

**NO LIMITS - NO REGRETS**

*Bouncing off the Redline of Adrenaline Addiction*



*AXE*

**"No Limits - No Regrets"**

**Bouncing Off the Redline of Adrenaline Addiction**

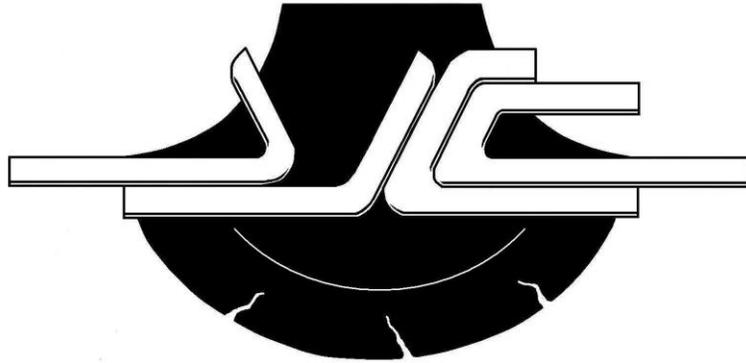
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**Figure 1 logo a**

## **Epigraph**

“We can be our own source of destruction and worst enemy, but we can also be our strongest motivator. Sometimes, the best competitor is the one in the mirror. The only competition with the closest skills and abilities is that person behind the glass staring back at us with the same intensity burning in their eyes as ours. With those factors being equal, the outstanding component is drive or will. It takes away all the excuses. If we aren’t continually outperforming ourselves, we aren’t trying as hard as we should. We don’t want it badly enough. When we make our own decisions as free men and women, we can truly live or die with the results with no one else to thank or blame but ourselves.” -Axe

## **Dedication**

I'm very proud of my successes in life, especially breaking the record for fastest cross country ride on a motorcycle. However, my greatest accomplishment was convincing the most beautiful girl, both on the inside and the outside, whom I've ever met to make her life with me. This book is dedicated to my Sunshine and our dog, Baron, for their endless smiles, patience, and enthusiastic support throughout everything that I've done.



**Figure 2 Sunshine and Baron**

# No Limits – No Regrets

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## **Preface**

I'm an addict. From the first time I get a taste of something that revs my engine, I keep wanting more and more until it goes horribly wrong, or I get distracted with another addiction. I don't consider myself some pathetic drug addict strung out in a crack neighborhood though I had to live in one for a while out of financial necessity. I'm not a Sterno drunk in a gutter that people watch and pity. Some might say I overindulged in alcohol and promiscuity in my formative years. They would be more accurate to say that I drank and fucked everything in my path with a fluid opening from age eighteen until my mid thirties. That's when jail and heart surgery helped me redefine my priorities in the whiskey department, and my girlfriend, Sunshine, gave me the best reason to retire from my extracurricular activities.

I'm a different kind of addict. The only thing that I want to inhale is fresh air, but I prefer to have my breath taken away. The only needles I desire in my skin are to deliver ink to make my exterior as colorful as my interior. I've never so much as tried an illegal drug, but that doesn't make me any less of an addict. I can assure you that my poison of choice will suck in people and drive them over the edge once they're hooked like any other substance. I still live life from fix to fix. In between highs, I try to quench internal thirst and keep myself distracted, but eventually, I have to face the cold realization that daily existence is only passing time until my next rush. Like any addiction, the more I indulge, the higher my tolerance grows, and the more it takes to feel that next high. My addiction isn't as easy to satisfy as opening a bottle, flicking a Bic, or stabbing a vein. My fixes aren't cheap, and they can't be bought as instant gratification. They have to be earned and experienced. My name is Axe, and I'm an adrenaline addict. This is my story of how I chased the ultimate adrenaline rush and became the fastest human to ride a motorcycle from coast to coast across America.

## **Chapter 1: Test Drive**

**Sat 19 Jun 10**

Holy balls! This BMW S1000RR is blasting onto I10 at eighty-seven miles per hour in first gear, and it's not even at redline! I don't even have the bike set in the most aggressive mode, and this beast is still beyond stupid fast. The throttle is so snappy that it feels like a rotating trip hammer. Even small bumps in the road cause my hand to accidentally blip the throttle just enough to make the bike lunge abruptly. It's so responsive in curves that it feels like I'm going to fall over when I give it a tilt. I've been afraid to drive vehicles before because I'm afraid something's going to happen to the vehicle, but this is the first time that the raw power of the machine itself scares me for me. Now, I know why the BMW dealer required my motorcycle license, paperwork, proof of insurance, and full Power Ranger gear to test drive it. This bike would definitely not have been safe for Axe '98. I'm not even sure if it's safe for Axe 2.0. For completely illogical reasons, that fear makes me want it even more.

Back at the dealership, the salesguy chaperone and I stand looking at the Thunder Grey, German engineered, demonstration bike. I'm admittedly not thrilled about the idea of an I4 engine, especially after the salesman at the Colorado dealership called this bike 'just another inline four cylinder like the rice grinders.' That configuration just can't produce the sound as deep as the V-twin Aprilia Mille sitting at home in my garage or the new Aprilia RSV4 I test drove yesterday.

*I've wanted to get my hands on an RSV4 since I saw that one in Daytona, and that drive on it yesterday was everything that I'd hoped it would be. The Italian styling gave it a unique beauty that stands out from the other sport bikes, and the sound of that V4 just resonates like music to the driver's ears. I blew by 120 mph on the frontage road before I even knew what happened. Besides the appeal of the bike itself, the guys at AF1 Racing are awesome, and I still prefer to buy from people I like if I have the option. They also said they'd throw in exhaust, a tail tidy, a new front sprocket, and the high performance computer upgrade. They are down to earth guys that just like to play with their cars, bikes, guns, and other toys at the shop. How cool is that? It made me a little envious to be honest. I loved being able to go play with machines at my shop all the time years ago. As much as I do love to be able to afford to eat and own a car, I do miss my old shop in Jacksonville for the same reasons that the guys at AF1 enjoy what they do.*

I'm not expecting any sales incentives here at the BMW dealer though. This demo bike will be sold for full price once it has the minimum test miles on it. You don't have to be a bargainologist to know that it's stupid to pay new price for a demo bike that everyone has thrashed on test drives. That's like recruiting from a whore house for a virgin sacrifice. In either case, someone's been or is about to get screwed. This dealership will only get one more S1K from the factory for this year. It'll be fully optioned in Thunder Grey just like the demo bike. I can either give them two grand to hold that future bike, or someone else will. It's a wicked looking machine, as far as sport bikes go, with its asymmetric headlights and body panels. Even if the I4 doesn't sound quite as cool as the Aprilia's V4 did yesterday, it's simply just scary fast. After owning four Porsches over the years, I'm a huge fan of German engineering too. This S1K is a true testament to those skills that I spent six years learning at Iowa State to capture the elusive four year engineering degree.

It's amazing how advanced both the S1K and RSV4 are compared to the 2000 model Ape sitting at home. I wondered how much sport bikes would really have developed in the last decade

since the Ape was released, and now, I know. Both the German and the Italian machines that I've driven this weekend are smaller, lighter, easier to turn, safer, and a hell of a lot faster. I think back to how that old Ape scared me the first time I cracked the throttle in first gear driving at Jacksonville Beach, and the gas tank bounced off my chest before I knew what happened. The Ape doesn't even have 130 horsepower. Comparatively, the RSV4 has over 150 hp, and the S1K has almost 190 hp. As my internal voice keeps telling me, 'it's just stupid fast.'

Sunshine has never eaten at a Schlotzsky's, and I haven't eaten at one since years ago when we were working on the base in Utah. Motorcycles may not be her prime interest in life, but as always, she's enthusiastically supportive and happy to act as a sounding board for me. "So, which one is it going to be?" she asks with a curious smile.

She listens politely as I vocally debate which bike I'll choose. Looks, sound, raw appeal, and ease of dealer negotiation go to the RSV4. Pure, scary speed goes to the S1K along with smooth, advanced technology and safety features. Can man really choose between a Ferrari and a Porsche, a chopper and a sport bike, or even a brunette and a blonde? We prefer each for different reasons at different times.

As Sunshine and I split a roll from the attached Cinnabon, I make the only decision that I can. The choice can't be made based on ambiguous preference or even financial reasons, as they'd cost the same. Finally, as I look at Sunshine licking the sticky frosting from her fingers like Monica in the Oval Office, I announce, "Well, I already have one Aprilia in the garage. The BMW it is."

She appears just as excited as I am that the new toy has been decided. Once the decision is made, I further justify it to her, but I'm really just convincing myself in an effort to minimize potential buyer's remorse later. I love German engineering, it's got more safety features, and it's the one that scared me to ride it. I have to have it. 'Have' is a strong word. This isn't a need by any stretch of self justification. At home, I already have the Goat, a silver 2004 GTO, and the Anarchist, a highly modified 2000 Harley Sportster, sitting in garages along with the current Ape, so either choice is way past want to ridiculous lust.

Now, I need to decide what I might want to paint on it when I get it. It'll be two months after I make the down payment for the last of the dealer's 2010 models until the bike arrives from Germany. I'm not sold on all the electronics just yet, but I'm very glad it's the Thunder Grey model and not the Acid Green or Alpine White options. It'll be a tough two months chomping at the bit, but at least, it'll be new and not the abused demo unit. This does go against my previous policies though. I've never bought a new vehicle or dated a virgin, as I always figured it was easier to let someone else break them in first and deal with the initial depreciation. Another rule was to never buy a vehicle that was the first year of the series. As an engineer, we always find something to improve on the next round. This will be the first brand new vehicle that I've ever bought and the first model year, but it's going to be a monster.

## **Tue 03 Aug 10**

The salesgirl at the BMW dealership is calling with what I assume is an update on the bike's pending arrival. As much as I didn't like the idea of new vehicle depreciation, it is kind of cool to think that once I made the down payment, an order showed up in the BMW factory in Germany to make the bike for yours truly. It should be getting close as it was at the port a day or two ago. I try to contain my impatience and answer the phone, "Hello?"

"Hi, Axe. It's here."

"No shit? Hell yeah!"

She laughs at the colorful language which she politely tolerates, especially since I'm the customer. "Yes, sir. They're pulling it out of the crate right now for final assembly."

"Badass! I might stop by at lunch to see it, okay?"

"Okay, see you then."

Pick, a coworker reminding me of a younger yet more mature version of myself, and I drive outside of town a few miles to the dealership at lunch to see the new addition to my stable. Wow, this bike looks just mean. Is it frivolous? Of course it is. Is it foolish to buy a new vehicle before it depreciates? Of course it is though this is one of those vehicles that could be thrashed before it gets to the second owner too. Do I already have three vehicles at home? Yes, I do. Logic and need surrendered to desire years ago when it comes to me and vehicle decisions. Is it a badass bike? Hell yeah it is, and this afternoon, it'll be my new badass bike.

Sunshine is kind enough to drop me and my Power Ranger gear at the dealership, so I can ride it home. I sign the paperwork and walk to the new machine. After turning the key, making sure it's in neutral, and pressing the start button for the first time, the engine comes to life. The salesguy explains the basic settings, which I have already learned from reading several articles about the S1K out there on Skynet. I push the button to select 'Sport' mode as he recommends and saddle the ridiculous missile. Sunshine tells me that she'll see me in a couple of hours as she fully expects me to disappear on it. As I pull out of the dealership parking lot, I'm reminded of how different this feels than the old Ape on which I've grown very comfortable. I point the front wheel toward Scenic Loop Road in an attempt to start getting familiar with the new bike while driving it in slower, less populated curves. The bike is currently set with a low level rev limiter at nine grand while I break in the engine, so I'm obviously not going to hammer it. Even the few short twists of the throttle let me know what's lurking inside the plastic shell. Every spurt of fuel from the injectors results in a spurt of adrenaline into my veins.

Much to Sunshine's surprise, I show up at the apartment with twenty miles on the clock. "Is something wrong?" she asks as she discretely scans me for any evidence of a wreck.

"No. Nothing's wrong. It's just a lot of power, and I want to work into it easy. The last thing I want to do is push it and let this thing get away from me before I get used to it."

"Well, that's probably a smart thing. Look at you growing up," she jokes.

"It was bound to happen sooner or later."

As I roll the new S1K into its new home in the empty one of the three garages we rent here at the apartment, I begin to look at the panels and think about which ones could easily be removed and painted. I've been looking at pictures and drawing sketches, but I need to solidify my artistic ideas now that it's sitting here in front of me. I think that tomorrow, I'll start taking the tank panel and lower side fairings off the bike and make this thing mine. By the end of the weekend, it'll have an axe on the center of the tank panel in simple white outline. Right above the axe I'll paint the bright red word, '*verrückt*,' which is German for 'insane.' I thought that would be a rather appropriate word for this bike. Along the very bottom of the side fairings will be a strip of real yellow fire with a strip of real red fire painted above the yellow strip. Those two strips of fire combined with the black background above them will look like the German flag at a quick glance. Then, the bike will never worry about pulling up to an identical twin at a stop light. Once it's got its tattoos, it'll be mine for sure.

### **Sun 08 Aug 10**

Tracer, an old buddy of mine from Jax, is calling. I'm at a good point to talk, so I'll see what he's doing.

“What’s going on, man?” I ask.

“Not much. You see how fast that fancy new bike goes yet?”

“No, I barely have any miles on it. I haven’t ridden it since I got it Tuesday.”

“Why the hell not?” Tracer asks in amazement.

I hesitate to respond as I know what to expect. “I took the panels off of it on Wednesday and painted them. I airbrushed a strip of yellow fire and a strip of red fire on the lower panels, so they look like a German flag on the black background.” I wait for the expected response.

After a failed attempt to comprehend my actions, he bursts, “What? I can’t believe this, even from you. Only white trash like you would buy a brand new BMW motorcycle and put fucking ghost flames on it!”

“I also painted the German word for ‘insane’ on the tank panel, so it’s technically culturally diverse, not trashy.”

His head is likely near the verge of explosion on the other end of the line as he finishes in his Napoleon Dynamite voice with, “Gah! Idiot!”

Tracer proceeds to express his confusion as to why I would buy such a bike. I point out my surprise in his surprise. He’s always preferred sport bikes over cruisers, and he was a big supporter when I bought my first sport bike, the Ape. Tracer is always providing guidance on things like suspension adjustment, riding techniques, and new motorcycle technology. For him to question my purchase seems conflicting with how he’s acted to date.

He attempts to justify his position. “No offense, but you can’t even drive that old dinosaur Ape of yours to its limits. That BMW is so far advanced that guys I know who race wouldn’t be able to use that bike’s full capabilities.”

“So let me get this straight,” I retort. “Now you’re saying that a person should only own something suitable for their level of skill. You’re saying that people shouldn’t have a Ferrari unless they’re a race car driver? When people start shooting, are you proposing that they start with a shitty old rifle instead of a good one with a nice optic?”

Although we agree that a bike like this probably doesn’t belong in the hands of a brand new rider, the last thing that either of us want to do is to pay more tax money to politicians to make more laws and restrictions. Maybe, Tracer’s questions stem from a blend of concern over a caveman like me on such a powerful machine combined with a general confusion over most of my actions in life. Regardless, it’s my money, I’m the one driving it, I don’t have to justify it to anyone, and he knows that as well as I do. If I had to justify my actions in life, it would be a full time job, and I’d never have time to ride.



**Figure 3 BMW flames**

### **Sat 11 Sep 10**

Now that Pick and I have some greasy, fried sea food and a couple beers in us, it's time to get over to the Concrete Street Amphitheater to catch the show. As we get closer to the gate, we notice that the guards are frisking everyone. As opposed to losing another Spyderco knife, I suggest we walk back to his truck and put our blades in the glove box for the show. Fortunately, we were early enough to find a spot right by the bike parking near the gate, so it's a short walk to and from the truck.

As we get to the security check at the gate, I see the chunky, young security gal frisking people in our line. I'm always eager to lighten the mood and brighten someone's day, especially if the person looks annoyed already. When it's my turn, she crouches down in front of me and feels up and down my legs. I look down at her, wink, smile, and say, "I hope you're enjoying this."

She looks up at me, and her scowl makes it apparent that she's less than impressed and won't be joining me and the guy behind me in laughter. That's fine though. If a girl is looking up at me from waist level, I'd rather be the one laughing instead of her.

We walk to the side stage where Hell Yeah is showing. The combination of former Pantera and Mudvayne members is turning out some great music. I may have to pick up this CD and add it to the MP3 player's collection for the gym. Once they're done playing, we cruise to the main stage where Hail Damage, or something like that, is playing. I've never been a big fan

of female singers for metal bands. The music and the singer are actually pretty decent, but it's hard to get into the music when you don't know any of their songs and haven't even heard of them before. Stone Sour looks a little different than when Jagette, a former intimate acquaintance, and I saw them with Disturbed back on the *Ten Thousand Fists* tour in Jax years ago. I think the Stone Sour singer still had long hair at that show. I'm enjoying them a lot more than the last time. They just seem to be playing with a much better energy level than when I saw them before. We're also able to get closer to the stage than the Jax show as this is a general admission show. GA shows are always more fun than a seated show when every ticket is a potential front row seat or stand.

By the time Avenged Sevenfold gets ready to play, the sun has dipped below the horizon. The stage is completely dark as the innocent sounding intro to "Nightmare" begins to play. A roadie falls down from the overhead light rack and is hanging by a bungee cord. He was also hanging by a noose as well, but it looks like the noose broke during the fall. Even if the stunt isn't flawless, it's still a cool visual to kick off their set. This song is absolutely wicked. "Nightmare" is one of those songs that just make the adrenaline rip through my veins.

We're a lot closer now than we were for Stone Sour, and it's hot and intense up here. The more they play, the more jacked I am to see these guys, and the more I wish I would've gotten interested in them a long time ago. Their stage prop gates of hell with the big 'A7X' on them burst into flames and add even more energy to the show. There are three mosh pits around us, so I better get in one of them for a while. I'm getting too damn old for this, but it's still fun. Pick has more sense and stays where he is. One of the other pits has a giant roid monkey standing in the middle with no shirt. He's trying to look like he's just there to have fun, but he's looking for someone to push him, so he can destroy them. I've seen guys in pits like that before and know better than to give them what they want. I'll let some young headbanger learn his lesson the same way that I learned mine years ago. My attention turns back to the adrenaline rush happening on stage. I am beyond impressed with the badass show these guys are playing! I remember thinking about buying one of their CDs when "Almost Easy" was released, but I never did because I couldn't remember if it was A7X or Sevendust that sang the song. I wish I had bought the CD a long time ago, and by now, I'd know all these songs and could enjoy the show even more.

Now, it's time for Disturbed. The last time that I watched them was with Sunshine back in Jax when I was only a few months out of surgery. This time instead of hiding in the back and just watching, I'm about ten layers of people from the stage and feeling the heat and pressure from the other crazy bastards in the crowd. My eyes are trained on the stage as the film starts showing on the giant screen behind the band's equipment. The noise and energy rise to new volumes, and the band bursts onto the stage blasting "Asylum." I don't have to worry about my sternum tonight. I can scream, punch my fist in the air, and jump around in the mosh pit while crashing into other fans. His voice does show a little wear and tear from the throat surgeries, but it's still putting on one hell of a show. I've seen Disturbed every tour of every album that they've released to date and have never been disappointed. I will admit that A7X was a really hard act to follow, but Disturbed is still down with the sickness!

## **Chapter 2: Just a Taste**

**Sun 26 Sep 10**

It's a nice, sunny afternoon, and Sunshine still hasn't been able to go for a ride on the new S1K with me. It's not that she hasn't wanted to go for a ride, but I've been resistant to put a passenger

on it so far. Since the bike is so much different than the Ape I have, I've just been trying to get used to driving the S1K by myself comfortably first. We decide to go for a little ride through the hill country. The dealer just raised the rev limiter too, which now offers the full 14,200 RPMs at my disposal. I'm curious to see how this I4 behaves over the nine grand limit that it's had until now.

We reach an open stretch of road with no other cars in sight, and I come to a stop. Let's see how fast we can get from a dead rest to a hundred mph, which will only take the first two gears with this rocket. I gently let out the clutch to start us rolling. There's no need to take off too quickly and scare either of us. The front tire of this bike hasn't been off the ground yet, which I assume is a result of the anti-wheelie feature this bike is supposed to have. That means that I shouldn't have to worry about anything but pinning back the throttle and hanging on to the handlebars, but I don't plan on doing anything too crazy with her on the back. Risking my safety in the name of my stupidity is one thing, but there's no need to risk hers.

The tachometer needle creeps into the redline in first gear at just over ninety mph. It still baffles me that this bike can go that fast in the first of six gears. I pull in the clutch and shift into second having not yet gotten familiar with the bike's shift assist feature. Supposedly, the shift assist lets you just ram from one gear to the next without even pulling in the clutch, but instinctually, that just seems like a good way to ruin a transmission until I try and trust the technology. As I let go of the clutch and tear back the throttle, something feels strange. I look down through the fairings around the dash, and the ground appears to be getting farther away. Holy shit, we're doing a three digit wheelie! I can't just let go of the throttle, or we might drop down too fast, and a slightly cocked front tire could mean one nasty wreck. As the bike quickly rises, I see an orange light flicker on the dash before I've even had a chance to really react. The bike's brain, which is obviously smarter than mine, settles us back down on two wheels as smooth as silk at over a hundred mph.

My heart is pounding like hell as I pull over to the shoulder to catch my breath and apologize. I didn't even know this thing would do a wheelie with the Dynamic Traction Control activated, let alone that damn high. I'm sure it wasn't as high as it felt, but it was enough to scare the hell out of me. If not for DTC, we'd be lying back there on the pavement in pieces. The familiar buzzards of the back roads of Texas would be dipping down from the sky in search of a potential next meal. As the Brembo brakes bring us to a stop on the shoulder of the deserted road, we flip up our helmet shields. I look back at Sunshine and apologize for what just happened. "I'm really sorry about that. I had no idea the bike would come up like that at that high of a speed."

Her calm smile melts into a worried, dropped jaw exclaiming, "I thought you did that on purpose and knew what you were doing!"

"Hell no, I wouldn't do that on purpose with you on the back. That doesn't mean I won't try it later by myself though." A smile hides behind the chin guard of my helmet, and an upset, gloved passenger hand punches me in the back of the shoulder.

I guess that's a lesson learned. Unlike V-twins with their low and mid-range torque, this I4 just keeps building power and torque all the way to redline. I should have been smart enough to look at the torque curve and see that the previously limited nine grand RPM was not even close to the maximum kick in the ass of an S1K. I didn't even want to pay for the safety electronics options on this new bike when I ordered it, but today, I'm damn glad I have them. After bouncing off airbags twice in my life in cars that went straight from the wrecks to junk yards, I'll probably never buy a car without airbags. In the same way, that little event just now

would make it really hard for me to buy a sport bike without wheelie control. I take a deep breath, drop the helmet shield, and continue a very conservative remainder of the drive for the sakes of both my passenger and me.

### **Fri 29 Oct 10**

I start the S1K and drive around the corner to where the band is already getting ready to play. It's a short trip, so I barely get into second gear or clear fifty mph on the way. That looks like a safe spot for me to park where the bike won't get bothered or be out of my sight. I don't feel like sweating any more than necessary, so I toss the collared, long sleeved shirt over the handlebars and stick with the much cooler, plain, white T-shirt. The bottom of my tattoos is exposed, but I don't work with most of these people, and I know the band doesn't care.

We finish getting all the instruments, stands, and cords in place and prepare for the introduction. The band, which is comprised of all coworkers, has come a long way since the first time that I saw them play. They've learned a few new songs and are playing tighter music all the time. I look toward my bike and see Vice, my old boss from years ago, walking toward me. It's nice to see him make the effort to come over here to watch me play considering he still works at the Institute, which is quite a jaunt from here. He tells me that he's actually leaving to go camping, so it all worked out well for him to stop for the show.

With the band now finished with their first set, it's time for my acoustic intermission. They put away their instruments as I pull my Martin acoustic guitar out of the case and adjust the microphone height. After a couple of sound checks, the guy on the mixer confirms that all systems are 'go' and it's show time. I open with "Knocking on Heaven's Door." Coincidentally, two years ago today, I began writing my first book, *Bouncing off Guardrails*, as I realized that I was a week away from that first open heart surgery. Since I only had about a week to prepare for this gig, I have to recycle what I know. Luckily for me, no one here was at my sister's wedding to hear these songs the first time that I played them in public. After performing "All Shook Up," I play my acoustic rendition of "Little Red Corvette." I know it's a Prince song, but it actually doesn't sound too bad on the Martin. Hearing this song always brings a smile to my face remembering a buddy of ours, Mordinner, back at ISU one night.

*The Stallion, a serious party girl from the dorms, got him obliterated and was purposely teasing him at her party. "Little Red Corvette" was playing. He was sitting on the couch of the small dorm room as she grinded on him and sang seductively to him. He looked up at her with hopeful eyes and said, "I've got a Monza."*

*We all laughed as we watched the torture continue. The poor guy even continued sitting on the couch pretending to be passed out, while I made a second and final repeat offense with Mabel, a friend of the Stallion, on the floor two feet from him. To add insult to injury, he tried to get up and leave when we were done and falling asleep. The poor guy forgot about the loft above the couch and smoked his head on it as he stood up from the couch.*

Next, the female singer of the band joins me for Kid Rock and Sheryl Crow's "Picture." Since it's a fairly simple song to play and sing, and she actually is a good singer, the song sounds pretty decent. As she walks back to the side, the drummer and bassist come back to the stage, and we crank out "Folsom Prison Blues." It's a fast pace and a little of a challenge to get the guitar and singing both right, but having the other guys keeping time in the background sure helps. That concludes my performance for today. I really do enjoy playing live like this. Maybe someday, I'll have time to start playing in local bars. I hate saying 'someday,' but with all the

book promotion and adjustment to the new job and location, the rock star hobby is going to have to wait. I just need to make sure that ‘someday’ doesn’t become ‘never.’

### **Thu 25 Nov 10**

It’s Thanksgiving morning, the sun’s barely starting to appear, and there are hardly any cars on the road. It’s plenty cool too, which means the air should be dense, and the engine will breathe its best. I cruise through the normal roads and simultaneously warm up my joints and the tires. Every time that I ride this rocket, I get a little more comfortable. I remember taking a couple high speed runs in the *Grauer Geist*, my old ’96 911 Turbo, on this long straightaway years ago.

*Once was in nice weather, so the car drove as smooth as silk. Another time was in blowing rain, and that car felt like an airplane in turbulence at high speeds. Both times, I stomped the big Brembos as soon as I saw 160 mph on the speedometer, so I could get back down to 120 mph to safely negotiate the quickly approaching curves.*

I don’t miss the job, house, or wife I had at that time, but damn, I really miss that car.

This S1K may only have half the horsepower of the *Grauer Geist*, but it revs twice as high and only weighs about an eighth as much as that car did. I wind through the curves and come to a stop for a deep breath. As the cold air rushes into my lungs and the intake of the bike, I stare down the ribbon of blacktop, rev the engine, and let out the clutch. The acceleration of this bike is just nasty as I redline through the gears.

The faster that I go, the slower that I accelerate, but the speed is still climbing. This is way too fast to be watching the dash. Eyes should be looking straight forward at this speed. I’m getting closer to the next crest. The Valentine One radar detector is active, but if a cop comes over that ridge, I’d never have time to slow down before getting tagged. My whole body is tense as I rocket through the gray morning air. I notice that even with the aerodynamic design of the bike, that air passing over me feels crazy fast. I quickly glance down at the dash and see 151 mph on the speedometer before letting off the throttle. Even during deceleration, this still feels incredibly fast. As I approach a more passive velocity, the tension in my body becomes obvious. I make a conscious effort to start relaxing the muscles in my grip, legs, core, and neck. Without the turbulence inducing subtle vibration in my torso, I can now feel my heart pounding from the adrenaline coursing through my system. I think I quit breathing for a few seconds too, so I take a couple of deep breaths to settle down my body from the rush.

### **Sat 11 Dec 10**

As Sunshine and I fly into New York City airspace, landmarks like the Statue of Liberty can be seen through the windows of the winged sardine can as it approaches the runway. This is the first significant trip for Sunshine and me together since the visit to Colorado in May to see my youngest sister, Vermin, get married. Sunshine loves all the sights to see in the city, but I’m more concerned about the sounds on this getaway.

*The German heavy metal band, Rammstein, hadn’t played in the country for about a decade. In case this is the last US show, I didn’t want to miss it. When I proposed the idea to Sunshine, her excitement to visit New York with me took the reins of her thoughts. It wasn’t until I started showing her some Rammstein videos like “Rosenrot” that she began to realize that I wasn’t the only one that was compromising on this trip. I wanted general admission tickets, but after waiting three days from my first search, the GA pit tickets had gotten ridiculous in price. I was still able to secure a couple of floor tickets, but I just couldn’t justify the cost by then to be in*

*the pit. Sunshine of course was a little relieved to know that she'd have a seat and not be in a free for all mosh pit.*

We'll both be able to dictate part of the short trip with what we like, and we'll both have to be patient with the other during the rest of the time. Both of us are looking forward to the trip for different reasons, but we both get to enjoy something while sharing it with the other.

As we walk through JFK, I let the German know to meet us by the Rockefeller Center. He used to do shipping contracts for me at the Office and helped me track the S1K's arrival to the States. I also send a text to Angel to see if he has time to meet us for a drink today.

*Angel sold me the 911 Turbo years ago. He and his brother used to have a guy that would sell them exotic cars at good prices, which helped me get the Grauer Geist at a good price. My first trip to New York was originally scheduled to look at the car before it shipped to Texas. We made the transaction a little early, but I still traveled to New York as planned, despite the fact that the car was already on a truck heading southwest.*

*Angel, his brother, their families and friends, and I didn't even get to dinner until almost eleven PM that night. The restaurant's focus was sushi, which I'd never had, so I ordered chicken to be safe. While at dinner, two meat heads came in with their plastic Barbie dolls. When I went to piss during dinner, I heard some intense snorting from one of the stalls. One of the meat heads poked his head up, looked at me, wiped his nose, and went back to snorting his dessert.*

*By about four AM, one of Angel's friends and I were the only two left on the prowl. We went to some giant three level bar, paid fifty bucks each to go inside, and couldn't even buy drinks once we reached the bar. Energy drinks were all that they were selling. I looked around at three layers of people dancing at this time of day with no booze, and my confusion was obvious. My partner in crime looked at me and asked, "Do you do drugs?"*

*"No, I never have."*

*"All these people are on drugs. That's why they're here," he said as if he could read my mind.*

*We left that bar at seven-thirty AM on a Sunday morning. There was a line of people waiting to pay fifty dollars each to go to a club with no booze, and the line was wrapped around the block. I was clearly out of my element to put it mildly.*

The cab drops us near the big ice rink in front of Rockefeller Center. Since it's so close to Christmas, Manhattan is packed with people skating, seeing the tree, and shopping. I almost feel like I'm in a foreign country here as it's such a different world than Texas. Sunshine is all smiles as she looks at the big tree and the displays in the store windows, which have been elaborately decorated for Christmas. The German and his associate meet us on the street by the big tree, and we walk to Grand Central Station to have lunch. It's intriguing to see pieces of history like this building.

Four sandwiches, a bottle of wine, and a two-hundred dollar tab later, we leave the station and aim toward Central Park. In such a busy city void of greenery, it's so nice to see that the park has been left intact for residents to enjoy versus turning it into skyscrapers. I had no idea how big it was until we began walking across it.

We stop at one of Sunshine's favorite places, the Central Park Boathouse, for drinks. When I hand the waitress my debit card, she scowls at me. The German waves me aside and hands her a hundred dollar bill, which she gladly accepts. I'm as much of a fan of cash over credit as the next person, and I'd probably like that aspect if I lived here. For whatever reason, it rubs me raw that she scowled at my card like I was handing her monopoly money. I guess I feel

like you can have your preferences, but you shouldn't be giving shitty looks to customers like that.

Payment issues aside, everyone seems to be enjoying the Christmas season and holiday cheer. After a couple of drinks, the German bids us farewell and heads toward home, while Sunshine and I start walking back through the park. The area in front of the big tree is a downright mob scene at this point. I can't believe this crowd and pity any claustrophobics trying to navigate through the sea of people. I'm also fairly annoyed by the fact that I have to piss like a race horse, and there's not a bathroom in sight. At times like this, I notice that there are no gas stations or rest stops or any public bathrooms besides the one we used on the way through Central Park to the Boathouse. How do people get gas around here? I guess the only drivers are the cabs and the few people who can afford to park in the city.

Finally, we duck into an Irish pub primarily so I can piss. We order a couple of their ten dollar beers, and I walk up the stairs to look for the head. As I'm walking up to the next floor, a waitress starts walking down the same stairs with a plate of food for a customer. She should know where the bathrooms are, so I ask, "Excuse me ma'am, are your restrooms up here?"

"They're down the stairs and to the right."

"Thanks," I say as I turn around and start walking back down the staircase.

"...and you'd better get the hell out of my way, or you're going to end up with this food spilled all over you," she snaps.

I of course get out of her way and don't speak my mind as I still need to piss. Forget the holiday cheer and customer service. How about some basic manners? A guy in San Jose had told me years ago that New York is just fast paced, but can appear rude to visitors. I don't see any other way to interpret the bitchy waitress's comment besides rude. Maybe, she thinks she's just being fast paced. Apparently, not everyone's filled with Christmas spirit.

We order an expensive appetizer to soak up our higher than strip club beers at the bar. In contrast to the snarly waitress on the stairs, the bartender and his buddies at the bar are very cool and polite. They ask where we're from and why we're in town. We explain that we just came to town for one day to see the sights and attend the Rammstein show in Madison Square Garden. These people, who look just slightly younger than us, recognize the name of the band but have probably never heard any songs beside "Du Hast." They remind me of the guys from New York that partied with us during one of the Cancun spring breaks, who all carried switch blades but were still fun, decent people. I'm sure these bar employees would probably have been fun party buddies in the old days. Right now, we've got higher priorities than finding a party crowd for later. We have a major, multicultural, musical event to attend.

Our feet are cold but feel like they've been walking on hot coals. After walking through the bright lights and steadily increasing energy of Times Square, we're now approaching Madison Square Garden. The crowd outside is convincing evidence that we're in the right place. There's a separate entrance for the general admission pit tickets, which doesn't give me a high confidence that we'll be able to bust our way from the floor seats to the GA pits. Damn, I wanted GA seats, but these seats were already three hundred bones a piece. When you add six hundred more dollars for the plane tickets, this is already one expensive one day trip.

Normally, I wouldn't buy an overpriced T-shirt at a concert, but this is a very special event. I better grab a memento now as I probably won't get another chance. As expected, several of the shirts are already sold out, and the opening act hasn't even hit the stage yet. This could also be the last time Rammstein even comes to the country, so I justify my purchase.

As we take our floor seats with our five dollar waters, we notice the Garden is filling quickly. There's a broad selection of musical enthusiasts here of various ages and attire. Some are young, some are old, some are dressed nice, and many are decorated in tattoos wearing black T-shirts like me. Some guys have dyed their hair silver like the lead singer, Till, often does. Sunshine gives me a confused look as she spots a girl that looks like she got lost on the way to Disney World. I explain that the girl is dressed like Snow White, and her date is dressed like a miner because of the "Sonne" video. In the mini musical, the Rammstein members are dressed like miners and acting like the seven dwarfs. Snow White's character in the video overdoses on some kind of gold flake drug in a bath tub. I'm not sure if my explanation makes any more sense to Sunshine than before I explained the costume. My head is nearly shaven as are many other heads in the crowd, but there are plenty of long hairs here too. Out on the streets of Manhattan, I may have been the one who doesn't match. In here however, Sunshine is the one sticking out like an anorexic at a Golden Corral buffet.

Soon, Combichrist takes the stage. I'm not sure if the stage lights aren't working or if this is just part of the show. Dual drummers are beating the hell out of the skins at opposite sides of the stage often from standing positions. The singer is screeching and difficult to understand, but overall, I'm enjoying the performance. It's the energy of the performers that becomes contagious.

That's enough of the foreplay. Let's get to the main event. Considering that it's been ten years since Rammstein played in America, and this is supposed to be their only US show, I'm sure that they're going to make it count. I've been a huge fan for years, but I've never thought that I'd be able to see them live unless I went to one of their concerts in Germany. Ever since I bought the tickets for this show, I've slowed down my studying of the German learning package Vermin had given me for singing and playing guitar at her wedding. Instead, I printed out all the songs of this tour's typical set list with the English and German lyrics, and I've been memorizing the lyrics and their meaning for two months. Yes, I am scarily excited for the insanity to begin.

The set goes dark, and we hear tools that are meant to be cutting open a doorway in the large wall on stage. At the same time, other band members are pounding through their portions of the wall with sledgehammers. The first sounds of their latest CD, *Liebe ist für alle da*, are playing in the background. They're a haunting combination of echoing tones and voices sounding like a choir as found at the beginning of the first song of the CD, "Rammlied." Soon, the members break through the false barriers and enter the stage as the song builds momentum like an avalanche. By now, the Garden is packed to the rafters and going absolutely insane. From what I can see, everyone in the building, except maybe Sunshine, is pounding their fists in the air with enthusiastic rage.

What amazes me is how many people besides me are yelling the German lyrics along with the band. I've spent a couple months learning those words. Did all of these people spend that much time memorizing the set too? Even if a lot of them speak German, it's still no small task to learn all these songs. Considering how rare it is for them to play in America, I'm sure it brought out all the hard core fans. This is not the kind of show that you get a wild hair to see on Friday afternoon and grab a couple tickets to attend. Most of these crazy bastards probably searched for seats as soon as they heard about it and have been waiting in twisted anticipation since they bought the tickets like me. The feeling that's fueling the fans may look like anger, but it's not. It's not really joy either. The abstract emotion that drives this response is just a simple intensity, yet it's so difficult to describe. Whatever it is, my system is on adrenaline overload,

and it feels so wickedly incredible to be screaming at the top of our lungs to words sounding so furious just by language alone.

Sunshine takes a step to her right to avoid my elbow catching her in the eye only to realize another elbow is barely missing the other side of her head. I take a second between songs to look at her apprehensive face. She doesn't look happy, but she's still not suffering at the level of my endurance of that horrific performance of *The Nutcracker* back in Jacksonville a year ago. Relationships are all about compromise, but I do applaud her tolerance of being way out of her element. Not being a big fan of crowds or metal, this is not exactly her ideal date. The apparently very angry crowd all looking like they want to kill someone adds to her unrest. She had an awesome day doing all the things she enjoyed in New York City today. Like a girl that makes her living on her looks at night, Sunshine now must pay her dues in the dark for the happiness she enjoyed in the light.

Rammstein pounds through the set list, which is almost identical to the group of songs that I studied. There are only a couple of songs that I really don't know. It's not just a concert either. It's a show. The bashing drums, crunching guitars, and bellowing vocals are enhanced by the stage show and a ton of pyrotechnics. The "Benzynes" set includes a huge gas pump in the middle of the stage. Till uses the flame throwing pump to set a guy running across the stage on fire. "Ich tut der weh" features Till on a platform pouring liquid fire into a bathtub below. In the bathtub is Flake, the keyboardist. Flake has to be tired by the end of the show as he's walking on a treadmill during the whole time that he's playing.

"Wiener Blut" takes the cake for the most disturbing song performed tonight. This catchy little tune opens quietly on a dark stage. Slowly, green lasers and low light illuminate a dozen dead baby props hanging from the light rack above Till, who's crouching in the center of the stage. The music gets faster and louder building up to an explosion, and the dead baby dolls fall to the ground. That in itself is on the bizarre side. For anyone who understands the lyrics, it's even more sinister. The song describes luring children to the darkness of a creepy house and never letting them leave. Do I think child abuse is a good thing? Hell no, I don't. It's one of the sickest things I can fathom, even if the media forgives Michael Jackson for it. It's just the music and words inspire a release of what evil lurks inside human minds. As the words are shouted and the fists punch holes in the air, it's almost a purifying experience in some twisted way.

Part of the way through the final song, a romantic ballad named "Pussy," Till pulls the cover off of a six foot cock on one corner of the stage and takes his position at its base. The two six foot pricks travel across the stage from one end to the other. The human one aims the other one at the crowd as the plastic one sprays a stream of foam into the sea of screaming fans. These guys are mentally screwed to say the least but highly entertaining.

As we walk out the doors of the hot Garden, the December air surrounds sweating bodies and quickly changes from relief to sobering cold. Sunshine and I ask a cabbie for the price for a ride to JFK Airport. It's almost twice the amount that we paid to get from JFK to the city, but this is a result of simple supply and demand economics. We agree to the fee that's more than the daily fee for a rental car and get in the cab.

The driver comes to a toll booth and holds his hand back to me telling me to give him the toll fee.

"No way, dude. You told me the price to get to JFK. That's all inclusive," I protested.

"You want me to pay, and you pay me later?"

"Yeah, you need to pay it."

I try to resist the urge to yell what I'm thinking at this conniving cabby as I don't want us to get dropped in the middle of nowhere. Once we get to JFK, he tells me the total bill, which includes the toll. Fuming, I hand him the fee he told us at the beginning, the toll amount, and nothing more.

"Hey, what about my tip?" he demanded.

"Here' your tip. Don't fucking lie to your customers like that, you fucking prick!" I yell as I slam the door of his cab. I have three levels of tipping. One is the standard seventeen percent or so for someone who does their job. They might even make a mistake but are at least trying. I'll tip more if they're just outstanding, or I'm too drunk to do math and erring in their favor. The third level is what this guy just got. I have zero tolerance for things like shitty customer service and dishonesty. Fuck that guy.

If I believed in behavior dependent luck, I'd blame Karma for my treatment of the shady cabby. Sunshine and I get into JFK, but the security gates aren't open. We're forced to grab two chairs in the lobby and make a weak attempt at sleeping in furniture that rivals airplane seats and beds of nails for least comfortable sleeping locations. Sunshine and I are both absolutely drained and want nothing more than to be comfortable at home right now. Instead, we maintain positions that may result in the need for a chiropractor if we do fall asleep by some miracle. My feet, legs, and back are trashed from walking all over this city as if the internal combustion engine didn't exist here. The concert ensured that my neck, throat, and arms are all killing as well. This was a horribly expensive trip, but it was worth every penny for both of us for different reasons. I've seen a lot of shows over the years, but this was by far the most intense to date. I don't expect any show to knock this one off the top of the hill for a long time. I had my adrenaline rush. I had my fix. Now, I can relax and get back to some level of normal.

### **Sat 25 Dec 10**

Seashell, Sunshine's cousin from Staug, and Cartmanini, an Italian Cartman looking friend of ours from Jax, decided to travel together for Christmas and stay with us for a few days. The two of them and Sunshine are all still asleep, but it's time for me to give myself a Christmas present. I didn't sit on the fat guy's knee at the mall, but he knows that all I want for Christmas is a new high speed on the S1K. I try to quietly put on my new Alpinestars one piece leather suit, helmet, gloves, and boots. It was a bitch squeezing in and out of this suit at first, but I'm starting to get the hang of the ridiculous motions necessary to cram myself in and out of it now. I've seen less awkward motion by cougars dancing to modern music with twenty-one year olds at the bar. As I walk stiffly out to the S1K's garage, the dark, crisp air cools the exposed skin of my eyes and nose since my shield is raised. I'm pleasantly surprised how warm I stay with this suit over the Under Armour. Besides the perceived improvement in temperature management, Under Armour also helps tremendously when it's time to squirm out of the suit, especially if I've been sweating. The Under Armour is like Teflon spray for the body in this sticky leather. This combination is a drastic improvement in comfort and warmth over the leather biker jacket and hooded sweatshirt that I used to wear in cold weather riding. It's amazing what a difference it makes to actually have the right gear for the job. The gloves are as good as I can get, but they just aren't as effective as mittens that keep all the fingers together. Unfortunately, mittens might be fine for blatting down the highway on a chopper, but they're not worth a damn for technical driving on a sport bike.

After burning through some curves and down the blacktop, I turn left and see the blind curves. I start building speed through the curves and am well into three digits as the ribbon of

road unravels to a straight strip in front of me. No cars are in sight, so I twist back the throttle until it won't twist any more. It's pitch black out here, and my eyes are watering a little from the cold air coming through the helmet vents. At this speed, any poorly timed animal or poorly placed road debris will result in my quick conversion to road kill. Despite the technology and safety features of my machine, I'd barely see an obstacle before impact, let alone react, in time to prevent catastrophe. The danger compounds the rush that I feel as I glance down quickly at the speedometer to see 142 mph on the screen.

All that I can control right now are my eyes as they focus on the road for threatening obstacles tossed into my path by the grim reaper in an effort to claim what he couldn't during my heart surgery. The rest of my body is locked in place and tucked as tight as possible into the bike, and my right hand is completely frozen at full throttle. I approach the crest of the next hill where I usually let off the throttle. I have zero visibility of what could be over that crest. I look down at the speedometer to see 161 mph on the dash, let off the throttle, and guide my eyes back to the road. As my head rises, the three digit air stream catches the helmet and reminds me just how fast I'm still moving. Just because I quit accelerating doesn't mean that I'm not still traveling at a stupid speed. Cherries lighting up the road would still mean a set of shiny new bracelets for me depending on who stopped me. This is why I hate the speed laws. If we really were innocent until proven guilty, we shouldn't be pulled over because we might hurt someone. Yes, I'm pushing triple the speed limit, but the only risk I'm causing is to me, and I'm insured if something goes wrong. See, I'm a responsible addict. It's as if a young Nikki Sixx bred with a girl scout.

As my throttle hand relaxes, so does the rest of my body. The adrenaline aftershock causes a smile to creep across my face and signify that the hungry demon has been pacified for now. I never realize how tense I am until this moment when I can feel all the muscles relaxing. It makes sense to have this feeling after a brutal workout, but it's a little surprising that after just a few seconds of adrenaline coursing through my veins and muscle tension, this relaxation phase is so drastic in change. I wonder what it would be like to actually race or do this for a long time. Does the release become more intense as the buildup lasts longer like some kind of full body orgasm?

As I walk back into the apartment, all residents, both current and temporary, are awake. Chip, a local buddy that I've known since ISU, is sitting at the table too. I tell him and Cartmanini about my new high of 161 mph on the S1K, but there's no need to advertise the fact in front of Sunshine. She's busy preparing enough food to feed at least twenty people in the kitchen anyway, so it would be impolite to distract her from her cooking pleasure.

After a drive through downtown and a visit to the Alamo, our holiday group takes the scenic route back to the apartment for dinner. I finally talked Sunshine into freezing a third of the twenty pound rib loin that she bought for five people. Hats off to the butcher who conned her into that purchase, but he was preying on the weak. As always, her culinary background shines, and the food is incredible. Chip and I stuff ourselves to miserable levels to ensure that none of the prime rib is left. We comment on the choice to gorge over waste being a result of our Midwest upbringing. On one hand, it's stupid to eat so much that we get sick. However, the thought of wasting food is just not in our code, especially when it's this good thanks to Sunshine's chef shaming talents. Hence, misery wins this round but in a pleasurable way.

## **Fri 04 Feb 11**

Wow, it really snowed in Texas. I'll make a mental note to spit on the next person that lectures me about global warming. There was a little flurry in Boerne when we moved here last February, but this is really snow on the ground. Pick calls asking if we have to go to work or not, and I tell him that we still do as far as I know. I'm close enough that it shouldn't be a big deal anyway.

The Goat is out in the parking lot because the damn garage door cable snapped yesterday from the cold stiffness. I thought the parking lot was slick when it was wet, but with a little ice and snow, it's terrible. The Goat starts with no problem, so I let it heat its insides while I climb out of the car and scrape the little bit of ice from the windows with a credit card. I haven't owned an ice scraper since I left Iowa, and I'd hoped I'd never have to see one again.

As I shift the silver bullet into reverse and start letting out the clutch, I learn how helpless this car is on ice. The car, despite being fairly heavy, is barely moving. I can understand that something like that lightweight, little Porsche 914 that I had in high school being worthless on ice, but this car weighs over 3800 pounds. I think I'm sliding sideways more than I'm moving backward. I finally manage to pilot the car out of the parking space, but I can't budge it up the slight incline of the parking lot. My tires are about ready to be replaced, but I had no idea it'd be this helpless. I can't afford to get it stuck out there on the roads, so I'm forced to wake Sunshine. With sleepy eyes and bed hair, she graciously bundles herself in warm clothes, squeals with happiness at the sight of snow and memories of Colorado, and climbs into the driver's seat of the Goat. She aims the struggling car back into the parking space while I push it forward and against the sideways slips. Finally, it's in a theoretically safe place. She gets out of the car and asks, "Are you just not going in to work?"

"I guess I can fire up that Anarchist and take that. It sits lower than the Ape, so I can put both legs down for outriggers. It's a lightweight bike too, so if I do fall over, I can lift it."

"It's too early to understand your logic. Just be careful," she responds shaking her sleepy head.

As I'm starting to get ready for work and predict any low spots in the road that might be challenging for the bike, Pick calls back and tells me that the work weather hotline told him that work is cancelled today. I thank him for the call and explain what my Plan B was. "You're an idiot," he laughs before hanging up the phone.

I go back to the computer to check my email, and sure enough, there is a message saying the same thing that Pick just told me. Perhaps, I should've checked my email before going down to the parking lot and fighting with the Goat, but at least, I found out before taking out the bike in this weather. Although, I have to admit I was kind of looking forward to a snowy ride on the V-twin sled for driving novelty. It's been a long time since I've been out on the ice on a bike.

*The last time that I was riding a bike in weather like this was back in my little home town in northern Iowa. It was some evening between Christmas and New Year's Eve. The General, my old '77 Harley FLH, had been sitting in Mom and Dad's garage since I'd brought it home from college for the winter at Thanksgiving. Every Harley owner knew it was better to drive a bike as often as possible to keep the gaskets and seals from going dry. Even though it was only around six PM, it was already dark due to the short winter days at that time of year. There was a little freezing rain falling, but it was no downpour. Thirty degrees was a heat wave for us, so I was only wearing a long sleeved shirt with no coat or gloves. After driving down Main Street, I turned out to the highway to take a loop to the edge of town and get the moving parts warm.*

*About the time that I was going to turn off the highway and head back to town on the old blacktop, a red and blue light show appeared in my rearview. Fortunately in a small town, I*

*knew the cops. The door of the patrol car flew open and Drago, who was a year younger than me in school, jumped out of the cruiser looking less than impressed. He knew me well having worked with me at the grocery store and lifting with me at the high school many times. Friends or not, he was pissed. "Dammit! I told you not to ride that thing when you're fucked up!"*

*To be fair, he had told me that before. "I know. I haven't even had a drop today yet."*

*He hesitated as he realized his assumption that I was drunk was not valid. I don't think he'd predicted the possibility anyone would be riding a motorcycle in freezing rain with good sense.*

*"Then you're just fucking stupid. Get your ass home on that thing," he hollered with just slightly less volume and anger.*

*I'd never been pulled over for driving while stupid, but there's a first time for everything.*

## **Chapter 3: Touring**

### **Wed 09 Mar 11**

My book promotion travel has me back in Jacksonville, the city where I spent the six most challenging and transitional years of my life. That time period is responsible for drastically changing me as a person in so many ways after a twisted roller coaster of events.

Now that I've driven all over the city in an effort to talk book stores into putting copies of *Bouncing off Guardrails* on the shelves, it's time to meet some old coworkers from the Office. I'm pleasantly surprised with how many people make the effort to come to lunch and happy to hear how well everyone has been doing since my departure. Hopefully, my leaving didn't contribute to their joy, but I'll refrain from asking a question that I don't want answered. It's great to see my friends again and realize how much I've missed them. They knew me much differently than most of my current coworkers as I didn't try to paint myself as an angel at the the Office like I do at the new gig. These former coworkers accepted me just the way I was, and I don't know that the current Company would think any less of me if they knew about the tattoos, arrests, colorful past, and the book, but I'd rather not find out the hard way and end up back in poverty. As much as I miss this group, I still have no regrets about moving back to Texas. It's still great to see all these people that were such a huge part of my life through my cocoon period when I lived here.

Since Tracer is still on the hunt for employment, work doesn't inhibit his ability to accompany me to Staug to visit one last book store for the day. After whoring my literary goods at the one book store in the nation's oldest city, Tracer and I swing by the Conch House, a local watering hole, for a couple of beers and to enjoy the gorgeous afternoon. I definitely miss this guy since leaving Florida. Having met him right after the divorce, he has been there through all the ups and downs over the years. That day I met him at Joe's Crab Shack seems like forever ago now. I guess it has been almost seven years that have passed. Time flies when your life is a giant, confusing X-rated cartoon.

Once Tracer and I are back in Jax, we meet Cartmanini and the Scott, another former coworker from the Office, at Sundog in Atlantic Beach for dinner. This place brings back memories too, and it's a tasty pleasure to sink my teeth into one of their incredible burgers again. Unfortunately, it's one of Florida's typical torrential storms outside. The rain here right now is ridiculous, so I don't blame the other buddies for declining my invite to meet us for a bite. After Sundog, the Scott and I decide to go have one more drink at the Ritz.

The weather has killed the crowd, but the bar starts filling with a few patrons as the rain subsides. Normally, I'd think a Wednesday here would be pretty busy, and it is starting to get busier, which means we're starting to get sucked into the party environment fun. I've got an early morning tomorrow though, so I need to bid farewell to the funny talker and get to AJ's guest room for a few hours of sleep. AJ is a friend from way back when he became my second customer for a full custom built chopper when I started Y Chrome Customs in Jax, and he became my official photographer for all the bike and bikini shots. Even though AJ didn't make it to dinner, he was going to leave the door open for me, so I could crash at his place. It's been cool over the years seeing him develop from the pictures he took of Nic and the chopper I built for him to shooting the whole Hooters staff's bikini pictures for their calendar applications. There are worse ways to spend your free time.

