I power-cycled my modem, unhooked my router, reset everything, tried hooking my computer directly to the modem, power-cycled everything again, and still, no connection.

So I was getting frustrated. My internet only went down once or twice a year, so I assumed that I had done something in my hard-drive installation. So I fought with it a bit more, and finally decided to take a break.

I went into my kitchen with the intention of taking a few knifens (Knifens is my preferred pot smoking method using hot knives over a stove.) But as I flipped the light switch on in the kitchen, I heard a sizzle and popping, and above me the lights flashed on for a moment, then died to a low flicker, leaving me in near blackness.

And I knew I had no replacement bulbs for the long fluorescent lights, so apparently the forces of the universe had decided that

at this moment, I wasn't allowed to use my kitchen, just as I wasn't allowed to use my new hard drive or internet.

Fine, I told myself. At least I could be certain that this problem wasn't caused by my inability to install a simple hard-drive. So I decided to go outside to my front yard, where I had a Frisbee-golf basket and practice my putting.

It was already dark out, so I needed light, and naturally, when I flipped the porch light on, I heard a crackle, a fizzle and a flash before my porch light died. I checked my junk drawer and found no replacement bulbs.

So... no hard-drive, no internet, no kitchen, and no front yard... all in a matter minutes.

And it occurred to me that I had even felt that evil presence before it all happened, and for a short time, wanted to believe that some kind of spirit was screwing around with me.

So I told myself that if this was something more than a crazy string of coincidences, that it should mean something... I should learn something from it... the coincidences should come together somehow to form something of purpose...

But they never did. I called my internet service provider, and they explained that they'd had an outage in my area. They had it fixed later the next day. I called the hardware company and found out that they had accidentally sent me the wrong hard drive that happened to be password protected. I returned the drive and a week or so later they sent me a new drive that worked perfectly.

And the lights, of course, were just blown lights. I bought replacements within a few days.

But I still waited for some kind of sign that there was a purpose to this and never found any. I have talked to people who firmly believe that spirits do things like this to us, but at the same time have never had a string of coincidences as dramatic as what I experienced.

If you think about it, every moment of every day there is a multitude of opportunities for wild coincidences. Every time our eyes move, we see dozens if not hundreds of different objects and occurrences that we could attach some kind of significance to, or that might match up somehow with some other object or occurrence. So to me it would seem ridiculous and statistically unrealistic if coincidences like this did not occur at least occasionally. It seems like with all the opportunities for things like this, I find it strange that they do not more often.

So perhaps that was the meaning behind it, to remind me that sometimes things do not happen for a reason, that there is such a thing as a wild coincidence that's just nothing more than a coincidence.

Kids These Days

- Sunday, January 31, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/kids-these-days/>

It was well after midnight and I was at the grocery store with a friend. At this time of night, there were only a few employees in the store, and only a single cashier. There were two people in front of us. One was a middle aged man paying for his items at the register. The cashier was a middle aged, slightly overweight, soccer-mom type of woman.

The other person in line before us was a younger kid, perhaps around eighteen or even younger. He had a shaved head, earrings, nose ring, lip ring, eyebrow ring. He wore torn and baggy jeans that sagged below his hips, his boxers clearly visible above them. A long chain dangled from his wallet. Tattoos adorned his arms, and across his torso he wore a dirty, stained and torn Pantera Tee shirt—the one with the giant marijuana leaf across the front.

The kid did not, however, have any items on the conveyor belt, nor did he have a basket. My first thought was that he was buying nothing more than cigarettes, but then I noticed his right arm pointed rigidly downward, his hand against his thigh. He had one item in his hand, and had turned away to block our view. It was difficult not to jump to the conclusion that he was buying Sudafed or whatever it is people use to make methamphetamines.

So I did a subtle little dance with him, turning to try and see what he had in his hand without making my curiosity too obvious. He saw me and tried to turn away to compensate, but the item was far too large to hide.

In his right hand he held an economy sized box of Tampax tampons, and nothing else.

I felt bad for the kid at that point so I looked away.

He finally placed the box on the belt just before stepping up to the register. The cashier took a long look at the tampons, then at the kid, then back at the box. She pointed at it. "Is this yours?" she asked.

He nodded.

But still she looked back and forth from the Tampax to the kid. "*This is yours?*" she asked again, her mouth betraying a repressed smirk.

The kid spoke slowly, holding several dollar bills and some change in his hand. "Well..." he said. "I would like to purchase it..."

And the cashier simply stared back. "I can't sell you those," she said.

He looked back in sudden shock, as though taking her seriously just for a second.

"You need to go home and tell your girlfriend that you decided to be a man and she needs to get her own tampons."

The kid stared back, still holding the money. His shoulders slumped and he sighed. "Can I please just buy it?" he said.

And the cashier let out a wild laugh as she grabbed the box and scanned it. She set it aside, but before taking his money she raised her right arm and flung her wrist like a whip as she imitated a dramatic whipping sound. She shook her head as she took his money and rang up the purchase. "Such a whupped little boy," she said. She turned back to stare at him. "She had better be damn good in bed."

"Yes," he replied decisively. "She is."

"These had better not be for your mom," said the woman.

“They’re not for my mom.”

“I swear to God, if these are for your mother I’m going to get a switch, I’m going to track you down, I’m coming to your house and I’m gonna *beat* you.”

“They’re *not* for my mom,” he repeated.

“Either way, next time you gotta remember to be a man about it... Tell me, what is she doing right now that she can’t come down here herself?”

He sighed and rolled his eyes. “She’s playing football.”

The cashier’s head rocked back in surprise. “What?” she said. Then her chin went up. “Ohhhh... like on a Playstation.”

“Yeah,” the kid nodded.

Then the woman suddenly grinned uncontrollably. “Let me guess – it’s your Playstation isn’t it?”

He grunted and replied after a long pause. “Yes.”

And her laughter came back in force. She gripped the counter to steady herself.

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath and shuddered, as though fighting an urge to strike her. Finally he raised his voice. “For Christ’ sake lady! Can’t a guy do something nice for his girlfriend? She has a cold right now.”

“There’s no amount of PMS and snot that would make me do that to my hubby,” the cashier replied. But the kid just shook his head angrily and stared at the ground.

She laughed as she handed him his purchase and shooed him away. She continued laughing as he walked away, then she went back to making whipping noises and snapping her wrist. She ignored me and continued her loud taunting until he had completely left the building.

Finally she turned to me, shook her head dramatically, and said, “What are we going to do with these kids these days?”

Middle Finger Justice

- Monday, August 02, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/middle-finger-justice/>

With the exception of Isaac Zamora, all the names in this story have been changed because they don't deserve to have this page come up when they google themselves. I apologize if I offend anyone involved, especially if you don't believe this incident actually occurred. Admittedly I was very young, but I feel I have an obligation to talk about what I remember that day, even if I must admit that my memory is no better than anyone elses.

My friend Isaac Zamora, his older brother David, and I were walking from my house down the long dirt road to thier place. As we came to a corner, walking near the middle of the road, an unfamiliar truck came speeding around the corner at two or three times the posted 15 mph speed limit. He had to swerve, kicking up dust in our faces and peeled out on down the road.

"Wow!" David exclaimed. "I can't believe he did that! I just can't believe it--we've gotta go tell Mom."

"Why?" I said. "People always drive too fast."

"No, not that. He flipped us off!"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"He flipped us off--he was probably mad that we weren't walking right on the side of the road."

"What do you mean, 'flipped us off'?" I said. "What does 'flipping someone off' mean?"

"When you stick out your middle finger at someone," David replied.

"Huh? I don't get it."

"When you hold up just your middle finger--your longest finger--but fold back all the other ones, then point it at someone."

So I held out my middle finger. "Like this?"

"No!" David said. "You can't do that!"

"Why not?"

"It's bad. It's very, very bad."

"Why?"

"My parents say it's really bad and we shouldn't do it."

"My dad points his middle finger all the time," I said.

"No, he can't," David replied.

"He does it all the time. If he points at things or pushes buttons, that's the finger he uses."

"He's gonna burn in hell."

"What?"

"No, maybe not. There must be something I don't understand. You can't use your middle finger for stuff like that. It's just, really really bad. It's like swearing at someone, but a really bad kind of swear."

"Oh, really? Well, maybe it doesn't count if my dad doesn't mean it as a swear and he's just pushing a button."

"Yeah, maybe. But that guy in the truck meant it as a swear."

"I didn't see it," I said.

"I didn't see it either," Isaac added.

"He definitely flipped us off," David said. "I saw it myself. I can't believe that just happened."

David seemed to have a little smirk on his face, as though he was proud and thought it was funny. As we continued on, David explained in more detail about the concept of flipping someone off and how it's done. The whole concept of flipping someone off seemed so ridiculous, however, that I assumed he was playing a joke on me.

However, immediately upon arriving at David and Isaac's house, David went to his mom, Gloria, at the kitchen table, and said, "Somebody flipped us off on the road today. Some guy in a big truck."

Gloria looked up from her paperwork and turned from the table. "What?" she said. "Are you serious?"

"Yeah, he flipped us off."

"You're certain?"

"Yeah, I saw it myself," David said.

"Oh, my God," Gloria replied, her mouth hanging open silently.

"I didn't see it and neither did Isaac," I said. "I'm not sure he even flipped us off. There was too much dust."

"No, he flipped us off," David repeated.

Gloria walked rapidly to the sliding glass door and screamed out into the field. "Benjamin! Get in here now! Hurry!"

"Do you know who he was?" Gloria asked, turning back to David. "Did he live around here? Did you get a license plate number?"

"No, he doesn't live around here. We didn't recognize him. We didn't think about looking at a license plate."

"Well why not?"

David shrugged.

"Strange people drive really fast down this road all the time," I said.

"But they don't give the finger to my children!" Gloria snapped.

David and Isaac's dad showed up at the door. "What's going on?"

"David says that someone flipped them off when he was driving past them."

"What?" Benjamin replied. "No..."

"No, I saw it," David said, still carrying his amused grin. "He gave us the finger."

Ben sat down at the dining room table, rubbed his chin and glared. "What is wrong with people these days? These kids never hurt anyone..."

Gloria began pacing angrily across the dining room. David stood near, watching expectantly, while Isaac stood off to the side, watching curiously, as though fascinated by the situation but not emotionally affected.

"What do we do?" Gloria asked.

"I don't see that there's anything we can do unless we know who the guy is... even then, I don't know."

"Should we call the police?" Gloria asked.

"For what? Speeding?"

"He flipped off our children!" Gloria shouted.

"There's no law against that," Ben replied. "They can't do anything." He scowled and took a deep breath.

"Then *we* need to do something."

"I suppose we could ask around the neighborhood and see if we can find out who he is."

"Can you start doing that, honey?"

"Right now?"

"Well, yes! We can't just let this go, Benjamin. The longer we wait the harder it'll be to find him!"

"What are we gonna do when we find him?" Ben asked.

"We're gonna break his legs." Gloria said.

"Yeah, break his legs!" David shouted.

"Honey--" Ben started.

"We can't let him get away with this!"

"Break his legs!" David shouted again.

Isaac cocked his head as he watched silently.

Finally I put in my own comment, "I don't understand what the big deal is. It's just a finger."

Gloria spun toward me. "How dare you!" she shouted. "Someone gives *my son* the middle finger and you have the *nerve* to tell me it's no big deal! Do you have any idea what this kind of thing does to people? When you flip someone off, The Lord sees it. God sees everything, Kalin, and it directly affects how He thinks of you, so when someone gives you the finger, they are making a prayer to God, asking him to hate you, asking him to make you burn in hell. I don't appreciate people who ask God to send my children to hell and I have every right to be angry, so don't you *ever* tell me that the state of my son's eternal soul is 'no big deal'."

"Yeah!" David said slowly. "Let's go find him. This guy's gonna pay!"

"Your father is going to take care of that," Gloria said. "You won't be involved."

"I don't get to watch?" David said.

"Okay, okay," Ben said, waving his hands. "We're getting ahead of ourselves here. I'm not going to break anyone's legs. I was thinking more of finding him and just talking to him."

"Talking?" Gloria replied. "What's that gonna do? We can't just let him get away with this."

"I don't think we have much of a choice."

"We can't let him get away with this!" Gloria repeated.

"He won't. The good Lord will take care of him, Honey. He'll get what he deserves in the end."

She sighed. "I guess that makes me feel better."

As I watched Gloria drop her head into her hands, I tried to remember if she had asked how David or Isaac felt.

Isaac continued to stand, nearly silent and motionless, just watching.

Over two decades later, after I had been away from the neighborhood for fifteen years, Gloria still lived in the same house.

On September 2, 2008, Isaac Zamora and his mother got into a fight and Isaac retreated to the woods to pray. God told him that he needed to 'cleanse evil'. By the end of the day, Isaac had murdered six people, including a sheriff's deputy as well as one of the most community-oriented individuals I can remember from my childhood, leaving their bodies badly butchered. He shot a woman to death on the front lawn of the house where I grew up. Meanwhile her husband was hiding, suffering from four bullet wounds, in the bushes where I used to build forts as a kid, listening to her screams. Isaac led police on a high-speed chase and was finally apprehended in the next town. At his arraignment, all Isaac would say was, "I kill for God. I listen to God."

On a memorial message board for one of the victims, I actually read the words, "Put your faith in God. Only God can heal."

Here's my [blog post about this story](#).

My Intro to Capitalism

- Friday, March 25, 2011

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/intro-to-capitalism/>

It was a hot day as I sat by myself at my cousin's Little League game. I don't recall how old I was. Somewhere between five and ten. My aunt had brought some delicious oatmeal-raisin cookies, but no water. After eating a cookie, I quickly realized how thirsty I was and wandered off to find a drinking fountain. Unfortunately there was none, so I continued searching for some kind of water source. The only available water I could find was a big plastic dispenser sitting near the garbage can on the bottom of the other set of bleachers. However, I've always been shy and afraid to ask for help, particularly from strange adults, so I simply sat, visions of waterfalls and drinking fountains running through my head.

My aunt came back to check on me and I asked her if she had any water or if there was a drinking fountain or anything nearby. She said no, but pointed at the dispenser. "I think they've got some water or juice or something," she said. "I'm sure they'd give you some if you just ask."

But I was afraid of asking for help, of being reliant on someone else. What if they screamed at me for wanting to take something that wasn't mine? What if they laughed at me for being helpless and thirsty? So when my aunt left again and left me alone, I simply sat and stared at the water.

I don't know how other people experience dehydration, but it's only happened to me three times, and I remember the feeling being nothing like being hungry. Hunger you can physically feel in your stomach, an actual, measurable pain. Dehydration is just this subtle sense in your mind. You don't feel dry, you just somehow *know* that you need water, and as the dehydration gets worse, it becomes an obsession, to the point where you can't think of anything other than water.

Finally I couldn't take it anymore, so I decided to steal a drink. I waited, and watched the cooler. When no one was looking, I marched up, trying to act like I belonged, but looking over my shoulder suspiciously. I somehow had this sense that I was doing a horrible thing. I knew it was only water. The paper cup probably only cost them a few cents, and I was only doing it because I was horribly thirsty. But somehow, I still felt like a shameful, devious criminal. It doesn't matter how much someone needs something, or what kind of use they can put it to, it only matters who owns what, and I knew I didn't own that water.

I carefully took a paper cup from the stack and watched the spout intently as I filled it. I assume the sounds of the baseball game carried on behind me, but all I could hear was the dribble of the water into my cup. I tilted the cooler just enough to see how heavy it was, confirming that they had barely made a dent in their water supply. Finally the cup was full and I turned off the spout.

As I turned away, I heard an angry voice, and turned into a woman I had not noticed, now towering over me. "What are you doing?" she asked. "You're not in our group are you?"

