

## Collected Works

BRIAN FULLER<sup>∞</sup>

### I. NO GOOD DEED GOES UNPUNISHED

*In this essay, the author recalls an encounter with an elderly guard at a past prison facility. He shares how the other guards misconstrued his role in a life-saving endeavor and made false assumptions about him based on his incarcerated status. Recounting the story with candor, he captures the irony and unfairness—and perhaps slight amusement, at least in hindsight—of the situation.*

My last time in prison, I was up at a little transfer facility in Bonham Texas. It's a dormitory style unit (minimum security), which means we're not locked up in individual cells. Well, not unless we do something stupid and get in trouble.

Ever since the infamous "TEXAS 7" escaped from prison a few years ago, security conducts more frequent count times to make sure nobody goes missing. My job was a dorm janitor during graveyard shift (11 P.M. to 7 A.M.). I liked it because of the peace and quiet. I could read my books, write my letters, get a little exercise, and pretty much just stay out of the way.

A lot of our guards are older folks who have already retired from one job. But the state has good insurance and an excellent pension plan for them. It's relatively easy work, and it's not like they put them in harm's way with a bunch of dangerous killers.

One of my favorite guards comes through a little after midnight. He's white as a sheet and sweating like a whore at church. I asked him, "you alright buddy? You don't look too good." He told me he was fixin' to go on break and get something to eat. His sugar was low. Well, he don't even make it back to the pod door before he drops his clipboard and slides down the wall as his knees buckle.

He's shaking a little bit, so I run to my locker and grab a Dr. Pepper and a Snickers. We manage to get about half of the soda can in him without spilling too much. I tear open the Snickers and he can barely chew it. He can't really focus his eyes or speak yet. So I grab the radio and hit the button and say, "OFFICER DOWN – D WING!"

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This is one of them real live conundrum situations you always hear about. But I ain't about to just sit here and watch this guy flop, and not try to help. I don't care WHAT THE RULES SAY!

In less than a minute, doors pop and about a dozen other guards come rushing in. "GET THE FUCK AWAY FROM HIM! GET ON THE GOD DAMNED GROUND!" I'm trying to explain to them that I'm the one that called for him! They ain't trying to hear it. They drag me out in the sally port and start beating the shit out of me. I'm already in cuffs, and I know the only reason they ain't gassed me yet is because we're in a confined area and they'd have to breathe it in too!

I'd already taken several kicks to the ribs and been stomped real good. Lucky for me, a sergeant stops them before they go too far. "GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE!" he screams at them. They leave and he takes the cuffs off as he helps me to my feet. I look up just in time to see the old guard mouth the words *thank you* as they wheel him out.

Sarge asks, "You okay?"

"HELL NO I AIN'T OKAY!" But I'm sort of hurting and laughing at the same time. "How's OLD SCHOOL?"

"Oh... he'll be okay—" Sarge says, "but we're all fixing to be in a world-o-shit!"

I sort of shake my head and tell him, "Look, I never touched the radio – and your guards never touched me. How about that?" All he could say was, "I owe you. BIG TIME."

## II. THE MONKEY BLOOD DANCE

*In this story, the author shares a childhood memory showing what happens when he, his cousin, and a herd of bulls converge. The sequence of events provides a window into his childhood, evoking a sense of childlike joy and boldness that perhaps reminds the reader of their own adolescent days.*

Sidewalks and lawns are nice, but a child needs room to run and play. Back in the '70s, the term "special" had several layers of nuance and inflection when applied to children. I was trying the patience of my parents, aunts, and uncles, grandparents, and teachers alike; basically, anyone fortunate enough to be assigned the task of "watching" me.

After a rough second grade year, full of many parent-teacher conferences and trips to the principal's office, it was decided that I might benefit greatly if allowed to spend some time with my cousins in the country. The change of scenery and rural atmosphere was a godsend. I had three other boys my age who were like brothers to me. And I would also get a fresh start in a new school that year for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

It was a whole new world for a kid from the suburbs. Now I had forests, fields, and barns to play in. There were hundreds of acres in every direction. People had horses, cattle, chickens, and every other animal you could think of. Certainly, all those barbed wire fences were only put there for the livestock. Us kids seemed to have no problems making it over, under, or through them just fine.

We were testing our limits and had become a force to be reckoned with. That is, until the day that our fun little game of "spook the cows" got out of hand. It was hilarious watching something bigger than us jump and run. Sometimes we'd throw a cow patty or a dirt clod. If you were really sneaky, you could run right up and kick them.

So imagine our surprise when the thundering hooves and breaking branches signaled that a herd of angry charging bulls was bearing down upon us. Suddenly we're in the middle of a mesquite thicket trying to run with our arms up in front of our faces so the thorns don't poke our eyes out.

I've always been the slow, fat kid in the bunch. Plus, my cousins were a lot better at clearing those fences than I was. I'd barely made it to safety before one of the massive beasts came up stomping and snorting along the fence line, letting us know well beyond the shadow of any doubt just exactly who the boss of that herd was.

