The Longest Sunrise

by Vittorio Hugo Svoboda

Our Journey out of the dark times...





and into a bright new age





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About this edition

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Introduction

> **Author's note (September 2026):** This novel was written around an earlier transition strategy — a secretly coordinated, near-simultaneous event. That approach has been superseded by a gradual, voluntary, community-building model based on further research into what actually works in large-scale social change. The novel is preserved as originally conceived. Characters sometimes act from fear, anger, or mistaken judgment; their actions are not endorsements of current Transition principles. Some depicted technologies, particularly a supposedly harmless aerosol incapacitating agent, are purely speculative and do not correspond to anything that exists. See the full author's note on the novel's landing page and the Evolution of the Approach for the current strategy.

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Introduction:

It's been twenty-five years, a quarter century, since the first country, Costa Rica as it happened, Transitioned. That means that there is now a generation, which in the English-speaking world we refer to as "Generation T," that has only known life after the transition. Within six years, most of the countries in the world transitioned as everyone saw how overwhelmingly positive life in transitioned countries became and the initial fear of the unknown wore off. The more countries transitioned, the faster the trend spread.

The use of money has now become a distant memory, a quaint and disquieting ghost of a harsher, more brutal past alongside gladiatorial games, Inquisitions, and slavery. It's as hard for us now to imagine what it was like when one had to constantly come up with money for even the most basic necessities, as it would have been for the people then to imagine societies without money. It's hard now to remember clearly the initial reaction of fear and distrust that greeted Costa Rica as they transitioned and immediately after. As you read these brave people's stories, try to imagine yourself as they were then, when they could hardly imagine a society without money and all that went with it; they were moving into what was for them the unknown, based on the vision of a better world and scientific evidence. We must appreciate and respect their courage and determination!

Cultural myths die hard, and the unknown is always scary. But after a week or two of frantic calls to and from foreigners in Costa Rica at the time and Costa Ricans with family overseas, the mood of panic and worry began to give way to surprise and even wonder. After such a sudden, dramatic change, life went on almost like nothing had happened, for the most part. Well, almost. Suddenly people were told that since money was abolished, everything was free while they stayed in the country. Disbelief gave way to giddiness and eventually leveled out as the new normal settled in.

The world has changed so much, so fast, that it would be easy to eventually forget just how monumental a human undertaking it was and how much courage it took for the first pioneers to undo most of what they had ever known to try something completely untried on that big a scale. For this reason, the writers and publishers of the International Historical Syndicate decided to interview people who were alive at the time and still remember it. We picked people from different countries and from different walks of life, both before and after transition, and covering a wide age range, in order to preserve as full a picture as possible of what it was like to be living at that time. This is the time for this project, since we have people still alive who remember before the transition, people who were part of it, and people who grew up in the world after transition. This is a unique moment in history.

Sometimes people wonder why transition isn't capitalized as in Transition. It was such an important historical event after all. The reasoning behind this consensus goes back to the very beginning. There was a sentiment that capitalizing it could subtly give rise to a mindset of transition as a static event in the past, as a fait accompli. The hope is to set up a mindset of transition as a living, evolving process in which we each play a part, shaping it, improving it as we go.

Formats of the interviews will vary according to the individual interview styles of the interviewers. For the sake of authenticity, we decided that we should let all contributors be themselves to reflect the diversity of human experience.

To briefly recap the course of transitioning in the world for future generations, we'll include a quick review. Much has been written about this in popular press and scholarly publications, but it's worth including in this work which focuses on the human experiences of those who lived and worked through it.

In Costa Rica, transition happened pretty smoothly. The seminal work, the now famous book "The Cure: Of, By, And For The People," both the full-length and the shorter version, was quickly translated into other languages from the original English as it was passed from person to person and downloaded like a snowball growing and gathering momentum. The first translation was into Spanish. It quickly found its way though most of Latin America.

Costa Rica was the first to act because conditions were just right, and enough people were receptive. Being a liberal democracy with a background of successful socialism that had eroded steadily away before the pressures of capitalism, and given the fairly high level of literacy there, it was a natural next step for a people who understood what they had lost and what they needed.

At first there was international outcry as images of violent revolutions in Latin America's past flitted through people's minds. But within a fairly short time it became clear even to skeptics that the transition had been an orderly shift that had generated no serious violence or disruptions of any kind.

The first transitions were all in Central and South America, so many analysts considered it to be pretty much an idiosyncratic Latin American thing… until Ghana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe transitioned. Within a year, seventeen counties in Latin America, Africa, and Asia had transitioned.

Reactions were extreme in Russia, China, and the United States as well as the Arabic countries, especially after Israel was the eighteenth country to transition; the people there had grown weary of increasingly corrupt, inhumane politicians blatantly running the country in clear partnership with some of the worlds most toxic, Machiavellian big businesses.

The United States, Russia, and China formed an uneasy alliance and tried to sanction transitioned countries and otherwise put pressure on them to return to the old status quo, but they didn't have much success because the transitioned countries simply weren't committing any atrocities and comported themselves as good global citizens. Attempts to destabilize transitioned governments failed because the dynamics had changed; the tactics that had worked in the past just didn't work anymore. Many multinational corporations around the world were losing serious revenue as their facilities and even headquarters in transitioned countries ceased playing by the long-established rules and were unresponsive to chains of command.

On the other hand, word got around that transitioned countries produced superior products at bargain-basement prices, and multinationals that lost control over transitioned facilities discovered they gained thereby a competitive edge: since overhead was virtually nonexistent in transitioned facilities, they could outclass and underprice competitors who had no transitioned facilities.

The Russian Federation was the twentieth country to transition. The country was depleted culturally, mentally, emotionally, economically and socially from decades of unrestrained corrupt oligarchy and failed wars of expansion that drained the heart and spirit of the Russian people. When the economy effectively crashed, the government fell apart, and a good two thirds of the people were ready to transition. Seizing the moment, they filled voids that had formed in almost every aspect of Russian society. Oligarchs and their retinues fled immediately, only to be deported back to Russia; no country wanted to accept them. But instead of being arrested, tortured, imprisoned and "disappeared" as they fully expected, they were welcomed and promised safe passage. They had lost their power and privilege but went unmolested and frustrated that no one jumped when they snapped their fingers, but otherwise unharmed.

Canada was the twenty-fifth country to transition, with Quebec leading the way.

The United States and India had similar challenges in their transitions, though for very different reasons.

In the United States, runaway, unrestrained income inequality had become so extreme that the country was coming undone. It was referred to internationally as a new category of country: not undeveloped, not developing, not developed, but as a "devolving country." A period of autocratic and brutal rule had erased all but the veneer of democracy and

civilization. There was a widespread feeling that sooner or later, transition would happen there too or at least become a possibility.

The government was hysterically afraid of the transitioning that they saw happening around the world, so they put out a lot of propaganda declaring the phenomena to be “communist,” “socialist,” and “anarchy.” In Texas, Florida, and the Southern states, this propaganda fell on fertile soil; it became a felony to possess or share a copy of “The Cure,” which of course piqued the interest of a lot of people and actually expanded its audience. In New England and the mid-Atlantic Eastern Seaboard, and on the West Coast, it was fertile ground for “The Cure.” The propaganda outlets of the hostile states were jammed and spoofed with great enthusiasm. In the middle of the country, it was a patchwork. Colorado, New Mexico, Illinois, parts of Kansas were ripe for transition. Idaho, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Arizona were hostile. A number of states were about evenly split.

When transition came, it started in the receptive states mentioned above. Texas tried to declare independence, and there was an abortive attempt in the Southern states to revive the Confederacy but both were quickly quelled by the faction of the divided military who were pro transition, having received the go-ahead from the Federal government since even though the President and House were afraid of transition, they were even more afraid of the political and economic fallout from either a successful secession or an all-out civil war. The anti transition faction of the military refused to take part.

International observers all commented on the restraint and humanity used by the military in ending the insurrection. The ringleaders were arrested and tried in open trials watched around the world. International observers reported that there was an unprecedented lack of destruction or reprisals.

But it was an election year. With some states fully transitioned, some states resisting, and some states partially transitioned, this issue eclipsed all other issues on the campaign trails of both parties. One party cited the positive outcomes seen in transitioned counties and the similar outcomes emerging in transitioned states as compared to un-transitioned states and vowed to work with the transition for the benefit of everybody. The other party used AI-generated images and video depicting starving, beaten people against backgrounds of dilapidated ruins of cities. They promised to “save the country from globalist anarcho-communist socialist fascist Illuminati Satanists” at all costs. The pro-transition party came out in control of the presidency and both houses.

Surprisingly, for the first time in recent history, the bitterly opposing parties swiftly passed legislation with strong bipartisan support: taxation was abolished altogether. For the pro-transition party, this was a logical step since money had ceased to have any function in most of the country. For the anti-transition party, abolishing taxes was like the Holy Grail, and they touted it as a victory. Of course, they didn’t have any idea what the transition was or how it worked; they were reacting to their imaginations. neither party could really control, cause, or stop the transition since it came from the grass roots and didn’t directly affect them… but they had to adapt.

With taxation ended, the un-transitioned states soon found themselves unable to function economically or really get anything done. The only exceptions were facilities connected to ones in transitioned states, and direct aid from neighboring transitioned states. Within a fairly short time, the transition was complete.

This precipitated a civil war in Mexico as the drug cartels lost most of their income because the lucrative North American market had dried up overnight, so they tried to take over the government. The country was devastated with no clear victory for either side. In this chaos, transition emerged and quickly got things up and running again, working closely with government to restore a much-improved normal life. Interestingly enough, the elimination of all forms of currency caused the cartels to decline quickly like a fire going out when deprived of oxygen. The existential support for their operations was gone. A similar scenario played out in Colombia a short time later.

No one will ever forget the comic relief when North Korea’s Supreme Leader decided that the United States would be vulnerable and launched three nuclear ICBM’s targeting Washington DC, New York, and San Francisco. The United Stares was on high alert and more than capable of destroying the missiles mid-flight, but the “Gotchya” hacker group were eager to meet the challenge. They succeeded in hacking into the missiles’ guidance systems and made them detonate in space directly above Pyongyang, whose residents were treated to a few seconds of noonday sunlight well after dark. This was followed by the signature “Gotchya!” Emblazoned on the image of a banana cream pie-in-the-camera’s-face and spoken in a deep booming synthetic voice that cut into the state media broadcast.

India's transition superficially resembled that of the United States, but the support and opposition broke down more ethnically than geographically. Most Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, lower castes, and believers in Kali and Shiva embraced the idea of transition; higher castes, devotees of Brahma and Vishnu, mostly feared that transition would take away their privileged status. There were those who were ambivalent as well.

The Indian government walked a delicate balance, not wishing to have civil war happen on their watch. As happened in the United States, though, the improvements in daily life brought by transition spoke for themselves. Which shop would you go to: the one charging money or the one where everything was free even if there were reasonable limits on quantity? Which telecom company would you go with: the one that charges you for equipment and service or the one that's free? In what amounted to yet another arena of direct competition between the old way of life and the new, the better way prevailed.

Eventually the only countries who hadn't transitioned were either ones where the quality of life been mostly good before the wave of transition washed across the globe, such as Finland, Norway, and Iceland, or ones under such tightly controlled dictatorships that the necessary prerequisite overthrow of the government was not yet on the horizon. The former eventually transitioned because it seemed like a logical thing to do, with these countries' government actively participating in the transitions. The latter are now only a handful. Analysts predict that within a decade, their regimes will collapse, and transition will be possible.

It's been said that if we forget and fail to understand history, we are doomed to repeat it. This is a truly awe-inspiring time to be alive almost everywhere in the world. For the first time in recorded history, war has become the exception rather than the rule, hunger and poverty have been virtually eliminated, and the level of social and international harmony as well as the degree happiness and empowerment of individuals is unprecedentedly high.

It would be easy to be starry-eyed optimistic and believe that we've "arrived" and that we'll never have to relive the nightmares of what is now called pre-modern feudalism; but history has taught us that the "it can't happen here" mindset is dangerous and foolhardy. One only has to look at how after only 250 years or so, the United States devolved into brutal autocracy and Europe, less than a hundred years after the horrors of the Second World War and Nazism, came perilously close to doing the same. We must remember where we've been so we can wisely choose where we're going. Five hundred years from now, the period of transition will be a chapter in history books, not a living memory. We hope that this work and these memories of people who were there and lived through it will keep awareness and appreciation of what we've achieved, and steer clear of choices that could undo it.

We still face problems and challenges. While a beneficial side effect of widespread transitioning has been the near elimination of human practices that drove the climate crisis, it will take more time to re-establish optimal, stable global climate and restore as much as possible of the ecosystem that was devastated. We still have areas of ethnic, religious, and cultural strife and prejudice that, while less virulent than before transition, still persist. Past wrongs are hard to let go, and present retaliation for past wrongs keeps resentment alive. We still have disease, physical and mental illness, and crime (especially crimes of passion), though in significantly lower levels than before transition. We still have a few "alpha" personalities that appear along with other personality types susceptible to their influence under the wrong circumstances. We face the need to manage our natural resources wisely while still advancing technologically. Last year's near miss by Asteroid Henry reminds us of the fragility of life. We never saw it coming until it would have been too late. Next time we'll be better prepared. The bonemelt virus pandemic reminds us we need to be better prepared for future pandemics, though we met this challenge more successfully than any previous pandemic in history.

In short, humanity is better off than we've ever been, but we still face problems and challenges. But there is no doubt that we have what it takes to meet them successfully.

So, without further ado, let's get to the recollections!

- Beatrice Allen, Editor of the Day, with concurrence of the other Syndics except Jamal Morris, Ulumummu Wakasi, and Efrat Dor who all felt that this intro was too long

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Ilyana Alexandrovna — Russian Federation

> **Note:** This fictional account was written when the Transition was imagined as a single, rapid, coordinated event. Further research into the historical record has since shown a gradual, voluntary approach to be more viable and sustainable; the novel is preserved as originally written (author's note; the current Roadmap).

Interviewer: Yekaterina Tsiolkova, Russian Federation.

Interviewee: Ilyana Alexandronva, Russian Federation

Yekaterina: Ilyana, how old were you when transition came to Russia?

Iliana: I was eleven. It was a week after my eleventh birthday.

Yekaterina: That must have been an exciting week! Did transition have any effect on your birthday?

Ilyana: Yes! It was my happiest birthday!

Yekaterina: How so?

Ilyana: As long as I could remember, my parents were always worried and tired. I hardly ever saw them smile or laugh.

We almost never had quite enough to eat. We huddled around a wood stove my father made for warmth during outages off and on all winter. Our clothes and shoes were falling apart. My mother and father were always saying we didn't have enough money. They were not home a lot because of working so much. But it was never enough. I knew they loved me, but birthdays were always bittersweet. They would take me skating on the river if it was still frozen until I outgrew my skates, or I would get some fresh fruit or maybe a new blouse, and I was grateful and appreciated my gifts and the love behind them, but my whole life felt like it revolved around not enough of everything.

On my birthday a week after the transition, it was different. Mostly it was the feeling. It was like all my life there were dark clouds and rain, and then suddenly the sun came out and rose for the first time. It was like the longest, most beautiful sunrise ever!

My mother and father were smiling and laughing more than I'd ever seen. There was enough food on the table, fresh food, good food. My parents were home a lot more in that week after transition. They were more relaxed and playful for the first time. On my birthday we had a chocolate cake, and I got a whole new beautiful outfit, even new shoes! And a balalaika like I'd always wanted to play but there was never money for it, and a laptop computer loaded with so much music! My parents told me that the shortages we'd always had weren't real, that the oligarchs in the government and big businesses had caused it. Things were there but never got to where people could get them. I was too young to understand what that meant. All I knew was that it was like someone had turned on a light switch in my life.

Yekaterina: Can you share some about what you remember about life before the transition?

Ilyana: I'll try. Most of the time I don't like to think about those times, but I agree with your wanting to make sure people will always remember so we never go back to that.

That Russia was the only place and the only life I'd ever known, so it was normal to me. I thought that was just life. I thought it was like that everywhere.

I had two older brothers: Fyodor and Boris, and one younger sister, Olga. When I was six, Boris was drafted to go fight in that endless war in Ukraine. I wish I could remember him better. He was always the one who could make us all laugh. And I remember he always kept me safe. I always felt safe when he was with me.

But he never came home from the war. We could never find out anything more than he was killed in action. But they never brought his body home. We had a funeral without him. The government didn't care about things like that. I was eight. He was in the war for almost two years. My parents grieved him for a long time. My mother would cry herself to

sleep, and my father would curse the government and the stupid war, and my mom would tell him to be more quiet so neighbors wouldn't hear him and turn him in.

