

THE HARD ROAD

THE HARD ROAD WRITING EXAMPLE

BY MICHAEL PRUETT

By forty years of age, Michael Pruett was a thriving businessman. He had raised millions in capital, started an Internet provider service, worked with contractors to develop and flip homes, and had established a well-respected reputation in Jackson Hole's real estate community. Add to this a new wife and stepdaughters, and he reached the pinnacle of the high life, or so he thought. He had risen high, and then he fell...hard. But there was a larger story in play, and July 15, 2012 happened—the day he should have died.

Michael's action-packed and riveting biography tells the story of a terrible happenstance that changed everything, in the best possible way. It asks the tough questions, its true-to-life characters exploring life's uncertainties—about the divine, why bad things happen to good people, and what to do when the road you picked just doesn't go as planned.

red arrow



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WHAT IF ALMOST DYING WAS THE VERY
THING THAT SAVED YOUR LIFE?



MICHAEL S. PRUETT

WITH VANESSA J. CHANDLER

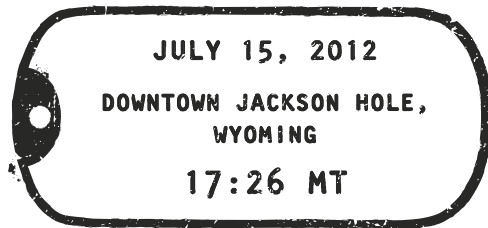


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Paramedic Trent Jensen was hunched over a makeshift table in the radio room of one of Jackson Hole's six fire and emergency medical service stations, writing a report. He ran his fingers back-and-forth across his forehead in contemplation, his thumb pressed into his temple. Seated, his six-foot-four frame was still imposing, but off the job, his congenial demeanor and good-natured grin revealed a homegrown young man from the Midwest.

Thirteen hours of duty lay ahead of him and his team who relaxed on recliners around the room, resting from the day's events and already anticipating what the night might bring. Every twenty-four hour shift at the station followed the same routine: EMS and fire training at seven in the morning, physical exercise in the afternoon, then administrative duties and rest at night. Some days no calls came in, especially during the off-season, but of course it was impossible to anticipate. Their waiting game

was endless. Adrenaline was always high. The knowledge that at any given time they'd have to make life-and-death decisions for someone was a weight that no one carried lightly.

Emergency calls could come in from four thousand square miles surrounding Jackson, and Trent was the designated leader of medical relief at the station. His team could be hiking in three feet of snow 10,000 feet up on the Grand Teton to rescue a waylaid tourist or rushing a few blocks away to administer help to someone suffering from a heart attack.

Tuning in for a moment to the conversation buzzing behind him, Trent looked up from his report and scanned the room, taking in the tired faces of his team and resting his gaze on Brian Carr. Brian was an honest, quick-witted friend and EMT that Trent could always count on to offer choice remarks.

“Well, that poor woman’s cat will never get up on a roof again,” Brian quipped. He was attempting to lighten the mood with a jovial comment about their last call.

Trent shook his head, relieving his heavy concentration. His colleagues often joked about what they called the “grandma calls.” Those rescues were tediously uneventful, like saving stranded animals or scouring the basement due to a mysterious sound. These were unexpected calls, but sometimes they served as light-hearted breaks from more harrowing rescues. Before Trent could join in with a quip of his own, a burst of static noise erupted from the radio on his belt.

In an instant, the room fell silent as senses snapped into high alert, listening. The first thing Trent registered was the tone signaling the nature of the emergency. It was not a fire.

Then the voice came through. “Medic 10, this is Dispatch. Man

on motorcycle collided with medium-sized truck on corner of 265 South Millward Street and West Hansen Avenue. First responders are recommending a CHARLIE response at this time. Repeat, CHARLIE response.”

Trent felt as though the blood drained from his body—a familiar sensation. CHARLIE meant a potentially life-threatening scenario where time could affect the patient’s wellbeing. “This is Medic 10. Roger that, Dispatch,” Trent returned. “On our way.”