We were all scratched and cut up, but we were laughing and bleeding at the same time. Lucky to be alive and basking in the glow of another small victory, our adrenaline induced euphoria was cut short by the sound of Aunt

Linda hollering at us: “Y’all boys get up here NOW!” She was standing in the road with a belt.

“Whoopins” was a common occurrence in those days. I can honestly say that we weren’t ever abused, and we rightly deserved every one we got. Usually, whichever relative, teacher, or neighbor present at the sight of said offense took their licks first. Then we got another one when we got home. But Aunt Linda, in all her wisdom, mercy, and grace, had a better idea. Instead, we’d receive some good old fashioned “country doctorin’.”

There were a couple of very common iodine-based medicines we used back then. One was called Merthiolate, and the other mercurochrome. I can’t remember for sure which one burned worse than the other. But us kids simply referred to them both interchangeably as “monkey blood” because of the red stain they left across our cuts and scraped knees. Evidently it worked really good because we’re still all alive and kickin’—and nothing ever got infected, that’s for sure.

We were given the order to line up and strip down to our shorts. The warm soapy water on a rag felt good. Even the cotton ball with peroxide didn’t feel too bad. But then came the cotton ball with the alcohol, and finally – *the monkey blood*. I was last in line. So I couldn’t help but giggle a little bit watching my cousins dance around.

Right down the line she came. “Now hold still. QUIT SQUIRMIN’! Alright. There you go. NOW GET!” And off we went, a jumpin’ and a twitchin’. I ain’t never been too graceful on my feet. Still ain’t. But I was sure cuttin’ a rug that day. And those events will forever be recorded as: THE MONKEY BLOOD DANCE.

Later that day my dad came to pick me up. Him, Aunt Linda, and Uncle Dennis all had a little talk and a good laugh while us boys tried to stay out of sight and out of mind. On the ride home Dad says, “So...what’d y’all do today?” He already knows, but he’s enjoying making me squirm. “Oh...nothing much,” I said. But there was no hiding all the little red lines that covered my arms and legs. He made me wait until we were almost home before he spilled the beans. You see, my dad played in those same fields with his cousins when he was a boy. Him and my uncles were a fearsome lot in their own right. They found plenty of mischief to get into back in their day as well. That’s when he told me that *we* didn’t invent THE MONKEY BLOOD DANCE. It’s sort of a family tradition or right of passage with us. “Y’all ain’t the first, and ya won’t be the last!” he laughed.

Just before we walked in the back door he says, “I’ll go talk to your mom before dinner. You’d probably do well to go and hide out in your room for a little bit and behave yourself. You already know how these things tend to go!”

### III. LITTLE SCRAPS OF PAPER

I found these little scraps of paper  
tucked inside my mamaw's bible  
There were pictures of us kids  
when we was missing our front teeth  
And every time I think about her  
I just smile and say my prayers  
'cause you were watching over me  
when I was running in the street  
Now there's contracts, bills, and deadlines  
just sign here if you please  
All the stress of this insanity  
nearly knocks me to my knees  
Our lives just little scraps of paper  
and all we ever want is more  
But I'd give anything to go back  
and walk right through that door  
To have her tell another story  
about their lives way back when  
Her eyes would sparkle when she laughed  
and then she'd smile that big 'ole grin  
She'd show me little scraps of paper  
About her cousin so and so  
Why do we always want to hurry?  
And do we really gotta go?  
It's just a little scrap of paper  
But I wrote it from the heart  
And every day I'll write another one  
Even though I ain't too smart.

#### IV. TRYING TO KILL GRANDAD

*This piece recounts a morning drive where the author and his cousin nearly caused an unfortunate accident. The story's humor and vivid detail provide an entertaining and perhaps relatable narrative of an occasion where one has to keep their cool amidst a near family blunder.*

Our morning ritual included: Dr. Pepper, chocolate donuts, and smoking. We'd come of age in the '70s and '80s. Part hippies, part headbangers, it was our solemn duty to carry the torch of tie dye and hard rock successfully into the '90s.

One day, as we emerge from the music, the fog, and the residential side streets of our home town, we see our Grandad's little white truck go tooling along in front of us. We are headed over to him and Grandnana's house for lunch anyways. Now that we have the munchies, our plans for the day seem to be coming together perfectly.

We pull out into traffic, weaving our way through cars until we're finally right behind him. At the red light, we frantically wave our hands trying to get his attention, but he never looked in the rearview mirror. All we wanted to do was say HI!

Instead, when my cousin honked the horn to get his attention, Grandad thought it meant GO! The next few seconds proved to be one of the most awesome spectacles of my entire life. Tires screech as people lock their brakes. There are thuds from the impacts, and the sound of metal crunching, glass and plastic tinkling across the asphalt out into the intersection.