"Um...." I started. "No." I raised the cup, but just before it touched my lips, her hand shot out and grasped the cup, smashing into my hand, the water running down my wrist. She pulled the cup away and threw it with a tiny splash into the garbage. "What? You think you can just help yourself to anything you want?"

"Well, I was really thirsty, and I thought since it was just water--"

"No!" She shook her head. "It doesn't matter how much you want something, that never gives you the right to take it! Do I come into your house and just take whatever I want?"

"Well--"

"Huh? Do I? No, I don't! So why do you think it's okay to just take something of ours? We took the time to bring this for ourselves, for *our* enjoyment. Do you plan to go through the rest of your life just taking whatever you want from anyone you feel like? Do you think you can just ignore the rules of society? I've got news for you, nobody takes kindly to thieves. Do you

understand that?"

"Yeah," I said, my lip quivering.

"You want to grow up to be a thief?"

"No." I struggled to hold back tears.

"Don't try that. I'm not going to feel sorry for you."

"Could I please just have a drink of water?" I asked.

"No!" she shouted. "If you had asked like that to begin with, then yes, we probably would have given you some, but not after you try to sneak behind our backs. So I think you need to leave."

So I backed off, turned away, and walked back to the other set of bleachers. I sat down and tried desperately to avoid looking at the cooler, but repeatedly found myself glancing toward it, only to see the same woman sitting right there, guarding it.

I waited and waited, obsessed with water, but finally, the game was over and my aunt and cousin returned to my spot in the bleachers. I, of course, mentioned nothing of what happened. As we were packing up, I watched a man cleaning up the area around the cooler. He grabbed the stack of paper cups and threw them in the garbage. He then unscrewed the top of the cooler, took a few steps away from the bleachers and flipped it over to dump the remainder of the water into the dirt.

here's my [blog post about this story](#)

My Near Death Experience on The Nooksack River

- Friday, February 19, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/my-near-death-experience/>

I floated on my inner tube through the freezing water on a hot summer's day. I paddled to the left, toward the biggest rapids and coasted through. I saw my friend, McLean, up ahead on his own tube. He called to me but I couldn't make out what he was saying. He pointed to the shore. I looked in that direction, hoping to see something interesting, possibly a nude sunbather like last time. But no, only a lonely deer, prancing along the shoreline.

We neared a fork in the river. The right channel was slow and shallow and looked as though we wouldn't be able to pass through without carrying our tubes. I didn't feel like walking.

The left was considerably deeper and faster.

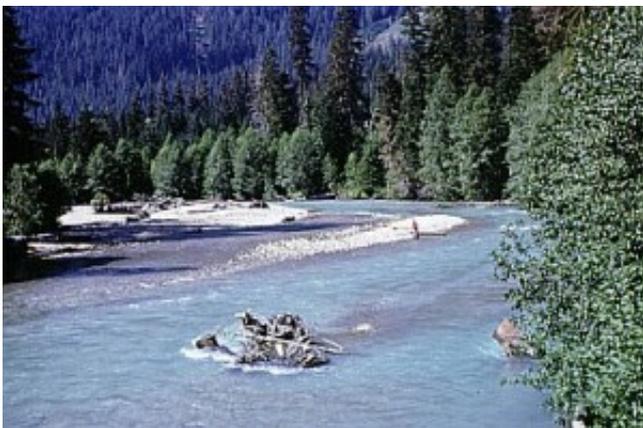
Directly in front the waterways were separated by a little island of rocks. A few yards beyond, a log jam. The left path turned sharply around the massive pile of debris into a fast and narrow channel, choked on the far left by another large pile of logs.

More enjoyable, but no doubt more dangerous than the right.

McLean was still ahead of me so he made the decision. He chose the left.

I needed to stay reasonably close to the left shore—but not too close—in order to navigate the narrow waterway. I paddled frantically.

After a few moments, I noticed McLean paddling in the wrong direction. I paused. He passed quickly by the entrance to the right channel. Instead he headed toward the log jam as frantically as I was paddling in the opposite direction.



This log jam is pretty small compared to the one I faced

All the warnings of kayakers trapped under logs sprang to the forefront of my mind. My mom had tried to talk me out of this, based on this specific concern.

As his feet hit the dividing island, he leaped from the tube and scrambled onto shore as the powerful water dragged at his tube.

He had chickened out.

I looked ahead again and saw the channel turning rapidly away from me. In the distraction, I had forgotten to paddle into proper position.

The white wave to the left, crashing over a massive stump, seemed to loom over me.

Frantically kicking and pushing, I reversed direction toward McLean. Halfway there I realized I was not going to make it. I looked back to the left. It was too far now, but I couldn't go forward either.

I watched myself heading toward the logs in the middle of the river.

I remembered all the dangers on a logical level. I'd been in similar situations but never in water this powerful. Still, I was confident in my abilities to get out before being pulled under.

I positioned myself with my feet forward, ready to leap off as soon as they hit the first log.

I waited. It seemed to take minutes for those few seconds to pass.

My feet hit and I pushed forward. The water rushed over the back of my tube and down my shirt. Before I knew what was happening, I was off the tube and submerged. My mind went blank.

I closed my eyes. Half a second later I reopened them to see the gravel at the bottom of the river as it slapped against my face.

I noticed myself spinning and turning in seemingly random directions. I watched confused images: the logs, gravel, stones, as well as other things of my own imagining: places, faces, and people I've never seen before.

The spinning stopped quickly and I found myself on my back, staring up at the logs a few inches from my face. They rushed past so fast I could not distinguish one from another.

I was trapped. This was my whole kingdom now, consisting of me and my dead logs and the remaining sixty seconds of my life.

Anything I ever wanted to do in life I now had to do before my brain ran out of oxygen.

I stared up in the darkness and imagined I could see the blue sky. I saw McLean, standing on shore, frozen with shock, mouth gaping. I tried to wave but I couldn't make my arms work.

By my best guess, I had been under water for about three seconds. It felt like I'd been there my entire life. I couldn't imagine being anywhere else. I tried to drift away from it by thinking about being at home, on my couch, watching TV... but that was a different world. I never could have existed in that world.

I looked back at the figure of my friend I thought I could see. I watched the future. He waited and waited, safe on dry land in another world. I never emerged, and he waited until giving up and running off to find a phone. I could see him further in the future as I was dragged out, dead for an hour or more.

Then I watched the past. As the images flooded through me, I noticed my surprise that it was actually happening. My life was flashing before my eyes. I thought that was something invented for television and movies.

I tried to concentrate on the images, to find some deeper meaning to them. They kept coming, comforting me, taking my mind off the situation.

It was all going to be okay. I had lived a good life, and this was the way it was going to end.

I watched the blur of logs speeding past my face.

Then, suddenly, something was different. Brighter.

I'm dead now. This is the transition... this is the light.

My foot dug into the rocks and I felt water splashing my face.

I jerked upward and screamed as the sunlight washed over me.

I looked down river. It widened rapidly as it connected with the right channel. After a few moments I was able to stand up. It took all my strength to hold against the current of the knee-high water, but despite the effort I walked toward the shore in a daze. My stomach hurt... the kind of pain you feel before an important oral presentation or a big test... but it slowly faded as I headed toward the shore and sank into my new reality.

The river roared behind me, deafening. The sound churned and bounced in a detail I had never heard before, as though I could hear each individual droplet slamming against the rocks.

I looked at the sky as I neared the shore and became more confident in my step. The blue pierced my eyes, contrasting with the bright white clouds. The trees seemed to be painted with the a child's magical brush from a more vibrant alternate dimension.

Even the rocks overwhelmed my senses with their neon-gray. I could see every pore, every grain of sand.

I stood on the shore for a long moment, the world twisting and churning about me. I looked up to see McLean calmly walking toward me, around the logs that moments earlier had encompassed my existence, carrying an inner tube in each arm.

My body tingled and I looked down, feeling waves of wondrous sensation washing through my flesh.

My fingertips pulsated.

I brought my hands up to gaze at them. Protruding chaotically from every angle of my fingernails were splinters, bark, and wet, mashed wood.

As McLean reached the sandy beach, I chuckled and rapidly lost myself as it built into uncontrollable laughter.

My [blog post about this near death experience](#)

My Spirit Animal

- Saturday, March 13, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/spirit-animal/>

One day when I was about 10, after coming back from the grocery store, I grabbed my big box of Fruity Pebbles and wandered out into the yard. I headed toward the stream at the edge of the woods, but stopped at the edge of our yard when I heard a loud rustling in the bushes in front of me. Hearing animals in the bushes wasn't uncommon out in the woods, but I could tell right away that this was something larger animals. I stopped and watched as dogs began emerging from the bushes. Three at first, then more followed until about ten of them had formed a line in front of me. They approached cautiously, staying carefully in line. They didn't have tags, they all looked like the same breed, and I didn't recognize a single one.

Coyotes. I'd heard warnings about them, and frequently heard them shouting in the night, but never thought I'd actually see one.

"No!" I shouted. "Get back!"

They moved forward steadily and the the ones at each end of the line began pulling ahead of the others to come around my sides. I backed up but they continued, staring intently until they had formed a half-circle around me.

I took another handful of Fruity Pebbles and shoved them into my mouth as I wondered if these animals were about to tear me apart or just wanted to make friends. "What do you want?" I shouted, spitting colorful crumbs.

They simply stared.

"What?!"

They gave no response. One took a step toward me and I heard a growl.

Finally I turned and ran toward the house, still clutching the box of cereal, expecting to feel their teeth sinking into my ankles, wondering if I should try to get in one last bite of fruity deliciousness before they ripped me apart.

After a moment I looked back to see the coyotes in the same location with their heads cocked, suddenly looking far less intimidating, as though they had merely been curious. I took a few more steps before realizing how rude I had been.

I turned back to offer them some of my snack, but the last of them were already disappearing into the bushes.

Search my Apartment for Dead Bodies

- Friday, April 01, 2011

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/search-apartment-dead-bodies/>

Around 2007, I had been a developer in Adobe Flash for a few years and was working from home for a little startup, building online video editing software. We had a tiny office in Seattle, but most of the employees were scattered throughout the world. Our server team worked out of Argentina, we had a developer or two in Pakistan, one from the Ukraine and a couple others from countries I can no longer remember. The project manager, I'll call Kevin, lived in Vancouver British Columbia, which is about a three hour drive from Seattle. I lived in Bellingham, Washington, halfway between Seattle and Vancouver.

So communication was often a difficult issue for us with language, time-zone, and distance issues to deal with, so Kevin decided to get all of us Vonage phone adaptors and buy into a special deal that would let us do conference calls at a very low price.

But Kevin didn't want to pay international shipping twice, once to have them shipped to Canada to his home, and once to have them shipped out again to all the employees. So instead, he had all of them shipped to my house, then drove down to Bellingham to pick them up before shipping them off to my co-workers.

I set up my Vonage adapter within a day or two of getting it and had no problems. A week later, everyone else received their adaptors, but all seemed to have considerably more problems. I watched them testing it in our chatroom, saying 'okay, call me again', 'nope still not coming through'.

So I left around noon to grab a lunch special at the Thai restaurant down the street. When I came back forty-five minutes later, I saw a couple cops at the next house, but didn't think much of it.

I went inside and within moments of taking off my shoes I heard a knock on my door. I immediately thought it would be the police, though for what reason I could not imagine. I looked around at all my marijuana paraphernalia and High-Times posters, knowing that I'd never have enough time to hide them all.

So I answered the door and sure enough, there were the two cops. They asked my name and whatnot, then explained that a 911 call had gone out from my apartment.

"Huh?" I said. "No, I was at lunch."

"Yeah, we saw you come home just now. Is there anyone else in there?"

"No," I replied. "Just me."

"And you don't know how a 911 call could have come out of your home here?"

"No," I said, "Do you know if it came from my cell phone or some kind of land-line phone?" I pulled out my cell and checked it to see if I had somehow accidentally made a call.

"We have no way to tell that," the first officer replied.

"Well, it's gotta have something to do with my new Vonage adaptor I got for work."

"Oh yeah?" the said.

"You ever hear of Vonage adaptors mysteriously calling 911?"

"No," they replied. "We need to come in and check your apartment and make sure you don't have anyone tied up in here or

something. Are you sure no one is in your apartment? This is very serious. We need to know if anyone else is in there. You can be charged with obstruction if you don't answer truthfully."

"No," I said, my knees visibly shaking. "Unless someone broke in and made some calls while I was away, there's no one in here."

"Okay, well we're just gonna come in and check your cabinets and under your bed and stuff just to make sure you don't have any dead bodies stashed, okay?"

"Um..." I balked, trying to think back to the information I'd read about Marijuana Law. Paramedics, police and firemen have a right to enter a person's home without permission if they have probable cause to believe someone's life is in danger. Otherwise, they can't enter without either a warrant or the resident's permission.

But was a 911 call and a shaky knee probable cause?

"If you have drugs in there, we don't care. We won't arrest you even for a few crack rocks. We just want to check for dead bodies. That's it. Then we'll be out of your hair."

But only a fool blindly trusts the cops when they say they won't arrest you. "Do I have to let you in?" I asked, having no idea of the safest thing to say. "Like you can legally just come in without asking me?"

"We're coming in whether you like it or not," one of them replied.

So I shrugged and backed off from the door to give them space to enter.

Thinking back I realize I played it rather stupidly, and my shrug could have been construed as permission to enter. Instead I should have clearly said, "I won't give my consent, but I'm not gonna try to stop you."

So I turned quickly toward my bedroom, and tried to throw a blanket over my little coffee table covered with marijuana pipes, a hot-plate for knives, my plate with a pile of shake on it, my drug-dealers scale, and a couple ounces of pot.

But one of the officers caught me. "No. You just sit down. Don't try to hide the drugs. We don't care about that." He pointed me angrily toward a chair then stood over me, glaring, keeping a hand over his gun.

The other officer went first into my kitchen, looked under my sink and in a couple cupboards, then came back to my bedroom, glanced for a few moments at my table of paraphernalia, then passed my computer table, carefully stepping over my bong to get to my closet. He looked in the closet for a moment, then peered under my bed, where my gravity bong was still sitting ready for its next use. He looked for a long moment, and I figured he was debating whether he wanted to dig into my storage bin.

"Nope," he said. "No bodies here." He returned to the living room.

"Thanks for your time," they said and briskly left, clearly annoyed at the whole situation.

"Okay, have a good day, guys," I said as they left.

And I just had to shake my head. Not even a mention of the drugs I had scattered throughout the house.

So I got back online and tried contacting my co-workers to find out if they knew anything about faulty, 911 calling Vonage adaptors.

Most of them had gone to lunch though, but after a half hour I got ahold of Stanislav, who worked from the Ukraine, and went by Stan when dealing with people in the states. Unfortunately I forgot to save the record of our instant-messenger chat, but it went something like this:

Me: Somehow these new Vonage adaptors made a call to emergency services from my house... I don't know what to do. Do you have any idea how a 911 call could have been made from my house when I wasn't here?

Stan: I have no idea. You called emergency?

Me: Yeah, but not on purpose. I don't know how it happened. The cops came and searched my house.

Stan: Police came to your house because you called emergency? Who did you talk to to get them to come over?

Me: I didn't talk to anyone. They just showed up. Somehow a 911 call went out from my house and I need to find out how it happened to keep it from happening again.

Stan: You called 911?

Me: Not on purpose.

Stan: What a coincidence. I too called 911.

Me: Wait? What?

Long pause.

Me: You called 911? Say that again.

Stan: Yes, I called 911 to test the Vonage adaptor. It didn't work so I hung up.

Me: Why are you calling emergency services to test your phone?

Stan: I never called for emergency. I called 911.

Me: 911 is emergency services.

Long pause.

Stan: Oh, I see.

Me: So that's how it happened. Your phone is still registered to my address.

Stan: You only have emergency number over there? No other services?

Me: We have 411 for information.

Stan: Oh, I see. Separate numbers. In Ukraine we only have 02.