Steadying his nerves, he signaled to his team with a glance and headed for the garage directly adjacent to the radio room, which housed two ambulances, a yellow wild land truck, and two fire trucks. The team had drilled procedures so many times that they didn’t need to communicate. Amanda revved the engine of an ambulance while Trent and Brian cleared the steps to the right side door servicing the back of the rig. Five others jumped on one of the fire engines. Lights flashed above the oversized garage door of the station as it rose, releasing the team to their mission. They knew there was a man near death that they could possibly help, but there were no guarantees.

The multi-colored, beaming lights and screaming siren of Medic 10 blurred through the air as it sped to the accident just ten blocks from the station. Suddenly, another voice cut in on the dispatch line. “This is Medic 60. We were filling up nearby, so we are already en route. Repeat, we are already en route.”

Recognizing Cori Neckels’ voice, Trent exhaled in relief. Fifty-year-old Cori Neckels was an intermediate EMT with twenty years of experience. Often referred to as the station’s “mom,” her calm demeanor during an emergency gave the team confidence that things were being done correctly,

and that everything would be okay.

As Amanda maneuvered the ambulance, Trent stared at the red and yellow lines running along the interior of the ambulance's double doors, grateful for an instant to steel his mind before entering the stress of another emergency. He had spent over two thousand hours training for moments like this. In fact, he lived for these moments. After nearly a decade of navigating through dangerous situations, he still looked forward to each day of work.

Trent prepared himself for the scene he knew he would soon be confronting and felt the familiar fear rise in his body. He unconsciously fingered the wooden cross that hung on a leather string beneath his uniform. A gift from his father, it helped steady his nerves when he faced how quickly and tragically life could end. Yet he also knew his training would kick in like a hallucinogenic drug, checking his emotions and channeling the adrenaline into tunnel vision that would help him make keen observations, identify problems, and administer solutions in a matter of seconds.

Camaraderie was essential to his team, and he implicitly trusted each member. They were not only trained to provide basic medical relief, but also to climb ladders to extract victims trapped in a fire, use an axe and a chainsaw, force entry into a burning and smoking building, break down a door or window, escape from entrapments, navigate in swift water in the wild, and enforce search-and-rescue tactics and hazard responses. They had seen and done it all, and most of them had witnessed death. Long after they had grieved these tragedies, the memories lived on, even in their dreams, fueling their vigilance and determination to be ready for the next emergency. They all knew it wasn't just a job—it was a lifestyle.

The ambulance slowed suddenly, coming to a halt in front of Snake River Brewing Company, a pub on the corner of Millward and Hansen.

Trent swung open the side door of the ambulance while Amanda hustled for the gurney, and Brian for the rig's exterior compartment. An audience had formed in the pub's parking lot. Trained to analyze the details of every scene, Trent immediately noticed the presence of one of his station's captains. The captain was off duty and dressed down, and Trent made the split-second assumption he had been eating at the pub.

Trent acknowledged the captain as he jumped down from the rig. The fire engine following behind them blocked the road. The rest of the station's EMTs sprang out and headed toward the crowd of people.

As the lead paramedic, a job that required a high level of intense training beyond EMT status, Trent would assess what the first responders were already doing, and in about ten seconds, decipher how best to manage the scene. The wellbeing of a patient was on his watch. If he failed, the patient's life could end.

Trent's eyes met a gruesome sight. A man's battered body lay on the pavement. A thick circle of blood surrounded a gaping wound in his head, a mess of skin and sinew. The right half of his scalp had peeled off from his skull and lay beside him. The patient was already combative. His writhing arms scraped the asphalt as he reached out in front of him. He mumbled an incomprehensible name. His legs jolted as if coursing with electricity.

John Doe. Trent noticed that the man, despite being mangled within a horrific scene, looked vaguely familiar.

The woman stationed at John Doe's head was the wife of the captain he had noted seconds before; she was a battalion chief. Trent determined that she had most likely been having dinner with her husband at the pub across the street, heard the frightening cacophony from the accident, and rushed to become one of the first responders at the site. She was already

administering a manual C-spine immobilization to keep the patient's head still and neck straight.

