

Scribbles Squibs # 70 (December 7, 2018)

“FINDING A REASON TO LIVE: THE STORY OF PUPPY  
DOE, KIYA. THE LONGER VERSION.”

By Sally and Jonathan Sauer

1. DECEMBER 31, 2018. DAN, THE GENERAL CONTRACTOR, SITS AT HIS  
DESK, LATE IN THE AFTERNOON. DRINKING. AND THINKING . HARD.

It was rumbling outside with thunder some and Dan could hear it raining, the drops hitting his window with a kind of urgent rat-tat-tat, like a snare drum urging a marching band forward on a dusty field on a hot and sunny day. But, also, raining very heavily. Raining like cats and dogs, as the expression goes. The clouds leaking raindrops, almost like tears, for reasons maybe only they best understood. To drop rain just as nourishment for the earth and for all that lived on it because water brings life? And, because all life needs water? Or, to try to wash away some of the filth that humanity was constantly making, covering the earth with a kind of scum that could never be thoroughly cleansed, no matter how hard the clouds tried?

Were the clouds sad to see the old year end, he wondered? Or, were they sad to think that a new year was about to begin?

“So, tomorrow’s gonna be New Year’s Day and 2018 is *finally* done with. Thank God!” he thought to himself, sipping a cold coffee, fortified, just the way the Bishop likes it.

Dan's general contracting business, like 2018. was looking more and more as if it were done for, too. Although he had the appropriate DCAMM prequalifications, public projects were being bid way too tight to be worthwhile. He had figured a number of these jobs recently and saw the jobs going for less than his estimated labor and materials and subcontractors with no mark-up. The better commercial projects seemed to go to contractors who were bigger than he was. His company's liabilities *way* outnumbered assets and there weren't *any* retained earnings. In the way of those who were beginning to feel no pain, he thought that outside right now, the sky was doing better than he was. Because, it had liquidity. His business, on the other hand, had nothing but *ill*-liquidity. If that is even a word.

Another sip. Mulling over his options, he thought that if he were that kind of guy, he might take all of that money due his subs and just keep it. Maybe just leave, turn the lights off and close and lock the doors and head for the hills. He'd heard of plenty of guys that had done just that. Run the subcontractor payables to 90 days, close the doors and maybe file bankruptcy. He had once heard the expression that the key to success in construction was 'two failures and a fire.' So far, he had done neither. He wondered whether or not he should have done either. Or, for that matter, *should* he do either.

But, the problem was that he just wasn't that kinda guy. Borrow some from the subs? Sure. But, *all* generals did that when they had to. That is what he had done last month. And, truth be told, the month before that. Taken a wee bit of a loan from his subs. But, just as a temporary thing. Until times got better. That assuming that times were going to get any better. Some of the subs were really beginning to complain. One or two had threatened pulling off the job until they got paid. He even had one that was threatening a mechanic's lien. On his only decent job.

In actuality, he *was* sitting on a fair amount of cash. He was saving it for a rainy day. A day other than *today*. He was almost afraid to pick up the phone these days. If it wasn't a sub, it was his sponsor. He felt totally unprepared to handle *that* kind of a call. Because, among other things, he didn't know what he was going to say. He hadn't actually gone to a meeting for . . . . a while.

Dan didn't used to think this way. But, these days, he thought that he kinda' didn't like most of his subs. He realized, though, that this was possibly just a way for him to borrow their money (without their permission) and to sort of justify this. To himself. To feel better about doing what he knew to be a wrong thing. He'd read somewhere that character is what one does when no one is looking. The problem is that, these days, there were a bunch of guys looking. And, most of them were subs.

"Bah, humbug!" he snickered to himself, those two unfamiliar words kinda feeling good to say. As those guys on Chopped would say, saying those words had a good *mouth feel*. And, if that expression was good enough for Scrooge, it was good enough for him. He wondered, though. Scrooge had had all of that money. Did that mean he was an *owner*? And, was he considered despicable not because of the way he did business but just because he was an owner? Is being an owner even more despicable than being an architect? Or, is an owner only despicable *because* he hires an architect? He had been drinking all day – hadn't called his sponsor - and he realized that his noggin was closed for the business of answering any complicated questions. He realized that the answer to these questions was above his pay grade. This assuming that he had a pay grade. Other than his current one which was, unfortunately, near zero. Except for his stash of sub money, which he had hoarded more out of fear than anything else.

He remembered more of the Scrooge story. The money, after all, hadn't made Scrooge happy. But, that's a problem that Dan wished he had right now. He would like to go back to Business Past. He wasn't all that wild about Business Present. And, he was absolutely scared to death of Business Future. Because that didn't look like it was going to be anything other than a lot more of the same. Most likely, worse. And, the future, in the guise of New Year's Day, would begin *tomorrow*, ready or not. He looked at his bottle. The only thing he was ready for right this minute was another drink.

Dan's hand lingered in a kind of lazy way over the gun he found in his center desk drawer. The neighborhood in which his office was located was getting more and more sketchy, more and more less safe. And, at different times of the month, he was in the office alone late at night. He had felt that he needed protection. So, the gun. A Sig Sauer. Maybe some company that lawyer that gave all those seminars had something to do with. Then again, probably not. If he could do something useful, such as making or selling guns, why then would he want to be a lawyer? Not exactly the most pleasant of jobs, he imagined.