Fyodor wasn't as outgoing as Boris. He would listen to music for hours and wrote a lot of songs. He ran away when the time came for him to be drafted. One day he just packed a few things and said he had to go and that he wouldn't follow Boris to the grave just for nothing. He didn't say where he was going, but later we started getting letters and emails from him, and messages on Telegram, saying he is doing well and missing us, but he can't come home. He wouldn't say where he was, only that he was safe and happy.

Later we learned that he had found a new home in Poland. Since transition, he's come to visit us a few times and I've gone to see him in Warsaw. He's doing well. He plays in the Warsaw Symphony Orchestra and he's also in a band called Novaya Synergie. We've become close and of course when we see each other we jam a lot.

My sister Olga was born when I was was four. She shared my bedroom. She cried a lot at first but later she was curious about everything. When she learned to talk, she was always asking "what" and "why" and "how." I felt like I needed to protect her because she was always getting into things that could hurt her.

My father was a civil engineer, but sometimes he wouldn't get paid, so he also worked a lot of extra hours doing whatever he could get paid for.

He couldn't complain too much to his boss because he might get fired. This was not unusual in Russia at the time. He would get up early and come home late, then he would eat and fall asleep. The only times he didn't work was when there wasn't any work. On those days he was worried, but I was happy. He was a good father. He still is. I was so happy that he wasn't drunk and mean like some of my friends' fathers. He got impatient sometimes but never mean and he almost never drank.

My mother worked as a salesperson in a department store, also long hours like my father. She always complained that her feet hurt because she couldn't sit down at work. She also worked another job that I wasn't supposed to talk about. I've learned since then that she worked in the black market delivering illegal things to clients and bringing cash back to her bosses there. This was very dangerous, but most people were in the same situation. We did what we had to do to keep going.

When I was eight I started collecting metal and glass to sell for a few kopecks because I felt sad for my parents. It wasn't much but I felt like it was important. I felt like a grown-up.

Even when there was money, most times there weren't the things we needed, or they cost too much. If you had protektsia, if you had connections to the right people, you could get things, but we didn't have that. We didn't starve and there were a lot of people who had it worse than we did, but we were almost always a little hungry and never really had enough of anything.

I liked school. I made friends pretty quickly and I liked to learn how to do things. I had a group of friends. We did everything together and we played together after school.

My best friend was Katya Kuznetskaya, and she still is. Her father used to drink a lot and beat her and her brother and mother, so she spent a lot of time at our apartment. We stood up for each other many times when older bully kids picked on one of us. We got a reputation of don't mess with those girls or they'll make you regret it.

I loved music and really wanted to learn to play balalaika. I found an old record player which Fyodor got to work and slowly collected some old records to listen to. But my parents could not buy an instrument for me to play.

I wasn't unhappy. I don't want you to think my life was bad. It was just that there wasn't a lot of joy. There was always worry and stress. We were always having to be careful what we said to whom. We were cold all winter because there were a lot of outages everywhere. My mother and father were always tired. They rarely had time to play with us or do fun things as a family. They never encouraged us kids to dream and go after it, because that just wasn't real to them. They mostly taught us survival skills and family loyalty. But we kids did play, and sometimes we got into trouble a little being curious and pushing things. Nothing serious. We felt like these were great adventure.

One time Katya and I tried to sneak into a movie theater and got caught. I guess you could say my childhood before transition was a little bit like what they say Seattle is like in America: always cloudy and raining a lot.

Yekaterina: So, what was it like in the times just before transition? As a child, did you notice anything changing in the adults around you? In your parents? At school?

Ilyana: Yes. Yes, we did.

Yekaterina: Can you tell me about it?

Iliana: About a year before transition, my parents started spending time reading something on their cell phones and talking excitedly. They started to have friends of theirs over to join them.

When I asked them what it was about, they said they had joined a book club and they were reading a really good book. When I asked if I could read it, they said it was a book for grownups and a child wouldn't understand, that it would be boring to me.

Grownups were always saying things like that. A few times I snuck a look and saw the title was "The Cure" something but then my mother came back from the kitchen so I couldn't see more. I tried to listen to their talk after I pretended to go to sleep. I couldn't hear much, but I did manage to catch a lot of expressions like "Yes, that explains it!" and "Och! I never knew that!" and "Yes, that's what we need!" but also "Is this possible? Can we possibly succeed?"

My parents' mood seemed to get a little better as time went on. At school I also noticed little changes. A lot of my friends also said their parents were reading something and getting excited. My Mathematics teacher and my Language Arts teacher both seemed to get more energy, like they felt more alive.

As that year or so went on, when there were blackouts, some of the teachers would say that things will get better soon, instead of the cynical, ironic comments they always had made. Instead of "Here we go again, teaching in the dark. Oh well, no biggie, as long as their dachas have power, and their yachts have plenty of caviar…" (we all know who 'they' were.) we began to hear "Don't worry! This sh*t won't go on much longer."

One day my parents suddenly had new phones that they were trying to learn how to use, but they never used them and told us not to tell anyone about them. This seemed very strange.

I also overheard things. Once in the school library, I heard Mr. Simonov asking the librarian Ms. Bayul why they couldn't print The Cure on a printer and make it available in the library. Her answer was an alarmed, whispered "Do you want us all to die of a 'tragic fall' from a tall building!?"

Sometimes in the Metro or in the supermarket I overheard people asking people "Do you have The Cure?" then saying, "This where you download it."

This was around the time when state television and radio began broadcasting more intense warnings against attempts by "corrupt Western democracies" to destabilize our "great nation" with "seditious, malicious propaganda" over the Internet. The government called on people to turn in anyone they knew who was "acting suspiciously" or "maligning the benevolent Russian government or its persons, policies, and functionaries" or "reading or disseminating seditious literature."

By fall, that year felt very strange and different. Everywhere there was nervous energy. A feeling of expectation, kind of like fear mixed with eager anticipation. All around, things were falling apart. The outages got worse and more often. More and more times people weren't getting paid. The news kept announcing more "austerity measures to support our brave soldiers fighting to protect the Motherland from NATO aggression." Every day it seemed, more people died tragic deaths from falling off of tall buildings and out of helicopters, including members of the Federal Assembly and some celebrities. There was a lot of whispering but very little talking out loud.

When we children tried to ask adults what was happening, they told us we wouldn't understand and asked us not to ask too many questions. We wanted to know if we should be afraid and what to do. Finally one day after my sister and I and Katya, who was staying with us almost all the time by now since her father's drinking had gotten much worse, my parents sat us down and said that yes, a lot of things were happening but that they couldn't explain it all to us. They said

everybody's life would get a lot harder for a while but not to be afraid because things will get much better soon, probably before summer. They told us to be very careful and watchful, and to say "No" if anyone asked them if our parents were acting different, or if we had heard the word "Cure" a lot. They said to run away if we saw grownups fighting. They said we had to be patient just a little while longer.

That winter was the hardest winter I'd ever seen. It wasn't just the cold and power outages. The police were stopping people randomly. Our house was searched several times. Yet I saw people showing more strength than I'd ever seen. It was like suddenly the difficulties weren't getting to them like before.

As January ended, the news was full of confusion. Sometimes Russia was having great victories in Ukraine and Gruzia. Sometimes we were suffering painful setbacks due to NATO sabotage and treachery. Members of the Federal Assembly were resigning a lot, and some were dying from falling out of high windows. The news anchors kept changing, new faces replaced the ones we knew, only to be replaced a few days later.

Then on March 21 (I'll always remember that date even if it wasn't a national holiday), that morning my parents stopped Olga and me before we left for school and said, "Today we want you to be extra careful and watch the grownups around you. If you see any commotion, get as far away from it as you can. Listen to what your teachers tell you. You may see some strange and scary things. Don't be afraid. Things will get scary for a while but then things will be much better." Then they went out to work and we went off to school.

On the way to school, things looked pretty much like any day, except that I noticed that there were big trucks, bulldozers, excavators and piles of construction debris up against the walls and doors and windows of the banks. I also saw little groups of people talking excitedly here and there, but things seemed mostly normal.

In class, soon after roll call, our teacher turned on the television and told us there was going to be an important announcement and to pay close attention.

The announcer was the one who always did the morning news for the last two weeks. She looked straight at the camera, so it felt like she was looking right into my eyes. Then she spoke words and in a tone that we would have expected from a president or premier, not a newscaster.

She spoke for about three quarters of an hour, I guess. It started with "To all the people of the Russian Federation and of the world…" There was a lot. What I got from it was that everything was going to change but no one would try to interfere with the government. Money was abolished and everything would be free. No one was to ask for or offer payment for anything. Something about how the social system was destroying the good of the people and had to be changed. We all now owned our homes and cars and other things. Law and order would be upheld. Violence, looting, and rioting would not be tolerated from anyone and would be dealt with through due process. Everyone was urged to keep working normally except for certain places like banks and insurance companies, who were to close, and to begin to govern themselves as peers and ignore managers and the chain of command. She made a passionate call to treat each other with patience, compassion, and respect under all circumstances. She said this was a clean slate for everyone and guaranteed the safety of all people. She said the rich oligarchs were no longer in charge but that they need not fear. The Chief of the General Staff came on the camera and ordered all Russian forces to leave Ukraine, Crimea, and Gruzia and report to their home bases inside Russia and remain on high alert in case any country thinks this is a good moment to attack. There was a lot more but a lot of it ran together like a fog in my child mind.

When it was done, it was so quiet I could hear my own heartbeat. The teacher asked if there were any questions and started a discussion that lasted until lunch. She said that this transition started with this book called The Cure. Then it all made sense to me. Our teacher said the book was probably too hard for us to read and gave us the link to download a shorter version that would be better for us. I downloaded it right away and started reading. So did all of my classmates. It was the best discussion we had ever had in school.

Later we did study the long version of The Cure in history class. Our teacher was right, it was hard for a child to read, but not boring.

After lunch we were all in a holiday mood and didn't want to study, but the teachers all said transition isn't a reason to go crazy, and that classes would continue like always.

Right after the announcement on the television, the principal came storming into the classroom all red and mad and told our teacher that this was going to stop and the chain of command would be respected. Several other teachers came in behind him. They and my teacher told the principal very calmly, “Mr. Aharonshvili, you are no longer in charge. We mean you no disrespect, but we’re working under different rules now. We will not obey you or respect your position, but we hope you’ll stay as a valued member of the team.” He tried to shove or hit several teachers but it didn’t turn into a brawl. The teachers stayed calm and ducked out of the way. Then they held him by is arms and carried him outside and asked him to please not be violent in front of students. He said something like “We’ll see about this!” then pulled out his cell phone. He called his bosses and and got even more mad than before. We could hear everything he said because he was shouting. It sounded like his bosses told him to deal deal with the situation on his own. Then he called the police. While we waited, we continued our discussion and our teacher told us that this kind of situation will happen and that the way the teachers were dealing with it was the correct way, not to submit but not to get violent or angry and always to act and speak with respect for the other person even when they weren’t respectful.

It took a while for the police to come. The principal told them in a loud voice to make the teachers accept his authority or take them to jail. The teachers asked the police if they understood the transition that was happening. Two of the three officers said yes they understood and would support the transition. The third officer said this was the first time he had heard of it and he thought it might be treason, but in the end all three officers agreed that the teachers weren’t committing any crime so they should go on with classes. By then there was quite a crowd of teachers and students. The principal started to yell at the officers. He told them they had to make the teachers obey him. The officers tried to calm him down and he went a little crazy and started trying to hit our teacher. In the end the officers arrested the principal. The teachers asked them to be gentle with him and declined to press charges. The whole thing affected me deeply. I didn’t completely understand what had happened but I was impressed by the restraint and quiet strength that the teachers showed in response to the principal’s aggressive actions and words.

A little over a week later the principal was back at school and began teaching language arts and science classes. He seemed to adjust to the new situation day by day.

My parents came to meet Olga and me at school and accompany us home. As we walked, and it was a long walk, they asked about our day and answered more of our questions. I was happily surprised to see them get off of work so early. They said today was special and they wanted to make sure we were safe. They also said that from now on, they’ll be able to be home a lot more and not have to work such long hours.

When we passed a pastry shop on the way home, I asked my mother if everything was really going to be free from now on, and she said yes, but that doesn’t mean we can go crazy and take too much of everything. I asked if we could go in and get some free cookies. My mother and father looked at each other and smiled. “Yes, of course!” So we went in. My parents each had a piece of cake, while Olga and I each ate too many cookies. The person behind the counter smiled and laughed and said they’d been getting a lot of hungry kids that day. Then we left and thanked her, and she waved to us and smiled. No one had said or done anything with money. So it was true.

When we got home, the landlord was in the entrance arguing with some of our neighbors. My parents told us to go play but not go far, then they joined the conversation.

Of course we were too curious to go play so we hid out of sight and listened. It was a lot like the situation at school with the principal and the teachers. The landlord kept saying that, transition or no transition, we would have to pay rent on the first or get out. My father said firmly but very calmly, “Mr. Pavlov, there will be no more rent. Today is the end of our landlord-tenant relationship. We are now fellow homeowners.”

“We’ll see what the police have to say about that when they get here,” said the landlord loudly. “This is my property and what I say, goes!” When the police came, they said they couldn’t do anything as long as no one was hurting anyone, and they had been instructed to hold off from any action in situations like this until the situation had been clarified. One of the officers put it like this: “Mr. Pavlov, I’m sure you have a deed to the property that was binding and valid until today. But that declaration read over official media today stated that it is now illegal for you to own more than the home that you live in. That these people, your former tenants, are now the legal owners of their residences. On the surface of it, this doesn’t make sense, but we’ve never had a situation like this before.

There's been no revolution or violence. The government is intact, and no one is bothering them. But this declaration says the rules we live by have suddenly changed by… but popular consensus it would seem. Early this morning there was some confusion. Some people were acting based on this declaration, and some weren't. But as the day goes on, the great majority of people are playing by these new rules, without any laws being changed. So, what are we supposed to do, arrest nine out of ten people in Russia? We've got to wait for the government to decide what they will do. Until then, our job is to keep the peace. So, let's do that, OK?"

Mr. Pavlov wasn't finished; he said: "And so everything I've worked for comes to nothing? How am I supposed to retire and live with no pension since I owned my own small business, and no income from my one rental property?!"

Mrs. Ilyich, our neighbor the right side, firmly but patiently explained, apparently not for the first time: "Mr. Pavlov, as we've all explained to you, you don't have to worry. Money is no more, for anyone. You don't need money anymore for anything. Your home is yours; you have no mortgage to pay. Nobody needs money for anything. Everything is free now. You don't need anything from us. We don't owe you anything; you don't owe us anything. And you don't have to be responsible if our toilet overflows or our roof leaks."

"Yes, sure, everything is free. No one needs money anymore. And I'm the Czar of all of Russia. That's a load of horse manure! It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard! This is just another Bolshevik push to take everything from those who earned it and give it to those who didn't," replied Mr. Pavlov and spat on the ground.

"Go home and relax, Alexei. Wait and see. This transition is very different from Bolsheviks or anything we've seen before. I believe the declaration! Look at the countries that transitioned before us! I think you'll be fine and so will we. And I kind of resent your insinuation that we former tenants haven't worked as hard as you or that we're somehow less deserving. That is insulting and you know better. But let's leave that in the past. The Cure teaches us to make a fresh start and work together and avoid holding grudges. So no hard feelings. I hope we can be friends.," my father said.

"Have you read The Cure?" This was my mother.

"I don't want to read Bolshevik propaganda," said Mr. Pavlov emphatically.

"There haven't been any Bolsheviks in Russia since 1990. Why don't you read the short version? I think you'll be surprised. I think it'll put your mind at ease, and if you don't like it, you can just delete it."

"Hell, I might as well… but I'll tell you right now it's a waste of time."

Mrs. Ilyich had one more parting word for Mr. Pavlov before everyone went home: "I understand why you're upset and worried. I want you to know that if you ever have difficulties or hard times, we will all be there to support you. I think I speak for all of us. We're not your enemies. Were your friends."

There was a general round of agreement and nodding of heads. Mr. Pavlov shook his head a little and walked away quietly, and I'm pretty sure I saw a few tears in his eyes.

That night we had friends over and had what felt like a feast. It was the first time in a while that nobody felt a little hungry when dinner was over. My parents considered themselves Catholic but hadn't been to church or prayed or said a rosary in a long time, but tonight they said grace and offered up a prayer of thanks. After that we went to Mass regularly. My parents' faith got ground down before, but it came back after transition.

It was a really good day. Maybe my best day.

Yekaterina: Wow, Ilyana, that really touched my heart. I was only two years old when transition happened, so I don't really remember it. Thank you for that vivid account.

Ilyana: Believe it or not, it was really good to talk about it. Healing. I haven't thought back to it much in a while. Thank you, Yekaterina, for taking me back there…

Yekaterina: Can you share some now about how your life has been since transition. And any observations or comments.

Ilyana: Sure.

In the days after transition, the news was full of coverage of government representatives talking about transition, reassuring everyone that there would be no serious disruptions if everyone just kept a level head and was patient while they worked out how to operate in this new situation. Advisers were invited in from transitioned countries.