### **Thu 10 Mar 11**

I'm not sure how late it was when I got in last night, but I know that it's four AM now and time to start the long drive on I95 south to Miami. The last time that I started down this way was last New Year's Day on the Anarchist, though that was on A1A. Sunshine and I took I95 to Miami the week before that in the Goat as well. I've put a few miles on this path over the years, so what's one more trip?

That's the last book store for today, which is a relief. It's been a long day of driving and selling a book about tattooed biker trash to book store people, who are very different than tattooed biker trash people. Coral Gables is a very nice area and must have plenty of money based on the car dealerships that I've been seeing. In two blocks, I see three exotic car dealerships. You don't see that on Bert Road, the old crack neighborhood where I lived and built choppers in my less prosperous days in Jacksonville.

I check into the Cleavelander Hotel in Miami Beach. This is the first time that I've been at this place for anything but drinks, and I'm impressed. The room is simple but very nice and overlooks the pool. It's too bad that it's not spring break. I'm sure this place is a wild spot at that time, which will probably be happening in just one more week. I settle into the room and walk down to the street to get a look at the ocean again. Someone at the hotel mentioned that there's some DJ event happening here this weekend. There are plenty of kids on the streets, so I stick to the beach for my walk. Eventually, I find a little deli for some cheap, healthy food. With a little fuel in the stomach, I walk into Mango's for a quick drink. It's still pretty early, but people are already drinking and starting to have fun. I lean against a pole in the shadows and watch the entertainment and crowd while I enjoy my Mojito. I'm just here to watch people and not to interact with anyone except the bartender. After finishing my drink, I walk back into the street and point myself back toward the Cleavelander. Once in my room, I look out the window and see the crowd at the pool bar slowly growing. I know that I'm tired and in serious need of sleep, but I hate to waste a night in Miami. I paid for it, so I should be enjoying it. Maybe, I'll lie down and see if I wake up before morning.

What time is it? The alarm clock says 10:18 PM, but they're wrong occasionally. The phone confirms it. I look outside, the sun has disappeared, and the crowd and noise has grown. The smart thing to do would be to lie right back down on the bed. It's not like I could fall asleep with that music anyway. Screw it, what's the worst that could happen? I take a quick shower to help bring myself back to life.

Mango's has kicked up the entertainment with the model dancers in the fancy costumes, but they've also kicked up their drink prices since I was here just hours ago. Oh well, I assume

my position where I can see, not be seen, and enjoy a Dos Equis Amber. I repeat the commercial in my head thinking 'I don't always drink beer, but when I do, I prefer Dos Equis.'

I'll have one more drink here at the Clevelander poolside bar before I call it a night. Some Russian sounding girl stands by me at the bar. She introduces herself and her not near as attractive sister. I'm always interested in meeting new people within the limits of being a good boyfriend, so I try to be polite and decipher their broken English. She says that her sister spilled something on her, and now, she's wet. I laugh to myself, but I hold back the numerous comments a younger me would have said years ago. I suggest that perhaps she use the dryer in the bathroom, and she looks at me like I am Einstein himself. She thanks me for the brilliant suggestion and trots off to rectify her moisture issue. New people can be so entertaining.

As I scan the crowd, I see a couple of guys about my age looking at a nearly perfectly round girl at the bar. The more boisterous of the two has tattoos up and down both arms. He leaves to go to the restroom. When he comes back, I tell him the round girl in the black came over asking about him, but I didn't know his name. He laughs and the three of us start to shoot the shit. I offer to get us a round of Jaeger shots. I notice two young ladies behind them and ask them if they'd like a shot as well to celebrate the tattooed guy's birthday with us. I figure a good way to make friends with these guys is to introduce them to nice, young ladies. Since I'm occupied, someone might as well benefit from my charm and charisma.

The guys are from Boston, and the girls are from Chicago. We all have a few drinks and laughs as the night progresses. When I mention that I'm from Texas, the tattooed guy describes how shocked he was by his visit to Texas years ago. He was riding with a girl who waved in the rearview mirror after getting in front of a car in traffic. When he'd asked why she waved, she pointed out that most people carry guns, and it's best to be very polite in traffic. An armed society is a polite society. The girls are definitely from the Midwest with their genuine personalities and unfamiliarity with a place like Miami. You would think the dresses and makeup put them in the same category as any other girl in Miami, but other people had already busted them for wearing flat shoes. It's amazing how something like the fact that they weren't wearing heels gave them away as not being from a city like this. Finally, I remember that I have another early morning tomorrow, bid the group farewell, and stumble up to my room. Axe out.

### **Fri 11 Mar 11**

I know that I was up way later than I needed to be, but it was fun hanging out with the new group of travelers last night. It's been a long time since I've been able to run on the beach. Since it's already six AM, I better make good use of the opportunity and squeeze in a quick sunrise jog along the ocean. Some cardio might do my body some good and help me sweat out the toxins from last night too.

While I check out of the Clevelander and thank the desk help for the stay, the young girl behind the counter asks about the book. She tells me that she's an avid reader and that she'll buy a copy from Amazon later. I wish there was a better way for me to get feedback from some girl like this who's only met me once. Does it make a difference to have met the author when you read the book? Does it only matter if you really know them well? One brief meeting might not be enough to make an impression or difference. The best that I can do is to keep an eye open for a review from her online in case she leaves one down the road. After the valet brings my rental wreck, I aim north and start my day of shameless self promotion at the book stores in West Palm Beach. This way, I can work my way back down to my hotel in Ft. Lauderdale by late afternoon.

It would've been nice to finish the store visits earlier today, so I could've enjoyed more time on Lauderdale Beach. It's getting close to dusk, so I'll just have to settle for a quick nap in the sand near the hotel on a pretty empty beach. As I walk back to the hotel, I swing into Bulldog Tattoo to say 'hi.' I introduce myself, and not only do they remember the reaper handprint tattoo on my trap, but they have my book poster hanging in the front of the shop. I have to admit that it's pretty cool to see the poster with me on my Anarchist at Daytona Beach hanging in the tattoo shop window. I guess this is my five minutes of fame in the loosest sense of the word.

Showered and clean, I drive down to Beach Place and have a snack at Lulu's. With just enough nourishment to carry me until dinner, I walk down the street to the Elbo Room. The bar is just as busy as ever. I ask the blonde beauty behind the bar for a bottle of Bud and if she's seen any posters for my book. Between the noise in the bar and her post tip apathy, she just shrugs and tells me to feel free to look around the bar walls if I want. I'd never noticed how many pictures and posters are on the wall of this old place. I wonder how many of these pictures Dad and Uncle Slim saw in their days here decades ago. There are many decorations on the wall, but my poster isn't one of them. Maybe, my five minutes of loosely defined fame are over.

After relaxing at the hotel for a little while, I point the rental wreck toward Solid Gold for dinner. When I get to the valet guys, I ask them if the manager is working right now. The manager has my poster hanging on his office wall according to a post of his on the GTO forum. He should be expecting me as I told him that I was planning to come here and have a drink with him tonight. I explain all this to the valet guys, but the manager isn't on the premises at the minute. They ask for a copy of the book since their employer is mentioned in it. As much as I don't like giving away books that I should be selling, I give them one and tell them to let the rest of the people at the bar read it too. I'll call this a promotional copy. Spread the word, guys.

Inside the building, it's impossible not to notice the blonde in the gold dress at the front entrance. The gold dress is the perfect wrapping for her Barbie doll body. It's wise of the manager to put her here in the front in case people poke their nose inside to decide if they want to stay or go somewhere else.

After paying the Barbie doll my cover charge, I stroll into the dining area and take a seat at the bar. This is exactly where I was sitting just over a year ago on a cold night for dinner. One of the other gold dress wrapped decorations is having dinner between me and an obvious regular. I begin explaining to the two of them my reason for being here tonight. Soon, I see Jodi, who has a cameo in the book, behind the bar. After she brings my drink, I make sure that I have the right waitress. "Is your name Jodi, right?"

"Yes," she says with hesitation. I'm sure no girl wants to hear a stranger identify her by name.

"I was here just over a year ago for dinner. Anyway, you waited on me that night. I wrote a book about going through heart surgery, motorcycles, and wanted you to know you appear in the book, right here on one of the last entries."

"Really?" she asks.

She takes the copy in my hand and starts to read the small portion of the book in which she's mentioned. The regular decides he needs a book so that both Jodi and I can sign it for him. You can tell Jodi is somewhat flattered to see her name in print like this. The other waitress in gold and customer seem almost excited for her. I'm sure it's not every day that people hear that they make an appearance in a book, song, or anything outside of their own little world.

As I enjoy my dinner, the regular, Norm, of the club talks to Jodi and the other staff about some of the stupid things other waitresses have done. I welcome the conversation and

entertainment among them while wondering just how often Norm is sitting in this bar. At some point, Norm points through the glass to the main stage where two girls are performing some kind of *Cirque du Soleil* show. These are not tiny little crackorexics by any stretch. They are dolls for sure but have definite muscle tone. They put those muscles to work as they roll up and down the drapes that are hanging from the ceiling. It's an impressive show to say the least and not something that I could do without breaking my neck or ass. Once the show is over, I decide that the manager from the GTO forum probably isn't going to make it tonight. I say 'goodbye' to the bar staff and patrons and drive back through the streets of my city of origin to the hotel.

### **Sat 12 Mar 11**

After only slightly more sleep than the night before, I'm awake and running on the beach again. I might be a little tired, but I still feel way better than I have on some of my past mornings here in Lauderdale. There are plenty of hotties bouncing up and down the beach sidewalk. Motivation is contagious, and seeing people being healthy makes me feel obligated to run further like some kind of penance for the last few nights of drinking. The ocean is the same gorgeous blue that I remember. Maybe, Florida wasn't the best place for me to live under the circumstances that existed, but it sure is a fun place to visit.

Daytona Beach doesn't look near as busy as it has in the past, but Bike Week is definitely in progress. I'm not as hypnotized by the sights and sounds as I was years ago on my first visit to Bike Week when I was in absolute awe to see so many bikes in one place and hear that thunder of all the machines. After so many years of attending bike events here, the newness has faded of course, but it's still a lot of fun to see. As I walk out of the final book store of this trip, I throw the collared shirt in the trunk and pull out a more appropriate black T-shirt. Now, I'm ready to enjoy my first bike event as a non Florida resident since the first one I attended back in 2000. Unfortunately, that also means I'll be on two feet and not two wheels, but at least, I'm here and smiling.

I find myself with Cousin Reno back at Lollipops, a strip club in Daytona Beach that has become a bike event tradition. They didn't have places like this in the little northern Iowa town where we were raised. It's not that I haven't had fun here at times other than the bike events, but this place brings in talent from all over the southeast for the weeks like this. Another differentiator from many strip clubs I've visited is that Lollipops plays almost all rock on nights like this. I can handle the few country songs that get peppered amidst the Mötley Crüe, Guns and Roses, White Zombie, Godsmack, and other obligatory motorcycle culture music.

AJ joins Cousin Reno and me at the ballet, shoe show, or charity event depending on your preferred terminology. I don't think any of the three of us have ever turned down an invite to this place. Who can blame us on a night like this? The evening is getting ripe, and I need to be sure to get out of here before I end up tanked by accident. Cousin Reno is maintaining his composure surprisingly well. It appears that he's chosen not to repeat a previous performance of pinstriping the side of his Exploder with recycled Jägermeister while I drive him home. Life's all about progress.

The three of us part ways until the next time, and I start driving north. Luckily for me, Tracer is awake and lets me know that his spare room is open if I need a place to crash. That offer beats sleeping in my car in a parking lot somewhere or paying for another hotel.

### **Sun 13 Mar 11**

Tracer and I inhale breakfast at the Beach Diner, a landmark restaurant in Ponte Vedra, before he and his guests leave for Amelia Island to see the *Concours d'Elegance* car show. I've seen it a couple of times, and it is one amazing car show. Today, I can't justify the fifty bucks that it costs to attend or the drive to and from Amelia considering my return flight time this afternoon. Instead, I swing by the old location of my motorcycle shop, Y Chrome Customs, in the Bert Road ghetto on the way to the gym. The Y Chrome sign that I painted years ago has been removed, and the next tenant has moved into the closest thing that I had to a home for my six years in Florida. I knock on the Swede's door in case he's working with the door locked again as it'd be nice to see my old shop neighbor while I'm here. There's no answer, so I leave a card in his door letting him know that I stopped.

After a decent workout at the old gym, I meet a few guys at the Mushroom for lunch. Yoda, the old shop foreman from the Office, rides here on his never been washed full dresser Harley tour bike. He's not at Bike Week since he hates the smell of new leather as he says. Cartmanini and a few other derelict buddies named Train, Snake, and Large meet us too. Large's tattoo epidemic now includes his ribs along with the already covered chest, shoulders, and arms. He's still as big as ever, so he can get away with it. Snake hasn't been able to lift like he used to because of the hernia, so he's lost ground on Large. Those two go back and forth like brothers while Train just sits back and laughs. Yoda, the oldest of our group, laughs almost uncomfortably as our jokes and war stories go to the gutter like most of our conversations did years ago. After an extended lunch and catching up with these clowns, it's time to aim back toward the airport and fly home. I really do miss the friends here, Cousin Reno, and the beaches, but I'm ready to get home to Texas and Sunshine. Like most simple animals, I'm a creature of habit and am most comfortable in a routine.

### **Sun 27 Mar 11**

That Anarchist isn't the most comfortable mode of transportation but sure looks good shining in front of the Book People store here in Austin. We have my *Bouncing off Guardrails* book poster posted in front of the store entrance in an effort to capture people's attention. Somehow, the bike should magically convince people that if they like the bike, they should go buy the book. Now, I just have quite a few hours to kill before the book event this evening.

I'm glad that the other two authors reading tonight have bigger followings. There must be thirty people sitting to listen. The older of my two younger sisters, Organisis, and her family are able to be here. Her husband, Matic, has a work event in town this week, so the whole tribe came out to Texas for a vacation. Sunshine and Chip are also here. I'm used to doing events like this alone, but I put my stubborn independence aside temporarily and admit that it is nice to have people here for it.

The first speaker reads from his book about how to raise money for the arts in communities. The second speaker boasts that she can prove that God and the afterlife exist. Regardless of a person's beliefs, that's a tall claim from anyone. That's one of the key aspects of religion. No one can prove the afterlife does or doesn't exist, so either you believe on faith alone or not. As long as we're on the subject of facing mortality, I kick off my readings.

It's morbidly entertaining for me to watch the reactions of those people in the crowd hearing my book's passages for the first time. They look like they want to laugh at the dark humor, but confused guilt forces their faces straight due to the sadness of the events that I'm reliving. Combine that with the colorful language, and I feel I've done a decent job of getting the

crowd's attention and leaving them, like many acquaintances of the past, unsure as to whether to admire, hate, or pity me. Even the Book People rep is at a loss for words when she replaces me at the podium. She just looks at the crowd with her mouth open, at me, and back at the crowd before uttering, "Thanks, Axe, for that interesting read."

Several people come to me after the readings to buy books and have me sign them. One elderly woman tells me that she got chills when I read the section on hallucinations in the hospital from the drugs. She explains that her husband went through similar experiences in the hospital before he passed. It is cool that someone finds that connection with my story, and would be even cooler to watch the look on her face as she gets home and reads some of the descriptive words, which I felt were too much for this public reading.

With the event over, I saddle the Anarchist and lead our little band back south to San Antonio.

### **Thu 31 Mar 11**

I don't have a tattoo for the S1K or the Ape, but all I really did was paint them. It's not like they were full builds from just an idea like the choppers. I told myself that I'd stop after the last tattoos, but the unique thing about being an addict is that nothing is ever done. The ink is currently limited to my right chest, shoulder, and upper arm, which can be hidden by most short sleeve shirts. I've been at this job with the Company for a year now, and I've worn long sleeves every day. In theory, I should be safe to add artwork south of the upper arm without worrying about career repercussions. I don't care what corporations say about things like individuality, constructive criticism, and work life balance. They'll never admit it, but most high level bosses just want a team of robots that will put on the uniform of a button down shirt and dress pants, all go to the same barber, pour their whole life into work, and never rock the boat. That's fine to me. They're paying me to work, so it's up to the bosses to set the terms. I just wish they'd be blunter about it so that people can make the choice about whether displaying tattoos or getting promoted is more important.

I've seen a lot of flame tattoos on forearms over the years. Most of them look more like the flames that I used to paint on bikes when I first started. They were very two dimensional with rigid outlines, occasionally with single sided ghost shading, but that just won't do for me. I work with Chicago Ink, my new go to tattoo guy, over at Fortune Brothers, and we lay out a design that will meet my high standards. Since the S1K has the red and yellow realistic fire on the black background, we're going to aim for that triple color look. This is going to take quite a few sessions, hours, and dollars, but I think it'll be wicked when it's complete. I can also look forward to the sheer joy of my first elbow tattoo, which should be about as much fun as a handjob from Captain Hook.

## **Chapter 4: Animal Instinct**

### **Sat 02 Apr 11**

I'm coming out of Grey Forest and can actually use my throttle on the S1K again. The GFPD has to have some kind of radar device out here among the trees on the side of the road as my Valentine One goes nuts every time when I go through here, even if it's five AM and still pitch black like now.

I jack the throttle as I leave the controlled intersection and start banking around the first curve to the right under heavy acceleration. Out of the blackness to the left, a giant raccoon darts

into the part of the road my headlight illuminates and is hauling ass right to my path. I could assume that he'll keep going the same speed and direction, hit my brakes, and aim for the left hoping to cross right behind him. That's a gamble I can't afford to take though. There's been too many deer that have changed direction at the last minute, and I can't take any chances being on two wheels with an obstacle that big on the road. My only option is to hammer it, lean harder into the right turn, and try to get in front of him assuming he's already running his maximum speed.

I hear a loud thud as I feel a serious jolt resonate up from the lower end of the bike all the way to every place where my body touches the machine. It's obvious that I smoked the raccoon, but the S1K and I are still upright and still moving. I better pull over to the side of the road under the light and see what damage that fat, furry bastard just did to my bike. Wow, he destroyed the whole underbelly section. Fortunately, he missed the front wheel and didn't throw me in the weeds, but he must've just missed the tire and hit the parts right behind it. There's blood and fur all over the shattered plastics at the very front of the bottom of the bike. Of course, it had to be the panels that I painted, so not only do I have to buy new pieces, but I get to repaint them too. I'm sure the raccoon got the worst of that collision, and I'm fine besides my current stress level, but the bike is going to be down for a while. I can just hear people now saying 'you were so lucky.' That's not true at all. If I was lucky, I wouldn't have hit the critter in the first place. With Mother Nature cutting my ride short, I slowly drive back toward the apartment. There's no need to go fast enough to have one of the panels blow off its cracked mounting points and damage something else in the process.

### **Sat 16 Apr 11**

We're stopped at an intersection in Sunshine's abused CR-V, or the Curve as we call it when we're not referring to it as a piece of shit. I turn around from the driver's seat to see how the little guy is doing. He's so quiet for being a three month old puppy. I haven't heard a bark or whine out of him since we left the farm and his identical brother in Dripping Springs. If it weren't for a little sunlight shining on him through the window of the Curve, it'd be hard to even identify him with that jet black fur. At twenty-eight pounds, he's a hell of a lot bigger than he looked in the puppy pictures online. Like a teenager says looking at his first chub, 'I wonder how big this thing's going to get.'

Our new pup is probably a little confused. He's gone back and forth between his foster parents, the farm that we just left, and the vet's office to get his nuts cut. That's a lot of adversity for the poor little bastard to have to endure in the first few months of life. It's baffling to me why people pay hundreds of dollars for a dog. This thing cost us just over a hundred bucks, including shots and even the microchip gadget. I guess it's like LoJack for pets or something in case they get lost. I may have wanted a pure German Shepherd originally, but I think this guy will be just fine for us.

*If I had the time and money, I would've gotten a pit bull years ago when I had the shop in Florida. Despite how nice the company would've been at that time, it was impossible to justify another mouth to feed when I was starving myself already.*

*Sunshine wanted another dog ever since her ex took her last one with him in the split. I wanted to see how things went with the new job and living in Texas before adding another complication to our lives during our adjustment period.*

*I always thought of German Shepherds as being smart, obedient, protective dogs. We'd been looking at the website for the German Shepherd Rescue of Central Texas when a new litter*

*of pups arrived. Several had the sable look, and two were black, so we knew they weren't purebreds. This would potentially be an advantage considering pure Shepherds often have hip problems later in life.*

*I told Sunshine that we better talk to the apartment first and know the rules before we get anything. The apartment manager told me that Shepherds were on the restricted list along with Pit Bulls, Rottweilers, and other perceived aggressive breeds.*

*"Are you kidding me? Shepherds are one of the smartest, best behaved dogs there are," I questioned.*

*"Yeah, but they're just so militant. There have been Shepherds that have jumped through plate glass windows to protect their owners."*

*"Yes, and protection is a reason many people have dogs. Look, man, we really want a dog, but we may have to break our lease and move if you can't work with us on this."*

*He sighed and thought about it. "You've been good tenants, and we don't want to lose you. Look, I'm not a vet, so just don't make me look stupid. Don't come in here with a Pit Bull and tell me it's a Yorkie, ok?"*

*"Fair enough. Thanks."*

*That's the reason we chose one of the black pups. We had to accommodate sue happy jackasses and shitty dog owners who can't properly raise an animal and screw it up again for the rest of us. When we officially requested permission to add the dog to the lease, I sent a picture of our pup along with a picture of a black lab in the same pose. We listed him as an unknown mix and noted that he looked like the lab pup picture we found on Skynet. If someone is going to make a stupid rule, I'm not going to lie, but I'll find a creative way to avoid following it.*

Our new critter is just lying on the seat next to Sunshine with his head on her lap. I can see her smiling ear to ear in the rearview mirror as we start moving toward San Antonio again. I know she was upset a few minutes ago when we had to leave this pup's brother at the shelter, but we eventually agreed that it's best for us to start with one and see how it goes. Once past that discussion, all I see is pure joy behind me now.

I know I'm a selfish person and not used to having responsibility for anyone but myself, so this will be a work in progress. I'm glad we waited until we were both ready, so neither of us has to feel like we were talked into something that we didn't really want. As a couple with jobs and the ability to work together to take care of an animal, it does make sense for both of us now. Hopefully, the pup enjoys his new home too. He'll probably be happy just to have a stable dwelling. I guess we need to come up with a name for him. Cat, an old buddy from the party days at the Institute, already used Dexter for his new dog, so that's out. Diesel would kind of fit the barrel chest and black fur, or maybe Baron would work. We'll have to figure it out soon, so we can start his German command training. Just because we didn't get a full Shepherd doesn't mean we can't carry on that part of his heritage.

I look behind me again at what appears to be a content and relaxed little ball of black fur. It's good we waited, but I think I'm really going to enjoy having him. Even if he causes some angst along the way, the glowing smile on Sunshine's face as a result of him alone will make it well worth it.



**Figure 4 Sunshine and Baron Pup**

### **Sun 24 Apr 11**

It's Easter morning, and the sun, like most people, hasn't even considered rising here yet. I make sure the little 'L' for logic mode is displayed on the V1, come out from the hidden curves to the straight stretch of dark road, and pull back the throttle on the S1K. I hate looking anywhere but straight ahead at these speeds, but I look down as I approach the crest to see 167 mph, a new high, on the speedometer. I quickly look back to the road and release the throttle a second later. Damn, that's fast. That's a chicken running through Ethiopia fast. It's the highest speed that I've driven with this bike, any bike, or any vehicle for that matter. I relax, raise my head, and feel the air coming over the windscreen try to clothesline me. As I realize how tight I was gripping the bars, I slowly relax my hands and the rest of the muscles follow. What an insane rush! Nothing beats that burst of adrenaline that comes from doing those kinds of speeds when you can't see but a fraction of a second worth of lit road in front of you. What better way to celebrate Jesus

rising from the tomb than by doing over triple the speed limit and not ending up in one myself? It's the day we both test our immortality in our own special way.

## **Chapter 5: Lakes, Mountains, and Rock Stars**

### **Sun 05 Jun 11**

One AM is late enough. I've got a long haul in front of me. Today, I'll be taking the longest motorcycle ride that I've even considered to date. I'm not planning to ride some comfortable bagger bike or even something as comfortable as the old General. Instead of selecting the vehicle based on comfort, size, or long distance ergonomics, I'm choosing the machine that will have me balled up in a knot for a thousand miles to Colorado but capable of getting me there as fast as possible. The S1K may not be BMW's recommended motorcycle for touring, but it'll be the best choice for carving through the Rockies once I get there.

The extra clothes that I shipped last week are already at Organisis's house waiting for me, so all I have to bring is my bike, my gear, and myself. I try to quietly get ready so as not to disturb Sunshine this early. Baron is already awake and following me around trying to figure out what I'm doing. I cram myself into the leather suit, grab all my goodies, tell Sunshine and Baron 'goodbye,' and walk to the garage housing the device of my torture for today.

I should have everything that I need. The wallet, Glock, and paper map are in the suit pocket. My high tech GPS is a piece of masking tape on the gas tank where I used a Sharpie to scribble the names and directions of the roads that will lead me to Loveland. The bag over my shoulder holds a few protein bars, drinks, and two camping fuel bottles of gasoline. At this time of the day in the wide open areas, I might be very glad that I have those two spare bottles in case I run dry in the middle of nowhere with no open stations. It's only a thousand miles. This shouldn't be too bad. Should it?

Dammit, did I miss a turn? I stop right in the middle of the back road in the darkness to check where I am. While I'm here, I might as well piss quickly as no one is in sight for miles to report me for public urination. Between the phone map and using the bike's headlight on the map that I had in my pocket, I finally get my bearings straight and jump back in the saddle. I love going places with Sunshine or Sunshine and Baron, but this is kind of fun being just out on the bike on my own with nobody around like this. It feels like a real adventure. It might feel like a real kick in the ass a few hours from now though.

I pull into a gas station on the edge of Amarillo and pry my ass out of the saddle. After filling the tank with more go-go juice, I walk around the bike while eating a protein bar. As I look down at the rear tire, I'm surprised how thin the tread is already. This bike doesn't even have five-thousand miles on it, and the tire is almost shot. There's no way that I'm whipping around mountain roads on that tire. It's a load of DNA away from being a completely used rubber. I realize the ContiAttacks that came on the bike from the factory are made to stick, not to last forever. I get both stickiness and way better life with Michelin Pilots, so I'll be going to those from here forward.

Twenty minutes later, I finally have a new Michelin being overnighted to the dealer closest to Organisis's house. As if the tire wasn't expensive enough, the overnight shipping made it even worse, but I'll be happy if that worn tire just gets me to Colorado at this point. I'll also feel a lot better on a good tire screaming through the mountains while hanging sideways around those curves. I don't want a repeat of my wreck in North Carolina because I tried to save a few bucks on a tire.

### **Thu 09 Jun 11**

Poison is always a fun band to see, and they put on a good show even after all these years. I've seen them multiple times at the *Glam Slams* and other shows. They're the bubble gum rock, but, as I just said, they're still a fun band to see. Now that they've left the stage, the roadies have changed sets, and the crowd is getting ready for one of rock's worst group of hell raising maniacs, Mötley fucking Crüe.

Maybe, Vince has put on some weight, and his voice takes a while to warm up, but these guys are still blasting the crowd with in your face rock. One fan gets brought on stage and gets to ride Tommy's roller coaster drum set with him. How cool would that be? Tommy always seemed like he'd be a blast as a barhopping team mate on choppers sometime. Nikki would be the one that I'd enjoy hanging with the most though. He's definitely the deepest intellectual of the bunch. It'd be great to let him know how much of an influence that his book, *The Heroin Diaries*, made to me when I was recovering from heart surgery. These guys stand for everything we enjoy that our parents told us to avoid. They celebrate the lifestyle of excess with partying, girls, bikes, fast cars, and thrashing metal. What else is there in life? All that aside, I'm very glad Sunshine and I are able to participate in such a cultural event, complete with their clothing impaired backup singers/dancers/eye candy on stage. This sure beats the hell out of *The Nutcracker*.

### **Sat 02 Jul 11**

It's disappointing to me that in the six years that I lived in San Antonio after college, I never even visited Canyon Lake or many of the other cool things in the area. Sunshine and I are here with Baron for his first time swimming. He wasn't thrilled with the water at first, but dogs instinctually figure it out. Now, after some fun in the sun, we get to cruise home with the nice aroma of wet dog. All three of us are in dire need of a shower when we get home. I don't mean all three of us together in some sick way. That would be twisted even for me. I'd have to check the 'yes' box to simultaneous multiple partners and homobeastiality all at once on some future survey.

I just returned to the apartment from the gun show with my new Springfield Armory XD40. I also found the earphone guy, who fitted me for my custom molded ear buds. It's a little strange feeling that putty inject into your ears, but the good news is that I should be seeing the new buds in a week or two. I'm hoping that they'll be more comfortable than some of the other ear buds that I've had, especially while wearing a motorcycle helmet.

The Ape's rear tire is giving up the ghost, so I might as well have some fun with its last bit of life. Power braking on the street in front of the apartment is fun, once I get the hang of holding that front brake in place and using my legs like outriggers to stabilize the spinning back tire. The notoriously slick Texas streets in a dry summer are perfect for power braking too. However, I want to throw some real smoke. I pull around the complex and enter the front gate. Standing next to a patrol car is an officer and some person pointing at me and waving. Did someone call me in for power braking on the street? Anyone with that much nosiness or time needs a lobotomy or at least a hobby and strong ass kicking. I stop and reluctantly ask what they need. Fortunately, they just ask me who owns a motorcycle sitting in the parking lot that's noted by a sign as being for sale. The officer is looking at my bike and complimenting me on the paint. The other person looks almost surprised that I own a motorcycle, but I don't know the name, details, and apartment number of every other motorcycle owner in the apartment complex.

After killing time in the apartment with Sunshine and Baron for a while, I assume that the patrol car should be gone by now. I push the front tire of the Ape against the outer wall of the

garage and let the throttle go. It's not bad, but I can do better. Next, I roll the flat black, Italian beauty into the garage and brace the front Michelin into one far corner of the rented structure. With the garage door shut, I slowly let out the clutch, twist back the throttle, and let the smoke fly as the engine climbs up the tachometer and speedometer, even though the bike isn't moving. By the time that I let off the throttle, the garage is filled with smoke and the smell of burning rubber. A nice black patch of rubber is tattooed on the garage floor, and tiny pieces of tire are sprayed behind the tire's contact patch. Was it childish? Of course it was, but it was also fun and didn't hurt anyone. In fact, I just helped the environment by converting the tire into CFC free smoke dissipating in the air as opposed to additional volume of waste in the landfill.

Sunshine and I pull into Sherlock's Irish Bar. This is the first time that I've been here since a couple visits when I last lived in Texas many years ago. It still has the same name, which is more than many bars can say after this long. Pick and company are supposed to meet us here shortly. Sunshine and I get out of the Goat and walk toward the front door. As we approach, the bouncer looks at my shirt that says 'Fucking Classy' in fancy script and asks, "Do you have another shirt in the car?"

"No, I don't carry spare clothes," I answer to what sounds to me like a stupid question.

"I can't let you in with that shirt, man."

"But it's fucking classy. It even says so." I point to the shirt as if somehow my humor might let me get into the bar. He's not buying any though.

"Sorry man, can't let you in."

I go from trying to laugh about the situation to being pissed. I walk away fuming as opposed to saying something that will prevent me from ever getting in if he's working in the future. Back in the Goat, I text Pick that we won't be joining them and drive Sunshine and me back home. Heaven forbid someone in a bar has a shirt with a cuss word on it. I'm sure no one in there will use that kind of language on a Saturday night. What if some twenty-one year old has never heard the 'f' word before? I know the cockbag bouncer is doing what the cockbag manager told him, but it doesn't piss me off any less. Some rules make me mad when I understand their reason, but this one seems to be made purely to irritate me.

### **Thu 21 Jul 11**

It's so much more convenient to fly to Colorado and pull the S1K out of Matic's garage than it was driving it a thousand miles here from Texas a couple months ago. I have to admit that it would be nice to have a place and bike out here and be able to hit the Rockies any time when I wanted. With that much constant access to the mountains, chances would increase that I'd eventually push my limits too much and slide off a nasty drop, but it'd be a blast up to that point.

I'm not impressed that it's raining in the mountains this morning, but I came here to ride, not to just sit on my ass. Suck it up, buttercup. Fire up that missile, and let her buck. Colorado roads don't get near as slick as Texas roads on the occasions when it does rain. So far, I've been able to lean and accelerate just shy of my normal levels without a problem. About half way up from the Dam Store to Estes Park, I hit some fun 'S' curves. As I switch back and forth quickly in the changing curves, I feel myself leaning just a little too much. Temporary amnesia and blindness must've prevented me from remembering or seeing the fact that the roads are wet from the rain. My mistake causes that back tire to slide out on me. The horizon in my view goes from a near forty-five degree to significantly more lean instantly. My calm reactions, the bike's whizbang electronics, or a guardian angel kicking the back tire back into line reset my horizon. The bike stabilizes again and keeps moving forward void of damage to my machine or me

somehow. Whatever the safety net, I'm tickled shitless that I'm still balanced and not crumpled up in Tupperware against that rock wall waiting for an ambulance.

I guess that would be a pucker factor of seven. My Ape sliding over the drop in North Carolina years ago would be an eight since there was actual wreckage. Breaking the bumper off of that woman's Ranger truck in Jax on the Stripper chopper would be a pucker factor of nine since there was injury, and nobody lives to tell about a ten. Anything for a pucker factor of one to six isn't even worth talking about. Like Tracer told me, the more you learn to just roll calmly with the little things like slips and bumps in the road, the safer you become and the harder you can drive. I will say that after spending a few days earlier this year out on these roads, I was leaning harder and faster on this beast than I ever have on a bike before. These roads are just perfect for providing that kind of intensity that can only come from feeling like you're riding sideways around a curve on the verge of certain carnage. Vermin has told me that I probably shouldn't go up to Trail Ridge where the road is nearly twelve-thousand feet high with no guardrails and tight curves. Maybe, I'll just check out those roads tomorrow when it's dry.



**Figure 5 S1K Trail Ridge**

### **Fri 05 Aug 11**

Yes, Axe '98 would've gone right to some bars after flying into LAX late last night, but the less fun, more mature me got to the hotel and got a good night's rest for today. I'm being boring, I know, but I want to hit as many book stores as I can in LA today. This city is definitely built

completely on entertainment. Every advertisement on the roads and sidewalks is for some movie or TV show.

After attempting to whore out my book in LA for the day, I call JCR. He's a popular guy on the Aprilia forum with a colorful racing history. We've all been following his story of going from living in his car not long ago to now having a decent job and place to live. I can relate to the rags to mediocrity transition having been through a similar experience myself. JCR lives in Ventura and invites me to his new pad for steaks and drinks. I'd rather shoot the shit with him about bikes, booze, and babes than sit in a hotel room, so I hop in the rental wreck and drive toward Ventura.

JCR tells me about his vibrant life from bike racing fame and parties to rental car housing and where he is now. It's good to see him getting a hold on life and happy to be where he is. I'm definitely glad that I got a chance to meet the legend. After several hours, a couple steaks, and a few drinks, I figure it's time to thank my host for the meal and head back to the hotel in LA. I'll need some rest before I drive to San Diego tomorrow for the book signing event.

### **Sat 10 Sep 11**

I have to get the S1K back home from Colorado somehow, but some people might say that a straight drive from Ft. Collins to San Antonio on a motorcycle like this is a stupid way to do it. If I had clear thought processes, I might agree with them. However, my brain is at the mercy of the adrenaline junkie inside me that is controlling the 190 horsepower machine catapulting me through the night on deserted blacktops. With the throttle lock keeping the S1K at around 105 mph, the time to react if an obstacle presents itself is far from sufficient when overdriving the headlights this badly. I'm still seeing burst speeds as fast as I can when I can as there just aren't many other cars on the road. If lights coming over the horizon are orange first, I know it's a semi, and I can continue hauling ass. White lights showing first means it's a passenger car, and I have to assume it's a patrol car. That's my first check, and the V1 is an added precaution and necessary for this type of driving. It doesn't matter if I'm risking anyone's safety but my own, the wrong officer would lock me in a cell and melt the key. A potential police car means that I slow down and keep an eye directly on the V1, not just on the H.A.R.D. LED alert system mounted in my helmet. Since I have to switch to low beams when a car is approaching from the opposite lane, I have to drop speed anyway as the lit distance is even worse than on the high beam setting. This process has saved me twice in a short time now. I've slowed down per protocol when switching to low beams for an approaching car. On two occasions, the cars were cops. As they gunned me just before meeting on the road, my V1 and H.A.R.D. helmet system both started flashing red lights. I know that they could see it from their cruiser, but I wasn't speeding at the time, so my strategy is working so far. I'd rather see flashing red on my vehicle than theirs.

Animals on the other hand are a different story. At three digits and more, I'm overdriving the headlights horribly. Now, let's add the fact that I've had a half hour nap at most since six AM yesterday. It's after midnight now, and I'm using every bit of remaining brain power to try to focus on the road and shoulders for eyes shining back at me from the woodland death traps. I've already torn by them standing on the shoulder several times, and a few hours ago, I saw a deer carcass on the road. He was close enough to the shoulder not to be a speed bump for me riding Pac-Man style in the middle, but it made me realize dead ones can be as much of a threat as live ones. A dead one can't jump into your way, but it can't jump out of your way either.

What the hell was that? I let off the throttle and back down from about 120 mph after the obstacle is far in the distance behind me. I'm pretty sure that was a dead raccoon that I just passed. The scary part is that the furry corpse wasn't lying even a foot from where I drove by it. Had I been driving just a few inches to the left at that speed, I would never have reacted in time. I'd be lying out here like road kill too. On such a desolate highway at this time of the night, I don't know that anyone would even find me. I'd probably just lie here and bleed. It was a warning shot that showed me just how clear it is that these speeds and lighting conditions require an absolutely clear path, or it's game over. Instead of worrying about what could've happened, I need to focus on making sure it doesn't happen. Much like in life, watching the rearview mirror only prevents you from seeing the road ahead. Once I catch my breath, I slowly wick up the throttle to get back to the speeds necessary to get me home as soon as possible. Since I won't be able to react sufficiently at anything over a turtle's pace, I might as well fly the rest of the way. If something's in my way, there's nothing that I'll be able to do about it anyway.

It's 2:03 AM. If I left Colorado at about nine-thirty AM Texas time, that means that it took me about sixteen and a half hours to make the thousand mile drive. I'll do the math later, but it's better than the eighteen plus hours that it took me to drive out there from here. The S1K gets really good mileage, but there are some desolate areas, so gas stops were every hundred and some miles to be safe, but they seriously hurt the average speed. I didn't even take my helmet off or piss for some of those stops. At any rate, after a thousand miles on this thing, I'm pushing it in the garage before I try to sneak into bed without waking Sunshine or Baron. Tomorrow, we can all enjoy a nice day back together again, but right now, I'm beyond drained.

## **Chapter 6: Spark of an Idea**

### **Fri 28 Dec 12**

My birthday present from Chip arrives at the box today. According to him, I will enjoy it. I open the box and find a copy of Alex Roy's book, *The Driver*. Chip knows that I'd rather write a book than read one, but he was right about me enjoying *Cannonball!*, which he'd bought for me several years ago for a birthday present. Based on a single successful data point, I'll at least give this book a shot I guess.

I begin to read about Alex and his quest for the world record for the fastest time driving from one coast of the country to the other. Driving from New York to Los Angeles is based on the original path established years ago during the first Cannonball and has been repeated for many rallies since then. As I read about how this idea began growing in Alex's mind, it's clear that this goal will evolve from a concept that he initiated into something that eventually controls him. Some people would be baffled by such nonsense, but I get it. He's an addict too. I get it so much that I can barely focus on reading the book.

*After heart surgery, I knew that I was going to have this problem. An addictive personality is never satisfied with less than before. Once I had my first drink, I wanted to drink more and faster to get even more drunk before I blacked out, and the Axe cam ran out of memory. Once I had sex for the first time, I lost all interest in the girl I was dating, and every public appearance was an opportunity to meet and screw a new girl. It's human nature. We find something at which we're good or that we enjoy, and we pursue it. At some point, addicts all turn passion into self consuming obsession. The words I had engraved on the flasks that I gave to Cousin Reno and Cousin Eddie at my wedding for being my groomsmen said it best with 'All or none. Excess is best.' I've learned this about myself and have accepted and even accommodate*

*it. That's exactly why I've never tried drugs or anything else that I could see becoming new addictions in addition to the ones that I already battle.*

I know that I've always loved high speed and the adrenaline rush that comes from feeling acceleration kick me in the ass or lateral 'g's while ripping around a corner. With Sunshine, I've been able to retire from trudging through girls at the bar because she is my perfect girl, and I wouldn't be able to find anyone better if I wanted. After jail and heart surgery, I've also slowed down to almost no drinking. An addict needs a vice though, and adrenaline is my new habit that steadily gains power as the stranglehold of girls and booze continues to weaken. With adrenaline as the reigning master, there's only so much release that I can get from a two mile drive to work. I occasionally take one of the bikes or the Goat on some fast runs through the hill country on early weekend mornings, and so far, that's kept the urges at bay. As I try to read this book though, my mind is already spinning about the idea of something bigger than a one hour cruise in the hills. It may not be exactly what Alex Roy did, but his eventual achievement is starting to become my inspiration.

### **Sat 02 Feb 13**

Finally, this big 300 rear chopper tire hits the pavement and its road cherry is officially popped. After months of blood and sweat, Y Chrome Customs' newest creation has made its maiden voyage. My new chopper, the Gripper, is complete and has successfully made it around the giant block between I10 and Vance Jackson Road for its first run.



**Figure 6 Gripper Done**

The Anarchist in the next garage is equipped with a sharp rake on the front end, small tires, and a ton of black parts indicating a serious chrome deficiency. Its paint is black with red she-devils, red candy coating, and real flames of orange and yellow paint. A stitched brown leather seat with a giant anarchy symbol burned in the center provides a cool, yet board like comfort when riding.

The Gripper is the opposite of the Anarchist in almost every way another American V-twin can be. The rake is drastic, and the fully chromed frame is long and low. Everything that can be chromed is chromed, and a lot of the other parts are polished aluminum. Its giant rear tire would make some drag bikes jealous. As opposed to the modified seventy-four inch Sportie engine of the Anarchist, this monster has a 121 inch TP engine with a ton of torque and power to drive the six speed transmission through a Brute IV Primo open belt drive. The dropped seat is covered in black material, and T-Roy, my seat guy from Jax, sewed in a cool, suede axe for an accent. I'm very proud of the she-devils and fire that I painted on the Anarchist, but the Gripper paint is my best job to date. I used white paint to airbrush a grim reaper scene on the tank and an hourglass that morphs into the parts of a woman south of the equator on the rear fender. Candy teal paint hides the details in low light but allows full visibility in the bright Texas sunlight. My best set of realistic flames adorns the tank and front fender in Limetime pearl with lime gold candy accents for a more three dimensional effect. Opposite as they are, these two bikes will both be dear to me in their own special way.

Twisting the throttle and feeling that 121 inch engine pull away makes all that work well worth it. How many years has that frame been collecting dust since I picked it up from Uncle Stevie? After almost two years without my Jax shop, I had to start building again, and right now, I'm happier than a pig in shit with what I made. So what if the flashy wide tires, chrome, and bright paint style of the prostreet look went out in the nineties. The Anarchist is actually a more modern looking bike since the chopper style has gone back to the bobber look of smaller tires and blacked out parts instead of chrome. That's the thing about styles is that they're all cyclic. Some day, maybe prostreets will be back in style, and I'll be ready. It happens in everything from bikes to clothes. One year some fashion designer decides that miniskirts are the thing, and every girl at the bar is wearing them. The next year it's denim skirts. One year it'll be leather pants, and the next year it'll be bell bottoms. Not only do classic looks look classy, but they also prevent you from having to chase changing styles. After building all those bikes for other people, this one is built for me the way I want it regardless of what a magazine or TV tells me is cool. I have something that will be a blast for barhopping, can still be taken for long rides, and most importantly, makes me proud to say 'I built it.' I should make T-shirts that say, 'My bike's the best. Fuck the rest.'

I'm sure there will be some tinkering required with this monster before I drive it to Florida for Biketoberfest this fall, but it's officially running and on the road. Much like me after heart surgery, it's alive, and the rest is just details.

### **Thu 28 Feb 13**

I've given it a lot of thought. The Goat has 118,000 miles on it and is going to be ten years old next year. It's in great shape to say the least, as Chip and I are the only two owners, and we both took immaculate care of it. Regardless, we all know once a car hits ten years, it's like a girl turning thirty. The marketability just takes a dive at that point whether it's justified or not. As a result, I'm seriously contemplating an upgrade.



**Figure 7 Goat**

*I'd never even heard of a Cadillac CTS-V until one of them driven by some kid handed my ass to me in the Goat several years ago near the outdoor mall in Jacksonville. It was amazing and painful all at once to have been beaten by a Cadillac or any sedan, but the vehicular thrashing caught my attention. When the V coupe hit the scene, they really had my attention.*

*Last year I test drove a V coupe and was beyond impressed. Several weeks after that, Sunshine and I test drove an '09 Porsche 911 Turbo. It was also stupid fast but had all four paws grabbing versus just the back two of the Cadillac. Sunshine pointed out that the inside of the Turbo's interior was not even in the same class as the inside of the Cadillac, which was a good point that I hadn't even really noticed. I explained to her that the Turbo's mission was speed, and the Cadillac's goal was luxury, but nonetheless, she was still right.*

After the last year of contemplation on what I might want for a next car, the logical choice is still the best, even when making an illogical decision. Neither the Turbo nor V coupe would be a wise purchase. That said, for the cost of a brand new V coupe ordered just how I want it from the factory with full warranty that no previous owner has thrashed, the best that I might get is an eight year old Turbo with no warranty, barely a back seat, no storage space, and who knows what kind of history. The fact that a friend of mine from work can get me a GM discount helps too. I can't say that I'm really ready to make the financial commitment, but Cadillac has already stated that they won't make a CTS-V wagon next year and possibly no more

coupes. From what I'm seeing, the '13 V coupe will be the last big, blown coupe with the aggressive edges that I like. All things considered, a CTS-V coupe is going to be my next car.

I hop on the Gripper and drive down the street to Batchelor Cadillac, the dealer that's been so patient with my questions, and place an order for a brand new Cadillac CTS-V coupe. My salesguy, the Argentine, is probably relieved that he didn't waste all his time answering my emails and calls for the last year. I have my options list describing exactly what I want. It will have the Raven black paint, black rims, and no sunroof. The no brainer options are the Recaro seats and the six speed manual transmission. I had not selected the interior wood trim as I was afraid it would be a very light colored wood. The Argentine, wanting to ensure customer satisfaction, shows me what the wood versus base option trim looks like and recommends coughing up the cash for the wood trim. After seeing the options, I'm glad that he made the suggestion before blindly taking my order. This will likely be my first and last brand new car ordered from the factory, so you can bet your ass that I want it perfect. Now come the two hard parts. The first item is to sell my Goat. The second item is to wait for the V to arrive.

### **Fri 29 Mar 13**

Blaze, a young guy from Florida, and his buddy are at the Holiday Inn at the end of street where Woodstone hits the I10 frontage road. They flew to Texas today and will be driving my Goat back to Florida tomorrow. I let them know that I'll be there shortly to scoop them into Sunshine's VW wagon and take them to dinner.

I call from outside the Holiday Inn, and the two Floridians climb into the wagon. I ask them if they would prefer barbeque or Mexican food since those are our two specialties here in Texas. They vote for barbeque. Rudy's is just a few miles up I10, but I want to take them to the River Walk after dinner, so I take them to Augie's Smokehouse by the zoo instead.

From years in the corporate world, I feel like the supplier is obligated to pick up the tab for the customers, so I buy their dinner. I don't mind, and barbeque isn't expensive anyway. After we stuff ourselves with dead animal, I drive us down to the River Walk. I don't really know if they are looking for a late night or just an after dinner cocktail, so we start at Swig for a drink. Blaze is genuinely appreciative of the short tour that I've given. "Dude, thanks a lot for taking us out tonight."

"Hey, you're my guests and came all this way to get the Goat. I don't mind a bit."

"This has been the best car buying experience I've ever had. Dinner, drinks, and mini tour of the city." Blaze finishes his drink as his traveling buddy nods in agreement. "Do you mind if we go see the car now?"

"No problem. Let me settle with the hottie behind the bar, and we'll head out."

Back at the apartment, I let Sunshine know that we're going to open the garage, so they can see the car. She's already in bed and responds in a sleep muddled attempt at English. Baron is barking as he knows someone else is here. I walk down the stairs to the attached garage and open the overhead door to see the two guys waiting on the other side of the rising door like kids on Christmas.

The new owner looks around the outside of the car with an uncontrollable smile. I had all the little dings removed by the paintless dent removal place and touched up a few chips with the Quicksilver paint. The body is about as perfect as a person is going to find on a car with over a hundred thousand miles. As he opens the door and sits in the leather seat, I hand him the key. He turns the ignition and the car to life for the first of many times in the future I'm sure, and his smile gets even broader. He's simply ecstatic over his new purchase and compliments me on

how clean the car is in person. I'm happy to see a satisfied customer and to know that the car is going to someone who will really enjoy it.

"Do you mind if we leave it here overnight so it's clean when we leave tomorrow morning?"

"Sure, I'll take you back to the hotel and come get you about six-thirty AM tomorrow, okay? You guys driving straight to Tampa or wherever?"

"No. We're going to Dallas to a racing store and try on helmets first. Then we'll go back to Florida."

"Ok, whatever works. I don't think you'll have a lick of trouble with it, so drive it like you mean it."

I take the guys back to the hotel before returning to the apartment. Sunshine's asleep again, but Baron's walking around wagging his tail. I walk down the stairs to the garage and turn on the light over the Goat. Baron follows me down the stairs and stands on the landing looking at me looking at my transportation for the last several years. Part of me is excited to get the Cad, but it's always hard to see a part of your life become a memory.

"Hey, Baron. Say goodbye to the Goat." I turn out the light and usher the black ball of fur up the stairs to crash for the night.

### **Thu 11 Apr 13**

I am a psychotic fan of the internal combustion engine, the human spirit, and the joyous catastrophes that mixing the two can bring. It's no wonder that Tanford, a coworker, and I get along well. We're both fascinated by stories like tales of Alex Roy and Richard Rawlings racing across the country. Technology is interesting to us both, but it's even more intoxicating when it's applied to vehicular advancement. Tanford has way more sense than I do. That may not be statistically shocking, but it is fortunate for him.

As soon as the Argentine calls to give me the good news, I call Tanford, who is more than happy to drop me at the dealer to pick up the new toy. The Argentine takes me out the back door of the dealership to my brand new CTS-V coupe shining in the parking area. Black on black with black rims was undoubtedly the perfect choice. Wow, this thing is absolutely gorgeous with its fighter jet sharp edges and big haunches. The body is just perfect, and the black features provide a menacing cloak to the luxurious interior. The open door provides a view of the inside of the car and reminds me, wicked body or not, it's still a luxurious Cadillac.

We climb inside the car so the Argentine can show me how to use all the whizbang features. This is by far the nicest interior of any car in which I've been. Full leather, suede seat inserts, and hand stitching adorn the cockpit of this rocket. I thank the Argentine for suggesting the dark wood trim, which adds a dark element of classic accents to the interior. Instead of a big gaudy digital clock, there's an elegant, chrome rimmed clock with a real face in the center of the piano black dash plate. The Recaro seats are adjustable every which way, and the lumbar support and bolsters wrap themselves around me for a perfect fit.

After the Argentine provides me with a crash course on the car's endless electronics, I have at best a basic understanding. I can turn on the satellite radio, and I'll be able to figure out the navigation eventually. For now, I know enough to drive Detroit's finest mix of luxury and performance to its new home where it can sit in a garage, collect dust, and be thoroughly enjoyed every couple of weeks in the hill country. Like the old man always says, 'a car you drive every day becomes an everyday car.' I'll of course be extremely careful with it, but I have every

intention of thoroughly enjoying it too. After all, it's the American dream. It's a brand new fucking Cadillac with all the options.

### **Thu 13 Jun 13**

This Cadillac is now just the way I want it. It's not that it didn't look gorgeous when it left the assembly line. The problem was that there were others just like it. It's a unique car, but it does have identical siblings from the factory. That's where I come into the picture. My job is to change the picture.

*When I first bought my old '78 Cougar XR7, it just didn't feel comfortable. Within months of buying it, I had installed a new Pyramid stereo and fuzzy seat covers. Scooter, a motor head coworker from the grocery store, lived a block away and told me that he was looking at a new set of wheels. That meant the current rims on his Cutlass Supreme were for sale. Despite severe eye rolling from Dad, the Cougar soon had a shiny set of Cragar SS wheels with white letter Grand Am GT tires. The car's previous owner had installed rear air shocks, so I had to pump them up to the max. The new stance and look of the car completely transformed it, and the covers and tunes made it feel like home inside. Most people think of a house as home. To me, a house is just a building. A vehicle is where I find comfort, happiness, and the feeling that the world is right. I was hooked and haven't been able to leave vehicles alone ever since that first taste of customization. Why drive something that someone else has when you can drive something that's one of a kind? That sparked the fire in me to never want to be or drive anything average again.*

Thanks to a heat gun, plastic putty knives, and some of Sunshine's dental floss, the factory and dealer badges are completely removed from the body of the black beauty. The only place on the entire outside of the car that identifies it is the word 'Cadillac' on the chrome trunk trim piece. I don't need badges to tell other drivers what kind of car it is or that it's the high performance model. If I want to show someone what this rocket can do, all I have to do is stomp the pedal on the right.

