

Suddenly, I Realize...



Roger C. Bull

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by
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Peacefully riding in my white 2010 Toyota Yaris, I stop for a red traffic light at Greeno Road and Fairhope Avenue. Alongside pulls a gold colored 1959 Chevy Bel Air, driven by a late teenage boy. He has a three day old beard, rather scraggly as you would expect of a youngster. An unusually big smile is drawn upon his face, right hand on the steering wheel, left elbow propped upon the driver's side door while grasping the upper window frame. Such a carefree, jovial look. He is playing a soft rock song and bobbing his head to the music. His dirty blonde hair bouncing to the rhythm.

He looks at me, with wild blue eyes and a broad smile, through his open passenger window. I look back and smile.

He says, “Great day, huh?”

“Yes it is. I love the coolness of the spring breeze and the clouds, like cotton balls, rolling with the wind.”

“Yeah, that’s it. I love it, too!” he responds with such vigor, like a Jack Nicholson character’s retort.

The light turns green. We drive away slowly. The blonde haired teen still bobbing his head and smiling like he owns his dreams.

I turn right onto Fairhope Avenue as the kid continues south on Greeno Road. I continue driving west until I reach the intersection of Fairhope Avenue and Section Street then turn left, after the turn signal implores me to proceed. One block south, I spot a parking place two spaces from Section and De La Mare Avenue. I pull into the space in front of the Crown and Colony Antique store.

As I exit my car, I feel the cool bay breeze upon my face. I grab my bag of tools and software, preparing to work on an errant computer.

I see something unusual, a vehicle parked in the median turn lane. It is not unusual for a delivery truck; but this was a dark green Jeep parked in front of the Page and Palette.

From the area, across the street, I hear the ratcheting sound of someone pulling the bolt of an AK-47. A scream ensues. Gasps, I hear. All of this from the peaceful respite of the Page and Palette bookstore.

Suddenly, I realize: There is a crime being committed in the bookstore. Instinct and training kicks in the doors of restraint. I react.

I reach into my Yaris. Under the driver's seat I pull my Colt Mark IV, Series 70, .45 caliber 1911 semi-automatic handgun. Along with it, I grab two extra magazines, each hold seven rounds. Running behind my car, using it for cover, I place my gun sights on a wildly smiling dirty blonde haired boy, exiting a gold 59 Chevy Bel Aire, recently parked behind the Jeep, with an AR-15, poised for action. His head bobs.

I squeeze the trigger of my .45 gently. A shot rings out, strikes the boy in the head. He drops, immediately, to the ground.

Two people, a woman and a young girl, escape from the De La Mare entrance, running west. Fleeing.

Three others, two adults and a youngster, bolt out the main door onto Section and run south, screaming for someone to call 911.

There is the rapid fire, with that clanking sound known only to military, police and firearms aficionados, burping rapidly from the direction of the bookstore. It's an AK-47 actively working its damage.

<"Roger... Roger!" a female voice seeps into my head, miles away, like a dream..>

Shouts, screams blast the air. People escape, bloody clothes. Many hold their bodies, body parts. Some fall to the ground.

There is laughter, too, from the reading place. Unlike any laugh you usually hear. The peaceful library is violated. The sounds too loud, too nightmarish.

I stand firm, on spot. The surreal scene unravels before my eyes. I focus my sight on a dark haired boy, shooting the AK-47, spraying it wildly in the store. I squeeze another round. The main window of the Page & Palette shatters into shards of glass, plummeting to the ground. The head shot grazes the kid-adult, infuriating him.

Out from the corner door at Section and De La Mare, comes two teenagers. The male with the neon green hair, a razor tattoo around his neck. He wears a full length black leather duster over a Anonymous t-shirt. The second is a young woman with bright reddish-orange hair with a purple streak. She has Chinese tattoos strung down her right arm and a series of scars from drug injections on her left inner arm. She wears a black leather skirt and a bright red silk blouse. AKs and ARs protrude from beneath their armpits, strung on shoulder straps. They smile. Drug-filled smiles. Non-sense slithers across their faces. Caricature white face paint with insanely drawn large red lips in sick smiles across their mouths and cheeks. The Joker comes to mind. Where's Batman?

Both see their partner in crime, down upon the street in a pool of blood. They look up. See me hiding behind my Yaris, weapon drawn.

Weird boy and girl quickly raise their rifles and begin to spray the street, buildings and my car with hot projectiles, penetrating metal and wood, breaking glass and mortar, some skitter down the asphalt of Section Street.

I am hit on the right temple. A graze. I am not aware of the wound; but I wipe blood from my right eye. *Where did that come from?* I think.

Across the street, Section Street, they run towards the awaiting Jeep Wrangler, top off. Dark green. Open air for enjoying the ride. They spray more rounds in my direction.

Blood soaks my shirt on the right side. No time to feel pain.
My .45 flies out of my right hand. I pick it up with my left hand. I move to the other side of my car.

I pop-off three more rounds, striking each of those headed to the Jeep. One head shot, two body shots.

The sicko boy-adult drops. Life gone.