Dan had always thought of guns as *good* things. Something with which to protect his business and his family. The business *was* his family, in some ways, as were the people who worked for him. At least, it *had* been. Some of the guys had been with him since day one. They had put up with a lot of difficult circumstances, when things hadn't gone so good, especially in the beginning. Like not getting paid some weeks and then their having to go home and try to explain *that* to the missus. Lately, he had not been able to give all of his guys five days of work each week. One or two of them had already begun talking about moving on. This really bothered him. He appreciated his guys and cared for them and their families' welfare. He liked his guys. Hell, he *loved* his guys. He had gone to almost countless birthday parties. More than a few christenings. A few weddings. They were part of his family because he was part of *their*

families. Was there anything *but* friends and families? God, he supposed. Although he knew that he had not been doing well on *that* score for quite a period of time.

And, where would his family be without the money his business had provided? They say that money is the root of all ev`il. He had looked that up in the Bible and there it had said that it was the *love* of money that was the root of all evil. Practically speaking, though, and especially for many of these last ten years, Dan thought that it was probably the *lack* of money that was the root of all evil. Without enough money, what happens to the family? To either of them. His guys during the day time? Or, his family *all* of the time? Nothing good.

Just a few hours earlier, one of his better subcontractors, Carl, had been sitting across from him, looking for a check. Almost whiny, Dan had thought. The way subcontractors always got when they were talking about needing money. Hey, fella, get in line!

Of course, Dan didn't think of *himself* as being whiny. Thinking back on it, Dan hadn't thought of Carl at all as being whiny some years back. In fact, he *liked* Carl. They used to ride motorcycles together to rallies, like the one in the Dakotas. To Daytona, some years. They used to have these contests about who could bolt the most chrome onto his bike. And, they had gone deep sea fishing every now and again. The wives did some things together, too. Although not so much recently, for some reason.

What had changed? In three words: The Great Recession. And, besides, other than subs, he owed the bank, too, on his line. And, of course, he would owe the bonding company if he couldn't keep his subs from going after it. He also owed those humorless blood-suckers at the IRS, who were the worst of all.

Funny how things were with the Feds. They had just *let* the Great Recession happen. They *knew* all about the sub-prime mortgages, the Jamaican cab-drivers with the six houses, how the whole thing was nothing but smoke and mirrors and very little of either. They simply didn't *care*. Those mortgage brokers made snake oil salesmen selling out of the back of covered wagons look legitimate. Practically reputable. All those a-holes making money hand over fist at the expense

of the little guy. Guys just like him.

That money guy the Feds had all worshipped? Greenspan? This is what he had he say to some congressional committee about the events leading to The Great Recession: “Those of us who have looked to the self-interest of lending institutions to protect shareholders’ equity, myself included, are in a state of shocked disbelief.” Do those words make any sense? What the hell does *that* mean? Kind of like many of the bid books he had been reading lately. The ‘cutting and pasting’ in the bid books these days. Just another thing which made construction so enjoyable.

You’re supposed to cut and patch drywall, not have to deal with cut and pasted specs. Especially when they expected you to take the job as the low bidder. Yet, somehow you were expected to have enough money in your number to cover for all of the design defects. For all of those things that were somehow ‘inferrable’. ‘Inferrable’ was nothing other than architect-speak for ‘let the generals and the subs fight it out between themselves’. ‘Inferrable’ being the word that was their ‘get out of jail free’ card. Always played at his and his subs’ expense.

One thing hadn’t changed in the last ten years. He hated most architects then. And, he still hated most of them today. Were there a few good ones? Sure. But, more and more, when they screwed things up, they refused to man up and belly up to the bar.

He took another sip. Greenspan, talking like that, sort of *sounded* like an architect. Wasn’t being the head honcho of the Fed bad enough? At least he had admitted that ‘he had put too much faith in the self-correcting power of free markets and had failed to anticipate the self-destructive power of wanton mortgage lending.’ *What?* More empty words. Dumb words.

Dan was pretty sure that Greenspan wasn’t refusing to collect that big pension these days because he felt responsible for how he had really let the country down. Dan, like a lot of guys just like him, had used up all of his retirement monies just trying to keep the doors open and the lights on. And, he’d taken most of the kids’ college monies, too. This was only one of *many* things that his wife, Sue, was angry at him about. But, the top three things on her list were his drinking. Which he had stayed away from for years.

But, then things got bad. And, it sort of snuck its way back into his life. When he was thinking

properly, he would be the first to admit that alcohol, like any other drug, only worked pretty well at the beginning. Then, it stopped working pretty much *at all*. And, he realized that the last thing a depressed person needed was a depressant. And, alcohol, first and foremost, was a depressant.

But, since the so-called end of the Great Recession, construction had not really come back. Not all the way. At least, not at his dollar volume. Margins for public work had all but disappeared. He knew of plenty of gc's who had just simply quit when they saw jobs going for less than what he knew to be the actual cost of just the labor and materials and subcontractors going into a job. Bidders playing games with prevailing wages, hoping that their competitors and employees (and their unions) didn't turn them in to the state.

*His* expenses hadn't gone down. This current bunch of crooks running the government looked like a bunch of armadillos. Anteaters. If there was something they didn't know how to handle – or, simply lacked the balls to do anything about – they'd just stuck their heads in the sand. Hey, if you didn't admit that there was such a thing as a 'radical Islamic terrorist', didn't that mean that they probably didn't exist? True, that was more of an Obama thing. With the current guy, things weren't all that much better, although he did seem tougher on any number of things. No Central Americans to be automatically put on social security the way that Carter had treated tens of thousands of Cuba's lunatics and thugs back in the day. But, how could he be truly effective when half of his staff was fired or quit every six months or so?

This current crop of politician losers would say: 'There is no inflation. Prices have been holding steady.' Well, then, answer me this, he thought. Why had the price of almost everything *he* bought for his business gone up? There was the price of only one thing that he needed which *hadn't* gone up. That would be the price of jobs. For that, he was expected to take it on the chin. Again. Even as tough a man as Joe Frazier would fall down at some point. Shots to the head. Body blows. It all added up.