Me: 02?

Stan: Yes, you dial 02 and wait for answer, then you ask for emergency services and they transfer you... then they call you back four or five times to ask you where you live. Police never come to your door.

Me: So why didn't you just dial 02?

Stan: I did. It didn't work, so I thought since Vonage is from states it might connect to the US line.

Me: Okay, well, lets remember that 911 is only an emergency line, and I can get in a lot of trouble if you call it again.

Stan: oki

Me: Okay, so seriously, no more 911 calling, okay?

Stan: Ok, no problem.

I talked to Kevin about the incident, and he agreed to change the address registration on everyone's phone adaptor, and make sure everyone knew that 911 is not an information line. Fortunately he knew that I smoked a lot of pot and that I usually had paraphernalia sitting out, so he fully understood why I expected him to take this seriously.

Later I did a little research about police policies on drugs and 911 calls, finding that it's standard procedure in almost all departments across the United States to ignore minor drug crimes in 911 calls, all the way up to sellable quantities of crack and cocaine. It's a stated policy in many cities because they want people to feel that they can call 911 without risking imprisonment for unrelated things.

So it was nice that I didn't get arrested for all my pot, but at the same time, it bothered me deeply, because it seems that through these policies, the police are openly admitting that there is nothing wrong with doing drugs in your own home. They know that there are so many people doing this kind of thing that our emergency systems would be notably compromised if police actually enforced the law in these situations. They are openly admitting that there are other things in our society that are significantly more important than fighting drugs, and that drug users are at least enough of a part of the community that we deserve the right to call 911 safely.

To me, this is blatant dishonesty and hypocrisy, and is just part of the careful balance that they must maintain to keep the public from recognizing just what a disgrace the drug war really is to our society.

Stockholm Syndrome

- Saturday, December 25, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/stockholm-syndrome/>

I stood at a counter in the back of a high-volume fish and chips restaurant breathing cod when the kitchen manager, Rob, grabbed me and invited me to smoke a bowl in the outside storage area. I normally did not smoke pot at work, however I would usually make an exception when my boss insisted. I left the fish sitting on the table and we headed out to the porch and sat down on a couple plastic buckets.

As the bowl neared completion and Rob was taking what could have been the final hit, the door opened. He stuffed the pipe and lighter into his coat pocket as one of the cashier's stuck her head out. She was a gorgeous woman I had seen only a few times before because she usually did not start working until the end of my shift. I had already classified her as being out of my league since I felt she was attractive enough to be a model and as a cashier she even made more money than me and for some reason I knew she was in college, which was something I had given up on after the first quarter. Still, I imagined being with her.

"Is there a 'Kalin' back here?" she asked.

"Yeah, that's me," I replied.

"Someone's here to see you."

"To see me?" I asked.

"Yeah, he asked for Kalin." She held out a hand. "I don't believe we've met before. I'm Sarah."

"Hi, I'm Kalin," I said. "So whose here to see me?"

"I don't know, but he looks like a cop."

My heart sank.

"A big guy with a gun... so... uh... you might wanna hide your stuff there." She motioned toward the pocket where Rob had stashed his pipe.

"Oh—" Rob started. "I'm sorry, I should have offered you a toke. I think there's another hit if you want—"

"No!" she cut him off. "No thank you. I don't smoke."

I went out to the front and there was old Stanley Marks, the officer who, unfortunately, I knew all too well. I walked up to the front counter and said hi.

"Why don't you come around and we'll step outside. Your co-workers don't need to see this."

I walked around and we stepped outside and started talking.

The story behind this, of course, is rather complex and detailed, but isn't really relevant to this story. We discussed the situation for a few minutes and then Stanley told me that he needed to arrest me on an outstanding marijuana charge.

He pulled out a pair of handcuffs. "I apologize for this, but I need to put these on you... I get in trouble if I bring someone in whose not in handcuffs." And as I spoke, movement from inside caught my attention and I saw Sarah poking her head around the corner of the salad bar to get a peek at us. She cocked her head and just gazed as I turned around to let Stanley put the

handcuffs on me, and I thought, now she's really out of my league.

My heart was thumping, of course, but I was calm, as this is something you kind of need to prepare for as a pot dealer. I remembered back to grade school and how I would always get picked on, and tried to tell myself that it wouldn't be that bad, as silly as that sounded. It would be good for me... like a trip back in time to seventh grade, just enough to help me appreciate my freedom.

But Stanley had assured me in no uncertain terms that my crime carried a mandatory minimum sentence of a year and a day in maximum security prison... so I just kept telling myself that it wouldn't be any worse than seventh grade, and I would get through it.

After arriving at the jail just two blocks away, someone asked me a long series of medical questions through a glass window then sent me inside to sit on a bench. I tried starting a conversation with a middle-aged drunk woman sitting next to me, but all she had time to say was "I've had a really bad day," before another guard came over and asked me to come over to a little stand to have my photo taken.

"Have you ever been processed into jail before?" he asked with a smile.

"Nope."

"Okay, well, I'm just gonna give you a quick patdown and get your photo and fingerprints and give you a little bracelet. It shouldn't take more than five to ten minutes and then we'll get you situated."

"Okay," I replied, following to stand in front of the camera. And already my nervousness started to ebb. I had expected to see condescending stares and blunt demands from these guards.

The patdown was quite quick as he'd promised, and as he finished it crossed my mind that I could have easily brought in a quarter ounce of weed in my crotch and a sheet of acid in my sock if I had wanted.

As he took my fingerprints and chuckled about the funny face I made when he took my picture, I thought to myself that he was just as friendly and courteous as I'd expect from a salesman at the mall.

Then I was sent into another area further down the hall to change. With me came another man who was being processed at the same time. He was a very large Native American but not especially intimidating. When he spoke, he was clear and concise, but only answered questions. Otherwise he would stand nearly motionless and silent. I wanted to strike up a conversation with him and find out what had happened to him, but I got this strange sense from him... like something horrible had just happened and he was still trying to figure out if it was real or not.

We went into this little room together and had to strip down to our underwear and change into big orange clothes that were actually surprisingly comfortable. Then we were directed out again and each given a blanket, bed mat, and a little book of jail rules. I walked with one guard and the big quiet guy was taken somewhere else.

We took an elevator up a couple levels and the guard sent me through two sets of doors and I entered alone into a wide room with two levels of cell doors lining one side and a series of tables made of concrete staggered across the open space in front of me. In most of the seats sat other men in the same orange outfits.

They all stopped and for just a moment everything went silent as they looked at me.

"New guy!" shouted one guy as he slammed a hand of playing cards back on the table. "It's my turn." He pointed at the man across from him as he pulled his legs out from under the table. "This guy is mine. It's my turn."

And as he came jumping toward me, all sorts of scenes from prison movies ran through my head... and all the prison advice I'd heard as jokes on sitcoms. I'm gonna stand my ground, I told myself. Don't back down. Don't be nobody's bitch, but also

don't fight. Act tough, but don't fight... because I knew I'd get my ass beat. But it's all about appearances, I told myself. Just look tough and don't let them fuck with you... but also do everything you can to avoid acting like a dick... and always remain calm and collected... don't let them get to you.

He stopped just in front of me and I stared him down, unmoving in my poker face, not knowing if I should smile and try to make friends or glare and intimidate.

But this guy was nearly a foot shorter than me, and up close, he was just a skinny white teenager wearing a goofy grin.

"Hey New Guy!" he said. "Welcome to the beautiful D-3 block, the most hard-core block of the lovely Whatcom County Jail. I'm Kurt, and I'm gonna show you around... get you orientated and situated."

"Um... okay..." I said.

"Have you ever been in Bellingham jail before?"

I shook my head.

"Ever been in jail before?"

"Nope."

"Well, wonderful then. Can I show you to your room? They should have given you a slip that tells you your room number."

I handed him the paper. "Ah, yes, you're down with Abdul... like duh... he's the only one here without a bunkmate. He's a pretty cool guy." Kurt waved me on and I followed him through the sets of tables and card-playing inmates.

We went down a set of stairs at the far end of the room, and past a couple revealing showers. "They like to keep the showers out in the open to remind us we're animals," he said. "You kinda need to go through a funny dance to get up and down the stairs without seeing anyone's dong, but it's the polite thing to do."

We stopped at a door just about halfway down the lower level and Kurt walked right in "Abdul! I've got a roommate for you."

Abdul was at the back of the cell, lying on his mat on the top level of the concrete bunk. He perked up and jumped down to shake my hand. "Welcome, I'm Abdul," he said, with a distant Arab accent. He held out a hand and I shook it. "The bottom bunk is all yours, Bud."

I threw my mat and blanket onto the bottom bunk and sat down on a concrete stool. I started asking questions about the procedures of jail, and what I could expect and Kurt sat on the concrete counter and watched me go through my little book of rules, explaining how important each of them were, whether or not I would actually get penalized for breaking them, and how I could get around some of them. The booklet, while thick and intimidating from the outside, was written in a large font in multiple languages, and I seem to remember it contained a number of unintentionally humorous illustrations. The rules proved fairly simple.

"Whattaya in for?" Abdul asked after just about ten minutes of rule studying.

"Marijuana," I said.

"Yeah, me too," he replied. "Doin' thirty days for thirty pounds."

"Thirty pounds!" I exclaimed, my eyes going wide.

"What'd you get caught with?" he asked.

"I sold three ounces to an undercover."

He laughed. "Child's play."

"How did you get away with only thirty days for thirty pounds?" I asked. "That's like eighty thousand dollars worth of pot."

He shrugged. "Isn't that normal? I don't know... I'm Canadian for one thing, so they're just holding me for thirty days then I get sent back to Canada and told I can never come back to the states... which honestly, I'm fine with that. If this is how you guys treat foreigners down here, I don't ever want to come back to The States. You know if you came to Canada with a bunch of pot they wouldn't treat you like this. I can understand taking the weed, but this is ridiculous."

"How the hell did you get away with thirty days?" I asked again. "I was told I had a mandatory minimum of a year and a day."

"What?" Abdul's jaw dropped. "For three ounces? Did you have a gun?"

I shook my head.

"A dead baby?" asked Kurt.

"No."

"You said you'd never been in jail before," Kurt said.

"I haven't."

"Then how in the hell are you getting a year and a day for three ounces? Who told you that? Was it a lawyer or public defender?"

"The cop who arrested me," I replied.

"Oh!" they both said at once. Abdul laughed. "Yeah, you can't trust cops, dude. You'll be out tomorrow."

"I don't know, he seemed pretty adamant... cops can't just flat out lie to people like that."

And Abdul just chuckled. "Yeah, sure."

Others began filtering in through our cell, standing around or sitting on the counter, introducing themselves. Most seemed in a good mood and seemed to want to chat about all sorts of random things, but I kept talking about my situation and my fear that I'd be spending the next year in prison. I imagine myself looking like quite the little baby, looking back on it now, but strangely every person I met was nothing but supportive. Everyone seemed to be offering advice and, more importantly, examples of people they knew (or themselves) who had been busted for more serious crimes and gotten away with little more than a slap on the wrist.

But somehow I just couldn't believe that the officer had been lying to me. Somehow, after all they had put me through, I still thought cops were somehow wholesome... or at least somehow unable to bend the rules.

And as the various people filtered through my room to introduce themselves to the new guy, I was consistently amazed at just how nice everyone was. I thought back to seventh grade, and how I would have given anything to have other students who were this friendly... and I rapidly realized that many of my worries had been for nothing.

So I decided to test them.

Within the first hour of being in jail I had admitted to being a narc, to having worked with the police to bust other drug dealers and to having sold out my moral values to do so.

In the social hierarchy of prison life (or such is my understanding), the child molesters are on the bottom rung, and consistently get the most abuse from the other prisoners. Narcs are supposedly just one step above them.

But as I told the story, this collection of supposed gangsters, criminals and wife-beaters didn't look at me like they wanted to beat the crap out of me, but instead gave me a look like I had told them my cat had died. They showed me little more than sympathy and while most agreed that I had made a mistake on both a moral and logical level, the most condemning comment I received was from another drug dealer who was in jail because of someone like me, who said something like "I normally don't have much respect for narcs, but if you know you were wrong... you know... cops tell a lot of lies and manipulations... I can understand how you wouldn't make good decisions, coming from a middle-class family and all... everyone deserves a second chance."

At some point I started making phone calls. I called a few friends. I also remember having a couple logistical issues, like I had left my bike and backpack at work and needed someone to go pick them up for me. My friends seemed shocked and sympathetic, and in some ways more upset than me. But I told them that it wasn't nearly as bad here as I thought it would be and according to everyone else I'd almost certainly get out the next day.

But then I called my job to let them know I wouldn't be able to make it in the next day and to apologize for leaving the fish sitting out on the counter. I thanked the heavens that I liked to get ahead on the fish breeding so they still had enough to get through dinner.

After dialing and saying my name at the prompt, I heard an unfamiliar voice say "Hello?" Then the recording came on, asking if he would accept the charges. Then there was a pause and a click, and he was gone.

I called again and he hung up even faster this time.

And that's when I started getting stressed. I'd always hoped that I'd never be fired from a job. I felt it was a sign of being... pathetic. This would be the first time, and I had visions of some kind of slippery slope.

I decided to give it some time. I didn't recognize the voice on the other end, so he probably didn't recognize me. I decided to wait and try again, hoping someone else would answer.

A little later I mentioned to Kurt that I needed something to cheer me up. "Okay..." he said. "Let's go get a treat from the TV room."

So we walked up the stairs to the top level and went all the way to the end to another little common area that contained little more than a solid orange door and a television rack bolted to the wall with no television. "They keep the TV stand there to remind us that we used to have a TV... or maybe there never was a TV and they just want to taunt us with the idea that there could have been be a TV."

Kurt walked up to the door and pounded several times. We waited a long moment and he pounded again.

Then a distant voice shouting from the other side. "What do you want?"

"Candy wrappers!" Kurt shouted.

"What?" came the reply, barely audible even with our attention focused.

"Candy wrappers!" Kurt shouted with a grin. "Candy wrappers! Candy wrappers!" he chanted, pounding on the door.

"Keep your pants on!" came a reply. "Give me five minutes."

So we waited. "This is pretty awesome," Kurt said with an excited look in his eye.

"What are we gonna do with candy wrappers?" I asked.

"You'll see."

And after a few minutes some neatly preserved and folded gum and candy wrappers slid slowly under the door. "Sorry that's

all I could find," the man shouted from the other side.

"Thank you!" Kurt screamed at the door. "These are good ones," he commented to me. "So... if you ever buy a candy bar around here, you need to be really careful about how you open it. Make sure you only tear down the seams and keep the whole thing in-tact. Or you can bring it to Dale and he'll open it the way he likes."

I followed him down to the other end of the third level and into the last cell in the row. Kurt introduced me to a man sitting at the cement counter in his cell. "This is Dale." And lining the counter were ornate little picture frames, about ten of them, many of them holding photos, which I assumed were his family members. Each one was different, but they all had a similar style. My first thought was to wonder how he got away with having these things in jail, but when I looked closer I saw they were actually built out of a multitude of candy and gum wrappers, folded and cut in intricate patterns.

"Got some more for ya." And Kurt handed him the new wrappers.

"Sweet Dude... Snickers. That'll go perfectly on the one I'm working on."

So Kurt and I sat down and chatted with Dale for a few minutes. He explained some basic process of making the picture frames and about how this hobby was what was keeping him sane in here. It would take him four or five hours of careful folding and cutting (without scissors of course) for every picture frame that he would make, then he sold them for five or six bucks through some organization that was set up to help inmates with this type of thing.

But five or six bucks for four or five hours of work... and in jail, having an income of ten or fifteen bucks a week meant you were filthy rich compared to everyone else.