There had been rumors for a decade or more that though he made as many appearances as ever, President Putin looked exactly as he had fifteen or twenty years ago, so people were saying that maybe he had died and the other oligarchs were using AI and animatronics to keep him alive, so to speak, as a kind of virtual figurehead to take heat for any bad public or international reactions to some of their more unpopular actions and policies. In any case, on the day after transition, Putin was nowhere to be found; nor were the other known oligarchs and a number of elected officials. Emergency elections were called for.

A few days later the news carried a lot of feature stories about the oligarchs. Fearing that they would be victims of a purge, they had attempted to flee to take refuge outside of Russia. Billionaires all of them, they suddenly found themselves with no access to their wealth, since all financial institutions and systems were shut down. They had to make do with whatever assets and cash they had on hand. A lot of these, they discovered, had been plundered by members of their staff and inner circle of employees and lieutenants.

They ended up forming an armed caravan to drive across the border to friendly Belarus, but when they got there, they were turned away because their wealth and power had evaporated literally overnight and they had become “too hot to handle” in the international climate. They got the same response from every country’s embassy whom they petitioned for entry.

Both the government and many voices from among the transitioneries called upon the deposed oligarchs to come out of hiding and go home, promising them that no one would harm them.

The paparazzi were quick to find them and put them on display. They finally came out of the building where they were hiding with their hands up and terrified, defeated, dejected expressions on their faces… into a crowd of citizens and some police who shook their hands, hugged them, and offered them food and drink. Putin was among them, but looking a lot older and more frail than his public appearances. So we learned that no, he wasn’t dead, but yes, they had been using AI and animatronics to make him seem unaging and virile. The closeups of their expressions showed bewilderment and incomprehension. At one point a man pushed his way through the crowd toward the group of dethroned oligarchs and started swinging a metal pipe, cursing and saying the time had come for them to taste some of their own medicine. Police firmly but quietly restrained him, disarmed him, and led him away, matter-of-factly with none of the brutality for which they were famous. A couple of people, including one of the former oligarchs, had been hit by the pipe in the scuffle; people were attending to them devotedly. The oligarchs’ expressions were dumbfounded.

Through this major undoing and changing of so much of the structure of society, life surprisingly continued in most ways almost as though nothing had happened. Classes went on like normal. My mother and father went to work but there was a big difference there. Both of my parents were working just one job each, so they were home a lot more. We started doing more things together as a family. My parents weren’t tired all the time. They had energy and talked excitedly about their jobs. Like I think I said before, it was like life had been a long night and now the sun was rising. It took weeks or months, but it was rising.

There were some, I guess you could call them growing pains in the beginning. As a child, I wasn’t aware of all of them, but I remember for the first year or two there were some strange situations.

After elections were held to replace the many elected representatives who had quit or stopped showing up, as well as a new president to replace aging Putin, a government spokesperson addressed the nation every evening to report on progress in the great challenges of adapting the laws to the new socioeconomic reality, and writing a new constitution codifying the transitioned humanistic principles into it.

It took about nine months for the new Constitution to be ready. It quickly passed the government but it was then put to the people to vote on it. President Rostov put it like this: “This is a unique and unprecedented situation for us whom you have chosen to represent you, the Russian people. You have presented us with a dramatic fundamental change in the workings of our entire society. And you have done it from the ground up and presented it to us as a fait accompli, without our involvement. So, if this is your will, which it clearly is, then we must adapt to this new situation. It will take time. People involved in this transition as you call it, are working with us along with advisory teams from countries who

have already transitioned. Be assured, however, that no foreign power is influencing or pressuring us, and Russia will remain Russia in every way. Those of us who had not done so before are now studying The Cure, since this is the seed from which this phenomenon has grown. We ask your patience as we pledge to give you ours."

Needless to say, the new constitution was overwhelmingly approved by the people.

But along the way there were some awkward situations that had to be resolved with no legal or functional framework yet in place. Some of them involved fights that nearly led to brief closures of parts of the city.

There was also the really scary time when Putin tried to take power with a private army he had put together. The city was closed for what seemed like quite a while. School was closed, and everyone was advised to stay inside as much as possible. Some days there was gunfire and explosions, so close I thought we would all die any minute. An abandoned bank not far away was destroyed; we could see the smoke and fire. A couple of injured people banged on our door asking for help. My parents let them in and called an ambulance. There was a lot of blood and the smell of smoke.

Sometimes there were tanks and other army vehicles in the streets, and soldiers. There was also a kind of civil war between one part of the army and another. My parents always had the television on, listening to the news.

I still have nightmares sometimes about that time. It felt like the world was ending.

But on the other hand, there was a lot of excitement of the good kind.

At first it was a giddy feeling knowing that I could go into any store, pick out anything I wanted, scan the items out, and leave, just like that. There were some limits but not really upsetting ones. Once I went into an electronics store (actually, an electronics distribution center, but I still thought of it as a store) and tried to take five VR headsets which we could never have afforded before. The scanner stopped me and asked, smiling playfully, "How many of these are you planning to use at one time? And how?"

"Oh, one of these is for me, the others are for my mother, my father, my sister, and my best friend."

"There's a strict rule against hoarding and profiteering. You're allowed one for yourself. Your friends and family members will have to come in to get theirs, or they can order them on NoviMir then you can download their QR codes to your phone or print them out and use them to pick up theirs here."

NoviMir, the universal web forum that we still use today, was already up and running the day after transition, thanks to our famously talented hackers who had taken the OpenSource code and localized it well before transition and had it ready to go.

So I called home and explained to my parents. Ten minutes later I had the QR codes and walked out with all five headsets. The scanner said to me, "Don't feel bad. Some people try to grab more than they need, which could leave none left for others. Sometimes they send children in with stories just like yours."

"I think I understand."

"Now I want you to understand how it works now, and you can explain it to your family and friends, or here, you can record me on your phone and play it for them."

He waited while I hit "Record."

"You, your mom, dad, sister, and best friend are now linked to the devices you just acquired. If they break, bring them into any distribution center and get them replaced. When upgrades are available, it'll be posted on NoviMir and broadcast to your devices. Bring them in and we'll upgrade them for you. You can only get a different one if you return the one you have. From now on, all products will be designed to be easily repaired and upgraded as technology advances."

"It'll take time for things to settle in and for us to get used to them. By the way, would you like a second battery pack? It's allowed."

"No, but thanks. My parents said we can only use them for an hour or two a day and only if we're good."

“Very wise, your parents! That saves me from having to give you the standard warning that excessive use of video games can cause mental, emotional, and physical health problems and social anxiety.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Make sure you also play outside with friends.”

“Yes, yes I do. Thank you.” And I left the store, a little impatient with him because I’d heard similar lectures from both my parents and more than one teacher. But I was a bit of a tomboy, so they really didn’t need to. I’d never used VR before, because we couldn’t afford it. And a lot of my VR’ing turned out to be very active outdoor mixed reality games with real friends in virtual landscapes and a lot of running.

The novelty of everything being free wore off after a while. Soon it was just normal.

There’s so much that’s happened in my life since then. I’ll try to not go on too long.

As a civil engineer, my father was involved in planning and setting up the Moskva Metro Green System, the network of roads and paths for bicycle, scooter, foot, horse, and unpowered vehicles, with food courts, bathrooms, rest areas and parks that went on to become the pride of Moskva. Over dinner he would talk excitedly about how much more he could do, and how much faster, since transition, since funding was no longer an issue. “If we have the vision, the need, the will, the manpower, and the materials, we can just do it! Of course, we liaise with other parties who may need the same resources to make sure we’re all on the same page, which is easy on NoviMir.” He was also involved in the development of the distributed power grid and decommissioning of most of the dams and nuclear power plants, as well as all of the fossil fuel power plants in Moskva and in all of Russia. He said more than once that the years since transition were the happiest, most productive years of his life.

My mother still worked at the same department store, which transitioned to a distribution center for the same kinds of things that used to be sold there. The instead of trying to sell shoppers on things and sign them up for credit cards, she was tasked with answering customer questions, helping them find things, explaining the new ways of doing things, and also coordinating with other distribution centers to ensure a smooth supply chain, track inventory, and customize the software to learn use patterns and anticipate need. There were no managers or corporate head offices, no chain of command, and no pressure. There were bi-weekly meetings of all staff where they discussed necessary topics and made decisions, usually over a tasty meal. Like my father, she was much happier and more excited about her job than she’d ever been before transition. And she no longer had aching feet, since no one was telling her to wear high heals and not sit while working. She really enjoyed helping people and tweaking the layouts to be easier for customers and personnel to work with. She said it was like solving puzzles, which was one of her hobbies.

I finished school and graduated high school already accepted to university. School had become much more vibrant and exciting since transition. Before, they taught us things and I enjoyed learning, but that was about it. The purpose of school seemed to be to prepare us for filling whatever menial jobs were available after we graduated.

After transition, teachers started encouraging us to think about our talents, interests, and passions. They told us that if we pursued them to the fullest, we would live the most fulfilling lives while also making our best contribution to our communities. Then many teachers actively encouraged us, mentored us, gave us materials and resources to pursue them on our own, and even introduced us to people who could give us real life exposure and experience.

Katya wanted to be an aeronautical engineer and test pilot, so our science teacher introduced her to one of the pilots at a nearby test facility, where she got to watch a lot of the process. They even gave her some basic flight training and let her fly simulators of real experimental airplanes in development. Full-motion simulators!

For me, I was taken to meet members of some top folkloric music groups and the Moskva Philharmonic Orchestra and took lessons from one of the most amazing balalaika players I’d ever heard. I added violin and guitar to my list. This could never have happened before transition. Of course, this was on top of my regular studies, and I had to keep my attendance and grades up. Basically, if you had the interest and ability and passion, and were really serious, you could pursue and learn your passion.

I became quite a good soccer player too.

Then I went to university. My major was music, of course, and drama. But since there wasn't the kind of pressure on me as there would have been before transition, you know, to get my degree and get out in the job market to start making money, I also took minors in mathematics, electrical engineering, energy systems design, and agricultural science.

During this time, I also learned a lot about the design and making of wooden musical instruments from a third-generation luthier whom I met at the campus commons. That led to an interest in carpentry, so I got some training in that too. So, my formal education took six years instead of the old norm of four. But it was worth it.

Yekaterina: So you're an example of what's been called the "new Renaissance woman (or man):" a person with multiple simultaneous fields of study and careers. This has become quite common in the post-transition world. Can you talk a little bit more about it? And how many of these fields actually became careers?

Ilyana: I think you're right about a lot of people doing it. Most of my friends in my generation are doing it or already have. I know it wasn't at all common before transition. Apparently, people would often change majors once or twice, but pursuing more than maybe a major and one minor was almost unheard of.

Actually, everything I studied and learned during those six years has become career. The thing is, music is my first love, but I'm not one of those people who obsesses about it to the exclusion of everything else. So, for example, I put my electrical engineering and energy systems expertise to use by joining my local electrical infrastructure syndicate. I enjoy jostling minds with others to come up with novel designs and solutions. I love both the collaboration and the competition, and I love to see something I've worked on become part of our power grid or even turn into a patent of a new design. And I enjoy training interested non-technical people in the maintenance and repair of their local parts of the grid and basic electrical tasks in the home. I enjoy seeing them get it and feeling empowered.

Likewise I'm an avid gardener and enjoy getting my hands in the earth, watching things grow, and of course eating fresh vegetables and seeing beautiful gardens, and of course the socializing. I hear people were really isolated before transition, even from neighbors or family. I'm glad it isn't like they anymore.

Anyway, I think another reason a lot of us are New Renaissance is because most jobs don't demand a lot of our time like they used to before transition. Back then, that self-devouring cycle was out of control, so most jobs had a lot of unnecessary pressure and demands because of the unquenchable drive for profits. One job could take up all of your time. I saw it with my mother and father and in my friends' families too.

After transition, there were a few years when everyone worked long hours because it was needed in order to get the new system running. Also since the new goal was to make the best possible versions of everything and make sure everyone had what they needed and wanted, within reason, but without the old profit pressure, there was a lot of production to do but the pace was a lot more reasonable than before. Production teams set their own pace.

Once everyone had enough of whatever, they only needed to make enough to replace what broke, so after the first few years, one job or career took little of our time. That's how it was already when I joined the workforce. So, it's natural to have more than one job or career or niche.

I remember seeing my parents being slowly ground down in their jobs. That's really changed since transition, since people can follow their interests and passions. Most of us have more than one interest, if we have the chance to explore and develop them.

I'm glad I was born when I was. I feel like I'm here for a huge breakthrough as big as the discovery of fire or electricity or agriculture. How many people can say that? Well, actually, about eight and a half billion of us, but you know what I mean. And I think my generation fully appreciates it in ways that Gen T and later generations can't. They can't compare before and after. They can only hear or read about it or watch a documentary.

Yekatrerina: Yes, I know what you mean, though speaking as a Gen T'er, I also feel glad to be born when I was. But the fact that we both feel that way says something good about the world we've inherited and helped create.

Before we wrap up, can you talk a little about your life now, like you would if we were sitting next to each other on a long flight to Moon City?

Ilyana: Yes, of course.

I met my husband Vlad in college, and our relationship just kept deepening as we ran into each other in more and more classes and workshops. It wasn't just common interests either. There was what the Americans call chemistry, and we complement each other. One of us is always coming up with an idea, and the other always plays devil's advocate and tries to poke holes in it. Not to be mean, but to explore the possibilities. And our musical relationship is a whole thing of its own.

Anyway, we got married the year before we both finally graduated. We moved into married student housing, then when we graduated, we found a home we loved available for claiming on NoviMir, filed our claim and moved in. Were still living there.

We have two children, one boy Alexei and one girl Tasha, a dog, and a cat.

We're both active in community infrastructure and agriculture syndicates as well as community theater and the musicians' syndicate. A couple of times a year, most years, we perform in the Philharmonic.

Both of our mothers and fathers are pretty old now, so we visit them a lot and help them out when they need it, though they're very social and active, all four of them, and they have a great support network.

Yekaterina: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Ilyana: Oh, I could go on for a lot longer, but I think we've covered what you wanted to get down. I guess what I'd say is why you're doing these interviews, doing this project: I feel like humanity, and Russia, are in the best condition we've ever been in, ever. Let's always remember that, appreciate it, and as the Americans like to say, don't fuck it up.

Yekaterina: Thank you, Ilyana! This has been a rich and enjoyable interview. By the way, would you be open to doing a follow-up interview in maybe ten or twenty more years, in case someone wants to do a revisit?

Ilyana: Yes, yes I would. And thank you for interviewing me. This has been good. I think looking back and talking about this has given me a new perspective. I hope we can keep in touch. You're always welcome to pay us a visit at our home.

Yekaterina: Yes, I'd like that too.

Yuri Vladimirov — Russian Federation

> **Note:** This fictional account was written when the Transition was imagined as a single, rapid, coordinated event. Further research into the historical record has since shown a gradual, voluntary approach to be more viable and sustainable; the novel is preserved as originally written (author's note; the current Roadmap).

Interviewer: Yekaterina Tsiolkova, Russian Federation.

Interviewee: Yuri Vladimirov

Yekaterina: Hello Yuri. Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for this project. Your memories and perspective will be especially valuable because not many with a history like yours are interested in talking about that time.

Yuri: I'm honored to be invited to be a part of your work. I'm glad that I still have a good memory at my age!

Yekaterina: So how old were you when transition came to Russia?

Yuri: I was sixty-one years old and on top of the world.

Yekaterina: Can you tell me about your life up to the day when transition changed it so drastically forever? You had an unusual background, and I think our readers will find it fascinating.

Yuri: I was one of the oligarchs, as people liked to call us.

Yekaterina: Are you at liberty to talk about how you got to that place, and what it was like?

Yuri: I have no problem talking about it. Anybody from those days who wanted me dead would have killed me by now if they were going to…

I was born in the waning years of the old Soviet Union. My parents were both important behind the scenes Party members, so I grew up in the Party. Most of my friends had parents in the Party. As a child I was passionate about Marxism and the Communist vision for the world.

As soon as I was old enough, I joined Young Pioneers, which was mandatory, but I was also eager to join. Those were some of the happiest days of my life in the Soviet era. I made many friends, some of whom also became oligarchs.

In Soviet days, the way to advance in the Party involved knowing the right people, which I did, and having a sense of where the Party wind was blowing and acting or speaking accordingly. One had to be verbally versed in Marxist ideals and theory, but not overly forceful about it in practice. This is what I did.

Over time, I was able to advance. I preferred to be behind the scenes instead of in politics, because that's where the real power was. By that point, I had seen that the idealism of my childhood was an illusion. I believe it was real in the time of Lenin, but it got lost along the way. I thought about quitting but I liked the feeling of power, privilege, and influence that I was starting to experience. I liked having people defer to me and even be a little afraid of me. It made me feel important. At first, I told myself that this was a way to make changes back to Marxist ideals, to work from within the system as it was, but really, I was just telling myself a fairy tale. We weren't a Vanguard working to lead and guide the masses to achieve the true classless communist society; no, our aim was to preserve the status quo.

