

November 15, 2011

Hello World!

Continuing from last week. Mohammed Ali stood up, looked me over from head to toe, and with a cautious sneer, asked, "Who wants to know?"

"It's me. Greg. From Yuba City," I replied.

Mo's eyes dilated as recognition sparked. He said, "What the hell are you doing here?"

My shoulders sagged and shame coated my face as I said, "Thirty-four years to life."

Mohammed Ali, that's his real name, given to him before the boxer took on the famous moniker, was originally from Pakistan. Mo was a bright teenager. A handsome, courteous, and soft-spoken young man when I knew him in high school. After I went off to college, Mo worked as an assistant manager at the local McDonald's.

Tragically, in an attempt to protect his younger sister from an abusive boyfriend, two teenagers were killed. Mo had asked this boy to stop seeing his sister. He refused. Mo then paid two friends \$50 each to scare the boy - push him around - intimidate him into not seeing his sister. When the two friends confronted the boyfriend who was with another boy in one of the many orchards surrounding Yuba City, knives were drawn by all parties and the boyfriend and his friend were mortally wounded.

Because Mo had paid his friends, and threatening another is a crime - felony, in California, if a death occurs during the commission of a felony, the perpetrator is charged with murder. No intent is necessary. Mo was charged with murder for hire times two - the death penalty. To save his life he accepted a prison term of 50-years to life.

Everyone lost.

I told Mo my story and he shook his head, saying, "I never thought you'd do drugs. You didn't even drink."

"It's worse. I didn't use them. I only sold them for the money."

Mo sighed and then said, "You're going to need a job."

More later. Right now I'd like to share the miracle of communicating with the family members of my victim. October of 2010 I wrote an apology letter to them, but not knowing where they lived, I mailed it to the Ventura County District Attorney's office. My crime(s) occurred on Nov. 10, 1986 in Simi Valley, California. In May of this year, two of the daughters, who had decided to find out what happened that day traveled to the D.A.'s office and requested assistance. It was either then or shortly after, they were given my letter.

Then in June, with incredible courage, they wrote me, asking, "Why did you murder our mother?" The question - so raw - ripped out my heart. What kind of a monster was I to have gotten to the point where I believed murder was the answer? Ironically, one week earlier, the parole board told me - "Unsuitable for release. Parole denied."

After reading the letter, I sat on the stainless steel seat at a four seat table in the 160 man gym/dorm to write the most difficult letter of my life. However, before placing the pen to paper, I prayed.

I'll share more next time.

Thanks for checking in on me.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gregory Barnes Watson". The signature is fluid and somewhat stylized, with the first name "Gregory" being more prominent.

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Novel: A Thundering Wind (Amazon.com)