Behind him, Trent heard the outside compartment of the ambulance slam shut. Brian was towing the yellow plastic backboard that would hold the patient's body. Trent's mental timer began. He had been at the scene only three seconds.

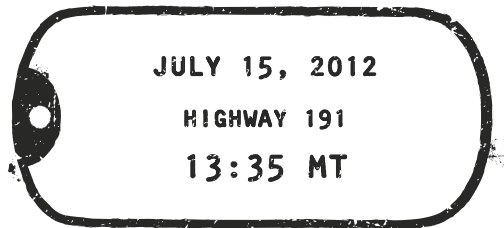
The petite frame of Cori Neckels from Medic 60, who had radioed Trent's team while in route, was crouched and leaning over the patient's right side, assessing his back. She cut the man's shirt to expose probable wounds and gently dug a hand beneath him over the line of his spine. She bit down hard on her lower lip, a nervous habit.

"He's not responding to anyone yet. He could be seizing," Trent shouted as he ran toward the scene.

Five seconds.

He scanned the area to see if the team had missed any other patients. A man sat in the bed of an older truck, shaking his head, as if in shock. Trent knew without asking that this man was responsible for hitting the patient. His wounds, which appeared to be minor, were being treated.

Trent arrived at John Doe's body in seven seconds.



Michael Pruett gunned his black and chrome Bonneville T100 into gear and maneuvered onto the highway. Before gaining speed, he glanced over his shoulder at Dawn, his wife of two years. Her deep aqua-green eyes met his gaze as she cozied her petite figure up behind his solid six-foot-four frame.

The ride to the park from the church was a short distance, and Michael barely had enough time to enjoy the wind against his face before slowing down his James Dean replica. Dawn jumped down from the bike and attempted to straighten and reshape her honey-colored hair without a mirror. Then she smoothed out her dark blue jeans that tucked into tall brown boots.

Noting Dawn's effort, Michael commented, "You look fine." Head and shoulders above his wife, he was proud to walk arm-in-arm with her, a classic American beauty who still caught the attention of a passerby.

Her cheeks were flushed from the summer sun and still full enough to give her the appearance of a much younger woman. Not only that, she was confident and professional. Combined with her beauty, those traits continually captivated him.

“You look great, actually,” Michael corrected himself.

“Too late,” she said, giving him a coveted, pretty smile. She quickly turned her attention to the people they were approaching.

“There you are!” came a recognizable voice behind them. Matt Deehan’s Boston Irish accent was easy to place in Wyoming. His rugged figure towered over Dawn, much like Michael’s. As usual, his salt and pepper curls lay unkempt, and he wore a wry smile. “I thought you guys either got lost or decided to head on home.”

“We might have gotten turned around once,” Dawn jested.

“No, no,” Michael answered in mock defensiveness, “I just like to take the long route.”

“Oh, is that what it is,” Deehan stated in obvious amusement. “And sometimes you like to take the very, *very* long route.” He rolled his eyes exclusively for Dawn before giving her a wink. It was a boyish gesture, but it had its intended effect.

Dawn laughed in spite of herself, and Michael shook his head as she let go of his arm, releasing him to make his way around the entire crowd. During their three-year relationship, Dawn had learned that meeting new people, having great conversations, and catching up with friends enabled her husband to come alive. At times others saw Michael’s outgoing, sociable nature as a form of social climbing, or—as his stepdaughters considered it—annoying. Michael didn’t mind and he certainly didn’t change. He simply enjoyed people. In the same way Dawn encouraged his social freedom,

Michael understood that although she could appear as an energetic people-person, she was a textbook introvert. She appreciated listening more than speaking and the personal over the public in almost every case.

“Hey there,” Matt Somers, one of Michael’s close friends, said as the couple approached his picnic table. “Take a seat.” Somers’ wife, Heidi, sat beside him, and one of his children was enthusiastically clamoring on his back. Like most of Michael’s friends, Somers was noticeably athletic and donned his usual red baseball cap. The three friends known collectively by their last names, Pruett, Deehan, and Somers, had traveled to many sports games in celebration of their fanaticism.