He took another sip. This cold coffee was tasting better and better! Especially after he had gotten rid of the objectionable part of it. That would be the coffee. He held up his cup to the light. Since when had they been making coffee that was colorless? Whiskey had color. But, then again, vodka and gin didn't. Six of one, half a dozen of the other. As the saying goes today, 'it's all good'.

Yet, even though one arm of the Fed Beast had allowed sub-prime mortgages to happen, which almost *encouraged* The Great Recession to occur as night follows day, *another* arm of the Fed Beast - the IRS – told him that he should promptly meet all of his tax obligations with not even half of the profit he used to make. Those a-holes had a guaranteed weekly check, benefits, even a pension. Two or three weeks paid vacation. Maybe more. What did they know about what life was like for guys who actually had to *work* for a living? And, he hadn't taken a vacation in almost ten years. The jobs didn't just build themselves. Especially the jobs that were very tight. Which seemed to be most of the jobs he had going on these days.

The Great Recession had all but destroyed his company. So, now, he had to play all of these games with subs, most of whom were not bad guys at all. Games that in years gone by he hadn't had to play. Or, at least, to this extent. Heck, increasingly, he was just trying to make it to another year. Sometimes, maybe, just to another month. Maybe just trying to get past this upcoming payday.

"Carl," Dan had said, a few hours ago. "As soon as the owner pays, you'll get your money." This excuse had worked well enough last month. Maybe lightning would strike again? But, Carl knew that he was lying. As he had last month. And as he would probably do next month. Some minutes passed. Carl replied evenly: "OK, Dan, I'll be back in a bit." Dan couldn't help but thinking that Carl wasn't so bad a guy. In fact, he was really one of the *good* guys. After all, he had to pay his guys, support his family. Truth be told, most of the other subs weren't bad guys, either. They had to make a buck, just like he did. To meet payroll. Buy groceries. Survive.

But, Dan thought, subs didn't have it any way near as bad as generals. Subs could only get screwed by gc's. Gc's, on the other hand, got screwed by *everyone*. By the owners, the architects and by the subs. They say fighting a war on two fronts is a sure way of losing. He often fought a war on at least *three* fronts. And, when his estimators booted a quote, make that fighting a war on *four* fronts. Four fronts would be like fighting in all directions, all at the same time. With so many adversaries, in whose direction was he supposed to be looking? The only chance one would have is if he were looking *down* from above. And, probably, not even then.

And, for many, a guy's gotta pay the alimony and child support to the ex. Wasn't it Groucho Marx who had said that 'paying alimony is like feeding hay to a dead horse'? He allowed



himself a small grin. Wondering, why would a dead horse be interested in more hay, anyhow? The only thing it probably should be thinking about is to how it could avoid the glue factory.

Dan had watched Carl leave the office. It had been raining then, too. Rain, a bit unexpected for the last day of December, when any precipitation should be coming down as snow. He opened his desk drawer and picked up that half-empty bottle rolling around his drawer. Lucky it hadn't smashed itself against the gun. Now, there would have been a waste of good booze! The coffee all gone and with his not wanting to make another pot, he put his big boy pants on and took it straight from the bottle. He took a big gulp and sighed, feeling the heat working its way down. A man took his comfort however he found it, whether he was supposed to do it that way or not. Certainly, this was something that wasn't good for you in the long run. But, it was a way of getting from minute to minute, especially when each sixty second period seemed like a day. Dan wondered with no small degree of desperation, how was he expected to get through life, other than by this? Through life and the unfair things that had been done to him ten years or so back? *Not one of which was in any way his fault.*

He flipped on the TV. Time for the news. The usual world troubles. His attention wandered some. He took another swig, hearing the words mindlessly coming out of the news anchor's mouth. What did she care? Nothing of what she said had any meaning or impact on *her* own life. Car accident after car accident. Suicide bomber after suicide bomber. Crooked politician after crooked politician. This politician's 'considering his or her options' about running for president the next cycle. As if any of them would be much better than any other of them. Men and women – and, boys and girls – who were sending the wrong types of pictures to each other. People writing hateful messages on buildings. Nitwits entering buildings killing and wounding as many as they could so that they could perpetuate the pathetic memory of their unachieving lives. So that they could get fifteen seconds or fifteen minutes of fame that they were not

remotely capable of obtaining otherwise. In moments of clarity, Dan asked himself since when were his thoughts so full of nothing other than that which was only dark and negative? *There were still good things about life, including a lot of good people.* He knew this to be the case. It was just that with those difficulties of the last several years, he was finding it difficult to find these in other people. Or, in himself.

Maybe, the news anchor only needed to say something like this: ‘Today’s news is just about the same as yesterday’s. In a word, it pretty much sucks. But, thankfully, not that much worse than yesterday. Too early to say much about tomorrow, although one should keep in mind that today was yesterday’s tomorrow. There being nothing left of any importance to be said, I’m going home.’ Then, break away to commercial.

The bottle was nearly empty. Two years into the new President. As The Donald had said: ‘Vote for me. What do you have to lose?’ Ronald Reagan had said just about the same thing but in a slightly different way: “Are you better off now than you were four years ago?” That had worked for him, just like what Candidate Trump had said had worked for The Donald. The American voter is angry? The politicians simply have no idea. Washington should be happy that the whole damn country wasn’t marching on it. It might come to that yet, he thought. I might be right there in the front row.

"Hell's bells!" Dan muttered to himself, watching one bad scene from the newscast on TV be replaced by one that was even worse. "You can't bleed for the whole damn world. When was the last time the world bled for *me*? That would be, like, *never*."

They started to play that dog video again. The one about Kiya. Maybe because it was like one

of those 'year in review' kind of things and they were going over the various things that had happened that year.