So I couldn't help thinking that it was just blatant exploitation bordering on slavery. These were certainly the most creative and interesting picture frames I had ever seen, unique, meticulously crafted, beautifully artistic, and made without tools. If someone on the outside were to examine them they might assume they were made from fine origami.

"...the fucking MacGyver of picture frames," Kurt commented.

I tried calling work again. Again the same voice answered and immediately hung up upon hearing the recording from the jail.

I would have been happy to pay for the call myself. My wallet was sitting down a couple stories in a little plastic bin. Of course they don't let you pay for your own calls, and looking back on it now, I realize that this is one of those subtle forms of torture that they do to prisoners because they can't get away with openly beating and spitting on them.

We ate a dinner of overcooked white rice topped with turkey gravy, an apple, a piece of white bread, and I think a carton of milk like we used to get in grade school. And lastly a little "salad" of chopped iceberg lettuce with a little bit of cheap coleslaw dressing on top. The bowl I had smoked just before getting arrested still hadn't quite worn off so it was all surprisingly not bad.

(A couple years later I went to a nice little teriyaki restaurant that would serve the exact same 'salad' beside their meat and rice. Normally I'm a bit of a salad snob, but found myself going back to that place, thinking about that iceberg and coleslaw dressing and remembering my crazy night in jail.)

I called work again, and again was hung up on by the unrecognized dude.

Now it was nearly official. I had been calling for hours. Whoever that guy was, he would have at least asked someone else in the kitchen about me. Everybody knew me, and Rob loved to tell stories, so I assumed everyone in the kitchen should know about me by now. The only logical explanation was that one of the bosses, John or Wendy, had told them to shut me out.

So I resigned myself to begging for my job back and wound up spending a lot of time thinking about what I would say.

On one level of my consciousness I was stressed beyond comparison, visions of being hauled off to prison or being thrown into the street with my inability to hold down a job.

But on another level, I was at a party. A great big party with no alcohol, no music and shitty food, but where nobody had to work the next morning.

And I spent the rest of the evening talking to a dozen or more people of all different ages and colors, telling stories and discussing everything from philosophy, law, and relationships to fart jokes and secret plans to smuggle heroin.

“There’s two types of people in here,” Kurt explained. “Those of us who are trying to make the best of a fucked up situation, and just enjoy ourselves while we’re here, and those who think they deserve this... or can’t escape their own thoughts and just want to be left alone. If you want to have a good time here, you gotta recognize the difference and just have as much fun as you can without making life any worse for those guys who just want to wallow in misery.”

Someone taught me how to make a fire using some toilet paper and tinfoil from a gum wrapper and the empty sockets by the door of the cells that supposedly had once been light switches that allowed us to choose whether or not to have the lights on.

A guy I’ll call Neil invited me and ten or fifteen others up to the “TV” room to play a popular jail game where each person draws a card from the deck then does that number of pushups. Jacks, queens and kings were worth 11, 12 and 13. Someone asked what an ace was worth and a fat man insisted that an ace must only be worth one. I couldn’t even do ten pushups, so I was glad someone else was in my boat.

Neil had a big sock full of something reasonably hard, which I assumed was other socks that had been very tightly packed. He kept swinging this sock and slamming it into the floors and walls, making a rather impressive noise. Others occasionally wanted to play with the sock but he wouldn’t let them.

“Anyone who can’t do their pushups gets whacked with the sock. One beating for every pushup you missed!” And he made this declaration to everyone he invited, but most of us followed anyway.

It sounds pretty stupid, I know, but somehow it was fun. Of course I was a little concerned that Neil might be serious about beating people for failing, but not enough to prevent me from playing.

And I kept drawing threes, fours and fives.

The fat man drew a queen and said, “Oh fuck this,” and did four or five pushups then gave up. Neil beat the wall one time for every pushup he missed.

I also met a guy named Allan. I thought of him as a kid, though he was less than three years younger than me, having just turned 18 a couple months earlier. He was skinny, short and combined with his mannerisms, and the type of things he liked to talk about, one might mistake him for a 14 year old. Though no stranger to illegal activity, this was the first time he’d been arrested.

“I robbed a bank,” he told me and whoever else happened to be sitting around my cell at the time. “I was forced to rob a bank.”

“Who forced you to rob a bank?” I asked.

“These guys I know.” He laughed. “They’re assholes.”

I stared at him and shrugged. “That requires a bit more of an explanation.”

“They put a knife to my throat,” he replied, “and showed me this gun they had and put it in my face and everything and told me they were going to take me out to the country and kill me and butcher my corpse and they got me all terrified and shit, then

told me I could get out of it if I helped them rob this bank... I mean, like, if I refused and came back and told my mom what they did she'd never believe me. The cops would sure as hell never believe someone like me, so what was I supposed to do?

"So we went into this bank and they took this one guy hostage and gave me a knife and told me to kill him if he tried anything and told me they'd shoot me if I didn't hold this knife to his throat, and I went in and told the guy I wouldn't kill him no matter what happened, and begged him to go along with it, because I didn't want to die, you know... and he saw what the other guys were doing to me and how they were putting the gun to my head..."

I couldn't believe the story. This kid seemed like something wasn't quite there... like there was something about him that just didn't care, like he didn't feel empathy for his own situation, and he laughed about it like it was a sitcom on television, and had only momentary lapses of frustration and sadness as he told the story.

"Then they gave me thirty-five bucks out of the sixteen-hundred they stole and let me go." He shrugged.

"So how'd you get caught? Did you go to the police?"

"No, I just went home and went to bed. The cops came to get me a few days later."

"They have you on camera?" I asked.

"Oh yeah," he replied. "We weren't wearing masks or anything."

"Why didn't you call the cops to tell your story first? Did you not realize they'd come for you?"

"Cuz I'm stupid I guess." He shook his head and sighed before seeming to brighten up again. "The hostage we took totally stuck up for me too. He got mad at the cops for arresting me, and he has the exact same story as I have, but you know, I had a knife, so they say I'm a robber not a hostage, even though they had the gun. The really funny thing is that they told me the hostage I took had some kind of disease. Can you believe that? A disease of the mind that made him not hate me. I've never heard of that. How can not hating someone be a disease?"

"What?" I asked. "They told you he had a disease that made him not hate someone that he's supposed to hate?"

"Yeah, exactly," he replied.

"Who told you that? The cops?"

"Yeah, and my public defender... it's a freakin disease that makes you not hate people... like people who hold knives to your throat apparently."

This kid was sounding ridiculous.

Abdul spoke up. "Stockholm syndrome," he said.

"That's what it's called?" Allan said.

"It's a real disease?" I asked.

"Yup," Abdul replied. "Of course. He said it in a rather stupid manner. A psychologist would have given you a whole other side to it, but basically yeah, Allan described it just as the criminal psychologists see it. They say from an evolutionary standpoint people are less likely to be killed if they identify with their captors, though I don't know how this guy could catch it in half an hour. Prosecutors like to use it whenever a victim defends a criminal." He grinned. "Is that like... the sign of the rapture or something... when we literally see compassion as a disease?"

"They released me from jail three weeks ago," Allan said.

“They released you?” I asked.

“Yeah.” He chuckled and shook his head. “Yeah, they let me go.”

“What the hell did you do to get back here in three weeks?”

“Nothing. I never left. I’m still here.”

“You never left but they released you?”

“Yup.” Allan nodded. “I got a piece of paper sitting in some file somewhere that says I was released three weeks ago. The judge released me on my personal recognizance because my whole family lives here and I’ve never been out of the state. They sent me back here and told me I’d just have to wait 45 minutes for the paperwork to process. That was three weeks ago, so none of my time is counted as time served. I’m not even officially here and everyone I talk to just says they’ll get back to me. But they never get back to me.”

Now this kid really sounded insane, but he also seemed genuine as he bounced between laughing and joking to somber sighs. One way or the other, he probably believed this had happened to him.

But Abdul piped up with his own confirmation. “Yeah, I’ve heard of that happening from time to time. There’s not much you can do about it unless you’ve got a good lawyer who wants to interview other inmates and pour through paperwork. I have no idea, that’s why I keep telling you to get a lawyer, Bro.”

Allan laughed. “My parents can barely afford the gas to come see me... or at least that’s what they say.”

“That’s probably why they did this to you. They know you can’t fight it.”

“Seriously?” I asked. “Are you sure? This can’t be legal.”

“Well, no I don’t think it’s legal,” Abdul replied.

“Well how would they get away with it?”

“You and I get away with selling weed. I don’t know about you but I sold pot to hundreds of people before I ever got caught, and I’m gonna sell it to hundreds or thousands more and might never get caught again. If I do it’ll be another slap on the wrist. Why would it be any different for them?”

This kid had listened to my problems and spent time and energy thinking about it and offering me advice... over my pathetic marijuana charge and one night in county jail. Almost everyone here was in more trouble than myself, and yet they’d shown nothing but sympathy for my situation.

They locked us in our cells around 9 or 10, but left the lights on all night. “It’s just another form of torture,” Abdul commented. “The human brain needs to go dark once in a while to keep balanced. They take that away from us and it helps keep us crazy and degraded without legally being abuse.”

And surprisingly one of the worst aspects of jail was trying to sleep under the bright fluorescent lights.

“I’d say maybe 65 to 75 percent of the people in here got in a fight with their wives or girlfriends... smacked ‘em around or something.” Abdul explained.

“That’s funny because I see almost everyone so eager to talk to their girlfriends on those phones.” I replied.

“Yeah, that would be them. I can’t think of any one of them whose girlfriends actually left them.”

“So do they go to counseling or something during the day?”

Abdul laughed. “What, like bring in some relationship counselors and have some group therapy? A little role playing, talk about your feelings, address the real problems and talk about ‘em with your loved ones? Is that what you envisioned happening in jail?”

“Well, I figured there would be some kind of counseling or mental health... I don’t know... something. At the very least a wag of the finger and someone saying ‘you really shouldn’t do that again.’”

“Nope. Not at all,” he replied. “We just do this all day; shoot the shit and play gin rummy. You gotta pay through the nose if you want counseling, and even then it doesn’t help your case.”

“We haven’t even seen a guard since I got here like eight hours ago,” I said. “I thought jail was supposed to be about rehabilitation and convincing people not to re-commit.”

“Yeah...” Abdul replied, “...that would make too much sense.”

I chatted with Abdul for another hour or so and finally decided to try to fall asleep. But I lay awake and finally that other, stressed out half came back to the forefront of my mind.

How would I find another job after just getting out of jail? What if Officer Marks actually had been telling the truth? A year and a day mandatory minimum. What if the same thing that happened to Allan happened to me?

But at the same time... and I hesitate to even bring this up as it may distract my readers... but most of my life I have had a sexual fetish for chains, handcuffs and other forms of bondage, and yes, even jail cells.

When I was a kid, in one part of my mind, I would think to myself that some day, when I was an adult, I wanted to spend just one night in jail, just to see what it felt like. For some reason I assumed the sexual fetish aspect would immediately disappear as soon as I was actually locked down. I had met numerous people who had similar fetishes, and read studies indicating that my feelings were actually quite common, but somehow I had never, and even today I still have never heard a single mention of the bondage fetish phenomena and how it relates psychologically to jails, prison and law enforcement.

Over the years I had always assumed that if prisoners were getting some kind of twisted sexual thrill out of jail and handcuffs, that someone would have at least mentioned it somewhere and raised a red flag.

But here I was, beneath the stress over losing my job and wondering what my parents would have to say, I was still getting a sexual--maybe not a thrill, but a sensation. I know that if not for the stress it most definitely would have been a thrill, and one that I’d willingly repeat.

I looked at the door that was locked tight and wished that it had some of those bars like you see in the old-time jails, where you could see outside so you could know what you were being locked away from. The steel toilet with no seat and cement bench and stool, however, provided a much more fitting ambiance.

I have Stockholm syndrome, I thought. A bondage fetish plus Stockholm syndrome. They both seem to have the same evolutionary purpose, like they’re really just two sides of the same coin.

We ate oatmeal for breakfast, but I gave most of mine away because my nerves were starting to get the better of me.

I talked to my public defender at some point, and I don’t really remember what she said. She probably mostly told me things I already knew, like don’t act like an idiot in court. I believe she confirmed for me most of the things the other inmates had been telling me about my situation, but for some reason I still just couldn’t believe that Officer Marks had so blatantly lied to me.

We went to a "gym" for an hour at some point, as the guards went into our cells and did their daily search. We had to stay

within these big yellow lines, someone warning me that we'd have a day or two taken off the good-behavior system and would likely get beaten by the guards if we didn't comply.

This was the first time I had seen a guard since I'd gone through processing, but they just stood stone-cold and told us to move along.

I sat against the wall as half of us did and just chatted with whoever happened to be nearby and watched the other half play basketball. There was a tiny window near the roof and we could see just a little bit of a tree top, which, of course, was the only vegetation many of these people would see for months.

Later I started playing cards with a few people, but my game was interrupted when I was called into court.

They led a bunch of us through a tunnel to the courthouse and we all sat in a room in front of a judge. Families of some of the others were on a monitor in the corner, apparently watching a video feed of us. The prosecutor and defense sat in the front. We all seemed to have the same prosecutor and public defender.

I don't recall a lot of the details. I don't remember if we were handcuffed. I do however, remember thinking it would take all day, then I found out to my amazement that the three individuals at the front of the room could decide people's fate over simple two-minute conversations and dealt with people's lives as casually as a gas-station attendant might count out change.

As they started going through the cases, I started feeling better and worse at the same time. Some of these guys had done much more serious things than me, though unfortunately I don't recall any specifics, and weren't seeing bail set at ridiculously high rates.

Then they got to the big case, and the large quiet man I had come in with stood up... or maybe he was locked up somewhere else and we saw him on video feed. I don't remember if we talked to the judge from where we were all sitting on the benches or if we actually walked forward to a bench at the front. It's all so vague to me now. It seems that when something happens that defies comprehension, your mind blurs the details.

He was accused of picking up his baby daughter and smashing her head against the kitchen table to make her stop crying, then waited three hours before calling 911 after threatening his wife into making up a story about the child falling.

But the defense was asking for the case to be thrown out.

"So this occurred at 4:30 PM, is that correct?" asked the public defender.

"Yes, that's correct."

"You're certain this is the correct time?"

"Yes," replied the prosecutor.

"Okay, so I have eleven witnesses that work with the defendant who all claim he was at work until 5:15."

"Oh..." the prosecutor shuffled through her papers. "Wasn't it listed as 5:45 somewhere? I'm sorry... there's a few discrepancies in the files."

"Yes," replied the defense. "I'd agree with that; there are definitely discrepancies. I did see it listed as 5:45 in one place in the report, though in most cases it's referenced as 4:30."

"Oh. I believe we've decided to go with 6:00 PM as the proper time."

"Oh, okay, you're going with 6:00 now. Okay. Is that your final answer? You're positive it occurred at 6:00?"

“That’s the time we’re going with, yeah.”

“Okay, well, these same 11 witnesses say that the defendant actually left work a little before 7:00 PM.”

“Oh,” replied the prosecutor. “Well, we can decide on a specific time later.”

“You’re gonna change the time on me yet again? The 911 call occurred at 7:45. Thankfully you can’t change that. The original reason he was arrested was on suspicion of having waited too long before calling 911. That was based on information that both the doctor and the defendant’s co-workers have shown to be incorrect. It takes him twenty minutes to get home. His co-workers said that he left in a good mood, so then he would have had a total of 25 minutes to become so enraged at his daughter’s crying that he commits murder, then assaults and threatens his wife—while being careful to not leave a scratch on her—and convinces her to make up a lie that she accidentally tipped over the high-chair when he walked in the door, then calls 911 at 7:45.