There are two major four lane roads, with medians and turn lanes. We watch in amazement as Grandad's little truck miraculously zig-zags through the carnage unscathed. Without a word between us, our mush-head telepathy functioning perfectly, Keith punches the gas and we take the right at the light. Bo and Luke Duke would have been proud.

Now we are TRIPPING OUT! "DUDE! Did he see us? OH MAN, this is bad! This is really bad!" We finally decide that, no, he most likely never knew it was us. Had he looked in the mirror, he would have just smiled and waved. Nope, he definitely didn't see us. Nevertheless, we're still going over there for lunch. In those days, there was no such thing as cancelling out on lunch at Grandnana and Grandad's.

He'd survived the Great Depression, World War II, and even quadruple bypass open heart surgery. But now, it seemed we were bound and determined to either give Grandad another heart attack, or just kill him outright by having him run over by a truck.

We walk in through the kitchen and hug Grandnana's neck just like it was a normal day. "Y'all go 'getcha a glass of tea and sit down. Grandad had

himself quite the scare this morning!” He’s got that thousand-yard stare as he blows the steam off his coffee. We feign a look of surprise and ask, “What happened?” He grumbles out, “Everybody’s always in such a hurry these days! Them dern fools was a honkin’ at me to go... AND THE LIGHT WEREN’T EVEN GREEN!”

## V. AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

Our *beautiful spacious skies* are choked with thick smoke.  
Our *amber waves of grain* have been jeopardized by the greed of genetic tampering.  
Our *purple mountains majesty* will fade to a dull grey.  
Our *fruited plains* might one day be rendered insufficient.  
AMERIKKKA America. Even *God's grace* has a point where it refuses to be mocked.  
*And crown thy good? With brotherhood?*  
Once sea levels start to rise, from *sea to shining sea*, is going to be a lot closer together.

The main idea of our Constitution was to protect the lives, liberties, and property of US; the citizens of Our United States of America. Those three gifts from God, precede all human legislation. We are now seeing "the LAW" perverted into an instrument for legal plunder.

Instead of protecting individuals' rights, "the law" has been increasingly and alarmingly used to deprive the citizens' rights for the benefit of the "state" itself. WE are the only protection we have against such reprehensible malfeasance!



## VI. TALK TO SOMEBODY\*

*This article urges readers to talk to someone. Describing his own reservations about doing so, the author explains why such outreach is important for both the speaker and listener. Talking and listening to one another helps people learn, expands understanding and acceptance, and shines a light of peace and serenity into the lives of those who need it.*

More often than not, the very thing I'm trying to avoid turns out to be the best thing for me at the time. It's sort of like what they say about exercise: the one day that you don't wanna go turns out to be the day you need it the most, and then you're glad you did it.

I must admit, sometimes I'm just too quiet for my own good. Now don't get me wrong, I like conversation, but I like to be alone with my thoughts, too. Reading, writing, meditation: these are all traits of an introverted personality. It's good to search the depths of one's inner foundations. However, too much of a good thing can leave me wanting more. I become unbalanced.

Sometimes it is difficult to just walk up to somebody and start talking, especially in a place like this. There are so many different personalities to deal with, and the negativity of the experience can actually prevent us from being as interactive as we would be under different circumstances. But, for the time being, this is the hand that we've been dealt. We might as well make the best of it.

There are some very good reasons why we have two eyes, two ears and only one mouth. I believe it's because listening and observation are twice as important as speaking. Just sit back and watch. It's not hard to see what people are about. This little microcosm of society can be a very powerful learning tool for us. We are receiving valuable education. As we become more aware, we start to notice our gravitation towards the most unlikely of teachers.

We've all had this experience of being placed in close quarters with people with whom we normally wouldn't associate. Our mind races through all of the negative scenarios. Deep down, we realize that contempt prior to investigation is never beneficial. So, we start to explore the unknown. We learn to embrace our differences, and because of our own diversity, we reach common ground.

It never fails that when I lean back in my bunk and open up a good book, someone walks up and asks me, "Are you busy?" Try sitting at the table and writing a letter. Watch them flock to you and start talking. I used to take that

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the wrong way. I would wonder: what is the strange magnetism that draws them to me, interrupting my solitude? Are they oblivious? Are they being inconsiderate? Actually, no. Not even close. When the answer came to me, it was like a light turned on in my consciousness.

Peace and serenity are precious commodities in here. They are rare and valuable. So naturally, people are going to be drawn to them. Therefore, when we assist others in attaining these attributes, we proliferate the position. We build bridges of understanding and acceptance. All it takes is an attentive ear and a few kind words.

I think about how many times I have just walked up and started talking to somebody myself. They took the time to listen. For that, I am very grateful. When we do this, it is mutually beneficial. We make a deposit in the credit union of good karma. We are allowed to cash a check at the bank of brotherly love.

So, the next time someone walks up and starts talking to you, consider the possibilities. Be attentive, responsive and engaging. All of us need somebody to talk to, and it's not like we don't have the time. Consider it a compliment when someone seeks your counsel. After all, you'll eventually be the seeker yourself.