In May of 2018, a Norfolk County Superior Court jury had convicted a Polish national, Radoslaw Czerkawski, who was in the US illegally, of torturing a pit bull that became known to the world as 'Puppy Doe'. (Her real name was Kiya.) They found him guilty of 11 counts of animal cruelty. He had seriously abused the 1- or 2-year-old pit bull between June and August of 2013 that he had bought off of Craig's List before dumping her on a street in Quincy's Hospital Hill neighborhood on Aug. 31, 2013. The dog had to be euthanized because of the severity of her injuries. Just before the vet was going to give Kiya her very last shot, he gave her a bowl of food, which she ate. After she had finished, but before he did that which needed doing, she licked his hand.

Man, there sure are some sick S.O.B.'s out there, he told himself. He realized that, for some time, he had been crying. They had played that Puppy Doe video every time there was going to be a new court appearance on the animal abuse criminal case. But, the case was over now, done. The guy had gone to prison. So, what was the point of showing videos of that poor dog on New Year's Eve? He had only been able to look at them completely only once. They were that bad.

"At least *I* haven't rummaged through my attic to find my medieval torture how-to book," he thought. "Or, gone to Craig's List and got myself some pit bull puppy who I would then keep in a closet for months. Breaking practically every bone in her body. Almost drawing and quartering her. Splitting her tongue. Burning her nose. Stabbing her in the eye. And, almost starving her to death." He was crying pretty good at this point. He simply couldn't help it. Shaking his fist at the sky, he shouted, "As God is my witness, if I could have done *anything* to

prevent this, I would have. I'd have punched this guy's lights out even if he were trying, at the same time, to punch out mine. I *really* would have." For all his faults, Dan was never one to make idle threats. Or, for that matter, idle promises.

His crying seemed to lessen. A person gets to the point that however badly they feel, they simply run out of tears. That poor dog had never caught a break, he thought, sobbing. A dog was kind of like a child in a way. They both look out at the world with innocence. And with love. And, with a complete sense of helplessness. Both are entitled to love. To at least be properly treated, he thought. He wondered if there was a doggie heaven. He fervently hoped so. And, if there were, he hoped that Kiya had found it.

Thinking about this situation made him angrier and angrier. Trials were simpler in the old days, especially out West, he thought. You needed only three things for justice: a rope, a tree and a horse. No lawyers. No appeals. No courts. The way things should be. You do wrong and what you were entitled to, you got. *Pronto*.

The statute of Lady Justice always has this blindfold on her. Some say that this was supposed to indicate her neutrality, her sense of being devoted only to what is fair. With her only interest being in what the *evidence* proved. Others, more familiar with the justice system, thought that she had a blindfold on because most of the time, she couldn't bear to look at what was being done, ostensibly in her name.

Dan wondered then, as he had in the past, why he had never had a dog as an adult. He had had a few dogs while he was growing up and he liked dogs. Maybe at the time he was about ready to get a dog for his first family, the first family fell apart. (That wife's name was Helen and he

could barely stand even saying her name.) Second wife Sue's and his kids would probably like to have a dog now. But, with things the way they were, he and Sue had not been discussing things like this. For a *long* time. Besides, having to support two families as it is with things the way they were, adding another mouth to feed didn't seem like the best of ideas. Then there would be the vet. All kinds of shots. Neutering. Licenses. The works.

"At least I'm still a human being," he said sighing, after the painful-to-watch video had finally ended. "And, I'm still enough alive to still *feel* things." He angrily wiped the wetness from his cheeks. He wasn't looking forward to telling Sue tonight that maybe they were going to have to file for bankruptcy. What kind of a New Year's present would *that* be?

Things had just gone south on him right about the time that he stopped going to meetings. Was it 30 days now? He looked at the 2018 calendar hanging on the wall, this the last day it would be needed. He picked up his office planner, the thing that helped him plan for and keep track of his crews. Looking at it, he realized that he hadn't gone to a meeting in December. *That* was pretty clear. Going back a page, he was pretty sure that he hadn't gone to one in November, either. He looked over October. Most likely, it was some time in October, he thought. Maybe towards the early part of the month.

Sue wasn't even his first wife. She was his second wife. Kids with the first. Kids with her. And, as he had gotten older and grown up to the extent that males were likely to, he realized that it was not a good idea to piss off second wives. This because it was seldom that a guy got to a third wife, unless he was a jerk or a Hollywood star, not that there was much of a difference between the two. By then, a man wouldn't have left a dollar that wasn't already spoken for at least two or three times. And, by then, he'd probably have run out of interest, anyway.

Besides, blue pills would just be something *else* that he would have trouble paying for. Would he really need them, though? “Yeah,” he thought. “I’d kind of probably need them.” He was a little pleased that no one was around to hear him admit to *that*. But he missed those intimate times. And, not primarily because of the sex. But, primarily, because he was no longer able to touch another person. Or, to have another person touch him. This seemed like such a basic need. Something he realized now more since he hadn’t had this for a while.

He thought about how they lay in that bed every night. Maybe only six inches apart. But, for all intents and purposes, it might as well have been miles. She was angry at him, he knew. He knew that he was murder to live with when he was drinking. He would rage on and on about what Wall Street did to his business in 2008. It’s not that he raged at her because he didn’t. Not at all. He loved her. But, frankly, and as she had repeatedly told him, she was just sick of listening to it. To all of it.

Things were really tough. And, he simply didn’t know what he could do about them. Or, about even himself. Because, he knew that he was most of the problem, any way you figured it. But, how could a person start feeling *good* when almost everything that happened to them or that they thought about seemed *bad*? Where does a person get hope, some sense of optimism when hope and optimism were in very short supply? How can a person restart his life when it never first stopped?