I admire my black paint job on the brake calipers and exhaust as I walk around the car. It's the same look that I'd created on its predecessor, the Goat, before upgrading to this younger evolution of the LS engine family. Was I pissed that I Plasti-Dipped every piece of chrome on my new car and had to tear it all off the car the next day? Hell yes, I was. That was my fault for not doing it exactly right, but I'm extremely tickled with the end product. The only black Plasti-Dip that remains is on the grill and centers of the wheels. The rest of the trim that remains chrome adds a nice accent to all the glistening and matte black surfaces. My favorite custom aspect to the exterior is the set of chrome, machined aluminum axes that replaced the Cadillac badges on the front grill and trunk lid at the rear of the car.

*Mr. Crowley cursed those axes after spending over sixty hours to machine two usable sets. Having worked with Mr. Crowley in the machine shop at Iowa State, I knew that he was too stubborn to quit any project, no matter how difficult the challenge. They cost me plenty, but I finally received two sets to send to Chrome Pros in Corpus for a rush chroming job. I told both Crowley and Chrome Pros that I absolutely had to have them in time for the Colorado trip.*

This is why I like to find suppliers that I can trust. The chrome axes are sparkling on their black backgrounds with a week to spare before the trip.

Electronic modifications to this already technologically advanced machine are my proudest upgrades. The rearview mirror now has the Valentine One indicators in the corner of the glass after sending it to Technicar for laser etching. With the indicators on the mirror surface,

the actual V1 is hidden nicely out of the driver's sight behind the mirror. The pride and joy of this luxury coupe on steroids is the thermal imaging system that I installed. This isn't what the alien used in *Predator* with live creatures showing up as red and yellow blobs on a black and blue background. On the contrary, my system is the same FLIR camera they use on our military vehicles in the Mideast. The actual camera hides behind the grill and to the left of the radiator where it won't block the incoming cooling air. That also puts it right in front of the driver's seat, so it best represents the road right in front of me. By pressing the mute button four times, a menu appears on the screen under the speedometer. Using the mirror adjustment buttons to select the video source, black and white video of the world in front of the car appears on the factory pop up navigation screen. I have no idea how a mirror control somehow interacts with a device plugged into the stereo, but it kept me from having to chop up the dash to add a new switch. No modifications for the FLIR are visible inside the car. The level of light independent detail on the screen is amazing. It shows features like painted stripes on the road and emblems on cars. The advantage over a night vision system is that oncoming cars don't blind the driver either. Using it effectively will take some adjustment, but it should give me a lot more notice of critters in the road ahead at high speeds than headlights alone.

One positive aspect of doing all these modifications is that they distract me from touching the engine. Once the computer gets flashed to accommodate performance parts, the warranty gets flashed too. I'm not thrilled about losing my warranty, but I know me. There's a good chance this thing will eventually have at least another hundred or more horsepower before that warranty expires. Isn't 556 hp enough to get the car from A to B? Of course it is. I could also be driving some shitty, little, flat assed hybrid too. I'll stick with my nineteen miles per gallon, luxury hot rod. As with the S1K, this car is way past necessity. It's not a need or even a want, but a lustful desire that I couldn't control if I wanted.



**Figure 8 V1 Mirror**

### **Sat 15 Jun 13**

There's nothing like the peace of an open road on a warm summer morning. Soon, it'll be a hot, crowded, treacherous cluster of people hiding behind their airbags. They'll be making attempts to successfully navigate their car as fast as possible between two points while eating, drinking, daydreaming, and, worst of all, screwing with their damn phones. For now though, the road is ours, and we only have to share it with a few two ton obstacles. Our pair of throaty V-twins thundering down the concrete amplifies the peace and tranquility for us while ruining it for the cagers in their four wheeled transportation units.

The Gripper's monster engine and six speed transmission allow me all the torque that I need at the low end and the ability to cruise right along at ninety mph without working the bike too hard. Pick follows a few car lengths behind in the outer tire track per proper pack formation, even if there are only two of us. Diesel, his murdered 2002 Night Train, is revving a little higher with its five speed tran but still keeping the pace with no problem.

As we guide our metal steeds onto the toll way, Highway 130, we blow by one of the eighty mph posted speed limit signs. I don't know exactly how fast we're going as I hadn't considered a speedometer to be critical when I built the Gripper. I'll assume Pick is just glad that my bike is the bright shiny one leading our ride and will be the first one to show up on a radar gun. Even with Texas having some of the highest speed limits in the country and me riding the slowest vehicle that I own, it's still not even close to enough. When you're an addict, nothing is ever enough.

Unlike yesterday when I brought all the books here to the Travis County Expo Center for Austin's Republic of Texas Bike Rally, the gates are already open when we arrive. I show my

vendor wrist band to the gate guy, and he points us to the parking area for Pick. I drive into one of the vendor buildings since I'll be entering the Gripper in the bike show.

Once the bikes are parked in their respective places, Pick and I grab a couple breakfast beers and head to my booth. It's actually just a section of concrete with a pile of promotional copies of *Bouncing off Guardrails*, bike and bikini posters, and rear window stickers. The idea was that I hauled everything I would need in the Cadillac yesterday, and today, everything would either be given or thrown away. Sure, a fancy booth and banners would've been nice, but Pick and I aren't going to carry anything home that we didn't bring this morning.

There's not a lot of booth traffic, so we walk to the bike show area to check out the competition. As expected, there are some damn nice bikes here. A show like this won't get quite the level of a Rat's Hole Show at Bike Week in Daytona, but I'm impressed with what I see. There are quite a few bikes that are almost bone stock and some that have nothing more than extra chrome and some fancy paint. Some bikes have had some metal work or custom parts made, and of course, all of these look great and bring the owners all the pride and joy in the world. I point at a flashing light on a custom V-Rod that's labeled 'flux capacitor.' "Check it out. It's got a flux capacitor," I note.

"What's a flux capacitor?" Pick asks.

"What's a flux capacitor? Really? Are you that young?"

Pick is pretty mature for his age, and I'm in a permanent state of arrested development. The combination makes it too easy to forget that movies like *Back to the Future* are engrained in my head but not in his.

In addition to the custom Harleys, there are some customized Victory Motorcycles too. I like seeing another American made bike, especially because it's manufactured in Iowa less than two hours away from where I was raised. One of the coolest bikes to me is an old Triumph. It's not just the bike but the old timer's story of the bike and how he built it. The rear fender is from a Model A Ford. There's a topless Kelly LeBrock on the gas tank, and I don't even bother asking Pick if he knows that she's the hot chic from *Weird Science*. The bike's proud owner explains that the peacock is a gas valve that he took out of an old house and shows us the bicycle pedal for the foot rest. Then he points to the very unique kick starter pedal. "Here's a fifty cal bullet I brought back in 1975 from the Marine Corps. I fired that thing."

"Fuck yeah! That's what I'm talking about!" I exclaim.

The suicide shifter and rigid frame can't make the old bike a treat to ride, but I don't think the guy cares. When you've built something and have that much history together, little inconveniences just don't matter. I can't help but wonder if decades from now, I'll be that old guy. Will I have my Gripper or an old bike I restored at a show and tell some younger bucks about how I brought that metal to life? Hell, I guess I'm already doing it in some ways as I'm not a boy of twenty-one anymore. Before I can grow to be an interesting old guy, I have to survive long enough to get old first.

The judges kick everyone out of the bike area and walk around with their clipboards as they carefully inflict their opinions on each bike. I haven't entered many shows, but I've never seen one that pushes the entrants out during judging. While that's going on, Pick and I sit off to the side and try stretching the cramps out of our lower halves from the ride here.

Once the judges are finished with their scoring, they put the trophies in front of the corresponding bikes. I have to admit that this is much more efficient than when the Rat's Hole judges announce every single trophy for every place of every class. We walk toward the Gripper, and I see something shiny in front of it. Holy balls, check this out. The Gripper took first place in

the professional built custom class. It's a little funny to me to think of it as a professional built custom, but technically, I owned a shop and was a professional builder for a period of time. Even though this particular bike was built in the three garages of our apartment at home, I guess once a bike builder, always be a bike builder.



**Figure 9 ROT Trophy**

I know that the current trend is for bobber bikes more like my old Anarchist, but I built what I wanted for me without consideration for whether others would like it or not. Nonetheless, I can't say that I'm not pretty jacked about this first place trophy in the pro class either. Fortunately, we're not a bunch of kids in soccer with Socialist parents giving us all participation trophies for attending. There has to be some competition, success, and failure, or the motivation to be our best becomes strictly internally driven, which isn't enough for most people. The success of personal accomplishment obviously wasn't enough for the guy that bought a hundred dollars worth of 'people's choice' tickets and put them all on his bike. I was pretty disappointed to hear that. It's not that I'm disappointed in humanity as I've accepted that. I'm disappointed that I didn't know about it earlier, buy ten more tickets than him, and take that trophy from him too.

I walk the Gripper back to the booth and park it sideways behind the stacks of books. As Pick and I hand books to anyone that'll take them, we chat with the booth neighbors. On one side of us are the religious bikers. Most of them grabbed their copies of the book yesterday. They're

just as friendly and happy to be here today as they were yesterday. On the other side are some guys selling Mercury filled insoles, which is smart considering people that come by their booth have been walking all day. Across the aisle are the motorcycle insurance or legal services or something like that. The guy has a couple booth girls in skimpy black attire. I don't know if he's getting a lot of business over there, but his booth is definitely getting a lot of traffic.

We take a break from passing out books and walk around the show. There are plenty of the usual biker T-shirts, leather goods, boots, sunglasses, and trinkets. I'm surprised at the number of bike builders that brought in trailers and are showing their machines. I know that they're not all from this area, but it's no secret that the bike business has declined a ton since the days when I was building full time. I'm glad to see it of course. Choppers are something that I'll always appreciate, and it makes me smile to still see people doing what I loved and what they love for a living.

Soon, all the books are in the hands of people who were excited to get a copy of the book signed by the author to people that might read it someday to people that just took a copy because they thought it would be rude not to take one. With no books to haul back home from Austin and the remaining posters in the trash, the only thing that we have to transport is my trophy. We fire up the bikes, rumble out of the Republic of Texas 2013 rally, and against good judgment point the thundering horses toward Sixth Street.

After backing our bikes into two of the remaining open spots on Sixth, Pick and I walk over to Coyote Ugly to meet Bagger, one of Pick's coworkers. The blonde Barbie doll in the white bikini top and cut off jean shorts in front of the bar reminds me how much I used to love coming to Austin to party in my youth. Say what you want about the deer in the plains, elk in the mountains, or dolphins in the sea. Some of the most beautiful creatures in the world are walking through the streets right here in Austin, deep in the heart of Texas.

After getting our picture taken with the Jack Daniels promotional girls and the three of us talking each other into just one more round several times, Pick and I agree that we need to leave now. If we stay much longer, we won't escape this city until bars are kicking us into the street in a condition less conducive to a safe ride back to San Antonio. It's not that I haven't done some involuntary camping in Austin before.

*The first ROT rally that I attended was with Flanman many years ago. He and I had started at the Institute on the same day and worked in the same division on the same project. I was still driving the old General at the time, and he'd just bought a Sportie. The plan was to stay with Dirty, another Iowa to Texas transplant, at his apartment. Instead, we ended up crashing on deck chairs at his apartment pool. Flanman was cussing me out for the poor execution of the plan and the fact that he was miserably cold despite how hot the day had been. I gave him my sweatshirt in hopes it would shut him up, so I could pass out for a little while. The Red Bull vodkas that we'd been drinking amidst other spirits weren't going to make it easy to sleep already. The one benefit of the deck chairs was that I could easily piss on the ground with little effort throughout the night.*

I suggest we go to the Library for a Red Bull as some type of false hope that the energy drink will reverse the effects of the beer in my dehydrated system. We all agree that it would be a sin to go to the Library without having at least one Long Island Tea, so we'll have to have one of those as well. Bagger puts my trophy in the tour pack of his bike since his bike actually has room to haul things whereas I have pockets to haul things. The three of us then walk over to the Library for three Teas and a couple Red Bulls. Bagger tries talking us into staying, but Pick and I know how this story will end if we don't get the hell out of Dodge right now.

One good thing about riding with a little booze thinning out the blood stream is that the vibration is dampened a little bit. One bad thing is that we're barely out of the Austin city limits, and I have to piss again already. I signal to Pick, and he confirms that his teeth are floating as well. We exit the interstate and take the frontage road hoping for a gas station to materialize soon. It seems like forever before finally finding a gas station almost to San Marcos. We replenish the fluids in the bike tanks, drain the fluids in our tanks, and get back on the road.

Now that we're ripping down I35 again, Pick leads since he has a speedometer and can do more to ensure that we don't get zapped for speeding. Maybe this bike isn't made for comfort, but the width of the rear tire allows a much wider seat than any other chopper that I've built. The handlebars feel just as perfect as I could hope. The feet feel good out there on the two inch extended foot controls although combining those with the low seat makes my knees blow outward more than I'd like. Much like the girls I searched for in college and the years that followed, I'm having a very hard time keeping my legs together. I am enjoying the ride though, despite a little discomfort. There are few pleasures more pure than man, machine, and a sun shining from blue skies.

I drive straight to Chip's birthday party when I get back to San Antonio. Obviously, I didn't call from the chopper, so I thought Sunshine would be here. Chip says that she was already here and gave him the birthday present from me. Since he bought the book, *The Driver*, for my birthday, I bought both of us a copy of the movie, *32 Hours 7 Minutes*, which is based on *The Driver*. I have to ask him to speak a little louder. My ears are ringing like hell from the road and are worsened by the dull roar of all the people talking in the small house.

I hear Baron barking as I start to turn the door knob of the apartment. He jumps on me to greet me as my attempt at training him out of that habit has not been as strong as Sunshine's encouragement of it. Sunshine tells me that he again recognized the boom of the bike coming down the road, began squeaking, and waited by the door until I arrived. My ears still have a little ringing from the wind noise of the ride, but I ask Sunshine if she minds if we watch *32 Hours 7 Minutes*. I know it's not her favorite type of movie, but we both suffer through plenty of movies at the request or poor choice of the other. The history at the beginning of the movie covers the original Cannonball Run and rallies that followed, and our attention is captured right off the bat. By the end of the movie, we're both finding joy in the success of Alex Roy for breaking the cross country driving record. We also find *schadenfreude* in poor Richard Rawlings for painting his cross country time on the Ferrari hood without knowing that he never actually had the record. Honestly, the movie only had my full attention for the first few minutes. The rest of the time was spent paying half of my attention to the movie. The other half of my attention was focused internally. All of a sudden, it has become clear to me. I now know what I have to do.

My fear has come true. After coming so close to death in open heart surgery, life has gotten somewhat mundane. It doesn't matter how good life is or how happy I am with everything about my life. There's no way that daily existence can compete with the excitement of coming that close to the edge. The reaper has left his hand print burned onto my shoulder where he almost had me. Now, I've run so far ahead that the speed and intensity has passed. I've become content with life. I say that like there's something wrong with enjoying life, but there's not of course. Some of us just have that hunger for excitement that burns deep inside like a first shot of whiskey in the stomach on a cold night. The only way to feel that excitement is for the hunted to become the hunter. Five years ago, I'd run from the reaper as he hunted me on his terms. Now, the tables must turn. I have to spin around and hound that soul claiming mother fucker chasing faster and harder toward him than I'd run from him the last time that we met. I'm not going to be

afraid of him this time. I want to stare him in the eye and spit in his face. The only way that I can appreciate life to the fullest is to come that close to death again. 32:7 has given me a taste for how I'm going to make it happen.

## **Chapter 7: Break-In**

### **Wed 26 Jun 13**

It's one AM and time to get out of bed. It's not that I have anything that I have to do right this minute, but I'm trying to adjust my sleep pattern for the drive to Colorado tonight. I've been slowly adjusting to an earlier wake time all week. In theory, I'll be able to lay my head back on the pillow later this morning, sleep until this evening, wake refreshed, and hit the road.

Why is it that I can never fall asleep when I want to? This damn overactive brain makes it impossible to actually sleep at the times when I need it most. The problem is that I'm mentally preparing for the thing for which I need sleep, but I can't sleep because my mind is busy mentally preparing. This kind of mental circle jerk is why I haven't actually fallen asleep for more than about a half hour since lying back in bed at ten AM this morning. Baron's been surprisingly good about leaving me alone too, so I can't blame him. He's either been lying in his bed next to ours, guarding the doorway, or looking out the window of the patio doors. This is ridiculous. It's five PM. If I haven't fallen asleep by now, it's not going to happen. If I'm going to be awake, I might as well be on the road and making progress. It's time to pack a pistol, load a bag, fire up the Cadillac, and head to the mountains.

### **Thu 27 Jun 13**

It's the middle of the morning, and I'm starting to drag. There's really no sense in pushing it past this point of being tired. I'll just back the car into the trucker lot behind a gas station and take a quick snooze. The little Texan made Snake Slayer IV is sitting well within reach just in case anyone thinks that they need this car more than I do. It may only have two rounds, but that's all I should need with .45 Long Colt ammo. I notice the .410 shells that I brought as extra rounds have spilled from my pocket to the floor, but they'll be fine down there while I recharge my batteries.

As I cruise through the darkness somewhat refreshed, I'm damn glad that I installed the FLIR system in this car. This handy piece of technology makes it obvious how much I'm really missing when I'm relying on headlights. The headlights show such a limited distance of the road in front of me, but the FLIR shows me the fields to the side, the road to the horizon, and even mountains in the distance.

Eventually, the sun begins illuminating the mountains in the distance that were only visible through the thermal vision up until now. I kill the thermal and drop the nav screen back into the dash, so it doesn't get in the way of my enjoyment of the beautiful sunrise and majestic mountains above the horizon.

'Welcome to Loveland' I think to myself as I drive by the Heart Center of the Rockies. I gratefully nod toward the building as if to telekinetically thank the staff inside its walls for helping me roll out in a chair and not be carried out on a platter over four years ago. Driving down Bert Road when I'm back in Jax reminds me how close I came to losing everything I had. Driving by this hospital reminds me how close I came to losing even more.

## **Fri 28 Jun 13**

The last time that I was rolling out of Matic's garage to go tear up the mountains was on the S1K. This morning, it's on four wheels instead of two. I turn the ignition on the steering column and hear the exhaust rumble with just the right mix of power and class. It's almost humorous for me to describe anything I own with the word 'class', but after all, it is a Cadillac.

Yesterday afternoon's ride on Buckhorn with Vermin was fun of course, but today I get to take it to the top. With the rearview mirror mounted V1 indicators watching for cops and the FLIR watching for critters, I tear up 34 to Estes Park on the curves that I've grown to know well over the last couple years. Traffic is minimal with it being so early, which is just the way I like it. Nobody is at the gate for the entrance to Rocky Mountain Park. I'd be more than happy to pay the ten bucks, but maybe it's free this early. If they don't want my money today, that's fine too.

Not that it wouldn't do major damage to lose control on a curve downhill from Estes, but up here on Trail Ridge, the roads and stakes are both much higher. At least in the car, I can't lean too far and end up in a low side skid off the mountain. The car has to remain right near the edge of the road though, whereas the S1K can hug the center of the lane if the pucker factor is high. Driving the Cadillaxe up here is a blast for sure between the acceleration, the blown V8 roaring, the lateral 'g' force in the turns, and the 9GB of metal blasting from the hard drive on the stereo through the Bose system. It's just so refined, which is great of course but just not what's normal for me. It's comparable to when I first started dating Sunshine. Her pleasant disposition and kindness were refreshing but unfamiliar compared to my years of bad decisions in that department. Even though these 4300 pounds of safety and technology surrounding me will protect me more than four-hundred pounds of bike under me would, there's just a dimension of excitement that's missing. Four wheels or two wheels doesn't matter right now. This junkie drove a thousand miles for an adrenaline rush at over eleven-thousand feet, and I'm not leaving this mountain without it.



**Figure 10 Cadillac in Rockies**

## Sat 29 Jun 13

I'm almost amazed that the old man doesn't lecture me once about the frivolous purchase of the Cadillac as we light up Buckhorn. I get it though. It's hard for him having grown up with nothing so many years ago to even fathom his boy driving a car that costs three times the price of the house he bought when he moved back to Iowa.

He sits in the passenger Recaro seat examining the gorgeous leather and wood trim of the car's interior. With him distracted and a straight section of road ahead, I slowly accelerate and ask, "You know we're going a hundred mph right now?"

"No way," he responds in his doubting tone until he looks at the dash and sees that I'm not kidding. He comments how the car's smooth, quiet ride masks just how fast it's moving. Like Vermin had commented, he notes that the 911 Turbo I used to have just felt faster. This Cad is actually around a half second faster from zero to sixty than that Porsche was, but it runs so much smoother than the violent acceleration of the old *Grauer Geist*. I miss that Turbo to say the least, and I can't say that someday I wouldn't mind having another. For right now though, this sleek, fighter jet body wrapped in luxury around 556 horsepower of Detroit muscle suits me just fine.

I arrive at the hotel in Denver and call Irv for directions to the room that he booked for Ronan's wedding. Irv, Ronan, and I were probably three of the worst abusers of alcohol in the old days at Iowa State as well as the years that followed. Among the three of us, several run ins with the law and a heart surgery have slowed us down from the pace of our youth. Every now and then, we like to test our immortality, and I have a sick feeling that tonight might be one of those nights.

Since Irv and I have the only room void of females preparing for the wedding, Ronan and his groomsmen volunteer our room for a place to get ready for the event. It's great seeing some of the old ISU low rent guys for the first time in ages. Numbnuts, Burrhead, Hellbeing, Big Ern, and the ever classy Slobio are all here. Ronan is more nervous than I've ever seen him.

*This guy was the captain of his rugby team for years. He got smoked across the head with a pipe by three homeless thieves behind the pizza place in Daytona Beach that night we were partying down there. One night, he even got a couple teeth knocked out after tangling with a bunch of UFC fighters.*

Despite all those beatings, this 250 pound Beerbarian is somehow rendered terrified by his tiny bride to be, Sporty Spice. Maybe, the poundings of his past were over in minutes or hours, whereas any pain Sporty chooses to inflict will be for years or decades. Ronan's bumps and bruises were healed way sooner than even my short lived, weak attempt at matrimony. Permanent, unknown torture really is scarier than a short burst of expected pain.

Irv and I want to make our long time friend feel better. We want him to relax, be at ease, and enjoy the day. Yes, we could promise him everything will be just fine, but neither of us are liars. Instead of blowing false sunshine up his ass, Irv and I do what any good friends would. We haul ass to the nearest liquor store for some help from an old friend of Irv's, Ronan's, and mine, Mr. Jack Daniels.

Back at the hotel, we all pass around a bottle of Jager. Some take their shot willingly, and others choke on it while scowling like a child being forced to take medicine. Once the deer adorned bottle of dark, thick syrup is gone, out comes the fifth of charcoal filtered whiskey from Lynchburg, Tennessee. I hand Ronan the first Jack and Coke in a helping manner and say, "Calling Doctor Daniels. Calling Doctor Jack Daniels."

After sweating through an outdoor wedding ceremony with a nice buzz, Irv and I plow through the crowd of people toward the bar in the back of the reception. The rest of the attendees are casually catching up with old friends, but we have work to do. That booze isn't just going to drink itself. We get to the bar and I place our efficient order with, "Two Jack and Cokes and two Red Bull vodkas."

Hours, a few bites of food, and a lot of drinks later, we're all in the hotel bar. I'm not sure which of us is in the worst shape right now, but we all have a pleasant jag to say the least. Slobio leans toward Irv and me at the end of the bar and tells us, "Guys, I've already been cut off."

"Dare I ask what you did to deserve that?" I ask.

"They said I had too much already," he slurs.

I'm not surprised considering the rate at which we've been slamming drinks. The tiny hotel manager comes and stands next to me at the bar in her oversized blazer with the hotel name tag on it. Considering how young she looks, I'll assume she's been at this job for only a short while and is just hoping we won't be too much trouble for her. I look down at her and ask, "Did you come over to keep an eye on us?"

"No, just checking things out. How are you guys doing tonight?"

It's obvious she's trying to gage just how hammered we are and if we warrant a call from her for backup. She's doing well so far and keeps smiling. I look down and realize that the object in my hand at the minute is just a can of Red Bull although plenty of other drinks are sitting on the bar among our group. I take advantage of the fact with, "I'm just drinking Red Bull, but not sure about these other guys."

We both look toward Slobio, and it's obvious he's about one ounce of spit short of drooling on himself. It's also obvious that we're not getting any more drinks at this bar, but we still have a stash upstairs. Slobio is soon buying a drink for a girl at the bar and soon after being dragged away from her by his girlfriend. Since we've worn out our welcome here, we might as well move the party to Ronan and Sporty's suite.

### **Sun 30 Jun 13**

I feel like I've barely slept. All I know is that it's five AM now, we crashed sometime between midnight and five AM, and Red Bull inspired twitching doesn't really count as sleep. I seldom touch booze or Red Bull anymore, so intake like last night means I can't sleep for shit. It's obvious that the caffeine and sugar in my system aren't going to allow any sleep right now. Instead of twitching any longer, I shower, pack the bag, and head out to Matic's Cavalier to drive back to Loveland. I'm not sure that I should be driving just yet as I'm fairly certain that I'd still be over the legal BAC limit. Just to be safe, I'll be putting cruise control on the exact speed limit and carefully navigating back to Organisis's house.

Even back here at Organisis's place, I still can't sleep for shit. If I'm lucky, I might have scored another hour of a poor excuse for rest. It's pointless to just lie here and twitch any longer. If I'm going to be awake, I might as well be on the road getting closer to home. It shouldn't take long to pack as I've learned to travel efficiently by this point in life. I should be able to get ready, say 'goodbye' to everyone, and be on the road within a half hour or so.

I'm getting closer, but there are still a lot of miles between me and home. Now that I'm getting into some of the less traveled back roads, I'm making better time. I shift my foot over to apply the Brembos as I close the distance too quickly on a string of three cars unwilling to pass the slow truck in front of them. It's not that they're going below the speed limit, but they're going slower than I want to be driving. I've got a wide, clear view of a long stretch of road

ahead, so I move my foot back to the right, downshift, and punch it. The monster, supercharged V8 roars by the slower convoy and continues accelerating up to 140 mph. This car runs just as smooth and quiet at 140 as it did at forty. I tip my hat to the GM engineers on this ride. In the words and voice of Darth Vader, I growl, "Most impressive."

Now, I'm really out in the middle of nowhere. I'm still amazed how much the thermal vision allows you to see and how blind I really am when driving with just headlights. I haven't stopped for anything but petro and peeing since I left Colorado, and the only things that I've eaten are a couple protein bars and some Gatorade. Of course, those were consumed while I was pumping gas as I'm not taking a chance at spilling something on that leather interior. Between the efficient stops, V1, and thermal system, I'm making this trip about as quickly as I possibly can with what I'm driving. I crank the speed up to 130 mph, which is moderately scary with thermal but would require a change of underwear if I was relying on headlights only for this length of time. It's so hard to fight the instinct to look out the windshield, but after the thermal shows me animals way ahead in the distance a couple times, I realize it's truly safer to watch the screen and not the road itself. As counterintuitive as it sounds, I put my elbow on the armrest, force myself to watch the black and white screen, and don't look out the windshield except for the occasional quick glance. I'm wishing that I'd gotten more sleep as this requires a ton of focus. One moment of failed attention, and this car and I will be a \$70,000 pile of garbage to be found by some local rancher when the sun comes up.

It's four-fifteen AM Texas time when I roll the Cadillac into the garage at the apartment. Having left at one PM Colorado time or two PM Texas time, I just made a thousand miles in fourteen and a quarter hours. It took a hell of a lot of concentration doing those high speeds through the night running the thermal system, but those Recaro seats were great for the drive. Normally, sitting anywhere for that long would have my legs in knots. Considering I barely slept the night before, I'm surprised that I was able to brainwash myself into making the drive without stopping for even a quick nap. My theory is further proven. If the desire is strong enough, the brain is capable of overruling the body's needs. 'Can't' is just a weak way of saying 'I don't want it bad enough.' Baron greets me at the door, and I pet him as we walk back to the bedroom where Sunshine is sound asleep. With my task accomplished, the brain can now let the body get the sleep it so desperately needs.

## **Chapter 8: Timing and Planning**

### **Sun 21 Jul 13**

I still feel like hell from breakfast at IHOP. The food was great, but the quantity that I ate is the problem. Moderation is such a simple word but such an impossible feat for me. Sunshine and I both have a tendency to order more than we should, but she has the good sense to stop eating when she's full. I hate the idea of leaving food behind, so my desire to prevent waste usually trumps my desire to moderate.

Regardless, I have my account set for the Texas Mile in Beeville, so at least, I've accomplished one thing so far today. That should be a complete adrenaline mainline. I have quite a few modifications to do to the S1K before that, but first things come first. Biketoberfest is the weekend before the Texas Mile, so I need to get the chopper work done before the S1K mods. Unfortunately, there's not more than a few days between my return from Daytona and my departure for Beeville. Basically, I need to get both bikes done ASAP. As if that's not enough, I still need to get Pick's bike ready before Daytona too. I'm glad that he can do most of the work

himself, but I will need to do the metal and paint work for his rear fender. He can do the wrenching and maintenance stuff while I'm doing the same on mine.

I'll get back to repairing this painful rear fender on the chopper. How many fucking times have I painted it now? First, it cracked the body filler, I welded more supports, and then it cracked in the back. This time, I'm welding more support in the back as well as adding fender struts. The fender has to be so wide to house the 300 rear tire, but the metal span in the fender is just too wide to be supported sufficiently by only a base mount. Rework frustrates me to no end, but a person just has to keep doing it until it's perfect. Anything short of that is shit. At least, I'm getting pretty good at painting the skeleton holding the hourglass that turns into a girl's ass by now. I just need to install the handlebar weights once Crowley finishes making them, make some saddlebags, and install the throttle lock. Once all that is done, the green machine should be ready for its half country trip in October.

### **Mon 22 Jul 13**

Jury duty is not really where I want to be right now. I'm not accomplishing anything at work or at home. I always get torn on this issue. Part of me wishes that I could skip it and do my projects instead. However, it's part of civic duty as a citizen too. It would feel good to be part of a jury that either gives a scumbag proper justice or prevents some litigious douche bag from getting a pay day by taking advantage of someone else instead of just accepting that shit happens.

Getting chosen or not is out of my control, so I might as well just sit here and wait. I didn't bring the laptop as I didn't think they even allowed cell phones during the last time I had to report to jury duty. This time, they even have free wi-fi for laptops. Dammit! At least, I brought my notebook and a pen, so I can try to be a little productive with my time and make a list of where I am today on my latest project. The notion of driving across the country has morphed from an idea to an obsession, which is not surprising considering my addictive personality. No matter what I'm doing, where I'm driving, or whether I'm sleeping or not, ideas will push their way to the front of my brain about some new aspect of the project. It's time to take all these random thoughts, put them down in one place, and turn this obsession into a plan.

First, I need to be honest about my limitations. I know that I can't compete on the same level as Alex Roy and Richard Rawlings. I don't have the money to do those kinds of modifications to a car, the time to research every possible route variation and take test runs, or a friend with a spotter plane. I'm not rich, and I still have to go to an actual job every day to achieve the income that I do have.

I do have a few options in the vehicle department. The Cadillaxe has the power, handling, comfort, braking, integrated V1, and thermal vision. What it doesn't have is sufficient fuel range. At an optimistic nineteen mpg, I'd have to have a fuel cell that filled the trunk and back seat to get the range needed to even come close to what those guys achieved. Truth be said, Sunshine's 2011 Volkswagon TDI wagon may not be as stylish as the Cadillaxe, but it probably would be the best vehicle for the job. It's capable of respectable speeds, handles well, was plenty comfortable for a thousand mile trip, looks much more inconspicuous than the Cad, and gets forty-five miles from every gallon of diesel. There's room inside to store a large fuel cell and any necessary electronics. She needs her car, so I'd have to rent her a backup vehicle for the time that I'd need it. The fact is that I still don't have the resources to have a hope in hell of beating Roy's cross country time of thirty-one hours and four minutes.

I may not have the perfect car or resources, so I'm going to have to rely on my two greatest assets, which are brains and balls. Maybe, I shouldn't be trying to compete on four

wheels with 31:04. In the same Cannonball Run that yielded the old record of 32:07 in the 1983 US Express run, a man named George Egloff drove across the country for the fourth time. George claimed to have the solo cross country ride record of forty-two hours. I would never have known about George or his record had I not watched *32 Hours 7 Minutes*. I've seen a few guys claim to have made long distance drives averaging over a hundred mph, but I can't say that I believe all of them necessarily. I can say that I averaged a hundred mph on a stretch too, but it was for three-hundred miles, not three-thousand. There just doesn't seem to be any kind of official proven cross country motorcycle record that I can find besides George's from 1983. The only other real record holders that come up on Google are much older when it took days to do it. It looks like by going from four wheels to two, the record that I have to beat goes from thirty-one hours to forty-two hours.

Obviously, there's a reason that the motorcycle record isn't as fast as the car record. For starters, motorcycle fuel capacity is much lower than a car, which means more gas stops. There's not much room for extra fuel, electronics, or people. The options are either having someone ride bitch or driving the entire distance alone. A single driver means no spotters, no help, and no rest. A passenger adds weight, reduces mileage, and may not exactly allow for quality assistance or rest. A motorcycle does not allow the same shifting of legs on the floor or ass on the seat. You might get two possible seating positions, and that's about it. Bikers are more at the mercy of Mother Nature in terms of dealing with hot days, cold nights, and the inevitable rain it seems. Safety is a much bigger concern on a bike too. Yes, you can get AFU wrecking a car at high speeds or low ones for that matter, but cars have seatbelts, air bags, and are surrounded by a metal cage. You can't high side or low side a car either with four paws on the ground versus two like a motorcycle. The fact that motorcycles lean, wheelie, and endo just add more dimensions of potential danger.

Despite the disadvantages, a motorcycle does have some serious pros. The chopper would not be a vehicle attracting law enforcement attention as a speeder as no one thinks of them as fast vehicles. Red Ferraris will get stopped before a big green chopper, which also has a smaller radar profile. Bikes make it easier to burn a shoulder and, in some areas, allow use of the high capacity lane or lane splitting. The chopper only has one seating position and would beat someone to death on a drive that far. I'm already cringing a little at the idea of driving to Daytona, and that's only halfway across America. Its low seat position looks cool and is comfortable for short drives, but the interstate wind tends to blow the knees outward. This means that I have to keep my inner thighs under constant tension to keep my feet from flying off the pegs. I could do the good girl exercise at the gym, but there's no way a self respecting weightlifter does good girl or bad girl exercises. It's just not right, and it still wouldn't completely avoid the inner thigh soreness from a long ride.

I built the chopper to look cool with little focus on speed, comfort, fuel economy, or handling beyond what the standard available components provide. The TP 121 inch engine that pushes it has around 125 horsepower, but a pushrod V-twin is just not going to get the revs for a high enough top speed for this task. Who knows what the handling would do if it could get to 150 mph? I love my latest chrome creation, but it's just not the right tool for the job. You don't expect a Tupperware torpedo covered in plastic to sparkle and roar, and you don't expect a chopper to do 150 mph through curves.

Even though I've eliminated the Cad, VW, and chopper as options, there's still one more horse in the stable. That S1K may have been built to race, but I've already made the thousand mile run on it between San Antonio and Ft. Collins twice. I even have the Iron Butt certificate on

the return trip from Colorado with a time of sixteen and a half hours. It may not be as comfortable as the Cad or VW or some of the other BMW bikes. However, it runs like a stripper through a prison yard, sticks to the pavement like road kill in the sun, turns with a flick, and stops on a dime. The electronic aids like ABS, DTC, anti-wheelie, and anti-endo make it as safe as a person will be on two wheels. With around 190 horsepower and a 14,200 redline, high speeds are no concern with this bike. Hell, the damn thing goes over ninety in first gear. The data from the ride back from Colorado revealed one other serious strength in that it averaged 46.5 miles per gallon on that trip. Alex Roy chose a BMW car for setting his record, so it'd be rather fitting to also make my run with the height of modern German engineering. He had the ultimate driving machine, but I'll be on the ultimate riding machine. It'll require a few modifications, but the vehicle has been chosen. Maybe, it's always been the obvious choice, but it just took me a while to realize it. Sometimes, you have to eliminate all the wrong choices to convince yourself that what's left is the perfect choice.

If the goal is to make it across the United States from one coast to the other coast in the shortest possible time, why would I repeat the route from New York to Los Angeles? A few minutes on Google maps make it obvious that the shortest route across this great country is San Diego to Jacksonville. Is it the same route Roy and Rawlings drove? No. Again, I have to capitalize on my brains and balls, and the first task for the brain is realizing that the shortest route is the smartest route for accomplishing the goal. There's another distinct benefit in that I used to live in Jacksonville and have friends there for support on that end of the trip. Hollywood, my old college roommate, also lives in San Diego, so I have contacts at both ends. The other advantage of driving east is that I'll be driving in the opposite direction of the relative motion of the sun. This means that I'll maximize the driving time in the dark, which is when I'll be able to fly with less traffic and the thermal vision advantage.

I'm also going to have to put the gray matter to use while getting this bike prepared. There are things to consider like extra fuel storage and effective electronics. I already have the thermal vision on the Cad, so I'll need to move that over to the S1K. That's where the balls will come into play. It was tense enough screaming at speeds up to 130 mph in the Cad for a thousand miles using the thermal. This is going to be over twice the distance and on a bike. When I drove the S1K back from Colorado, I was hitting speeds of 110 mph at times but horribly overdriving the headlights. Missing that carcass by less than a foot scared the hell out of me. The thermal vision will drastically improve visibility, but it can only work if I stay completely focused. An axe is a very simple, effective tool, but worthless without maintaining its sharp edge. That's no small task while being seriously deprived of sleep. There is absolutely no room for error, or it's game over. It'll be a battle of brains versus balls at that point. The noggin will want to be conservative in speed to allow a few more milliseconds of reaction time to any obstacles, but the steel sac is going to want to crank that throttle and drive as absolutely fast as possible. Finding the best balance for survival and success will be a constant decision making process for every single second of that drive.

### **Sun 28 Jul 13**

That's about enough work on the chopper for a Sunday. The rear fender's coming along well, and I finally have the new license plate mount installed after sweating off my ass for the last few hours. July in Texas wouldn't have it any other way. Since I finally scored a box of ammo for this Snake Slayer pistol besides the two rounds someone gave me for it, I better go relax at the shooting range and see if I can hit anything with it.

These .45 Long Colt rounds are a little different than what I expected, but desperation prevents pickiness. From what I read on Skynet, these rounds are made specifically with a .45 LC rifle in mind. The plastic ballistic tip allows the benefit of a hollow point expansion for maximum tissue trauma while still feeding well in a lever action rifle. The feeding isn't a concern with a two shot, over and under pistol like my Snake Slayer, but the rounds will still work fine for what I need.

As I expect, this little bastard kicks like a mule into my palm. The extended rosewood grip helps me keep my grasp by allowing use of all fingers around the grip to hold and balance the tool. My first two shots are almost touching each other in the nine ring of the target from nine feet away, and the rest of the shots at this distance are all in the nine or ten ring. At twenty-one feet, I have a few in the eight ring and one scared into the seven ring, but this little stainless steel and rosewood beauty is still plenty effective at a respectable range for being a pocket gun. It's a little heavier than some options, but it allows me to have two big, nasty rounds in something that I can easily conceal and carry. For those times when I don't feel like screwing with a holster for one of the .40 caliber pistols, this will allow me to carry something versus nothing. That fact alone makes it well worth the purchase price. Some may say that a person can't put a price on safety. It looks to me like that price is about five-hundred bucks worth of Texas craftsmanship.



**Figure 11 Snake Slayer**

This Sena Bluetooth helmet system has been sitting in its box long enough. I might as well install it in the brain bucket and see if I can conquer the technology by making it work. Installation is pretty straightforward, and having some well written instructions helps too. Use of the device is easy enough with a cheat sheet right in front of me, but will I remember these steps

when I get on the road? I imagine it'll take a few uses for operation to become habit. I save a few albums of music to the phone for a trial test. After hitting a few buttons as instructed, I hear speakers fill the helmet with the sweet sounds of Avenged Sevenfold. I'm also able to successfully call Sunshine in the living room and receive a test call from her as well. It'll likely be a lot harder for either of us to hear the other with ninety mph wind noise, but the technology appears solid. Now, I'm taking this helmet off before I sweat any more in it as its interior smells rank enough already.

### **Tue 30 Jul 13**

I need to figure out a plumbing solution for my big ride. I've done a little research and experimentation in this department over the years but now need to refine a plan.

*When I worked for the Institute, I used to make a lot of long distance drives between the base in southern Georgia and the base in northern Florida. Those drives were strategically driven in the middle of the night to minimize traffic frustrations and wasted daylight for work. I would generally bring a big bottle of Gatorade, drink the hydrating fluid on the way, and use the empty bottle, large mouth of course, for what Uncle John, an equipment rep of ours, called a range extender to reduce lost time for piss stops. On one visit to Cousin Reno's old place in DeLeon Springs, Reno saw the Gatorade bottle on the floor of the rental wreck, and he quickly guessed its purpose from the distinct color of the fluid in it. He and the warden suggested condom catheters for range extension.*

*One New Year's Eve in Austin, I told Diver, a coworker, and Fatman, a buddy since ISU, about the indoor plumbing idea I'd applied to fluid intake. I knew drinks would be expensive, so I brought some clear tubing, corks, and four pints of whiskey to fill the four pockets of my cargo pants. Diver, another engineer, suggested that I use the tubing like a condom catheter and be completely plumbed for efficient intake and expulsion of the whiskey. After going into the hotel bathroom with my makeshift arts and crafts materials, I attempted to scotch tape the tubing to the end of my prick. As I tried to piss, the warm recycled liquor all over my hand made it obvious that the test was unsuccessful. I ran out of the bathroom into the main part of the hotel room with the tubing in my hand still taped to the end of my joystick yelling at Diver for his horrible suggestion. Unfortunately, another more conservative coworker and his wife had entered the room while I was performing my failed experiment. The situation was awkward then and every time that I saw them from that point forward.*

I often learn more from failure than I do from success, and I do need to find a solution for the drive that will actually work correctly. For safety and comfort reasons, I'll be in the full one piece leather suit for the drive. Perhaps, I could try to find some of the condom catheters online and route the tubing somehow to avoid getting urine all over my suit, boots, or bike. Eliminating the time to piss at stops will shave off significant time for such a long drive. The bigger concern is the amount of work it takes to get in and out of the suit if necessary. If I have to have a bowel movement along the way, it's going to cost me at least ten to fifteen minutes per episode. I can't afford to lose that kind of time. I can mitigate it with proper diet, but the possibility of a mid cruise crap still exists. There doesn't seem to be many options besides Plan Pampers. I'd like to say that it'd be the first time if it does happen, but that's unfortunately not the case.

*I accidentally shit myself on a Saturday at the Office after my stomach shredding trip to Dubai. Luckily, I found an extra garbage bag in the bathroom trash to contain the destroyed boxer briefs. At least, I was wearing underwear that day. That night at the Highlander years ago wasn't so fortunate. I told Sambo in the head that I felt like I'd just had an escapee. He laughed*

*and walked back to the table. I went to the stall, took down the Levis, and it looked like someone had wrist snapped a chocolate pudding cup down the leg. As I sat in that Gato girl's car on the way to the next place, I wondered if she could smell what I could. If she did, it must not have mattered. After a fun night with a car full of idiots at the Palace and some other bar, I opted for a shower back at the house of Olive, Sammy's girlfriend at the time, before making a sticky mess with Gato on the couch. Anyone can score when they're clean, rich, and famous. It takes skills to pull action with shit in your jeans.*

This is one of those points where I have to really ask myself how badly I want to succeed. Desire can of course overcome limits that would normally exist, so I need to use that fact to my advantage. If someone told the average person that they need to get from coast A to coast B, they'd fly. If you took the ones who were willing to drive, how many would try it on a motorcycle? Of those true bikers, there'd be only a small fraction of them that would even consider or be capable of making the trip in one shot. This is a big one though. How many people are willing to shit themselves in order to accomplish the highest level of success possible? There are virtually none, and I'm the only person that I know who would even contemplate such behavior. I don't know if that makes me uniquely motivated or uniquely stupid, but it does make me unique.

In addition to output, I'll need to figure out the intake too. The Colorado return on the bike included minimal protein bars and Vitaminwater during fuel stops. As much as I hate to use any kind of drug for any purpose except alcohol for fun, Red Bull is going to be a requirement for this task. Sunshine has a CamelBak that I may have to borrow. There will have to be a mix of Red Bull and Gatorade to battle dehydration since I have to minimize fluid intake to keep equipment weight low. Perhaps, it'll be possible to somehow get protein into the mixture as well. I'm guessing milk isn't the best option for a fluid that needs to stay fresh in a CamelBak for a couple days. After being on my back for that long in the sun, it would probably resemble something closer to cottage cheese than moo juice and smell just phenomenal.

### **Sun 15 Sep 13**

My motorcycle launches are improving, but I'm no drag racer. Coming out here to the hill country and practicing is the only way that I'm going to improve. S1K's have anti-wheelie, shift assist, and dynamic traction control. In theory that means that I should be able to wrap up the engine, dump the clutch, point it straight, kick it through the gears, and hang on for my misguided life. However, it's just very difficult to trust all those whizbang features to do that. Inherently, it just seems like a stupid idea, but I do have to get to the point of trusting it more. The only way to do that is for me to just keep practicing on this open blacktop, so I don't waste my runs on the strip at the upcoming Texas Mile. My starting position is of course with my torso on the tank and legs stretched to the rear to try to minimize front wheel lift after takeoff. This bike is so damn fast that it makes it a challenge to get my feet evenly back on the pegs in time to shift into second gear. I probably should've been practicing this a long time ago, but better late than pregnant.

My German missile is almost ready for the Texas Mile. After a couple more hours of sweating in the garage, I'm soaked, tired, and satisfied. Sliders, a kill switch lanyard, the cross drilled oil plug and safety wire, and the aluminum chain guard are all installed. That should wrap up the safety mods necessary to pass the technical inspection at the event.

The cross country drive in the spring will require even more modifications to the bike as well as some special training for me. I've been thinking about this whole preparation for quite a

while now, and I think I'm going to write a technical paper or even a patent for my work. It seems like everyone performs risk analysis on machines, but the analysis stops short of considering a human in the same way. Machines need periodic maintenance, and humans need bathroom breaks and rest. You don't find out the true failures of a human or machine until you run it through the worst case scenario and look for limitations. This is going to take a little thought, which is fine for keeping the Axe sharp. Someone may have already explored this, but it's worth researching. If nothing else, it'll generate the preparation checklist that I need to make sure man and machine are both as prepared as possible for the run.

### **Thu 03 Oct 13**

Tanford and I wait outside the S1K's garage at the apartment as the door slowly rises. I reach under the still moving door and flip the switch to illuminate the S1K standing in the middle of the floor. The cheap, plastic, folding table that I bought for some bike event years ago sits on one side of the bike with various tools and components waiting for installation.

Since Tanford has offered to help with base support for the project, we review my plan to date so that he can question anything sounding less than logical, excluding the idea of attempting it in the first place of course. He's from San Diego, so he'll be able to film the takeoff and provide assistance as necessary on that end of the trip. I'll ship the bike out to the San Diego BMW dealership and have them give it a solid check for any possible items that might prevent successful completion. Equipment like the V1 and thermal vision will be sent separately, so I can install them before the trip and avoid damage or theft during bike shipment. My Galaxy S4 Active phone will serve as the central communication portal. The V1 Bluetooth component will allow the V1 to relay warnings to the phone. Music can play through the phone, which will be interrupted for phone calls or V1 alerts. All audio from the phone will connect to the Sena Bluetooth device in the helmet, and the phone will be mounted on top of the V1 in the dash for easy view and access. Both the phone and Sena will require power connections to eliminate the risk of dead batteries in either of the critical items.

I'll need to design a FLIR unit bracket, which will be most likely integrated with the right rearview mirror. Cramming the display screen on the dash will be hard enough, but I also need to fit a couple of GoPro cameras in that area. I'll buy extra battery capacity and the largest memory cards that support HD video. The cameras still won't be able to capture the entire trip, so they'll have to be turned on and off as needed. This brings up an interesting discussion point. Filming highly illegal speeds is what will contribute to the excitement of the project and resulting video, but that same video is also incriminating for up to a year until the statute of limitations passes. Do I have two GoPros on the dash? One could look at the speedometer and one could be positioned so as not to see the speed. If I get pulled over, I almost have to be prepared to take the card out of the incriminating camera and break it. There's some thinking to be done in that department yet.

The ride will have to take place in the spring. The S1K engine will prefer cooler weather, which might also mean lower chances of road construction. Tires won't grip as good in the cold, but the tires will be plenty warm for straight line riding. Since the route covers all hours of the day and a broad variance of regions, there is going to be a wide spread of temperatures. This is going to cause concern with even little things like glove selection. Do I take light gloves for best tactical feel or thicker gloves to minimize chances of numb fingers? I know from my years in Florida that winter in the south can still be cold, fall is definitely the rainy season, and the heat of a summer cruise is out of the question. Spring it is.

Another advantage that the bike has over a car is the ability to easily change the gearing for improved mileage. When it does need a refill, it will take less time to pump nine gallons versus sixteen gallons. I bought a marine primer fuel pump. My plan is to mount a gas can on the rear seat and plumb the system to be able to transfer that fuel to the tank without stopping the bike. There's one other thing that I have to explore. I'd like to install a switch to kill all the lighting on the bike. I need the ability to ride in complete stealth mode while relying only on the thermal vision system. Brains will take care of the planning and installation, but balls are what still have to use the tools effectively when the time comes.

### **Sat 05 Oct 13**

Few things relax me as much as a ride through the hill country. These roads are incredible and make for a much more enjoyable ride to Austin. This route may not be as quick as I35, but the wide open curves and straight stretches make for a good combination of ripping up the asphalt at excessive velocities as well as hanging sideways around some high speed sweepers.

Pick is behind me on Diesel, and he's keeping with me pretty well. He's gotten better in the curves with it since the time I smoked him out here with the Anarchist. This chopper's long wheel base and big rake don't allow it to flick around twisties nearly as easily as the Anarchist, but I'm still pushing it pretty hard. At a stop, he notes that my pipes looked about ready to drag on the road around the last set of curves. After getting used to leaning so much on sport bikes, I tend to push these chopper type bikes a lot more through turns than most people would. Chicken strips are the unworn outer edge of a tire. Smaller chicken strips mean the bike has leaned further over toward the road, and the rider is less of a chicken. I look back at the big 300 rear tire and see that it doesn't have much left for chicken strips. I'm guessing you won't see many 300 tires that have been leaned that hard, but I don't build garage art. Guitars are made to be played, guns are made to be shot, and motorcycles are made to be ridden.

We pull into the Hula Hut after being on the bikes for about two hours. Pick winces as he gets off Diesel and is clearly sore from the ride. I look at him and sarcastically say, "Don't worry, man. We just have to do that ride ten more times and we'll be in Daytona Beach."

"Fuck," he replies as a look of dismay crosses his face.

"Think about all the character we'll build," I say with a laugh of *schadenfreude*, even though I'm going to have to suffer through it with him as well.

As we both roll back onto I410 in San Antonio, I smile knowing that both bikes seem as ready as we can make them for the trip to Florida. That was the purpose of the test run today. It looks like both bikes passed. Now, it's up to their pilots to get ready for that drive.

A couple of old high school classmates were supposed to be in town tonight. About ninety-three, I get word that they're down at Coyote Ugly on the River Walk. Sunshine's dragging already, so she opts to stay home with Baron. I borrow her low profile VW wagon to go downtown as it's much less tempting to speed home at the end of the night. Even one beer combined with speeding can cause serious legal problems these days.

Besides the shaved head, CT looks basically like he did in high school. I haven't seen him since that night in the XTC strip club in San Antonio almost a decade ago. Unlike that night, I'm not wasted on Everclear tonight and actually recognize him. Reality is that I absolutely hated CT when we were kids in high school. I can remember practicing judo with him as younger kids, but he was my number one cause of angst in high school. All I heard from him was bullshit about me being in the advanced math classes with the older kids. He'd be nice occasionally when he needed help with his homework but then go right back to being a prick after he got the help he

needed. I started high school at ninety eight pounds with no muscle, no confidence, and basically no balls. There was no way I would win in a fight against him, so I just put up with it and tried to avoid him. No matter how much hatred I had for him, I never once thought about going section eight and taking a gun to school like these pussies are doing these days. That's because I was raised by parents, not spoiled by TV and Skynet. Regardless, that was over twenty years ago, we were kids, and those details are pretty irrelevant now as adults. I respect the fact that he served in the Marines, and I've been through enough self induced adversity that makes anything from that long ago completely trivial. You leave the bullshit in the past where it belongs. Like Crowley told me after divorce, hating anyone is a complete waste of time and energy.

Ikkin is here too for some work convention with a few more of her teacher friends. I haven't seen that girl for over two decades, but she doesn't look much different than she did in high school. She even has long hair yet unlike many girls that chop it after a kid or two. There's a pretty big bunch of us enjoying our drinks and the entertainment on the bar. One girl asks Ikkin and me if we're together, and we both laugh. It just seems ridiculous to be with anyone but Sunshine. The girl turns out to be a weapons expert in the military, which is of course interesting to me as a firearm enthusiast.

I buy a round of Jager shots for our group per my old ways. There are a couple extra shots, so we give them to the weapons girl and her friend as I like showing gratitude to military folks when I can. When the next song comes on, the weapons girl asks me to dance. As if she'd just poured hot grease on me, I jump back from her. "No way!" I exclaim.

She looks at me confused and says, "You bought shots for us though."