Dawn made herself comfortable. “There are so many people here! I’m surprised you haven’t taken off on a visiting mission, Michael.”

“Don’t worry,” Deehan whispered to Dawn loudly enough for everyone to hear. “He’s already mentally orbiting the planet!”

Dawn glared blithely at Deehan and Somers laughed.

“Oh come on, you guys,” Christina Feuz cut in as she stood up. Christina was Dawn’s ever-smiling small group leader from church. She and her husband, Dan, sat next to the Somers clan. “Give Michael a break!” she declared, clutching her newborn with one arm while reaching over to playfully pat Michael’s back with the other. “Poor Michael.” She motioned for Dawn to go with her to get a plate of food. “This little one’s finally ready for me to eat.”

Michael shook his head and laughed as the two women rose from the table. He was used to the incessant teasing.

As Dawn passed him, she gave her husband a quick, nearly imperceptible, coy look.

Deehan joined in. “Yeah, yeah. Poor Michael. Cruising in on his

motorcycle with his trophy wife. God knows I'm still looking for mine.”

“I married for love, not looks,” Michael quipped in return.

“No, that's what Dawn did,” Deehan jeered.

Somers chuckled, and Michael grabbed Deehan's shoulder as if to pick a fight.

“That was my plan too...” Deehan added quietly with derision.

All present unintentionally heard Deehan's comment and the table became unexpectedly quiet.

Michael added awkwardly, “I should at least get something to eat before I sit down.” Spying the location of food, his eyes strayed to Richard Lewis, a new colleague at his firm, Jackson Hole Real Estate Associates. Richard looked casual yet somehow debonair in his fresh jeans and crisp white shirt. His white hair and gray, neatly trimmed beard stood out in the crowd. Michael's stomach tensed. Maybe he wasn't that hungry after all.

Richard caught Michael's look and lifted up his cup of iced tea to greet him from across the lawn.

Michael acknowledged him with a single nod. Before Richard joined the company, he and Michael had been rivals in the real estate game. At one point, when both men went after the same sale, things got heated. Richard had lifted his hand to him on that day as well...only to defend himself against the threat of Michael's swinging fist.

Decades had passed since Michael was in an actual, old-fashioned fight, and his reaction caught everyone off guard, including himself. He had accused Richard of trying to steal one of his potentially lucrative deals, and since Richard had already landed a number of important clients that year, Michael wasn't about to lose a sizeable and much-needed commission without a fight. Thankfully, someone—Michael could never remember

who—restrained him. In his mind, Michael could still see the look on Richard's face, his bewildered and slightly amused expression. It still shamed and infuriated him. If Richard had gotten physical in return, who would have come out on top? Richard could have, at the very least, let him win that one.

Their relationship now, though a little distant, was at least cordial. It had to be. They were in too many of the same circles. Michael knew how to be friendly with anyone, even a competitor, despite the undertone of resentment he still felt when he noted Richard's professional success. Although he hated to admit it, Richard was a great agent and a convincing seller—especially for ranches and resorts. Michael had tried to analyze Richard's success on numerous occasions. Perhaps it was because he gave off the essence of a real cowboy, a man that looked more like a character out of a classic western novel rather than the typical stuffed suit selling real estate. Whatever it was, Richard came across as strong and reliable, and buyers sensed it.

"Why the sour look, man?" Somers nudged, noting the change in Michael's face.

"You're coming over to watch the Cardinals on Wednesday, right?" Michael inquired, ignoring the question.

"Yeah, of course," he answered.

Michael flashed him a friendly, if somewhat forced, smile. He suddenly felt exhausted. He had the urge to get out of there, to hop back on his motorcycle and drive the familiar route to Yellowstone National Park. He and Dawn had planned on leaving the picnic early anyway and a ride through the landscape might be just enough to keep his mind at rest. If they left now, they could be back in time to meet their friends for dinner

as planned.