"Maybe, I should just let the bank take the house," he thought, bitterly. Then, remembering Helen, he had to amend that to *houses*. "Maybe move down South where the rents aren't so high. Maybe start over." After a pause, "Again."

Dan's hand mindlessly rooted around in that center desk drawer, idly taking inventory of everything that was in it. He counted four pens. A couple of pencils, one with a broken tip. For some reason, he had saved some used staples. Talk about your pack rat! A few business cards from subcontractors he'd never used and would probably never use. Three quarters. Those he put right in his pocket. "Last money I'll make this year," he muttered. There was that candy bar that was pretty old and as hard as a rock. For some reason, he couldn't throw it away. That pack rat thing again.

He touched the gun again. The metal communicated a kind of alien quality to him. Cold as death. Lifeless. As death. Which, maybe, he soon might be. He did have that life insurance policy, a pretty good-sized one he had bought back when he used to have money. Only, it was gonna lapse in less than two weeks if he didn't make the payment that would be due then, which he knew that he wouldn't be able to do.

He had discussed this with his lawyer. Since he had had the policy for more than two years, it would probably pay out, even should he have some kind of 'accident' cleaning the gun. Like an Ernest Hemingway-type thing. Not that Sue would ever forgive him for that, if it happened. But, hell, he wouldn't be around to worry about that now, would he? Let her next husband put up with her! And, with her moods!

So, the question kind of boiled down this way, he thought. Was his family better off with him around? Or, would they be better off having the million dollars instead. A million dollars was still a pretty good chunk of change. And, which way would *he* be better? At the moment, he

didn't seem to have an answer. But again, he was only thinking idle thoughts. At least, some part of him *hoped* that they were only idle thoughts.

## **2. DAN LOVES COUNTRY MUSIC. RANDY TRAVIS, ESPECIALLY.**

It had settled into a fairly continuous rain. And, it was almost completely dark by now. So, he could hear it but could only just barely see it. Except where it fell in front of the street lamp, which he could see through one window of his office. From that window, he could see it fine. Rain. Shouldn't it be snow this time of year?

Dan was lost in thought. The radio was playing softly. It was almost always on. Just very low, when he needed to be able to speak on the phone. Louder at times like this, when no one else was around and there was no business to be done. What business was left to be done today? The year was over. Any smart guy would be home by now. He was delaying leaving his office. Sooner, rather than later, he and Sue were going to be having that talk. Not something he was looking forward to.

He loved country music, especially Randy Travis. But, even the great RT had had his share of being down and out. In spades. But, since country music was all about drunkenness, divorce, lost jobs, poverty, cheating, time in prison and just plain bad luck, having some ups and downs along the way seemed almost like an apprenticeship. Somethings that had to be done to hone one's job skills.



A while back for Randy, maybe in 2012, there was this DWI, as well as public intoxication. They said he had been found lying naked on the side of the road. Then they claimed that he threatened a cop. Woman troubles. Just like the rest of us, Dan thought. Hell, the guy had recorded a single, "I'll Take Any Willing Woman". And, those in the world who were more critical might think that this was precisely what he had done. Once. Maybe twice. Maybe more.

Now, maybe Dan was doing this disremembering thing a bit, confusing RT with someone else. But, as he remembered, Randy had divorced his wife in 2010. This being the one he had moved in with when he was 18 and she was something like 36 and still married. To someone else. (Talk about your basic cougar!) That wife had become Randy's first manager. She ended up divorcing her then-husband and she and Randy got married.

Again, as he sort of remembered it, it turns out that the new wife had this dentist, who she liked a lot. Of course, it turns out that Randy liked the dentist's wife a *whole* lot more. So, Randy starts an affair with the dentist's wife, Mrs. Dentist. Then, her husband has an argument with Randy and, at some point, Randy is lying naked at the side of a road. Something like that. Didn't make much sense, he thought. I guess you would have had to be there.

Randy had this brother, who had his own pack of criminal problems. Maybe some alcohol involved, maybe some drugs. Maybe both.

Then, Randy had his first stroke in July, 2013, after having an operation for congestive heart failure. This was the same month the brother got arrested for having a meth lab in his home, if

Dan remembered correctly. (Hopefully, he was not ‘misremembering’ as that news guy Brian Williams seems to do every once in a while. Especially when it’s convenient.)

Dan knew that there had been more serious health problems for Randy. Dan remembered a couple of years back when he was watching TV, he saw Randy go up on stage in October, 2016 at the Country Music Hall of Fame, getting ready to be inducted. He might have had with him then his current wife, whose name might be Mary. Assuming he was remembering correctly, she was the ex-wife of the guy who was the dentist that everyone seemed to like, some liking the wife even more, RT possibly being right on top of that list.

Stepping up to that microphone, no one sitting in the audience knew exactly what to expect. Maybe Randy wasn’t entirely sure about what was going to happen. Dan had watched the YouTube video many times. (There not being that many active, paying jobs, he had *lots* of free time.) Dan thought again about how touching that video was. "Well," Dan sighed. "What can you do? You can't save the whole world. God Bless Randy and everyone around him and I hope he recovers and comes back to country music, better than ever, real soon." Still, from what he knew of the facts of the matter, this wasn’t real likely. But, one never knows. As long as there is life, there is always a chance. For something. For *hope*. And, Dan knew that some people thought that some people actually had Guardian Angels. Not something he himself believed in. Although, he guessed that he wouldn’t mind being proved wrong, especially if he got to have one of his own.