"No offense to you, but my girlfriend is at home, and there's no way I'm having some asshole post a picture of me within three feet of a girl on the web and fuck up what I have with her. Sorry, I'm flattered, but no thank you, ma'am."

After that awkwardness, I've had about enough of the bar scene for tonight. I still need to drive home, and I can't afford to stain my perfect driving record in Texas considering my plans for the spring. I tell everyone 'adios' and head back home to Sunshine and Baron for a good night's rest after a long day of activity.

## **Chapter 9: Air of the Open Road**

### **Sat 12 Oct 13**

The Gripper is washed, polished, and shining as much as it did on the day that I finished building it. My first attempt at leather work is lying across the rear fender in the form of custom saddlebags. I even made a tool pouch to go in one side, while the water proof bag will hold clothes in the other side. My clothes are laid out and ready. The fuel tank is full, and the battery tender is plugged into the outlet to ensure that this chopper is all charged and ready to go in a few days. This is going to be brutal, but I'm excited as hell to see this beast sparkling and ready to grip and go.

### **Wed 16 Oct 13**

I wake up at five AM like clockwork in the Blockhouse in Houston. It was nice to get here last night, shorten today's drive a little, and get to hang with Pick's buddies. It was also nice of them to provide a roof over our heads and save us the cost of another night in a hotel. Pick and I drag our gear down to the bikes in the parking garage and pack the saddlebags. I better strap the half brain bucket to the handlebars like he's been doing. Tying it to the saddlebags yesterday resulted

in it dragging for three hours and the top of it looking like someone took an angle grinder to it. We'll have to put them on our heads when we hit Louisiana, and those false senses of security will have to stay on our melons until the Florida border. It's just awesome that some self righteous assholes take our tax money to tell us what's best for us since we're obviously too stupid to make our own decisions. There's a serious logic flaw if I ever saw one. We pay money for condescending restriction of our freedom. Epic fail.

I can't believe that we're stuck in locked traffic again for the second time since we entered Louisiana. It's hotter now too, which isn't good for these air cooled engines. I'm watching the rear pipe on the chopper turn blue as I sit here. This isn't good. Something just changed in the sound too. What the hell could've caused that? This traffic better start moving at a faster speed soon, or I'm going to be stranded out here with a blown engine. I put the oil tank on the front of the frame and used a full four quart model for maximum cooling. When you're sitting still in traffic, the tank being in front for air flow doesn't really matter. The weather's hot, I'm hot, and worst of all, the bike is hot. Louisiana and I won't explode from heat, but the bike might.

Besides the last twenty minutes of rain, the weather has been pretty decent. I just had no idea that it'd take so long to get to New Orleans. We left Houston by six AM, and it's four-thirty PM now as we pull into the French Quarter. These one way streets are kind of a nightmare to navigate. They're so narrow that they make me feel like we're just driving through a bunch of alleys. As we arrive at the curb in front of the hotel, I holler from the bike to the valet, "Hey, can we just park these out front here?"

"No, sir. Let me get the van, and I'll lead you to the secure lot for hotel guests."

As the valet crosses our path in the van, Pick and I pull in the bikes behind him and follow the van to what looks like a pair of big castle doors. The valet opens them and points us into the lot. It's an open top, but the walls around the outside of the lot look as safe as can be expected. The valet waits patiently at the doors while Pick and I unpack and lock the bikes. The valet locks the castle doors and gives us a ride back down the narrow streets to the hotel.

Considering how late we are, Ricky and Mr. Clean, my local buddies, arrive at the hotel shortly after we get to our room. Pick and I each take just enough time for our turns to rinse the road grime off our sore bodies, and the four of us trot down to the hotel bar just in time for happy hour. Ricky and Mr. Clean couldn't be more different from each other. I've known Ricky since his first internship at the Institute shortly after I started working there. He is a smaller guy with shaggy hair and a beard and wearing a short sleeved flannel shirt, cargo shorts, and flip flops. Mr. Clean actually roomed with Newton, another old ISU buddy, at Iowa State though I didn't meet him until a few years after college on a trip he made to Austin. Mr. Clean has really gotten into the bodybuilding lifestyle, and it shows. With the shaved face and head and tight, bright, neon green shirt, he's about one hoop earring short of being on a kitchen cleaning bottle. They've both been great friends of mine for years, and I'm happy we're able to all hit Bourbon Street as a group of mismatched amigos on the way through town.

As we leave one strip club and the beautiful scenery it employs, Mr. Clean runs into a bachelorette party from one of the earlier bars in the evening. He points down the street with all five fingers as usual and yells over to us in his distinct Louisiana accent, "C'mon guys! Let's all go to amateur night at the other titty club with these girls!"

I look at Pick. We both know it'd be fun to keep partying, but we also know that we have to get up early and have one long day in the saddle tomorrow. The slope is getting slippery, and if we keep drinking, we might be up until five AM versus waking up at that time. It's something

we'd talked about a week ago, but after today's ride, I'm not sure if I have it in me to pull an all nighter and ride all day tomorrow to Florida. I tell him, "You can do what you want, but I'm going back to the hotel."

"Fuck! I really want to stay out, but today sucked, and tomorrow will be as bad or worse."

"C'mon, guys!" Mr. Clean yells.

"Sorry, bud, I know how this story ends and five AM comes early. Have a good time," I apologize.

"What about you?" Mr. Clean asks Pick.

"Sorry man, I better not," Pick hesitantly responds.

"Ricky?" Mr. Clean asks the last of our bunch. Ricky tells us goodbye and follows Mr. Clean and the girls.

Pick hangs his head as he turns to follow me back to the hotel. "You know it's a sad day when you're the voice of reason."

"Amen, brother." If it wasn't so true, I'd be insulted.

### **Thu 17 Oct 13**

Just like yesterday, the alarm goes off at five AM again. Pick and I search through each of our piles of balled up clothes. We debate whether to put on new clothes or save them for tonight and wear the same nasty threads from yesterday. We both agree that it's better to save clean clothes for tonight. Maybe, it'll rain on us today and reduce the smell. As we pack our bags, Mr. Clean walks through the door of the hotel room. "Hey, you guys mind if I crash here for a while before driving home?"

"Knock yourself out, man." I offer. "This is exactly why I left last night when I did." Hopefully, this is a sign of intelligence and not a sign of weakness or maturity.

Now I know what that child molesting Michael Jackson would've felt like if he'd plagued the world long enough to make it to prison. My ass is sore as hell, but here's the old familiar I295 of Jacksonville. We're aiming up the I95 ramp I used to take home from work at the Office every day. Why did the chopper just sputter? There's no way it can be low on gas yet, is there? The sputtering continues, and every choke of the engine is met with another burst of vulgarity from my mouth.

We pull into the gas station off Gate Parkway just blocks from the old apartment where Sunshine and I lived before leaving Jax. At least, this is happening near the decent apartment and not by the old crack shack on Bert Road, but I'm still pissed. The Gripper makes it eleven-hundred miles with no problem, and then this shit happens. I try to troubleshoot everything I can with the tools in my saddlebags to no avail. Now, it won't even start. Sonofabitch anyway.

We sit in the parking lot of the gas station waiting past nine at night for the one truck in the city that can haul a long chopper to Tracer's garage. Not only is Tracer a good friend, but he lives just a few miles away and has a very well equipped garage. I have a feeling that I'm going to need it. He's nice enough to let us park the disabled chopper in his garage and loan me his VFR for the night. He of course enjoys a little *schadenfreude* at me having to drive a bright yellow Honda. Brutal.

With Pick's dark black HD and the bright yellow Tupperware torpedo parked outside the hotel at Jax beach, Pick and I take our turns showering and changing into the last moderately clean set of clothes we have. We each rinse our shorts and socks in the sink and hang them to

dry. The Under Armour type material will dry much faster than cotton, but it's still likely that we'll be putting on wet clothes tomorrow.

A cab takes us over to the Mellow Mushroom for pizza and a few beers. Sunshine and I used to go to the Southside location quite often as it was only a few blocks from our apartment. I've never been to the beach location, but I'm not surprised to see it packed with hot young girls like most beach bars. Pick's eyes about bug out of his head at the scenery. It's not quite what we'd see going to a bar by us in San Antonio. Jacksonville, especially the beach, always did have some beautiful girls, and tonight is no exception. We also stop at Lynch's, Brix, and the Ritz for a few more drinks to numb the road pain. Eventually, the bars kick us out, and we cab back to the hotel.

### **Fri 18 Oct 13**

It was sure nice of Tracer to not only let us use his garage to work on the chopper but loan me his brand new Corvette Grand Sport to drive to Sanford and pick up parts for the repairs. I know the battery is shot on the bike, but I'm not convinced everything else is top notch right now. There's no reason for Pick to hang around here, so he hops on Diesel and heads to Daytona.

I get to Scooter's parts store and am greeted by the bouncy blonde working in the front office. I pick up one of every part that I think might be the problem. I'm not even going to buy a new charging system. If that has to be changed, that's more than I want to do in Tracer's garage. I turn the Vette back toward Ponte Vedra with a throbbing head and growling exhaust. I never thought I'd say it, but admittedly, the combination of the two makes me miss the plush sound insulation of my much heavier Cadillaxe.

The battery is replaced, the rear wheel is back in place, and the Gripper is washed and shiny again. I didn't bother replacing the key switch or starter as those aren't the issue. I just hope the charging system isn't faulty. Saddlebags are packed, I'm showered, and it's finally time to saddle the chrome horse and head south on A1A to Daytona Beach.

I was really hoping to make this southbound drive while enjoying a nice view of the ocean like many rides in the past. Completion of the repairs however took longer than the sun was willing to wait before dropping below the horizon. Instead of pinks, oranges, and blues in the sky over greens and blues in the water, all I can see is a black and white view of the ocean under the subtle lighting of a full moon to the left as I drive down the old familiar blacktop. Regardless of the time or colors, it's still an enjoyable ride. The weather isn't blistering hot, but it's still warm enough to be comfortable as the chopper under me thunders across the pavement.

Pick and I start walking from the hotel to the Daytona Beach bar area while looking for the nearest place to eat. Along the way, the model that AJ and I chose for the photo shoot texts confirmation that she'll meet us at the beach tomorrow morning at 6:45. Pick and I get sick of walking in our biker boots and find one of the bicycle rickshaws to haul us the rest of the way. We eat at the Oyster Pub before going to Razzles for a few drinks. It's nothing like the environment that I remember from spring break years ago, but we're thirsty with money and they have booze to sell. Win, win. Pick and I go to the back bar and order a couple Red Bull vodkas for starters. The Barbie doll of a waitress talks us into shots and more drinks as we watch the club fill with what's clearly more of a local crowd than visiting bikers. One overly large patron in a cheetah patterned dress stands at the edge of the dance floor. I lean over the bar toward our waitress and ask, "What would my buddy, Pick, have to do to pick up a prize like the cheetah over there? Perhaps some buffet promises may be in order?"

Pick is obviously embarrassed and the waitress doesn't know whether to laugh or call me an asshole. I get that a lot.

### **Sat 19 Oct 13**

It's time to meet AJ and the model at the beach. This extra heartbeat in my head isn't making me function very well, but sunrise is burning. AJ's already at the parking lot when we arrive on the bikes. The beach is closed due to the high tide, but I roll the Gripper down the sidewalk and position it according to AJ's expert direction. Tides continue to roll up the beach, loosen the sand, and cause the front tire to lose position and turn to the left. After I build a little berm around each side of the tire, it finally seems to stay where AJ wants it.

AJ takes a few test shots while I finish polishing the chrome, but there's still no model. She hasn't answered my calls or texts. The last text that I send is 'if weren't coming, could've told so could've got a real model.'



**Figure 12 Gripper in Sand**

It doesn't matter how hot she is if she's not here for pictures. I should've hired one from the actual agency or at least the model in Orlando that seemed very professional. She'd been in *Playboy* and even had a LinkedIn page. It's always a gamble with models. I had rolled the dice on the one that was local in Daytona, and I apparently lost. This is what I get for trying to give someone a chance to prove the stereotype wrong.

*I remember asking a stripper at Gold Club years ago if she'd be interested in modeling for the Y Chrome calendar. She never called. The next time that I saw her, I called her by name. She asked how I knew her. I said, "You said you'd model for my bike shop, but never called, and I had to go find a real model. You wonder why people have low opinions of strippers. I tried to give you a chance to be professional, and instead, you just fit the mold."*

I see a cute, young girl in pink running shorts and a white top on the beach. I wonder what she's wearing under those clothes and if it'd look good enough for a photo shoot. Hot or not, I don't think a sports bra would make for the best bike photos. Dammit. I knew I should've gone with the more professional model option.

Despite my current bitterness with the model that did her part for the boob to brain ratio theory and my throbbing melon from Razzles last night, I try to focus on at least getting some decent pictures of me on the bike. This was sort of the point of this trip.

*Five years ago I was in this same spot on the Anarchist with AJ taking pics at sunrise during Biketoberfest. That was only a week or two before I flew to Colorado for open heart surgery. I couldn't stand the idea of having a picture at my funeral of me in a suit that I never wear. Just in case I didn't make it through surgery, I at least wanted some decent pictures for the ceremony. At that time, I was a mental wreck wondering if I had less than a month to live.*

Here it is five years later, and I'm back for more. Instead of riding over a hundred miles, I rode over a thousand miles to get here. As opposed to the Anarchist I modified last time, now, beneath me is a chopper that I built from the ground up with many parts that I made and designed. This bike is without a doubt my finest two wheeled creation to date. I have a new job, live back in Texas with the greatest girl in the world and our furball, and have figured out life a lot more than I had back then. I've realized and learned to deal with my own mortality. With the heart valve that I have being estimated to last about ten years, that means right now is about halfway to the next rebuild. I live every day like it's my last while keeping the door open to do the same thing tomorrow.

After getting some good pics, AJ leaves, and Pick and I ride over to the water park for the Rat's Hole show. They finally start checking us in to the show and directing bikes to the right areas. Soon, the Gripper is as shiny as it's going to get, a poster is lying next to it that notes that the bike was ridden from Texas, and Pick and I start walking over to the little diner around the corner for some breakfast. By the end of the meal, we're both shot and agree to cab back to the hotel for a nap. Unfortunately, on the way back to the room, we see the pool and decide it'd be a waste to go sleep in a hotel room on such a nice day. We grab a couple of drinks from the pool bar and relax in the sun for a while. The water is cool but not as cold as the Fox River in September. Again, this is nothing like a spring break crowd, but it's a gorgeous day, and we're still going to enjoy it. We deserve a little relaxation after the twelve-hundred mile drive to get here.

Eventually, we call the cabby and have him haul us toward Main Street. We're not walking any more than we have to. Our bodies have taken enough abuse while riding here. Pick and I pop into Dirty Harry's, and I see a girl that I think was the no show model. After I pay her for two beers, I ask her where the hell she was this morning. She realizes who I am and shows me her shattered phone. She also says that she couldn't check the email, because she doesn't have internet at the new place yet. I think the main reason is because she didn't get out of here until two AM. It's a shame as she is hot and has that nice Florida bleached blonde, beach trash look. Dammit, anyway. I'll have to find a model back in Texas for the Gripper.

After a wet T-shirt contest, a few more drinks, and the Froggy's dancers, we walk back to the Rat's Hole. I'm not thrilled with fourth place of course. It's fair to assume that my bike is the only one that was driven anywhere close to this far for the show, but the judges aren't scoring based on distance driven. The trophies are pretty cool with their 3D rat faces. I'll put it at home next to the other fourth place Rat's Hole show trophy won by the Anarchist and the Gripper's first place trophy from the Austin show. Large from Jacksonville and his buddy come to the show for a while. It's good to see him again for the first time in a while. He's still as huge as ever and of course still sports the ink up and down every inch of his torso. Like many guys, he picked up a chopper cheap that had been sitting in some weekend rider's garage collecting cobwebs.

Now that the bikes are back at the hotel, it's time for one of the most unpleasant parts of a bike trip. Pick and I both sort through rank boxers, socks, and jeans and give them the sniff test to find the lucky winners for the night. Washing clothes in a sink in a hotel just doesn't provide the same fresh scent as a washing machine. Nasal passages scarred, we walk to the front of the hotel and wait for Cousin Reno.

Reno arrives in his new sled and takes us down to the Ocean Walk complex. Winghouse has a forty minute wait, so we keep trucking through the mall until we get to Mai Tai on the beach. As we wait for the food to arrive, Reno tells us to just rent a truck for a hundred bucks and haul the bikes home tomorrow. "You proved you can drive out here. There's no glory left in punishing yourselves all the way back. Ryder on line, a hundred bones, and coast in the AC."

"My rule has always been that if the bike can make it, I can make it," I reply.

Pick sits quietly. I'm guessing he wouldn't be opposed to hauling the bikes back home, but he just doesn't want to say it in front of me. Reno just shakes his head surprisingly baffled at my stubbornness, even though he shares the same gene pool that I do. I wouldn't say that I'm a masochist by any means.

*In fact when I first moved to Texas, Chip and Jesus talked me into going to the S&M Ball in Austin. I found out for sure that's not my thing when I volunteered to go on stage. As I stood there in my leather pants with no shirt and felt that girl's whip crack across my back, it was far from pleasure. I got pissed, yelled some colorful names at her, and had a pile of bouncers on me in no time.*

I definitely don't enjoy pain, but I do seem to enjoy a challenge, even if it's painful. That's completely different than being masochistic, right?

The three of us stroll into Lollipops and shockingly secure three seats right on the corner of sniffers' row. This bar is exactly how I remembered it from last time. The DJ is playing a ton of rock, only a little country, and no hip-hop. The club is filled with hot girls shipped in from all over the southeast for the bike event. After a couple sets, Pick looks at me and says, "This is what a strip club is fucking supposed to be."

"I couldn't agree with you more."

As opposed to some of Reno's previous visits here, he maintains composure and is the one driving us at the end of the night about one AM. We better stare at some eyelids for a while. I don't know if we'll really be able to make it all the way back to Texas without getting a hotel on the way, but tomorrow, we'll find out. If we do drive straight through to Texas, remember, it's not masochistic.

### **Sun 20 Oct 13**

It's after seven AM. This is later than I wanted to sleep, but we'll still beat most of the bikers, bike riders, and bike owners leaving town this morning. We pack what's lying around the room

into the bags and walk down to the bikes. There's no point in showering. Besides the fact that our recycled socks, underwear, and jeans could make a skunk gag, it's not like we'd stay clean on the road anyway.

We stop for gas at the south end of Jax. After filling the thirsty tank, I turn the key and get a half hearted attempt from the bike to turn over. I push in the compression releases again, but there's still nothing. For whatever the reason, the battery just doesn't have enough sac to turn and fire the engine. It could be because the battery is smaller than the original one, or it could be the charging system. Whatever it is, the bike obviously isn't going to start. Even if it did start now, it'd be stupid to keep going and risk this happening in the middle of BFE. I have to admit that as pissed as I am at the bike, I almost feel a sense of relief that I don't have to drive this monster all the way back to Texas. It looks hot as hell, but it is just not the most comfortable little cruiser in the world. I look at Pick and tell him, "Well, I have to haul this thing back. Don't let me stop you from the pleasure of riding Diesel back to Texas though if that's what you want to do."

"I appreciate it, man, but I feel like I should haul mine back with you too for moral support," he laughs sarcastically. We're both equally disappointed and equally grateful.

I call Cartmanini, who's nice enough to give me a ride to Uhaul to rent a truck. It's eight-hundred damn dollars for a one way truck to Texas. Ouch. Next, we go to Home Depot and buy the tools and materials to slightly modify the rental truck and install a channel for safely securing the bikes on the way home. I already have electrical repairs to do on the chopper. I'm not adding body work to the fix it list if I can help it.

This truck may not be as comfortable as the Recaro seats in the Cadillaxe, but it's a hell of a lot more comfortable than that chopper would be right now. Any bike failure pisses me off, and I'm not going to be at peace until it's functional again. The fact is that the bike did make the twelve-hundred mile drive from Texas to Florida. I'd like to see very many other garage built customs make it that far or their builders for that matter. I'm disappointed as I think through this. Listen to me bragging about making half of the distance. See me smile at my fourth place trophy. Am I really celebrating mediocrity? I need to be careful. Next thing I know, I'll be patting people on the head for a good effort after disastrous results and asking the next bike show to just give out participation trophies, so everyone can be a special winner.

### **Mon 21 Oct 13**

Pick drops me off at the apartment at six-thirty in the morning. We'll unload the bikes later today after we've both slept for a while. Right now, my ears are ringing like hell's bells, I'm tired as shit, my ass is sore as a sonofabitch, and I just want to lie horizontally on a mattress. Sunshine will be leaving for work soon, so at least, I'll get to see her before she goes. Hopefully, Baron will keep quiet and let me rest. I need it.

## **Chapter 10: Fueling the Fire**

### **Thu 24 Oct 13**

My body hasn't yet recovered from Daytona, but there's more riding to do. My head and ears are still ringing, and my tailbone still feels lodged in my throat. I'm hoping the drive to the Texas Mile isn't too painful. The S1K is a little more comfortable than the chopper. More importantly, it'll be an alternate seating situation to the position in which I was stuck for twelve-hundred

miles not so long ago. Beeville is a whole lot closer than Daytona as well. Painful or not, the ride to the Texas Mile shouldn't take too long and should be well worth it.

### **Fri 25 Oct 13**

For a first launch at my first Texas Mile, I'm very happy. The front tire skips gracefully across the pavement all the way to the shift to second gear. That means the bike is seeing maximum acceleration by twisting the throttle as much as possible without raising the front end high enough for the anti-wheelie electronics to intervene. There's the half mile mark and the speedometer of the S1K already shows over 150 mph. I back off the throttle as I just have to hit between 140 and 165 to be able to get to the next license class. Wait a minute. I have to be doing that at the one mile mark. Shit! I pull back on the throttle, but it's too late. My first run speed is 137 mph. That means that I have to waste another run getting the next license upgrade before I can just let it fly. I guess this is how you learn, but it doesn't piss me off any less.

As I wait in line to take the next run, I look at all the cool rides here. Most of the bikes are Busas, which are great for this event with their big displacement engines and long wheelbases. One younger rider brought his Busa all the way from Arizona. Another Busa guy that is staying at the same hotel as me came from Kansas. There are a couple brothers with a NOS equipped Busa from close to Dallas that know their stuff, and they are just good humored guys and funny as hell.

Most of the cars are pure American muscle. Corvettes, Mustangs, Camaros, Challengers, Ford GTs, GTOs like my old Goat, and a surprising amount of Cadillac CTS-Vs fill the rows. Most of them look stock until the owners flip the hoods, and you see the engines. Sometimes, even a popped trunk will reveal a tank or two of NOS. In some circles, meth and alcohol are about partying and making people's systems burn faster. In this circle, meth and alcohol are about making engines burn faster. Both result in a high for the person of arguable different levels of both risk and reward.

There are a few Porsches and one Lamborghini. When I comment on the lack of pasta rockets, one of the other drivers says that Ferrari owners got sick of their quarter-million dollar cars getting spanked by thirty thousand dollar American cars with twenty grand worth of engine mods. I can see that. There's an Audi R8. Its driver looks pretty young, and it makes me wonder what some of these people do to afford cars like that. Maybe, he works at a shop, and that's a customer's car, or maybe he's as foolish with his money and cars as when I was his age. As he gets out of the sleek machine, I have to look twice at his shirt. What does that say? It has some weird face on it with the words 'I will buttfuck your soul.' I thought I had some classy shirts. "Hey, soul buttfucker, nice shirt!" I holler over at him while laughing. He just laughs back as I'd expect from someone wearing such a shirt.

Sunshine and Baron finally make it to the hotel. Fortunately, Sunshine has my bag that she was able to intercept from the Cadillac dealer car on the road that was accidentally hauling it back to San Antonio. I should've known better than to put it in the trunk while I was making my runs, but no harm done. We're both hungry, so the three of us pile into the wagon to go find a Subway and get some food to take back to the hotel.

### **Sat 26 Oct 13**

If you don't get to the strip by six AM at this event, you're going to be waiting for a long time to make your first run of the day. With the S1K holding its position in the line, I walk to the Cadillac tent to grab some breakfast. I'm continually impressed with how awesome the Batchelor

dealership is about customer satisfaction. They've been great about letting me hang at the tent, even if I'm not running the Cadillac this weekend. Everyone is just as friendly and helpful as they are at the San Antonio dealership. Staff members from the Dallas and Houston dealerships are here too as both of those cities are represented by customers on the strip.

As I stand outside the tent watching the sunrise over the runway, I almost spit out my orange juice and Danish in laughter. I see an Audi R8 driving down the side road with dew on the windshield and the driver's head out the window for vision. Is that the soulbuttfucker? It has to be. I don't know why he's not just using the wipers, but I'll give him shit about it later. I'll register that as the first healthy laugh of the day.

Sunshine and Baron arrive at the strip and get to see me make one run down the track. Unfortunately, Baron doesn't care for the noise, and the fuel fumes have him vomiting before long. He's probably not well rested considering he was awake barking at all the new noises in the hotel half the night. Sunshine packs him into the wagon, wishes me luck, and leaves for San Antonio. I am glad they made it to see one pass at least, but I didn't expect either of them to spend a lot of time at the event. Car and bike events are a lot more interesting to me than they are to them. It's probably on the same level for them as it'd be for me to go to a wine tasting trip with Sunshine or butt sniffing event with Baron I suppose.

The S1K only got to make two passes down the strip today. I'm really not happy with today's launches, but the second was better than the first. That second run saw some treacherous cross winds just pass the half mile marker. At the same point where the landscape and resulting cross winds change, there's also a small bump. I swear that I felt that front tire shift over just a hair on that bump at over 150 mph, but that's still only a pucker factor of five or six. Today, I've heard some of the guys in cars comment that the guys on bikes are crazy. It's hard to imagine that someone will do close to two-hundred mph in a car but think that doing that on a bike is insane. It's just proof that everyone has their lines in the sand. Personally, that's part of why I wanted to do it on a bike. It feels way more intense doing these speeds on two wheels or even one wheel at times. Although I love a kick in the ass from any high power vehicle, I'd think a car would tone down the adrenaline rush a little for me compared to the same acceleration and speed on a bike where you're right out in the airstream.

As I'm getting ready to leave the dinner for the racers at a local hall, I see one of the other CTS guys being carried out of the building. He's clearly had a few too many cocktails as evidenced by the fact that he can't walk, stand, or speak worth a damn. As they pour him on the curb to wait for his ride, I laugh out loud at the words across his shirt reading 'can't fix stupid.' That's so choice.

### **Sun 27 Oct 13**

I can't believe the guy with the 'can't fix stupid' T-shirt last night is already in line well ahead of me. Just to be sure, I ask him if he was the guy getting carried out of the hall last night. He laughs as I remind him what shirt he was wearing the night before.

As I begin moving in the line to the burn out box, I remind myself that this is the last day. I hit 163.2 mph yesterday on my best run, but the best launch that I've had was the first run of the event. It's just a challenge to hammer that throttle and let the clutch out as fast as I want. I suppose it's just that instinctual fear that the bike will flip over backwards on me though in theory, the electronics should prevent it.

I'm up. It's time to let the balls drive this round and put the brains on standby. I wrap up the engine to about midrange where the launch light illuminates. I take the advice of the two

Busa brothers and keep my feet close to the pegs instead of hanging them to the back. As I leave the starting line, I move my feet up to the pegs and twist the throttle for all it has. It's too much though. The front end climbs, and the electronics start flashing indicating computer intervention. The anti-wheelie feature cuts the power, and the front end drops accordingly. It's as smooth as it could be, but it's still interfering with the maximum acceleration that I want and will cost me in speed at the end of the run.

This is the last run that I'm going to get at this event. This has to be my best. This run has to be perfect. I let out the clutch, raise the feet to the pegs, and pull back the throttle correctly as the front tire skips down the strip. Every gear revs all the way to the redline before shifting at the perfect time. I scoot back in the seat and tuck in the head and limbs for minimum drag. The throttle stays pinned for a conservative distance past the one mile marker to avoid premature deceleration. That feels like the best run that I've made yet and has to be my highest speed.

The ticket shows a 167.2 mph final speed. That's pretty incredible in a standing mile for a 220 pound guy and stock bike. I was going 157.2 mph at the half mile mark. With my weight and the power and gearing of the bike like it is, this is the best I'm going to achieve in this event. I was considering gearing it to have a higher top speed than the 192 mph it currently has. What I should've done was gear it the other way for a lower top speed of around the 180 range. That might've allowed me to break the 170 mark at least with the gearing advantage. I'm happy with 167.2 mph though. That was my minimum requirement as I've hit 167 in the hill country before. I didn't get to that speed in one mile like today, but it was also at five AM in pitch black with a little more risk. As dangerous as this might seem to some, it's still safer than early morning hill country runs.

As I say 'goodbye' to some of my fellow adrenaline addicts, I think about what a great bunch of people this is.

*Everyone from the staff to the participants was just here for the vehicles and the adrenaline rush. When that Ford GT hit 278 mph today, everyone went crazy with excitement. No one was gloating or criticizing. Everyone here was just happy for the driver and impressed with what the car was able to accomplish.*

I don't know that I would drive in this event again unless I did some modifications to either the car or bike. I can see coming back to watch and see the good people I met this weekend though. The Texas Mile is definitely an event worth experiencing for any motor head or speed junkie.

As I drive back toward San Antonio, it is damn near impossible to stay under the speed limit. I was just going 167 mph, and now, I'm trying to keep it at sixty-seven. If I just showed that I can safely drive those speeds, why can't I do that here? Oh yeah, it's because of the rules for the lowest common denominator. Some dumbass can't control a car safely at sixty-five because they're texting while screwing with the radio and eating a burger, so none of us can drive over sixty-five. Before long, I'm buzzing down the blacktop at well over 90 mph. Let me be clear. I'm not breaking laws in my opinion. I'm celebrating my freedom as an American and accepting the level of risk to myself that I choose. I haven't hurt anyone, and I should be innocent until proven guilty. After all, that's the spirit of the intent of the law as the legal folks would say.

It's baffling to me that two married people can cheat, destroy two families, and suffer no legal ramifications or even a breach of contract penalty, but I can get in a lot of shit for driving faster than some sign on the road says. That whole concept just seems fucked up like a soup sandwich to me. Therefore, I'm going to choose to drive a speed at which I feel comfortable and

enjoy the last of the rush I have from the weekend's event. This was a blast, but I need more. As I've noted before, all I did is trade one addiction for another. Adrenaline has replaced whiskey as my poison of choice. Whiskey can kill a person over many years of abuse, but I only have five years left on this heart valve, so I need something faster acting. Adrenaline itself may not take you in a flash, but it can sure lead to activities that will. I have no desire to die, but I need to feel alive for whatever time I get. I'd rather die with adrenaline in my veins than morphine.



Figure 13 167 mph

## **Chapter 11: What's it Worth?**

### **Fri 01 Nov 13**

Today, my little home town in northern Iowa is burying T who was a year older than me and always good for a laugh. I talk to Dad after the funeral. He says that T had been driving his Harley with some buddies last Sunday, tried to pass a plow and tractor, misjudged the width, and lost control. It doesn't really matter how he died though. It's how he lived that's important.

I hadn't even realized that T had moved back to Iowa until Dad tells me on the phone. I don't make it back home that often. When I do, it's usually a blurry trip with a night in Des Moines and a night at Mom and Dad's before rushing back to my current state of residence. Dad also tells me that T would stop by Dad's shop now and then with a couple of beers for them. "One time," Dad says, "he told me he was working for the factory over there. I asked him what happened to the schooling he was getting to work on those big wind turbines. He said 'You know I'm forty years old? Maybe, I shouldn't be climbing up on wind generators that high in the air,' and he was forty-one years old when he died."

*I believe his old man and my dad used to raise hell together years ago in Florida. I remember Dad saying once that T's dad was their booze carrier one night as they raced across*

*Lauderdale to go see a movie, but T's dad got kicked out of the movie for having the whiskey on him.*

*The last time that I saw T was well before I left Iowa. As far as I remember, I don't think I saw him even once after I graduated from high school. When I lived in Texas the first time, I found out that he was somewhere in the state and tried calling him about getting together for a few drinks. He was out of town at the time, and unfortunately, we just never got together.*

Now he's gone, and I'll never have that chance again. Why the hell is it that you always realize the importance of making the effort to see people after they're gone?

### **Sun 03 Nov 13**

Mom's telling me more about T's funeral. Since he was a biker and had been in the Army, he had a lot of brothers from both groups escort the procession. Mom tells me, "There was a passage from the funeral pamphlet about how he lived more in his forty years than most do in a lifetime."

"That's true. He went doing what he loved," I agreed.

"Yep, he lived a full life hard and fast...just like you," she said flatly.

So many times over the years, I've heard concern in my mom's voice regarding my lifestyle choices and repercussions from the drinking to jail to the crack neighborhood to my insatiable taste for speed. However, I don't hear the normal worry in her voice when she makes that comparison. She says it void of concern with almost an actual hint of pride as strange as it sounds. It's almost like she has finally accepted the way that I'm wired after all these years of wearing down the beads of her rosary. Maybe, T's funeral let her see a little of my perspective. Maybe now, she understands why I'd rather live life to the hilt, even if it cuts it short, than to just idle through life hiding from everything in a mundane existence. It's very comforting to know that if, heaven forbid, something goes wrong with my chase for adrenaline, she'll understand. Religion is the cause of more violence and war than anything and is abused by televangelists and other opportunists everywhere. Religion is also what brought all the residents of that little town in Iowa together to celebrate T's life and perhaps offer some comfort to them for the loss. Religion does have its purpose and can be a good thing, but like anything, it gets a bad rap for those who abuse it.

Maybe, it was the talk with Mom earlier or a renewed appreciation for what I have. Whatever the reason, I'm really enjoying working on Pick's fender out in the garage today. Metal is my favorite music and material. Despite the noise of the grinder, the ability to take a fender, cut it to the shape I want, and grind it smooth with every curve perfectly tangent to the mating line is so soothing. You can drill and tap holes through the steel, and simple bolts now hold the fender to the struts with enough strength to rattle down the road. Metal can be beaten, bent, welded, and ground to be made exactly how I want it. People are definitely not like that. It's difficult enough to change yourself, let alone others. People are what they are unless they really want to change. Until then, you have to just accept them for what they are, and either they're worth having in your life, or they're not. You won't change them, fix them, or bring them back when they're gone. I look out at the beautiful day and bright blue sky and find myself smiling at the idea of T ripping across the clouds on his steel steed smiling all the way. Ride in peace, T.

**Sun 24 Nov 13**

It sure feels later than two AM, but obviously it's not. I know I won't fall asleep again, so I might as well be productive versus lying here twitching and waking up Sunshine. The bikes and tools are still at the apartment garages, but at least, all the inside stuff is moved from the apartment to the house. I'll start unpacking the office and setting up the computer and electronics. I don't think it'll be too noisy, but the office is far enough from the master bedroom that it should allow her to sleep until more human waking hours.

What the hell does Chip mean by texting me that he wishes me the best moving forward? Is he trying to say that at this point he's done with us as friends after twenty years of friendship? Let me get this straight.

*He has been constantly disappointing to me and others socially by backing out on plans and being horribly inconsistent and disrespectful of other people's time, and I've talked to him about it before. He's always just told me that I need to be more tolerant of his flakiness. When I told him that we'd like to hire him to move us, Sunshine asked me if that was a good idea considering his reliability, or lack thereof. I stuck up for him and assured her that he'd follow through with the agreement since money was involved. I checked with him every week to make sure that he could still move us as there was a lot riding on the move for us. The week or two before the original move date, he texted me informing me that he just realized that he was going to be in Florida that weekend for his sister's Ironman event, and I should get other movers. I was livid but knew that it was best not to call him and tell him what I thought of his bullshit as he was obviously never going to change.*

*The move date changed, but I had already eaten my words and admitted to Sunshine that we needed to get someone professional to move us as we just couldn't depend on Chip. Even if he showed up on time, what else might go wrong due to poor planning or saving a penny? It just wasn't worth it. He had brought some moving boxes earlier, so I'd texted him yesterday asking if he wanted them back. When he asked why I didn't hire him to move us, I replied by pointing out the reliability concern as nicely as I could. It all boils down to him blaming his inability to follow through on a commitment on me for pointing out the shortcoming. What stage was it in childhood development that addresses self awareness?*

*What pisses me off the most is how much I have stuck up for him over the years. Fatman spilled a drink on someone's coat at Tazzles years ago. Irv and I got Fatman away from the situation before it got ugly. Boz, the bartender buddy of ours, came by later stating that Chip was back there with the group of guys badmouthing us and denying that he even knew us. From that point forward, Irv and Fatman never did trust him. I tried to ignore it, but logged it in the mental database. I visited Tazzles one night after college, and Organisis told me the next day that Chip had punched me in the head for no reason that night. I didn't remember the event, and the only thing hurting in my head was the hangover, so I let it go too. When I visited ISU with the ex, we stayed at Chip's place. She told me the next day that he tried to hit on her. I hadn't seen it, and she was a dramatic piece of trash anyway, so I never said anything about that either. When he first met Sunshine, he told her that I usually only dated hot girls. He tried to joke with her and Pick when he saw them, but they both told me he just came off like an asshole.*

For him to say that I'm not tolerant of him at this point is ridiculous. I should've kicked him in the stones years ago, but I know that friends are hard to come by. I guess I'm just the only one of us that realizes that. Irv has always said that you find out who your friends are when you need them. Chip'd rather surround himself with hollow ass kissers than someone who's going to be honest and try to help him be his best. I guess that's why he dates Starla. She'll put up with

his bullshit when no one else will. As disappointed as I am in him, it's not worth spending another ounce of energy. I'm going to enjoy the new house, my life, and continue to surround myself with people like Sunshine that help me be my best. Done.

As I try to put it all out of my head, I open Facebook to make sure the internet connection is working. Wow. There's a post on Chip's page from last night about how some events make people appreciate a person's true friends. This just keeps getting better. He blames his own flakiness on a friend of twenty years who's supported him and tried to help him achieve everything possible, and then he posts that snide stab on Facebook for the empty supporting likes from efriends. Knowing he won't be up for a long while, I post a reply stating that true friends are there for you always and not just when it's convenient for them. I'm sure he'll delete it when he gets up eventually.

This Ucoatit stuff better work. I'm paranoid about the possibility of going through all the work and it not sticking to my garage floor. The directions and Tracer both stressed the need to make damn sure that all the oil spots are cleaned before application. This floor coating works on the fact that it bonds to the concrete, so oil slicks mean failure and repair. I spend about three hours on my hands and knees like some kind of sorority house finger cuffs to get all the oil scrubbed off the concrete with a mixture of acetone, Simple Green, and dish soap. What's good enough? Is the water really beading on these areas, or am I just paranoid? I'm out of cleaners, so it'll have to be good enough. I just dread rolling the Cadillac out of here for the first time with this floor coating stuck to those wide sticky tires and pulling off the concrete. That just might be enough to make me cry or at least cuss like hell.

Now that the acid wash process is done, I'll lay down the primer coat tomorrow. I need to get this done, so I can move all the equipment and bikes from the apartment garages to this garage. It's Thanksgiving week, so we'll have a little more time to settle into the new pad and get things organized the way that we want them. It will be nice to have this garage just the way I want it as it'll be that way for the next thirty years until we actually own it.

### **Wed 27 Nov 13**

I've been giving more thought to some of the peripheral aspects of the cross country ride. It seems like it wouldn't hurt to try to put my suffering to some good use. I just have to be careful about getting too much attention to the fact that I plan to do stupid speeds on it. I update my website to state that I'll be making a solo cross country drive called 'Ride4FallenHeroes' with one of my three vehicles sometime in 2014. I ask for pledges to donate to the Wounded Warriors or Fallen Officers charities if I can complete the drive within three days. That keeps it vague enough and hopefully dismisses thoughts of an attempt at a speed record. My thought also is that if I do get pulled over, this little fact might mean the difference between going to jail and completing the drive. It sure can't hurt. I post the link on all the social media as well. I want it to be searchable on the web, and hopefully, I can get some actual pledge participation. It's posted, so that means I'm officially committed to doing this now. After all, you can't put anything on the web that isn't true.

### **Thu 28 Nov 13**

*I ate way too much at the Thanksgiving feast at Cat's place today, but it was a fun day, and Sunshine and I were more than happy to attend the festivities. She would've liked to have cooked Thanksgiving in our new home of course, but having only been in the house for a few days, it's just not quite ready for an event like that. Cat also gave me the foot pedal and cord to the*

*Marshall stack that I bought from him, so I should have all the parts for that now. It's too bad that their new pup was sick, and we had to leave Baron at home. I didn't need vet bills for him after dropping that check for this house last week.*

With the floor coating dry enough for walking, I go out to the garage and plug the Pandora into the stereo. I have the same Bose cubes and sub out here that I had in the living room of my old house in Texas. It's amazing that anything electronic lasts over a decade these days. The cubes are installed in opposite corners aiming at the walls and set to reflex mode, so the system does a great job of filling the garage with Pandora's selection of A7X, Disturbed, 5FDP and other soothing holiday tunes. Now while Sunshine's sleeping off the meal, it's time for me to get to work painting the charcoal mopboard around the garage floor perimeter.

### **Wed 04 Dec 13**

I think that I've finally quit coughing from spending last Sunday playing dusty Twister in the attic running cable for the surround sound speakers in the living room. What a pain in the ass, but it's done, and the Polk Audio surround system sounds awesome for a lot less than the equivalent Bose system would've cost. With the living room complete and my combination office and recording studio arranged close enough for now, I can do some actual work in the garage on the snazzy, coated floor. I've got rear brake pads, exhaust, and an alternator to replace on the Gripper from Daytona trip damage. Pitter, patter, let's get at 'er.

### **Wed 25 Dec 13**

Baron runs back to my office wagging his tail, which means he's done sleeping and starting to torture Sunshine in an effort to get her moving. If we're not getting ready for work, he automatically assumes it's a day for him to go to the dog park. He's relentless about trying to knock things over, pull clothes out of drawers, bark, squeak, swat us with his paw, or whatever else will ensure everyone's awake and getting ready for the park.

Once Sunshine gives in to his cry for attention, we all have a seat by the Christmas tree. Considering how much this house and move has cost us, we didn't spend much for Christmas gifts, but we still open what we have and any items shipped from family or Uncle Amazon. The first thing Baron gets to open is a bunch of squirrels with squeakers that hide in a stuffed tree. He of course gets to work tossing it around the living room while constantly struggling for traction on the slick wood floor. It's our first little family Christmas in the new house. With the smell of a real Christmas tree and both of us laughing as Baron plays with his new toys, it feels like Christmas for me for the first time since I left Mom and Dad's house many years ago.



**Figure 14 Tree**

Having not accomplished much today besides watching a few episodes of the final season of Dexter, guests begin arriving in the late afternoon. One of Sunshine's coworkers and her husband are the first to arrive. Cat and his family show up next. Soon Pick and his roommate, Kerm, are here too with their dog, Bullet. Between Cat's two kids and the two dogs running around the house, it's a busy place. Sitting around the new dining table Sunshine just bought, the adults all drink beer, egg nog with spiced whiskey, or cider with spiced rum, and eat way too much. I at least eat way too much, which doesn't mix well with the two egg nog and whiskey drinks that I've had. The food is great as always. Having graduated from culinary school, Sunshine absolutely loves being able to cook for a big group like this. Being able to entertain a bunch of good friends in our own house has her beaming from ear to ear. I would've been fine in an apartment, but it's great to see her so happy. I have to admit that even I'm happier than I thought about tonight as I sit at the head of our table in our home, turkey drumstick in hand, able to have the people close to us here with us on Christmas. I almost have a sense of pride bubbling to the top, or maybe, that's just a burp from everything that I've stuffed down my throat tonight. Either way, it feels damn good.

### **Thu 26 Dec 13**

Last night, I was able to settle into a domestic evening of entertainment with our guests. This morning, I wake up around five again, and the demons are back. Before I even open my eyes, my mind starts whirling about preparation for the trip again. All the groundwork needs to be done as soon as possible to allow plenty of time for ensuring that every detail is addressed. There is no room for error on this. I want to make this ride once as quick as I possibly can and never have to try it again.

While researching some items online, I see an ad for the movie, *Senna*. It seems like Tanford had recommended that I watch it. I've got a few things done today already, so I take a break and select it from the Netflix menu. It's a great movie for an adrenaline junkie like me. *Senna* is a fascinating, real documentary about a young racer from South America that becomes a phenomenon in Formula One racing. His natural ability combined with his pure drive to be the best is inspiring. When he dies at the end, it changes something a little inside of me. I've been looking at my cross country drive as fun while knowing in the back of my head that there is some serious risk. Seeing this skilled driver's luck run out on the screen changes my viewpoint of my own pursuit of speed to a more serious one.

This all reinforces just how risky this drive will be. Flying at ground level on roads, some of which I've never driven, in the middle of the night guided by a thermal vision system on two wheels at ridiculous speeds on no sleep is far from safe. It's why Ricky had told me in New Orleans that as my friend, he had to recommend against such a bad idea. I know that he'd felt the need to say it, but we also both knew that his suggestion fell on deaf ears. Tearing through the Rockies at high speeds while leaning sideways around curves at eleven-thousand feet with no guardrails is risky too. At least when I do that, I have keen senses and a rested mind on roads that I know. Not many parts of this ride will have those luxuries. Sadly, I know there's a good chance that I'll be so jacked for the ride that I may not even be able to sleep the day before the ride. I may already be sleep deprived before I even leave San Diego. Pulling over to piss is not an option, let alone pulling over to sleep. Brains and balls will get a person so far, but luck is still the wildcard that can screw you in the end. It's what got Senna, and it could get me just as easily.

I'm making a conscious decision to risk my life, but it's what I have to do. I am truly happy with my life today. Who wouldn't be happy? I have a great girlfriend, our dog, a nice house in the state that I love, and a good job that allows me to have toys like guns and guitars. Some people might say that I'm materialistic to have a stable with arguably the fastest sport bike in production, a custom chopper that I built, and a brand new Cadillac. Sometimes I think they're right, then I think 'So what? I'm the one with a sport bike, chopper, and Cadillac.'

The fact is that I have everything I want in life, and all of these things from Sunshine to the Cadillaxe are perfect for me. It's just that satisfaction is the end of progress. One of my greatest fears is working all day, coming home and sitting in front of the TV, golfing every Saturday, and spending every Sunday at Home Depot and working on the house. Can it be fun to work on little projects around the house? Of course it can, but I need more than that. I need to accomplish more with my life than a mundane existence endured by every suburban dad, no matter how happy it makes me. Looking for new projects and new adventures provide the spike in excitement I need to allow me to be able to enjoy the more relaxed day to day life. A lot of people have mental milestones. We need to look forward to something to provide the motivation to live each day leading to that event. Sunshine enjoys her job and coworkers. I know she's happy with her life, but she likes to know when she gets to travel next. It doesn't mean that she can't wait to get away from me, but those are her spikes that she needs. Without those experiences along the way and some kind of passion for something, life isn't living. It's just passing time until you die. My last big spike in excitement was heart surgery. I've had many spikes since then like moving back to Texas, Biketoberfest, the Texas Mile, and tactical events. This ride is different though. This is the big one. This is the rush above all highs.

### **Fri 27 Dec 13**

I'm a little surprised to say the least to be waking up on this morning that I thought I'd never see.

*When I was a baby, Mom left me in a running car while she went into the post office. When I saw her walking back to the car, I grabbed the shifter, put the car into drive, and ran into a car parked in front of our car. Since then, I've had ten cops pointing guns at me in West Des Moines, bounced off airbags in two car wrecks, drank myself into the emergency room, almost drowned in the Fox River in Illinois, crushed my leg between the air cleaner of the Stripper chopper and that girl's truck bumper, and slid the Ape off a mountain in North Carolina. Also, let's not forget the two open heart surgeries five years ago.*

I just cannot believe that I turn forty years old today. Will wonders never cease? Milestone birthday or not, I still don't want to have a party much to Sunshine's dismay who of course loves any reason to be able to cook for and entertain a bunch of people. I had toyed with hopping on the chopper and driving down to Corpus to watch the sun rise over the ocean this morning or just going for a ride somewhere randomly. I look outside and see that it's cold and raining, so there's no sense in getting the chopper dirty as I just put it all back together recently and washed and polished it. I have plenty of projects needing attention at home, so I'll just let the day slip by while I get some stuff done. There's no need to be as stubborn about turning off the phone like I used to do on birthdays. I'll accept calls and say 'thanks,' but that's the extent of my acknowledgement of today's date. It's just another Friday, regardless of how much it defies the laws of probability.

Dad of course is the first to call at five-fifteen AM. There's no question of where I get my early riser habits. Later, Tracer calls who has recently retired at age fifty-seven I believe. He has a few years on me, but he also has gone through divorce, job loss, and resistance to acting his age in the same ways that I have. Neither of us can believe I'm forty.

*When I turned thirty, I was about where many people were at that age. I'd graduated from college, worked for a few years, had already owned a house, and was married. Tracer met me when I was just barely past the thirty year mark. I was recently divorced, trying to survive at the chopper shop, and living in the crack neighborhood on Bert Road in Jax. I was broke, hungry, tired, yet enjoying my freedom from domestic and corporate chains that had made me so miserable for so long. By forty, many people are still married or divorced, have a couple kids, have some equity in their house, and have a very different life than I do. As Tracer says, I'm in arrested development. Part of that was the hiatus from career and civilization that I took when he first met me. I regretted few if any of the experiences that I gained from the decisions that I made, but it did contribute to a very different path for me than many people. Nonetheless, all those things led me to where I am today being a very happy forty year old.*

I'm happy with my suburban existence because of who else is in it with me, the toys I enjoy, and the spikes and rushes that keep me driven. As always, the next challenge is making it to the next birthday. Unfortunately, the years only get tougher to survive as you get older.

### **Sun 29 Dec 13**

The new front sprocket is installed on the S1K. Being a hair bigger due to the extra tooth, I was a little worried it might not fit, but everything seems peachy. Now, I'm stuck until I get those rear sprocket nuts. It's so aggravating to get so close but not be able to get the bike back together today.

Why is Sunshine calling? My hands are full of chain gunk, but I'll try to answer it on the speaker with my knuckles. Most likely, she's just asking if we need something from the store. It's her speaking, but she sounds wasted as she tries to form the words, "I'm on the way to the hospital."

Even though she hasn't been in a wreck since getting her wagon, she has a bad history of car accidents. "Are you okay? Did you get in a wreck?"

At least, she is talking, so I assume she is repairable. Then she says, "I had a stroke."

My heart drops into my stomach at the thought of that poor girl having some kind of permanent damage. She quickly corrects herself thanks to the guidance of the medics with, "I mean I had a seizure." My heart doesn't have any further to drop.

As Sunshine lies in the bed in the emergency center, the nurse and doctor show us the MRI scans. Her brain is riddled with spots that I can only assume is the worst option that I can fathom, which is cancer. I can understand broken bones and even my flawed heart problem, but the brain is beyond me. It's just a ball of mass inside the skull that controls everything. To me the brain is like a computer. It's a black box that just does stuff, but I have no idea how it does those things. It's not like an engine or a piece of metal that I can see and understand. We fear what we don't understand, and the brain really scares me. The few times that I've heard of people getting brain cancer, they didn't last long at all. This is beyond serious. It crushes me to look over at Sunshine as she tries to make sense of everything she's being told in her foggy state. She's the sweetest girl that I've ever met, but deserves really have nothing to do with these things. They're obviously not related at all as nothing that horrible should happen to someone that incredible.

Once they get ready to move her to the main floor where it's way past visiting hours, I drive home. Baron is waiting by the door in the dark since the lights weren't on when I left. He looks past me to the sidewalk then back at me wondering how come Sunshine isn't with me. I let him outside while I brush my teeth. He lies down in the living room where he can see the door and watch for a later arrival of Sunshine. Not that he understands, but I have to let tell him that she's not coming home tonight and coax him to his bed in the bedroom. I know that I'm no saint, I'm no hypocrite, and I hate asking for favors. I haven't prayed since before my heart surgery, and that was just for my family and Sunshine as opposed to me. This time I'm praying for her. It's not that she's religious either, which I'm sure is a direct result of her dad's very anti-religious influence over the years. Religious or not, she's still the genuinely best quality example of a kind human being that I've ever met. God may have other ideas, but it sure won't hurt to ask. I'm not asking for myself as I get what I deserve at this point in life, but she deserves to be alive and happy to say the least.

I have trouble even focusing as I try to remember all the poems they taught us as children when we all still believed in beings we'd never seen. All I can picture are those gray MRI scans with white spots at every layer. Between the fact that I haven't eaten for hours and having those images burned in my head, I feel like someone punched me in the stomach and just kept doing it over and over again. I'm not expecting a great night's sleep, but I try to close my eyes as I think about my girl lying in that hospital scared out of her innocent mind.

### **Mon 30 Dec 13**

As I walk up to the main hospital entrance, there's a sign that points to the chapel. It can't hurt, can it? I walk into the first small room called a meditation room. I'm not sure if there's a bigger room that looks closer to a church or not, but this will do. I sit in the back row of the tiny room. With just chairs and no kneelers, I just kneel on the floor while trying to keep my Redwings from getting stuck under my chair. I look up for a crucifix and see a cross on the wall. Instead of the normal Jesus hanging from nails, this cross has some kind of weird, dancing Jesus floating in the foreground of the cross. It's not as bad as the buddy Jesus from *Dogma*, but it's not much better.

Regardless, it'll serve the purpose. I guess it's appropriate that I'm on my knees considering the fact that I'm basically begging for consideration on Sunshine's behalf. I think about the scene in *Easy Rider* with the sign that reads 'If God did not exist, it would be necessary to create him.'