“Sounds good,” Michael said, turning his attention back to the table. “I’m gonna go get Dawn, maybe head out a little early.” He spotted her in a conversation with Nathan Ver Burg, a new board member at River Crossing Church.

Setting down his drink, Deehan raised his hands in the air. “You haven’t even eaten yet!”

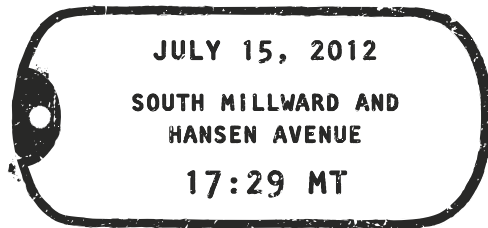
“I’ll grab something on the way out,” he called back over his shoulder to a confused Deehan.

Michael’s lengthy form and determined gait was hard to miss as he approached his wife from across the lawn.

Dawn looked up from her conversation, and he could tell that she interpreted his intent immediately.

“I think we are heading out,” she explained to Nathan.

She would be as relieved as her husband to spend time away from the crowd.



Based on the team’s efforts and John Doe’s reactions, Trent knew the man had been severely traumatized, which meant his spine had been affected. The chances of a successful rescue with patient recovery were dwindling rapidly.

Cori was talking to the victim, attempting to gauge his consciousness. “Wake up! Wake up, Sir!”

John Doe’s words were becoming clearer, “Wi...wife...”

The plea resonated within Trent. Was the family close by? He had seen too many of those moments. Past accident scenes soared through his internal lens, almost all with the same harrowing effect—a father arriving at the accident in time to see his son take a final breath; a mother screaming as her child’s body hung halfway out the windshield. Those were the images that stuck with him even years later, that came back to him in moments like these and had to be forced away.

“All right,” Trent belted out. “What do you guys have?”

Cori’s raw green eyes bore up at him. She seemed just as relieved to see him as he was to see her. “Single patient. Unconscious at first. Consciousness level is now a six, maybe seven. Primary wounds in the head only. Response to pain. Back is clear.”

“Okay. His skin is pink, warm, dry. Good signs.”

Brian reached the battalion chief’s position and took over. Now at the head of the body, he became the designated leader reporting to Trent. He felt the skull for fractures. Cori knelt on the stranger’s left side and handed Brian saline to clean the head laceration. Scarlet blood spilled over Brian’s hands as he rinsed the wound and placed a large white 4x4 inch gauze inside it to stop the bleeding. For now, they’d have to leave the gash open as they found it. Only a nurse or doctor was authorized to staple the skin back together over his skull.

Before the off-duty battalion chief walked back to the lingering crowd, Trent overheard her say, “He was just lying here when we arrived. There was so much blood that no one wanted to touch him.”

Trent prodded his team further, “Rapid trauma assessment?”

Cori refocused on the patient and pulled up his eyelids, then measured his pulse. “Breathing and pulse are good.”

Brian piped in, “Broken ankle. Minor abrasions on left arm, right arm, and legs. Nueros intact all around.”

John Doe’s arms shot out again. “Wife...my wife!” He was reacting to head trauma. EMTs would often compare the human brain to a computer’s hard drive. When the computer crashed, it had to reboot. This man’s brain was restarting.

As Cori tried to pin him down to put an oxygen line into his nose,

he gripped her arms. He appeared to be about six-foot-four with a sturdy build. She and Brian wrestled with him to keep him subdued. If he moved too much, the abrasion on his head would no doubt worsen.

Possible subluxation, Trent realized. The victim's vertebrae were probably misaligned, and the chance of recovery minimal.

"We need to get ready to lift the patient onto the backboard," Brian interjected, breathing heavily.

"Roger that," Cori replied, gasping as the stranger swung his fist toward her face. "Some hindrance here!" After managing to somewhat contain the patient, Cori announced, "On your count, Brian, we're going to move him as a unit."