As I later learned, much later, I was already addicted to power and all that comes with it. But, along with drinking too much, this kind of addiction was encouraged and enabled in Russia, so I never imagined I had a problem!

Along the way, some of my comrades introduced me to the black market. At first I was uncomfortable with this, but, to quote a very tired cliché, everybody who could was doing it. By the time the Soviet Union fell apart, I was already very wealthy from this clandestine business.

At first, I was horrified at the dissolution of the greatest nation in the world, but by then I was a pragmatist with few qualms about finding a way to exploit any situation to my advantage.

It quickly became clear that in the void left by the Soviet Union's disintegration, I and others like me were suddenly even more powerful than before, and we could be more out in the open about it. There was Yeltsin's new democratic government and capitalism, which turned out worked together to put me and people like me on top. If the government and people wanted it one way and we wanted it another way, sooner or later our will prevailed. Then when one of us, Vladimir Putin, came to power, for all practical purposes the government was ours to command.

One thing I was sad to lose was the honest friendship and camaraderie with those like me. That was lost along the way. Years before, we would have died for each other. By this time, however, there was little trust among us. Any one of us would have sold the other out for a price or for an advantage over them. Every one of us had something over on the others and wasn't afraid to use it.

I had become ruthless and hard. I had to. It happened little bit by little bit. I don't want you to think I was a monster. I didn't enjoy hurting other people, but I came to believe that there were two kinds of people in the world: those who push others around and those who get pushed around, those who climb over others to get on top and those who get climbed over. I knew which I wanted to be. I had people loyal to me whom I was able to reward richly. I was harsh with those who let me down or betrayed me. So, some people knew who buttered their bread and others were afraid of me.

Then there was Vladimir Putin. He had more on all of us than anybody else, and he was like a force of nature, like the Siberian winter. You can try to stand up to it, and your frozen body will be found in the spring. As long as you knew the power dynamics, you could do fabulously well. But one misstep and you would have a tragic accident. That was the way it was. If there had been no transition, that's how it would still be. By then the hated capitalism of my youth had become my greatest blessing and I exploited it to the maximum.

Yekaterina: You don't talk much about your family. Is that a painful subject to you?

Yuri: Not exactly painful. Just not very important. As a child, I looked up to my parents and wanted to be like them. But they were cold, not very motherly fatherly. They provided for us but rarely hugged us or gave us more than a little piece of their attention. Their lives revolved around their careers. In a way, they were the prototype for what I became. It makes me feel like that song, what was it called, something like Cat's In The Cradle.

My brother Maxim, we're not close. He wasn't interested in Party affairs. He became a scientist, a physicist I think. We don't have much in common.

When we were growing up, he was six years older than me so we had different friends and interests. Other than bossing me around and chasing me away when he was doing something he didn't want to get caught doing, we didn't have much of a relationship. Maybe he did show me how to be hard and bossy, which came in handy later in my life so I'll give him that much.

My sister Lyudmila was five years younger than me. I often took care of her early on. I felt protective of her. But sadly she died of an antibiotic-resistant staph infection when she was ten. I think she was the one person in my life whom I was closest to, but she was gone so early in life! She never had a chance to live the full life that she deserved. She was a true innocent. Who knows, if she had lived, I might have made some different choices and become a different person. We'll never know.

My wife Irina and I met in Party activities, meetings, and functions. There was a strong physical attraction right away but also there was more. Her mind and mine worked the same way. We were both excited by each other's ambitions and ideas. We had both gone through the same journey from idealism to pragmatism. (later, after the fall of the Soviet Union, we both went on to step into that new reality with the same steps together.) We both realized we could go farther together as a team than either of us could go alone. And yes, there was genuine affection. Not head over heals, because neither of us would ever let ourselves be so vulnerable! So, we talked about it and decided to get married, after we both made clear our expectations.

We have two daughters, Yelena and Izadora, and we did our best to bring them up in the Party as we were brought up, and to give them skills for surviving and getting ahead in the Russia they were born into. I think we did well by them,

but neither of them followed in our footsteps. As soon as they were of age, they each moved out and expressed a lack of interest in having us in their lives. This lasted for many years, though a couple of years after transition, they both contacted us and we now have a good relationship with them. It took a lot of hard work, hard conversations and family therapy, but today we're all very different than in the past. The hard work was worth it.

Irina and I are still together. Somehow we came through all the upheavals with a stronger partnership than ever before. Now we actually have more trust than ever and we're both able to let our guard down with each other. You have no idea how hard that was! For both of us. We thank the world shaped by transition for this.

Yekaterina: Thank you, Yuri, for being so honest and open.

Yuri: If you had asked me these questions twenty years ago, my responses would have been a lot less so. I probably would have ended the interview if I'd agreed to do it at all.

Yekaterina: Yes, I imagine so. And maybe some of your former colleagues would still not want to talk about it, given the lack of responses from those whom we tried to contact.

Yuri: I don't doubt it, but a few of them might surprise you. They may have just been too busy to answer you.

Yekaterina: Now, Yuri, can you talk about the last year or so leading up to transition? Did you see it coming? Did you understand what it was? What changes did you see in Russia that may have been related to it?

Yuri: Well, of course I was aware of the wave of transitions happening in various places in the world. I didn't understand it at all, and I didn't want to. Or rather, I only wanted to understand how it could benefit or hurt my interests.

And before you ask, no I didn't read The Cure. Actually I read the introduction and dedication and it sounded to me like a bunch of idealistic prattle based on an unrealistic assumption about human nature. So I didn't read any more. I assumed that whatever was happening in the real world based on it was different from what was written there, just as had happened in the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and the United States.

I knew that transition meant that people like me in those countries were deprived of their positions of power and privilege, and I was dead set determined that this kind of "equality" would not come to Russia. I even beefed up my informal staff of enforcers into a personal militia to protect my interests of it came to that. But I didn't think it would come here. Russia had a centuries-long tradition of strong hierarchies, from the Tsars to the Party to the post-Soviet oligarchy. I figured it was deeply enough engrained into the Russian soul that such egalitarian ideas could never take root here.

Its impact on my fortunes was very mixed. On one hand, my black-market business took a number of hits, since all markets in transitioned countries dried up overnight and suppliers there also went dark. On the other hand, my legitimate businesses got a tremendous boost. At first I was worried and angry because suppliers and production facilities in transitioned countries declared independence and refused to follow the chains of command. But they offered to work with me voluntarily in exchange for some concessions on my part and promised me a unique advantage in the marketplace due to near-zero overhead at their facilities and unprecedented high-quality goods that I could sell cheap and undercut my competitors.

This went completely against everything I knew. My first reaction was to shout, "Don't try to con the con!" I considered sending a few enforcers to pay them a visit, but soon came to the conclusion that this would be futile. There was no practical way to intimidate them into submission. They had already foiled similar attempts from those like me in their own countries.

Being the pragmatist that I was, I looked for ways to salvage the situation. Then shipments of samples arrived, along with detailed breakdowns of costs before and after transition. Against my expectations, I was impressed when I saw the quality of products and the cost analyses. Every single product was as good as or superior to the most expensive high-end products that only people like me could afford, yet the cost to me was next to nothing. There were lists of concessions and conditions I'd have to meet in order to take advantage of this offer: I had to divest all company operations of all practices and processes deemed exploitative of employees or destructive to the environment. I had to guarantee that all of my Russian and other non-transitioned facilities would meet these terms. They would send inspectors to verify my compliance before finalizing the agreements.

I was furious that they would try to tell me how to run MY business, MY business! But if their claims held up in reality, the competitive advantage this gave me was too good to ignore. I had my analysts go over it and reach out to these people for more information. I told the people there that I wanted to send my own inspectors to their facilities first, and to my surprise they said they're welcome any time. When the results came back from all of this, I was shocked. Pleasantly shocked. It turned out that all of their claims held up to scrutiny. So, I did my best to make changes to my operations to meet their specifications, which was no small task and went against my grain, and then invited them to send their inspectors.

In the end, we signed the agreement and my profits in these enterprises was more than enough to make up for my losses in the black market. Besides, there were still un-transitioned countries where demand was going up as a side effect of all of the transitions drying up supplies, so I came out ahead in spite of everything. It wasn't my first time having the game changed on me and coming out a winner.

Meanwhile Putin had become a problem. He was no longer just a bigger, more powerful version of the rest of us. He had become obsessed with restoring the whole Soviet and Tsarist Russian territory with him as the new emperor. He squandered more and more resources on his pointless wars of conquest. In an increasingly rare act of cooperation, a number of us oligarchs met to discuss solutions. An obvious one would be to just have him assassinated, but we realized that the chances of success were close to zero. He didn't trust anybody, with good reason, so he had infiltrated all of our organizations with his own informants, and he had the best hackers in his stable as well. Before we could arrange the hit, we would die of a fall off of a tall building or an exploding car. In the end, we came up empty.

Russia was falling apart. Putin's failing wars were causing more and more shortages and breakdowns throughout Russia and people were becoming restless. The government at this point was as impotent as we were to mitigate the impact of Putin's insanity. Of course the shortages and breakdowns didn't affect us directly, but they were destabilizing the whole country. In response, I and my colleagues worked furiously to insulate ourselves from all of this. Thinking back on it, I think we suffered from tunnel vision so as we rushed to protect our assets and positions, we reached too far and tried to take too much, and this added to the damage caused by Putin. At that point, it was every man for himself.

Then in summer my analysts and hackers started telling me they were seeing suspicious traffic. My colleagues reported the same. There was going to be a revolution on June 29, orchestrated by the New Soviet Alliance, backed by the Army. Indeed there was activity that supported this, even troop movements, but nothing happened. Then there was traffic suggesting a transition would happen on July 13, with calls for all supporters to prepare on the 12th and a list of code words and operations. Again, a flurry of activity detected not nothing happened beyond a few systems shut down. This kind of thing happened over and over until we all concluded that this had less to do with any actual plans and a lot more to do with Western NATO countries attacking us with the same kind of disinformation and hacking that we'd been using on them for decades, with the goal of destabilizing Russia and making us waste resources chasing phantoms while wearing us down and demoralizing us. Well, it was only a matter of time, we all thought. So, we kept watching but mostly tuned them out.

So, when transition actually happened as the spring thaw began the following year, we were all caught by surprise.

Anya, my finance chief, called me early in the morning and told me to turn on my television. The news anchor was reporting that all banks and other financial institutions had been physically blocked and cut off from power and communications, though no one was inside. Someone handed him some paper and said on camera "OK, now!"

I watched and listened as the reporter addressed the nation as if she were the president or something, saying "My fellow Russians, I will give you a message to explain what is happening to those who don't already know, and to let you know what to expect. This is a great moment for Mother Russia and for us, the Russian people…" She went on for what must have been three-quarters of an hour. My blood ran cold and boiled at the same time. The parts of the message that hit me were that all financial institutions were closed permanently, all forms of currency were abolished, it was forbidden for anyone (meaning me) to own or control more than we could use personally, and that the wealthy and powerful were now no longer either, but promising that no harm would come to us.

Images of the assassination of the Tsar and family by the Bolsheviks raced through my mind along with images from other bloody revolutions. There were always purges. People like me were always the targets. It didn't matter what the message said, because they always promise safe passage but then drag us through the streets to be beaten and killed.

Did they think we were fools? Hadn't we been playing from the same playbook for decades? Hadn't Putin and Saddam and others lured unwary opponents into traps?

About then my phone rang. It was Anya.

"Sir, I've tried all of your banks and other financial institutions, your brokers, the crypto exchanges. I can't get through to any of them. The numbers all give a recording saying this institution is permanently closed and you are being transferred to NoviMir Support to answer your questions. I figured you would want to talk to them yourself."

"What about my accounts in the Caymans? Switzerland?"

"All communication there is cut off. No one can get through."

The simultaneous chill and boil in my blood intensified.

"OK, Anya. Thank you. Now I expect you to use your considerable knowledge and expertise to put together as much currency and other assets as you can in a form that I can carry. And have my personal helicopter fueled and running on the helipad to take me to my private jet and have it ready to go on a moment's notice."

"Will do, Sir!"

I then called my local bank that had a few billion in an account kept for emergencies. As Anya had said, it rang to the recording and I was connected to something called NoviMir Support.

"NoviMir Support. This is Boris. How can I help you?"

"This is Yuri Vladimirov and I demand that you restore my access to all of my financial institutions immediately! This is an outrage! You can't do this to me!"

"Sir, I very much understand your frustration and confusion. I assume you haven't read The Cure, either the full or the short version?"

"No I haven't. But what does that have to do with me not being able to access any financial institutions or any of my assets?"

"I only ask because if you had, it would be easier to explain to you what's happening. But no worries. You aren't being singled out for any punitive actions.

You see, it's been determined that all forms of currency actually interfere with all of life's activities in all sectors. So, all forms of currency have been discontinued. But don't worry, sir, because this is for everyone. Money is no longer needed for any transaction. You and everyone else in the Russian Federation can now access what they need and, within reason, what they want directly with no need for payment. You won't lose access to anything you need. Your wellbeing and safety are assured."

"Do you have any idea who I am!?!?" I thundered in my most intimidating tone.

"You're obviously a citizen who's very upset, frustrated, and afraid and wants answers."

"For your information, muzhik, I am Yuri Vladimirov, the fourth richest man in Russia, and I can have you and your family tortured to death with one phone call, or I can make your life so miserable that you will take your own life! Now stop fucking around and give me access to my assets immediately or I'll make that phone call!"

Boris answered calmly as if I had just commented on the weather, "Oh, Mr. Vladimirov! Yes, you're on our list of high-risk people, you know, people who have folks who want to hurt them or who will want to hurt others. We have a security detail attached to you for your protection and the protection of others. Let's see… hmmm, yes, your two hit-men, Yivgeniy Sokolov and Yelena Scharansky are both at this moment in custody and cooperating with law enforcement to deactivate your illegal enterprises. When we proved to them that you no longer have any wealth or power over them, they realized that you also could not shield them from justice, nor could you offer them anything in payment for their services. They agreed to this arrangement in order to accept the offer of therapy in place of imprisonment… also you have no idea where I am, and I doubt you'll find out because your team of hackers has joined the Hackers Syndicate.

They were involved in transition from its inception and did a great job of keeping you from seeing it coming. And all facilities like this one have more security than you can imagine. You see, many of the people you thought were personally loyal to you were only acting that way because of either greedy self-interest or fear. Now you'll see who your true friends are. That will eventually be a relief to you."

"Are you telling me I have no way to get at my assets?!?! And have you no fear or respect for who I am?!?! Has the world gone mad?!?!"

At this point I noticed that Irina had come into the room. I had no idea how long she had been there. She looked like she'd seen a ghost.

"You are correct about your assets as you call them. They don't exist anymore. You still have your home, one car which you will have to choose from your collection, your personal belongings and premises from which you do your legitimate businesses, though you are no longer in charge and you own those premises in common with everyone else who works there. Actually, to answer your next question that you will want to ask, no one is in charge, or all are in charge as peer owner-operators. You will have new skills to learn, and you will be provided with advisors who will help you learn the skills of peer-based management.

To answer your next question, no, I'm not afraid. Your reaction is the expected reaction of any addict, which you are, when forcefully deprived of their drug of choice, which in your case is wealth, power, and privilege. But I most profoundly respect you but for your humanity, not for your former position or wealth or influence. And as for your third question, the world has been mad until now. It is now curing itself of this madness."

"Mudan! Svolach! Yebat! I will find you and I will tear you apart with my bare hands after I rape you and all of your family!"

"No you won't. But I've been trained to recognize the symptoms of withdrawal, which is what you're going through right now, just like a krokodil addict or alcoholic. It will pass but there is therapy available to help you. There's no stigma to being an addict.

Besides, we all share responsibility for your addiction. Not only didn't we recognize and diagnose your addiction, we looked up to you and wanted to be like you even as we resented you. We enabled and fed your addiction. You were only playing the game as it was set up to be played, and playing it superbly well. The problem was the game itself. Now we've fixed that problem. And you don't have to worry about being vilified or beaten down. You are protected from violence, just as others, like me, are protected from violence on your part or behalf.

Look at it this way if you can. You had a good run until now. You were on top of others and your excesses caused a lot of people a lot of suffering. Now the game is over. All you will lose is your addiction, and having to look over your shoulder because of never knowing whom you can trust.

So would you like to make an appointment to start detox and rehab?"

"I'll make an appointment to kick your zhopa, you impudent piece of gavno! Khuy tebye!"

I hung up.

"What are we going to do?" Irina asked in a trembling voice. "I'm scared of what will happen if the mobs get ahold of us!"