*I remember being at the funeral home for one of the three cousins of mine that was killed in a drunk driving wreck. I stood there listening to Uncle Ike, who was just as great a guy as you could imagine but whom I'd never known to be religious. Uncle Ike told those next to him that he'd asked God to take him and bring back his son. It baffled me to hear someone who hadn't previously been religious to suddenly reach out to God at a time like that.*

Does religion become the last ditch effort for people to try to change what's already in motion? I'm sure some turn to religion when shitty things happen just because they want to believe in that master plan. People would rather believe there's a reason for why these things happen because no one wants to accept shitty luck as a reason for anything anymore. I pride myself on being a very objective person, but anyone who turns to religion in desperate times like this, including myself, must believe a little. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here on my knees in front of the dancing Jesus begging for my Sunshine to be okay.

I knew a spinal tap was more than just a silly movie in the eighties, but I've never seen the process until today. I feel Sunshine's hand grip my hand as tight as the muscles in her face wince as the needle goes into her back. I feel so bad for my poor girl lying here in pain. As long as she'll eventually be okay, the rest of this will all become just a bad dream. God, I hope she's okay.

### **Tue 31 Dec 13**

That was one incredible steak. Bob's Steakhouse isn't cheap, but the food is damn good. It's New Year's Eve, and even this dinner is still going to cost less than what I used to spend on many NYE bar tabs of the past when I was drinking heavily. At least this time, I have some memory of enjoying it. More importantly, getting Sunshine home from the hospital today is the real reason to celebrate. The spots in her MRI turned out to be parasites in her brain that she got from eating poorly prepared food in some third world shit hole eight years ago. It's bizarre to think that one vacation so long ago is what caused her seizure. Hopefully, the medications she has to take for the next couple weeks kill those little bastards and keep her healthy from here forward. It's a good thing humans only use ten percent of their brain matter as she may always have those little holes in her brain. It's not an ideal scenario, but at least, my girl is home, and it looks like she's going to be just fine.

As we get the bill, we both agree that next year we're going to have to tighten the belt on spending. The house is going to cost us a lot more every month than the old apartment did, and these new medical bills have to be addressed as well. This dinner is going to be the last splurge for a little while. I am looking forward to some discipline in my world again. After the hernia started acting up several months ago, I haven't even been in a gym since before Biketoberfest when I'd gotten back down to about fifteen percent body fat. No, it's not the six percent like in college, but I'm not in my early twenties anymore either. Between moving and the holidays, my eating has been horrible. I've eaten more fast food recently than I have in years, and I've developed a bad habit of drinking a beer or eggnog and spiced whiskey drink at night over the last month. Starting tomorrow, it's time for all that shit to stop. I may not be able to jump right into heavy weights, but I need to at least start working on cardio and flexibility for the ride in a few months.

2014 is going to be a big year. I'm halfway to the warranty expiration on this heart valve, and I need to quit wasting the time that I do in front of the TV and dicking around on Facebook as if I care what someone ate for lunch that day. If I wake up at three or four in the morning, I need to get up and start being productive instead of sleeping until five or six. There's a ton of preparation to do on the S1K before the trip with the electronics, all the gadgets, and extra fuel storage. I haven't even set the dates for the drive either. Everything that I do is hinging on this ride from the book to the movie to the album to the patent and process. If the ride fails, everything else is pointless. If it succeeds, everything else will come in time with enough work. It's not a guarantee that my book will end up on the New York Times Best Sellers or that my album will go platinum, but without a successful ride, no level of success with the other efforts is even possible. It just has to succeed. There's too much riding on it. Failure is not an option.

Dammit. My brain is spinning out of control again, but it's reset seeing Sunshine's smile as we stand outside of Bob's. Tonight is the night to just be happy she's home and going to be okay. As I see the valet pulling up in the Cadillac, I'm damn happy with where I am in life today. After all the shit I've been through, I'm amazed that I even made it to forty. Am I lucky to have all the things I do? Hell no. It's not luck that pulled me out of that crack neighborhood. I busted my ass to work to where I am. It's not luck that brought Sunshine into my world. I saw who I wanted, had the balls to go after her, and did the right things to keep her. All luck does is provide an opportunity. It's still brains and balls and hard work that get you where you are, and I couldn't be happier with where they've gotten me. We climb into the shiny black Cad and pull out of the parking lot leaving Bob's and 2013 in the dust.

## **Chapter 12: Details**

### **Sat 04 Jan 14**

I can only assume that BFD3 means the third release of Big Fucking Drums software. It looks like it'll be a while for the program to install. I know jackshit about drums, so hopefully, this software makes it easy to add drum tracks to the album when I get that far. It's amazing how much technology has changed in something like music recording. These days, better sound is achieved by software than actually recording a real drum set. Of course, BFD has recorded the real drums at some point in a sterile sound booth one at a time. Cat has told me that sound engineers now just look for the digital signal of when the drummer hits a particular drum, delete the sound, and insert the software sound of that type of drum. I guess the ends justify the means, but it's still hard to imagine that's where the industry has gone.

Baron watches with curiosity as I shove the green tip 5.56 rounds one by one into the thirty round AR-15 mags with ranger plates for easier mag swaps. It's too bad that I can't teach him how to load mags. That'd be a lot more useful than sitting or shaking paws, but it's probably outside of his ability constraints.

Mags are all loaded for both the AR-15 and the XD40. The Eotech was a little dim a couple weeks ago at the last Texas Tactical event, so I replace the batteries. With a fresh set of lithium AAs, the red crosshair is much brighter, which it needs to be for outdoor, daylight shooting. I have the iron backup sights, but I prefer not to have to switch to them if I can avoid it during the match. I probably don't need two to three Gatorades like when we do these events in the summer. I also don't need the coat, gloves, and beanie like I did at the event around a month ago when it was a whopping twenty-seven degrees that morning. Today, it's a little warmer, and having shot at two events in the last month or so, hopefully, I'll shoot a little better today.



**Figure 15 Rock N' Load**

Usually, we start the events with a prayer and the pledge of allegiance to the flag. The preacher must be in a hurry today. He offers private prayer after the event if needed by any shooters. Religious or not, I kind of like starting these events with it. There's nothing wrong with praying for safety before a firearm event. It's very fitting too that we show respect to our country and the freedoms we have before we celebrate our second amendment rights like this, especially at a time when so many people in the country are crying to limit those rights. Gun owners feel worse than anyone about the horrible events that have happened in the last year or so with gun violence. Anyone capable of objective reasoning can quickly see that there is zero evidence to support restrictions on gun owners contributing to reduced violence. In fact, they'll find the opposite. Confrontation crimes drop dramatically if there is threat of getting shot. An armed society is a polite society. The knee jerk reaction types wanting gun restrictions forget about the big picture too. Our enemies' leadership has recognized for years that it would be foolish to invade America due to the huge number of armed citizens. This logic and these events are part of why I love living in Texas.

A couple of the guys let me know that they started or finished reading the copies of *Bouncing off Guardrails* that I'd given to shooters at the event right before Christmas. It's good to hear the kind words from these guys. I know that I'll never get rich from things like the book, but it does mean a lot to me to know that someone else enjoys what I've produced. Everyone always get a kick out of my Rock n' Load case too. It looks like an ordinary guitar case, but inside, it holds an AR-15, sidearm, and spare mags for both. People have been hiding guns in instrument cases for decades, but I chose to design and commercialize the product. It's convenient, especially for events like this, and practical. Guns are one of those things you

shouldn't be showing to people until you have to show them. Until that time, it's best to just keep them to yourself. Hopefully, that SEAL from the *Lone Target* Discovery Channel show gets stateside soon, and we can work toward getting him a few cases for his show. That would have to be some good publicity. Who knows? I might have actually found a product that might turn a profit. If nothing else, I have fun with it like I do with all my projects, and that's what's most important. Life is all about the experiences.

### **Sun 05 Jan 14**

I can kill two birds with one stone while I'm working on this technical paper. Not only am I able to make progress on the paper and my MMAP project, but it also helps me plan some of the trip preparation. The lawyer is in the process of filing the provisional patent for the MMAP, which should get me a patent pending number. I can use that to give the concept some clout for a year to publish papers and present material on the process. Unfortunately, the real thing it needs to put a bow on the project is the final validation test. The results of the ride in a few months, if successful, will be the proof that my process, papers, and presentations have merit. Whether or not the US patent office feels the idea is valid remains to be seen. The process would have the most value to military applications and professional sports activities, and both of those organizations seem to have large budgets. Like most of my ideas, the chances are slim but existent that this concept might generate a revenue stream in the future, and it'll be enjoyable in the process.

I swap the strings on the Les Paul and tune it with the new Korg stomp box style tuner that Pick recommended. The guy at Sam Ash had sold me flat wound strings instead of normal round wound strings. I don't know if I looked like a jazz player to him or if he just made a mistake. Regardless, it's good now. I'm glad Pick pointed me to Century Music for setup on the guitars. The Les Paul and Martin play a little better, but the guy's work really shines on the Fender twelve string. The action is way better than it's been in the twenty-two years since Mom and Dad gave it to me for the combination of Christmas and my eighteenth birthday. How many things even last for twenty-two years these days, let alone look and function as good as or better than they did new? I got three months out of my last phone. Of course, there's a big difference from electronics that go out of style or become outdated after taking them out of the box compared to timeless classics like guitars, guns, and vehicles. As I look at the beautiful guitars in the corner next to the Marshall tube amp, it's clear that some of the coolest things in the world still don't have touch screens.

I just put the last nail in the sound insulation foam on the exterior wall of my home recording studio. As I roll the Marshall back toward the wall, I realize that I forgot the cutout for the power outlet. I'm not happy with my error, but it's nothing that a razor blade and a couple more nails can't fix.

The studio is pretty much ready to rock now. Both the little Marshall combo amp and the Marshall half stack from Cat are placed with their backs to the foam wall and aiming the sound inward to the house. The desk and shelves should provide a dampening for echo while the fake wooden floor hopefully adds to the live sound of the room. I can dampen that with a rug if necessary. I should look into a guitar rack for the three I have versus having them sitting in or lying on their cases. I could also get a power supply for the keyboard since I unknowingly threw away the original cord during the pre-move purge at the apartment. I might use that keyboard for an intro on one song of the album.

With the new interface, microphone, ProTools11, Guitar Pro 6, and BFD purchased, that should be all that I need for equipment at this point. Guitar Pro has proven to be handy as hell for writing music. It's a pretty amazing package and lets you notate everything like tablature, notes, chords, lyrics, melody, and drums. It also lets you play it all back as you make changes to hear how it'll sound. I'm sure ProTools will allow everything imaginable for recording as it's the gold standard for sound engineers. That will make it easier to send out to real sound engineers if I decide that I want to use Penni's guys to do the final edits and mixing. There's always the option of taking one of the ProTools seminars in Dallas and learning to do it myself. I'll just have to see what I have for time and money at that point. It looks like all that I need now is to develop some musical talent, and I'll have everything that I need to make my first album. You can't force creativity or buy talent on Amazon, and it's going to take a load of time to write, play, record, and finalize the music. If I can be proud of the final product though, it'll all be worth every second and penny it took to make it.

While I'm taking inventory of the sound equipment and have a few minutes, I could probably just play the Les Paul through the Marshall for a little while. I turn on the power to the amp in 'standby' mode, so the tubes can get warm before playing. After jamming through a few of the familiar songs, I'm extremely happy with how this sounds. It's no wonder that the Les Paul and Marshall stack has been the classic combination of choice by guitarists for years. I'm going to enjoy this for sure. I'll probably enjoy it even more than Sunshine, Baron, and our neighbors.



**Figure 16 Les Paul**

## **Sun 12 Jan 14**

Damn, Sunshine and I missed Baron's twenty-first birthday on Friday. Of course, it's only his third birthday, but in dog years, he's officially old enough to drink.

*Foxy, a high school and college classmate, had come over to the house on the night of my twenty-first birthday many years ago and insisted that he take me out for a drink. It's not like I hadn't been in a bar or drank before that, so the novelty was already gone. We went to the Rooster, one of only a couple of bars in town, had one Jack and Coke each, and called it a night. If I'd kept that rule years later, I'd have had a lot more sense and money and a lot less fun in my past.*

As Foxy did for me, now I will do for Baron. I haven't had a drop of booze so far in 2014, but tonight is a special occasion.

Dos Equis Amber is what's in the fridge. I pour it into his bowl as I repeat the commercial drilled into my head. "I may not always drink beer, but when I do, I prefer Dos Equis. Stay thirsty me friends." Baron's not fussy. He'll eat his food and water with no problem, but he's always eager to try something new, especially if we're eating or drinking it. I pour a little fluid from the brown bottle into his empty water bowl, which he inefficiently transports from his shiny bowl to his mouth with a lapping tongue. He then stares at me as I take a swig of what he now knows that he can have too. A drink for him, a drink for me, and soon the bottle is all but empty. The last thing that we want is a sick dog, so that's enough celebrating for our little critter.

Baron runs around the house and fights with his stuffed toys and his bed in the living room. As Sunshine and I watch another movie claimed to be a comedy by its Netflix description that turns out being horrible, we notice Baron laid out flat on the floor. Soon, we're cleaning up dog vomit in the bedroom. I guess maybe dogs are like their owners, except he didn't try to hump anything before passing out and getting sick.

## **Sun 19 Jan 14**

Three AM is too early for Sunshine to even hear my alarm. I can hear Baron's collar and tags jingle as he gets off his bed. I pick up my phone and water glass and feel my way around the Rock N' Load case holding the AR and XD. Baron follows me back to my office and lies down on his cushion while my brain slowly comes to life purging the email box. This would be a lot more rough if Kramer and I had replayed a night in the old days last night. Fortunately, I've stuck to my New Year's delusion of not drinking so far.

*Okay, Baron and I did split a beer when he turned twenty-one in dog years a week or two ago. Last night Kramer and I sat at the bar at Twin Peaks for a couple hours. For a breastaurant, the place has great food, including the best mozzarella sticks I've ever had. Even Sunshine gets a taste for their mozzarella sticks now and then, and she's picky as hell about her food. The girls are the finest talent of any business that I've found in San Antonio, and they allow exposed tattoos unlike Hooters or Winghouse did. Kramer pounded a few of their sub-thirty-two degree beers while I stuck to a couple of Red Bulls. I also inhaled the mozzarella sticks and the giant, plate covering, chicken fried steak.*

I may have left the bar stuffed, but I feel much better right now than if I'd left the bar ripped.

As the Cadillaxe coasts through Helotes, I see red and blue lights on the shoulder indicating that the local authorities are ruining some poor bastard's Sunday morning already. At this time of day, there's an unfortunately probable chance that the driver is drunk and not just

speeding. Most people on the road right now are ending their days, not beginning the day like me. There's no point in tearing through this little town that seems to always have at least one LEO in visibility every time that I drive through here.

Once I leave Helotes well in the rearview, I kill the headlights as I start through the sweepers. It doesn't take long for me to get nervous and reactivate the lights. This is a hell of a lot harder than I thought. The thermal vision shows a nice layout of the road in front of me and will alert me of any critters in the distance. The problem is that it's harder than I realized to differentiate where I am in relation to the edge of the road. I'd sure feel stupid driving off the road into the ditch in this car. The thermal shows the edge of the road, but it's not always clear where the road borders the shoulder and the shoulder borders the ditch. The moon was full a couple nights ago, but right now it's not hanging in a spot in the sky that shows me much outside the windshield except darkness. I don't mind Pac-Manning the center lines as long as the road is wide open, but it's still a little nerve racking. Maybe, I better leave the lights on and just try to watch the thermal screen until I get to straighter roads.

As I bank hard onto a generally open highway, I put the throttle to the floor until the speedo reads over three digits. Once I get out of the curves and see the straight ribbon of open blacktop stretched out in front of me, I punch it through the last couple gears. The fastest that I've driven a car on this road was 160 mph years ago in the old 911 turbo. I've had the S1K up to 167 mph out here. Today, I'm hitting a new personal high speed of 170 mph in this beast.

That was a blast, but I need to work on my use of the thermal vision system. As I start slowing back down to something less ridiculous, I catch the glimmer of a deer's eyes in the ditch across the road. As I look down to the thermal screen, I can see the white image of the deer confirming the system's accuracy. I have to be looking at it for it to work though. The best tool in the world is worthless if you don't use it. After turning around the 4300 pound Cad, I speed up to eighty mph, kill the lights, and creep up to and past a hundred again, this time watching only the little black and white screen in the middle of the dash.

That was a little better. The trick is to focus on what I can see on the screen and not on what I can't see in the darkness out the windshield. I'm wondering if it'd be best to schedule the trip during a full moon, which might make it easier to see the road and potential obstacles. Even if the headlights get overdriven, they still help by illuminating an animal's eyes and help keep me on the road. The ultimate problem here is opposing forces. Anything that helps me to see other threats easier help threats to see me easier too.

I take the S1K for a test drive with the phone mounted to it and the new YAV1 app loaded. It's strange to me that some individual wrote an app better than the company that makes the V1, but as long as I have something that does what I need, I don't care who wrote it. The Sena and V1 are both now connected to the phone by Bluetooth. As I drive down Vance Jackson, I hear the beeps from the V1 in the helmet and see the phone screen display the alerts. Now, it's time to turn on the music on the phone and make sure that I still hear the beeps. Once I get back on the frontage road and near some false alerts, I confirm that the V1 alerts are audible with music playing. The YAV1 app displays the alerts on top of the Waze display, so I can still watch for alerts while watching the map. Waze is pretty slick as it not only shows the map, but the app also reports stalled vehicles and police waiting to ruin my day. I even call Sunshine for a quick test and make sure the V1 alerts can still be heard during calls. The call ends, and the phone goes right back to playing music. That's one more piece of the puzzle solved before the trip. The next items of focus will be mounting the phone, the thermal camera, and the spare fuel tank. Those

things will wait for now as Sunshine and I are going to see the *Lone Survivor* movie. Everyone's said it's supposed to be pretty good.

Sunshine and I walk out of the theater after the movie. She's still wiping her eyes, and neither of us utters a word as it's tough to even find words to describe the feeling left by such a powerful movie. Finally, she says, "There's just not much you can say after a movie like that."

I agree as we walk toward the wagon. I'd contemplated taking the chopper for a ride considering the beautiful weather. After watching that movie, I just feel like I should take a ride alone with my thoughts for a while. As if she can read my mind, Sunshine asks if I'm going to go for a ride on the bike when we get home. I confirm the plan to get some fresh air.

I roll the long chopper out of the garage and into the setting sunlight in the driveway, push in the compression releases, turn on the gas, pull the enrichener, and turn the key. The bellowing 121 inches of American power echo through the quiet neighborhood as I roll down the street to the neighborhood gate. After a few stoplights, I'm able to enjoy a little open road and some curves. That movie was just incredible. I left the theater feeling so many different things. The hatred that I have for the enemy and for those people in this country that stomp on our freedoms every day steams inside of me. Humility overcomes me though. As much as I like to appreciate what I have and live life to the fullest, it doesn't seem like enough after watching what these soldiers go through to protect us and our freedoms. The big ride I'm planning will be a challenge, and most people would never try anything like it. It's a night at the strip club though compared to what those SEALs go through just in early training.

The feeling that overpowers every other sensation is the pride and appreciation for our troops doing what they do. I'm really glad this movie was released as maybe it'll help people appreciate the sacrifices made. Maybe, it'll get someone to quit complaining about what they don't have or think about what they as citizens can do to make the country better. There has to be a huge sense of honor that soldiers feel for knowing that they've contributed to the betterment of this nation. I never would've even gotten through basic training with my heart problems at that age, and I'm sure as hell too old now. I'll never be able to do what soldiers do. However, I can make the most of the freedoms that I have and maximize the benefit of their sacrifices. As I ride across the concrete on a chopper that I built with my hands with no helmet and with a pistol in my pocket, I can't help but smile. I may never feel the pleasure of putting a bullet into a Taliban, but I can enjoy my freedoms, show my appreciation when I can, and help others see that outlook by doing things like my ride for fallen heroes in a few months.

### **Sun 02 Mar 14**

It's frustrating to be lifting such pussy weights at the gym, but the high volume training isn't the worst thing in the world for a person. The days of dips with 180 pounds between my legs and six-hundred pound deadlifts are over for me. At this age, I can still get in decent shape, but it's not going to be through really high weights and low reps. Youth spoils a person. Either you adapt and learn how to add cardio and eat disciplined, or you start storing fat like a college freshman who never drank in high school.

Between this touchy hernia and the aged joints, heavy weightlifting would only lead to injuries that would prevent my ability to even do what I'm doing now. I don't need to blow my intestines into my nuts again like when I was twenty-one, and I can think of a lot of things I'd rather experience than knee or shoulder surgery. Using the P90X or Insanity workouts and lifting on the weekends has been a good start for 2014. As soon as the bike preparation is done, I'll start hitting the weights on weekdays too as it seems to result in lowering the insulation layers. That

only makes sense since cardio burns fat for minutes and muscle burns fat all day. I need all the muscles to be flexible and highly circulating before balling into a pretzel for 2400 miles.

Pick and Uncle Eighties show up at the house. Uncle Eighties is riding Diesel, which he sold to Pick a couple of years ago. Pick has a big, rented, garbage wagon with a blasphemous motorcycle radio on it. Radios belong on bikes like bikinis belong on a beach behemoth. The day is warm and drizzling, so I better wear the hoodie as well as the mask and bandana. That will hopefully minimize the effect of raindrops making my face feel like a pin cushion. I roll the Gripper out to the street, and we roar out of gated suburbia, likely causing investment doubt in the neighbors' minds.

I downshift around a curve approaching a stop sign on Babcock that I don't remember being here years ago when I used to tear out here in the *Grauer Geist*. As the tran drops a gear, the big 300 rear tire bucks out to the side on the wet, slick street. Two decades of two wheeled experience allow me to keep from dropping the bike at times like this when a newer rider would be shopping for paint shops. A second downshift bucks the 300 again, though not as drastically. I needed the reminder of just how slippery Texas roads become in the rain, especially without an extra pair of wheels to keep me upright. These roads are like the black ice we used to have in Iowa, which sent me aiming toward a ditch more than once as a kid.

After a few miles in the rain on the road to Bandera, we decide the safety factor should be taken into account. It's not that we've never driven in the rain before, but if we head out 211 and come back on 37, the curves that can be a blast when dry could be potentially tragic in the rain. It seems that someone told me once that we're supposed to get wiser as we get older. Maybe, this is a first step toward that as it does border maturity.

About halfway across 46 to Boerne, we hit a wall that feels like the temperature drops an unexaggerated twenty-five degrees or more. I go from comfortably wet to freezing cold instantly, even with the mask and gloves. We hit Boerne, and I hammer the 121 inch engine toward San Antonio doubting the other guys' stock engines or common sense will keep them in my vibrating mirrors. A few miles down I10, we hit a wall of heat so drastic that it fogs my sunglasses and almost blinds me. I have to drive with the Force until I'm able to wipe the lenses clean with a gloved hand. In all my years of riding, I have never experienced any temperature changes that drastic in such a short distance.

Kerm meets us at Twin Peaks, and we wait for one of the scenic, young waitresses to bounce over to our table in the uniform that reminds me of what the Brawny man's slutty sister might wear. The other guys order their beers, but I've told myself that the next drink that I'll have will be while sitting in Jax after driving across the country. As opposed to sitting here drinking free water and looking like a complete tight ass, I order some food. The wall of cold hits the patio, and the waitress moves us inside. I happen to look toward the bar and see CT and his buddy from Coyote Ugly a few months ago. They're just pulling stools up to the bar, so I wave them over to our group, so they can join us.

Eventually, the first four of us make our way to Boneheadz in the cold rain. One of the greatest mysteries of this city is how this little dive bar always seems to have such hot bar wenches. Kudos to the recruiter for this place.

After more discussion about experiences with girls, bikes, and rock and roll spanning from Pick's late twenties to Uncle Eighties' late fifties with Kerm and I in between the two, we all decide to stick a fork in our Sunday and call it done. The ride home is cold and rainy, but the worst day riding is still better than the best day dead.

Considering Sunshine is still under the weather, she is happy that Baron has let her rest most of the day in an effort to recover. I suggest that we rent *Rush*, as I've heard it's a great movie, and I really enjoyed *Senna*. I'm hooked as soon as I see the debauchery of the opening scene with the hot nurse. The sex at first sight scene is made more noteworthy by one of the best quotes that I've heard to date about proximity to death making people feel more alive. It really captures what I've felt when chasing adrenaline rushes sideways on two wheels through the Smokies and Rockies after surviving heart surgeries.

The movie is absolutely incredible, and most of the story really happened. With such incredible history like this and *Lone Survivor*, it's too bad most of what you see in movies is such sensationalized trash with every car equipped with explosives that ignite after impact with a speed bump. Even what TV calls 'reality' these days is so ridiculous whether it's staged social rejects living together in some scenario or following some celebrity whores around their mansions that depict nothing close to reality. At least, it's there to poison children's perception of the world, so they don't have to rely on drugs for that purpose. The eternal optimist in me strikes again.

### **Wed 05 Mar 14**

Some days, you come home just mad at the world. I've dealt with enough shit in my life from divorce to surgery to jail to the ghetto that generally, I don't get too pissed about insignificant bullshit. Small events are only as significant as the pre-existing mood though. If you're having a great day, and you spill something, it doesn't matter. If everything else has been shitty, that spill can feel like the end of the world. I let Baron out the back door and watch him run around the back yard in his figure eight pattern or infinity pattern as the engineer in me might call it. Soon, I find myself smiling and appreciating the simple pleasures again with the world back in proper perspective. Significant others and pets can cause some inconveniences every now and then, but they can really help a person keep smiling in life too. As long as a person chooses them because the highs outweigh the lows, it can be a really good thing. That reminds me that I need to update my will before the ride. I'm just being pragmatic, not pessimistic.

### **Fri 07 Mar 14**

What a shitty week, but at least, it's finally over. I can't believe how long it took those clowns out west to send my thermal vision screen and V1 back, but at least, they're here safe and sound now. That'll be the last time that I depend on someone in a state with legalized weed. Tanford was going to come over to see everything, but I text him and suggest waiting until tomorrow. The parts are installed, but they're not coming to life. Don't tell me that something broke during shipping. Here's the problem. When I made my cabling with Battery Tender pigtails, the fused leads ended up on the ground side. Loosely translated, that means I screwed up and have to repair those cables. Where's the damn soldering iron?

The cables are fixed, and I turn the key. I can hear the thermal camera click, and the screen begins its startup routine. There's not much heat signature variance with the camera staring at the garage wall, but it's definitely working. I'm pretty proud of the installation. Thank goodness for 3D printing. The brackets holding the camera and screen are the fourth or fifth versions as the earlier ones were less than perfect. This process would've cost me a fortune and weeks to have machined, but 3D printed parts are able to be turned around in a couple of days, and plastic will be fine for this application. The mirror is still in place and usable while neatly clamping the camera bracket to the bike. It would've been nicer to have the screen closer to the

dash and be able to see it without looking so far from the road, but it's as close as it can be. This is pretty damn cool, if I do say so myself. Even a blind squirrel gets a nut occasionally.



**Figure 17 S1K Thermal Cam**

## **Sat 08 Mar 14**

It may only be three AM, but as I gain consciousness, the first image I see is before my eyes even open. It's an image of that thermal screen and V1 lighting to life when I turned the key of the S1K last night. I jump out of bed ready to be productive while Sunshine, Baron, and the rest of the normal world still consider it the time to be sleeping.

After considering Hollywood's input on San Diego hotel options, I settle on the Liberty Station Courtyard, and the room is now reserved for those couple of days in San Diego. Of course, I have to pay three days' worth of hotel fees since I won't be checking out of the room until the evening of the drive, but those are just details. I also have a rental wreck reserved, so I can run around SD as needed before the drive. I could cab back and forth to the dealer, but this will be easier, especially if I have to go find parts or tools. My task list is updated with a few more items checked as complete. I've responded to the rags in Austin, San Antonio, and Jax to run ads for the Ride4FallenHeroes charity aspect of the ride.

I think that I heard something out in the garage. Sure enough, there's Tanford standing at the entrance and Baron staring back at him. They're probably both wondering what's going through the other's head right now, but both of them calm down when I enter the garage.

I explain all the mods to Tanford. When we actually stand there on the slick epoxy coated floor reviewing them, it's more obvious just how much work I've actually done to this machine. The engine may be stock, but there's a whole lot more happening on this German missile than when it left the Motherland back in August of 2010. Tanford needs to determine if he'll be in SA or SD during the ride, but he is still ecstatic about being my point man for the event. The Sena on the helmet allows one touch calling of the last dialed number, which is way more practical than trying to mess with the phone at three digits. We review the technology, logistics, and training yet to be completed. Project *Verrückt* may just register as a bike ride to those incapable of planning anything more than what to watch on TV. It's probably just a bike ride to those who plan large military operations too. However to me, Project *Verrückt* is so much more than that. This is the biggest project that I've ever taken by the bars. If successful, I'll have material to support the patent filing and technical paper as well as my book, movie, and soundtrack. Without this project, none of the other projects are possible or worthwhile. I don't know if I'd quite call it military level precision, but for a civilian, I'm putting a ton of thought and preparation into it for sure.

## **Sun 09 Mar 14**

Two-thirty was too early for a Sunday, but four-thirty is a good waking time. The GoPros are both dead, so I must've left them on when I last used them. Once they're charged, I can try a test run.

The gas nozzle stops with a click at three gallons in the reserve tank on the tail of the bike. That will probably be sufficient for testing my in-flight refueling. It's hard to believe that it's March ninth and only forty-five degrees here in central Texas. Ok, Mother Nature, I get it. You made your point. Global warming was just a political scare tactic to control the population. The gullible would buy hybrids while destroying any chances of reproduction, and population growth would go down as landfills fill with more batteries and junked hybrids that owners couldn't justify saving. We get it. Now, please turn up the damn thermostat out here already.

The thermal vision system seems to work just as planned as does the V1, helmet Sena, and the phone, which talks to both of them via Bluetooth. With all the mods, this S1K is just slightly higher on the whizbangery scale than the old General, which didn't even get electronic

ignition until I finally replaced the old points and condenser with one near the end of our ten years together.

As I cruise down Babcock toward 1604, the low fuel light begins to glow on the dash. I try the refueling while zipping down the road and am pleasantly surprised to see that the in-flight refueling works slicker than snot on a doorknob. Between that and the twelve percent additional mileage that the gearing should buy me, the bike should be able to go five-hundred miles before needing a fuel stop. Now, I need to get myself to make it five-hundred miles without needing a stop. It's no wonder that the terminators decided that people were the limiting factor when compared to the machines.

While I've got a few minute in the house, I'll hang the pictures from the Texas Mile. The picture of the back of my helmet at the track is a cool one for the dining room next to all the family pictures that Sunshine hung in there. This one of me on the bike in the burnout box will go nice in my studio along with the pictures that I hung of all my bike projects over the years. I prefer the pictures with the bikini models in them of course, but a few of me on the machines carry some good memories too.

### **Mon 10 Mar 14**

The bike is close to ready, and the date for the ride is set to start the night of April twelfth. I should probably figure out how I'm going to ship the bike to San Diego. JC Shippers have shipped every bike that I've ever moved, so I'll call them first. The website forces you down a path, but I have an old number that I'll try. I tell the guy when I need the bike in SD, but I also explain that I need another week and a half or so to test everything. My heart just sinks as he tells me that I'd be lucky to get it to SD in time if I shipped it tomorrow. Because of the shitty weather across the country this winter, all shipments are way behind. Some shippers are quoting six to eight weeks. I explain that I have too much riding on this event, and one way or another, that bike absolutely has to be in SD when I need it. The dealer still has to install a new front tire, put in a new battery, and give it a detailed inspection to make damn sure to minimize any chance of mechanical problems on the trip. We agree that I'll haul the bike to the depot at Houston as soon as I can to save a week versus a San Antonio shipment, and hopefully, that'll ensure its timely arrival. I sure hate depending on hope, but I don't have much for options right now.

I adjust the foot controls to get them as low as possible while still allowing me to effectively shift and use the rear brakes without burning my boot on the exhaust. After a quick ride around the block, it seems this position will allow me a little less bend in the knees without compromising functionality. Now, I'll just wait for dark, so I can do a decent test run.

It's after nine and plenty dark, but it's also raining now. Mother Nature hasn't left me much choice though. I put on the full Power Ranger gear, turn on all the electronics and GoPros, and point the rocket into the dark rain. The thermal camera doesn't produce as clear of an image in rain, but it will still show the big things like cars and critters. It's just hard to look down in this rain as my instinct is to look straight at the road in front of me. How pilots can fly relying solely on instrumentation is beyond me. This is harder than granite.

I hate leaning much on these wet curves as I can't afford to deal with a wreck or repairs right now. Once I get to the straight, open road in the hill country, I drop to first to see how fast it'll go in low gear. The fact that this bike does ninety-two mph right out of the box is impressive enough. With the modified gearing, I should see just over a hundred mph in first. Here comes a car from the other direction, so I'll wait until we pass each other before I hammer it. The road is clear and I twist the throttle all the way to 107 mph before the rev limiter cuts power just as I

shift and run the bike up to 130 mph in second gear with room left on the tach. I wouldn't have believed the bike would do 107 in first gear if I hadn't seen it myself. Holy balls, that's fast, and there are still five gears left.

Everything seems to work. I'll get a trailer tomorrow and haul the stupid fast machine to Houston on Wednesday. It just has to get to San Diego in time. It has to.

### **Tue 11 Mar 14**

Before I start taking all the electronics off this bike, I better start making a list on the laptop of what needs to be packed for the trip. Later, I can classify the items on the list by what ships to San Diego, what ships to Jax, what ships between them, and what I take on flights.

There's a nice, big pile of electronics, tools, and miscellaneous supplies on the epoxy coated garage floor matching the packing list on the laptop lying just a couple feet away. I'll have to figure out a creative way to ship all of this stuff safely. I might be able to take one of my Rock n' Load cases, cut out the foam to fit around all this stuff, and ship it that way. It would be safe in the case and protected from vibration with the foam. I think I'll look into that once the bike is on its way to SD.

This Simple Green stuff works like magic for degreasing bikes. I wish I'd found it years ago when the old General was notorious for marking its territory with oil leaks. In drastic contrast, about the only place I need to use the Simple Green on this S1K is around the brake calipers and underbelly from road muck. The chain's a little tight since I softened the suspension the other day, so I'll need to adjust it once I roll it back into the garage.

With the S1K washed, I grab the wax that Stabby, an old friend from Jax and coworker from the Office, sent to me. This stuff is supposed to minimize how much crap sticks to the bike. In theory, that should correlate to less air friction over the surfaces and less drag. I don't have access to a test tunnel, but the bike sure shines a hell of a lot better after a couple coats of the wax.

The bike is clean, the chain is adjusted, and I suppose I could load it onto the trailer. After a failed attempt up the trailer ramp, it dawns on me that the trailer is aiming downhill, which makes the peak at the ramp top more pronounced. That would explain why the catalytic converter isn't clearing the peak. You'd think six years of engineering school would've allowed me to predict that, but it doesn't. I park the bike in the garage and will secure it in the trailer on flat ground in the morning. Enjoy your last night at home for a while, *mein Motorrad*.

### **Wed 12 Mar 14**

These Canyon Dancers always bring to mind a couple of Arizona strippers, but they're actually an awesome product for strapping down a motorcycle in a trailer. With the S1K tied down tighter than Dick's hatband, I hop in the VW wagon and start the trek to Houston. It's not quite six AM, so I should arrive about when the shipping depot opens at nine. That should have me back here and returning the trailer around lunch time.

I never lived in Houston, but I've spent a lot of weekends here in the past puking in yards, swimming while clothing impaired, and waking up on a floor with a pierced nipple that stayed with me until an x-ray shortly before heart surgery. Fatman, Sambo, and I are all very different versions of the clowns we were back then. Fatman has kids, Sambo has kids and a grandkid, and we've suppressed the desires of the past by choosing survival over the levels of debauchery from those days.

*Hypothetically, what if Axe 2.0 could go back and see Axe '98 standing outside that girl's house one Houston morning with no shirt, puking in her flower bed, and getting dirty looks from the neighbor? Axe 2.0 could have told Axe '98 that in 2014, he'd be driving down those streets with his high tech crotch rocket shipping to San Diego for a cross country drive. Axe '98 wouldn't even believe he'd live to thirty, let alone forty. He probably wouldn't believe he'd ever own a crotch rocket either. It's pretty certain that Axe '98 probably would've told Axe 2.0 to go fuck himself, finish turning last night's whiskey into stomach acid flower killer, and gone back into the house to tell Fatman it was time to hit the bricks.*

The transporters have some slick pallets that they use now for bike moving that are a big improvement over the old flat ones that they used when I used to ship choppers. My S1K is strapped to the pallet and riding on the front of a forklift up the loading ramp. The next time that I see it, we'll be in San Diego. I'll be installing the electronics and preparing both of us for the ride of our lives. It'll be a true partnership. Either we both succeed, or we both fatally fail.

I might as well install the thermal camera back in the Cadillaxe until I have to ship the camera to SD. Since every participant in the Texas Mile in a couple weeks is getting a copy of my book, I should be down at the event sporting my handiwork. I need to have the thermal vision system working in the Cadillaxe, so I can show it off at the Cadillac tent. Even though I won't be tearing down the strip this time, it'll still be fun to see a lot of the people I met last fall. Who doesn't love seeing a bunch of high power vehicles scream down the strip too? It's such a wicked event. This event will still be a good time, even if I have to just be an observer this round.

### **Sun 16 Mar 14**

The Excel trip calculations file is pretty well laid out, but I need to add in the calculations to allow Tanford to update the file with tracking and projections. As it stands, the spreadsheet helps me estimate where I'll need to stop for gas, but it has to be able to accommodate changing conditions. With this gearing and fuel capacity, I originally estimated that I should be able to get almost five-hundred miles between fuel stops. This ride isn't going to be with the throttle locked at fifty-five mph though. I'll be modulating that throttle constantly as conditions allow faster bursts, which will hurt my mileage. There can be strong winds out there that will hurt it too as well as the added extra weight of the spare fuel tank and supplies.

With my modifications, Tanford will be able to enter data when the first tank sees the low fuel warning and predict when the rear tank will run dry. The spreadsheet will also calculate a running average speed and projected arrival time. Between this and Google Maps, Tanford will be able to help me keep from being stranded on the side of the road begging for a ride to a gas station. Waze will also let him see where I am and advise me on any adverse traffic conditions and potential detours. That should be everything that I can provide, so I email the file to him, and he can run through it and ask any questions.

I take the contact information from my master spreadsheet and send copies to Tanford and each group to establish contact among them. The codename for Tanford as ground support will be Wolf Den, I'll be Lone Wolf, and the others all have codenames too. The wolf references are borrowed wording from the classic film *Rambo: First Blood Part II*. In the email, I include instructions for Tanford to begin providing notices to potential filmers two hours before my estimated arrival to those locations. That's all that each of those individuals will know, and that will help ensure that Tanford and I are the only two that know the final time at the end of the event. I also send one email establishing contact among Tanford, Sunshine, Mom, and my

sisters. That contact group is only to be used if the worst happens. Hopefully, it won't be used, and I'll be sending them all a text at the end to let them know that I survived the trip.

### **Mon 17 Mar 14**

Skynet has helped me find all the details about concealed weapon permit reciprocity for the ride. Every state along the way will honor my Texas CHL except, you guessed it, California. It pisses me off that they have those laws. However, while I'm in their state, I'll respect their laws. The whole point of states being able to make their own laws is to best serve the residents of that state. I just hope people out there respect our laws in Texas when they visit. They can wave when they get in front of us on the highway like we do. I wouldn't want them coming to our state telling us that we should surrender all of our guns and avoid the health hazards of eating a ton of red meat. Therefore, I'll just deal with their laws on guns and keep my opinions to myself while I'm a guest in their state.

As I try to search for the recorded speed that will result in a shiny new pair of bracelets and stay at the Casa de Concrete, Skynet isn't even aware. I decide to take up Cousin Reno, a former police officer, on his offer to advise me on the matter. After we discuss it for a while, it's obvious that anything twenty or twenty-five over the posted speed limit could result in cage time. Getting stopped by a cop at all will cost me an estimated half hour of delay, but arrest and the cage mean failure for the ride. It's going to be a tough balance of going as fast as I can while minimizing the chance of getting stopped. Of all the risks associated with this little adventure of mine, a felony is probably the one that scares me the most. Do I think it's stupid that speeding out in the middle of nowhere can be classed as a felony? Hell yes, I do, but my opinion doesn't mean shit in the equation as the law does what it wants regardless of common sense or fairness. Like the other pitfalls, it's a risk that I acknowledge and accept to get the job done.

### **Wed 19 Mar 14**

The music collection on the MP3 player is pretty extensive, but a lot of the songs are getting old. I feel so judgmental as I delete some of the songs that sound outdated and keep the newer songs. I can't say that all the songs that I delete are just because they're old. I'd like to say that I'm above discarding older music just because it's older and keeping new stuff just because it's new and cool now. I've been listening to Danzig's "Mother" since '93, and it still makes the cut every time. Admittedly, the newer music has an advantage because it has better quality sound and is usually louder. What it really comes down to is either the song sparks something inside of me, or it doesn't.

I copy the whole MP3 player to a folder on the computer that'll eventually go on the phone for the trip. Every single song gets the ten second test, and that's not a reference to my college dates. That's all the time that I need to know if it's going to be a song that just fills my ears for a few minutes or a song that's going to drive me harder to drive that bike harder. Take Godsmack for instance. They have a lot of songs that I enjoy hearing for both fun and the gym, but this is a much more critical ear. "Whiskey Hangover", "Good Day to Die", "Saints and Sinners" stay, but the others have to go. "Ain't it Fun" by Guns N' Roses is slower but just has a wicked, angry tone to it. I want that bitterness, hatred, anger, intensity, and an almost masochistic feel. This is not a trip to the day spa. It's going to be self torture and void of consideration for my personal safety, let alone comfort. These musical choices are all about motivation to drive faster and longer than I ever have before. Energy drinks in the CamelBak will help the body, but I've learned to never underestimate the power of the mind and its

influence on the ultimate outcome. As any serious gym rat knows, music can be a huge part of that mental influence.

Some songs are about the feel, and others are more about the words and their relevance to the objective. "Breaking the Law" and "Balls to the Wall" might be older, but they say more than a mouthful. "Kickstart my Heart" is absolutely mandatory for this event as are other Crue classics like "Saints of Los Angeles", "Primal Scream", and "Wild Side". All the Rammstein has to go on this German missile launch as well as some Eisbrecher. Tons of Avenged Sevenfold, Disturbed, and Five Finger Death Punch will be perfect. A few from Marilyn Manson, Megahertz, and of course Metallica are included. I'm not talking about songs off *Load* or *Reload* but the heavy shit like "One", "Master of Puppets", "Sanitarium", and *Kill em'all*. I keep some Pantera, Sixx AM, Slipknot, Stone Sour, Bullet for my Valentine, and System of a Down. Not much of the hair band era survives the slashing due to the common happy go lucky feel of that time's music. I can't have Poison's "Nothing but a Good Time" making me laugh back at my old party days, but Skid Row has some good ones that fit the bill. I love Tool and Type O Negative, but their drawn out songs have too many lulls to work for what I need. Every song has to bleed instant energy. White Zombie is a natural choice with "Electric Head Part. 1" from *Astro-Creep 2000*. From that CD, I also keep "Electric Head Part 2", "Super Charger Heaven", and the coincidentally appropriate eighth track, "More Human than Human", which played when I drilled a girl named Angel back at ISU. Now, I'm going to need an angel of the guardian type to hopefully keep me from ending up flat on my back and screwed like that college girl years ago. In total, there's about twenty-one hours of top notch, nasty rock that makes the top cut. Every song should get one chance to play, but only a handful better have time for a replay. I plug in the phone and simply drop the files from one folder to the other without having to log into any site that begins with an 'i'. The Droid phone is now loaded with the best music for the job, and one more task is checked off the list.

### **Sat 22 Mar 14**

Sunshine is getting out of bed early today and seems thrilled to hear the phone alarm. She's probably only half asleep as Baron and I started moving around an hour ago. Normally, she wouldn't be awake this early on a Saturday, but she has some run event for work. Poor Baron is excited to see both of us awake and thinks he's going to get to go to the dog park like most weekend mornings. With Sunshine leaving soon for her work event and me getting ready to leave for the Texas Mile, his tail eventually quits wagging as he realizes that he has to stay home by himself this morning.

With the sun still hiding below the horizon as I drive toward Beeville, I wonder if it'll be clear weather for the drivers today or not. The sprinkle that I saw earlier in San Antonio doesn't mean much as we can get a lot of weather variance just in the city itself. I make my weekly call home from the road and talk to the old man for a while. About the time that I'm telling him that I'll call later and catch Mom when she's awake, I realize that I just missed the turn for Beeville. Sonofabitch! I should know better than to talk on the damn phone while I'm driving. The hands free feature in the Cadillaxe is much safer than holding a phone with one hand, which also creates other challenges when driving a stick like this. A phone call is still a distraction, and I just got burned by it. Hopefully, there's an exit ahead that will allow me to get back to where I need to be.

I take the next exit and stop at the gas station as the thirsty Cadillaxe needs a drink. At nineteen miles per gallon under ideal conditions, it plows through fuel like I used to plow

through whiskey. Oh well, if all that I cared about was mileage and not looks or power, I would've bought a stupid hybrid. None for me, thanks. It's sprinkling just a little bit here at the gas station, and I'm not too far from Beeville. That's not good for the day of a racing event. After a drink for the car and a couple bottled drinks for me to take to the strip, I try to find my location on the phone map. This looks like the road that'll point me back toward Beeville and drop me on the south side of the city where I can buzz right over to the Mile.

After leaving the threatening mists at the gas station and enjoying a nice high speed drive across some back roads void of many other cars, I see the familiar military base and know that I'm getting close to the event. I soon find the Sewell Cadillac tent and park the Cad out front. Another perk of buying from Batchelor is that they're great about letting us use the tent as kind of a home base here, even if we're not driving in the event. Hell, last time I had my bike instead of the car, and they were still more than accommodating. Membership has its privileges. As I get out of the car, another V owner and his mechanic come over to compare notes. I show them the thermal vision system, and the guy tells me that he's seen my car on Facebook or somewhere. It never ceases to amaze me when people recognize me or a vehicle of mine from Skynet.

After some complimentary breakfast at the tent, I walk over to the lanes to look at the vehicles and see if I know anyone. I see the burgundy Busa in line with one of the brothers from Frisco standing by it. He says that they have the NOS working this time as opposed to the last Texas Mile event. The other brother didn't make it this time, but their other buddy is here for support. Not only do these guys know their shit, but they're very helpful and regular comedians. I've even sent them a couple book posters for their shop. I also run into the guy with the black Busa from Kansas that had stayed at the same hotel as I did last time. After talking to him for a while, I walk over to the big guy from New York with the highly modified, red Porsche 911 turbo. He and his wife ask if I'm running the bike again today.

"No, I'm just here for promotional reasons today, so I drove the Cadillaxe this time," I reply.

"Promotional?" he asks in his New York accent.

"Yeah. You should've gotten a book in your driver package, right?"

They look at each other and both nod confirming that they remember a book in the bag. He tries to remember the title. "Something about guardrails maybe?"

"Right, it's *Bouncing off Guardrails*."

"That's it."

"That's my book. I actually wrote it and had one put in every driver's bag here."

"No shit? I'll actually read it then, thanks."

He proceeds to tell me about some of the work that they've done on the Porsche and challenges that they had getting it ready for the event. His wife points out the slogan on my shameless, self promoting shirt that says 'Guns are like rubbers, rather have one and not need it than vice versa.' The couple laughs, and he talks about the clusterfuck in his area with the anti-gun bullshit happening right now. I tell them that's why I'm glad I live in Texas.

I don't see the soul buttfucker here today, but I do see the Queen of Speed. Besides being a celebrated drag racer and multi time motorcycle land speed record holder, she too has gone from riding Harleys to an S1K like mine. I've heard that she hit 212 mph on her S1K at the Texas Mile event before the one in which I drove. I walk over to her and her two technical guys standing by her S1K and introduce myself. They're all of course pretty focused on the bike and preparing for the next run but gladly take the time to entertain some of my questions. Granted, the petite blonde driver probably weighs half of what I do, but I still can't believe she got 212

mph in a standing mile on her S1K, and I haven't even broken 170 on mine. I guess when the bike only weighs about four-hundred pounds, another hundred pounds makes a big difference. The group says that they've installed the Akrapovic exhaust system, computer updates, some lighter parts, but not much else. I thank them for their time, wish them the best, and keep walking through the lanes of two and four wheeled beasts that are just waiting to blast down that runway.

I see another S1K with what looks like a slightly longer swingarm to help increase the wheelbase length and keep the front end on the ground during takeoff. That's a big deal on the bike as my front end was skipping down the pavement up to near three digits. The one run that I'd made with way too much throttle resulted in the safety intervention of the computer cutting my power and preventing maximum acceleration. The added weight of that swingarm may be more of a detriment in the long run though when the driver is trying to get the highest speed he can before the mile marker. I stop to talk to the guy from San Antonio with his black Mustang GT. He's much happier now that he hired a new tuner. I remember how pissed he was last time because the tuner he had hired forgot to disable a governor in the computer that kept him from clearing 155 mph. His mood is much calmer than his ballistic condition last time when he realized that all of his efforts were stifled because of an oversight from inexperience or carelessness. The reason hadn't mattered that day as the result was still a pissed customer. He's definitely in much better spirits today.

I also spend some time talking to the tuner for the car driven by the Texas V Club president. It's interesting hearing about some of the ridiculous requests that he gets for performance modifications and how mad people get at him when they ignore his recommendations and do stupid things anyway. He's done some impressive work on the V coupe in front of us since the car owner knows to listen to the advice of the expert. Somehow, we get on the subject of hybrids and the question of whether or not they'll eventually be showing up to events like this. Electric motors have instant torque, but a one mile event is about top end, not just acceleration. I get that people buy less gas at the time, but won't the eventual battery replacement cost more money than the value of the used car at that point? From a green perspective, I don't understand how you can take fossil fuel at a power plant, convert it to electricity, convert that to charge batteries, and convert that to mechanical power of a car more efficiently than just converting fossil fuel into mechanical energy directly. He points out that those power plants are much more efficient than an internal combustion engine, which is a fair point. I'll stick with my internal combustion engines though. I do better with metal and ignition explosions than wires and computers.

There's one pasta rocket again. This time, it's a bright orange Lamborghini Aventador. Hearing him take off makes it obvious that the car is equipped with a launch feature. Many people consider the Lambos to be just too flashy, but there's no denying that they are a wicked looking machine and have the performance to back them. I watch a now rare Buick Grand National and old truck take off down the strip too. There's of course the usual assortment of Corvettes, Camaros, and Mustangs. They're all affordable cars that, for a few bucks more, can be made ridiculously fast.

It's hypnotizing for me to walk among these unique machines. Their sharp edges and smooth curves decorated in everything from sparkling bright paint to matte black finish to stickers are beautiful works of art. The engines that car makers try to cover with plastic these days are not only exposed for ease of maintenance on these sleds but sometimes cleaner than the body. As each row is flagged to prepare, the sound of what's mostly V8 engines roaring to life fills the air. The engines purr through exhaust systems that wouldn't allow leaving a

neighborhood without pissing off the neighbors. The purr becomes a ground pounding growl combined with squealing tires in the burnout box before exploding down the strip. What makes this whole experience so real is the smell. You can't record it or post it on Skynet. It has to be experienced, and it adds a dimension that you can't get any way except being here in person. The scent of burning fuel of a slightly rich engine rolls into the nostrils and creates a feeling that I can't imagine coke being able to do. The fog and smell of burning rubber as tires shed their outer skin pollute the air near the burnout pit. I take a deep breath of the air that a lawmaker would tell me is hazardous to my health and smile from one ringing ear to the other.

All of these aspects are what bring people like us together for this event. I'm not the only adrenaline addict here today. We're all junkies, or we wouldn't be here. The racers spend so much time and money to participate. They stand tentatively watching others rip down the track as they wait for hours for their fix. Time can't move fast enough for these crazy bastards to stare down that open strip of concrete. Once they're on that line with the clutch down and throttle up, it's an even more painful wait before they can release the clutch and hammer the throttle to the limits of tire friction or wheelie control and catapult themselves for one mile of pure adrenaline saturation in their system. That one mile rush is what brings us here to the Texas Mile. It's how we get our fix, and it's how we go back to our daily existence back in the real world. Some of these racers go back to work in a performance shop constantly surrounded by this. Others go back to our day jobs that don't provide near the passionate thrill of racing but are necessary to pay the bills for this habit of ours.

This is almost like therapy or a support group for adrenaline junkies. We all get together, talk about our addictions, and help each other. There's one major difference. This would be like an AA group meeting at a bar, getting completely wasted, discussing how different drinks can be made to get each other drunk faster, taking cabs home, and not drinking again for a long time. Since we can't do this activity every day, we have to get our fix, and this is a controlled way to do it in as safe of an environment as possible. Unlike my early morning blasts through the hill country, there are no animals, darkness, curves, or police to distract me from going as fast as my machine and abilities allow. The only person that really could get hurt here is the driver, and it's a risk that we all accept when we come here. The event organizers go through great efforts to minimize danger, but we all know that we can end up in a ball of fire or being launched into the air like a rag doll and splatter like a water balloon full of bones on concrete. Any potential risk remaining outside the safety practices are well worth that mile of adrenaline to us though. That's what makes us addicts, but it's also what lets us function in society the rest of the time. We get it out of our system, try to suppress our needs, and wait for that desire to grow inside making that next release even more intense like some kind of Tantric, high octane orgasm.