Brian nodded. "One, two, three." Together, they carefully lifted the patient onto the plastic backboard. Brian held his neck while he velcroed the blue and yellow c-collar to keep him from further damage.

Trent noted the man's closed eyes and verbal incoherence, estimating that his level of consciousness was rising, but still not much above the lowest level of three.

"We're going to run Code 3. I'll give a report to Saint John's Hospital. Rapid transport," Trent decided.

"Copy that," Brian answered.

"Saint John's. Medic 10." Trent waited for a response.

"Go ahead, Medic 10," a voice rang out from the walkie-talkie in Trent's hand.

"Saint John's, be advised we have a Trauma Red patient. Approximately forty-five year-old male. Patient was on a motorcycle. Hit by a truck. No helmet. Scalp avulsion, right side. About half of his scalp. Possible open skull fracture. Subluxation of spine. There is profuse bleeding at this time.

We're controlling it. ETA five minutes."

"Roger that, Medic 10. Room One is being prepped."

As Brian and Cori strapped down the unrelenting man, Trent tried to gauge his awareness. "Sir, can you tell me your name?"

Conscious enough to understand what was being asked of him, the man began mouthing a word, only managing to make an unintelligible sound.

Trent repeated his question twice before he got a clear answer.

"Pru...Pru...Pruett." The name sounded familiar, but Trent couldn't place it.

"Pruett, tell us what happened."

No response.

Brian, who was gripping the man's hand, commanded, "Pruett, pull on my hand."

The patient managed a small tug.

Cori was finally able to place the oxygen line in Pruett's nose.

"Okay, Pruett," Brian coached him. "Take big, deep breaths for me."

The man's eyes fluttered open momentarily.

"Excellent. Lungs sound clear, both sides."

Cori cut in, "Hey, Buddy. We're taking you to the hospital. You got hurt."

Trent started toward the back of the rig. "I'll get things set up."

Brian, Cori, and Amanda gripped the sides of the backboard through the handholds, lifted the patient smoothly onto the gurney, and wheeled him toward the ambulance doors. From inside, Trent gestured that he was ready for them to load the gurney. Brian gave a thumb's up, and the gurney jolted up and inward. Cori climbed in after it and settled on Pruett's

right side. Brian jumped in next to Cori, and Amanda clambered into the driver's seat.

Brian caught Trent's eye. "He kept saying 'Pruett.' He doesn't know what happened. I don't know what his first name is, but I think it's Michael. I've seen him advertise property a few times. He does real estate in town."

Trent looked down at his patient. First names are better, but personal. *John Doe* is just a body; *Michael* is a life.

"Michael, you're still with me, right? Squeeze my hand."

"Still has a good grip," Trent reported. His focus now was to keep Michael breathing well. He reached out for Michael's left hand and clamped on a finger monitor to measure his heart rate and oxygen saturation. Bright lines on the monitor's screen came to life, rising and falling with his bodily rhythms. Trent wrapped the inflatable upper bicep cuff over Michael's right arm to read his blood pressure. Iridescent lines jolted upward above the other lines on the screen.

The time read 5:35—only seven minutes since the call.



PROSPERITY — WITH — PURPOSE

PROSPERITY WITH PURPOSE WRITING EXAMPLE

BY MIKE FRANK

Starry-eyed young entrepreneurs often ask me, “What’s the formula for success?” After they hear whom I’ve worked for and the companies I’ve developed, they want the holy grail of business — extraordinary financial wealth. Each walks away dejected when I frankly admit, “There’s no formula.”

As a boy, I made a misguided vow that propelled me into becoming an “ice man” in the corporate world, a man who didn’t care for anything but his own advancement. I was a high level executive at General Mills, PepsiCo, Frito Lay, TacoBell, and Disney. I helped build a company worth billions (MFS), and was a founder of another (Level 3 Communications) worth over 100 billion. In fact, the Internet largely sits on that company’s infrastructure. But at the height of my career, tragedy struck . . . and a terrible, wonderful decision had to be made.