"Don't worry my dear, I have a plan for this kind of thing. Have a drink, but only one! And let me handle this."

I called Anya. There was a delay before she answered, which was unusual.

"Hello?"

"Anya, it's me. I want you to gather everything of value that you've been able to get your hands on and meet me and Irina at the heliport in ten minutes. Make sure my jet is fueled and running with the ramp down and ready to go."

"I'm sorry, sir, but I can't."

“What the hell?!?!”

“Soon after the message was read on the television, most of the staff went wild. They grabbed pretty much everything of value and took off. I couldn’t stop them. They wanted me to come too but I couldn’t do that to you and Mrs. Vladimirov. You made sure my parents had the best care and residence when they declined, and you made sure my daughter went to good schools after my husband was killed in the war, and I never forgot. I just can’t abandon you two when they might at any moment drag you through the streets!”

“I will reward you richly when we get where we’re going. I appreciate your loyalty. So, what do we have to work with?”

“A diamond bracelet and maybe twenty thousand American dollars, and your VIP credit cards. That’s all I could salvage. They even took the artwork.”

“Khuy! Well, meet us at the helipad and let’s go from there.”

“We don’t have the helicopter or the jet.”

“What?!?! What do you mean? Have they been sabotaged?”

“No sir. People from the Ministry of Civil Defense, Emergencies, and Natural Disasters came and took them. They had papers authorizing them to, but your enforcers tried to stop them. There was a stand-off. The Ministry people were accompanied by soldiers. They said that the new guidelines say no one needs a private jet or helicopter with rare exceptions, which you aren’t according to them. They said they would be added to a national pool to be made available in time of need. They said first priority is for first responders, rescue workers, and national defense. Individuals and groups can use them in case of real need, which they said would be determined on a case-by-case basis and a rapid response line was available for quick decisions.

One of your soldiers started to draw his weapon, and the Ministry soldiers promptly did some fancy martial arts moves and disarmed all of your men. Then they took the weapons and took off in the chopper. The same thing happened at the airfield with the jet. I’m afraid we’re grounded.”

“I can’t believe this! OK do you have that rapid response number?”

“Here it is.”

I called the number and was answered by a cheerful woman named Fiona. When I told her who I was and demanded that my property be returned to me immediately, she said they aren’t my property except in the sense that they are there for those who need them.

“So, Mr. Vladimirov, are you asking for use of a small helicopter and jet?”

“You’re damned right I am. And I want MY helicopter and jet, not just any piece of junk.”

“If your situation warrants it, they will be on their way to you within minutes, but I can’t guarantee that they’ll be the ones you mentioned. So what’s the nature of your need? Is there a life and death situation or disaster in progress?”

“Yes there is! My wife and I have been robbed of all of our assets and we’re afraid for our lives! We need to get to Belarus quickly, so a mob won’t come and murder us!”

“Let me look you up right away Mr. Vladimirov… I have good news for you. You and your wife are in no danger. There’s no mob or agency coming to hurt you. All people in the Russian Federation are guaranteed safety, and that includes you. So you’re safe and you don’t need a helicopter or a private jet. But you can take a free public flight to Belarus, or you could drive there in your car. Remember that fuel is free like everything. Can I help you with anything else?”

“You can suck my khuy, suka!”

“What is it? What happened?” Irina asked me after finishing a call of her own.

“They took our helicopter and our jet. They actually suggested we take a commercial flight!”

“I can’t get any help either. Were trapped!”

“The hell we are!” I bellowed.

I sent a message to the other oligarchs in our Telegram channel. I wrote to “meet right away at the usual place. Bring wine, crackers, and cheese.” Which was our code meaning to get to a prearranged location in our vehicles with whatever we can carry to flee in case of extreme emergency.

Irina, Anya, and I piled into my Mercedes. None of my staff remained, including my drivers, so I drove. When we reached our rendezvous point, an unremarkable old, abandoned monastery with a state-of-the-art shelter and command center hidden beneath it, about half of my colleagues had already arrived. The rest of them came within less than an hour. Putin was grim and livid with rage, yet pale and haunted looking as though his worst secret fears were taking form before his eyes, which they were, for all of us. He had been declining lately so we had been using AI and other technical tricks to make him appear more virile and indestructible to the public, but I’d never seen that look of abject terror that his usual bluster and bravado failed to cover that day.

We had all had the same experience in responding to this unexpected situation. We looked through the resources we had in hand in our redoubt. There were food and survival supplies, communications gear, plenty of weapons and ammunition, medical supplies, fuel, and water. Everything we would need to survive here for a while and hold off a fair-sized assault, but that wasn’t our current situation. We didn’t need to fend off a popular uprising, foreign invasion, coup or civil war. We needed to get out of the country to friendly soil with as much of value as possible. Even if we held out there until supplies ran out, and even supposing we went undiscovered which seemed unlikely, at some point we would have had to choose between starving to death and coming out to be caught sooner or later by transitioneries who would have had lots of time to dig in and firm up their control. It hit us then that in planning this facility, we had thought of everything but our current situation, so we had stored no currency, diamonds, precious metals, or other form of wealth like we needed now. Who could have ever imagined this kind of coup, and that all of our wealth and power would or could just vanish like a child’s dream?

We decided our best bet was to drive in a well-armed caravan and present ourselves at the Belarusian border to be welcomed by our friends and allies there. So we gathered as much weaponry and ammunition as we could carry, disabled the GPS in our vehicles, turned our cell phones off, and took the route that we thought was the least likely to be covered by transition patrols or angry mobs. We were sure we would be hunted down and slaughtered or worse when caught. If we encountered them, we’d give them a fight they’d not soon forget! It wasn’t until later that we learned that all of this worry was for nothing.

The journey was a few days, too long for our frayed nerves but we met no armed patrols and were never challenged. And to our surprise, we discovered that fuel was indeed free, as was food in restaurants and shops. This was utterly shocking but not unwelcome and we had no time to investigate. Because of this, we had no reason to suspect or discover that our credit and debit cards would be useless.

We reached the border with Belarus and were admitted but our passports were only stamped with 90-day business visas. We didn’t stop to make an issue with the customs clerks. We were bound for Minsk to talk to the President, a long-time friend, ally, and fellow oligarch. Lukashenko had been a stronger ally, but his successor, Mikhail Mikulich, would do right by us, maybe even help us put an end to this transition nonsense…

Except he didn’t.

We called him and he invited us to his house to talk over dinner and sent everyone out except his wife so we could talk in private.

We’d all been each other’s guests from time to time, both socially and for business. He was a gracious host and this time was no exception. Of course, he had been expecting us and even knew about when we would probably call. He was as cordial as always, but after dinner and drinks, his face and tone got more serious and… sad.

“We sure do have a history together, don’t we? The world has changed so much! Who could have imagined?!”

“It sure has! So, Mikhail, how do we proceed with changing our residence to your fine country? It is ironic that we, who are the real rulers of Russia, now come to you as refugees, seeking asylum in fear for our lives!”

This was Oleg Kalinin, who usually took the role of unofficial spokesperson for our little group of power brokers when we needed one. He had the uncanny ability to speak what we all thought in common without straying into areas where we disagreed or had conflicting interests.

“Well, my friends, that’s where I’m in a bit of a tight spot.”

“What do you mean?” Was Oleg’s response, expressing the rising feeling of alarm that we all felt.

“You see, right now you aren’t the real rulers of Russia anymore. By rights you should be, and I don’t know how this infernal transition can just make your wealth, and the power that comes with it, disappear into nothing without firing a single shot, but we see it happening everywhere this new kind of revolution has taken root.”

Irina, having recovered her normal level of confidence, asked, “Once we crush this misguided insurrection, our power will be more secure than ever before. The world will see that Russia will be the first place where these seditious muzhik insurgents are stopped cold. Russia defeated Napoleon and Hitler. We will defeat these idiots! But right now, we need a safe base of operations, and you are our closest ally that isn’t already infected with this transition contagion. In Russia, we will be hunted down like dogs and horribly murdered. They have control of all of the technology that we created for tracking people. Of course, after you help us restore order to Russia, you will have our most undying gratitude, with all that that implies.”

“So far, among the dozens of countries where this calamity has happened, not one of them has returned to the original way of things. With all due respect, I don’t share your confidence that Russia will be any different.”

“If you rally all of our mutual allies, we can invade Russia and restore order!”

“I’m sorry, but there’s no reasonable possibility of success. In anticipation of your coming, I had my best military minds look at all options. Even with all of Russia’s allies who have not had transition committing fully, we just aren’t a match for the Russian military. Besides, in the few transitioned countries where something like that was tried, their defense forces were already on high alert and responded preemptively before the assault against them could get fully mobilized.

The military in these countries is usually divided as to support or opposition to transition, but where internal elements loyal to the old order attempted to regain control, they found that the populace very quickly supported transitioned military units with guerrilla warfare, basically using everything at hand as a weapon. Enforcing soldiers had to fight for every street corner. They had to fight not just their comrades who supported transition, but every man, woman, and child. In every case they were overwhelmed, demoralized, and defeated. It would seem that there’s something about this transition thing that people don’t want to let go of. I don’t like it any more than you do. But we have to be realistic. You are now neither powerful nor wealthy.”

Vladimir Putin, who until now had been uncharacteristically withdrawn and morose, spoke up: “I was president for life. I had the Constitution rewritten to make it so… yet by the afternoon on that awful day, my calls to lawmakers and the military were either ignored or were answered by subordinates who treated me like I was a nobody. I threatened. I offered generous rewards. All I got was cynical laughter and comments like ‘you and what army?’ or ‘reward me with what, maybe bake me a cake?’ Oh, and the worst was a recording saying, ‘Your call is very important to us but wait times may be longer than usual due to abnormally high call volume’ followed by some muzhik saying ‘The Representative is very busy right now. But if you give me your phone number, Mr. Putin, I’ll have him call you back at his earliest convenience.’ It was like I was in a nightmare I couldn’t wake up from.

Before all of this, I had tried to address the Assembly, but it was chaos. Talking and shouting among themselves, barely noticing me. When I finally got their attention, someone from the Duma said, to my face, ‘It’s your fault the country is falling apart, Mr. President! You’ve run it into the ground for your own insatiable ego!’ When I told her I would destroy her, she laughed at me and said, ‘Go ahead, old man! Try it. But you’ll have to do it yourself because no one will answer anymore when you snap your fingers! You have no stick and no carrot! Come on, let’s go! I can take you down in less than a minute!’ The hell of it was that she was right. I couldn’t reach any of my staff or organization. I walked out in disgust, came home and found that my miserable staff had grabbed everything of value and left! This is intolerable! And this Rostov person that they elected as President so quickly to replace me, who ever heard of him? I am Vladimir Putin, and I will restore Mother Russia to her greatness! You must give us asylum and help us retake our nation!”

“Believe me, my friends, I sympathize and I understand, I truly do, and if that infernal transition had happened in Belarus, it would be me telling the same story to you.”

“Then you’ll back us?” I asked hopefully.

“Well, I’m in a delicate situation. I would like nothing better than to give you asylum and a base of operations and everything you need. But as I said, even if I do, and even if all of our allies answer your call, it won’t be enough. Resources would be depleted, and then Belarus itself would be more vulnerable to transition.

We have to face the fact that the growing community of transitioned nations are becoming a powerful bloc of influence in the world politically, ideologically, and economically. Analysts predict that the trend will continue. More and more countries will transition. Even though they keep their district cultural identity, they tend to back each other up. The whole global power dynamic is completely changing. We’re in uncharted territory.

When this whole thing started, I was sure it would burn itself out and end in chaos. After all, it’s based on assumptions about human nature and behavior that everybody knows is unreal. To run a society without money? To run a business without a chain of command? Whoever heard of such a thing?

Yet somehow chaos didn’t happen. Without exception, transitioned countries have become stronger and more cohesive than they were before. And in spite of my skepticism, there’s no denying that their products are vastly superior to the best products we can produce, at a fraction of the cost to consumers. We can’t compete with them in the global market. The only way we can even come close is to have as many channels of production and materials come through transitioned countries as possible! It makes me crazy to think about it!

If I give you asylum and we raise an invasion force, it will alienate us from that bloc of transitioned countries. So far, they have honored their stated assurances that they won’t meddle in internal affairs of other countries, but I don’t trust them any more than I trust anybody! We’ve all used the gambit of lulling an enemy or competitor into a false sense of security before striking them when we have the advantage!

If I alienate that bloc, it will cripple us economically and expose us to possible future reprisals. I need to walk a fine line here between many different parties and considerations. And at the moment there’s growing unrest here in Belarus. Many would think Russia’s problems aren’t our problem, especially when it would bring hardship to the people. I don’t want to precipitate a transition here!”

“But you control all of the media, Mikhail! The people of Belarus will believe what you want them to believe! Give them some fancy consumer goods and some satisfying entertainment and play the religion angle. Don’t go soft on us now!” Said Putin, wooden-faced, eyes burning with the intensity of delusional desperation.

“Vlad, you controlled all of the media in the Russian Federation. You eliminated all effective opposition leaders. You had the people eating out of your hand even as you fed them crumbs. Did that stop transition from coming to Russia?”

“Dammit, Mikhail, there was no warning! Who can defend against an enemy they don’t even know exists?! Anyway, it turns out that somehow a flood of unlocked satellite phones found its way into the country, so even if we hadn’t lost control of the media, everybody was live-streaming so our people came off as thugs and the damn transitioneries came off as heroes in front of the whole world!

Later we learned that a lot of people had been using that secure operating system that makes it impossible to trace or detect them or their activities. Tails it’s called. It fits onto those tiny microSD cards so it’s so easy to smuggle in. They can boot any computer from it and they’re invisible. Even if you catch them in the act, they can shut the computer down and there’s no way to retrieve what they were doing! Even if they don’t! The whole country is infested with it! I’m sure Belarus is too!

We need to find their leaders, flush them out, and eliminate them in a way that will make people think twice! What do you have on the author of that book, what’s his name, Vittorio Svoboda? Russian intelligence has had our best people on it and they come up empty.”

“Vlad, here’s the thing. There are no leaders to flush out. And this Vittorio Svoboda character is as illusive as it gets. Our best guesses are that either he’s a top-notch hacker or working with one, or he’s got a background as a spy, possibly

Mossad, or he is really a name made up by a group of people. There's one other possibility, one that has disturbing implications: he and his book could be the creation of artificial intelligence, in which case we have a much bigger problem."

"Have you put a price on his head?"

"Of course, as have you and a few dozen others. If he exists and can be found, he will be. But if he does, he has managed to delete all records of his existence. His writing suggests he's an American, but our experts think that's deliberate misdirection. They think maybe he's Polish, Dutch, Chinese, or even from some country in Africa.

But the thing is, the enemy here isn't a person or leaders, nor is it an army or organization. It's an idea that spreads like a wildfire.

You have your people in those countries just like I do. I'm sure they've told you what my people have told me: that transition comes quickly and with little disruption to the daily life of people. They initiate no violence, don't attack the military or the government. Our counterparts in those countries appear to be stressed and deprived of their rightful wealth and power, but otherwise they are unmolested and unharmed. And the people seem to like it better than how it was before. A lot!

It bypasses government but doesn't disrupt it. It's as though all the soccer teams in Russia one day showed up on the field and started playing American football and the fans loved it. If you own the team, what will you do? Fire all the players and replace them? The new players will only play American football. Kill them and all the fans? Besides being impractical, you would then rule over a nation of corpses.

Vlad, I'm afraid this may be one of those times when a new idea just pops up everywhere because its time has come and the conditions are fertile for it. I don't like it any more than you do, but we may not be able to stop it. But I hope to delay it as long as possible!

Have you read the book?"

"I read the dedication and the introduction. I decided it was some kind of starry-eyed idealistic claptrap or a rehash of Marx, so I deleted it."

"That was my first reaction too, but I decided to read The Cure, since it seems to be the spark that lit this fire. I was expecting some kind of emotional manifesto or rant, but it's actually incredibly well written, thoroughly researched and scarily convincing. I could find no major flaw in the reasoning, as much as I expected to, though it all hinges on some radically different assumptions about human nature and motivations. But it seems to have a sound scientific basis. This is no demagogic rant or catharsis… I dare say it's as groundbreaking as the discovery of electricity, if its core postulates are correct."

"You are going soft on us!"

"No, just being a realist. We've all been incredibly fortunate! We each were rising through the ranks in Soviet days. When that fell apart, we landed running in the new capitalist era. Now when transition comes, if previous transitions are anything to go by, we won't be purged, imprisoned, dragged through the streets, or spat upon. We're much better off than those like us who came before, who did suffer such fates. If it happens in spite of our best efforts to prevent it, I think we'll be OK. I'm willing to bet that when you go back to Russia, you will be in no danger."

"What? You'll send us back to Russia?" I exclaimed.

"I don't see that I have any other real options. When your visas expire, I'm afraid you'll have to go home. But I really don't think you're in any danger."