“Your honor,” she continued. “This report is ridiculous. There’s misstatements and misquotes, there’s police statements that make no sense, and in some cases the writing is nearly illegible. The detectives only spent a few minutes examining the girl’s injuries, but somehow had a chance to draw all these conclusions. The defendant has numerous friends and family members who have stated that his family is more important than anything to him, and that he’s been getting his drinking under control. His boss stated that he’s an excellent employee. This prosecution is based on nothing more than the fact that he looks like a killer. Because he’s big, quiet, doesn’t speak very good English... and because he drinks. Yes, he’s had a couple assault charges, years ago, but they were minor, one amounting to little more than him pushing his girlfriend on the shoulder.”

“We’re still collecting evidence,” said the prosecutor. “I believe I can get a conviction.”

“You already talked to the reporters before you had all the information and now you need to save face by going through with this, regardless of the costs. Let me ask you, do you even believe this man is guilty? On a personal level, you don’t even believe he’s guilty do you?” And the public defender stared down her opposition.

The prosecutor looked up from her papers and in an emotionless monotone, accompanied with a subtle smirk, replied, “I’m not doing anything illegal.”

Then it came my turn and I stood up. The judge went over what I was accused of, selling three-ounces of pot to an undercover, then asked the prosecution for their recommendation.

“Prosecution recommends \$10,000 bail.”

My heart sank. I’d thought having local family would save me. I had no way to get \$10,000 without getting some serious help from someone, thus, humiliating myself.

“Would you like to say anything?” The judge asked me.

“I was hoping I could get out on personal recognizance. I have no intention of not showing up for my court date.”

“Well, we’ll see about that. How long have you lived in the area?” asked the judge.

“My whole life. I was born just south of here in Mount Vernon.”

“You have family here?”

“My mom lives in town, my dad lives fifteen minutes north of here and my grandpa lives an hour away.”

It was just as much about whether or not you were a local than it was about the crime you committed. The people who grew up here and had family here had lower bail. It was as simple as that.

That had never occurred to me... in a literal sense, whether or not you do time is based as much on where you were born as it is on the crime you committed. If I had recently moved here from somewhere else, I'd be screwed.

"Okay..." replied the judge... "And you have no prior arrests?"

"No."

"And you're not lying to me, right? It won't help you to lie because we double-check all this stuff before we let you go."

Yes, I knew about that double-checking period that can last anywhere from half an hour to three weeks.

"I haven't lied about anything," I said, and at that point, I hadn't.

The judge looked back at the prosecutor. "So why are you recommending \$10,000 bail for someone with no history of violence or even prior arrests and whose entire family lives in the area?"

"Well..." the prosecutor looked through some papers and tossed them back on her desk. "I never actually read Mr. Ringkvist's file, so I just went with the maximum by default."

"You haven't read his file?"

"Well, no. This child-abuse-manslaughter case has been taking up all my time today. It's too high-profile for me to put on the back-burner."

The judge paused a moment. "Okay... well it complicates things when the prosecution hasn't read the files of the defendants."

"It's been an amazingly hectic day," she replied.

"How many of these people today have files you haven't read yet?"

The prosecutor paused for a moment as she looked out on the crowd. "About a third of them."

"Okay then..." The judge turned back to the public defender with a long sigh. "So what are your recommendations for Mr. Ringkvist?"

"Personal Recognizance is fine with me," she replied.

"Have you read his file?" the judge asked.

"No, I have not," she replied.

So I guess it turns out that yes, we have a right to legal representation in the United States, but what I never realized is that there aren't any requirements that the legal representation actually do anything.

"I see."

"It's been a hectic day for me as well."

"Okay then, I guess we'll take him at his word. Personal recognizance it is."

The judge explained a couple logistical issues to me, then said, "Now, you can't do anything illegal before your trial."

"Oh, no of course not," I said instinctively.

"No marijuana smoking or illegal drugs of any kind until your trial." She gave me a stern glare.

“No, I won’t,” I said, being one of the few bold-faced lies I’ve ever told in my life. At the same time I thought, so is she implying that after my trial it’s okay? I wondered, does that judge actually take herself seriously? How can she seriously be looking me in the eye and not see that smoking weed is the first thing I’m going to do when I get home?

So after court I was locked in a little room with benches in the back and large Plexiglas windows lining the front. Soon the room was filled with so many other inmates that we were standing nearly shoulder to shoulder. People kept being taken in and out, and occasionally guards would call out for people and we’d have to shuffle around to let them out. Eventually, however, the other inmates dwindled down again until it was just me and a black guy from Los Angeles who was in on some gang-violence charge.

He started telling jokes and stories, and somehow started making me laugh. I was in a sudden good mood after finding out that I’d be getting out soon, and very receptive to a comedian. So this guy became steadily more and more silly and was finally jumping around, acting out his stories and doing impressions until my laughter almost threw me from my seat.

But for the life of me I can’t remember what any of those jokes were.

Then someone came and took him away and I was left in this strange room by myself, looking out the giant windows onto an empty hallway.

Eventually a guard came by and stopped by the window and looked curiously at me. “What are you doing here?” he asked.

I shrugged. “I don’t know... I’m supposed to be getting released on PR.”

He pointed at me and gave a friendly grin. “Are you the guy who escaped?”

“Uh...” I replied. “I don’t think so.”

“I think you are... what’s your name? Can you show me your ID?”

“I put my wrist identification up to the window.”

“Yup, that’s you...” he laughed. “Looks like we caught you. No need for the dogs. Hold on. I need to let the guys know that nobody got loose. I’ll send someone around to figure out where you’re supposed to be.”

“Okay, thanks,” I replied.

Five minutes later a woman came by and unlocked the door. “Come with me,” she said in a cold, flat voice.

Something seemed different about her from the other guards I’d met. Her face and body were rigid and she seemed to have a permanent scowl on her face. She would not make eye contact with me, and for the most part would not even look at me. This woman was much closer to what I had been expecting from the jail guards.

“Are we going back to D-3 block?” I asked.

“Correct,” she answered.

“Because I’m supposed to be getting released. I just came from court and they gave me PR.”

“It takes time for the paperwork,” she replied coldly.

“How long does that usually take?” I asked.

“Depends.”

“Can you give me an estimate?” I said.

We stepped into an elevator and she turned toward the front and stared forward, cold and blank. “Maybe An hour,” she replied.

“And is it true that the time it takes for them to do the paperwork doesn’t actually get counted as time-served?”

“The time is stamped when they first start the paperwork. If you’re getting out today, I wouldn’t complain about losing an hour if I were you.”

“Does it ever take longer than an hour?”

She didn’t answer; instead she just stared forward, perfectly rigid, toward the front of the elevator.

“...because I talked to a guy who said he’d been released three weeks ago and is still waiting for the paperwork to go through...”

Her eyebrows went up and she glanced at me for just a moment before returning to her cold stare. “Well, that would be abnormal.”

“But you admit that it can happen?” I asked.

Again, no response. I gazed at her and tried to move to catch her eyes, but still could not get so much as a twitch of emotion other than some kind of loosely veiled anger and disgust.

“I mean...” I continued. “The guy could have been mistaken. He wasn’t the brightest guy in the world.” I waited for some kind of reaction, then continued, “I talked to him for a while, and he really believes he’s been here for three weeks on some kind of paperwork error and regardless of whose mistake it is, it seems like something that should be looked into. I mean, at least he deserves to understand what’s going on with his case, doesn’t he?”

Again, she responded with only silence.

“I’m just talking to myself here, aren’t I?” I asked.

“At least you can figure out that much,” she replied.

I returned to the main holding area and gave updates on my situation to a few people who congratulated me on getting out so easily.

“You want my pager number?” Abdul asked. “In case you ever want to hook up some pounds in Canada? I can get you whatever you need and I’ll be getting out in seven days. I can show you the best ways to get it over the border.”

“Yeah, absolutely,” I replied, as I was always looking for bigger and better connections.

He wrote down his number and gave it to me just as someone poked his head into our cell and invited us to join a game of Rummy 5000.

“You actually play Rummy to 5000 points?” I asked. “How long does that take?”

“Two or three days... so yeah, if you start playing you gotta be willing to commit to a full game.”

“Well, I’ve already been released,” I replied. “That’s what the judge said today, anyway.”

“What time are they actually letting you out?” he asked.

“They weren’t too clear on that.”

“Then you might wind up being here till the end of the game,” he said with a grin. “We’ll let you go if they come for you.”

So I agreed to the game. I normally liked to plan for the worst so getting involved in a two day card game seemed like a good way to hedge my bets in case I wasn't actually getting out any time soon.

But I didn't even get through the first hand before someone called my name. I threw my cards down and jumped up. I ran back to my cell to collect all my stuff, snapped a quick goodbye to Abdul and whoever else I happened to run into, but otherwise I simply ran out as quickly as my feet could carry me and neglected to find all of my new friends to say my goodbyes. I was too frightened that if I waited this guard would give up on me and leave me here indefinitely like Allan.

I changed back into the clothes I had been wearing when I came in, then was directed through some doors to the front desk clerk.

"Ah... you're a popular guy," said the guy at the front desk from behind a Plexiglas window as he pulled out my plastic bin of personal items. "Your pager was going off all night last night. You were getting pages every half hour until three in the morning."

Every one of them, I knew, was someone looking for weed.

"Guess you've got some phone calls to make today, huh?" the attendant said with a grin.

I asked myself if he knew. How could he not know? Who else gets multiple pages from multiple people until all hours of the night?

"Why didn't you just turn it off?" I asked. I held up the pager and showed him the power button.

"Well, I'm not gonna disrespect your stuff," he replied. "You need to be able to get your messages."

I was kind of speechless. After all I had gone through and witnessed here, this guard didn't want to disrespect my stuff. I couldn't help but laugh.

"Well, you still get the messages even if the pager is turned off," I replied.

"Oh yeah? Really? Oh, I guess that makes sense. Maybe I can just shut them off when this happens and don't need to feel bad about it."

"You'd be saving their battery power anyway, so I think most of us would be able to get over it."

"Yeah," he said. "I don't like riffling around in people's stuff unless I absolutely have to, you know. So many people who come through here are having such a hard time that they don't need me adding insult to injury."

I suddenly thought about my so-called 'crazy' idea that jail would not be as bad as seventh-grade, but as I signed my name to the sheet stating that I had received all my possessions, I thought back to grade-school and remembered that there were many times that I would have given just about anything to have teachers who were as respectful toward their students as this jail attendant was toward the average drug dealer. Most of the teachers I remember were closer to the guard in the elevator than this man.

At the same time, he almost seemed like he was admitting how wrong all of this was. "...insult to injury...". Why would he have referred to jail as an 'injury' if it was something justified and necessary?

Then I walked outside to what seemed like a whole other world. The first thing I saw was that big tree that we had seen from the window in the gym, but I didn't stop to look. I started running past the post office and down the long steps of the amphitheatre that led down to the park, then raced up to the restaurant where I worked and ran in the back door.

"Hey! It's the jail berg!" everyone seemed to shout. "How's the cornhole?"

"Ha ha ha," I said. "Yeah, there was no ass raping... is Wendy here?"

But it was already late enough that that was highly unlikely, so I went into the office and sat down, took a deep breath and thought of all the things I had been preparing to say. I had to do it, I told myself. Swallow your pride, beg for your job... tell her about how marijuana isn't all horrible and evil and won't affect my work ethic. Get her to see the bottom line. She wouldn't want to bother finding another prep cook. I had to make her see that.

I called the boss's house and Wendy answered after a couple rings, sounding annoyed. "Hi Wendy," I said. "It's Kalin."

"Kalin!" she shouted, her voice immediately brightening. I could tell she'd had a couple drinks. "Mister jail berg! How are you? Are you doing okay?"

"Oh I'm fine--"

She cut me off. "You're coming into work tomorrow, right?"

"Yeah, sure," I said.

"Oh thank God. I got all scared that I was gonna need to bread fish! Oh God! We're running out of fish, Kalin! We have like two pans left. I got worried about you when you didn't call... like you were mad at us for letting this happen."

"I did call!" I said. "I called five or six times and some guy hung up on me every time."

"Oh, yeah... that was our new dishwasher. He's never answered a phone before. He mentioned that some psycho stalker kept calling but somehow didn't remember your name. He didn't bother to mention the creepy stalker was calling from jail. That probably would have clued me in. Like what can a stalker do from jail anyway?"

"Oh, Wendy... that was terrifying."

She laughed.

"Yeah, that was the worst part of this experience was thinking that I'd lose my job over it."

Then a bout of cackling laughter burst from the phone. "Oh dear Lord." She tried to calm herself and her laughs subsided after a few seconds. "I'm sorry. I know you're serious." Her laughter built again. "I'm sorry I'm laughing at you... but... come on... seriously? With all the reasons I've had for firing people over the years, you thought I would fire you over a little reefer? That's classic."

"Well... you hear about it in the after-school specials."

"Yeah, they always lose their jobs in the after-school specials don't they?" she said through more laughter. "I know all you cooks are out there smoking and selling pot. I mean for Christ's sake, half my cooks are stoned. I'm not stupid you know. As long as you're not selling out of my kitchen, it's none of my business."

"Okay, well, thank you," I said.

"Frankly I'm a little insulted that you thought I could be that much of a bitch. So you're coming in tomorrow. Usual time, bright and early?"

"Yeah," I said. "Absolutely."

"So are you okay, Kalin? Sorry I didn't ask you that already."

"Oh I'm fine," I replied. "It was kinda fun, actually."

"So your cornhole's okay then?" she asked with another chuckle. "No ass-raping?"

"No. There was no rape."

Then I had to deal with some kind of logistical issue. I remember a friend got a couple other friends to drive her to Boss Tweed. Perhaps she had the keys to my motor scooter or something.

I rode my scooter home and the moment I walked in my front door, something changed inside me. I felt this sense like a whole new world had opened up to me. I had been so terrified. I had been selling pot every day because I was so confident that I was making the world a better place, that just like the moonshiners during prohibition I was fighting for a better world, putting my freedom on the line, and that when we succeeded, future pot smokers would thank me for years to come, just like many still thank the moonshiners of 80 years ago.

But now I knew I could do all that... I could still be that rebel and I didn't even need to pay the consequences I had feared.

The law was a joke, and that knowledge set me free.

I looked at my pager and its sixteen messages. So many people couldn't wait to see me.

But first, before calling anyone back, and even before removing my shoes, I loaded a bowl and started smoking. I turned on my music, cranked it up and found myself dancing, as though overcome by some magical joyous force of nature, and to this day, I'm not sure if I have ever felt as free as I did in that moment.

The next day I was walking around downtown and something in the paperbox caught my eye. I knelt down to look at the headline...

...about a cold-blooded baby-killer.

There was his picture, on the front page of the Bellingham Herald, and I read the article, about how, in a drunken fit of rage he had picked up his two-year-old daughter and smashed her head against the table, then waited a couple hours before calling 911 after beating and threatening his wife into submission. The article went on to mention his history of alcoholism, and his previous assault arrests.

What the article did not mention was anything that had been said by the defense. No mention of the discrepancies in the police report. No mention of the 11 witnesses disputing the prosecutors timeline. No mention of the family members who would testify that he would never do such a thing, and of course, no mention of the misquotes made by the police.

Instead, the Bellingham Herald condemned this man on the front page of the paper.

I started feeling guilty about how I had acted in jail. Everyone had been so caring and thoughtful and ready to help over my little legal troubles, even while there were so many people dealing with troubles that were far beyond anything I could imagine.

...because this is the sacrifice we all make for our system of "justice".

Seeing your baby daughter fall and crack her head open would be difficult enough, then to have the police come, insisting that your wife said something she didn't, then getting hauled off to jail so you can't even be with your family as your daughter passes away... then to be condemned on the front page of the local paper, and have the prosecutor look straight through your suffering as though you're not even human, practically admitting in court that you're probably not guilty, then just shrug and say "I'm not doing anything illegal."

Even if he's acquitted, this is the kind of thing from which a person never recovers... the kind of thing that tears families apart and drives people toward real violence.