Back at the Cadillac tent, the board shows over twenty CTS-Vs running this weekend. I see the father and son from last time and ask the son where his 'can't fix stupid' shirt is this time. We laugh about him sitting on the curb at the dinner last October where he was wearing that shirt, hammered out of his gourd, and waiting for his dad to pull the car around to get him. He asks if I happen to have a picture of it. I tell him I already had on my gloves and was getting ready to leave, but I sure wish that I'd been able to get that moment captured too. The shirt would've made the picture perfect with him sitting there so drunk that he couldn't have counted his balls three times and got the same number twice.

The V Club asks all of us to get a group picture with all of our cars by one of the hangars, so we all drive over to the area behind the motorhomes. Having worked at Winnebago on an

internship years ago in Iowa, I always tend to scan the lot for anything with a big 'W' on it out of habit.

One of the other V owners and I are talking. When I tell him that it's my book in his driver bag, he runs to get it for me to sign. It is funny how just having a book can be viewed as a big deal to some, but obviously I'm flattered and happy to sign it for him. After the pictures, we all go back to the tent for lunch. With a full stomach, I start to walk back to the lanes. I stop at my car and weigh my options. I could stay here all day, go out with people for dinner and drinks tonight, and get back home late tonight after Sunshine and Baron are fast asleep. Discipline is key right now though, and I only have three weeks to get in the best shape that I can for the ride. It's not like it's easy at this point in life either, but age is a factor, not an excuse. I don't want to just look good for forty. I want to look good. Unlike college, it's not just about looks though who doesn't want to look their best? I'm no longer trying to gain a cosmetic edge over every other swinging dick in the bar as we all strive to maximize the balance of quality and ease of conquest in girls we approach. A six pack has zero bearing for what I need to do. This ride is going to test me both physically and mentally, and I need to be in the healthiest condition possible. I'm not going to get my adrenaline fix here, but I need to be ready for when I do in less than a month. After exhibiting a little will power, I slide into the driver's Recaro seat of my Cadillac and light up the dash and engine. There's still time to go home, squeeze in a good workout at Gold's Gym up the street, work on trip preparation tasks, and enjoy a night with my girl and our pup.

### **Wed 26 Mar 14**

Ever since hearing that gal and her team tell me that she hit 212 mph on her S1K with only minor modifications and a much smaller pilot, I'm starting to wonder more about modifications to my bike. Stein, the head of service at the San Diego BMW dealership, had said that the Akra exhaust and ECU package was about three grand for maybe ten to fifteen horsies. I find the system online and send him the link to confirm that it's the same one that he was describing. He'd said that the twenty pound weight saving is almost a bigger effect than the hp increase. I'll ask him if the reduced weight would improve my mileage enough to account for how much richer the bike would be tuned. Maybe, there's a way we could install the new exhaust, use the factory tune for the trip for the best mileage, then put the performance tune on it when the bike is back in Texas. If the modifications will result in less mileage for the trip, they're not an option. I need maximum range on that thing for the ride. Gas stops are brutal on the average speed.

I think that's Pick, but who's SUV is he driving? Maybe, it's his girlfriend's rig for hauling around her kids. Sunshine asks, "Is that him? Did he trade in his Jeep for a Tahoe to haul her kids around?"

He confirms that he did in fact trade the Jeep for the Tahoe as we all get out of our rides. He loved that Jeep, but he tells us that his bad knees made it a nightmare to drive every day. Pick also points out that the Tahoe offers plenty of covered space for hauling musical gear for gigs. They both get shitty mileage, but I have no room to talk considering the overly thirsty four wheeler back home in my garage. His stated legitimate reasons aside, I'm still guessing the trade is for hauling his girl's kids, but we'll go ahead and just go with his story for now if denial is his preference. It's his ride and his life, not mine.

While we're all signing my will and getting the document notarized, Pick tells me Uncle Eighties will be back in town in a couple weeks. "We'll be riding that Saturday if you can make it."

Sunshine's eyes casually look for my reaction as I'd told her that we'd do something that weekend. "Love to man, but considering that's my last weekend at home before the ride, I wanted to spend most of it with her and the dog."

"Oh yeah, that's cool."

"Hit me up when it gets closer, and maybe I can at least meet you for a beer or a short part of the ride."

Pick asks for more details about my request to have him video me coming through town on the ride. I explain that Tanford will be the point man keeping others connected, so I can focus on the objective. His smile sags to a look of concern. "You know, a lot of us are pretty worried about this ride. Not that it'll change your mind, but it's a really stupid thing to do."

"I know."

I don't even try to argue with him. It is a stupid thing to do to the average person. I don't expect people to understand what could possibly possess me to do something like this. Like the old biker shirts used to say, 'If I have to explain it to you, you wouldn't understand.' He knows that I'm an addict, knows my mind is set, and just wants to feel like he at least gave it one more shot to talk me down from the ledge. Addicts don't care about the concern of others though. We are blatantly selfish, and we do whatever's necessary to get our fix. All other factors are irrelevant. That's why they call us 'addicts.'

As we head toward the house, my tongue gets a sensation like a small tint of barbeque. After telling Sunshine this, she asks how I'd feel about going to Rudy's for some dead animal as if I'd ever decline an offer like that. Not only do I love eating things that had a mother, but barbeque still falls into my starch free diet that I started this week. I redirect the wagon past the house and toward the original Rudy's location in Leon Springs. Sunshine is looking over the signed will. "For you, this line about not having children should say, 'that I know of.'"

"Ha, ha. Child free since '73."

How can you not love a girlfriend's sense of humor like that? I tell her that Dad as the executor will figure it all out. I imagine that he'd take the chopper. I would leave the S1K to Tracer, but if I don't survive this ride, it's doubtful that the bike will either. The Cad and house would probably just get taken back by the banks that own them. After all, I may possess and use them, but both items are far from being mine. I remind her that she's listed on the life insurance policy, so there'd be at least a little for her to start over again. She replies with, "or you could just not die." She pauses for a second and adds, "You're going to be safe on this trip, right?"

"Like I've told you before, this trip is about going as fast as I can short of getting arrested. I can't slow down for safety. Of course, I want to complete the trip safely, but I have to finish it knowing that I had nothing left. When it all ends, I have to know that I gave everything that I had and could not have made it any faster than what I did."

She gives me a playfully dirty look and utters, "HmMMM."

"Look at the bright side. If I don't make it, you'd finally get to move back to Colorado and be close to your family, which we both know you'd like."

I know it'd be tough for her if that happened, but she'd survive and be fine. People die every day. Every single person from a child in diapers to a world leader on this earth is expendable. The world is not going to stop spinning if one adrenaline junkie dies, and life will go on for her and my family and friends. She says, "I wasn't as concerned until Pick said what he did about people worrying so much about this and how stupid it is." She looks over with concern and pleas, "Just make it safe, please."

Her expression quickly goes from concern back to bounciness as she asks, “What about having a picture of Baron and I taped to your gas tank so you remember what you get to come home to after the ride?”

“No. Absolutely not,” I reply as if she’d asked a silly question. As I look over and notice her reaction, I feel the need to explain. “Remember what Niki said in that race movie? It was something to the effect that if you get too focused on being happy and what you have to lose, you start holding back, and you won’t give it everything you’ve got and take those risks. You know that I want to come back here to you and Baron, but while I’m on that bike, I have one focus; to make that ride as fast as I possibly can. The more focused that I am on driving, the safer that I’ll actually be, and the better the chance that I’ll come back in one piece. Make sense?”

As with many times in the past, Sunshine’s not in agreement with my thought process and pseudo form of logic. Just like all those other times, she knows it’s easier to just agree. After six years, she knows a brick wall has more flexibility than I do once my mind is set. She knows what I am, has even grown to love it, but that doesn’t always mean she likes it. Addicts care about the rush, not minor details like safety and aftermath. We both know that there’s more risk in this ride than anything that I’ve done before now short of heart surgery. She’s stubborn herself, and she’s more likely to do something if forbidden out of defiance regardless of her actual preference. She and I both know at this age that when you can’t change something or someone, acceptance or abandonment is all that’s left.

I love a place like Rudy’s that lets you order meat by the pound on butcher paper. You don’t have to eat filler sides, but you can order them if you want. While we eat at one of the picnic tables inside, I notice an employee walk by with a gift basket and hand it to a young guy in a camo hat with a flag on the front. I remember hearing the girl at the counter asking the young guy how long he’d been in the military and thanking him for his service. How awesome is it for this place to let soldiers know that they’re appreciated like this? As I watch other patrons holding doors open for each other and exhibiting manners that are too scarce in the world these days, I smile with the satisfaction that we made the decision to move back to Texas.

### **Thu 27 Mar 14**

Tonight, I’m off to get some inspirational ink to remind myself of my focus as I now mentally prepare for the ride. It’s a later appointment than the times that I usually schedule for artwork, so I use tonight to try one of these new XS Naranja Blast energy drinks. I bought a case of them from AbJ, a friend of mine that sells nutritional supplements. I’m used to how Red Bull affects me, but I want to try this new stuff and confirm its effectiveness before the ride. I’ll see if it helps me stay awake effectively for the late night inking.

It’s been a long time since I’ve been over to see Chicago Ink at Fortune Brothers.

*The last ink work that I had done was the biker trashathlon around my upper arm. It consisted of three skeleton hands doing my favorite things. One bony hand was holding my Smith and Wesson .44 magnum, the next was holding the fret board of my Les Paul guitar, and the third was holding the handlebar of my old Anarchist bike with a skull reflecting in the rearview mirror. This series of tattoos nicely filled in the gap above the yellow, red, and black flames on my forearm matching the lower panels of the SIK. We also talked about having him refresh the previous ink work above the trashathlon from the old days in Florida, now faded from too many years in the sun without sun block.*

They’ve remodeled the tattoo shop a little since my last visit. The old theater seats are still lining the entrance, but now, there’s a reception desk to the left with a little gal with funny

colored hair sitting behind it. Chicago Ink comes out of the back area greeting me. The two other ink slingers briefly look at me before focusing back on their works in progress. Ink tells me that the Ducati Monster outside the shop is his latest vehicular purchase. He asks if I'd mind taking it around the block to see what I think about the front end instability while he gets ready. It's not like I'm going to pass up a chance to take a Duc for a spin.

The Duc fires as soon as I hit the button, and I hear that ninety degree V-twin rumble below me. I love my S1K, but I do miss that V-twin sound of its predecessor, the old Ape. This Italian beauty seems to idle well though I notice a smell of gas. The tank is right under my nose, so it might be just fumes escaping the cap or a tank vent. As I shoot down Oblate toward San Pedro, I continue to admire the sound of this engine. That admiration is interrupted when I squeeze the brakes and feel the front end chatter. After repeating the drill several times as I circle the block back to the tattoo shop, it just seems like the rotor needs faced or replaced. The lever isn't pulsing like a failed cylinder seal, so the master cylinder should be fine. The gas smell still concerns me though.

Back inside the shop, I tell Ink my summary of the bike's brake issues and ask about the fuel smell. He had suspected either the brakes or front end on the chatter and confirms a potentially leaky fuel line under the gas tank. I strongly recommend that he doesn't wait until Christmas to fix it, or he might be singing 'Ink's nuts roasting on an open fire.' He suggests that down the road perhaps, we trade tattoo work for bike work. It's not like I have a ton of spare time to work on bike repairs, but it's an option to consider.

Behind the new desk, Ink has a printed copy of my design spanning two sheets of paper. He tapes the two parts together on his tracing table and holds it up to my arm to see if the size is about right. It's close, but one zoom adjustment later it's perfectly spaced to stretch from shoulder to wrist. We double check the words to make damn sure that they're right. The words *Leben Ohne Grenzen, Sterben Ohne Reue* are German for 'Live without limits, die without regrets.' Since German is neither of our native languages, it's more important to check the words as it won't be as obvious as if the words 'cool guy' were erroneously written as 'douche bag.' Ink transfers the design to my outstretched left arm, and we triple check the words one last time for good measure before he sticks that first needle in me. While the craftsman carefully sets up his work area with the needles, gloves, and small caps of ink, I show him the Snake Slayer IV that I've been carrying lately. We talk about guns until he is ready to start the new decal and directs me to the chair.

The sharp prick of the first outliner needle stings in a unique combination of pleasure and pain, but my nerves quickly adjust. With half of my torso already in ink and having gone through heart surgery twice, my body is more than used to needles. This isn't even a painful location. The wrist is a little bony and might sting, but it's not terribly close to the armpit, and the ditch isn't the worst place. It's not like he's going to be jackhammering my elbow again like he did on the right arm, which hurt like a sonofabitch.

The filling follows the outlining, and soon, the first tattoo of my left half is complete. With my arm down, the letters at the top look italicized. They straighten out when my arm is horizontal since that's when we applied the stencil. You just can't expect tattoos to always look perfect on moving body parts. I like it, and that's what matters since I paid for it and have to wear it. It's pushing one AM, so I thank and pay Ink and aim for home to get a few hours of sleep before the alarm sounds in a few hours.

## **Fri 28 Mar 14**

I can't believe the alarm is blasting already. I've only been lying here about three and a half hours, and I don't think I slept for more than an hour total. I'll consider the testing of the new energy drink a success and mark it as 'effective' in my notes. Staying awake when you need to sleep is bad. Staying awake when you're doing high speeds on two wheels is good.

## **Sat 29 Mar 14**

Skyenet says it shouldn't rain in Corpus this morning, so I'll drive the chopper to the beach and watch the sun rise over the ocean once more before my trip. Some time alone in my head might not be such a bad thing right now anyway. Corpus is 160 miles away, so I better leave soon to make sure that I get to see the sun rise over the water.

It's warmer than the twenty-six degrees we had three weeks ago here, but it'll still be a chilly ride at five AM today. Wifebeater and jeans will not be the attire on this brisk morning. I'll be covered in the worn leather coat that I've had since the mid nineties, my YCC beanie, the skull mask, shades, and gloves of course. The beanie is nice for keeping the personalized molded tactical ear buds in place to provide some soothing metal for the ride. I tell Sunshine and Baron 'goodbye' though neither barely stirs at this time on a Saturday. As the garage door opens, I unplug the battery tender from the chopper and roll it into the driveway. Next is my drill of hitting the garage door button, scurrying out the garage, jumping just enough on the way out to hurdle the light beam at the bottom, and avoiding hitting my head on the closing door.

After arranging my gear, I roll the chopper down the driveway and into the street. Even with the flexible baffles in place in the monstrous FSD pipes, 121 cubic inches of air exploding through them is going to be loud. Pissing off the neighbors will eventually happen due to noise from the chopper, tools, or music. Hopefully, firearms won't be the noise that gets me in trouble with the home owner's association, or I'll have more critical concerns. With the chopper pointed correctly, I go through the standard starting procedure. Gas is on, compression releases are in, enrichener is up, and the transmission is in neutral. Two squirts of the throttle and a turn of the key and the beast fires, sputters, and dies before I can work the throttle to maintain life. Another turn of the key brings it back to a noisy idle. I quickly drop into first gear and let out the clutch to get out of the neighborhood as quickly and quietly as possible. My efforts are wasted as the exhaust bellow echoes throughout San Antonio suburbia waking anyone who isn't still drunk and passed out from last night. Fortunately, it's only a few blocks to the exit gates.

I love driving through this city in the dark without hundreds of other people on the road. I10 takes me through the lower level curves to I35 North and I37 South toward the nearest beach only a few hours away. The amount of cars and lights shrinks as I exit the southeast corner of the city along the same path that I took last weekend to Beeville. I37 will take me almost right to the ocean. I'm glad that I dressed in warm gear and didn't pull my usual habit of dressing too lightly and freezing. The familiar look of the surrounding darkness speckled with white lights coming at me to the left, white lights in the rearview mirror, and red lights in front of me is a scene that I've experienced many times over the years. It's such a feeling of tranquility. Most of the world isn't even awake, so they can't call me or bother me, especially on a chopper. Thanks to Lasik and sobriety, my vision is crisp except for a little starburst effect on the red and white eyes peeking at me from the darkness.

*Years ago, this view was seen through blurry eyes as I'd drive back to my parents' place after a drunken night at ISU or UNI. I'd try to race back home for a forty-five minute nap before having to get up for whatever summer or internship work I was doing at the time. Sometimes, it*

*was the old '78 Cougar, and a lot of times, it was on the old General. Whether on two wheels or four, I'd tear across the back roads of Iowa in the middle of the early morning as fast as the vehicle would take me. I was always one motion of wildlife away from injury or death and one unfortunate location of a patrol car from jail. The sleep deprivation was probably as much of a risk contributor as the quantity of cheap whiskey in my system. At the time, it was just standard behavior for me, but it almost scares me to think back to it now. Like I once told Juano, my college roommate in that basement penthouse dump off Hyland in Ames, "It's a good thing I'm immortal, or I'd be dead by now." I didn't even realize how ridiculous the statement was until I saw his reaction. The further I went in life, the more significance that statement carried.*

Skynet said that the sun wasn't supposed to be rising for a while, but I can see Mother Nature's brush strokes of orange and blue across the sky in the distance. I'm still miles from the beach, but there's nothing preventing me from enjoying the brightening color scheme of the sky as I continue on my ride.

Finally, I enter Corpus and rattle to the north across the bridge. The bike hesitates as the angle of the bridge changes the fuel position in the tank and lets me know to turn the petcock to the 'reserve' position. I'd stopped about half way here for fuel, but the range on this chopper isn't great as I learned on the Biketoberfest trip. It should be no surprise with a huge engine, and that high performance carb isn't exactly tuned for fuel economy. I still wonder if it wouldn't be worth dropping one size on the main jet. I'll worry about it later I guess.

I pull up to the beach parking and put the kickstand down in the sand. The sun is now lighting up the whole sky. There are a couple of people walking in the distance, but it's mostly just me, the bike, and the gulls squawking as they fly over us. The smell of salt air would let a blind man know where he is. I can remember the first time that I smelled that sea air, which was just a few miles south of here in South Padre for the first spring break. If I caught a scent of coconut tanning oil right now, I could close my eyes and think that I was back there and back in time sitting on the beach. I have a lot of good memories from the old days, but again, if you spend too much time looking in the rearview mirror, you won't see where you're heading.

A couple comes walking by the bike and me. The guy stops to slobber over the bike, and even his wife takes a second look at the sparkling metal beast next to me. He asks what kind it is, and I tell him that it's a Y Chrome Custom as I point to the name on the air cleaner. The guy looks confused as YCC was far from a household name. I explain that I used to build choppers in Florida, and this is the last chopper that I built, which I made for myself. He compliments me on my work and takes one more look over his shoulder as his wife leads him away. That's one more testament to the fact that this Gripper is my best work to date.



**Figure 18 Gripper in Corpus**

The USS Lexington is floating off to the right and just out from the shore. Back to the right is where I took my parents and sisters when they visited years ago. Right in front of me is where Sunshine and I let Baron swim in the ocean for the first time a couple years ago, even though he was more interested in chasing birds than swimming. It's so hard to believe that it's been almost two years since we came down here that day to pick up the chopper parts from the chrome shop. It's harder to believe that it's been fifteen years since I was here with my family. Now, both parents are retired, both sisters are married, and Organisis has three little boys with her husband.

The next time that I plan to be on a beach watching the sun rise over an ocean is in sixteen days from Jax Beach. Hopefully, I'm sitting safely on my bike, enjoying the same salt air smell, and watching the same bright ball of fire in the sky reflecting off the waves in the water past the sand like I am today. If things go well, my driving and criminal record will still be intact,

and I'll have driven the whole distance coast to coast without stopping for anything but refueling. There are a lot of 'if's between now and that safe, successful arrival in Jax.

Hope in one hand, shit in the other hand, and tell me which one fills up first. I'm not relying on hopes and dreams to make it happen. Hope is for the passive and the weak. I have to make it happen. I need to have confidence in my planning, my machine, and myself. Brains got me this far, now come the balls to get it done. I'll be taking way more risks on this ride than I normally would. Generally, on an interstate, I wouldn't dare go over three digits, even with the V1, as there could be a highway patrol hiding anywhere. Add factors like wildlife in the dark, and the safety risk grows more with higher speeds. I got up to about 120 mph coming back from Colorado until I passed a raccoon carcass and missed it by just inches. Had I been a bike width to the left, I would've ended up lying there splattered on the road just like the bandit looking critter. We'd both bleed and wait for a truck to find us at dawn. I'm not slowing down for safety on this drive, so the thermal vision system will have to bridge the gap between speed and vision at night.

Every decision made has to be with regard to completing the objective in as little time as possible. Safety is not the primary objective by any stretch. In fact, things like safety concern and fear are counterproductive to the mission. Thinking about what you have to lose is not how to achieve the best performance. Full focus has to be given to the objective. It requires complete selfishness. Since I'm an addict, this will be easy for me. Nothing will matter except driving that German missile from one coast to the other in as little time as possible. When I uncurl from the fetal riding position and set my boots in the Florida sand, I want to know that I gave it every ounce of effort that I could with nothing left and no excuses. I have to know that whatever the time is, I did the best that I could with what I have. That's the only chance I have at some type of peace from this. Anything short of that will be unacceptable. If I get arrested, have to take a nap, have mechanical problems, or make a wrong turn at Albuquerque, it'll eat me from the inside out to my skin until I do it again and achieve the objective. We addicts obsess about things like the perfect high.

Of course, I don't have to do this. By that, I mean no one is forcing me to do it, but I want it in the worst way. Nobody has ever forced me to take a shot or do something stupid and fun either. The only person that ever makes me do any of it is me, and only pussies blame others for their own mistakes. We can be our own source of destruction and worst enemy, but we can also be our strongest motivator. Sometimes, the best competitor is the one in the mirror. The only competition with the closest skills and abilities is that person behind the glass staring back at us with the same intensity burning in their eyes as ours. With those factors being equal, the outstanding component is drive or will. It takes away all the excuses. If we aren't continually outperforming ourselves, we aren't trying as hard as we should. We don't want it badly enough. When we make our own decisions as free men and women, we can truly live or die with the results with no one else to thank or blame but ourselves. The whiskey has been a numbing agent for me in the years before, but now, I can appreciate so much beauty that I never could before like this sunrise. Unfortunately, one addiction just replaces the other, and now I need these adrenaline shots to keep sane. I can't ask Sunshine or my family to understand, but I hope they can just accept it, whatever the outcome.

If things don't go as planned, there's no reason for anger or sorrow. Hell, people should be happy for me. Just think of all the experiences that I've had in my years, and those are all you can take with you in the end. I have so many incredible memories of growing up in that little town in Iowa with my parents, sisters, and our dog, Benji. They all did so much for me over the years that I never learned to appreciate until so much later. Of course, my life today couldn't be

better than it is with Sunshine. She's truly a chrome sparkle on a sheet of black leather. I think of all the girls that I had to plow through to get to her. She lets me be exactly who I want and need to be, whatever that might mean. That's why we work so well. Having that understanding and ability to be myself allows me to combine the freedom of being single with the partnership of being with the perfect girl. She means the world to me, and I'd hate to lose her, but if I'm dead, it won't matter to me. All the people left behind are the ones that hurt. Dying is the easy part. At least, she'll have Baron and vice versa. The poor furry guy will probably be confused and lost for a while, but he'll still continue with his eating, sleeping, and playing routine. The family will still have each other as well. No one is going to cease to exist because one person passes. I'm not saying people close to me wouldn't miss me, but they'd all be fine. Baron would be okay, except for when Sunshine makes him hike in the Rockies where there's no damn oxygen to breathe. I just hope that they would all remember that I lived life exactly how I wanted with intensity and that I died the same way with adrenaline in my veins, an evil grin on my face, and a twisted sparkle in my eyes. There's not a bit of tragedy in a story like that. As twisted as it is, living and dying how you want is the happy ending so few people get to experience. Truly living is the only thing worth dying for.

I don't plan on letting that happen though. I've beaten death so many times already, and I don't plan on starting to lose now. Are you ready, Mother Fucker? I am. I'm not running from you this time. I'm chasing your ass down at three digits plus, and you better get the fuck out of my way. I know what I have to do, so I'm doing it. I'm fucking doing this.

I straddle the chopper, take one more look at the sun over the ocean, and turn the key. The engine comes alive overpowering the noise of the seagulls and dull crashes of the ocean waves. In parallel, my brain washes away the images of peaceful nature as the focus turns back to hammering two wheels down asphalt. I roar through Corpus and shoot back onto the interstate. The shadow of a biker and his chrome horse remains just slightly ahead of me along the highway below us. He may have the lead, but I'll do my damndest to catch him all the way back to San Antonio.

### **Wed 02 Apr 14**

One of these Rock N' Load cases will be perfect for shipping all the accessories to San Diego. The pre-cut version for an AR-15 and sidearm won't work, but the three layer foam blanks will be a good starting point. I put the thin piece in first to cover the bottom of the case. I'm sure Sunshine won't mind if I borrow a thin butcher knife from her kitchen to cut the two thicker pieces of foam to the shapes that I need.

This is pretty slick, if I do say so myself. Most of the items fit in one layer though some of the bigger pieces bridge across both layers. Everything is in the case and protected by foam on all sides. I have mirrors, the vision system and mounts, a V1, fuel dump fittings, tools, the cable harness, GoPro cameras and accessories, and the phone mount all neatly organized in the case.

With the bike accessories boxed and ready to ship, I gather everything else that has to ship tomorrow. My packing list is coming in handy to identify what ships to San Diego and what ships to Jax. Only a few clothes need to ship to Tracer's place in Florida. In addition to the case, there will be two other boxes going west to California. The riding gear alone will take up at least one box by the time I cram in the leathers, helmet, gloves, and boots. This tank bag with its shoulder strap should work well for easy access to things like my wallet and extra GoPro discs and a battery. In another box, I can pack the catheters and diapers along with whatever gear doesn't fit in the first box. There is no part of me that wants to have to use the diapers, but I don't

want to ruin my leathers either. With all the goodies sitting by the garage door, I'll be able to pack them into Sunshine's wagon in the morning and get them on their way to where they'll be waiting for me.

### **Sat 05 Apr 14**

I couldn't really find much on sniper diets on Skynet, but feedback from Batman, a former soldier and coworker, and some of the forums indicate that I should be eating MREs before the drive. That diet combined with some Imodium AD will be the best preparation to avoid justifying the purchase of the adult diapers. I find a website that has them in stock and offers a decent assortment. I'm assuming these are the full meals like the ones that I had some time ago from the gun show or some military charity event. I place my order for about three days worth of MREs to help clog my system. Damn, I don't want to have to shit myself on that ride, or it'll go from unpleasant to miserable faster than the speed of me.

While talking on the phone to the old man before he leaves for his shop, I check the E-Trade account online. I took ten grand that I had saved and put it in the highest performing mutual funds on E-Trade. In only a few months, that ten grand magically turned into almost eight grand. Sonofabitch! Sometimes, I swear all the things people told me to do when I was a kid seem like dumb ideas in practicality now. All my life, adults have told me to grow up, pick a job, buy a house, marry a wife, and invest in stocks for the future. Every time that I've tried any of those alleged pieces of good advice, it has always blows up in my face. I need to be smarter and just bury cash in coffee cans in the yard. This is exactly why I'd rather save the money and invest in my own little ventures. There doesn't seem to be any decent investment opportunities available for the amount of money that I have. At least, if I invest in my personal misguided schemes, I feel like I have only myself to blame if it fails. If I do fail and the project loses money like almost everything else that I've tried, the venture becomes tax deductible fun like the others. That beats losing it in the stock market or having to pay more in taxes so crooked politicians can piss it away on my behalf.

Sunshine and I meet Tanford for breakfast at the local Cracker Barrel to talk live once more before the ride. He has some new whizbang pen that somehow records what he's writing. I'm not exactly sure how it works, but it is a cool little gadget for note taking. We go through the process for calls, calculations, updates, and notifications. I also walk him through what I have to do when I arrive in San Diego, timing, and any other details either of us have considered.

After finishing our breakfast, we all walk out to the wagon, so I can give him a few cans of the XS orange energy drink from AbJ. The least I can do is to give Tanford some high octane drinks to help him stay awake. After all, how many other people would be willing to pull an all nighter to provide ground support for my little adventure? Sunshine thanks him for playing this part in my project. "Thank you so much for doing this. I sure as hell don't have the technology background, and there's no way I'd be able to stay awake all night, so I'm glad you're able to keep him focused and safe!"

She gives him a sincere hug as I chuckle inside at the relative definition of the word 'safe.' I guess it might be safer to have ground support than not to have it.

Since it's our last Saturday night to go out to a nice dinner before my ride, Sunshine and I make the short drive out I10 to Boerne. She wants us to try a little restaurant called Cypress Grille. As we locate parking, it looks like a small car event down one side street from the main drag. We're only able to see a few older cars, but we make a note to walk by the street after dinner in case it's still happening.

Dinner is comprised of more reasonable portions versus the common Texas sized portions served at most restaurants. I used to love huge portions and the perceived value, but lately, I just feel miserable because I eat everything on the plate. The Midwestern upbringing prevents me from wasting a single bite though I guess I could just take leftovers home for later. The quality of the food at this restaurant is incredible, and it's something that I can enjoy as opposed to Sunshine's preferred level of fancy food. She did go to culinary school, so she appreciates the finer things in food like I do about vehicles or guns I guess. The young waiter did a decent job of serving us, but that was one dry guy. Unlike me, he has many years to develop his social skills. I can rake on him all I want. At the end of the day, I'm the old dog refusing to learn new tricks, and he has youth.

I've been giving Sunshine a bad time throughout dinner for checking weather on her phone when we we're sitting right by a window. She simultaneously laughs and flips me the bird as I observe that seeing rain out the window might be an even more accurate indicator than her phone's weather report.

We walk out of the restaurant and see that it's just slightly misting. I ask her to check her phone to see if it's raining outside. Before I get the words out of my mouth, she already has her phone in front of her face, and the screen is lit. She then hears me laughing, stops, and gives me a dirty look. She realizes the smart ass intent of my request, which I clearly thought was funnier than she did. After taking a playful attempt at a punch in the shoulder from her, we walk toward the car event to see if any of the old cars are still sitting in the dreary weather.

### **Sun 06 Apr 14**

Poor Baron wants to go to the park, but I open the door and show him that it's raining. He'll have to suffer inside the house today without his Sunday morning exercise. After a few errands, Sunshine and I both agree that some mozzarella sticks at Twin Peaks would hit the spot.

I notice a big Glide parked in the motorcycle parking area in front of the patio of the breastaurant. The dedicated driver, not bothered by the rain, removes the primary coat as he sits at the table behind Sunshine. I see the Air Force patches on his vest as he takes off his rain gear. Soon, he walks over and asks us, "Can I buy you guys a beer?"

We give him confused looks, and he points at my shirt that says 'Guns are like rubbers, rather have one and not need it than vice versa.' "I appreciate your blatant support of the second amendment and want to say thanks."

"Wow, man, I really appreciate the offer, but I can't drink until after I finish a cross country bike ride I'm doing next week for wounded warriors and fallen officers. Thanks though."

He nods and smiles, shakes my hand in understanding, and goes back to his beer. We settle our tab with the bouncy, clothing impaired waitress before leaving the table. On the way by the wet biker, I stop by the former airman's table. "By the way, thanks for your service. Be safe out there on two wheels on those slick roads, brother." We shake once more, and Sunshine and I walk outside and into the mist.

On the way home, I tell Sunshine how much I appreciate little things like that. I appreciate that airman's service that helps protect my freedom to shoot, ride, and do everything else that I enjoy. Perhaps, he appreciates seeing people celebrate those freedoms that he helps to defend. Whatever the case, it brings me a smile and sense of pride.

Later in the day, Pick finally calls and asks if I want to meet him and Uncle Eighties at Boneheadz. I ask if they're still on bikes as I thought Uncle Eighties' rental bike was due back to

the dealer an hour ago. He confirms that they're on four connected wheels, so I call them pussies and tell them that I'll meet them on the chopper shortly.

I'd taken the chopper to get gas earlier and noticed a new exhaust rattle. I hadn't noticed it on the way back from Corpus the other day, but my ears were probably ringing on most of that trip. I'm guessing that one of the baffles came loose in the exhaust. It's not the end of the world, and I'm sure that the bike should be able to make it to Boneheadz without exploding because of it. The weather is far from great, but at least, the rain has somewhat slowed down compared to earlier. A bike ride in shitty weather is still better than a day at work in the best weather.

After ensuring that the chopper is parked and stable on the angled parking lot outside of Boneheadz, I take a bar stool next to the other two pieces of biker trash. The waitress is as attractive as one would expect from this strange little hole in the wall bar. She's not the most responsive as she seems more concerned with counting her tips for the shift change. I sarcastically thank Pick for his comment at the UPS Store the other day about being worried about my trip in front of Sunshine. He apologizes, even though we both know that I'm not mad and just giving him shit about not thinking that one through first. We talk about bikes, music and Uncle Eighties' plan to move to SA soon.

After a few beers for those guys, a couple orange juices for me, and some metal polluted with rap on the juke box, the three of us walk outside. They look at the chopper under the street light as I bundle myself for the short but cool ride home. Pick looks at me and says, "Well, good luck." Uncle Eighties echoes Pick's comment. Pick continues with, "Come back in one piece."

"I hesitate to quote *HD and the Marlboro Man* when they say it's better to be dead and cool than alive and uncool. I don't want to become a self fulfilling prophecy. Instead, I'll just say that it'll be over soon. There are only three options. I'm coming out of this dead, jailed, or legend."

We all have a slightly uncomfortable laugh and part ways. They slide into the shelter of the warm, comfortable inside of the Tahoe, and I ride the most efficient machine for turning fuel and air into noise into the cold drizzle. Regardless of the weather or rattle, it always just feels so good to be on this bike. A smile hides behind the skeleton teeth on my face mask as I rip up the entrance ramp. There's the feeling of that ducktailed seat kicking me in the ass thanks to the 121 inch V-twin between my legs. I let off the throttle once the bike well exceeds highway speed. A quick glance down at the exhaust lets me see the left over fuel burning blue at the exit of the pipes in the dark night. As a red blooded American male, blue fire shooting out a chrome exhaust pipe is just damn cool.

## **Chapter 13: Burnout Box**

### **Thu 10 Apr 14**

I feel like such a bitch complaining about having to get up at two-thirty in the morning having been up until after ten last night. It's hard to fathom how I used to get by on about three hours of sleep on average for the two years or so before I had heart surgery. The body will adjust to what it must. Maybe, I'm spoiling it by sleeping too much these days. Maybe, I'm extending my life, but would I rather get more time now in my youth or more time later when I'm too old to do anything? I think I just answered my own question. I need to live a little more and sleep a little less. Three hours a night wasn't even close to healthy, but I shouldn't need a full seven either.

Sunshine's older sister, Rooster, flew in last night to be Sunshine's ladsitter while I'm out. Yes, Sunshine is an independent adult, but she still can't drive until six months have lapsed

since her seizure back in late December. I know it's frustrating for her to have to rely on cabs and coworkers for rides, but it's just a few months. The important thing is that she's hasn't had any more seizures and seems to be doing just fine. It would've been nice to have her meet me at the finish line in Jax, but all things considered, this is probably the right choice and keeps Baron out of the kennel. It's good for the two sisters to get to spend time together as well. I'm sure Rooster, whether she'll admit it or not, will enjoy a short break from her ankle biter's constant need for attention. That in turn will give her hubby quality time with his daughter. It sounds like wins all the way around.

Everything that I should need for the trip has either arrived in San Diego or is packed and ready for me to haul with me on the flight. With fifteen minutes remaining before the time I want to leave for the airport, I wake both of the sleeping sisters and Baron. I'm not sure which of the three groans the most about having to get up at what they consider an ungodly hour. Baron probably shows the most enthusiasm while the other two drag toward the door and to the car. I drive us to the airport and let Rooster take over once the wagon stops at the curb of the concourse. Sunshine hugs me a little longer than normal, and I can only imagine the concern she's burying inside. Fortunately, the sleepiness is probably numbing the actual fear she may have if my flight was leaving later in the day. Baron could care less. He has no concept of why his *meister* is getting out of the car when everyone else is staying inside. The dog doesn't know what his idiot owner is planning to do before they see each other again. The only thoughts in his furry head are probably the confusion as to why this morning is not like either weekday schedules or weekend schedules. After all, he's a creature of habit that prefers structure just like his master.

With the .45 Snake Slyer in my bag, I declare the firearm at the ticket counter. The ticket guy soon escorts me to some back room to wait for an inspector. Surprisingly, the security guy doesn't even ask me to open the gun case to show him that it's unloaded. He just takes swabs off the outside of the case. I'm guessing he finds explosive material. It's called gun powder residue, and it's probably on the outside of most gun cases. Hopefully, that gun makes it to California okay. I would expect the destination state processes to be much more cumbersome than Texan processes due purely to familiarity and local culture.

Here I am sitting on another airplane. I'm in the aisle seat that I reserved as soon as I ordered the ticket. The window seats make me feel trapped, and we all know middle seats just suck. At least this time, I'm not crammed in this winged, stuffed shirt, sardine can for someone else. This time, there's only one person I'm doing this for; me. As I sit here in my mentally neutral state, I can't help but notice the activities of the guy sitting up a row and across from me on the flight to Phoenix. He goes from watching racing videos on the bigger screened version of my phone to *Wedding Crashers* on a tablet once the stewardess announces permission to use larger electronic devices. I used to love that movie and watched it many times sitting in that old apartment in Jacksonville, but that was six years ago. In these times where any media product is only relevant for a month or three, it's surprising to see Vince and Owen settling divorce disputes here on a plane when they originally performed that on the big screen nearly a decade ago.

On the second leg of my flight, a long haired kid points to the seat next to me, which lets me know that I need to get out of my aisle seat to let him take his. The hair, clothes, and complexion remind me of a young Kurt Cobain without the exit wound in the back of his head. If I had to guess, this guy's probably an aspiring musician trying to mimic Cobain's look. Hopefully, he doesn't go down on a shotgun to make it more realistic someday.

My fellow traveler instantly begins complaining about the airline almost losing his guitar. It comes across as more of a statement or point of conversation as I don't really sense much genuine anger in his voice. It's almost as if he's trying to act upset but is almost incapable of that emotion. We end up shooting the shit the whole way to San Diego. He's been in Houston with his family for four months and is now heading back west to continue his musical career. I'm impressed to hear that this kid is actually on the *Warped* tour. His group has to get up at six bells to work as caterers in the morning and roadies at times to earn their place in the show, but it's still an accomplishment for a musician to be on a recognized tour like that. Their chores allow them to play on the acoustic side stage and sell their CDs and T-shirts.

As we compare notes about my book promotion versus his music promotion, he realizes how much older I am than him. The kid sits back in his chair designed perfectly for chiropractic business building and says, "Wow, you grew up in the nineties. What was that like?"

"Actually, I was just a kid in the eighties, went to college in the nineties, and am still far from grown up."

"What's one of the biggest differences do you think between then and now?"

"The main difference is probably communication changes. Think about it. We didn't have cell phones when we went to the bars. We just all kind of showed up randomly without texting every minute of the night and coordinating schedules. If we got drunk and lost, we had to figure out how to get home or somewhere to sleep for the night because we couldn't call a friend's phone. If you met a girl, you had a few hours to close the deal. You didn't get her number to text her later or friend her on Facebook for later."

He just stares at me in disbelief like I'd just told him I was an alien. It's obvious that we have very different life experiences. The gap is made more blatant when he comments that one day they sold six-hundred bucks worth of CDs in a very short time, and his share meant one more month that he could afford his ninety dollar phone bill. I guess he eats what he can from the catering gig, and I have no idea how lodging works on a tour. How times have changed that this young musician's top priority for money isn't food, rent, a car payment, or even gas. The main financial concern for him is of all things his cell phone, and I'd just finished telling him about life without one in my college days. I feel like a caveman at a Best Buy around kids like this. It's so hard to fathom traveling home for months. This young rocker may not have a Caddy, chopper, and S1K in the garage, but he also doesn't have a mortgage to pay on the house attached to the garage or the payments on the Caddy. He's young, unattached, completely free, and doing what he loves. I'm not sure that it gets much better than that for a guy his age. As much as I enjoy the material things that I have, it's too easy to become a slave to them as they come at a cost of both dollars and freedom. There's nothing saying that this kid won't end up being a rich rock star with a fleet of sports cars someday like Sixx and others. If he does, he'll have gotten them by doing what he loves too.

After exchanging information and agreeing to swap one of his CDs for one of my books, I walk to the San Diego airport baggage claim office and tell the desk jockey that I need to claim my baggage with a firearm. He gives me a confused look and tells me that there are none. When he senses my desire to start yelling at him, he asks me, "Was it in one of the long gun cases or just your normal luggage bag?"

"Just my checked roller bag."

"Then it's out there," he says as he casually points at the luggage carousel.

As opposed to asking him if he sees any concern with my firearm floating around a carousel where anyone could grab it, I haul ass over to the carousel and run to my bag as soon as

I see it. I'm absolutely shocked that as much hell that's being raised over gun control right now, the state of California of all places lets my luggage containing a .45 float out there for anyone to grab. It's shocking, but I'm sure as hell not going to beg for more firearm processes to follow.

I'm constantly reminded why I hate traveling. One other unlucky traveler stands in front of me in the prepaid, incorrectly coined 'express line' at the rental wreck office. The two of us watch people walk in from the street with no reservation moving faster through their line than we are in ours. Finally, the equally incorrectly named 'customer service specialist' behind the counter plods through a couple reservations, and I'm at the counter at last. He looks at his screen and awkwardly tries to upsale me. "Would you be interested in upgrading to a Camaro convertible for just ten dollars more per day? It's a little sportier."

"Didn't I reserve a Mustang convertible?" I ask.

"Uh, yes you did."

"Okay, so what's your basis for thinking the Camaro 'vert is so much sportier that it justifies the ten dollars additional cost per day?"

It's not like we're talking about going from a Mustang to a Corvette. The two cars he's comparing probably cost almost exactly the same. Not so shockingly, his knowledge of sports cars is even worse than his speed of handling customers. I stick to the Mustang and take my bags outside to see the car that I'll be driving for the next few days.

There is my white Mustang convertible. Behold the pale white horse, and the man that sat in it was Axe, and hell followed with him. After adjusting the seats and mirrors from the obviously vertically challenged previous driver, I grab my phone and program the address for SoCalGuns where a box of .45 long colt hollow points is waiting for me. I point my steed through the city toward the gun shop according to the directions provided by the know it all electronic device. After paying for the box of boom, I tell the guy behind the counter that I only need a handful of rounds. I take eight and give him back the remaining brass, lead, and powder. Carrying additional weight isn't going to help fuel mileage. Will a few rounds of ammo make a big difference? No, they probably won't. However, if I run out of gas a mile from a gas station, I'll be kicking myself for any unnecessary weight that I was hauling. It's always better to plan as perfectly as possible and avoid regret before it happens.

I feel like a helpless idiot as I program the address to the BMW dealership into the phone. There's no reason that I shouldn't be able to look at a map and just drive to the dealership, yet here I sit depending so heavily on this phone. It's smart to use the best tool for the job, but at what point does efficiency overshadow simplicity and independence? As long as the phone functions, everything will be fine and spelled out in detail for me to make the short jaunt to BMW. If the phone fails, I'll be lost without a clue, have to pull over, and have to call for directions, which I couldn't do if my phone had failed. I begrudgingly follow the phone's instructions blindly to the BMW dealership and pull into the last parking space on the side of the building. There are only bikes parked out here, so hopefully, nobody will get pissed that I'm parking a car back here.

I enter the front door of the dealership and walk into the showroom. It's packed with bikes, gear, and accessories like most motorcycle dealerships. There are a couple of offices on one side and a parts counter on the other side. I ask the first person I see where I can find Stein in Service. Soon, I'm shaking the hand of the young manager of the service department as he enthusiastically shows me around the dealership. He starts clearing the path to my bike and already has another guy clearing a corner in the shop for me to do my work.

Once my bike is sitting in the open shop spot, Stein guides me to the boxes of goodies that I'd shipped here in advance. I'm relieved to see the boxes in good shape indicating unlikely damage to the expensive components packed inside them. Near them sits an old vintage bike and a land speed bike. The land speed bike is hidden under plastics, but one look at the tank and dash make it clear that the basis of this bullet is an S1K similar to mine. Stein explains all the work that had gone into the beast. In addition to the Akra exhaust system and race computer, they also installed high compression pistons and performed some work on the heads. BMW is very protective of their bike brains, so the tuners had to purchase all the codes for that bike to be able to modify the programming and tune it for optimum performance. That and the aerodynamic plastic skin is how this two wheeled technological advancement achieved a top speed of 227.5 mph on its fastest pass. That's amazing to me considering the bike is only capable of about 192 mph out of the box. Based on my Texas Mile performance, I don't know that my bike could actually get there with over 220 pounds of yours truly in the saddle. Stein says that they have almost the original cost of the bike invested in this thing in modifications. I can't say that I can justify that, but I can't say that I wouldn't love to hit two-hundred mph on my S1K in a future Texas Mile. I better get to my bike and focus on the task at hand.

Before I start preparing the S1K for the most important journey of its young life, Stein takes me into the office of the dealership's co-owner, Gary. Hanging on the wall is an article from a local newspaper describing how Gary set the record for a cross country drive on a motorcycle covering 2232 miles in thirty-six hours. He went that far without putting a foot on the ground with the help of a trailer full of go-go juice behind his bike. This explains even more why Stein and Gary have been so supportive of my goal to do this ride. There can only be a handful of people mentally cross wired enough to try such a feat, and the dealership helping me is partially owned by the guy that holds the current record.

At my temporary work station on the end of the line of motorcycle lifts, I begin to open the packages and sort through all the tools and parts as I think about where to begin. Rearview mirrors only need four lock nuts, so I start there. Unfortunately, my excitement combines with temporary clumsiness, and I drop one of the nuts down in the bike in an unknown location where it will remain for the foreseeable future. As much as I hate to bug the mechanics, I need a replacement part. One of the guys is happy to sort through his spare fasteners drawer until he finds me a suitable substitute.

As I continue installing the mirrors, thermal camera, and bracket, the mechanic next to me begins telling me more about Gary's ride. This guy had worked on the seventy-two gallon fuel trailer for the trip, which theoretically would fuel Gary's BMW tour bike all the way across the United States without having to stop once for gas. Gary hadn't put a foot down from San Diego until a couple hundred miles from the east coast of Florida. That's where he was stopped by Florida Highway Patrol. It wasn't that Gary was doing a wheelie or three digits. The trailer's tail light had developed a loose connection and resulting flicker, and the officer was trying to be helpful by letting Gary know about the marginally functioning tail light. That had to be so frustrating to have made it that far and get stopped so close to the goal. Regardless, 2232 miles in thirty-six hours of straight riding on a bike by any human is impressive. I need to do better than that, but I'm going to have to drive a lot faster than Gary. Even with my gearing and additional fuel capacity, I'm going to have to make a lot of fuel stops on the way compared to his zero stops. Those fuel stops kill time and average speed, but beating his time isn't impossible. In order to be the best, you just have to beat the best.

One guy climbs off his forklift to look at what I'm doing and talk for a while. I install the fittings for the in-flight refueling process and tie it down to the bracket for the thermal vision screen. As I continue working on the thermal vision system, I hear a female voice behind me ask, "So I hear you have a CTS-V too?"

It's the darker haired girl of the two girls that I'd seen out front earlier. I'm not sure if she was hired as the wife or girlfriend of one of the other employees, eye candy for the customers, or has the unique combination of looks and abilities. It's impossible not to notice her respectable form hiding under the skull decorated pants similar to the pair Sunshine wears, which I think look more like pajamas than public wear. With the gothic hair and obvious time on the beach, she brings to mind terms like day walker or tanpire. I show her the pic of the Cadillac on my phone, and she shows me the pic from her phone of her CTS-V. It's a previous generation sedan and also decked in all black. Parents show each other pics of their kids, and car people show each other pics of their vehicles. Car people probably don't want to see kid pics any more than parents want to see car pics, but most people feel more obligated to fake interest in kid pics than car pics. I however prefer to be honest about lack of interest in kid pics to prevent having to see every pic of the kid and its subsequent siblings through college graduation over time.

She notices my Dragon's Tail souvenir T-shirt and tells me that she used to live in North Carolina, which explains the accent that I doubted was local. Like many others I've met over the years, she used to ride bikes years ago but quit after moving to the city due to the higher perceived danger factor. Axe '98 would've made the standard assumption that if the girl talks to me first, the only possible solution is that she wants me. If I'd tried this stunt back then, I'm less than convinced that Axe '98 would've focused on the primary task. Most likely he would've already asked her to have drinks later tonight and be planning an all night hotel desecration risking the success of the ride. Axe 2.0 is still an addict but with better priorities and his perfect girl already at home. Once an addict smells a chance of a high, nothing else is even a remote factor in decision making, even a competing addiction. It may be considered but quickly ignored. It's just that Axe 2.0 is now addicted to adrenaline and not as easily distracted by the scent of whiskey or perfume as Axe '98. It's good to be tempted occasionally by past addictions just to remind myself why they are in the past and know that I have successfully replaced them. I say that because I don't believe a true addict ever kicks addiction. We only replace them with something else that is hopefully less destructive. Addictions are like energy. They are neither created, nor destroyed, but only transformed.

Stein comes by my station right after I've confirmed operation of the thermal vision system. He's thoroughly impressed and slobbers over the technology as I demonstrate by walking in front of the camera, so he can see my white image on the screen of gray inanimate objects around the shop. I tell Stein that I've debated making a kit for adding this feature to the S1K but question whether anyone would buy it or not. He comments that it may not be as desirable on the S1K, but it could have a market for the larger touring bikes. We discuss the possibility of working together in the future on a possible kit for those bikes.

Another employee walks through the side entrance on crutches. Apparently, he'd just been hurt in a bike wreck. I wonder how many times people have told him how lucky he is to have not been hurt worse. I wonder if he responds with the same comment Tracer and I do when we say 'If I was lucky, I wouldn't have wrecked in the first place.'

Not only does this dealership have a load of BMW's, but they also have some weird looking bikes that might be electric and a couple old Ural Russian bikes with sidecars. There was one old Ural in the back by my workspace that looked like it was from World War II. On one

walk through the showroom to refill my water glass, I eavesdrop on the sales guy talking to a couple of customers about the shiny Ural and sidecar in the window that looks fully restored. It has to be painful for him as he tells them that the state of California won't let him sell it to California residents due to some emissions bullshit. Here's this nice bike that these people might want, the salesguy wants to sell it to them, but the state has nixed it. It must be because of that CARB agency out here that slammed West Coast Choppers with some ridiculous fine years ago when Jesse was still in Long Beach. I remember reading somewhere that he had offered to go convert every bike he'd sold in California to a compliant setup, but CARB said 'No. Just pay the fine.' That pretty much proves that they just wanted the money. I'm guessing that cluster and the gun restrictions out here were key factors for him moving to Texas.

The planning and organization that I put into this project is sure paying for itself. To have everything neatly packaged and quick to assemble has made this whole conversion go pretty quickly. After only about three hours, I think everything is installed on the bike from the spare tank plumbing and thermal vision to the radar detector and phone mount. All the gadgetry seems to be working well at a quick glance, but the road will be the real test.

It feels a little strange riding this bike with all the screens and lights looking up at me from the tank and dash. My one test ride in the rain before shipping the bike was not enough to get me familiar with all this gear. I don't know where the hell I'm going, so I'll just head down this road and see where it goes. Soon, I'm forced to turn around and drive back the way from which I came. I go past the dealer and make another U-turn near the janky looking strip club up the street. The sign for lunch specials, likely a nice muffet, reminds me that I've barely eaten anything since I woke this morning. My stomach feels ready to wrap around my spine. CaveAxe needs food badly.

I pull back into the dealership, duck in the side entrance to the shop, roll my horse back in its stable, and walk over to Stein's desk. "Well, I think it's pretty much put together. Is there anything at all your guys found during inspection or any supplies you'd recommend I take with me as a precaution?"

"Nothing at all," he assures me. "That bike is so low mileage that there aren't even any major inspections needed. There shouldn't be a worry in your head about that bike making it cross country with no problem."

That's good to hear, and my rule still stands that if the bike should be able to make it, I should be able to make it. The light bulb illuminates over Stein's head and he asks, "Do you by chance have any extra oil? The bike could burn a little if it's being driven at high speeds for a long time. That's the only thing I can think of."

"Good thinking. Thanks!"

I go buy a quart of oil from the parts counter and add it to my pile of parts to take back to the hotel. I shoehorn all the remaining boxes and gear into the Mustang. It's not that the car wouldn't be fine for a couple to make an overnight trip, but Ford didn't have oversized guitar cases in mind when they designed this rig. I finally have my leftovers crammed in the trunk, back seat, and passenger seat as I punch in the hotel address and blindly drive where Google tells me.

Once I check into the hotel, I realize just how tired and hungry I am. After borrowing the luggage cart, which looked surprisingly tasty for some reason, I haul all the boxes and bags to my room and return the cart to the front of the hotel. Back in what will be my dwelling for the next couple days, I open the box of MRE's to see what looks good. These aren't the full meals in a big brown pouch like I've eaten before. Each small box contains only a single item. I had been

surprised that they were so cheap for a full meal, and now, I know why. It looks like I have two turnovers for breakfast and an assortment of various beef and pork in various sauces in small sealed pouches. I grab the first one and look at the microwave in my room. These pouches look like they could contain aluminum. As opposed to risking a tombstone etched with 'Here lies Axe because he couldn't outsmart a microwave,' I'll just eat it cold. I've eaten every lunch for the last four years cold, so it's not going to kill me. The Spyderco works great for cutting the top off the pouch leaving a little flexible tray full of meat, sauce, and whatever chemicals make it last forever in a pouch. Unfortunately, the blade of the Spyderco is not as effective at getting the sloppy food from the pouch to my mouth. Every bite requires focus to keep from slicing the side of my mouth as the blade enters full of food and exits empty for the next bite. The awkward task reminds me of eating sardines out of the can with a toothbrush back in Florida when I didn't exactly have the world by the balls. I suppose I could walk down the hallway to the restaurant and grab a fork or spoon, but I'm hungry now and don't want to delay nourishment any later. Eventually, I make it through the cold beef stew, meat balls, and a blueberry turnover. It's been a long day with little rest, and I need to start converting my body to a nocturnal sleep schedule.