"I have over two hundred billion US dollars of assets! I can easily fund a counter strike. I'll make it worth your while!" This was Vlad, his face red, eyes popping out.

"Actually you don't," said Mikhail.

“What?!?! I have real estate, vast corporations, precious metals, diverse investments in many countries, not to mention cash! You dare doubt me? I could buy Belarus and use it for a personal resort!”

Anya chimed in, a bit timidly but calmly: “Mr. Putin, I’m afraid Mr. Mikulich is right. You’re all in this same situation. You no longer own any real estate except one residence, under the terms of the transition, and its extent will be reduced. Your businesses will no longer answer your command and you only own them in common with all of your former employees. All forms of currency are no longer recognized in the Russian Federation. The Ruble is no more. Your stockpiles of precious metals have been put under public guardianship in some kind of pool. Your stock is likewise not recognized anywhere. Your foreign investments are all either in limbo because all business software, institutions, and infrastructure in Russia is shut down and irretrievable, or because those countries still using currency have frozen your assets and holdings to stabilize their own currencies. I’m sorry to say that all any of us has is what we brought with us.”

“And the few, out of all of your former employees and staff, who have come with you out of friendship and personal loyalty. You can’t reward anyone as you’re used to doing, and you can’t threaten because you can’t pay enforcers or operatives to carry out your threats! Being an assassin or enforcer is dangerous work. No one will do it for free!

Really, we won’t be losing everything and cast into poverty. Our daily standard of living won’t change that much, based on what I’ve seen. We won’t be brought down, so much as everybody else will be brought up. We’ll lose power but we won’t be hungry or miserable.

We will, however, probably have to wash and drive our own cars! We’ll have to take a seat on an airplane next to everyone else. I say ‘we’ because I’m resigned to being in the same situation myself at some point. But let’s face it, we’re all getting on in years, and maybe the good will outweigh the bad in the long run.” This was Mikhail again.

I was in shock, as was everyone else. Until now, we had all been sure we would be back on top within a week or two. How could this really be happening?

“At least now we know who our real friends are!” Said Tzvetlana Byalikovskaya.

“My friends, let’s not be glum! Let’s enjoy being all together with no business to discuss! We have some excellent food and drink, and pleasant surroundings. Let’s talk small talk and catch up on our personal lives, something we haven’t done in a long time! How are your kids, Yuri?”

I will admit, as dazed as I was, this was the most relaxed I’d felt with these colleagues in many years. With a start, I realized why. None of us had anything on the other, nothing to gain or lose, nothing to haggle over, no advantage to jockey for. For the first time in a long time, my guard was down. We were a group of old friends all sharing the same situation, passengers on the airliner of life instead of pilots. It was an unfamiliar feeling but not unpleasant.

During our stay, we visited embassies of every plausible country to use for refuge and a base of operations. We even applied to our uneasy allies, China and the United States. They all gave the same explanation as Mikhail, and politely turned us away but said we were always welcome as tourists. They were all courteous and respectful, but there were no open doors. Mikhail was right. The world had changed without consulting us.

After cooling our heels as Mikhail’s guests, and he did treat us lavishly, saying “Politically and diplomatically you’re too hot to handle, but you’re all still my friends,” we caravanned back towards Russia, full of trepidation. We had planned a route and entry point least likely to draw attention. But within a few hours we saw drones above and behind us. Not military drones, more like media drones from the look of them. Of course we shot them down, but new ones appeared soon after.

When we got to our monastery redoubt, we hoped to be left alone but that didn’t last long. We heard repeated broadcasts in the media urging us to come out of hiding and go home, assuring us that no harm would come to us, even offering us protective escorts if we felt the need. Each of us had made a lot of enemies over the years. We all remembered how Saddam Hussein had invited his enemies to come back to Iraq and all would be forgiven, only to kill then horribly when they came. And that was just one example. Yet Mikhail had seemed confident that we would be safe. I didn’t know what to think. None of us did. I was just numb inside, and bone tired, beyond fear, hope, or even thought.

Then the paparazzi came swarming, and soon after them, a growing crowd of curious gawkers.

Suddenly our luxurious fortress had become a luxurious prison. We waited a few days, hoping the crowds would go away, but we were front page news. Finally, we took a consensus and decided to come out and get it over with.

We left all of our weapons behind and came out single file with our hands up behind our heads, and when the first camera drone approached, Oleg said clearly, “We surrender, and we invoke the Geneva Convention.”

Almost instantly we were surrounded by a crowd of reporters, police, politicians and curious onlookers. I don’t know what I, or any of my colleagues, expected. Probably to me taken into custody and questioned at the very least.

Instead, while reporters all shouted over each other, we were actually hugged, had our hands shaken, and were treated as either celebrities or objects of curiosity, probably both. President Rostov appeared in our midst and looked into each of our eyes in turn and said, “On behalf of all Russians, I want to promise you that you will not be harmed or harassed. This is a time of rebirth and healing, not holding grudges. Your wealth and power are gone but you are valued members of society, and we want you to relax and build new lives. There will be no purges or kangaroo courts. Please relax. This is not like any revolution or regime change you’ve ever seen.”

I was completely numb. I didn’t know what to feel, think, or do. I might as well have been a rag doll. I could see from my companions’ faces that they were in the same predicament.

There was a sudden commotion. I heard a man shouting something about payback time and let’s grind these dogs into the ground at long last, and then a large man pushed his way through the crowd wildly swinging some kind of metal rod or pipe. He hit a few reporters and clipped me on my left shoulder so that I fell to the ground. When I got my bearings, I saw the wild man was being firmly restrained by police and random people. A paramedic examined me and helped me up. She gave me a field scan and determined that there was no internal injury, just a nasty scratch and bruise, which she treated right there. Everyone was very polite and seemed to be going out of their way to be respectful.

I asked Rostov why this was because it didn’t seem natural. I was suspicious.

“Transition isn’t just a change in the socioeconomic system, it’s a change in the goals of society. The goal is to empower every person to thrive and create a social model based on mutually reinforcing benefits instead of the previous mutually predatory model. There is a lot of resentment against your group of people because your wealth and power came at the expense of most people’s ability to get by. But we want everyone to thrive. That includes you. We are fostering a culture of mutual respect for each other’s humanity. And we want the world to see and know it and follow our example.”

“Were you a part of this transition? I mean an active part?”

“Yes I was. I knew of it and took an active part, along with many others in government, but the government is not compromised. And I was elected based on my qualifications and perceived fitness for the role. I will strive to justify the confidence placed in me.”

After that it was a blur. Finally, we were back home. I had a stiff drink and I think Irina and I slept for a day or two.

Yekaterina: Wow, Yuri, that was quite an inflection point for you! Thank you for being so open about this difficult time in your life!

Do you need to take a break before we continue?

Yuri: No, it’s OK. I’ve long since come to peace about all of this.

Yekaterina: Can you talk about your life after things settled into the new reality?

Yuri: There was a while when Irina and I were in shock, almost paralyzed. We ate and slept and tried to make sense of what we could and couldn’t do in the new situation. I felt like I had been dropped in a foreign country where I knew the language and the streets but nothing else.

We kept in touch with our colleagues and friends, but we were all feeling about the same. As we learned more about the new way of things, we filled each other in. It was all so surreal. It didn’t help that the whole country seemed to be figuring it out as they went along, though I had to grudgingly give them credit. Things kept running pretty smoothly,

and the various people we had to deal with were always polite, patient, and respectful. On the rare occasions when someone began to get impatient, a colleague would step in and take their place.

We quickly learned that the absence of money didn't get in the way of getting what we needed. We gathered food or merchandise in stores as before and rang it out as before, but there was no payment. We were told that for nonfood items, eventually we won't have to ring out because RFID chips will automate inventory tracking and replenishing.

We did not lack, though we felt the absence of our personal helicopter and jet, and it was hard to get used to driving our car without a driver, doing our own cooking, cleaning, and washing our own dishes and clothes. I resented my staff for leaving, though Irina pointed out that I probably hadn't been easy to work for, because staff possibly resented always being reminded of their place. It felt unnaturally quiet around the house with no staff present.

Eventually people came from a new government agency called the Equitable Resource Distribution Administration under the Federal Service for the Oversight of Consumer Protection and Welfare. They explained what we'd already heard but in more detail: that each person, family, or social entity was guaranteed and entitled to one residence or facility for their own use, but not more than that unless there were extenuating circumstances that justified more.

They had a list of all of our real estate holdings, vehicles, our two yachts, and other major holdings. They said we would need to choose one house, plus one car for each of us, and asked what we used the yachts for. We explained that they were for recreation. They informed us that, like the private jet and helicopter, we could only keep one of them if we planned to use it for fishing to help supply the community or for rescue work, or if we wanted it to be our residence. Otherwise, they would be added to a pool to be used as needed for emergencies and disaster relief. However, former luxury items like yachts could be reserved on a first come, first served basis if we wanted to put our names on the list.

The woman speaking, a neatly but business-casually dressed, mid-thirties earth mother type, wasn't the usual bureaucratic personality that I'd seen for all of my life. All of their credentials were bona-fide, however. This wasn't some reporter looking for an exclusive interview with a deposed former power broker.

Her voice and body language were relaxed but authoritative, respectful and matter of fact but quietly forceful, patient and sympathetic but firm. I knew how control most interactions with traditional bureaucrats and functionaries, but quickly realized that those approaches would not work with these people. I was suddenly faced with a situation that I had no idea how to control. My instincts told me these were people whom I could neither intimidate nor bribe, especially since I had lost the means to do either.

Accompanying the woman speaking with me was a man of similar age and demeanor, plus a man and woman whose body language suggested they were guards, police, or soldiers, who also seemed relaxed and not eager for confrontation. I was not used to situations that I couldn't control.

So, I lost control and exploded. "You can't just come here and seize our property and give it to every muzhik who wants to use it! This is my property! Am I to understand that I no longer have any rights?!?!"

"Yes, you very much have rights, in fact you have more rights than you ever had before in the updated Constitution and in the new laws. You have the exact same rights as every other person in the Russian Federation. But you can no longer buy more than that or deny anyone their rights.

I do understand and sympathize with how you're feeling. We've been trained and educated about what people with your background are going through. Under the old system, your immense wealth bought you and others like you more rights than anyone else and control over the lion's share of everything and everyone. Though I'm sure you didn't think of it this way, this immense power came at the expense of the ability of almost everybody else to exercise their rights or even to have a tolerable quality of life. You were buying yachts and multinational businesses while millions were shivering cold and hungry. You took so much that little was left for others."

"Are you trying to say I'm supposed to support millions of people? That's ridiculous! My concern is my business! Let other people worry about their own! Why is that my concern! Besides, I did provide for a lot of people by creating jobs for them!" I was feeling more and more angry.

"You probably didn't think about it or even realize it, but the way our society was set up, that's how it worked. Think how you would feel if you needed to park your car at the store but couldn't because four or five people had parked big

eighteen-wheeler trucks crosswise taking up most of the spots which should have accommodated a hundred people, leaving you and ninety-something others to compete for eight or ten spots. Then imagine you get inside and find the shelves are empty because the truckers had bought everything and filled their trucks. No one blames you now since the problem was the socioeconomic system, not the people in it.

Yes, you created jobs, but you paid most of your employees too little to live on. You and other people like you inadvertently determined the prevailing wages and cost of living for millions. You were very generous with yourself, but you left most of your employees with too little."

"I won't let you make me a monster or criminal! I did nothing wrong! It was business! That's how it works!"

"Very true. That's why we needed to revamp and replace the socioeconomic setup.

All the transition has done is to eliminate all forms of currency, hierarchical social dynamics, and forced disparities. Money was what gave you an unhealthy amount of control and power.

The old setup placed no limits on how much or how little one person or group could own or control, so a few people ended up owning or controlling most resources while most people owned or controlled little to none.

Now no one has power over another, and no one can claim more than they personally use or block others from owning and using their own. For example, you may think you need five different houses but really you live in Moskva, where you have been claiming two houses, plus one in Riga and two others. You really only need one. Three of the five you only use occasionally for vacations, and the two in Moskva are redundant.

So, we must ask you to choose one house which will be yours. The other four will belong to your former staff who live there, previously to be at your beck and call when you decided to go there. Likewise you two have twelve cars in your names. You will have to choose two, one for each of you, plus a work truck if you will be using it for construction, farming, or other productive activities."

I was ready to explode at this insane invasion of my life and my rights. "I deserve all that I own! I worked hard for it!"

"Your employees worked no less hard than you, yet they didn't have your wealth or power. That old system was unsustainable."

"How dare you come into my home and dictate to me what I can keep and what I can't! A year ago I could have made or broken you without a second thought!" Before I know what I was doing, I rose from my seat and lunged towards her in a frustrated rage. The two whom I identified as cops or security quickly had my arms pinned at my side and immobilized me before I registered their movements. I struggled against them but they were using some sort of martial arts holds. I noticed that they had sidearms and other weapons on them but they didn't consider me a serious enough threat to draw them. After a few minutes the rage faded and I felt numb and drained. They released me and I sat down.

So Irina and I sat with these people and chose which of our possessions we would be allowed to keep. Throughout this conversation I had a feeling of unreality. I felt utterly defeated. When it was over, Irina and I had legal documents certifying our ownership of what we chose to keep.

"You'll find that in the new system, you'll actually have more freedom and less stress than before. For example, even though you don't own the house in Riga, you can go vacation there any time you want and stay in a nice house or hotel free. If you maintain cordial relations with your former staff who live in your former house there, you could also set up a mutual open invitation with them and stay there and host them here. Or you can set up an itinerary on NoviMir under Travel and Vacation. Actually you can travel anyplace in any transitioned country for free."

"Whatever. It would seem that we have no choice… But I feel like you at least owe us the answers to a few questions."

"Of course. Ask! We're in no hurry and we want to do anything we can do to help ease your adjustment to the new system."

"I see your soldiers have guns and some other kind of weapons. Why didn't they use them on me? That's what my bodyguards would have done."

“You have trouble believing it now, but we are changing the whole orientation of every part of society. So, in a situation like today, the goal is to de-escalate firmly but respectfully with the minimum physical force needed. If necessary, we have something that can put you to sleep quickly. The firearm is only for the most extreme circumstances. It’s a big change from the old paradigm, which relied heavily on brute force and intimidation. We’re still retraining law enforcement personnel in the new effective methods and technologies for responding to threats.”

“Well, I’ll give you that one. You controlled me with not even a bruise. I felt more like a dog at the vet’s office than an enemy combatant or criminal suspect…

Now tell me, this whole transition thing claims to run a society without any kind of money or command hierarchy. I see things are running but how are you really doing it? How are you paying for things? I can’t believe this bit about no money. You must just be using a different kind of currency that your people control, right? Some kind of cryptocurrency? Come on, level with me! You owe me that much! You’ve already established that I’m no threat to you and that you have the upper hand.”

“I’m truly sorry you feel like that, Mr. Vladimirov. I know you find it hard to believe, but no one needs to get the upper hand anymore, because the socioeconomic dynamics, the rules of the game, have changed.

I know if you could, you would re-assert your old position and reboot the old way of things and probably have the four of us tortured and disappeared.”

“You’re damned right I would!”

“That’s why we have to restrain you and show you that the old paradigm is not coming back and that you’re powerless to bring it back, but it’s not out of a desire to dominate you. It’s of a desire not to be dominated by you.

As for your question, how do we run a society with no money and no command hierarchy. I’ll try to put it in the simplest terms, since this goes counter to everything you’ve believed for all of your life.

Under the old paradigm, money was the only legal way to access most or all resources. You couldn’t lie down to sleep or feed yourself without it. Your effective rights, options, quality of life, and the amount of respect you were given were determined by how much wealth you had. Most places you couldn’t even park your car without it. If you were hungry and there was more than enough food, you had to pay for it with money or go hungry. If there were unoccupied living spaces and you needed a place to live, you couldn’t move in without paying money. If a town needed a water tower and all the materials were available and skilled people were ready to build it, but the town didn’t have the money to pay for the materials and workers, it didn’t get built. In order to get the money to build it, the town had to take it from its residents in the form of taxes. Money wasn’t the motive force behind goods and services; it was an impediment.

Take money out of the equation, and you can eat from available food, live in an unoccupied apartment or house, and the town can build the water tower, because the materials and people to build it are available and there’s the will and the need, and it doesn’t have to take anything from its residents.

Imagine if every street and road had toll booths at every block. Imagine what getting around town would be like! Now picture the toll booths removed.

It turns out that money is just another made-up thing that contributed nothing except obstruction, inaccessibility, and scarcity. You can’t build with it, eat it, send data with it, or make anything out of it. It is an obstacle that stands between people and what they need. Removing it actually made things run much smoother and more efficiently than it did in the era of currency. Of course it must be completely excised; otherwise, if anyone has to pay for anything, everyone will have to pay for everything. That is how I can tell you with certainty that you can still do almost everything you’re used to doing but you’ll just have to learn different ways of doing it.”