If you want to understand the underlying core values of success, my journey will assist you. If you have been debilitated by pain, my story will bring comfort. If you are an executive that thrives on business but are thirsting for more, this book may be your story as well. I can’t give you the formula for success, but I can show you how to live a life of relentless purpose . . . which may or may not include profound wealth.

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MIKE FRANK

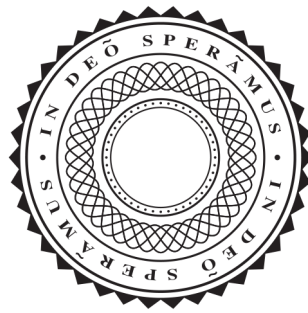


PROSPERITY
— WITH —
PURPOSE

An Executive's Search for Significance



M I K E F R A N K



P R O S P E R I T Y
— WITH —
P U R P O S E

An Executive's Search for Significance

red arrow



— Author's Note —

*“Try to become not a man of success,
but try rather to become a man of value.”*

ALBERT EINSTEIN ¹

NOT LONG AGO I sat in a coaching meeting while overlooking the ocean in Santa Barbara, the most luxurious city in California. Palm trees and European cafés line the walkways that lead to a quaint wharf, idyllic harbor, lengthy beaches and lapping waves. It is utterly pristine.

“To be honest, Mike,” my client said, his impatience becoming evident, “all I want to know is how you became successful.”

He had been an executive vice president at a respected college in southern California, had prospered financially, was happily married and had a seemingly healthy family. From the outside, he had *already* been successful, not only in occupation, but in life. He lived the American Dream.

Yet here he was in his 50's, still looking for a magic formula for what he referred to as “success.” What was he missing? Some describe it as a gnawing, empty feeling of something unknown, something unexplainable.

PROSPERITY WITH PURPOSE

Is this all there is? There has to be more...

After years of doing what he thought would bring him happiness, questions glared at him, demanding answers. He had none.

My answer?

He simply needed someone to give him permission to be a man outside of his job. Metaphorically speaking, my client needed to be given permission to go on the most significant journey of his life—to slay dragons, save a damsel in distress and send a rock spiraling through the air to knock down Goliath! How is that different than what he had already accomplished? It's a matter of perspective. He wasn't living an adventure, and the only way he could change that fact was to lend purpose to his prosperity.

Like many people, my client failed to realize that there is no success without significance, and wealth is a byproduct, not a goal. Hundreds of books have been written on wealth, but none of them contain the "Holy Grail" that answers the myriad of questions on the subject. They might have a modicum of breakthrough, or a few tactics and tips, but that is all. Most people want a step-by-step guide toward corporate success, but in good conscience, I must dispel this misplaced trust. There isn't a formula for success, significance or wealth.

There have been several impossible situations in my life that I would not wish upon my worst enemy. However, through these events, I have gained perspective that has enabled me to provide hope, comfort, and depth of experience. Within this book, I have included several life lessons that will hopefully assist you in your journey towards genuine success through legitimate significance, which may or may not include unfathomable wealth. But I should remind you that this is merely one man's journey. That being said, welcome to the story of my life...

CHAPTER 1

— Piercing the Cold Heart —

*“Now I know I’ve got a heart,
‘cause it’s breaking...”*
THE WIZARD OF OZ²

A YOUNG GIRL stood out from the crowd as we walked by huddled groups of women in the refugee camp. Her skin glistened with sweat and the distinctive red dirt of Africa. She was too young to be a mother, yet a tiny baby was nestled in her arms. Her desperation was evident, and I felt my heart surge with emotion.

The women distrusted us, a group of light-skinned male “rescuers” with World Relief. Some were even terrified. The men they had previously known raped their bodies, ravaging their self-worth. They wore ragged and faded clothes with gaping holes. I could see misery in their eyes. Hopelessness. Most of them were hollow beings, overcome by trauma. Their sanity teetered on the edge of insanity.

I was only just beginning to understand brokenness like theirs. Three years before I had been introduced to my life’s first tragic situation, and I still didn’t know if I would have the strength to

PROSPERITY WITH PURPOSE

recover. But now, by witnessing the sorrow that consumed these women, I was able to see a deeper perspective of my life—I was being ruined by compassion, and I was grateful.