After a few hours of rest, the alarm blasts to let me know that I need to get ready to meet Hollywood for dinner. He'd suggested a couple places close to my hotel, and both Stein and the dark haired girl at the dealership had strongly suggested Slater's 50/50 over the other option.

I arrive just a hair before eight PM and put my name in for a table for two with the cute young gal at the hostess station. She asks for my number, so they can text me when the table is ready. I resist the urge to respond with 'I'm flattered, but I have a girlfriend.' I'd think it was funny, but no one else is here to enjoy the laugh. There's a good chance she would not see humor in a guy almost twice her age implying that she's hitting on him either, even if it's obvious that I'm not. Hollywood shows up a few minutes later, the notification text conveniently follows, and we're soon being seated by a waitress.

The waiter comes to the table and provides his rehearsed blurb on the restaurant. Whether we want to or not, we soon learn that the restaurant is named 'Slater's 50/50' because the burgers are made out of half ground beef and half ground bacon. That's an interesting combination that should be good I would think. There are many beers on tap here, but I stick to orange juice and water, as I'm already straying from my planned MRE pre-ride diet. I've come too far to cloud my brain now or worse yet weaken my immune system.

Hollywood's still as thin as he was the last time that I saw him. It's not that he looks sick or anything. He's just much smaller than the 230 pound solid frame he had when we roomed together in ISU's Helser Hall for a couple years. The difference I'm sure is that in college, he lifted almost every day. Now, he's contemplating a weighted vest to get more exercise while hiking with the kids. It sure takes someone a lot less selfish than me to be a parent. Other than the size, he barely looks like he's changed or aged since college.

Though we live in very different places and have very different views on many things, Hollywood and I shoot the shit well past removal of the empty plates. Our lives have taken very dissimilar paths. He goes from work to kid activities to sleep, which pretty much occupies every minute of his day. In contrast, I interrupt my day job with a workout, surround my day job with side project activities and hobbies, sleep when I must, and try to balance all that with Sunshine and Baron. He tells me about a buddy of his who questioned some of his choices. "A buddy of mine just started this website that actually might allow him to retire early. He told me that I'm smarter than him and could easily do it too and asked why I don't try something like it."

"Yeah, why don't you?" I interrupt.

“I told him that I’m just very risk adverse. Especially with a wife and two kids, I can’t even fathom giving up a great paying job to pursue something that statistically has a higher probability of failure.”

“The bike shop definitely taught me that similar lesson, but I’m now able to do both by basically working a full time job for a paycheck and a full time job for my side efforts.”

About the same time, we both realize the difference and I note it with, “I don’t have nightly kid activities like you do though or the cost of them. That’s the difference.”

“Yeah, you can do that stuff, but I can’t.”

“I get it man. That’s why I don’t have kids. Too selfish.”

Entrepreneurship isn’t for everyone. As Tracer has pointed out to me, he thinks it just sounds like a good way to spend a lot of time and money with little chance of reward. This is generally true, but if any of my ideas ever pan out to actually becoming profitable, it’ll be a very rewarding time. Having one idea become a legitimate success would more than make all the failures up to that point well worth it. To me, just accomplishing all my little projects is success. Of course, it’d be nice to get rich at one of them, but I’m not counting on it. Low expectations are the key to happiness.

On the way out of the mini city of everything from yoga studios to hardware stores to bars, Hollywood points me toward a grocery store. As long as I’m out and about, I figure it’s a good time to pick up the Red Bull and Gatorade to mix with my Naranja Blast drink for the CamelBak on the ride. I also buy some orange juice and V8 for vitamins and Slim Jims for the ride. I see Sunshine called, but that was hours ago. I’ll talk to her tomorrow when she gets up as I imagine she’d rather not be woken at one-thirty AM her time. Now I’ll let my phone guide me back to the hotel, since I’m clearly unable to read a map and think for myself.

### **Fri 11 Apr 14**

Dammit. I forgot to deactivate the two-thirty AM phone alarm. I should get out of bed now and take another step toward a nocturnal sleep pattern. I’m still tired, and CaveAxe must rest.

My eyes aren’t open yet, but the gears in my brain are starting to turn and grind. When I do open my eyes, it looks like only a couple hours have gone by since the unintentional, earlier alarm. I’m not going to fall back asleep, so I get dressed, grab the MP3 player and a bottle of Gatorade, and walk down the hall to the hotel fitness center. It’s no surprise that I have the place to myself at this time of day. This hamstring is still tight and will only get more miserable while driving across the country, so I do all the stretches for longer than the usual five seconds to try to get more limber. After a few minutes of walking on the treadmill to get everything warm, I begin to run through the P90X Kenpo routine. Since it includes both kicks and punches, it’s good for overall body work.

As I watch my form in the mirror and throw one punch after another, “Afterlife” is playing by A7X on the MP3 player. I find myself looking at that guy in the mirror with some kind of unexplainable anger toward him. For some reason, I feel some kind of *autoschaddenfreude* as if I can’t wait to watch him suffer on the ride. The combination of sleep deprivation, mental preparation for this ride, and intense music have my brain swirling in a mix of anger, excitement, pride, and even despair. I know this is going to be dangerous. I know that even under the most ideal circumstances, it will still be a painful experience, but I feel almost helpless as I stare at that guy in the reflective glass like he’s now a separate entity residing in that mirror. He’s the adrenaline junkie that forces me to do these things. I may not want to do them. I may know as well as those around me how stupid it is. Like Lucifer, he doesn’t control me but

offers the temptation and lets free will decide. He might try to push me to do what he wants no matter how destructive it might be. I also have the other option of defying him and being punished by him later with unrest while my ability to be happy with my daily life erodes. I can't control him, but I'm not sure that I even want to stop him. Admittedly, I enjoy it too despite all the reasons not to succumb to his ridiculous taunting and misguidance. I know this addiction like any other ends one of four ways. Either I learn to control or suppress it, I replace it with another addiction, I continue giving in to the growing hunger on a path for destruction, or I resist it, and it spirals out of control and destroys me from the inside. I'm not sure if a person ever truly eliminates desire or just adapts to be able to control it more. Right now, it's all irrelevant. I am doing this. I am giving in to the person in the mirror. The addiction wins this time due in part to the fact that I want him to win. Like I told Pick and his uncle, 'I'm coming out of this dead, jailed, or legend.'

The intense feelings, whatever they are, drive me to push myself harder during the workout with the metal in the MP3 player here for motivation backup. Eventually, my sleep and nutrition deprived body have endured enough. I turn off the music, take one more look at the demon in the mirror, and see him with a mischievous smile that I don't feel my own mouth making. These feelings are good. They can be confusing, but if I can harness them, it'll push me that much harder on the ride.

Back at the dealership, I perform the finishing touches like taping the American flag to the back of the spare fuel tank. Stein assures me again that with barely over ten-thousand miles, there's no need to worry about this bike making it coast to coast. He tells me to just call in the morning from the rental wreck office once I've dropped off the car. He'll send someone to grab me, bring me to the dealership, and let me take the bike back to the hotel.

The hotel cleaning lady is almost to my room, so I change clothes and hit the fitness center again. After this workout, I lose the shirt and shoes and sit in the hot tub outside. The hot water bubbling from every direction feels good on the muscles. Anything that will loosen and stretch them will help prepare for the knots my muscles are about to endure on this ride. Once I climb out of the hot tub, I lie by the pool and let the sun dry my outside while the MP3 tunes sooth my inside. About the time that the water has evaporated from my skin, it quickly gets hotter than Satan eating Salsa. If I'm going to sleep somewhere, it might as well be cool enough to actually sleep.

As I debate next steps in my head in the hotel room, I realize that I need to ship those boxes soon. After a few minutes, I have the floor, couch, and bed of the room covered with everything organized by category. One pile is for items to take on the trip. Everything else is to be shipped either back to Texas or to Tracer's house in Florida. One box will remain for Stein to ship back to Texas for me tomorrow morning. I borrow one of the hotel luggage carts again and take three boxes out to the parking lot. As soon as they're all crammed in the Mustang, I return the cart and let my phone guide me to the nearest shipping store.

It costs a small fortune to ship the two boxes to Tracer, but I need them to be there in two days to allow me to get all the gear off the bike and packed before I leave Florida and fly home. One of them is the big guitar case too, so I get gouged by the shipping dude on these. At least, the box going back to Texas isn't a rush and doesn't cost quite as much as the two hurried packages.

With all the boxes shipped, I drive back to the shopping center near the grocery store that I visited last night. According to Skynet, there's a small jewelry store in here somewhere called A.L. Jacobs and Sons. It's a small, modest shop, but I like the fact that it looks more like a small

business than a big chain. The one guy working here walks over with his long, gray ponytail and asks how he can be of service. I tell him that I'm looking for some kind of diamond necklace and my price range. He shows me a couple examples that happen to be on sale for the range I mentioned. I know jackshit about jewelry besides the nipple ring that I carried around for years, so I'm forced to take his word for what he tells me they're worth. One pendant is unique in that the diamond is suspended within a sort of cage. As it moves, it sparkles at different angles. The design makes it look like the diamond is constantly oscillating within the pendant. I like the effect, but six years of engineering school tells me that it might break, and the diamond will get lost. The jeweler assures me that it's a solid design and will hold together under normal use. He hasn't met Sunshine. Hopefully, she treats this better than she did her Curve and other cars of her youth, and I hope she doesn't lose this necklace like the one from Tiffany's that I bought her a few years ago. That Tiffany's necklace was probably the last shiny object that I bought before today that wasn't part of something being driven, shot, or strummed.

As he boxes and rings up the new purchase, I ask him if this is the only location of his store. He proudly points to an article hanging on the wall and tells me that his grandpa started it in 1937, handed it over to his son, and now he runs it. I feel even better about buying from this store after hearing the history. How many third generation business owners exist today? That's outstanding for them to have built and maintained a successful business over so many years.

On the way back into the hotel, I stop at the front desk and pick up the package Sunshine overnighted to me. That was a lot of money to send me Baron's first dog tag. If she could've found her Tiffany's necklace, I would've just brought it and the dog tag with me. This way I can take Sunshine's new necklace and Baron's dog tag on the trip, so both of them can have something that rode with me on my adventure across America.

As the day goes on, I notice myself sniffing more and more. My nose is running like a suit through a crack neighborhood. I absolutely cannot afford to be sick, so I buy some NyQuil for today, DayQuil for tomorrow, and Halls. After popping the NyQuil and putting a Halls under my tongue to hold it from choking me in my sleep, I lie down for some day rest.

Nocturnal adjustment is not easy to do in two days, and of course, I wake up in the middle of the afternoon. The phone shows a missed call from Vermin, so I call her while I'm awake. She tells me about her recent world and asks a few questions about the trip. As it all sinks in and I get ready to hang up, Vermin starts getting a little choked up and says, "I know we don't talk about how we feel, but I love you."

I respond with what I know probably sounds like a cold response even as I say, "I know. Talk to you on the other side."

As much as I try to keep void of emotion, I have to admit the little twerp's outburst of emotion almost gets me choked up too. Hell no, I don't want to leave my family. I want to see them again. I want to get back to Texas and see Sunshine's smile and golden eyes and that black furry pup of ours. Thinking about them or the chance of never seeing them again isn't productive though. I can't think of what I have to lose right now no matter how much they all mean to me. I have to think of what I have to gain. It's the addict's way.

## **Chapter 14: All or None**

### **Sat 12 Apr 14**

I still feel a little on the shitty side of healthy. The nose is running a little less after a night of Nyquil induced sleep, but now I have a nice headache to make life grand. I drag my ass out of

bed, trudge down to the front desk, and buy ibuprofen, a banana, and some Vitaminwater. It's obvious that someone coming to buy these things at two-thirty AM is not feeling the best. The guy at the front desk tells me that it might just be allergies, which are affecting a lot of people right now. I sure as hell hope so. I can't be distracted by a runny nose or headache for this ride. I need to be one-hundred percent focused.

After a couple more hours of sleep, the ibuprofen has beaten the headache into submission. I expected to have the fitness center to myself, but one guy is already on one of the cardio machines. He's got a few years on me and isn't the most fit individual, but he's in here early and actually sweating versus sitting on a machine while checking his phone.

With blood flowing to the now stretched muscles, I turn off the MP3 player on the short walk back to my room. I use the Spyderco to cut off the end of the last MRE in the room and squeeze the sausage and gravy from the pouch into my mouth one clenched fistful at a time. It's a much more efficient method than trying to cut the top of the pouch and eat with the blade or even the Plasticware I received at Subway yesterday.

I check the room once more to make sure that everything is either in the box going back to San Antonio or ready to go to Florida with me and the bike. I take a deep breath as I walk out of the hotel and admire the crisp morning and blue skies. It's a good day for an adventure, so that's exactly what I'll do. The Mustang snorts to life and hauls me toward the beach on the route that I'll take on the bike later today. I stop at a gas station near the water and fill the car with gas to prevent the triple priced fuel charge for bringing back a rental car with anything less than a full tank.

There's the dog beach and parking lot. I guess I'll just cruise up here to where I can see the ocean from the bike, capture the mileage and time on video, and then haul ass for Florida. That seems simple enough. Hopefully, Hollywood will be able to meet me here and film the departure for me.

Driving away from the beach, I stop at a Walgreens for some Advil and Imodium A-D. As I pay for the misery prevention materials, the clerk tells me he hopes I feel better. On one hand, it's nice of him to wish someone the best, but do people feel embarrassed by such comments? He's basically assuming I have diarrhea. If a girl came in buying tampons, I wonder if he would provide some encouragement like 'At least you're not pregnant. In a couple days you'll be able to screw again without it looking like a Charles Manson visit.' I'm not going to explain that I'm just buying the Imodium to minimize the chances of me having to shit in my diaper while I ride across the country. Instead, I just nod, thank him, and walk out the door.

Finally, the Mustang is pulling into the rental wreck return at the airport. Returning it is much easier than it was to pick up the car. With my available wheels dropping from six to two, I sit down on the bench outside the office with my box and riding gear.

While watching the lot entrance to my left for my ride to come from the BMW dealer, the sound of a guy fussing to the right of me catches my attention. The guy and his wife are both younger than me by a few years and both carrying plenty of extra weight around their midsections. They look like the typical Jason and Jennifer who met in college, live in the suburbs, and now raise Eric and Erica in a house that they can't afford. The wife walks inside the rental office leaving the sperm donor to beg his two loin trophies to behave with their mini wheeled suitcases. "Come on, kids. Please stop roughhousing."

I have zero recollection of my dad ever begging me to stop doing anything that I shouldn't have been doing or even indicating that it was any kind of a request. From the lack of sternness in this pleading father's voice, it's probably a safe assumption that neither of those kids

has ever been spanked either. That fact could be why they're being ornery in the first place. With lack of discipline, their only hope to grow into proper behavior lies with internal initiative or lessons instilled by the world around them as they age. Unfortunately, that applies to many kids who don't get the jump start on manners that I received.

The annoyed father is wearing a baseball cap, which is likely an old college habit to hide his bed head. Perhaps, he's trying to hide an early monkey's butt, or balding spot, on the top of his head instead. His glasses would indicate that it's probably bed head as he probably just woke and didn't take time to shower and put in his contacts. The shorts and a T-shirt make sense, but I'm not sure about the orange vest. He doesn't look like a hunter, it's doubtful he's ever held a flag at a construction site, and the vest is a little thin to float him if he plans on going boating later. The slip-on Pumas are a nice touch, and right above one of them is a small tattoo. The slightly faded ink looks like a capital 'E'. Perhaps, it's from his frat days in college and probably the wildest thing that he's ever done.

I'm observing and guessing more than judging, though it doesn't sound like it in my head as I think about it. If the guy is happy with his life, that's good for him. I wonder if this anti-Axe forms opinions of those who look so different from him. He might have glanced toward me in jeans, black boots, and arms of tattoos protruding from the wife beater that I'm wearing. Maybe, he looked at the folded black leather motorcycle suit and box next to me and wondered how white trash even afforded a rental car in the first place. Then again he might just be going about his day to day life worrying about his kids hitting a car with their mini suitcase and not about some biker on a bench. I telepathically wish him well. 'Safe travels, anti-Axe. I doubt our paths will cross again.'

After texting back and forth with Stein, I finally see the driver pulling into the rental lot in the BMW shop van with its decorative vinyl wrapping. It's the guy that was driving the forklift back at the dealership a couple days ago. I throw all my stuff in the back of the van, which is empty and set up for hauling bikes, and crawl into the passenger seat.

The driver is an old military guy and talks like it. With the impression the country gets about this overly politically correct state, the refreshing blunt language of the driver reminds me that San Diego is still a military town. He talks about some of the guns he used to have and how he recently sold his last one. It's so hard for me to imagine someone who has relied on a firearm to defend themselves in the past to not own a single one for defense now. I have no war experience like this guy obviously, but I know that the pistol that I carried in that ghetto in Jax was the only thing that made me feel safe when I lived there. After needing a gun like that for something besides hunting and target shooting, there's no way in hell that I'd ever be without one now. It's a safety feature you just learn to keep in case you need it. Not carrying a gun is a mistake you might only get one chance to learn.

After the entertaining ride back to the dealership, Stein points me up the stairs to the offices and bathroom for changing. The jeans and wife beater are replaced by the Under Armour and Alpinestars one piece leather suit. As I walk back to the office area, Stein introduces me to Gary. He tells me a little about his cross country trip.

"It was late at night, and I'd made it to within just a little over a hundred miles of the beach in Jacksonville. The cop that stopped me already had someone else pulled over. He saw me go by him, ran to his car, and flipped on the cherries as he chased me. I had to pull over as much as I hated to."

"How fast were you going?" I asked.

“I wasn’t even speeding. The trailer we built had a loose connection, and he pulled me over to let me know my tail light was flickering. He wasn’t being a dick or anything and was just trying to be helpful letting me know about the safety concern, but I was so pissed. If he only knew what he’d just cost me. I’d ridden all that way without putting a foot down then got stopped so close to the end.”

As Gary tells me the connection issue, I remember the mechanic downstairs telling me that the other day. I imagine how torqued Gary must’ve been when he saw those cherries. “You had to be so pissed. Damn, dude. Either way though, you should still be proud as hell to have done what you did.”

I thank him for everything, he wishes me luck, and we shake hands with a mutual respect for each other as someone else ridiculous enough to tackle such a task. Besides a handful of adrenaline junkies like us, most people couldn’t even understand the concept, let alone attempt it themselves. Yet, here we stand as two guys that, in a couple days, will both have completed the same test of personal metal.

Downstairs at the service counter, I hand Stein the last box of items to ship back to San Antonio for me. He rings up the tab for what I owe him for installing the new front tire and tells me that we’ll figure out the shipping on the last box after it’s in the wind. I thank him for everything he did helping me with the logistics, a place to work, and the tips. He shakes my hand and tells me to let him know when I make it safely to the other beach. I wave to the mechanics on the way by them as I walk toward the bike. After getting the phone mounted to the bike and the helmet mounted to my head, I drive to the gas station up the street and fill both tanks. Waze takes me back toward the hotel successfully, but I think I see a blip on the thermal vision screen. Hopefully, it was either my imagination or nothing serious as it seems to be steady now. I can’t afford to piss away time on the side of the road later screwing with some loose wiring connection. Once I start the ride, I can’t stop unless it’s to replenish the go-go juice in the tanks. That’s absolutely all that will be acceptable.

I pull the bike up to the front of the hotel and walk up to the front desk to ask the girls behind the counter if they’re content with its parking location. I ask the first girl that looks up at me, “Will my bike be okay where it is until this evening, or do you want it somewhere else?”

“Go ahead and put it on the sidewalk right here next to the building. Nobody should bother it there for you,” she replies.

“Is there any chance I can borrow a bed sheet to put over it while it’s sitting there? There’s military grade equipment on that thing, and I can’t afford to have anything happen to it.”

The desk girl looks at the other girl and back at me with almost a scared look on her face. “Our head housekeeper would kill me if she saw a sheet on your bike. I’m sure it’ll be fine where it is though.”

This is irony at its finest. How many messes have I made on sheets in hotels over the years? Despite the puke, blood, and intimate fluid artwork on those linens, now, I’m being told that I can’t put a sheet over my bike outside because it might get dusty or suffer a drop of oil? I’m tempted to point this fact out to the young girl, but I’m not sure if the colorful comparison would help or hinder my cause. Maybe, they won’t give me one but wouldn’t prevent me from doing something with the one I already have.

“What if I just use the one in my room?”

“Sorry, but she still might see it and have a fit. No one will touch it,” she reassures me.

I continue to display a smile, even if it contradicts my internal frustration. Getting mad at them isn't going to help anything, and I would rather they like me at least enough to keep a close eye on my bike and the thousands of dollars in equipment bolted to it.

I walk toward my room annoyed at my inability to convince the girl to accommodate a simple request. Perhaps, I'm getting too old to exercise the youthful, confident charm that used to get me what I wanted from a young girl. I would get irritated back then if the girl was too self-guided to follow my suggestions, but it was fun to see the power of my Jedi mind trick when it did work.

*In downtown Des Moines one Wednesday night in our college days, Juano introduced me to a random cute brunette and told her that I was shy. As planned, she soon asked me to dance. After a couple songs, I asked, "You're giving me a ride back to Ames tonight, right?"*

*The girl looked at me confused.*

*"You didn't have any other plans, did you?" I persisted.*

*"Well, no, but..."*

*"Cool. We can dance one more song, and then we can leave."*

*"Well, ok..."*

*Later in our shitty college apartment, the basement penthouse, I put the original Star Wars movie into the VCR in the living room. When the movie was almost over, I gave the easily manipulated brunette a kiss and stood up from the couch. "I'm tired, so I'm going to bed. Why don't you finish watching the movie, and then come back to bed? See you in a little bit. There's only about twenty minutes left."*

*The girl stayed on the couch while I walked to my room and got ready for bed. Once the movie was over, the girl walked back to my room, complete with the musty smell from the wet carpet in the closet, and proceeded to do as I wished on the sheets that would warrant laundering by classier folks.*

Maybe, the housekeeper doesn't want her sheets damaged, but what if they were my sheets? I need a different approach, and there's one last ditch effort I can suggest. I call the front desk and get the other girl on the line.

"What if I just buy a sheet from you? How much can they really be?"

"Sorry sir, like she told you, the housekeeper would have a fit if she saw any sheet on the bike."

"Well, you can't blame me for trying. Thanks anyway."

It never hurts to ask. The worst thing they can say is 'no.' Like that kid told me during my freshman year of college, 'If you don't get rejected, you're not trying hard enough.' I guess I'll have to rely on faith in humanity, which never leaves me a warm, fuzzy feeling. At least, it's only for a few daylight hours, so hopefully, nobody will screw with my high tech two wheeler before I hit the bricks.

I suppose I should try this condom catheter standing still in my hotel room as opposed to finding out the hard way that my plan is flawed at ninety mph. I pull off the cap and can see the silicone adhesive or whatever sticky material it is that seals this thing from leaks. In placing it on the top of the mushroom, it unfortunately goes on a little crooked. I cuss blue streaks as I try to pull the misplaced device from my prick and create a scene that must resemble Stretch Armstrong jerking off. If it's stuck that well now, I have to believe it'll seal fine when the time comes. This hurts like a sonofabitch, and I'm not putting on another one and losing any more skin by removing it again like this. I also don't want to have to sleep today with it as I have to believe my plumbing contraption won't make a nap any more comfortable. I'll just install one

later before the ride. I better make sure this diaper fits too. I pull on the padded underwear. It's a shoulder banner away from a bad New Year's Eve party costume, but at least it fits. I'm pleasantly surprised that this diaper isn't horribly uncomfortable, but it's also empty right now. Man, I hope I don't need this thing, or I'm not going to be a happy camper in my dirty Pamper.

All that I can do now is try to get some sleep before I launch. I've been up since four-thirty AM, and it's a long damn drive to Florida from here. It's critical that I get some rest, but that means that my brain has to quit thinking about the trip long enough to let me fall asleep. I'm not sure that the chance of that happening is much better than the proverbial snowball in hell. Even though some NyQuil might make me sleep better for the next few hours, I have to wake up focused and ready to blast, not groggy and ready to crash. I'm still sniffing a little, so I take some DayQuil to combat the runny nose and a couple Advil to prevent the soreness sure to come over the next couple days. I pop a Halls under my tongue to soothe the throat, and a couple Imodium join the chemical experiment to work with the MRE's and clog my waste management system. Now, all I have to do is close my eyes, turn off my brain activity, and get some critical sleep.

My brain's back in gear. It's only been a few hours, and calling that quality sleep would be like calling a Prius a blend of luxury styling and brute power. I've been fading in and out of a half sleep, but I might've racked up an hour or two of good sleep before my eyes opened. It's not great, but it'll have to do. Now that I'm awake, I need to move ASAFP. Lying here awake with my eyes closed won't accomplish anything. Delaying the ride now just means delaying how soon I get to sleep again, and that means that I'll be even more tired driving as I near the end of the trip.

In the interest of time, a quick text goes out to Sunshine, Mom, the sisters, and Wolf Den before I take a quick shower to improve alertness. This time, the condom catheter goes on straight, and I roll it down to the hilt like a Trojan in the old days. It seems strange that it's a tighter seal on a device to protect me from piss instead of the one that is intended to protect me from diseases and kids, but most things don't make sense from at least one perspective. I assemble three links of urine line from my box of plumbing supplies and think about routing. I can't afford to get a kink in the line, or I'll be relying on the diaper to absorb the piss and have a nice rash before Jacksonville. With the diaper in place, I aim my prick and the attached drain line toward the waistband. The drainage line runs out the top of the diaper, curls gently a hundred and eighty degrees, and then aims down my leg. I look like I stepped out of a Marilyn Manson video with this twisted crotch equipment, but I'll probably be very glad I have this later. After putting on the Under Armour long johns, I check the drain line again to make sure there are no kinks. It looks like the three hose segments will be just right to exit at ground level. "How does it feel to be part of the beautiful people?" I ask myself in the mirror.

I pull the fluids out of the room refrigerator and fill the biggest available CamelBak I could buy with a liter each of orange XS Blast, Red Bull, and Gatorade. This liquid speed ball should keep me as alert and focused as can be expected for this long of a drive. The Gatorade should help keep me hydrated, since the Bull and XS tend to have dehydrating tendencies. Three liters of fluid isn't very much for a day and a half, but I can refill it if need be at a gas stop. I lay five Slim Jim sticks next to the CamelBak, so they won't get left behind. I used to be able to eat two pounds of steak in a sitting, and now, I'm planning for a few ounces of dried meat to last across the whole country.

I take a Rhodiola 110 for focus and put the rest in my pile for the small carry bag. I also do the same for the Advil and Imodium. Either Tracer or I had bought a small magnetic tank bag

years ago for my Aprilia, and I'm glad that I packed it in one of the boxes. The backpack is going to be a bitch to remove, so I'll have this small bag slung over a shoulder for easy access to meds, credit cards, the Sony Handycam, my Spyderco, and an extra battery and chips for the GoPros.

I do the closest thing to dancing that I'm going to do at this age as I wiggle into the one piece leather suit. I make sure the drain line stays in place and isn't pinched anywhere. It has to exit the suit through the zipper at the bottom of the leg, but that zipper is on the inside of the leg. If I piss out the tube there, I'll have it blowing back at the bike. That would be the exhaust side too, which would generate the awesome smell of boiling urine on my pipe. After putting on my boots, I route the drain line out the inside zipper and around the front of the boot so the tubing aims outward. With a little black electrical tape wrapped around the tube and boot a few times, it looks like my plumbing solution is complete. The kit came with a collection bag, but I have no idea how much of my recycled CamelBak concoction that I'll generate on this trip and can't waste time changing bags. Disposal of the recycled fluid will have to be *el natural*.

With the leather suit zipped balls to neck, putting on the GoPro harness reminds me to be thankful that I don't have to put on a bra every day. Next come the tank bag over the shoulder with the quick access items and finally the backpack. This thing is jammed with the CamelBak, tools, oil, and my .45. It seems as pointless as a solar powered flashlight to keep a self defense device unloaded and out of my reach like this. As much as it pisses me off that California had to be the one state that wouldn't honor my Texas concealed weapon permit, I'm a guest here and I'll follow their rules. Like it or not, I'll start my trip with the beautiful stainless steel and rosewood Snake Slayer acting as nothing more than added weight until I get out of this state.

The phone buzzes on the room desk. Hollywood's already at the beach. Dammit, that was quicker than I expected. I let him know that I'm just about ready to leave the hotel. I think he has a kid or two with him as well, so I don't want him to have to sit there with them any longer than necessary, especially since he's doing me the favor. I grab the helmet and gloves and take one more look around the room before walking into the hallway. The remaining diapers and catheters can remain on the room floor for the cleaning lady. I'm sure she'll appreciate the free gifts.

I'm not wearing the helmet in the hall, but I still receive some funny looks from hotel guests. Some are just dressed casually to enjoy their vacations, but a few people are in formal dresses and tuxedos. It is about prom time, so maybe some rich kids brought their dates to the hotel for the event. A hotel bed is probably more comfortable than back seat gymnastics at the end of the night as they display all the seventeen year old endurance of a nitrous fueled drag car.

It's relieving to see the S1K sitting in its place on the sidewalk with all the gear still in place. This isn't like the old crack neighborhood on Bert Road in Jacksonville where a person would expect to find the bike stripped or missing, but I'm still relieved to see it here unmolested. I put the phone in its cradle and connect the charging cable. There's no way that phone battery will last that long with music, Waze, and YAV1 all running in combination with occasional phone calls to Wolf Den. After inserting the key into the ignition and switching all of the electronics to life, I connect the power cable to the helmet and confirm that the charging light is glowing.

As I awkwardly swing a leg over the seat while trying not to hit any body parts on the walls of the tight corridor, my eyes look through the glass of the hotel in front of me and down the long hallway. Two photographers are walking backward in my direction as they snap pictures at whoever's following them. Behind them walks a bride with a bright smile outshined only by the white dress surrounding her like a robe of false purity. Unlike the bride and bridesmaids, the

dress is probably the only thing wrapped around a body for the first time assuming the group of girls is normal by today's standards and not some rare social pocket of moral conviction.

The beaming bride looks like she's in her late twenties. This may even be her first wedding or starter marriage. I can only assume that the guy in the tux next to her is the groom though I thought they weren't supposed to see each other before the event. He's talking on his cell phone the whole way down the hallway, but it doesn't faze the bride's Alfred E. Neuman grin at all. She's not yelling at him to put down the phone or point out that it's her day to be the princess at her royal ball. Maybe, she's relaxed, and maybe, she's so focused on smiling for the photographers that she doesn't even notice his phone call. She's thinking about how beautiful she'll look in these pictures that will hang on her wall for years to come. I'm snickering about how mad she'll be when she realizes those pictures will show her perfectly bleached smile and her new husband's poorly timed phone call.

I'm such a cynic. It's so different how opposite her world and my world are at this moment in time. She's dressed in white as opposed to my black attire. We've both been planning this day for close to a year, but my idea is creative and hers is cliché. This is the day that she's imagined since being a little girl, but so has almost every other female. We're both striving for a sense of fulfillment or even pacification, yet both of us risk nothing but disappointment after all this work if failure is the result. The two of us are both doing something completely selfish and self indulgent by spending thousands of dollars for one weekend of exactly what we want to do. Her motivation is just easier disguised as sharing with someone else, while I'm not trying to hide my driving force of selfish intent. It'll be the most memorable day of our lives for both of us, but I'll bet my riding experience tonight lasts much longer than hers tonight if the groom can't even put the phone down long enough to get married. If she ends up under her partner in crime for the night, it'll be positional preference. If I end up under four hundred pounds of metal and plastic tonight, it won't be my choice, and I'll be screwed in a way much more permanent than hers.

The I4 engine whines out of the hotel parking lot for the last time. After several days of navigating the area in the pale white horse, I can finally ride with directional confidence past the mock Navy ship, around the roundabout, and onto the main road. Waze and my memory from the beach drive earlier today guide the S1K toward the ocean. I stop at the last gas station before the beach to fill the tank and get a timed receipt, but the handy gas pump is out of receipt paper. The pump display screen politely directs me to see the attendant for a receipt, and I politely respond to the pump with a middle finger as I don't have time for technology shortcomings right now.

I drive past the beach parking lot and stop right at the edge of the sand looking across the beach at the vast ocean all the way to the horizon. Hollywood's wife's mommy rig is nowhere to be seen. After a couple texts back and forth, I circle into the parking lot and finally find him and his daughter standing by the SUV. I should suggest to him that a Ferrari would be much easier to find in a crowded parking lot, but I'm not sure that the Ferrari dealer would take his Prius on trade. I have no idea how old his girl is. She can talk and walk, but she can't drive yet. That must put her in the late single digits. It's hard to imagine what must be going on in her young mind at that age. Did Hollywood explain to her that this person is going to ride that bike from one side of the country to the other? It's unlikely as that might force him to explain to an always inquisitive child why anyone in his right mind would do such a thing. However, he could squash any further questions by taking exception to the term 'right mind.'

All systems are good to go, Wolf Den is on the phone via the helmet Bluetooth, and Hollywood has his phone ready to record the departure, which I'd rather call it than the departed.

I wave as I back the bike away from the sand while capturing the departure time and miles with memory and the GoPros. As I tear down the roads praying no cars or people jump into my path, I think of the Joker in *The Dark Knight* saying ‘Here we go!’



**Figure 19 Launch**

I get to Sunset Cliffs Blvd, which is nothing but a four lane parking lot right now. Fortunately for me, it's legal here to split lanes. I've never done it before, but there's no time like the present to try new things. I cruise across the near lanes, slip between bumpers blocking the intersection, turn hard to the left, and am now pointing down the dashed line between the two east bound lanes. I try to focus on avoiding collisions with cars to the right and left of me while wondering how the hell big garbage wagons like police bikes and tour bikes do this without constant mirror replacements. Just about the time I start getting the hang of Pac-Manning the white stripes, a sport bike stopped in front of me forces me to apply the Brembos to prevent bouncing off his back tire. I see the driver look down in the rearview mirror at me and wave him forward frantically implying 'Grip on the right, pull it tight!'

The bike in front seems a little shaky at lane splitting, but at least it's moving in the right direction. Eventually, we both save about twenty minutes worth of aggravating stop and go traffic as we enter the I8 entrance. The lanes of the interstate and throttle bodies of the engine below me both open wider than a stripper's legs, and I hear the engine whine as I dart between cars and begin the long journey ahead.

The scenery changes from city outskirts to the open road. It's such a feeling of freedom to stare at the ribbon of highway stretched out in front of me, but a CHP parked behind some unlucky speeder reminds me that I'm still under watch, and freedom can be misleading and temporary. Soon, the elevation changes drastically enough for my ears to plug. After years of flying every week or two while at the Institute, I'm more than used to this and can snap my jaw to relieve it. What I can't do anything about is the sudden confirmation that I do have a sinus infection. Sonofabitch, that hurts! Out of nowhere, it feels like a million needles just appeared behind my forehead trapped between the front of my brain and the skull. The pain is bad enough that my eyes are almost starting to water, but it's not like I'm going to stop for this. The ride must continue, regardless of the stinging pressure inside my helmet. This is the worst sinus infection pain that I've had since that flight to our first Cancun spring break ages ago. Gatorade had seemed to cure that one, and I just happen to have about a liter of Gatorade strapped to my back right now. The valve to the CamelBak is tucked inside my helmet, so I can drink on the fly. Look ma, no hands. Mother dear would probably say 'No brains either' right about now. I take a couple sips of my replenishing fluids, wince, grit my teeth, and focus on the road instead of the pain. I'm making decent time and need to keep moving.

I pass a sign advertising air speed patrol as I enter some mountain curves. I make my first progress call back to Wolf Den. "Hey man, just passed a sign warning about air patrols. Have you ever actually known anyone to get zapped by one out here?"

"I can't say that I have, but don't be the first."

"Fair enough."

These roads would be fun to shred, but I'm out here in clear skies wondering if a plane actually lurks overhead. I don't see any at the moment, but I'll still keep it under three digits, as there could be more CHPs hiding around the curves ahead. I watch the V1 on the dash and keep my ears perked for warning beeps. If I get a ticket, it'll cost me at least a half hour of screwing around with roadside interrogation about my past. I'll just keep things moving over the posted limit, but within a range that will allow me to react quickly if needed.

As each hour passes, I click through the dash menu to the total miles traveled so I can estimate my average speed. A little quick math helps keep my mind sharp as well. So far, I seem to be averaging about eighty mph. There's quite a bit of wind across this area, which explains all the giant wind turbines like I see in the fields in Iowa. A nearly or completely full moon hangs in

the still blue sky overhead. I'm not exactly one of the three kings from the Orient following the star to Jesus, but it's still a light in the sky telling me where to go, and I'm on a spiritual mission that most people wouldn't understand. There's only a slightly different purpose to the trek, and calling me a wise man would be one hell of a stretch at best. About the only time you'd hear my name used in the same sentence as 'wise men' is if you were describing a shot of Jim, Jack, and Johnny that I order.

The fuel warning light lets me know that I've burned through my first main tank of fuel. I call Wolf Den, so he can record the miles and calculate the estimated point where the secondary tank will be dry. Armed with that information, we can plan the fuel stop and prevent backtracking or, worse yet, being stranded on the side of the road like a clown with blood on his gloves and a child sized duffle bag. Based on the one time that I tried this at home, my in-flight refueling process worked flawlessly. That was at forty-five mph, so let's see how it works at eighty plus. Without taking my eyes off the road, I feel around on the tank, turn the gas cap key tied securely to the ignition key, and open the gas cap. Just as planned, the spare tank outlet fitting easily inserts into the throat of the tank. A quick flip of the fuel valve in the fuel line lets gasoline start flowing from the secondary tank to the main tank. I assume it is anyway as I'm not actually looking at it. The fuel warning light goes dark and lets me know that fuel is in fact flowing. In theory, if I just leave the valve open, the tank could overflow since the secondary tank holds slightly more fuel than the main tank. I let the fuel flow for another ten minutes before shutting the valve and the gas cap. The next time that the warning light turns bright, I'll empty the rest. This may not be an ideal configuration, but I just saved at least fifteen minutes by refueling on the go instead of having to pull over at a station. I smile inside my helmet as I look up at the bright moon now hanging on a canvas of black instead of bright blue.

There's a border stop coming across the Arizona horizon. Hopefully, no one asks me to stop and take off my helmet or anything. With the charging cord and CamelBak hose in perfect locations, I really don't want to have to readjust everything. The guard simply waves me through, so very little time is wasted. It seems like they always ask if people are carrying produce. It was probably obvious that this bike isn't being used to smuggle large quantities of fruits and vegetables.

Night time is an advantage for me. The thermal vision screen still has a flicker, but overall, it seems stable and usable. I won't have to worry about air patrol at night, but there can still be patrol cars cruising and hiding. The thermal and V1 should alert me of any stationary bogeys and some of the moving ones if they're not running instant-on. I drive as fast as I'm able on my side while trying to estimate the likelihood of each oncoming car on the other side being a patrol unit. At the times where I can pour the coals to her, I constantly scan the horizon for lights. If the first lights of a vehicle show as orange and are followed by white lights, it's a semi, and I can keep screaming. If white lights are the first thing I see, I dial the bike back to a speed where I can react faster just in case the V1 beeps at me.

Threat of arrest is the only thing keeping me from turning this bike loose at wide open throttle and letting it run free like a wild animal turned loose into the wild after being in a cage. An arrest would kill my average, so I have to continue to push my limits just shy of causing the desert to fill with red and blue flashing lights. Cell phones are a threat to consider as well. It only takes one pissed off trucker to call me in to the authorities, and I'll be sitting along the shoulder just the same as if I get a direct bust. Fear of the trucker calls and common decency keep me maintaining basic road courtesy. I'm not passing anyone at three digits, making asshole passes, or riding wheelies. I go like hell on the clear sections of interstate until I come up on fellow

motorists, dim the lights so as not to blind them in the mirrors, and start to slow down enough to pass them at a slightly faster clip than their speed. As I pass each one, I wait until I'm well ahead of them, turn on my right blinker, shift right, wave, and turn off the blinker. Truckers flash their lights twice to say thanks after a pass, so I flash the brake lights twice, kick on the high beams, and crank the rocket back to a speed that turns dashed lines on the highway into a single, blurry, white strip. The unique combination of excitement and fear causes a serious adrenaline spike in my system as I shoot like a sniper round through the desert night. Even if I were concerned about safety, I wouldn't be slowing down for it. One of the rules of this ride is that I will not let off the throttle for anything that isn't going to prevent accomplishing the goal, and fear is not an acceptable reason. Like a junkie with his needle, I'm only concerned with the immediate rush and not the things that could go wrong. One might call it selfish or stupid. I call it dedicated and living for the moment.

Wolf Den calls and says that he heard from Fatman. The fact that I've been averaging higher speeds than expected for this stretch means that there's no way Fatman would be able to make it to the highway to film me passing through his area. It looks like there will be no desert film for me, but I'm making good time, so nothing else matters.

My chariot of yellow and red fire is nearly out of go-go juice as I exit the highway and pull into the first gas stop. The helmet and cords all stay connected, and all that comes off of me is the pair of gloves. The shoulder bag is positioned properly to quickly pull the credit card out of the bag, slide it into the pump, and slip it back into the bag making damn sure that the zipper's secure and not going to let anything fall out of the bag and end up on the road. I fill the main tank, make sure the secondary tank fuel line valve is closed, and fill the secondary tank. I spend just a couple of minutes making sure that everything looks solid. This S1K is drastically more solid than my old General, which required checks and tightening every time it needed fuel if not sooner. I know that this bike is solid, and I'm really looking more at the accessories that I installed than anything. Everything looks top notch, so I jump back in the saddle, turn the key, drop the tran into first gear, and punch it on the way out of the parking lot of the station.

I'm still on the Bluetooth with Wolf Den as I look back to my left making sure that the lane is clear as I get back on the interstate. As my eyes turn back to the road ahead, something's missing. It's pitch black here with no lights over the road, but I don't think I see my phone where it should be. Don't tell me I lost that damn thing! I don't have time for this shit! It has to be close, or I couldn't be hearing Wolf Den ask why I'm spewing forth vulgarities. I explain the problem as I begrudgingly hit the brakes and aim for the shoulder. Now able to look closer, I see the Dual Lock on the back of the phone came loose from the cradle, which surprises me. Fortunately, the phone is hanging by a thread, and that thread is the charging cord. It's a damn good thing that I noticed it when I did. I'm not sure that cord connection would be rated for three digit speeds. It looks like the phone came loose when I turned the forks too sharp, so I'll have to remember not to do that at the next stop several hours from now. With every hour that goes by, my average speed seems to drop, and shit like this isn't going to help that. With the phone back in place, I cuss a few more times for good measure. I make a weak attempt to try to keep the front end in contact with the pavement as I accelerate from a dead stop on the shoulder to license risking speeds on the highway in mere seconds. Then I shift into second gear.

### **Sun 13 Apr 14**

As expected, the still of the night and early morning is the time to make time with darkness and less traffic. I couldn't be happier with the S1K. It's not even breathing hard at these speeds. The

plastic covered beast has buzzed along at well over a hundred and climbed as high as 165 mph smoother than Jack Daniels on the rocks. I haven't topped out the bike on this ride since that doesn't contribute to the mission. The mission is to drive coast to coast in as little time as possible, not to jeopardize the mission by seeing how big of a number I can display on the dash.

A second border stop rises from the darkness ahead, so I turn down the helmet volume with the left hand, flip up my helmet visor, and make it easier to hear any questions. The guard hollers out to me as I slow down to almost a stop, "US citizen?"

I debate telling him that I am a Texas resident, since my license plate now matches my location again. There's never value in telling an authority figure more information than what answers the question though, so I simply yell back, "Yes, sir."

He waves me to continue. Without having to put a foot to pavement, I flip the shield back into place and crank up both the speed and the music volume as soon as I'm back to cruising velocity.

Shortly after entering the giant state of Texas, the V1 lights up like a Christmas tree and notes a laser lock. Obviously, I jam the Brembos to get down to a closer to legal speed, but I don't see any Troopers within eye shot. Usually, a laser lock is as sure of a sign that you just got screwed as a used Trojan on the sheets, but maybe, it was a false alarm, or maybe, a man behind the badge didn't feel that I was worth the effort. No cherries and no visuals mean I'm twisting back the throttle.

The sun begins to light the Texas sky as I blast through my current state of residence. The speed limit here is eighty mph, which means my conservative speed is over ninety with higher bursts every chance that I get. As opposed to a bright ball in the sky, the blazing light source in space is diffused through clouds. Like a heavenly body that was just kicked to the curb, the world above mine begins to drop tears onto me, my bike, and the road stretched out in front of us. There's no need to let off the throttle. I know the roads in Texas get so little rain that even a drizzle can cause treacherous traction conditions that remind me of Iowa in the winter. I wouldn't drive full speed around curves in this weather, but straight lines aren't a concern as I've proven before on the Ape.

*One Sunday afternoon, Tracer, some of his friends, and I were just leaving Daytona Beach on the bikes. Since one of his friends was from out of town, we were going to stop at Destination Daytona on the way back to Jacksonville. The dark clouds forewarned us, so I motioned to Tracer that I was heading home before the rain came. It was too late though. The sky opened wide and dumped streams of rain into my path. Since the Ape was my first sport bike, I hadn't ridden it in the rain very much, so I kept my speed safely at just over eighty. A Lexus flew by me like I was standing still, and I stuck to his bumper at around 120 mph for the next fifty or sixty miles. We darted in and out of the more conservative cars while I banked on the fact that my reaction time and faster stopping would prevent me from ending up in his trunk if he locked his brakes. The Ape never twitched a bit, which I attributed to the small contact points of motorcycle tires splitting the shallow lake of a highway. That following Friday, I walked outside to see a flat rear tire on the Ape. As I looked closer, I found a nail in it. Additionally, I found two patches of threads showing through the rubber on the tire. Darwinism only has to win once, but this round again went to me.*

If a bald tire can handle three digit speeds in a downpour, a good one will handle them in a drizzle. It's only a safety issue anyway, and that means it doesn't justify reducing speed. The higher speed limit has been great for time, but the bike is also thirstier now too. The fuel warning light flashes at me earlier than I expected. The range showing on the dash is lower than normal

too due to the decreased mileage. I call back to Wolf Den for guidance on fuel stations. I don't want to turn back to the last town, and I am just as close to the next town anyway. As much as I hate to do it, I slow down to almost fifty. This sucks, but it's a better option than having to walk or hitch to a gas station. All the people I just passed are now cursing me as I crawl in the right lane in a desperate attempt to conserve my precious remaining dead, liquid dinosaurs.

As I try to telepathically raise the fuel range on the dash and Wolf Den checks Skynet for the distance to the nearest gas station, I look down at my fuel line between the two tanks. The barbeque smoker looking, secondary tank bottom is just about level with the top of the main tank, but the hose between them has a hell of a sag to it. There's gas in the sag of that line. If I can get rid of the sag, that gas might flow into my main tank and mean the difference between riding and walking. Unfortunately, the hose is between the bike and the inside of my right leg, so my crotch is in the way and prevents me from just holding the hose up to the height of the main tank cap. If my crotch is the constraint, I won't accomplish much until I redefine my limits. That means that I'm going to have to stand up on the pegs while raising the hose. With the hose in the throat of the main tank and the valve open, I look ahead once more for obstacles. I'm moving slow, and there's a good cushion of space in front of me. Slowly, I stand on the pegs, hold onto the throttle with the right hand, and lift the hose with my left hand. As long as my boots don't slip off the wet pegs, this should be just somewhere north of risky. If one of those boots slips, I'm toast. I can see the fuel running through the short, clear section of hose that I installed after the valve, and the warning light eventually goes dark. I give my upper legs a rest for a few minutes while I sit and wait for the range to update. Soon, the dash is showing even more miles left than when the light flashed a few miles ago. Whatever gas was in the line has made a difference as did the turtle's pace speed. I stand on the pegs and hold the line for a few more minutes to get every drop of fuel into that tank.

According to Wolf Den and the dash, there should be just barely enough fuel to get me to the next station. I can't start pounding ground in three digits again, but hopefully, no walking will be required. There's a sign for fuel at the next exit, which is one exit sooner than Wolf Den had identified. I exit the interstate hoping for a station that's close enough to minimize lost time for the stop. Luck is just not with me right now. I say that in my head as if it usually is with me, but that's beside the point. The exit drops me onto a blacktop with a painfully slow speed limit and a sign stating that I'm still two miles from fuel. It's just my misfortune too that the slow blacktop drops me at a gas station right by the exit that Wolf Den told me to take in the first place. That's what I get for thinking for myself. Hell with it. I'm just happy to have made it to the station on the fuel that I have without pushing the bike or walking through the drizzle with a gas can.

As I run through the process and see the fuel running out the nozzle into the main tank, I realize that it's been almost a full waking day and seven hundred miles since I've pissed. I drank some Gatorade and juice yesterday morning before I hit the hay, but occasional sips were all that I had before leaving the hotel. I must not be drinking much of my fluids on the ride either. There's only one way to see if this indoor plumbing solution is worth a damn. With the diaper as my backup plan, I convince my bladder to trust my makeshift solution and let loose. I slowly feel a warm sensation across and above my twig and giggle berries. That can mean one of two things. It might mean that the system is working fine, and the urine is going through the tube. It could also mean that there's a leak, and I'm pissing myself. I know my preference, but I also know how things have been going recently.

I can only watch one fluid at a time, so I let off the gas handle for a second to look at the end of the tubing taped insecurely to my right boot. I feel myself peeing, but I don't see any fluid exiting the dump line. That's not good. There's nothing like diaper rash to make an uncomfortable ride even less enjoyable. Soon, I see the glowing yellow fluid rush through the exposed clear line across the boot and out the end of the tubing. The almost neon puddle created on the ground is a sure sign that I'm already dehydrated, but the good news is that the contraption worked a hell of a lot better than tubing and scotch tape did in Austin that day many years ago. I stand in my own piss as I cram as much fuel in the tanks as possible, jump back on my steed, and race back up the entrance ramp into the dreary mist.

Even though rain is not ideal for such a ride, it's not slowing me down a lick. One actual advantage of drizzle is that there's no sun in my eyes. I was a little worried that my eastbound ride into a sunrise might combine with road grime on the helmet visor and cause visibility issues. Damn the wet roads, full speed ahead! I have to make up some serious time, and this higher speed limit is just what I need to do that.

The throttle thumb isn't too bad yet. I've used the throttle lock where I can, but it's not very practical for this ride. No racer ever sets his cruise at one speed and just drives the same pace through a race. If he does, I can guarantee that he doesn't win. When trying to maximize performance, consistency is important, but the throttle still has to be controlled as conditions vary. The same speed can't be best for open road, curves, and various traffic conditions. I have to slow down if there's threat of arrest but hammer it every chance I get. My delusions of just pinning that throttle lock at well over a hundred and just flying have been backhanded by reality. I have made some good time in spots, but a modern day interstate just gets too much traffic to think that I'd be the only vehicle for miles. The throttle lock still makes life easier though. I can set the lock and just nudge it as conditions allow. Anything that makes less work for my thumb is going to be well appreciated later.

As I blast across I10, I'm starting to see familiar areas like Kerrville, Comfort, and Boerne. In my last few miles before reaching San Antonio, the phone screen shows an incoming call from Sunshine. She sounds as bubbly as ever of course. "How's it going, babe?"

"Surprisingly not too bad so far. Besides almost running out of gas and a little rain, the trip has been surprisingly smooth."

"Is your ass numb yet?" She laughs knowing how uncomfortable I must be.

"It's getting there. Having these pads on the rear pegs gives me an alternate seating position though, so it's not too bad."

"You're one crazy man, but you're half way there, right?" she says in her adorable way of finding the positive view in everything.

"Just about."

"I just talked to Tanford, and he let me know you were getting close, so Rooster and Baron and I are in the car. Where are you right now?"

"I'm just an exit or two from 1604. Why don't you just get on I10 and drive slow, and I'll catch you, so you can film me cruising through town, ok?"

"We're on it. Call you back in a minute," she says excitedly.

Soon, she calls back, and they're ahead of me by several exits. I need to turn up the dial even more. I just don't want the embarrassment of being dinged in my home city on a ride like this, so my eyes are peeled. At least getting stopped in San Antone would eliminate the explanation I'd have to give if it'd been in Cali or Florida with a Texas plate.

"We just got on I37. Where are you?" asks Sunshine.

“I’m going like hell. Hold on.”

“We see you! There you are!”

“Ah, gotcha. I’ll come up on your sister’s side of the car.”

“I’m recording. Now take off really fast.”

“Will do. Thanks for doing this, and I’ll talk to you from Florida, doll.”

“Okay. Be safe.” Sunshine pauses. “I really don’t know why I bother telling you that, as I already know the response.”

“You’re learning. This trip’s about speed, not safety. Talk to you tomorrow!”

“Bye, have fun!”

You just have to love a girl that watches me do anything I want, no matter how ridiculous, and just wishes me the best with a smile. Some couples try so hard to control each other, but we just let the other live their own life. Part of that is because we both know the other is too stubborn to listen to our advice, and part of it is just a mutual respect for the other’s wishes. That’s what gives us the best of both worlds. We have the freedom to do what we want, but we still get to enjoy having someone else in our lives.