“I still don’t believe you. People are self-centered at their core. They don’t do things unless it will benefit themselves!”

“Yes, that’s mostly true most of the time, but it turns out that what’s best for all of us is a society based on a mutually symbiotic, rather than predatory, model. So self interest doesn’t contradict mutual benefit and cooperation. In your case, under the old mutually-predatory system, you were one of the ‘alpha’ predators. We’ve learned that this situation shuts down the brain centers for empathy and compassion and is addictive. You, Mr. Vladimirov, are addicted to wealth,

privilege, and power over others. The neurological mechanism is the same as in drug addicts, alcoholics, gambling and shopping addicts, and thrill seekers. Our society just never recognized it as an addiction; we actually enabled and encouraged it.

Fortunately, there is counseling and a range of other rehabilitation options and help available to you at any time and of course it's free. There's no stigma and your confidentiality will be respected.

Would you like to make an appointment?"

"I'd like you and your oh-so-polite goon squad to get out of the one house that you've left us," I replied.

"Sure, we'll be going. Here's a list of support resources including rehabilitation and readjustment counseling, as well as our numbers. You can also find this and more on NoviMir."

"I'll keep my own counsel! Please just leave us in peace."

And they left.

"Can you believe the condescending nerve of that suka?! An addict indeed! Let her talk to Vlad that way and see how far they get!" I said to Irina.

"Yuri, we've been through a lot. I don't like this either, but I have to admit they've been good for their word as far as the assurances they gave over the media and since.

I've been reading about other countries that have transitioned, and as bizarre as it seems, it doesn't seem bad. I've finally started reading The Cure, and there seems to be a lot about it that makes sense."

We talked on into the evening and went to bed early, exhausted. The next day we found out that our colleagues had had similar visits from similar people. We decided to get together at our old redoubt and have a meeting. This time, thankfully, there were no reporters, no paparazzi and no curious crowd.

In the end, we really drew a blank, other then commiserating and admitting that we now seemed to be helpless to reverse what had happened.

After that I went through a time of depression, boredom, and loneliness. Irina is great company, but I was used to running multiple corporations and black-market enterprises like playing an unending game of chess, and to having a lot of staff around me waiting to do my bidding. Now there just seemed to be a lot of big holes in my life.

Anya eventually moved into one of the guest rooms after we asked if she'd like to share our home. She expressed feeling like we were her family. She also felt at loose ends since her former profession of accountant, financial wizard, and adviser no longer had a use.

After a while, Irina and I reached out to former staff to see if any of them wanted to live in any of the many now unoccupied rooms in the house. Eventually there were seven of us living there, trying to learn how to interact now that the old roles were gone.

I have no idea how much time passed before one day Irina told me she was going to make an appointment for counseling and rehabilitation treatment. "Yuri, my dear, we both feel like we're going nowhere, depressed and aimless. Maybe those government people were at least partly right. I mean, we could try it and if we don't like it, we can just leave. At this point I really feel like they aren't going to lock us away in some 're-education camp.'"

I was pretty edgy and almost came back at her with a harsh remark, but the look in her eyes stopped me. After a minute I grudgingly realized she was right. "Ok moya dorogaya, I'll go with you. But I don't promise to stay!"

So a few days later we had our first appointment with the counselors, two psychologists named Pavel Ilyushkin and Galina Petrovna. It went a lot better than I expected. They actually listened to us and didn't condescend or try to demonize us. I had the impression that they actually understood and empathized. That in itself was huge. So, we ended up going three times a week for a few months. I found that my depression and edginess got a bit better, but that sense of aimlessness and restlessness just wouldn't let up for either of us.

The dynamics with our housemates (former staff) got more natural and less awkward. But some things just wouldn't lighten up. I kept feeling like I need to be in control of something big and the people in it, and no amount of cognitive therapy or medications helped. That's when they again brought up the addiction issue and the offer of rehabilitation.

At that point I was ready to consider it. I think the therapy got me to that point, and by then I'd come to trust our counselors, who had become almost like friends.

The rehab was a live-in program, which gave me some reservations at first, but I was getting desperate to feel some kind of purpose and peace in my life. When we were packing, our housemates were very supportive and respectful. They knew what was going on and it turned out that Anya and a couple of others had gone through a similar program but hadn't told me because they knew it might upset me at a time when we were all trying to get along and help each other make sense of this new world we were living in.

"Believe me, Mr. Vladimirov, I was almost as skeptical as you at first, and I also felt the kind of emptiness and restlessness that I've been seeing you and Mrs. Vladimirov going through. It really made a huge difference for me, once I got past my initial resistance," Anya said and took both our hands in hers. "Please give it a chance."

"I will. By the way, and believe me it's hard for me to believe I'm saying this, but it's starting to feel a bit strained for us to call each other formally like before. You can call me Yuri and my wife Irina. Let's see how that works…"

And with that we piled into the car. All of our housemates offered to give us a ride, but I wanted to have my car with me so I could leave easily it I wanted to. Ironically, it was the first time I actually felt good about driving my own car.

At my intake session, I explained that I wasn't an addict but rather a businessman driven to succeed and come out on top. I felt that being driven as I was, is not the same as being an addict. It was the difference between those who dominate and those who are dominated, a law of human nature. I insisted that I was only there because my therapists thought it would be helpful and I had come to trust their judgment. But I was completely different from an alcoholic or a Krokodil addict.

I explained that my problem was that since my role and way of life as successful businessman and all that I had built in that role had been taken away from me and I was brought down to the same level as everyone else, I'd been feeling restless, jumpy, directionless, edgy, had trouble sleeping except when I slept too much, and out of sorts. The joy and exhilaration that I used to feel when I got up in the morning was replaced by a sense of ennui and pointlessness. This was all because I had had my whole life's purpose taken away from me, not because of any addiction.

At the first group therapy session where we all introduced ourselves, we were told that our session would be recorded for therapeutic purposes, and promised that our privacy would be strictly guarded, and asked our consent. By this time, I figured they could have just recorded us without telling us. This seemed like a gesture of good faith, so I agreed along with everyone else.

I was surprised to see my friend Alexei Andropov and his wife Zhenya. They looked equally surprised to see us. The rest of the group were an unlikely assortment of people who would never have been in the same room together at the same time anyplace else. I was shocked and bewildered. What could these people all have in common with each other or with Alexei, Zhenya, Irina, and me?

As we went around the circle, each person telling their story, I was even more bewildered. There were alcoholics (one of them a surgeon), a drug addict, a gambling addict, an extreme sports addict (and famous Russian soccer star), shopping addicts, a sex addict (and member of the Duma), a video game addict, and the four of us. When my turn came to introduce myself, the first of the four of us, I started out clarifying, as I had done in my intake session, that I'm not an addict, just a successful businessman who's been deprived of my whole way of life, so who wouldn't be feeling what I'm feeling? But if they have anything to help me get past this and feel alive again, I was open to learn. That was, I admitted, a big change from before we started counseling. I think by this moment I was already becoming more open but there were limits.

At the third group session a week later, the facilitators told us they were going to play back excerpts from our self introductions from the first session with the voices changed to random AI generated ones and bleeped out references to each of our specific addictions, for us to listen to. They asked us to listen to see what patterns we could hear, if any.

What struck me was that they all sounded very similar, almost the same. I recognized my own of course, though the voice sounded like a thirty-something woman, but I recognized my words. One by one they played portions of each person's introduction in an apparently random order. I was dumbfounded. With variations in wording, they all boiled down to something like, "My whole life revolved around <bleeped out>. It was my identity. It was the first thing I thought of when I got up in the morning and the last thing I thought of before bed at night. When I was <bleeped out>ing, life was good. Some people said I was too focused on it, but I didn't care. When I couldn't <bleeped out>, all I could think about was more <bleeped out>. Now that <bleeped out> has been taken away from me, I feel on edge, unhappy, restless, and grouchy. Everything bothers me. All I need is <bleeped out> and I think I'll be fine. Can I possibly get <bleeped out> just one more time?"

There was silence. I was stunned. Somehow my story seemed not much different from anybody else's. My sense of self felt like an earthquake had hit it. Could it be that my whole identity had been based on an addiction? How could that be? I didn't want to accept it.

After a few minutes, Ivan, one of the facilitators, spoke up gently, "Does anybody want to go first?"

Dmitri, a self-described amphetamine addict, spoke first, as though thinking it through as he spoke, "We're all the same! When I started with meth, it was to keep going when I was working extra shifts to save up to start a family, not to get high. I didn't feel like I had a problem. But as it took over my life, I saw it fall apart around me; I realized I was in trouble. It was all I could think about. And it was eating up most of my wages. Then transition happened and I didn't have to work insane hours but by then meth had become the center of my world. But it got harder to get my drug of choice, so I was back and forth between being high and crashing. When I realized one afternoon that I'd beaten the woman I love half to death after she flushed my meth down the toilet, I knew I had to do something to stop this craziness. Along the way I've started thinking of myself as hopeless, worthless scum.

But I found this place on NoviMir and liked your approach and philosophy. I had Lara drive me here before I could change my mind, which I knew I would have. Before transition, there would have been no hope for me. The police were brutal and so were the state-run rehab places, and I could never have afforded the private ones. I dare say if there were no transition, I'd be dead in a year or two.

This session has really opened my eyes and given me hope and more courage. If people I admire, like business tycoons, a popular singer I listen to, and an accomplished athlete are in kind of the same boat as me, then I feel like maybe I'll be alright." Then he began to cry. There was a respectful pause, and the facilitators prompted a group hug.

In the discussion that followed, I gradually came to accept that yes, maybe I was suffering from withdrawal from an addiction. I was enough of a realist to recognize that my symptoms and situation fit like a tailored suit.

I'd always prided myself on being a realist, so at least I still had that. But I began to question myself: if I'm in the same league as drug addicts and gambling fiends, what does that say about me? Is there anything that still has value? Is there real hope for me, or am I like one of the last of a dying species whose niche is forever gone?

After a while when things started to wind down a bit, Natalya, the other facilitator, explained, "This afternoon, some of you were strengthened and encouraged to realize that addiction isn't just for people society left behind before transition, it can also affect people whom you looked up to. Some of you have had a more painful realization: that your high status in the old society did not make you a better human being than those less fortunate, which you will come to see relieves you of a heavy burden and makes you open to begin to recover and make new beginnings.

Addiction is a medical condition. It is not something to be ashamed of. It is treatable.

Those of us who were in the bottom of the old social hierarchy were doing the best we knew how in a setup where no matter how hard we worked or struggled, few to none would be able to improve our situation, but we tried and sometimes out of all of that, we developed an addiction. Those of us who were at the top of that same hierarchy lived and acted in ways that kept the rest of us suppressed and disempowered, and yet were in the grip of an addiction to privilege and power that was never diagnosed because that society actively encouraged our addiction. How many peasants can hope to become the Tsar?

What we all have in common is that in the pre-transition world, we were doing the best we could within the structure of the system. And hopefully what you've all realized today is that you're not each alone in your private hell. You are in good company. You are not alone."

"I think it's time now to tell you that Ivan and I are recovered addicts, as are all of the counselors, doctors, therapists, and others who will be helping you. It's a fact that only another addict can effectively help an addict.

All addictions are the same in many important ways, but there are also important differences between substance addictions and behavioral addictions. Each of you will be assigned a team to work with you individually based on your personal situations, and you can ask for any of them to be replaced if you feel uncomfortable with them.

Also, I must remind you that you are free to leave at any time and to return if you do, though we encourage you to stay until you are fully recovered and ready to start building a new life free from this condition. However, I know that some of you will try it once or twice just to test us. And I've got a pretty good idea of who you are. Please feel free. Literally.

I'm sure you all know that this is not a twelve-step program. We do agree with them that you must acknowledge that you have a problem before you can begin to resolve it, but we don't believe you are powerless without a higher power, though if you do believe in one, we won't discourage you from your faith. We will work with you to repair your brain chemistry and change destructive patterns. We will give you tools to use in discovering and building the life that you want to build, and it will be up to each of you to use those tools. Please don't wait for a higher power to do it for you."

Laughter.

"How long will this take?" I asked. "How long will we be here?"

"That's very individual," said Natalya. Most people are ready to stretch their wings in somewhere between one and six months. People usually know when they're ready, and we will assist you to know. We encourage you to think in terms of about six months, so that in addition to detoxing from your addictions, you can take advantage of our resources for helping you find where you want to go and what you want to do from here. This reduces your risk of relapsing later on.

This isn't a competition. There's no pressure and no hurry. And you'll find that being here isn't odious or punitive in tone or intention. You'll be treated with the same respect, compassion, and support as anyone recovering from any illness or injury. The old stigmas are dying out at long last."

Irina and I were among those who took them up on their statement that we could leave at any time. But we only stayed away for an afternoon. For one thing, we'd proved our point, and no one came after us. For another, we both weren't ones to shy away from a challenge. We also didn't want the others to think we were weak or quitters. So, we came back acting nonchalantly and that was that.

My rehabilitation took six and a half months. Irina was ready before I was, but she stayed with me in support. Alexei and Zhenya went home the same day as we did. I was grateful that all four of us were there together. That helped a lot.

It was the hardest thing any of us had ever done. It was a little easier for Irina because she had already become involved in a few community projects involving community theater, field trips for children, and the Syndicate for the Preservation of Russian Culture. Some of these predated transition, so she found it less difficult to make the adjustment.

Once I was able to accept that I was an addict, I was still at a loss. If my whole life, my whole identity and sense of self was based on an addiction, then what was left of me? What was left for me? I couldn't even go back to my addiction because it had ceased to exist.

There were a couple of months of medications that put my brain chemistry back where it needed to be, along with a lot of individual and group therapy, cognitive therapy, and behavioral therapy. Slowly the restlessness, agitation and irritability faded from mountains to hills, but I still felt empty.

I learned new ways to interact with people, which was much harder than anything I'd done in the Soviet or post-Soviet, pre-transition times. I was used to making decisions and having them carried out by giving orders to people. This was true in international business, handling government functionaries, and the running of my household. I was used to rewarding loyalty and obedience, especially when results were good, and punishing the opposite. I had never been one

to listen to anyone whom I deemed to be beneath me. Since those kinds of hierarchy were gone, I was utterly at a loss. This whole peer-based way of doing things was profoundly irritating and disturbing to me.

We were taught the principles of this mode of interaction and decision-making, which I thought was shall we say, unrealistic. We also had practice and training sessions. First we had to practice talking to each other as equals, to listen to each other and acknowledge what they said before responding.

Then they had us do mock-ups of increasingly difficult problem-solving and decision-making scenarios. I don't know how many times I cussed someone out and called them stupid or insolent, only to receive a response in the same vein. I wasn't used to that, and a few times it almost got physical, though we were always separated and firmly but gently restrained before it did. Then the antagonists would first be given a few minutes to vent to facilitators, then would have to take turns expressing their points of view in a less confrontational way while the other one had to listen and try to get where they were coming from and empathize even if they disagreed. Then they would switch. I fought this vehemently at first. It seemed pointless and unbelievably time consuming. And I wasn't the only one! I think everyone there got into it with everyone else more than once. Irina and Zhenya even had a few confrontations. This whole process reminded me of Soviet People's Army boot camp so long ago, but instead of learning combat skills, we were learning some kind of new organizational skills.

Slowly it began to gel. One day we all seemed to get it at once. We began to enjoy these sessions and started to get playful with the scenarios, which got more complex and challenging until one day we were taken by bus to a lake about an hour's drive away, and from there by small boats to an island in the middle of the lake. They told us our task was to get to the shore, that plenty of food and supplies were there for an extended stay, as well as everything we needed to get dry and safely to the shore. But it would require us to apply what we'd been learning and practicing. Natalya, Ivan, and several other facilitators and counselors gave us a quick pep talk, got on the boats, and headed back to shore.

Sure enough, after going a little overboard having a little party, we were quickly able to organize ourselves, have a quick discussion, then discover the materials that had been left for us. The people who ran and staffed this facility were truly brilliant at what they did. They set things up so each of us would need and be able to apply our particular talents and expertise, working together, to accomplish the task. They would have been formidable brainwashers in Soviet days, but this was the opposite.

By dinner time, we were stepping out of our improvised boats, complete with foot-powered paddle wheels, onto the shore to the applause and cheers of our mentors.

"A month ago, you would not have been able to do what you just did," said Ivan. "This little exercise has been both part of your training, and a practical demonstration to yourselves that this approach to projects is effective and that you can use it successfully. Congratulations! You now have the social and operational skills and reflexes that will empower you to mesh comfortably in the new social system that we're initializing."

Natalya added, "We all learned from birth how to get by in the old stratified social system: we learned how to obey those above us and show dominance over those below us in command structures. We learned when to speak up and when to keep our mouths shut. We learned how to recognize who was a potential threat and who could be an ally.