I told myself that this would be the most twisted, horrifying thing I would ever witness being done in the name of our criminal

justice system. Unfortunately I was very, very wrong. But that's a whole other story.

Some days later at work I sat down on a box for a quick break and a bite to eat in the tiny hallway where we kept all our coats and bags. Sarah came down the hallway. "Hey, Kalin!"

"Hi," I said, "sorry what was your name again?"

"I'm Sarah... remember... we met right before you got arrested? I couldn't forget you because everyone's been talking about you and your cornhole."

"Ah yes..."

"So you're out now I see. How was it? How's your cornhole?" She giggled. "Rob told me I had to ask you that."

"No," I said. "My cornhole's fine. There were no ass-rapings."

"Well, that's good. So your'e okay?" she asked.

"I'm great," I said. "I had a lot of fun, to tell you the truth. Jail is like nothing I ever expected, and everyone was ridiculously nice, which really surprised me."

"Yeah, nice people in jail isn't really the stereotype. I'm glad to hear it."

"I still have my id tag." I held up my wrist and the paper bracelet with my mugshot, prisoner number and information. "I should take it off soon and keep it for a souvenir cuz it'll get worn out eventually."

"Oh yeah!" she replied, holding up her own wrist to show me a very similar bracelet, also with her picture and ID on it. "I have one of those too!"

"You went to jail?" I asked.

"No!" she replied. "I went to Vegas with my mom for my 21st birthday, and they give you these things so they don't need to check your ID everywhere you go."

"Oh, cool. I turn 21 in a week and a half."

"It's been three weeks now... I suppose I should do the same... take it off and keep it for a souvenir."

A few nights later I got a call from a fellow marijuana dealer named Oscar. Oscar was definately a cool guy. He worked as a dishwasher at the fish & chips restaurant with me by day, but by night he played in and wrote most of the music for one of the most popular hippie jam bands in the city. When he called me, it usually meant he wanted to buy an ounce of pot, but he also mentioned that a couple people from work were coming over to hang out.

Oscar was what you'd call a ladies-man. Somehow he just had a way with women, with his big puffy hippie-hair and smooth, Snoop-Dogg style voice. He was forever having new girlfriends and girls who wanted to be his girlfriend, but somehow managed to do it without any significant drama.

So I dropped by his house to hang out and came in to see Sarah with some girl I didn't recognize. She introduced herself as Sarah's roommate.

"You guys wanna smoke a bowl?" Sarah asked, and of course we all agreed. She busted out a 40 sack and stuffed a bud in one

of Oscar's giant, ornate glass bubblers. She took a fat toke and passed it along.

Then when we were done with that bowl, Oscar loaded another one, then myself, and as soon as that was done, Sarah asked about the bong sitting in the corner. Oscar brought it out and Sarah packed another fat bowl. Soon Oscar started saying that he'd had enough, but strangely continued taking puffs as we'd pass them to him. "You don't need to smoke your whole sack with us, Sarah... I mean, save some for yourself."

"Well, that's what pot is for, isn't it?" she asked. "You smoke it!" And she packed another bong bowl and passed it along. "I'll save a couple bowls for tomorrow."

Sarah became very giggly, which seemed to spread to the rest of us, and soon we were all nearly falling over in laughter, and at times I thought Sarah was going to faint she was laughing so hard. An hour or two went by and Sarah's roommate finally needed to leave, and soon I was left alone with Oscar.

As soon as the girls were out the door, Oscar looked at me and said, "That was pretty crazy." He shook his head. "Unbelievable. Fucking Sarah... crazy girl."

"Yeah, she likes smokin' weed, I guess," I said. "I've certainly seen people smoke more than that though."

"Yeah, me too... but not after three years."

"Three years?" I asked.

"Yeah. That first bowl she smoked right after you showed up was the first pot she'd smoked in three years."

Now that was impressive. "What?" I said. "Why?"

"She wanted to impress you," Oscar said. "I've been trying to hook up with Sarah for weeks now, but she never wanted anything to do with me until she found out I was friends with you. I've invited her out to smoke pot and every time she told me she doesn't smoke."

I laughed. "That's like something out of an after-school special... like who smokes pot to impress someone other than middle-schoolers who want to be like the big kids?"

"I have no idea." Oscar shook his head. "And me and my roommate were talking about his cousin earlier before you got here and suddenly Sarah started talking like she knew the guy, but wasn't making any sense, and it turned out that she thought we were talking about you... I mean, why would we be talking about you? It was like she just couldn't get you out of her mind and assumed everything had something to do with you..."

"No..." I said. "That can't be. She's gorgeous. She's that interested in me?"

"Yeah, definately."

"Girls like that don't go for me. I'm a college dropout and she's almost ready to graduate and she watched me get arrested the first time we met."

"Trust me, Dude. Sarah's crazy for you."

But you know that too-good-to-be-true syndrome... I knew it could never be true.

A few days later I stood in nearly the same position as I did at the beginning of the story, at the prep table, slicing cheddar cheese on the big electric slicer, and Sarah came up beside me. She looked nervous, and immediately I thought that someone had choked on a bone from my fish.

But then she started, "Um... I was wondering... if maybe... you would like to... sometime..." And I noticed strange movement and looked down to see her knees trembling. "Would you like to go out sometime... kinda like a date?" Then she burst forth with a string of nervous chatter. "I'd say we could go to a bar but I know you're not 21 yet, but if we go bowling I can buy a pitcher of beer and we can just share a glass and I've done it before and it's all good cuz they don't really care at the bowling alley but if you don't want to go bowling maybe we can do something else like a movie or something or go out to dinner or whatever..."

Then she stopped and just looked up at me and swallowed nervously.

So I played it cool and pretended to think about it for a second, nodding faster and faster as though I were slowly realizing that this wasn't such a bad idea. "Yeah, I think we could do that," I said. "Bowling sounds good for me. What's a good night for you? How's Thursday? I'm heading East on Friday to see Phish, so the weekend doesn't work for me."

"Yeah, thursday sounds good to me!" She grinned and giggled nervously, then did an awkward hop, as though wanting to jump up and down. "Okay... well... customers are waiting for me. I need to get back to work."

I gazed at this beauty as she walked away, past the dish-pit toward the dining room. My jaw dropped slowly open once I knew she couldn't see me.

She had watched me get arrested.

And I realized, for just this moment alone, everything I had gone through was worth it.

I asked myself, is this supposed to be a deterrent? Is this typical of someone who gets arrested for drugs and spends a night in jail? If so, I wanted to do it again and again and again.

Thursday came along in a day or two. We went bowling and I had one of the easiest, smoothest dates ever. We shared a couple pitchers and played a couple games, then she drove me back to my apartment where we watched a movie on my 13 inch TV, then around 2:00 or 3:00 AM we started kissing, and didn't stop until I had to go to work at 4:45.

Over the coming months, Sarah slowly became obsessed with me, and soon started asking me if I wanted to move in with her. One of the most beautiful and intelligent girls I'd ever dated also happened to be one of the most caring and lovable women I knew.

And none of it would have been possible if not for Officer Stanley Marks, those handcuffs and my trip to jail.

So I asked myself, is this really how criminal justice is supposed to work? Because if this is how it works, no wonder we have so many criminals.

The Borrowed Car

- Thursday, March 25, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/borrowed-car/>

I ran out of sellable quantities of weed one night. Sure I had enough to smoke myself, but other people kept calling me, looking for sacks, so I felt frustrated that I couldn't hook them up.

I decided to go through a different person to buy my usual quarter-pound, so I talked to my friend Aleks, who claimed to know some people... or he knew someone who knew someone.

So Aleks made some calls and confirmed that he could get me the weed, with a couple of minor hoops. The seller, however, was unwilling to deliver to my house, nor to deal directly with me. I wasn't used to dealing with a middle-man, but in this case I needed to get some weed quickly.

But I had no car, Aleks had no car, and the middle-man had no car, so at first I thought there was no way to make this work.

But Aleks knew someone who had a car. A woman named Karen lived directly above me in our apartment complex. He took me up there and she invited us in, and immediately, before even introducing ourselves, she invited us into the back room to smoke some weed and look at her new marijuana plants, which she was quite proud of. But to me they looked rather sickly.

Aleks told her about our situation and asked if she could drive us to make the buy. She quickly refused, but instead, offered to just let me take her car. Aleks did not have a drivers license, so I would be the one driving. She tossed me the keys and I joked about the fact that she was giving me her car before she knew my name. She simply shrugged. "Whatever," she said. "I trust ya. Just smoke me a bowl when you get back and I'm all good."

So after smoking a quick bowl, Aleks and I got up to leave, but Karen stopped us and said, "There's a few details about the car... there's no back seat, but there is sort of a back... plywood platform he can squeeze into... and the left turn signal doesn't work, or the heater, or the passenger side door... so the passenger has to crawl over the drivers seat to get in... oh and I think the seatbelts are broken."

I sighed, not wanting to carry a quarter-pound of marijuana in a car with no turn signals, but went on with the plan anyway.

Aleks climbed over the seat and we settled in. We drove across town at Aleks' direction and pulled in front of some old house. Immediately a guy came up, as our connection had apparently been waiting out on the street for us. I got out to let him in and he looked at me and cocked his head. "Hey dude, I know you," he said. "It's Ryan... We work together... don't you recognize me Dude?"

It took a moment, but finally I recognized him as one of the line-cooks at the restaurant where I worked. So I immediately felt a little better about this shady deal, knowing that our middle-man wasn't an undercover.

Ryan took a minute to squeeze into the back of the two-seater car, propping himself up on the plywood, hunching his back and putting his head between his knees just to keep himself from spilling out into the front seat.

We drove almost all the way back to my house again to find the actual dealer's home. Ryan got out because Aleks and I were not allowed to come in. I gave Ryan some money and gave him a price outline.

Ryan came out again five minutes later to tell me that the dealer had refused my price. He was willing to sell me ounces of some weed I had already sampled for \$250 a piece, which for the quality, was a very reasonable price. However, I wanted a quarter pound (four ounces), and was used to getting better deals on larger quantity.

Ryan went back in, relaying my negotiations, then came back out again to say the dealer had firmly refused, demanding a thousand dollars for four ounces, which was just a bit too high for me. Finally I refused and Ryan went back in to apologize

and say goodbye. Later I realized I should have simply bought a single ounce to cover my buyers for that night.

So Ryan crawled back into the back seat and we started to pull away from the curb, but just as we did, I saw a cop racing toward us from the side of the car. I stopped quickly, scared that I'd almost hit him, and hung halfway out of the parking space.

It took me a second to roll the window down. Fortunately the window actually worked.

At this point I was thanking God that I had not bought any weed that night, but still figured I was in for some problems, not even knowing the last name of the car's owner, and doubting very much that she had insurance.

The officer took a quick look at Ryan hunched up in the back seat. I assumed he would point out that his positioning was not legal, but the officer didn't seem to give it a second thought.

"Hey, have you guys seen a guy named Alex Robinson?" he asked.

I looked at Aleks in the seat next to me, and tried to remember his last name. He had told me a few days earlier but I had completely forgotten. Robinson sounded very familiar.

"No," Aleks said. "Never heard of him."

"No," Ryan repeated.

And the cop looked at me, "Um, no," I said, nearly certain that I was telling a lie. "Whose Aleks Robinson?"

"Oh, he's just this little punk whose been running around this neighborhood causing trouble. You haven't seen anyone suspicious around here?"

"No," I replied. "Haven't seen anyone."

"Okay, then, have a good night," said the officer, waving me on with his flashlight.

Slowly I pulled out and drove away, thanking the heavens that he didn't even ask for the cars registration and proof of insurance. After a few blocks I asked Aleks, "What the hell did you do? Is your last name Robinson, you crazy bastard... did I just lie for your ass?"

"What?" he asked. "No Dude, that's not me."

"You fuckin lyin to me?" I shouted.

"You wanna see my ID?" he shouted back, pulling it out and shoving it in front of my face.

I pushed it away frantically without reading it, trying to keep my eye on the road, but was sufficiently satisfied that he was not the person they were looking for.

We returned Ryan to his house, said sorry for wasting his time and went home.

About two-weeks later I came home to find my apartment complex swarming with cops with dogs. A day later I heard the story from some other residents.

Karen, the woman in the apartment just above me, had been confronted by the police, but had managed to get away by jumping out her second-story window and running into the woods. The cops had brought out the dogs and had finally tracked her down and arrested her.

What was she arrested for, you might wonder...

She was arrested for stealing cars.

The Dog Trap

- Sunday, January 31, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/dog-trap/>

One day I went to a 7-11 to buy some junk food from a friend's house who lived behind the store. In the back was a large dog tied to a railing on an extremely long leash. He seemed perfectly nice and behaved as I came around him the first time, but as I was leaving with a bag of soda, chips and candy, and rounding the back corner, this dog started barking menacingly and blocking my way up the stairs to the apartment complex behind the store.

Now, I have no fear of dogs, so I just kept walking toward him and said hi to him, expecting him to either calm down and realize I was friendly or move out of the way.

But instead, as soon as he realized he wasn't frightening me, he leapt from the front of the stairs, ran a fast circle around me, then sprinted off in the opposite direction. The seemingly playful but surprisingly rapid movement caught me off guard and I stopped and watched him run until he hit the end of the leash and my legs immediately snapped shut, the leash wrapped tightly around me, just under my knees.

The dog turned to stare at me, continued barking frantically, and backed away from me as forcefully as he could. I leaned over to pull at the leash, but found myself too off balance, and the dog too strong, so I hopped around for a long moment, pulling at either the leash or my pantleg with my free hand. Finally I pulled long enough and wrenched my left leg out of the loop, coming close to toppling over as the rope stuck on the tread of my shoes and the dog pulled in random directions.

But as I put my free foot down, ready to start on the second one, I noticed the dog sprinting directly toward me again at a full run. He wrapped around me again and took off in the same direction until reaching the end of the leash, trapping my leg once again against the other and pulling as tight as he could manage.

So I couldn't help but laugh at this point, and try to talk to the dog, like maybe he'd tell me why he was doing this, but he just continued barking incessantly.

I stood for a moment, concentrating on keeping my balance, and finally set my bag down and put both hands on the leash to pull the dog closer. He fought hard, but gave a few inches and I was able to slip my left leg out once again, but once again, this animal was ready and sprinted toward me, leaping right over my bag of junk food, looping around me and running again to the end of the line. But this time, I knelt down to grab the line as it wrapped around me, but instead of being able to hold onto the line and keep it from pulling tight, it simply caught my right wrist and pulled it tight against my legs.

Fortunately getting my hand free from the trap was a lot easier than a pant leg and shoe. But I found it even more difficult at this point because of my own laughter.

So I stood and stared for a long moment at this dog as he pulled and barked, then finally I picked up my bag and hopped toward the stairway. I set my bag down on the stairs and leaned against the railing. I pulled my left leg free yet again, and immediately the dog sprinted toward me, but this time stopped when he reached the railing, unable to fit through. He turned to go up the stairs, but I stepped in front of him, waving my arms and legs. He stopped at the bottom and jumped back and forth frantically, still barking without pause.

I pulled my other leg free and stumbled up the stairs with my bag until I got halfway up, and out of looping range. I stopped and shouted a victory bark at him, wondering if the dog's owner was hiding in the bushes watching, ready to give him a treat if he got me to topple over.

The Drunken Porch Dive

- Sunday, January 31, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/drunken-porch-dive/>

On Halloween one year I dressed up as a redneck with a dirty old delivery uniform shirt, some buck teeth, a Hooters baseball cap and most importantly, a 24 ounce can of Rainier beer, which I insisted on pronouncing Ron-Yay.

I went to a party at my friend McLean's house and opened my beer. I drank it quickly and refilled it several times with the good beer from the keg, but was careful to keep a hold of it, since it was the most vital part of my costume.