I37 takes me back to I10, and the scenery is becoming less city and more rural. A couple Banditos on bikes are being followed by an SUV with a Banditos sticker in the window. They’re in the left lane, and people in a hurry are getting frustrated. I’m not going to risk getting shot by one of them for burning the center line and getting too close to them. A sport bike is about the worst location from which to push your limits with bike gangs. I’m just waiting for this clown beating the steering wheel of his four cylinder Honda to get shitty with them. If he does, he’ll get to see a gun pulled from a moving bike or the following SUV. Fortunately only a few minutes later, a path opens, and I’m able to squeeze through the mess.

My stomach grumbles and feels like it’s shriveled and wrapped around my spine again. Dammit, I just realized that I forgot the five Slim Jims on the counter in the bathroom at the hotel. I haven’t had a bite of food since eating the last MRE yesterday morning at the hotel. The tanks are almost dry, so I’ll have to stop soon for fuel. I hate to take any longer at the gas stop than necessary, but as long as I’m stopped, I should get some calories. I feel like I’m starting to get light headed, and that’s not a good sign. I have a hell of a long way to go.

After seeing the fuel warning light, I stop at a little Shell station in Columbus, quickly remove the helmet and gloves, and walk inside to the coolers. I have to be getting low on fluids too, so I buy a couple cans of Red Bull and a big bottle of Gatorade. After grabbing two Slim Jims, I quickly pay and run back out to the bike while tearing into the first Slim Jim. After fighting off the backpack, I see that I’ve only drank about one liter of the fluid. It’s no wonder that I’ve barely had to piss in the last day. I need to start drinking more fluids, or the light headed feeling will only get worse with dehydration. I pour one can of Red Bull and most of the Gatorade into the CamelBak and give the other Red Bull to the guy at the next gas pump. I could load the pistol and put it in my suit or the shoulder bag, but even in Texas, someone might call me in for doing that at a gas pump. I hate having it on me like this as an unloaded gun is no more useful than a paperweight. Right now, the risk of being delayed is higher than the risk of confrontation crime, especially in this state.

With all my gear back in place, tanks full, and Slim Jims inhaled, I finally scream back onto the highway to try to make up the lost time. In retrospect, if I’d remembered the Slim Jims, I wouldn’t have had to even go in that station or remove the backpack. It seems that the slow rate of fluid consumption would’ve allowed me to reach the coast on the three liters I had. There’s no use crying over spilled energy drink, though I do need to try to drink more fluids from here

forward. Twenty four hours of minimal sleep, food, or drink is one thing, but the second half isn't going to get any easier.

Several other speeders and I dodge in and out of I10 traffic on the way to Houston. I'm making good time as I approach the sauna of Texas, but another grumble in my stomach makes me nervous. I was hoping that three days of MREs and the Imodium would keep the bowels in check until I hit the east coast. Pulling off the highway for a bathroom break is not an option as it's not mission critical. It'd probably waste twenty minutes by the time I unzipped this suit, took the boots off to roll down the suit far enough, launched the offender, got everything zipped back in place, and climbed back on the bike again. That's an unacceptable delay. I really don't want to have to rely on this diaper to serve its purpose and have zero desire to spend the second half of this trip riding on a steaming meany either. I'm not sure what would be worse. Dropping a nugget would be an uncomfortable feeling, but trying to slide around in the seat in a mud slide wouldn't bring an ounce of joy to my life either. Ugh, I just need to clench as necessary and overcome whatever's urging to escape. If a four foot tall, nine-hundred year old Jedi can use the Force to raise an X-wing out of the swamp, I can clench my ass enough to keep from making this ride a whole lot more miserable. That may have been in a movie, but it's not like my world isn't at least a little removed from reality too.

After getting spoiled by the speedy bursts across I10, Houston traffic is an expected disappointment. It's not as bad as rush hour traffic in this city, but it's still far from an open runway at the Texas Mile. It's just unrealistic to think that a person can drive coast to coast, even on the weekend, and not hit some serious traffic jams. I planned on the first half of this trip being the faster portion and traffic congestion being a hurdle in the second half. I need my bowels clogged and the road clear, not vice versa. A newer Mustang GT races me back and forth a little, but Sunday afternoon in Houston just doesn't allow for much speeding. At times, I'm lucky if I'm even able to go the speed limit. This blows like a fan, sucks like a vacuum, and bites like a rabid pit bull. The Mustang finally darts down an exit while I continue plodding in the left lane, misleadingly called the fast lane at times like this. Motorcycles are allowed in the high occupancy lane, which helps a little occasionally. It looks like this lane separates very soon. The big sign says that it's free, gives times, and says it's for Monday through Friday. What the hell does that mean for Sunday? Is it free, or am I going to get stuck at a toll booth digging cash out of my backpack for five minutes? I can't risk having to fight the pack off my back, so I just stay on the main section of the road.

There's another fork coming in the near distance with a big wreck in the left lane of the right branch. I wonder if someone realized too late that they were taking the wrong fork and tried to correct the mistake without enough time to do so safely. It must've just happened as people are just getting out of the two vehicles. Most of us see the wreck, move to the right, and slow down so as not to grow the disabled car pile by adding our own vehicles to the mess. Of course, there has to be one asshole in a Benz SUV that continues racing up the left lane as everyone else is getting out of the way. The prick barely has time to slam the brakes before almost joining the other two wrecked rigs, and the Benz then cuts rudely in front of one of the cars in the next lane to the right. This jerkoff is only saved from Karma by the awareness and consideration of the much more cautious and courteous driver that slowed to make room for the boxy Benz. What a dickhead.

Now cruising through Louisiana, I feel the urge to piss again. My S1K moves into the right lane with plenty of clearance behind it. There's no need to risk having someone get a windshield full of my toxic, recycled fluids and call the authorities. I'm not sure if that would

technically be public urination, but my preference is not to learn that answer the hard way. I even hold my right leg away from the bike to minimize the possibility of urine boiling on the exhaust pipe. There's something about the position that just won't let my bladder release. It's almost as if my body knows it's not right to drain fluids while sitting on a moving motorcycle, despite my fancy plumbing.

It doesn't look like I'm going to be able to piss this way, so I get back in the left lane and continue to make progress. Unfortunately, I feel like I'm starting to mentally fade. Much like a flashlight with dying batteries, I try to shake myself into a renewed energy state, but it's getting taxing. There are a lot of cars on the road, and none of them are moving very fast. That's usually a good indication that the law around here has little tolerance for speeding, and the V1's frequent warnings confirm higher patrol presence. Since I'm not able to fly as fast as I'd like, I use the throttle lock more often to give my hand and thumb a little break. I think the nerves in my ass are completely destroyed too. This simple fact that contributes to my soreness is the same that contributes to failed relationships all the time. There are only so many ways one body part can interface with something else. No matter how great it might be at first, eventually, the limited options take a toll, especially for those with short attention spans.

After a call with Wolf Den, Mr. Clean receives the proximity alert and calls my phone. During that call, we lose connection. I look down at the phone, and it has a SIM card failure. That is really not what I need right now. I try to restart the phone with no luck. Sonofabitch! I'm going to need fuel pretty soon, so I'll try taking out the battery and card while I'm stopped to see if that magically resets something like turning off and on a computer.

I exit the interstate toward the Tiger Stop in Grosse Tete and realize that it's the same station where Pick and I stopped on our drive to Florida. I'm also realizing just how bad I have to piss. As soon as I have both boots firmly planted on the ground between the bike and the gas pump, I let it flow. The stream exits the tubing and begins to form a puddle. I think that I'm being sneaky, but the puddle grows and flows under the S1K as the waste forms a giant yellow mess on the other side of the bike in open view. Conveniently, the woman parked on the other side of the pump walks out of the store and right past the yellow puddle. I'm busy fighting with the card reader on the pump and ask her if there's a trick to the pumps. Part of the reason is that I'm really having trouble with the pump, and part of the reason is to try to avert her eyes up at me and away from my mess. It's too late. The scowl and snappy response are evidence that she was not impressed with the fluid dump. She doesn't know that I have the indoor plumbing, so she probably thinks that I just pissed right here behind the bike. It's not like I'll ever see her again or care. I just don't need her yelling to that cop over there in the parking lot that I'm pissing in public.

Once the tanks are both full, my attention turns to my phone. Before I get a chance to screw with the SIM card, I see that the charging cord is bent at ninety degrees to the phone. Let me guess. When I turned the handlebars too far, it bent the cord connection, which is no longer delivering electricity to the phone. The helmet Bluetooth device uses the same connector and has a longer cord, so I switch that to the phone for now. With that problem fixed, I pull the battery and SIM card out of the phone, give it a few seconds, and put it all back together. It seems like it's working for now. Hopefully, it stays working at least until Jacksonville. I wonder if the damn thing is just getting hot from being on this whole time. I haven't been using Waze the whole time, but the music has been blasting since I left San Diego. I like this phone, but for the six hundred bucks that I had to give for it, I would hope it could make it a couple days of constant use without eating her pigs on me.

While filling the rear tank, I see that the latch that holds it to the bike has come loose. I sure don't need a five gallon spare fuel tank bouncing down the highway behind me. After using the key to latch it again, I'm just not convinced that it'll stay latched. Did it just vibrate out of place once, or did something break inside the latching mechanism? It's seems solid for now, but I'll have to check it again at the next gas stop. I'm about tired of checking things as everything I check seems to have issues. I'm glad I'm not pissing in the traditional manner, or my dick would fall off in my hand the way everything else I touch has been coming apart at this stop.

Shortly after the gas stop, I look down at the dash. I've been riding this two wheeled beast for twenty four solid hours. 1783 miles are in the rearview mirror, and another six hundred or so miles of torture remain in front of us. It hasn't been easy getting this far, and it'll get a lot worse before it gets better. None of that matters though. I've come this far, and nothing's going to stop me from getting to that beach as soon as I possibly can.

The phone hasn't complained about the SIM card since I took it apart at the station, so I call Wolf Den. Sure as shit, the SIM card bites it again. As much as I hate the idea of stopping again, I need to at least let Wolf Den know what the hell's going on. I pull to the shoulder, take the phone apart, and call Wolf Den just long enough to tell him not to worry if he doesn't hear from me again. I'm stopped and have been drinking more fluids, so I piss out the tube quickly while there are no witnesses. It's just starting to get dark too, so the sound of the splatter would give away my activity before the sight of a yellow puddle.

While the phone is functional, I call Mr. Clean and tell him about the technical difficulty as well. He assures me that he'll be with some girls on the shoulder at the Slidell exit to film my pass. The SIM card dies again. I can't keep up this time sucking activity anymore, so I'll have to make it the rest of the way on my own. As I get close to the Slidell exit, I see a truck parked on the shoulder. I slow down and move to the right lane while starting to see figures dancing on the shoulder. The closer I get, the louder their music becomes. Even in the darkness, I can see Mr. Clean and two scantily clad girls jumping up and down to the music coming from the truck speakers. They all yell as I drive slowly along the shoulder. Once I get to them, I wave, they cheer for the idiot in black leather, and I twist the throttle back where it needs to be. That guy's awesome. Not only did Mr. Clean gladly make the effort to come to the highway and film me, but he also brought dancing girls with him. Outstanding!

I may not be able to check in with Wolf Den, but I still have the radar detector, the music, and a throttle. It's all up to me to make the best use of what I have and not worry about what I lost. At least the metal is still cranking through the speakers in the helmet to stimulate what mental capacity remains. It's only been dark for a little while, and there are many hours of driving ahead of me before I can rest. I look up in the sky and see that same almost full moon hanging in front of me like a guiding light in the darkness. It feels like *déjà vu* as this scene is like a rerun from yesterday. Instead of the desert last night, the moon now lights up swamps all around me. For whatever reason, I catch my second wind and feel invigorated. Perhaps, it was the encouragement from Mr. Clean and the girls. It could be that the increased intake in energy drinks from the CamelBak is taking effect. Maybe, the nocturnal adjustment is working, or I just know that night is my time to fly. It doesn't really matter why because the ends justify the means in a purely objective mission like this. When this is over, I'll want nothing more than to be at home with Sunshine and Baron. Right now though, there's no place I'd rather be than on this badass motorcycle piercing through the night in pursuit of that bright, cratered sphere in the sky.

Without the sun to show me the surroundings, I go back to relying heavily on the thermal vision system. Up to this point, I've kept my eyes forward and glanced down at the thermal

screen for checks. Much like adjustment to it in the Cadillac on the way back from Colorado, I'm finally able to use the thermal screen on the S1k for primary vision and not just augmentation. At long last, it's feeling natural to watch that little screen on the gas tank to drive effectively. Not only am I able to keep the bike on the road properly and avoid other cars as I could by just watching the road, but I'm now able to watch for animals and hiding patrol cars the whole time and not just during downward glances. The additional confidence combined with a fast speeding Jeep here and speeding sedan there help me kick up the speed even more as I tear over the bridges of the old South. These blatant left lane speeders are big enough decoys to distract the law from little old me shredding the right lane and dodging to the left by a lane or two as needed.

The adrenaline is starting to flow through my veins again as I dart in and out of the slower moving traffic, which is still exceeding the speed limit. Mississippi and Alabama go by in a dark blur as I chase my rush. Several of us are tearing across Alabama when we enter the George C. Wallace Tunnel. I wind up the bike even more through the underwater tube. Even an I4 engine sounds cool while wrapping through a tunnel. As soon as we exit the other side back into the darkness, the V1 lights up with a laser lock again like it did in west Texas. My heart stops as I let the brakes take me back down to less illegal speeds. Traffic around me is still moving, and cars are easier targets than a bike. In the absence of cherries and sirens, I slowly creep back up to speed.

The tanks are dry again, so I pull into a gas station in the Pensacola area. While filling the tanks, I do the SIM card shuffle on the phone again and move the charging cord from the phone back to the helmet in hopes that they'll both stay charged for the remaining miles. As soon as the phone screen comes to life, I call Wolf Den and quickly tell him where I am and that I'll talk to him from Jax. By combining the time wasting phone dickery with fueling and relatching of the rear tank, I'm able to keep the stopped time to a minimum. Would it be nice to relax and stretch my legs? Of course it would. It'd also be nice to have a mansion in Miami with a fleet of sports cars in a shed behind it too. Neither of those is going to happen while I'm standing here at this fuel pump, so pitter patter, let's get at 'er. As I tear out of the parking lot of the gas station, I point the bike toward the lights. I think I'm on the south side of the interstate, so that means that I should go to the right. As I pull onto the highway again, I soon see a sign that says 'EAST I10.' A breath of relief releases into my helmet as I confirm that I didn't get confused and start driving west by accident. I'm a little concerned that the sleep deprivation is starting to have an effect, and I absolutely can't afford to make a stupid mistake that costs me any more precious time.

Florida traffic isn't moving as fast as I'd hoped. That shouldn't be surprising considering what I saw the last time I was here. When Pick and I rode our choppers out here for Biketoberfest, this stretch of I10 through Florida was littered with FHP cars hiding in the trees that line the interstate. It is creeping toward midnight on a Sunday night, so hopefully, law enforcement is lying low tonight. Luckily, the thermal cam will give me notice of any police vehicles hiding on the side of the road well in advance. The V1 will also help warn me if they happen to be gunning someone in the vicinity. The equipment doesn't make me immune to the radar gun, but it'll sure as hell give me a big advantage over not having this technology. I need every advantage that I can get as I rip through the final state of my trip and the state that spawned my existence over four decades ago.

My eyes are moving from the road to the mirrors to the dash to the thermal vision screen to the radar detector to the radar app on the phone in constant rotation. The whole time, I'm listening carefully for the series of beeps from the V1 to interrupt my metal motivation blasting

from the embedded speakers inside the helmet. It's a lot of information sources to monitor simultaneously, but it keeps my brain active and focused. What are the three basic needs of the human body? From what I remember, they're food, shelter and clothing. Of those three, clothing is the only one that I've met for the last day and a half, my helmet is the closest thing to shelter, and two Slim Jims are the only food for that time. The body also needs sleep and fluids, and I'm sorely deprived of both of those necessities right now too. I'm getting close. Hang with me, brain. I need you, buddy.

I close the distance on a truck in front of me. I can't imagine that the lift kit and oversized stomper tires make for a smooth ride or great mileage. Nonetheless, I'm happy to have someone else besides me driving moderately fast. I'm guessing that the cruise on that truck is set right at eighty-two mph as that's how fast I've been going behind him for a couple miles. Even when the road opens ahead, and no headlights are coming from the other direction, the truck stays at a constant eighty-two. Why doesn't he speed up when we're the only two vehicles in sight and both have clear sailing conditions? I can't wait any longer for this clown and his cruise control to go faster, so I twist up the throttle well past three digits. I can hear the big, noisy tires as I scream by them only a few feet away from the oversized, rotating rubber. As soon as the next pair of headlights comes over the horizon, my speed drops back to the safe range. The next pair of white lights coming over the crest is preceded by a set of orange lights, so it's a truck and no threat. I again grab a handful of throttle sticking to my standard operating procedure with rigid discipline that's proven successful in the past. The next lights are only white, which again force me down to the low eighties. The lifted truck must've stood on the gas as he is gaining on me while I've slowed down to his old cruising speed. Eventually, he seems to have learned my pattern and is mimicking my strategy. He's letting me lead but being careful not to let me leave him in the dust like last time.

This is fun. Instead of being out on this road alone, I have my protégé a few steps behind me. My partner in travel may not have a vehicle as tailored to this high speed game as I do, but I still appreciate the company to keep this contest more interesting. I glance in the mirrors and don't even see anyone else from our side in the rear view. It's pretty empty out here. I see the occasional lights come over the horizon from the other team. I wonder if they're doing as well as we are. There's no way they could be. My process is solid and should ensure victory for us. It's composed of simple concepts and rules. If white lights show at the horizon first, reduce speed to the low eighties until the car passes an imaginary line perpendicular to both their lanes and our lanes. If I get close to the rear of a semi on our team, I turn off the high beams, slow down to the mid eighties, signal left with the blinker, pass the truck at a ten or fifteen mph difference, turn the blinker to the right, cross the line and move in front of the truck, turn off the blinker, wave, and turn on the high beams before twisting the throttle again. Any other condition should be addressed by driving as fast as possible and paying damn close attention to the instruments. The truck is getting better and even tries to get next to me at the slow times, but I'm not worried about him overtaking me. I didn't see a radar detector hanging from his windshield when I passed him miles ago, and I highly doubt this truck has a thermal vision system. It's made for mud runs, not high speed runs like my S1K.

I continue watching the thermal screen primarily and point my eyes forward at the site of a glow at the crest. This way, I can be ready to see if the first lights over the hill are white or orange. The thermal is perfect for this. I constantly scan across for any bright white spots on the screen indicating a possible animal. Tearing a deer in half wouldn't do me any favors, and I hate to have to repaint this bike again like the time I hit that raccoon a few years ago on Scenic Loop

Road. In addition to watching the thermal, I also periodically scan the area in front of me for glowing eyes, just in case something is out of the view of the thermal cam. I wonder if this same truck will come out with me again on the next time through this course or if they'll send someone else. Do we have to all wait at the beginning for everyone to finish? The other team must just be going the opposite way around the course and will end where we do before the next round.

Wait a minute. I'm picturing in my head this road as part of a course that winds through all these trees around us. That's not what this is at all. This is I10, and I'm heading east toward Jacksonville. I'm not going in a circle or even an oval or any kind of a closed loop track. I'm driving straight east, and I have to continue this for a long time yet. I begin a conversation within myself and ask, "Where the hell am I?"

"Think about this. I just stopped in Pensacola a while ago."

"What time was that?"

I reach down to turn on the Waze app, but the bad SIM card caused me to lose the navigation ability too. I can't call Wolf Den, so I need to figure this out on my own.

"It feels like I'm dreaming this. I can't be though, can I?"

"No, this doesn't feel like it's real, but it's real. It has to be."

"How do I prove it to myself? How do I know that I'm not dreaming?"

"Maybe, it doesn't matter. If it's just a dream, I'll eventually wake up. If it's real, and I keep doing what I'm doing, I should be fine. No, scratch that. Don't even question the reality. This is reality. It's your reality you've created, so deal with it."

"Alright, I'll accept this is reality. Now what?"

I just can't shake the thought in my head that this is just some closed course through a forest, and I'm heading right back to the starting point in Pensacola, but I know that's not true. I try to picture I10 in my head as a straight line from here to Jacksonville. In my mind, it looks like a Google map with a straight orange line across a gray background and the blue shield noting that the orange line represents I10. My brain fights back and forth between the two images.

As the mental tug of war continues deep inside my helmet, I again realize why I'm following my process. The whole point is to avoid arrest while driving as fast as possible. Oh, shit! What if I did get pulled over right now? What would I say? I can't even differentiate reality from dream right now. If a cop asks me to tell him where I am going or where I've been, the hesitation in my voice would be obvious that I'm afraid or sound like I'm wasted. Would I slip and say more than I should? Would I just blurt that I'd been on the road since I left San Diego two evenings ago and haven't slept since? I'm not drunk, so they couldn't get me for that. What if a video camera at a gas station caught me peeing somewhere on the trip? Fucking commie cams! No, that would be in another state. FHP shouldn't care if I peed in another state though I'm sure they wouldn't approve.

More cars come over the horizon, and I start to panic at my loss of mental control. I wonder if I should be worried about wrecking. A dream state may not be the best mental condition for high speed driving requiring lightning fast reflexes that could mean the difference between jail and freedom or life and death. My process is solid though. I'm confident that it's the best approach to meeting my objective. I just need to have faith in myself and what I'm doing. Even if part of my brain thinks that I'm doing it for some real life video game, the fact is that I'm still following proper procedure. The ends justify the means, and results are what matter right now. I have to make it to Jacksonville with no more delays than absolutely necessary. I'll keep doing what I'm doing, following the procedure, and picturing the Google map in my head of I10

as a straight line from a blinking blue dot where I am to the last bit of land before the big blue stuff.

As I struggle to force my fading brain back to visualizing reality instead of the forest course dream, I realize that I have no idea how many miles exist between here and my destination. How far am I from the coast? Maybe, I can use the mile markers. After just over a mile of that approach, I realize that the numbers on the mile markers are increasing. All they tell me is how far I am into Florida, not how far I have left. I have no idea what exit numbers or mile markers are in Jacksonville. If I could just remember one exit number along I10 in that city where I lived for six years, I could do the math and figure out how far I have left to drive. Dammit, brain! The balls are doing their job, why can't you do yours?

I finally see signs indicating that I'm close to Tallahassee. I think that's good, but I don't remember how far Tallahassee is from Jax. Pick and I just drove this same route a little over six months ago. Why the hell can't I remember how many miles it is from Tallahassee to Jacksonville? At one time, I know I used to think it was about a four hour drive, but didn't someone tell me later that it was only an hour and a half? Was it Doughboy that told me that? Maybe, I'm thinking of Lake City, which seems like it might be just over an hour away where I75 hits I10. Maybe, I75 is an hour from Jax. If only this stupid SIM card hadn't shit the bed, I could call Wolf Den or pull up a map. Technology is great. It sucks you in, makes you dependent on it, and eventually screws you when it has you by the balls like some kind of electronic Socialist.

I think my brain is on the return trip from dreamland, but now, the awareness of reality is just sucking the life out of it. It's in dire need of rest, and I know it. The body isn't as stupid or stubborn as I am. It knows when there's a problem, and it's trying to tell me in hopes that I'll have enough sense to correct the problem. Much like a college kid ignoring the check engine light of a beater car for school, I discount and ignore the bodily preservation warning. First, two parts of my brain were debating dream versus reality. Now that I've suppressed the dreaming portion, this new battle emerges. The body and its risk adverse part of the brain are trying to tell the other part of the brain that enough is enough. Humans are not supposed to do this to themselves. We are not meant to go this long without food, sleep, and fluids. If we do go this long under those conditions, we sure as hell shouldn't be balled up on a 190 horsepower missile tearing through the Sunshine State in the middle of the night at high speeds.

The common sense between my ears doesn't have any more chance of success than a one legged man in an ass kicking contest right now. The voice of safety is David to the Goliath of addiction, except Goliath already took the sling from David, tore off his arms, and beat David over the head with them. Logic can find no reason why a person wouldn't stop this nonsense and sleep somewhere. Reason sees no logic in proceeding any further under these conditions, but none of this matters. Addiction is calling the shots. Emotion is defined as thought without logic, and addiction falls in the same category because its decisions are based on feelings instead of objectivity. Neither addiction nor emotion will listen to logic, because they by nature are unreasonable thought processes. All either of them can understand is their own tunnel vision of desire. Addiction is the part of my brain with all the control. It's sending signals to my right hand to twist back the throttle. Muscle control that keeps me moving forward while scanning sources of input is a completely automatic function that doesn't care one way or the other. Addiction is flying down the highway with common sense as its prisoner who is trying to survive, and muscle control is just the indifferent motor catapulting them both down their dark path.

The temperature has dropped significantly. Perhaps, all my powers of observation were consumed with the battle in my helmet, and I just didn't notice the cold earlier. I sure as hell notice it now. Did it get this cold last night at this time? It's only been a day ago, but it seems like ages. My entire sense of time has been smashed like a dumbbell landing on a cell phone. I do remember being cold yesterday as I think harder, but it seemed like it helped keep me alert and focused. Now, it's just making me more miserable than before. It's bizarre that the same stimulus can result in two very different results depending on other factors. I and everyone else who's been married to a bipolar spouse know this painful fact well. I could eat the south end of a north bound rhino, am running on fumes, can't even get a unanimous decision from one brain, and am now colder than Arctic ice to top off my pampering. I have to keep pushing forward though. This is where adversity becomes the condom of society and separates the hardened pricks from the pussies. I told myself months ago that I'm not stopping for anything but mission critical items, and I'm not going to break that promise to myself now in the final state of the ride.

I keep driving with my elbows and knees tucked close to the bike in a failing attempt to keep warm while getting closer to the objective. As I approach Tallahassee, I debate whether or not to stop for gas. I should have about a hundred miles left in fuel, but I still don't have a clue how far it is to Jacksonville. It's two AM, so who knows where I might run out of gas and if there would even be an open station. I've been stuck on fumes enough times before in this state while cruising through the middle of nowhere in the dark hours of the night. There have been times when I barely avoided sleeping on a gas station's sidewalk for the night, and tonight is not the night for that to actually happen. Gary made it so close before his trip was cut short, and I'm not going to let that happen to me. There's no fucking way that I'm not finishing this trip as planned, but I have to keep what's left of my cognitive functions focused and not drift back to the dream state. If I would get pulled over right now, I'd sound like a blithering idiot. I wouldn't even sound sane, let alone capable of managing a machine like this in the middle of a black highway. Another radar alert lights the display of the V1 and my phone as the beeps interrupt the music, and the brakes cause my headlight to dip momentarily. After a quick scan of the area and thermal screen, I look in the rearview and see headlights far behind me. Could that be a patrol car at this time of night out here? I don't have time to wait and find out. As soon as the headlights are out of sight, I hammer the throttle to make damn sure that I'm out of his range.

Finally, a road sign tells me that Jacksonville is eighty-seven miles away. Another sigh of relief blows refreshing warm air into the helmet. Instead of the feared four remaining hours, only an hour and a half remain. I take the first exit near Tallahassee that advertises gas and hope that the station is still open. While refueling, I switch the charger cord back from the helmet to the phone but don't bother with the phone dickery to call Wolf Den. I know where I am and can make it the rest of the way without ground support. I refuel as quickly as possible, pull to the end of the drive of the gas station, and drain my bladder through the tubing at the stop sign while waiting for the semi to get out of my way. I push the engine to its three digit, first gear redline as I make damn sure that I'm going the right way on I10 again. Even the next couple signs receive real close attention from my foggy eyes as I triple check that I'm eastbound as planned and heading to Jacksonville, not westbound to Pensacola.

The remaining human portion of me would like to say that in these last miles before Jacksonville, I am thinking about those that matter most to me. Visions of Sunshine and Baron waiting at home remind me of all that I have to lose, and I decide to just make it safely to my destination. That part of me wishes I replay fond memories of my parents and sisters and decide

that nothing is worth the risk of not being able to see them again. This is not the case, since that part of me is completely stifled.

The adrenaline junkie in me would be proud to say that I'm spending this final stretch with the throttle pulled all the way and covering these eighty miles in less than a half hour. Nothing stands in my way as I shred this interstate daring anyone of this world or the next to get in my way and test my immortality. That isn't exactly the case either.

The addict is forced to shake hands with the last few pieces of active gray matter concerned with survival. It's no question that the junkie is still calling the shots. There is no consideration for safety, wrecks, or irreparable damage to man, machine, or relationships. All that matters is completing the ride as fast as possible, which includes not getting arrested. It isn't some glorious rush of adrenaline with me standing on the seat and screaming the words to whatever metal song is blaring inside of the helmet. It is a matter of trying to keep my shit together long enough to finish the mission. It's absolutely all that matters right now. I am beaten to a pulp, but I am almost there and nothing, especially my own weakness, is going to prevent success. I didn't come this far to quit. I can accept failure, but I will not accept quitting under any circumstance.

I'm no longer in the dream state, just the drained state. I need to keep pushing it as hard as I can short of causing a red and blue light show in the darkness. I'm tucking behind the shield as much as I can to try to maintain what little body heat my starved body is able to generate. My planning paid for the time in spades as this neoprene skull mask around my neck is at least keeping my neck from freezing. Not all the riding positions allow tucking behind the shield, but it doesn't matter at this point. They're all horribly uncomfortable right now, so adjusting from front to rear pegs or front of the seat to rear of the seat makes almost no difference at all anymore. It's like deciding between a stick in the eye or an ice pick in the ear. They're all going to hurt, it all feels like shit no matter how you twist it, so I just take another hit from the CamelBak and keep pushing east.

I ignore my brain's desperate cry for sleep as it's not going to happen. My focus is the key to keeping my brain active. The eyes continue to shift from the screen to the radar to the road amidst the blasting heavy metal. I take back what I said earlier about not screaming the words to the music. I'm not doing it in defiance or victory, but it's more of a desperate effort to keep energized. Even if I did get stopped right now, I could quit screaming before the officer got to the bike. If they had a way to see that I'd been yelling to the metal inside my helmet, I'd be trading my single piece leathers for a straight jacket in a nice padded room where I could finally sleep. I try to dust off corners of my brain and muster an image of Jacksonville from the numerous times that I checked Google maps over the past few weeks. The outer skirts of the huge city produce a glow over the road ahead in the distance. 'West side is the best side' as the zany local DJs used to say. I'll take it, because this means that I'm getting really close to my goal. I295 should be just a few miles ahead of me. I could take it south around the city until I get to JTB, but there's no traffic at this time of night or morning or whatever the hell it is right now. I think it'll be faster to just plow right through the middle of the city, but my V1 is beeping, and I'm seeing JSO patrol cars already. This is bringing back flashbacks from the last time I got stopped in Jacksonville.

*I'd just left the doctor chic's place about five AM that morning and was hammering the Ape through the curves right around this area. Just as I really started hanging sideways and was starting to bring the Ape's V-twin to a high revving roar, cherries lit my rear view mirror and*

*darkened my outlook. I said to myself "Self, you just got laid, but now, you're about to get fucked."*

*The JSO officer climbed out of the paddy wagon and walked to my bike while I took off my helmet.*

*"Where you heading in such a hurry?"*

*"Just leaving my girlfriend's place, so I can get ready and go to work."*

*I figured that was a better response than telling him that I was leaving a hooker's place to go buy crack on Bert Road. He asked where I worked and told me about someone he knew that once worked there who of course I didn't know.*

*"Do you know what the speed limit is here?"*

*"It's interstate, so I'm guessing it's sixty-five or so."*

*"It's forty-five."*

*"What?!"*

*"You passed a sign back there when you first got on, another sign right back there, and there's one right there."*

*He pointed at a big sign right in front of me that confirmed his statement, and that also meant that he'd been following me long enough to see my slightly aggressive driving. "Do you know how fast you were going?"*

*I saw my one chance for potential forgiveness that was the honest truth. "No, sir. I just put a new battery in the bike. When you do that, it goes back to kilometers per hour, so I have no idea."*

*He looked at my dash, and I showed him that I was being honest. "We don't want anyone getting hurt out here. I'm going to go back in that truck and watch you set that thing back to miles an hour, and slow it down, okay?"*

*"Yes, sir."*

I cannot risk a half hour long, embarrassing delay right now with less than as much time left until my destination. I just need to keep moving within a safe cushion above the posted speed. The bad thing is that I95 is all SNAFU here yet with construction, and the speed limit is still forty-five mph. This really doesn't help. There goes the V1 alert again as if to remind me to watch my ass around here. There's a cop too, so it's not a false alarm from an automatic door somewhere on the side. Shouldn't they be home in bed by now? This is painfully slow, but I push my limits through the city until the JTB exit. I turn left onto JTB like so many times in the past and plan in my head to incinerate the concrete strip from here to the beach. The good separation between eastbound and westbound lanes would make it almost impossible for a JSO on the opposite side to get me either, especially over the big bridge.

There's one car ahead, which I soon pass, and it looks like a clear shot. I tuck into the bike and get ready to hammer it to the sand. Just before my elbow drops and twists the right grip, the V1 blares at me, and I see a pair of headlights pull in shortly behind me. You have got to be fucking kidding me! I can't even enjoy a balls out run down JTB to finish this ride? I can't slow down and make it obvious that I'm checking if he's a cop, but he had to be the source of that radar alert. I'm within five miles of the limit and don't dare push past that. That would be just my shitty luck to get stopped in the final twenty miles out of a two-thousand plus mile ride. I'm sure that he can see my out of state plate too. Those would be fun to explain in my current mental state. I can guess exactly what he's thinking too. 'This little prick thinks he's going to come out here in the middle of the night and top out his bike. I'll make damn sure he doesn't get a chance to do it on my watch.'

He and I both know that I want my fix. We both know that I want to abuse this rocket and see how close to two hundred mph I can hit on this beach bound drag strip. Come on, fucker, exit already! I'm not going to hurt anyone but myself, so why the hell do you care? There's not a soul on this road except us. The Texas Mile approved me to drive 190 mph. You'll honor my Texas concealed weapon license. How about honoring my Texas Mile license? Lady luck has given me a golden shower as the assumed JSO car follows me the whole fucking way out JTB. The shocks of my S1K bounce us up and down as we cross the extreme dips in the big bridge across the Intracoastal Waterway. From spring break drives to Padre to drives to Corpus to any drive to a beach, I know that I'm getting close to the ocean when the smell of the salt air fills my nostrils. It almost relaxes me for a brief second before the speedometer and headlights in my mirror send me back to being absolutely furious.

After completely robbing me of what could've been a very well deserved adrenaline rush, the car finally disappears from my mirror as it veers off the Marsh Landing exit. As soon as I'm free of my unsolicited chaperone, I crank up the speed and lean around the 270 degree A1A North exit ramp. I'm not pushing it to the point of risking a wreck so close to the end, but I'm going to get at least a partial fix around this spiral. Like every other time when I've taken this ramp, I enter A1A North already exceeding the posted speed limit. I cruise up A1A again wanting to give it hell. If I drove ninety, I might save three minutes, but I'd be risking a half hour of delay or even incompleteness. Preventing myself from giving into that primal urge is beyond aggravating, but the addict has to just hold tight and let me finish. The brains and balls both worked together to get me this far, but now the balls have to take a breather and let the brain, which is barely even functioning, end this event.

I think this is Sixteenth Avenue at the light ahead. Once the street sign confirms that I have the right road, I turn right and blast through the last couple blocks and the beach parking lot. I don't know if it's relief, accomplishment, or just exhaustion, but I don't even think to hit the brakes. The racing inspired tires come to an abrupt stop about ten feet into the sand. I check the dash of the S1K. It says 2:39 AM and 408.1 miles. That means I just drove 2408.1 miles in, carry the thirteen, thirty-three hours and ten minutes. That beats Gary's time by a few hours. That means that I'm the fastest human being to ride a motorcycle from coast to coast across America. There's no two ways to slice it. That's fucking cool, if I do say so myself.

As I cuss myself for getting my motorcycle stuck on the beach, I struggle to rock the bike backward to free it from the fine sand.

*When I first started planning this trip, I imagined Sunshine, Tracer, Cousin Reno, Cartmanini, J3, Train, Large, Snake, Stabby, the Scot, AJ, and any other local friends standing here at the beach waiting to film my high speed arrival and take pictures of the event. As the ride crept closer, I questioned whether it was wise to attract so much attention to such an illegal event. Then, Sunshine couldn't make it because she was still recovering from the brain parasites. Then, it became obvious that everyone would be asleep at the time when I was arriving. Then, I lost my SIM card and couldn't let anyone know when I was coming. Then, JSO followed me all the way to the beach. Then, I got stuck on the beach.*

*During the last time when I was in Florida sand, I was also on two wheels. That was last October in Daytona Beach, and I was sitting on this bike's louder, shinier gagemate, the Gripper chopper. Spending several days and riding my best work to date for the twelve-hundred miles from Texas to Biketoberfest was a proud accomplishment for me.*

Tonight stomps that one into the sand though. I just drove twice that distance in less than a day and a half. My brain is barely able to comprehend it right now, completely fried, yet finally

relieved at some level. The relief doesn't really stem so much from it being over as I have almost a tinge of disappointment that my adventure has ended. The relief comes from having done exactly what I set out to do. Nothing that I've endured over the last couple days matters. I did it. I rode coast to coast across America for 2408.1 miles in 33:10. I did it for me. It's not corporate sponsored, and I'm not being paid to be on a TV show. It's just me, my machine, and the giant dark ocean oblivious to this dark spec cursing in the sand on a sliver of its massive beach front property. What is important is that I just set the record for fastest cross country ride on a motorcycle. It's a little bizarre to think that there's something out there that no one in the whole world has done better than me. Even if someone beats my time someday or already has, it really doesn't even matter. I did it for the right reason. I did it to test my metal. I swore to arrive in this sand, look back, and know I gave it a balls to the wall effort and left nothing on the table. Every ounce of strength, drive, and energy that I had is left out there on that highway. I know that I gave it everything, and that's the perfect amount to have given in anything that I do that's worth doing at all.

There are no dancing girls, no crowd to cheer, not even anyone to take my picture in my private victory circle. There are no bands, and the only sounds apart from the ocean waves are those from the music in my helmet and the ringing in my head. Reality is that the only people I'd really like to be here are the ones that matter to me most like Sunshine and my family and friends, but there's not even a soul in sight besides me, assuming I still have one. The whole arrival is rather anticlimactic. I didn't spend the last half hour at full throttle with the adrenaline racing through my veins and my heart pounding. My heart may have been beating faster because the only fluids that I drank for the last day and a half were primarily energy drinks. I didn't cruise into the beach with grace, poise, and a victorious fist in the air while screaming to the sky over the dark waters ahead. The closest thing to that is me cussing out loud as I finally turn around and drive out of the last couple feet of sand.

Even though my body is about ready to collapse, a tremendous sense of accomplishment rushes over me as I pull into one last gas station. It feels like I should tell someone what I just did, but there's no one here to tell. The whole area looks like one of those movies in which all of the humans have been eradicated. In addition to the unavailability of human interaction, the deal was that only Tanford and I would know the actual time, and this whole ride should be kept under wraps for the next year until the statute of limitations are over and the next book is released. It doesn't really matter if anyone else ever knows it. I know it. I know that I met my goal of driving non-stop across the entire country while only stopping for mission critical items. I never stopped the bike because I was tired or uncomfortable or even to use a restroom. There were no delays, arrests, wrecks, breakdowns, or even the need to add oil to my rock solid rocket. I just focused on the goal and did it. The addict won. Fuck everything else, because the goal was all that ever mattered.

The mission is accomplished, the objective has been met, and no one can ever take that fact away from me as long as I live. I guess this is how you know that you're really doing something for the right reason. A person knows they did something for themselves when it doesn't matter if anyone else even knows it. Will I tell others later? Of course I will. I just don't need to post it on Skynet and wait desperately in anticipation for likes to appear for a sense of acceptance. Right now, I'm the only person in the world who knows what I just achieved, and that's still enough to make me proud as hell.

I just rode across the entire country in less than a day and a half, and part of me feels like I should celebrate. I could go walk into a bar in full leather, stand at the bar, and enjoy a nice

Jack and Coke. Unfortunately, there are no bars open, and the last time I tried walking into Brix with a helmet, the bouncer made me leave my 'potential weapon' outside. I shot past starving conditions hours ago, but the only place that might be open is the Third Street Diner. As I leave the gas station, I drive north on a deserted A1A toward the diner. After about two blocks of slowly deciding that my body needs sleep worse than food right now, I turn the bike south and cruise down A1A toward Tracer's place. I have no business driving this bike any further. I shouldn't even be in public for that matter, even if it's a deserted public place like Jax Beach at about five AM on a Monday morning.

The bike would be fine turning to the west and racing back to San Diego, but its pilot is not. I pull the bike into Tracer's driveway and park it in front of the house for the SIK's first good rest since leaving the hotel in San Diego. Once inside the lower floor of his house, I walk to the spare bedroom and wrestle off the backpack. I sit on the bed to perform SIM card voodoo on my temperamental phone. Texts go out to my Sunshine of course, Wolf Den, Mom, and the sisters to let them know that I made it safely. Now that the junkie has gotten his fix, the human side resurfaces for less selfish acts like making sure people don't have to worry any longer. In the process of phone operation, it becomes obvious how much my hands are shaking. My whole body is actually shivering from the last few hours of riding through the coldest part of the April night. I peel off the leather suit, and the shivering seems to get worse. In the spare bathroom, I laugh at Exhibit A of Tracer being one of the few people more organized and OCD than me. There's a foam cup sitting on the bathroom sink with 'Axe' written on it. It's a good thing he left it there and labeled it for me, so I wouldn't get confused and use someone else's foam cup in the bathroom. After two full cups of water, the throat is a little less dry but still pretty scratchy. I remove the Under Armour and socks and stand shivering in my diaper with the catheter taking its U-turn from the top of the diaper to the floor. I drop the diaper and cannot find the words to express my relief that it's still a clean diaper that simply served as an unnecessary backup plan.

Bandages are always easier to remove in the shower, so I'll assume a condom catheter will follow that same logic. Exhibit B of Tracer's OCD is the laminated sign in the shower alerting guests to pull down on the spout to make the water reroute to the shower head. Standing here in the hot shower, the uncontrollable shaking gets worse before it gets better. I have no idea what the temperature has been for the last leg of the trip, but I know that I have been freezing for hours. I'm sure that the body's weakened state did nothing for my ability to keep my body temperature in the comfort zone, even with the single piece leather suit. Staring downward at my numb, red feet brings back flashbacks of the New Year's Day 2010 ride south from Jax in the cold rain.

This isn't as bad as that night was. I suppose I shouldn't complain if it's no worse than what I've endured in the past. As the hot water starts to dampen the shivering, my eyes shift from the red feet to the plumbing contraption hanging between my legs. If I were a betting man, I'd bet this isn't going to be any fun at all. I stand up straight so that the hot water is showering my mid section instead of running off my head as if somehow the hot water will just melt the catheter into submission like a Band-Aid. I start to peel the silicone off my piss stick and cuss quietly. The elastic flesh stretches like hell before the silicone adhesive finally starts coming loose leaving a trail of pain on the sensitive skin. Even with the sticky jimmy hat removed, the catheter has left a nicely formed hickey ring around the shaft as a memento of the occasion. It looks like I just got blown by a Goth chic.

Finally warm, clean, and plumbing attachment free, I drag my body back to the bedroom and collapse under the sheets. My body hurts in places that I didn't know existed, my right

thumb is completely tingling, my head is ringing, I'm so exhausted that I've forgotten how hungry I am, and I have a black ring around the base of my prick. Despite all of these temporary inconveniences, a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction soothe and relax me as my eyes finally close. It's the post rush comedown, like a heroin junkie falling asleep with a needle in the arm and pool of blood in the palm. This same stage is equivalent to passing out after an all day drunk or instantly falling to sleep after orgasm. The addict has achieved the rush and can now rest in peace. The longer the rush lasts, the deeper the sleep. I earned it.

## **Chapter 15: Exhaust of Relief**

### **Tue 15 Apr 14**

I'm finally waking up from the first decent night of sleep that I've had in a week. Considering the condition of my body and the fact that I actually drank a little last night, I'm surprised that my head and bowels aren't in turmoil this morning.

*Yesterday, I woke after a whopping two and a half hours of sleep after arriving at Jax Beach. You'd think that after being that exhausted, I would've slept longer, but living on energy drinks for a couple days prohibited that ability. Tracer had left a selection of whiskey on the upstairs bar for me on Sunday night, but I didn't even see it until yesterday morning. I did have a celebration shot of cheap whiskey with lunch yesterday with the old crew from the Office. It's not that I needed or barely even wanted the shot, but it felt almost obligatory considering that I hadn't drunk this year and had just completed a task of such magnitude. In the two and a half days from Saturday morning to lunch yesterday, I logged about five hours of sleep, less than three liters of fluids, and two Slim Jims while spending over half that time in the fetal position like a monkey fucking a football on that Tupperware torpedo.*

*After a short nap in the afternoon, I rode up to Lynch's and met J3 for a beer last night before Tracer and I grabbed a steak and beer up the street at LongHorn. We then sat on Tracer's balcony drinking whiskey while we shot the shit and watched the Monday night traffic of A1A below us.*

My body is starting to feel closer to normal, but that's not saying much when compared to how I felt a day ago. I still feel better than I did yesterday, and progress is what matters. It's true that my throttle thumb is still tingling and worthless, and my dick still looks like a raccoon's tail. At least, I've now eaten a couple of solid meals and slept for more than a nap's length duration. My body is still a wreck and full of more cramps than a sorority house on aligned crimson tide cycles, but that's of course no surprise.

Since I'm awake, I decide to take a ride to my destination point and see it in the daylight. I climb back on the filthy bike in front of Tracer's house, wince a little as my body assumes the position that it had for thirty-three hours this weekend, and buzz up A1A toward Sixteenth Ave.

As I pull through the parking lot, I brake to a stop on the concrete and avoid getting stuck in the sand like I did a couple nights ago. The sun is still low in the sky over the ocean but high enough to have turned the sky blue and eliminate any hint of night. It's not much different than the sunrise that I saw from Corpus before the trip, but something about this dawn is just better. It's not because of where I am as much as what I've done to get here. I rode 160 miles to watch the Corpus morning, but the price of seeing this sunrise was 2408 grueling miles. The more you work for something, the better it is, and the more you appreciate it. If it were easy, everyone would do it, and not one person would truly appreciate it.

Views like a sun rising over ocean waves or snow on mountain tops are beautiful just as they are. What makes those scenes even cooler to me is sticking one of my machines right in the middle of them. You start with this gorgeous view of nature that could have been viewed the same way a century ago, and then, you stick a finely crafted technological accomplishment in the scene to contrast it. If done with an artistic eye, the two complement each other. At the right angle, I see the sun bursting its light over the tank of the S1K with its orange rays of light providing just enough warm colors to really make the red and yellow flames of the paintwork pop from the lower portion of the bike. The gold of the front shocks contribute to the warm colors as well. A light blue backdrop of sky brings out the white and blue of the BMW logo in the center of the Thunder Grey painted panels. Simple materials like the sand and rocks are so drastically different than the high tech, 190 horsepower beast with its Brembo brakes, lightweight materials, and electronics that would drive KITT from Knight Rider to turn green with envy.

These are the times that make everything else worth it. I take a deep breath of the salty air as I admire the picture in front of me. The beauty combined with the sun and sense of accomplishment send warmth through me like a first shot of whiskey. When I rode into this sand in the dark the other day, my brain was so destroyed that it was hard to really comprehend it all. Now that I've had time, food, and sleep, the whole event is just another experience in the past. The bike and my body survived without any major lasting damage. It's over. I did what I set out to do, which is the most rewarding part about it. I did the best I could with what I had, and I don't have to wonder if I could've done better. Done. That was some of the most miserable fun that I'll ever have. It wasn't easy, but again, no human is faster than me at driving a motorcycle across this great country of ours having slaughtered that stretch of road in just over thirty-three hours. That's not too bad to be able to say for a mere day and a half of misery.

Now, the addict follows the tail of the cycle like any other common junkie. We get the itch, chase our rush, and indulge with no concern for anything but the high. Throughout those phases, the rest of the world and even other aspects of our own lives mean less and less as the addiction consumes every thought that we have. Then after the release, we come down from the high, and the crash pushes us into semi-hibernation. We rise from that phase like an ugly moth from an uglier cocoon and go back to our worlds. Those of us with such crossed wires return to daily life and are again able to act with concern toward others and care about people close to us, often having to beg our loved ones for forgiveness for our recent slip. It's not that we don't care about other people. We just care more about ourselves, especially when it comes to our addictions. Humans have free will, and all of us make the choices of our individual actions. Even if we do something nice for someone else, we're still being selfish. Acts of kindness are committed because ultimately, people make the decision to do it because of how it makes them feel. Maybe, addicts aren't any more weak or selfish than normal people. Maybe, we're just more blatant about being self serving. It doesn't help that our temptations are more overpowering than an impulse to buy a new shirt or to do whatever normal people feel is losing control.

The other side of the coin is that one could say that addicts are simply dedicated to their purpose. It's difficult to justify a coke addict as being motivated. Does the opinion change if he or she is snorting Columbian snow to work two jobs to take care of kids or sick parents? We all judge, and we're all hypocrites when it comes down to it. The only person that is not in moral conflict is the purely immoral person who acts on every single instinct and accepts anyone doing the same. The rest of us justify our own actions and condemn those who differ from our beliefs. I admittedly do the same damn thing. I look down my nose at drug users and how they destroy

their lives and families. Yet, here I am on the comedown of a high speed adventure risking everything that I will ever have in an extreme act of self centered masochism with zero regard for friends, family, or even myself for that matter.

Ricky was right. I justify it by saying that it's for wounded warriors, fallen officers, research, or a book. What if good does come out of it? Does that justify it? What if I go speak to another high school, and one kid is inspired and makes a better future for himself or herself because of what I did? Perhaps, some soldier comes back from war depressed about an injury, and he or she hears my words and sees that people do appreciate their sacrifices and live life to the fullest while enjoying all the incredible freedoms soldiers help to defend. Do the chances that those things could happen warrant the risk that I took in the first place? If one believes in sacrifice of one for the greater good, then I believe it is worth it.

Yes, it has felt beyond badass when I've seen my talks or book inspire people in the past to appreciate life more, quit their bad habits, or just have a more positive outlook. Who wouldn't? The only time that it seems like most addictions turn positive is when the junkie quits and tells others to quit. In contrast, if my addiction makes me happy and has potential positive influence on others, then is it really a problem? I'm not going to say that's the reason that I do things like this ride because people know me better and know addicts better. I do them because I want to, and I care most about what I want. If I don't get to do what I want, then I'll just resent whatever it is that prevents it. If that whatever is me, I'll spin out of control while thirsting for it until I explode. Tackling this task may have not been a great decision, but the decision not to have done it had its drawbacks too. Sometimes in life, there are no good options, and you have to choose the one that seems like the best idea at the time. Right now, I'm choosing to prepare for my flight home tomorrow. I'm choosing to go back to my daily life with Sunshine and Baron and take them to Colorado in July to spend time with our families. In that daily life, I'll squeeze in my high speed rides through the hill country in the Cadillac. My chopper will thunder up the back roads to Austin for the ROT Rally in June. We'll haul the S1K to Colorado, and in the mornings, I'll be shredding the Rockies as I continue to shoot past the limits of good sense while continuing to test my immortality. It's a balance that I have to maintain to stay on the sane side of crazy. Addicts occasionally go on a long weekend binge like I just did in hopes that they'll quench the urge. Maybe, we'll get such a rush that we won't feel like we ever need it again. Maybe, the hangover will be so miserable that it will miraculously cure us. Any addict knows better and fully accepts that these thoughts are just false hopes. No matter how good the high was, we eventually become restless and hunger for that feeling again. Unfortunately, every time we start down this path, it's harder and harder to beat the last high.

I know that I'll be able to adjust back to daily life and speckle time with those close to me with my little bursts of adrenaline. The question is whether this weekend and those future maintenance doses will be enough to keep my system in balance. Will I learn to control and quench those needs? Will the little bursts grow into binges, or will some new bender to surpass this weekend rise from the depths like the Kraken to destroy my life and those around me. No one knows the future until it happens, and these balls are a lot closer to bubble gum than crystal. I'm afraid that I can guess the likeliness of the possibilities. The problem is that I'm not afraid of those odds, because I know what I want. It will be my choice, and I want that stranglehold of adrenaline addiction to drive me and help me live life the only way that I know how. If even I don't want myself to stop, the only hope worth having is that I continue surviving my habits since it's clear that I'm not quitting any time soon. We all know that it doesn't matter how many times you escape the reaper. He only has to catch you once to win.

An engine races higher and higher as it spins faster and faster until the needle of the tachometer reaches the redline. That warns the driver to shift gears or back off the throttle. If the driver pushes the limits or is already in high gear, the rev limiter prevents the engine from going too far. Sometimes, extended abuse can cause major engine damage. Often, the engine can be repaired, but sometimes, it just explodes into flames and burns everything near it to the ground. Some people have rev limiters like getting sick before they drink too much. Some of us weren't born with rev limiters and aren't sensible enough to shift gears or slow down when we reach the redline. We pull harder on the throttle somehow thinking that it will make us go faster than the last time we did it. Without the wisdom to shift or back down or the safety of a rev limiter, all we can do is hope that we get our fix before the engine blows. If damage is the outcome, we hope it's repairable. If it can be repaired, will we just go right back to twisting the throttle and try to make up for lost time? Generally, we do. That's what makes us addicts. Only time will tell if the engine eventually explodes, and everything around us incinerates.

As bad as that all sounds, is my only other option to set cruise on fifty-five in life? The thought of just safely accepting the limits imposed by others in the name of what's good for me is even more morbid to me than fiery death. If never feeling the rush of that revved engine kicking me in the ass through some accomplished tunnel of breath taking exhilaration is the alternative, I'll defiantly take my chances living without limits, deep in the redline with not a single regret.



**Figure 20 bike on beach**