### **3. DAN PREPARES TO FINALLY GO HOME.**

Dan thought again about going home and talking to his wife about their troubles. This was not something he was in any hurry to do. Even after having decided to go home, he still didn't seem to be in any hurry to leave his office. His hand wandered again to the drawer holding the gun. His wife could make do with that money. His last act on Earth would be to provide for his family. Something that he didn't really seem able to do for them just now. And, the insurance company would be cancelling that policy in two weeks when he failed to make the renewal payment. After that, there didn't seem to be any way that he could provide properly for his family, things being the way they are. There was a choice for the next two weeks. After that, no choice. The thing that kind of stuck in his mind was his wondering if the way that things were now necessarily would have to remain that way in the future. Could things change? Could *he* change? His thinking would have to improve? Exactly, how? And, did he simply have enough energy to make another go of it? As to his work? And, as to his life? Could the New Year actually be a new year?

Dan pulled the drawer all of the way out. One moment he seemed to be leaning in one direction. The next moment, in the opposite direction. For a time, the decision seemed almost to have been made. But, not quite yet. He looked out the window at the rain. It was almost as if he were looking for another possibility. Another answer. Another *choice*.

What could there be outside for him on this cold rainy night, finishing off a year that had truly sucked? How could the next one be any better, realistically speaking? He wished that he had a Guardian Angel. (He wondered why he was thinking about Guardian Angels at least twice today,

when he probably hadn't had such a thought once in the last ten years?) These things probably never really happened. Probably not for guys like him, in any event.

The Navy Seals have this saying: 'the only easy day was yesterday'. He let out a sigh that turned into a groan. If *that* was the case, he could hardly *wait* to see what might happen tomorrow.

Suddenly, he heard a kind of strange sound at his front door. He walked over to the door and put his hand on the door knob but didn't try to open the door. At first, he thought that maybe someone had knocked on the door. Had Carl come back to argue with him? Maybe, to punch him out for not paying him? Dan knew that he wouldn't have blamed him if he did. He wasn't sure that he would even try to stop him, if that was what Carl was fixing to do. Dan had always considered himself to be basically a fair man. And, what's fair is fair. And, he had not exactly been all that fair to Carl. As well as not to some others.

He knew that one of the reasons that he drank was to try to keep from feeling shame. Although not quite sober yet, that is what he felt. Shame. A lot of it. What a miserable way to feel on a cold, rainy and miserable night, this being the last miserable day of a truly miserable year, with another *new* miserable year lining him up in its sights, all ready to go in just a few hours. In all likelihood, Sue was going to tear him a new one, sooner or later. Maybe, even tonight. He knew that they had been steadily working their way up to a real blow-up. He found himself looking back at his desk. But, his being right at the door, he couldn't quite reach anything on it. Or, in it.

The knock was really more like a light, scratching sound. Not unpleasant, like fingernails drawn across a chalk board. But, something kind of like it but a lot softer. A bit of an eerie sound when it's dark and raining. The last remnants of his mildly pleasant alcoholic haze were rapidly leaving him. He was all alone and only the slightest bit drunk. Nowhere near as drunk as he would like to be. The 'Blue Laws' being as crazy as they are in Massachusetts, he wasn't even sure if the liquor stores were allowed to be open on New Year's Eve.

"Man," Dan thought. "Can this day get any worse. Now, I'm afraid to open my own damn door."

Dan moved to the door and opened it a crack. There sat a very small dog. Or, what looked like a dog. Dan found, to his surprise, that he could somehow really relate to this small animal.

Because, it didn't look like life had been doing her any favors recently. He reached down to, what? Pet her?

Whimpering, she lifted her head up and did something unexpected. She slowly stood up on her back legs and licked Dan's face. He was stunned! Of all of the things he might expect from this night, this wasn't one of them! But, shoot, she was licking Dan's face, her tail wagging, every which way.

"Crap," he thought. "I didn't even know my face was dirty." Dan looked around outside, jumped over the dog and ran around his office building. Was somebody playing a joke on him, some kind of prank? With a couple of minutes, he had done a lap around his office. He couldn't see anybody. The only vehicle in his lot was his truck.

What was he supposed to do with this dog? He was in the process of going home. He didn't know that much about taking care of dogs any more. These days, he could hardly seem to take

care of himself. He looked at the dog's neck. No tags. Family pets were supposed to have tags. What was this dog's story? What had been *done* to her? She looked very dirty and very cold. Still, she seemed like she was probably a pretty good dog.

"Oh, Christ," Dan thought, returning inside. "Now, what am I going to do? How on earth could this dog have shown up on a night like this? When I have so many other things to worry about? I don't need another mouth to feed." Dan sank to the floor, his head between his hands.

"Why me, God? I don't need you to send me a dog. I just need for you to send me some *help*. A well-paying job or two. Customers who pay on time. Now, *that* would help"

The dog kind of walked over to Dan and laid her head on Dan's knee. After a bit, Dan realized that he had been petting the dog, not aware that he was doing this. Even though she was wet, he wondered if she might be thirsty. He looked around for some kind of dish to put water into. The coffee cup was empty. Why not use that? And, he remembered that someone had left half of a small meatball sub in the fridge in the break room. It had been there for a couple of days and was probably all dried up and probably should have been chucked. And, since when had construction workers started eating small subs? Bad enough. But, having leftovers, too? How do you have left-overs from a small sub? "Only a guy who hadn't given me a good morning's work would have left-overs from a small sub," he thought.

He wondered if, maybe, the dog might like it. The dog took one bit of the sub and acted as if this was the best meal she had ever had. She licked Dan's hand vigorously. She wolfed down the rest of the sub with only two or three bites. Dan realized that she must be very hungry. For some reason, it occurred to Dan that this dog was the only living creature in his world right now

– at least, at this very minute - who didn't actually *want* anything from him other than a small amount of stale food and some water. Who wasn't interested in criticizing him. Who wasn't interested in judging him. But, who was actually willing to touch him. And, in being touched in return. Both feelings just felt wonderful!