McLean was dressed as Link from The Legend of Zelda, and had a little fake sword that people kept stealing. I watched several people grab the sword then get caught in the crowd and fight over it before giving in and letting McLean take it back. It all kind of reminded of being in seventh grade, but I was drunk enough at this point that after McLean was done yelling at everyone and telling them he'd beat the next person to touch the sword, I ran forward and snatched it from its sheath on his back and darted through the crowd, asking people to step out and block McLean's path along the way.

I ran out the back door, his sword in my left hand and my Rainier in my right. I ran down the steps, watching my feet, but when I hit the bottom I turned to see McLean take one leap across the porch, hit the edge and spring outward into the open air toward me.

And in my drunken state, time seemed to slow as he flew through the air toward me, and a number of thoughts ran through my head, like the idea of jumping out of the way, which I felt I did not have time for, and more prominently, the amazement that McLean was able to fly like that and would be willing to risk injury over a fake sword.

But all my thoughts in that moment were overwhelmed by one far more powerful: My Ron-yay; and the fear that my beer would spill, and even worse, my can would be crushed.

So I looked at the concrete steps that I had taken the care to actually use, and threw my beer, careful to keep it upright.

McLean slammed down on top of me and drove me to the ground into the leaves and dirt, but as I hit the ground, I saw from the edge of my vision, my beer settling onto the step, almost exactly where I had aimed, still right-side up and spill-free.

McLean was screaming and clawing at me, grabbing my collar and my Hooters cap and demanding his sword, until I finally let go. I tried to tell him about my beer, but he simply screamed louder about his sword.

He jumped up in what seemed like an instant and turned back toward the house. He leapt up the stairs taking two at a time, his first step landing directly on top of my Rainier can, crushing it, sending beer splattering everywhere.

And how we both walked away from that without so much as a scratch or a bruise, I will never know.

The Flood

- Friday, April 08, 2011

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/the-flood/>

I found myself barefoot on a hot summer day with my friend McLean, playing with a hose, spraying each other with water or forming little streams in the driveway. We ran around the house, inventing things to do with running water, and eventually found ourselves climbing through the window into my mother's greenhouse, dragging the hose behind.

As we stepped on the dirt floor, dust began to rise. It was even hotter in the greenhouse than outside, but we crawled in anyway, looking for a new place to flood. We left the hose hanging through the window and watched as a miniature river formed. Eventually the river became a lake, and began spreading toward the lower area of the greenhouse, and out, across the floor.

"My mom's flowers are gonna drown," I said. "Go turn off the water!"

"No, no, wait," McLean replied. "We don't need to. We can save the plants." He dropped to his knees and began building a dam out of dirt.

A moment later the water hit his creation and it collapsed. I began running frantically around, looking for something to build a more sturdy dam as McLean tried to hold the water back with his hands. "Lets pick up the plants and put them up on the shelf," I suggested.

"No, we can do this. Just find me something to hold back the water."

Digging around the potted plants and gardening equipment I started finding stones or pieces of wood and handed them to him and he tried to fit them together to form a blockage in the flow of water. He succeeded for a short time, but again, the water overwhelmed his creation. I soon dropped to the ground and helped. We worked together on another dam of mud and wood, this one right against the first of the potted plants and actually managed to hold off the water.

Our triumph did not last long. The stream split in two directions and threatened more of the plants around the greenhouse. We each took one stream and attempted to protect the plants in their paths. We worked frantically, using anything we could to block the flow of water. Eventually one of us had the idea of putting something under the pots to raise them up and get them out of the flow. We found blocks of wood and bricks, but soon ran out. We had to start tearing down our dams to use the material to lift the pots. This allowed the water to flow freely, and we had to race even faster to stay ahead of it.

As the water continued to spread, we ran out of material. We stood up and stared at each other, completely out of options. "What do we do now?" I asked, praying he had another idea.

McLean stared, and after a moment, his face brightened. He clapped his hands and pointed at the hose. "We can just pull it back out," he said.

Of course! Just pull the hose out the window. I couldn't understand why I hadn't thought of it. I took a step toward the window, but stopped, suddenly feeling cheap. This is cheating. The hose is beyond my control, I thought. I shouldn't be thinking about touching it.

I stood, squishing mud between my toes and an idea came to mind. I turned back and said, "Lets stack the plants on top of each other. That'll keep them out of the river."

"Good idea." And we set to work stacking the pots in such a way that the plants were not crushed. We could not stack them more than two high and always needed a base of at least two, so it didn't make things much easier, but it gave us a new sense of hope. There were still plants getting wet, but each time we saved them in time, either stacking them on others and getting them above the water or moving them to the small area that was still dry. We didn't think about putting any of them up on the

shelf.

When the water had completely covered the floor of the greenhouse and it looked as though there would be a few flowers that we could not save, I had the idea of going outside the greenhouse and finding blocks of wood to use. I climbed out the window, over the hose, accidentally kicking it out. Without thinking about it, I picked it up and placed the hose back in the window and let it continue flooding the room. I scanned the area and found several items that would work as stilts. I began picking up blocks of wood, boards, rocks, and a plastic basket, and handed them through the window to McLean, who used them to lift the endangered plants out of the water.

I climbed back in and helped stack the pots on top of the items I had found and after several minutes, we had all of the plants out of the water. I stood up in the deepest area, the water climbing up my ankles and we screamed in triumph. We had defeated the flood. It would be a long time before the water reached any of our plants. We'd won.

Several moments later, my mother came through the door that led into the house and let out her own cry. She bolted back out again and turned off the water.

"Look Mom," I said when she returned, "we saved your flowers. You don't have to worry. We rescued them from the flood."

The Grumpy Old Man

- Monday, March 29, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/grumpy-old-man/>

McLean and I were out riding our bikes at about 12 or 13 when we found ourselves at a KOA campground and decided to stop to grab a little junk food. There was some kind of confusion about where to put our bikes, and for some reason we couldn't leave them near the front door. Most of the camping spots were empty so we dropped them in the nearest one.

We returned to our bikes and as we stood around munching our candy bars an old man came out of nowhere. "What do you think you're doing?" he shouted.

"Huh?" we both said at once. "What are you talking about?"

"Why would you do that?" his face reddened as his voice went louder. "I saw you right here. I was right there and you saw me!"

"What?"

"Don't play dumb with me!" He beat his fist against some invisible table. "I'm not an idiot! I was right here and saw you and you saw me!"

"We don't understand--"

He cut me off with a loud grunt. "I'm not gonna play this game with you! You punk kids think you can just go around and get away with anything--well I've got news for you, this is gonna catch up to you, and you'll have to pay eventually... I mean, I have half a mind to..." he drifted off with a shake of his head.

"Ok," McLean said. "We're sorry."

"Yeah, I hope you are!" He replied, only slightly calmer.

"Yeah, we're really sorry," Mclean continued. "We won't let it happen again... we promise."

He grunted again and turned toward the store. "See that it doesn't," he said as he walked away.

Mclean and I reached for our bikes without taking our eyes off him. The man shot us another angry glare just before entering the building.

"Dude..." Mclean started slowly. "Do you have *any* idea what he was talking about?"

"Not a clue," I replied. "Why'd you apologize if you didn't know?"

"What else was I supposed to do?"

"So how do we keep this from happening again?" I asked.

"We're gonna get the hell out of here is what we're gonna do."

The Jesus Leap

- Monday, August 09, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/jesus-leap/>

I sat on the floor playing my old-school Nintendo system when my roommate, Aleks came through the front door, breathing heavily and shaking. He started pacing back and forth across the living room as he talked. "Dude," he said. "I need your help, Dude. It's Josh. He's going to do something really crazy." I heard a high whine in Aleks' voice, as though he were about to burst into tears. "He just called me, Dude. He said he's going to make a leap of faith. He's like, all sober now. He hasn't done any drugs in like two weeks and now he's going insane without them. I think he's gonna jump off a cliff, Dude. I know that sounds crazy, but I really think he's going to go jump off a cliff to prove that he loves God or something."

"What makes you say that?" I asked.

"Because that's the kind of person he is, and because he's talked about it before. He wants to do it for Jesus. Please, Dude you've gotta help me find him."

"Don't you think he was just playin with you?" I asked.

"No, Josh is crazy. Like seriously crazy."

"Well, I have a hard time accepting your definition of crazy after the time you almost burned our apartment down trying to cast a spell on your ex-girlfriend."

"No," Aleks said, his body moving randomly as though he couldn't contain his energy. "I know I've done some crazy shit, and I know you think I'm out of my mind, but Kalin, Josh is a Christian... Christian's can be *really* crazy. And he's a *real* Christian. That's rare. He's not someone who just goes to church and plays along. I mean he really believes. The only thing keeping him sane was all the acid he was doing, because it would distract him from God talking to him all the time, but now that he's been sober for two weeks all he has is his religion, and I swear he's going to hurt himself or someone else... probably himself."

But I didn't believe it. Josh seemed like a very rational and collected person. Aleks and I actually had plans to lease his house from his mom. "So God is telling Josh to go jump off a cliff."

"That's what Josh believes, yes," Aleks replied. "And I think he might go through with it."

"Okay, well I don't believe it," I said. "But I guess I've got nothing else to do. Do you wanna go over there and see him? I can head over there on my scooter, I guess or we could catch a ride with someone."

"I don't know where he is. Do you think you could just go out on your scooter and look for him?"

"Where would he be?"

"I don't have the slightest idea. I need to cast a spell and find out."

"What's that gonna do?"

"Like a locator spell. Don't worry. I don't expect you to understand. Just give me like five minutes to set up my altar then it should only be fifteen minutes to tell me where Josh is."

"Why don't you use logic?" I asked. "Try to think about his personality, where he likes to go, what he's trying to accomplish and where it would make the most sense for him to be."

"I've tried and I can't think of anywhere he might be." Aleks continued pacing, his arms pumping up and down as though

anxious to punch something that didn't exist. "Josh is a very magical person too, so my spell should hone in on him."

As Aleks ran to his bedroom and closed the door, I tried to think about all the cliffs in the area. We had a few in a park across town called Whatcom Falls, but people jumped off those into the water on a daily basis. In order for it to be a leap of faith he would need to do a sideways jump to head toward the rocks and I just couldn't picture a leap of faith being that precise and calculated. Even so, I figured the cliff at Whatcom Falls was the best bet, or perhaps the one tall building downtown, though he would have needed to go into someone's office to find a good jumping window.

But the chances he was at Whatcom Falls was probably slim, and it would take me a couple hours to get there on my scooter and then explore every possible location, even if there was any truth to what Aleks was claiming, so I figured the best bet would be to stay home and wait for a call (this was before the age of cell phones) or try and catch a ride with someone. The problem was that Aleks was now locked in his bedroom casting spells when he should be calling friends and family, trying to figure out what was going through Josh's head.

I sat and thought for ten minutes or so before Aleks came back out of his bedroom. "Okay, it's done. It's all set up. I should be getting a message in a little bit if the spell worked."

"So this is where you suddenly remember something he said to you that'll give you a clue and you'll get to give credit to the spell... instead of just remembering what he said in the first place."

Aleks ignored my cynicism as he sat nervously on the couch for his vision. As the minutes passed he became more frustrated. "Why isn't this working? I should be getting a sense for him or something. These kind of spells always work. Why isn't it telling me anything?"

"Because they never work, Dude." I said. "If you really want to help Josh, try using your logic and memory instead of begging invisible spirits to do your work for you."

"You just don't get it," Aleks replied as he got up to leave. "I'm going to look for him."

"Okay," I said. "I'll wait here. Call me in a couple hours and I'll let you know if anyone calls or anything. Give me a call too if you figure out where he went and I can hop on my scooter."

Aleks left and was gone the rest of the night. He called several times from different locations, each time anxious and distraught, but without any new information. Naturally, I didn't take Aleks seriously, and figured the probability was that Aleks had completely misinterpreted something Josh had said.

But around 3:00 AM, as I was about to lie down for bed, Aleks called one last time. "We found Josh," he said.

"Where was he?" I asked.

"On the railroad tracks. I'm gonna head up to the hospital to see him. I think he's in surgery right now, but I'm not sure."

"What happened?" I asked.

"I was wrong about the cliff," Aleks said. "He jumped off a bridge, not a cliff."

"Why?"

"Jesus told him he could fly."

"Seriously?"

"Yeah. See, I told you there were people crazier than me."

"I guess so. So is he gonna be okay."

"I think so. His mom said he's got a collapsed lung. He was lying on the railroad tracks for four hours before he finally crawled to the road for help."

"Oh, shit," I said, putting my head in my hands. I knew exactly what bridge he was talking about. It was less than ten blocks from Josh's house and just about the only place in the city where someone could kill themselves by jumping. It seemed so obvious now, but I realized my mind had been so clouded by my theory that Aleks had completely misread the situation, that that particular bridge hadn't occurred to me.

The next day, Aleks came home and told me that Josh was recovering just fine. "You wanna know something funny," he said. "I knew exactly where he was gonna jump the whole time."

"No you didn't," I said. "I know it seems obvious now, after the fact, but if you knew where he was you woulda gone there."

"Well, what I mean is that Josh and I were walking across that bridge a couple weeks ago and he said to me, 'this would be a perfect place to take a leap of faith.' And he told me all about how Jesus had been talking to him and telling him he needed to do something to prove his faith. He said if he jumped, Jesus would protect him."

"See," I said. "If you had focused on your logic and memory instead of on casting spells, maybe you could have remembered what he said."

"Maybe," Aleks replied. "But you can't say what the consequences of that might have been. Josh was obviously *meant* to jump off that bridge. Maybe the spell was what caused me to forget, because it was doing what was best for Josh. He needed his leap. Spellcasting doesn't always give you what you want, but it always gives you what you need."

"You think him jumping off a bridge and getting a collapsed lung is a good thing?" I asked.

"You just don't understand the spiritual realm, Dude. You just don't get it."

"Yeah," I said. "If it involves jumping off bridges, I don't wanna get it."

As we read the news and heard more of the story, we heard that Josh had been the 13th person to fall or jump off that bridge and the only one to survive. He had walked there immediately after calling Aleks, then closed his eyes, prayed, and leaped off the center of the bridge. Luckily there had been a tree below him that he hadn't seen, which slowed his fall.

Several months later I was riding the bus home late one night when I noticed Josh hop on. He was frighteningly skinny and frail, in a plain white t-shirt. He recognized me immediately and sat down next to me to catch up on old times.

"I've been doing great lately," he said. "I haven't done heroin in over two years now and I haven't done any drugs other than weed in months and I'm feeling really great. I'm getting my life and priorities in order now. Gonna focus on my daughter."

"You working yet?" I asked.

"Working?" he asked.

"Like a job."

"Oh no," he replied. "I'm on disability. That covers everything I need so I don't want more than that."

"Are you looking for one?"

"Oh no. I need to focus on my daughter. She's what's really important to me."

"How often do you see her?" I asked.

"It's been about a year."

"Hmm... so she's not *that* much of a priority, huh?"

"She's down in California with her mom so I'm just working at getting myself together mentally so I can move down there. I've been reading The Bible every day and it's been helping me more than I could have imagined. It's like a whole other world has opened up to me. Ever since I made that jump, the whole world looks different now and I can feel God's love in every step I take... because Jesus is my drug now."

"So, I'm curious," I said. "What have people been saying about your leap of faith?"

"Well, a lot of people think I'm crazy, of course. A lot of people treat me different now... they like, baby me I guess... it's like everyone is real careful what they say around me. But most people think I'm nuts."

"Are you going to counseling or anything?"

"I'm doing counseling through my church. It's pretty good for me because the pastor seems to understand... I mean, sometimes God asks people to do things, and you've just gotta go do it, regardless of risks or logic or what people think or even if it's right or wrong, so I'm really happy to have that kind of support and have someone in the church who agrees I made the right choice... but it doesn't matter because I know in my heart I made the right choice."