It was time to leave. As I climbed up into the seat of my team's Land Rover, I noticed that the girl with the dark shiny skin had followed me. She ran up to the open door and shoved her little girl into my arms. I responded intuitively, cradling her small child before I realized what I had done. My arms ached for the weight of my two year old back home in Omaha, Nebraska. My baby girl, the one who I believed must have been sent to me for a divine purpose. Her birth had initiated my heart's greatest journey.

Using broken English phrases, the girl spoke forcefully, "You take her. I want you to have her. If she stays here, she dies!"

The year was 2000. Our World Relief team had traveled the dusty roads of Sierra Leone with the goal of bringing food and encouragement to the inhabitants of a war-torn nation. The girl that stood in front of me was a former sex slave of the rebel RUF soldiers.

Once again my heart was jolted at the sight of her desolation. I could not refuse her. What I could not do for my own baby back home, I wanted to do for this girl's child. Yet I knew that legally, I could do nothing. Nor was my studied and analytical expertise as a business executive helpful in knowing how to respond to her personal tragedy.

Oh God, I thought. How can I leave her this way?

The girl's forcefulness, turned into screaming, "You take her!"

My tongue felt immobile. Finally, I said painfully, "I can't! There's no way I could smuggle her out of the country."

She chose not to hear my words. "I can't keep her here! You must take her!"

PIERCING THE COLD HEART

I began to weep.

The girl turned and walked away without looking back.

I sat transfixed, emotionally torn and unable to take action.

“COUNT ME IN”

Clive Calver, the president of World Relief, had asked me to join him on this ten-day trip to Sierra Leone, which occupied the western hemisphere of one of the most fabled continents in history—Africa. British, armed with a PhD in Theology and a compassionate heart, Clive was fearless. Civil war, famine, and highly precarious situations never deterred him.

At the time, I was two years out of a company, Level 3 Communications, which was the darling of Wall Street. The company was flying high. I used to be one of their top men, running strong in the marketplace, competing to win, making a difference and being someone with power, influence and momentum. I hadn't wished to leave. In fact, I had clung to Level 3 as long as I could. But my family had been faced with multiple heart-breaking circumstances that required all of me. It was one of the toughest decisions I had ever made. I knew that leaving my corporate job to care for my family had been the right decision, but there was still a part of me that dreamt of soaring with Level 3 in the corporate world. I was floundering, not knowing who I was without my persona of “highly successful, money-making, head-turning senior executive” who was on the envious list of nation-wide headhunters.

I had obsessed about the scoreboard my entire life, thinking, *How am I going to get higher in the 'pecking order'?*

Now I was challenged with questions I had never asked before:

PROSPERITY WITH PURPOSE

Who am I?

What is my purpose?

And most frightening of all, *Where am I going?*

As a result, peace eluded me. My sense of traction, decimated. I had become broken and disillusioned. The career I had so carefully built, trained toward, and fought to obtain was gone. When I looked in the mirror, I didn't recognize the old guy with the gray hair staring back at me. And so, as much as I wasn't interested in actually going to a Third World Country (not to mention a nation at war), I was desperately looking for something, a purpose that would make me feel alive again.

My wife Robbie, an incomparable woman of wisdom and support, spoke prophetic words that eventually coaxed me into accepting the invitation, "I feel that there's something for you in this trip."

I boarded the plane, still not convinced that she was right.

THE DARK CONTINENT

Sierra Leone is an African nation that almost succeeded in destroying itself. With one of the world's largest natural harbors, it was a port of entry for the transatlantic slave trade in its early known history. In 1787, some of London's "black poor," who had been promised freedom in exchange for service in the British Army, were dropped off on its coastline.

Five years later in 1792 through an arrangement with the Sierra Leone Company, Thomas Peters, a former slave, brought a second group of over 1,000 Black Americans. Together with other freed Africans, they established the capital city of Freetown. However, for