The only thing this dog seemed to want other than a brief drink and a very small snack was the opportunity to lick his face and his hand and place her head on his knee. And, of course, wag her tail.

Yeah, Dan knew that having this dog lick his face was probably kind of gross. Who knew where that tongue had last been? He remembered enough about his childhood experience with dogs to have a pretty good idea where that tongue *might* have been. But, strangely, whatever lack in hygiene this might represent didn't seem bother him, at all. He just found it to be so very comforting!

Truth be told, it had been a couple of months since he had touched Sue. Or, she, him. When that kind of thing was going on – or, *not* going on – it didn't really matter who was the first or the last to do or not do something. Who was to blame? Who was *not* to blame?

The Program had taught him to only concentrate on his own faults, not on those of others. When had he forgot this lesson, he wondered? He realized that this might be more front and center in his thinking if he went to meetings more than once every ninety days or so. This from a guy who went to meetings once or twice a *day* when he had started with AA! It was an investment that had reaped rich rewards. He sighed. Lord knows, he certainly had a lot of faults to think about.

That's why the Program talks about taking an inventory, he thought. More than one fault. *A lot* more than one fault. You gotta list them. An inventory.

Dan smiled. He realized that this was probably his first smile today. Maybe even this week. *What the hell is going on with me?* he wondered. He locked the center drawer of his desk, picked-up the dog and headed out to his truck. It was still raining, although a bit less so. The dog was shivering some. Cold. He zipped his jacket over the dog so that she was mostly out of the rain. "Guess I'll have to take you to the vet now," he told the dog. "You probably will need some shots, too."

He looked at her again, and then up at the sky. "God," he asked. "Just *where* do you think I'm going to get the money to pay the vet? They charge more than lawyers!" Even though he wasn't a Catholic, for some reason an old Catholic saying popped in his head. Or, maybe, it was an old Irish saying. This being Boston, there probably wasn't that much of a difference. This is what he remembered. "With every baby, God sends with it a loaf of bread." He laughed. A canine version of this would probably involve a bowl of kibble. After all, what would a dog need with a loaf of bread? He'd never known of any dog that could make itself a sandwich.

It was cold outside and Dan himself was shivering, his jacket covering the dog more than it was covering himself. He looked at the dog again. She had perked up considerably after having had a drink and a bit to eat. Somehow, though, he could tell by looking at her that she was far from full. This was a situation that would have to be rectified! But, for the moment, she seemed content. The dog looked at the truck. Possibly wondering where *they* would be going. Possibly not at all caring, as long as she would be along for the ride and that *they* would be going some place together. They got in the truck and Dan started the engine.



“I suppose I am going to have to give you a name,” he told the dog. He thought about that poor dog in the video, which he had just seen again this very day. A dog who had not deserved even one bit of the shameful way she had been treated during her short and miserable life. It made him angry just thinking about this. And, if ever there had been a dog that had *needed* a Guardian Angel, it was that dog. The name came to mind.

"Kiya," he murmured. "I think I'll call you Kiya," he said, petting her. "That name didn't do that other doggie much good, I'm afraid," he said with a sigh. Petting her some more. "Maybe the second time around will be the charm." The dog made a kind of noise that was sort of like *cooing*? He had to smile. Since when did dogs *coo*? Well, this one sure did! His dogs growing up had been a lot bigger. Maybe, this was a small dog thing.

#### **4. A MAN AND HIS DOG.**

Kiya was firmly entrenched on his lap. He couldn't get his seat belt on because to do so, he would have to move her. Which he didn't want to do. And, she gave no indication of wanting to move until, say, March or April. Within a few minutes, the dog was asleep. The dog appeared to be smiling. Dan wondered, did dogs actually smile? He wasn't sure. He remembered that when babies appeared to be smiling, some of the time it was just gas. He smiled. Again. *What was going on with him?* he wondered. Smiling. Having sane thoughts. Actually feeling happy?

“Ah, heck,” he thought to himself. “Subcontractors aren't so bad, after all.” And, after having had that thought, he wondered how that idea had come into his head just now. “Maybe I'll call

up Carl and ask him if he'd like to get a sandwich and a beer. I know he needs some dough. We can work something out. Maybe it's time for me to give him some of his own money that I've been sitting on." He turned on the heat and started to drive out of the lot. Rain or not, it was cold. And, that made his lot pretty slippery.

The wipers were going at a pretty good clip. "I guess I can stand Sue," he said, smiling. "After all, most of the time, she seems like she can stand me. Especially after we get through this little rough spot we are having." The petting more or less continuous. Not much traffic yet. He figured that those who would be going out to celebrate were probably still getting ready. It would be good to be inside on a cold and rainy night. Maybe make a fire in the fireplace. How long had it been since he and Sue had had a fire?

He thought he would surprise Sue by picking up her favorite: a sausage, pepper, pepperoni, onion and mushroom pizza from Town Spa. Of course, he would have to stop at another place and pick up another meatball sub. A fresh one. And, this time, a *large* one. The way Kiya was farting, he would tell them to hold the peppers.

Petting his dog just made him *feel* good. And, he was grateful that Kiya was a dog. Because Sue was allergic to cats and would never have allowed him to keep a cat. And, so was her mother, for that matter. Smiling slightly while petting Kiya's wet fur, he wondered if wet fur might be enough to keep his mother-in-law away, even a little bit. Maybe, she would be at least a little bit allergic to it. He shrugged. Probably not. That would be too much to hope for.