"So you don't regret jumping?" I asked.

"Oh, no, of course not. I can't even tell you how much happier I am now. I proved my faith. God asked me to prove it and I proved it. No one can ever take that away from me. Jumping off that bridge was the best decision I ever made."

The Library Terrorist

- Sunday, January 31, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/library-terrorist/>

So this one time when I was about 10, I went to the library after school and had to take a big dump, so I went into the men's room and put my book bag on the floor outside of the stall. A couple minutes later someone came in and used the urinal, and I heard him say, "Hmm" and sort of mutter to himself. He stood around for a minute or two and then left.

A couple minutes later I heard a woman's voice from outside saying to the man, "Okay I'll take a look," and recognized her as the librarian.

The woman walked into the bathroom, saying "Hmmm," to herself, "Hmmm?"

So I kept quiet and watched the woman through the cracks in the stall as she walked into the men's room and wandered around, saying "Hmmm... hmmm...", sounding very concerned about something.

She left, and I was still pooping, thinking, *What the hell?*

And a couple minutes later the woman returned, and said, "See it's right there."

And behind her another man came in, looked around, and said, "Hmmm... hmmm..." He walked further into the restroom and I noticed that it was a cop.

"I'm sure glad you happened to be here," said the woman.

"Yeah, lucky," he replied, then went back to saying "Hmmm..." to himself. He walked right in front of the stall and asked the woman, "So you didn't see anyone else?"

"No. No one," she told him.

"Well, it's probably nothing," said the cop, "but I'd better call the bomb squad just in case. I don't really want to touch it."

So finally I spoke up and asked, "What are you guys talking about?"

And the woman screamed loud enough that it echoed through the restroom and I instinctively brought my hands to my ears, and I saw her through the crack jumping backward and putting her hand on the counter for balance.

"Woah," said the police officer. "There's someone here. How long have you been there?"

"Like ten minutes," I said.

"Is this your bag here?" the cop asked.

"Uh... Yeah," I said. "Whose did you think it was?"

"We didn't know!" gasped the librarian.

"I'm the closest person to it," I said.

"We had no idea you were here!"

"Didn't you look under the stalls?" I asked.

“Yeah,” replied the cop. “I’ll probably try that next time.”

The Pee Martini

- Friday, July 30, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/pee-martini/>

In the summer of 1999 I went to The Gorge in George, a huge amphitheater in the middle of nowhere for Ozzfest with my friends Brandon and Jeremy, my ex-girlfriend Shannon, and a few others. We arrived the night before so we could camp and hit the festival as it opened at noon. However, Dave Matthews was playing that night, so the campground was already full and we were stuck in the huge grass parking lot just outside the amphitheater. We were smoking lots of weed, of course, and we each had our own choice of alcohol. I had a Sobe bottle half full of Vodka, and my friend Jeremy had brought a couple cases of Budweiser for himself. I also had a few Valiums, which I had never tried before.

I had heard good things about Dave Matthews' live performances so I had gotten a ticket just for myself. Everyone else was there solely for Ozzfest. So I took two Valiums and a few sips of my vodka, left my Sobe bottle on the floor against the divider in the center of the back seat of the car, and headed in to Dave Matthews.

Dave played a wonderful show and I decided I needed to come back to see him the next time. Afterward, when I reached the car, I was ready to pop a third Valium and get really messed up. I grabbed my Sobe bottle off the floor and found another pill. I threw it to the back of my mouth and took a quick drink of vodka to wash it down, preparing myself for that nasty vodka pucker. Instead, the pill went down smooth and easy, the liquid oddly refreshing.

Something isn't right, I thought. Am I really that drunk that I can't taste vodka?

I smelled the bottle. No smell either. "What the hell's going on?" I asked. Then it occurred to me. "Jeremy! Where the fuck is Jeremy?" I took another drink to confirm the lack of taste. "That fucker Jeremy took my vodka and filled it up with water." This was the best explanation since Jeremy was an alcoholic, and had pulled this maneuver before.

"Huh?" my buddy Brandon said. "Jeremy's got his beer. Is your liquor missing?"

"No. It was right where I left it and now it's all water! Here, taste it!" I held the bottle out to Brandon.

Brandon backed away. "That's not Jeremy's pee jar is it?"

"No," I said. "It's just water."

"Kalin!" Shannon said, suddenly looking up from her spot on the grass. "Is that Jeremy's piss? He put it in the backseat on the floor in the middle."

I rolled my eyes. "Yeah, sure. Real funny." I took another drink, still wondering if this really was vodka and I was just too messed up to taste it, but still, it was nothing but water. I couldn't walk or talk straight, but it didn't seem right that I could get drunk enough to miss the bite of 80 proof vodka.

Shannon screamed and shook her head. "Don't fucking drink it!"

"You guys are assholes," I said.

Brandon opened the car door and began digging through clothes, fast food bags and other garbage.

"Why are you covering for him? You just let him steal my booze? That was the only alcohol I had." I took another angry drink.

Shannon screamed again and shook her head. She turned and started marching away. "Oh my God that's fucking disgusting." And as she continued walking rapidly away, it suddenly occurred to me that maybe they weren't joking.

Then suddenly Jeremy came out of nowhere. "What's up with Shannon?" he asked.

"You stole my vodka, you fucker!"

"Hey!" Brandon shouted from the back seat. He held an identical Sobe bottle, one-third full of clear liquid. "I got your vodka!"

I hesitated before taking the bottle, still convinced this was an elaborate joke. I sniffed and immediately felt the familiar vodka bite. I took a sip, puckered my mouth and shook my head as I usually do when drinking hard alcohol.

"Is that it?" Brandon asked.

"Yeah," I replied. "Thanks." I paused and gazed at the other bottle. "So what's in this one... you weren't serious..."

Jeremy laughed. "Oh, is that my piss jar?"

As I glared, I took a long drink of my real vodka. "Why can't you use the port-a-potty like a normal person?"

"Because they're disgusting," Jeremy said.

A moment later I blacked out.

Here's the little [blog post](#) about this story.

The Sacred Rules of the Drive-Thru

- Friday, March 04, 2011

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/sacred-rules-drive-thru/>

Part 1: Christmas Day

One Christmas Day, around 2001 or so, I was all by myself since my family had celebrated the day before and all my friends were off opening presents. I was hungry. I had no food in my kitchen and no car, so I grabbed my bike and rode downtown toward The Ranch Room, one of Bellingham's few 24 hour restaurants.

Twenty minutes later I found myself at the front door of the restaurant, staring at the unfamiliar 'Closed' sign that they only brought out on special occasions.

Okay, I thought. Maybe there's another restaurant around here that's serving a nice, fancy, Christmas dinner. I was getting very hungry, and at this point, didn't care if I needed to blow 20 or 30 bucks on a five-course dinner. I rode around downtown for forty minutes or so, checking every restaurant I could think of, praying one would have a Christmas Day special.

Nothing.

Fine. At least Taco Bell should be open. It was a half hour ride away, but I didn't have much choice. I set out for the shopping center in the distance, but when I arrived there, alas, The Bell was all dark.

However, next door was a beacon of hope, A Jack In The Box with a giant "Drive-Thru Open" sign. I gave my thanks to the creator (I was not an atheist at this time) and rode over.

The sensors didn't recognize me when I pulled up to the menu and intercom, so I rode all the way forward to the pick-up window.

Then my heart sank as I saw the big sign. "Pedestrians and guests on bicycles will not be served." But of course, as I read it, it said, "We don't think you deserve respect as a human being if you don't own a car." No doubt a conspiracy by the oil companies.

But I prayed they would make an exception on Christmas, so I knocked on the window. As I waited, I thought about what I would do if they refused. If I couldn't get food now, I wasn't going to be able to eat until the 26th. My only choice would be to simply walk in the back door of Jack In The Box and start making my own food, making sure to cook rapidly enough that I could get a few bites before the police came to haul me away. It would be worth it. I was just that hungry, and it was still early enough that I'd still get a full meal in jail. In the end I wouldn't feel bad, protesting a discriminatory law. Simply because I don't have a car doesn't mean I'm a second-class citizen. It would be a good story to tell, too, an interesting character builder.

A young woman came and opened the window.

"Hi," I said, and began spitting out my order of tacos, one dollar chicken sandwiches and the like, hoping I could just push past the moment where she felt uncomfortable about breaking the rules. She glanced at my bicycle, but punched the order into the computer and took my money. She closed the window and I breathed a sigh of relief, thanking God once again.

A minute later the woman returned and opened the window. "Um..." she said. "Can I ask a favor? Could you pick up your bike and put it up on the sidewalk and just stand over there and don't look like you're ordering food from me? I'm technically not supposed to serve bicycles."

Part 2: Drunk Drivers

Nearly a decade later it was about 2:00 AM on a Tuesday night and I was hungry. I wanted to go to Taco Bell, but this time, I

had a car. I would have preferred to walk, of course, but knew about their no pedestrian rule, so I grudgingly hopped into the old automobile.

As I pulled into the drive-thru two young men jumped out of the bushes. One of them leapt in front of my vehicle, forcing me to hit the brakes. He staggered, slapping his hands on my hood for stability. He came around to my window, leaning dramatically left and right, keeping a hand on my car.

"Hey, Dude!" he said. "Can I ask you a favor? Me and my buddy just want to get some tacos." He pointed to his friend standing to the side, swaying back and forth. "This ass-hole won't let us buy tacos 'cause we don't have a car. We can get tacos if we're drunk as fuck behind the wheel but for some reason we can't if we're on foot."

"Sure," I said. "No problem. What do you need?"

"Two bean burritos and four tacos. Simple simple. Two bean burritos and four tacos." He handed me a small wad of bills. "Dude, thanks so much for this. I swear to God, we've been waiting here like forty minutes."

I put in our order and pulled ahead. The two guys stood around outside and chatted.

"My car is right there on the other side of that fence." The first man pointed. "At first we ordered from this guy and he said he'd give us our food, then he came back and refused to take our money, said he'd changed his mind. Got all scared about losing his job for serving a couple pedestrians. I told him I was drunk as fuck and that I'd drive here if I had to and he told me to go for it. It's okay for him to serve a drunk driver. Can you believe that? I was screaming at the guy, 'I'm gonna kill someone!' I can barely walk and you want me to fucking drive here just because of some stupid insurance bullshit?" But no, he called my bluff."

"Either he called your bluff or he just didn't give a shit," said the other. "He just cares about his own job."

"There was a lady in a van here like twenty minutes ago, and she refused to help us too," said the first guy.

"You scared the shit out of her, Dude!"

"Yeah, she was all like 'aaaaahhh get away! Get away, freak!' And I'm like 'Please Bitch! I just want a fucking burrito! Please God!' There's hot tacos and burritos right there inside that building and I can't have any just 'cause I don't want to drink and drive. She threw my money back at me 'cause she didn't want to break the goddamn sacred rules of the Drive-thru."

"Yeah," I said. "It's amazing how often you see rules and regulations substituted for logic and common sense."

Here's my blog post I wrote about this, [Taco Bell Promotes Drunk Drunk Driving](#).

And here's my blog post in response to Renee's comment below: [Dangerous Drive-Thrus and Laws Justifying Laws](#).

This Aint Your Car

- Sunday, January 31, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/aint-car/>

I arrived at work one day and the day cook named Gary told me a story of his two vehicles that had both recently broken down, and asked me to drive him down the street about a mile to his car that had not made it all the way to work that morning. The bartender agreed to hold all orders until I got back and we headed out to the parking lot.

Gary's wife was in the parking lot, standing in front of the pawnshop that shared our strip mall. They shouted back and forth about the logistics of getting their vehicles in order. I stopped and waited for them to stop shouting across the parking lot. Gary stopped beside me.

A moment later they seemed to work out the details and Gary turned to open the passenger door of a nearby car, which I of course, assumed was his other broken-down vehicle. He crawled in and sat down and I waited for him to grab whatever it was that he was grabbing.

But instead he reached for the door and just before pulling it shut he looked up at me and asked, "What's up? You coming?"

"Yeah, sure," I replied. "What are you getting?"

"What do you mean, what am I getting? I thought you were driving me to my car."

"Well, yeah, my car's over there," I replied, pointing. "Did you need to grab something before we go?"

"Umm..." he replied slowly. "I thought this was your car."

"Nope." I shook my head.

"So whose car is this?"

I shrugged. "I don't know."

And just as a look of shock came across Gary's face I saw movement from the pawnshop as someone burst out the door.

"Hey!" the man shouted. "What the fuck are you doing in my car?"

But Gary was already leaping out. He slammed the door behind him and jumped away from the vehicle. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry dude! I thought it was his car."

The man at the pawnshop took several quick, angry steps toward us, his arms puffed out to his sides, muscles flexed and fists clenched. He stopped at the edge of the curb and glared suspiciously as Gary sprinted toward my car. I waved a quick apology and chuckled.

Twinkies and Ho Hos

- Sunday, April 25, 2010

<http://kalinbooks.com/kalins-true-stories/twinkies-ho-hos/>

I was working the line on a busy saturday at the Village Inn Pub, flipping burgers and steaks, making salads, dropping french fries, when the owner, Mare, walked in and said, "I'm going to the bread store. Does anyone need anything?"

This was kind of a ridiculous question, and one she had never asked before any of her twice-weekly trips to the bread store. She had gone around with a pad of paper just like every other time and marked down exactly what we needed.

"Twinkies and Ho Hos." I said.

"You could buy me a cadillac," Jo-Ann added as she threw together some of the last remaining breakfast plates.

"No," Mare replied. "The *bread* store."

"Twinkies and Ho Hos," I repeated.

"Just what's on your list, Mare. You know better than we do what our bread stock is."

"Twinkies and Ho Hos."

"I don't think they even sell hostess products at the bread store," Mare said.

"Twinkies and Ho Hos!" I shouted as I jumped back and forth between the fryer, grill and cutting board.

"What do you need Twinkies and Ho Hos for?" she asked, strangely curious, as though I were making a serious request.

"I wanna run a burger special."

"A burger special with Twinkies and Ho Hos?"

"Hell yeah! Dice 'em up and fry em on the grill, then pile 'em on top of a burger with bacon and two slices of *American* cheese."

"You gonna put lettuce and tomato on that?" Jo asked.

"Fuck the lettuce and tomato."

"I'm almost certain they don't sell hostess products at the bread store," Mare said.

"We'll butter and grill the bun though," I continued.

"Oh of course..." said Jo "That makes sense... or we could deep fry the bun."

"Well now you're just getting ridiculous. A little mayonaise never hurt anyone, though."

"They don't sell Twinkies and Ho Hos at the bread store!"

"Twinkies and Ho Hos! We *need* them!"

Mare stared at me for a long moment.

“We’ll serve it with those deep-fried macaroni and cheese wedges,” I said. “...and a side of ranch.”

“Oh Lord...” Mare shook her head.

“Twinkies and Ho Hos!”

She sighed. “I don’t think it’s gonna happen.”

“Twinkies and Ho Hos!”

“I’ll take that as a no.”

“Twinkies and Ho Hos!”

She walked out of the kitchen but a moment later I jumped to the window under the heat lamps as she passed by. “Twinkies and Ho Hos!”

An hour later, Mare returned with her arms full of bags of bread.

“Twinkies and Ho Hos?” I asked.

“They don’t sell hostess products. I even asked the cashier.” She set the bags on the prep table. “So she gave me some swiss rolls for free.” She pulled out two packages of Little Debbie Ho Ho knockoffs.

“Sweet!”

“Is this good enough?” she asked. “You can run your burger special now.”

“Hell no. I’m eating these myself.”

“Yeah... that’s probably for the best. My biggest fear was that someone may have actually ordered it and enjoyed it.”

<http://www.hostesscakes.com/recipes.asp> (check out the Twinkie sushi)

Here’s my [blog post](#) about this little story

Kalin's True Stories

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