The wild girl moves again, attempting to recover her weapon. I cap two more rounds into her body. Her movements cease.

<"Roger... Roger!" *There's that lady's voice again, calling me.*>

To be safe, I hit the magazine release button and eject it. I pop another into my gun.

Ready.

Expect the unexpected.

I show no emotions..., other than my eyes furrowed in a Clint Eastwood glare, focusing on the shooters. I prepare to blast at any motion.

Blood drips from my right hand, making small droplets with directional pointers.

<Sirens wail in the background. Help on the way.>

What was I thinking?

Nothing!

After all, I am a veteran peace keeper, a law man. Trained to respond. Sixty-five. So what!

Those victims are human beings. Plowed down like weeds, with no value to this earth, by animals with no respect for Life. I do what I must, to stop further loss.

Now, it's time to help. Help the victims of this distress, this disaster, this inhumane act by scumbag thugs bent on harming the innocent.

I run to each perpetrator's body, double checking that they are a threat no more. I remove their weapons and pile them in a corner of the Page & Palette, to await the crime scene unit and the detectives to photograph, to fingerprint, to draw, to document and to analyze their work.

There are children in the back reading room, I am sure. I yell outside, demanding help for the wounded.

Few run into the building; but, those that do, respond to my barking orders.

Mr. Brown runs out of the antique store, into the P&P and asked, "What's going on?"

I shouted, "Get some clean sheets, bandages, compresses, whatever you can find! We need to stop the bleeding!" I pointed around the room at the innocent victims, plowed down like rotten stalks in a sugar cane field.

Mr. Brown, an average height, casually dressed, well spoken, with an intelligent mind, in his mid-forties runs to his store, seeking what he can to assist.

Others help me apply pressure on squirting arteries of the wounded, the bleeding. The bodily fluids seeping onto the floor, oblivious to us. Saving lives is the utmost goal.

<"Roger... Roger!" *There it is again. That voice.*>

Within minutes, police cars, fire trucks, ambulances and other first responders arrive at the scene.

All is a rush. First responders walk through pools of blood and carnage to assist the living. EMTs push gurneys to the crash trucks and ambulances. Clothing, soaked in life giving red stuff. Oxygen masks over faces. IVs on poles. Lives at risk, going. Lives lost, remain.

I stand, in stunned silence at the carnage. My work not done. I now face a myriad of questions, procedures. I expect to be in the detectives custody for many hours, possible days.

With the injured gone, Mr. Mendal approaches me and asks, "Are you shot? Okay?"

I slowly turn and respond, "Yeah. I think that I am. I'm okay. I'll be busy for awhile with these officers. They'll need your statement, also, Mr. Mendal. Stick around, would you?"

He looks at the dried blood on my right temple and says, "You're shot!"

"I'm not."

The immediate danger gone, my mind has time to think about what could have happened. *It could have been worse.*

I begin to feel the searing hot pain on my right side. My right temple begins to throb.

Suddenly, I realize: *I'm shot.*

I tremble. The tears begin to roll from my eyes. My lips quiver at the thought of all the unnecessary losses suffered in such a short time.

"You're in shock. Come with me," as he gently grabs my right arm.

"No, no. I'll be okay. The kids. The innocent. Dead, dying, injured. It's all so useless." I mutter.

Mr. Mendal grabs my left hand, gives me my tool bag. He walks me to a comfy-looking chair and says, "Here, sit a while. Rest."

I remain standing. Drop my bag. Look around for a corner. Go to it and crouch, in a sitting fetal position. I look around and scream.

"Bloody madness! Senseless death. I have seen the loss of innocence. The children plowed underground. Blood spilled for no reason. Truth defiled. Madness and insanity encouraged by drugs, greed-drivers and other evil-doers. What has become of humankind?"

With no sense left within me, I cry. I cry for those gone before me. Those dying now. For future losses yet to come.

I remember the many arguments about gun control. *Today I've seen the psychos, with guns, do their madness.*

“Why not allow the death penalty? Fear is the only thing that they respect. Death is the only workable solution to their madness.”

Mr. Mendal, “Who are you speaking to?”

I look up blankly, “To the world, Mr. Mendal. To no one specifically.”

“Roger, there’s blood on your shirt. Are you hurt?”

“Yes... Deeply.”

“Where?”

“In my soul, Mr. Mendal. In my soul and heart.

“How long did you work in law enforcement?”

“About ten years, sir. Nine in New Orleans. I’ve seen the darkness that most don’t see or hear. It’s not a pretty sight or sound. The weeping, the gasping, the last death rattle. The blood and guts, the gritty doom of destructive natures impaled upon the living vitality of human forms and minds and hearts.

“Come, Mr. Bull. Get off the floor. Come to the chair. Let me make you some tea.”

“Tea. Hmm. Such an elegant drink... Yes. I’ll have some. Thank you, Jacob.”

* * *

“Roger! Roger! Wake up! Wake up!”

“Huh? What?”

“Wake up, Roger. You’re having a nightmare.

“Get up. There’s news on the TV. Three psycho kids, teenagers, went into the Garden District Bookstore in New Orleans. There was a shooting....”