After driving for another ten minutes or so, he realized that it had stopped raining. The New Year was not starting to look so bad, after all. He realized that reality wasn't necessarily what he thought it was. Especially, not when his thinking wasn't correct. He was guilty of 'stinking thinking'. (More Program lingo!) He had to start going to meetings again. Maybe even

tomorrow. What a good way for him to ring in the New Year! Sober and at a meeting. And, it was time for him to start working the steps again. The thought just came to him that all of his belly-aching and drinking were just ways that the Devil had devised of stealing his soul. And, for awhile, he had been successful. But, no more!

He realized that he *could* do something about his problems. How much of his problems with Sue had to do with him? Probably, a lot more than he usually was willing to acknowledge. And, for the business, he was just going to have to work a lot harder. Start going after the smaller jobs that no one really wanted because there wasn't all that much that could be made from them. Those home improvement jobs, the ones that Carl was always saying that Dan should be doing. Carl said that there was money to be made with new kitchens and bathrooms, which jobs had fewer headaches than additions and new second floors. Sure, he couldn't make that much off of any one job and working for homeowners could be tough sometimes. Especially when they kept changing their minds about what kind of bathroom tile they wanted or what kind of kitchen cabinets they *had* to have or which kind of kitchen countertop looked absolutely the best. Thinking about it some more, this didn't worry him. He had always been able to get along good with his customers.

If one could believe those discussing construction on the radio and TV, 'they say' there was plenty of that kind of work available because 'they say' the economy was pretty good and 'they say' that the banks were now willing to lend money to homeowners for home improvement jobs. He realized that it was time to put that to the test.

Maybe he could rebuild his business that way. He had had hard stretches before. And, somehow, he had always come back. Yeah, he was older now and a bit more tired. And, this last one had been the worst one by far. Still, he would be able to do it if his attitude changed some. He had subs that had stuck with him, Carl being one of the best of them. Dan decided

that calling Carl would be his first business call of the New Year. Carl didn't know it yet but there would be a check for him ready the first business day of the New Year. And, it would be most of what Dan owed him.

It was warm in the truck now, the heater having come up to temperature. Kiya had burrowed right into his chest. Right next to his heart. He picked up the pizza and then he picked up the sub. The food smelled good. Kiya was dry, warm and seemed to have relaxed. He could tell that even though she didn't really know him, somehow he knew that she really liked him. For a small dog, she snored pretty good. She seemed happy. And, he realized that knowing that made him feel a little bit happy, too. The New Year would be better! He would work harder and smarter so that it would be better!

He called his wife. "Sue, I'm coming home and bringing you one of those pizzas you like." He listened to what his wife was saying. It made him smile. "Our family is also growing today with a new member, as you'll soon see." He listened a bit more. "No, it's *not* a cat. Although if it would keep your mother away some, I'd consider getting one!" He could hear her laugh. She spoke some more words. "No, I haven't been drinking. At least, not for the last couple of hours. And, we have some things that we really need to discuss. I think I have some things to say that you've been waiting to hear. Hey, what do you think about having a fire tonight in the living room?" Sue thought that this was a good idea. Maybe, he thought, that it wouldn't be too much longer before they started having fires once again in the bedroom.

Sue has a very level head, he thought. If something could be figured out to get them out of their problems, she'd be the person to do it. Assuming that he was willing to help. Which he suddenly realized he was more than willing to do. In fact, he was actually looking forward to the challenge!

## **5. FROM A BETTER PLACE.**

Somewhere up in Heaven, a dog is smiling. That would be Kiya. Happy, at last. And, satisfied in her having successfully arranged for this *friendship* on the very last day of 2018. Of course, this was the kind of thing that Guardian Angels did. And, she was very good at it.

And, especially when she could help some other poorly-treated dog, this brought her the most joy out of all of the Guardian Angel things her duties entail. After all, she was full of joy now. And, she was only too happy to share that joy. To kind of spread it around. With that man and with that dog today, both of whom really needed each other.

She was especially pleased to be able to help Dan. A Guardian Angel knows the hearts of her wards. She had heard him make an oath to God that he would have tried to prevent what had happened to her, had he had the opportunity to do so, and she knew he meant it. So instead of her, she was going to give him Dustmop to save. (And vice versa.)

She grinned. Granted, people tend to give dogs dumb names. But, *Dustmop*? Well, she sometimes looked like a kind of fur ball, covered in curls, her exact features under certain circumstances hard to completely see. Still, *Dustmop*? This didn't matter any more as Dustmop had a new name: her own. And, for that, she felt very honored.

She sighed with contentment. Tomorrow was the first day of a New Year. She could hardly wait to find out who she would be helping tomorrow. It was her life now to try to save the world one human with one dog at a time. She closed her eyes. It was time to rest. Yes, tomorrow was going to be a really big day. Another very good day in a long line of very good days to come. Her last thought before dropping off was that life, *eternal* life, simply couldn't be any better. And, for that, she was truly grateful.

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*MAY GOD BLESS! AND, HAPPY HOLIDAYS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU AND YOURS! AND, IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE - OR, IF YOU HAVE FEWER THAN SIX - WHY NOT THINK ABOUT GETTING A DOG?! YOU'LL BOTH BE GLAD YOU DID!*

*YOU CAN PLAY HOLIDAY MUSIC ON YOUR CAR RADIO DURING YOUR ROUND TRIP TO NEW YORK CITY. THAT WILL MAKE THE TRIP GO BY QUICKLY! IF YOU CAN FIND YOUR WAY TO DO THIS, SOMEONE VERY SPECIAL WILL BE WAITING THERE FOR YOU!*

*IF IT'S A GIRL AND YOU'RE STUCK FOR A NAME, WE'VE ALWAYS KIND OF THOUGHT THAT KIYA IS A NICE NAME!*