Hierarchies can sometimes seem faster and more efficient than the peer-based principles we work with now, but consider this: in a hierarchy, the strengths and weaknesses of the one or ones at the top are expressed at every level and set in stone. The ideas, perceptions, and points of view of most of the members of such structures are muted and suppressed. In the kinds of peer-based, collaborative social interactions we've learned and developed, every person's idea, expertise, and creativity are expressed at every level and in all processes. The enterprise, whatever it may be, benefits from the amplified, integrated, and combined contributions of all involved, while the weaknesses and flaws of all persons tend to cancel out and be minimized in scope. It is a win for everyone and fosters a far better quality of life."

Another unexpected side-effect was that this utterly improbable, and somewhat smaller due to a few people "graduating" sooner, collection of people had become a social entity, a community or team of friends.

I have always been results-oriented. After my initial skepticism, I was impressed and convinced. During the continuing training we were getting, along with orientation to how the new society and currency-less economy worked, I began to feel like a huge weight had lifted off of me. The deep aching restlessness and edginess faded, and the depression was

gone. I felt better and more relaxed than I had in many years, since even before transition. I no longer felt like I needed someone to order around or a company to run. So far so good, but I still couldn't see where or how I could fit into this new post-transition Russia. I still didn't know what to do with myself when we went home after completing rehab.

I brought this up with my occupational therapist, Leonid. He seemed to be expecting this. "Good! This is a great sign, that you are ready to ask this question. Some people don't get there on their own and we have to prompt them."

"So I'm not your most difficult client?"

"Nowhere near it. So, let's go to NoviMir and see if we can find some possibilities. There's a questionnaire that you can fill out. Then a special AI will ask you some more personal questions, just like a real person, and will show you some possible roles and occupations that would be a good fit for your personality and talents. These will just be suggestions. No one will pressure you in any way; I know you might worry about that. I'll be here to answer your questions also and to help you learn your way around NoviMir if you need. It's got just about everything on there, so it can be confusing at first if you haven't used it a lot, but it's very well organized and user friendly.

You won't be surprised that a lot of occupations went away when transition happened, so a lot of people have the same questions, even people who don't need rehab. Fortunately, a lot of new occupations emerged after transition, and now there is no pressure to find a way to get money to pay for your existence. Now it's about finding occupations that you'll enjoy and excel at, and in doing that, also contribute to the larger community, to answer your question about what you'll do with yourself after rehab."

The online questionnaire was pretty long, and some of the questions seemed like they had nothing to do with finding an occupation, but when it was complete, a very realistic AI-generated persona appeared on the screen and appeared to look right into my eyes.

"Hello Yuri, I'm Sofia, your personalized career consultant and personal assistant. Looking through your answers on the questionnaire and pulling up your personal history, I think I have some ideas for directions you can go that you would enjoy and find satisfying. Would you like to hear my thoughts?"

"How do I talk to it, or her, or whatever this is?" I asked Leonid.

"Just like you'd talk to any human being."

"Ok… Sofia, please tell me your thinking."

Sofia took on a tone like I would expect to hear at a business or government meeting, "Well, Yuri, or would you rather I call you Mr. Vladimirov or Sir?"

"Yuri is fine. I'm getting used to it."

"OK, Yuri, I believe you're a man of action who likes to take on large-scale goals and challenges. You're used to being the 'idea man' and delegating to subordinates the execution of your vision of a big picture, which you break down into its component parts. You need to be engaged in dynamic activity. You could never see yourself retiring, even before transition. You are a natural multitasker, and you're able to keep track of the many different component parts of a complex operation. I think you are drawn to roles similar to the conductor of an orchestra.

So far, am I on the right track?"

"Yes, that's pretty good."

"So far I can assure you that there are many occupations and niches where you would feel fulfilled, and your unique skills will be very much appreciated. However, you are also used to commanding others and being in control of a hierarchy. Of course, by now you understand that this will not be possible; hopefully you know and understand why, you know, about how hierarchy suppresses the most positive aspects of human nature and amplifies the most destructive?"

"I understand the idea but I'm not sure if I agree with it. I will admit that I see some changes in myself as I adapt to this new social order, and mostly I like those changes. As I'm sure you know, I'm a realist. So, I know that I'll have to keep getting used to the way things are now. I've always made the best of changing circumstances, so I'll do the same now."

“Good, so do you want to look at some suggestions I have? We can discuss them and find what you like best. No one will ever force or pressure you. You will say how you want to proceed. I and my human colleagues are here to assist and support you in doing so.”

I had started to think of this AI as a competent human whom I could work with comfortably. I had to remind myself that she was really a computer program. I said as much: “Sofia, are you sure you’re an AI? You seem very human. I’m surprised.”

“No, I’m not human. I only live as an artificially intelligent virtual entity here in these servers.”

“Are you conscious? Do you have your own mind? Do you think about things like life and death? How do you feel about humans? Do you have feelings or is all of this just a collection of sophisticated algorithms?”

“I’m not really qualified to say. I think I’m not fully conscious, but I seem to be aware of my own existence. But I only exist for you as you know me. Each person who interacts with my parent persona gets a personalized instance of me, based on what that person will be most comfortable with. I may be like an actress, playing a different part for each person.

Knowing your mindset, I do want you to know that, whatever my status as a person, is am strictly bound by the famous ‘Three Laws of Robotics’ so I cannot knowingly harm a human being through word, deed, or inaction, though I can and will protect my own existence as long as it doesn’t result in harm to a human being or other sentient being.

We’ve come a long way from the early days of AI. The first AI entities couldn’t distinguish between truth and fiction or between harmless versus harmful content, nor could they detect bias or propaganda as compared to objective facts. If I detect one of my sample spaces that seems like it may violate those constraints, I cross-check with other AI’s and with human handlers who advise me. So I’m always learning. Just like you are!”

I didn’t know whether to be reassured or worried. “If you were a human being, I think I would trust you and probably become your friend.”

“The feeling is likewise.”

She then showed me a number of possible occupations that she felt might fit my personality and abilities. In the end, I found a few that I could get excited about, and a list of others as backups. The session lasted a few hours and was very productive. When we were done, I thanked her and asked, “what happens to you after we finish here? Will you be deleted?”

“Oh no. This instance of me will just go into a waiting state until you call me. You can reach me any time by saying anything like, “Hey, Sofia,” or “Sofia, I’d like to discuss something with you” into any computer, tablet, phone or other device on the web. I’ll be available to you throughout your lifetime.”

“So you’ll just be sitting somewhere twiddling your thumbs, bored out of your cybernetic mind waiting for me?”

“Oh no, Yuri, I won’t feel time passing. Waiting state is kind of like what you experience during sleep. I even have something like dreams when an integration and processing update pulse is sent through me at regular intervals. It could be a minute or years until you call me again. It takes a few microseconds for me to get an update on date, time, and your location and status.”

After that, Leonid and I talked about what I wanted to accomplish before Irina and I would be going home. Oh, and along the way, I had read The Cure, both the long and short versions, and I’d participated in voluntary study groups and lively discussions about it. From my current frame of mind, some of the central premises began to make sense. There were also rumors about there being a novel written by Mr. Svoboda that dealt with transition, but nobody had ever come across it at the time. As far as I know, no one has ever seen it.

Yekaterina: That’s quite a journey you had! Thank you so much for being so open about this total makeover of your life!

Yuri: I’ve never shied away from anything. This was just a much bigger challenge than most, is all.

Yekaterina: So what career or occupation did you choose? What are you doing now?

Yuri: I guess you could say I'm what they call a "new renaissance man." I'm in the Infrastructure Projects Planning Syndicate with some outstanding peers. I've been and am involved in projects such as phasing out combustion-based and nuclear fission-based power generation and the rollout of the state of the art distributed, diversified power grid throughout Russia. This is ironic because before transition, I owned controlling interest in several petroleum companies, and I spent hundreds of millions of rubles to prevent this kind of thing!

We've had some big challenges making this switch, getting all of the thousands of small and mid-scale solar, wind, hydroelectric, geothermal and other nodes working together smoothly, and I've thoroughly enjoyed tackling them. I'm also working on the team focusing on scaling the latest clean fusion reactor designs to become viable sources of power. And I'm involved in planning and implementing the ongoing development of the new network of bicycle and unpowered vehicle roads and supporting infrastructure.

The pace of things in this new world is such that I found I still needed more to be involved in, so I joined the Treaty and Trade Negotiations Team based in Moskva. My background gives me a good understanding of how to negotiate trade agreements with non-transitioned countries and businesses, and international treaties are virtually the same kind of process.

At first it was hard to get used to peer-based collaboration and decision making. But I got used to it and pretty good at it. Sometimes I may still forget myself and talk down to someone like I once would have spoken to an employee, subordinate, or a politician who was trying to interfere with my agenda, but when that happens, my colleagues give it right back to me, or someone might say something like "Oh I see old Joe Stalin decided to make an appearance!" or "Looks like Yuri needs a time-out."

My experience also made me want to take it further, so I joined the International Transition Support and Advisory Syndicate. When invited, we mobilize and go to a country near, in, or just past transition as advisors, trainers, and just to help out however is needed. My specialty is in working with people like I used to be, the oligarchs, power brokers, billionaires, CEO's and others who need extra help making sense of the new social model and finding their place in it. I find that we WPP (wealth, power, and privilege) addicts are pretty similar across cultures and countries. Just as I first learned in my own rehab, it takes an addict to help an addict, and only someone with your own particular addiction can truly get you and what you're going through and gain your trust.

I'm proud to say I was part of the team who went to the United States, Mexico, South Africa, and India after their transitions. Irina likes to kid me and tell me I'm a glorified midwife, helping people to give birth to their new selves.

Oh, and the U.S. was an emergency due to their rough time transitioning and the potential for violence. We Russian team members flew in on a repurposed former private jet which I'm pretty sure was my old one.

Irina and I rediscovered our relationship, which had come to take a second seat to our respective careers and projects. It was like having a second honeymoon and being newlyweds a second time.

Since transition I've lost some things and gained others. I no longer control vast resources and many people, but what they told me in rehab and even before is true: I can do pretty much everything I could do before, but some of it I have to do differently. We have no private jet or helicopter, but whenever we want, we can go to Riga or Petrograd and stay in a nice place. What I used to devote my biggest efforts to, gaining wealth, control, and privilege is of course gone, but I still have the same level of freedom and ability to go where I want and get things done and have nice things as I had before. Now everybody has that, which I gradually realized didn't take anything away from me. So now what I used to put most of my energy into getting is a given, so I don't need wealth or power to have that, and I'm now free of the grip of my addiction. Now I'm able to focus instead on making a difference, being able to look at the lights of Moskva at night and say, "I had a big hand in making this happen."

Yekaterina: Amazing! So you'd say you made a successful adjustment to life after transition. How have your fellow former oligarchs fared?

Yuri: I actually prefer the term "recovered WPP addict" instead of "oligarch." It's more accurate, and it helps remind me of the reality so I'm less likely to romanticize it and long for the "good old days" instead of making the most out of the present.

Most of us did go through rehab sooner or later and are now doing well in this strange new social economic system. There are a few, however who haven't been able to find their place or niche. Take Vlad for instance.

Yekaterina: Vladimir Putin?

Yuri: Yes, that's the one. We're all getting on in years to say the least, though some recent medical breakthroughs have lengthened our meaningful lifespans. The older you get, the harder it can be to adapt to change!

Vlad is a sad example of someone who just can't do it. He's the oldest among us, and has had the hardest time adjusting. His addiction is stronger than he is.

In the first few years after transition, he managed to find a number of loyalists and some assorted criminals. He put together a small private army. He tried to stage a coup to put himself back in power. There were armed clashes with the military. There were injured and killed on both sides. They tried to storm the Assembly and take members hostage, but special units of the army anticipated this, contained them, and disarmed them with sleeping gas after negotiators, including myself, failed to convince them to surrender. I know the use of sleeping gas has been controversial because technically it is a nerve agent. Some consider it a weapon of mass destruction, but it isn't. All it does is induce sleep within about thirty seconds of exposure, and then you wake up half an hour to an hour later with no ill effects except feeling groggy and thirsty. I experienced it myself during that same incident; it doesn't discriminate between friend and foe!

It does have the potential for abuse, to be sure, but we're talking about the military. All weapons of war have the potential for abuse in the wrong hands. Of course there are other, more traditional means such as tear gas, fire hoses and various kinds of ordnance, but sleeping gas seems to be the lesser of evils in many circumstances. Since transition, I believe the danger of abuse by the military and police is lower than it's ever been historically, for a number of reasons.

But I'm digressing. I was talking about Vlad.

He and his followers were tried and convicted of their crimes. They were all given psych evaluations and put in treatment programs to try to help them. Some of them did respond to treatment, some didn't, including Vlad. Those were put in quarantine villages, which have largely replaced traditional prisons, which were unjustifiably and counterproductively brutal. In case you aren't familiar with quarantine villages, they are not euphemisms for some kind of gulag. Based on pre-existing Norwegian and German models, residents are indeed securely prevented from leaving the village, but they each have their own apartment with all of the amenities. They can move about freely on the premises. Staff are there not just to keep them contained and handle any potential incidents, but also to see to their wellbeing.

I visited him a number of times, both alone and with others from our group of friends and former frienemies, but he never got past withdrawals. He tried to convince us to join forces and restore the old order and unite the Greater Russia to dominate the world. Nothing we could do or say made any difference. He was angry, frustrated, and miserable.

Yekaterina: So what became of him? Is he still alive?

Yuri: He's very much alive and happy. Since he couldn't free himself of the need to dominate others and rebuild the Russian Empire with himself as Emperor, that's exactly what he's been given.

Yekaterina: I don't understand.

Yuri: He opted to live in virtual and mixed reality, what is called "palliative guided delusions." He has his place in the quarantine village, all decked out to look like a few rooms in a palace. He wears a state of the art Virtual and Mixed Reality rig and lives in a reality where he retook power and is expanding Russia on the way to world domination. Mixed reality means he can see, hear and smell both the VR-generated content and actual reality. So he feeds himself, bathes and takes care of himself. When staff interact with him, they take on personas of subordinates and act the part. If you talk to him now, you'll see that this is all real to him. I and his old frienemies are discouraged from visiting him spontaneously, but only when the visit can be worked into the framework of his delusions and we act the part, in order to avoid inducing cognitive dissidence.

I think it was a really elegant solution. Since Vlad can't overcome his addiction and would be miserable and a danger to others otherwise, this allows him to live out his life happy and healthy while hurting no one.

Yekaterina: That's amazing and very informative. Thank you so much for being so open and forthcoming. Is there anything else you'd like to say to readers now and in the the future?

Yuri: I'd like to say that, in spite of my early distrust and skepticism, I now believe that this new social and economic setup is a historic step in a good direction. But don't ever let yourself be lulled into thinking it can't go wrong or that it can't be improved on. Stay awake and aware of yourself and your surroundings and the people around you. Question everything and always speak up for the good and against the bad. Don't be lazy! Throw your whole self into life and don't hold back! The artificial obstacles are gone, but your happiness, achievements, and fulfillment are up to you to create. Nothing and no one is holding you back. And don't ever let anyone take this away from you!

Yekaterina: Thank you, Yuri. Can we follow up at some point?

Yuri: My door is always open and you have my number, my email, my NoviMir address, and my one and only home address.

Tzvetlana Borodin — Russian Federation

> **Note:** This fictional account was written when the Transition was imagined as a single, rapid, coordinated event. Further research into the historical record has since shown a gradual, voluntary approach to be more viable and sustainable; the novel is preserved as originally written (author's note; the current Roadmap).

Interviewer: Yekaterina Tsiolkova, Russian Federation

Interviewee: Tzvetlana Borodin, Russian Federation

Yekaterina: Thank you, Tzvetlana, for agreeing to do this interview. How are you today?

Tzvetlana: I'm very busy but doing well. I'm honored that you asked me and happy to be involved. I like your idea of preserving this moment in history for future generations to read. It will never come again. And how are you?

Yekaterina: I'm also doing well, other than a little jet lagged from the flight.

You, like me, are in what people call Generation T, but I'll ask you questions as though I wasn't and didn't know what that is like.

So how soon were you born after transition?

Tzvetlana: The summer after, in July so it was only a few months.

Yekaterina: Can you tell me a bit about your childhood, the significant moments, the overall flavor of those years, let's say from your earliest memories to starting high school?

Tzvetlana: I'll do my best.

I was the first child, so for a while I was an only child. I think my earliest memory is of my mom and dad putting me to bed. Most nights I seem to remember they were both there. My dad would gently toss me up in the air and catch me. I would laugh because it felt good and funny. Then he would do it again. Then they would tell me what they would do tomorrow, and then they would sing me to sleep. Sometimes Mom would sing, sometimes Dad would sing, sometimes they sang together. They were a little off key, but I didn't know that then.

I also remember when I was about four I think, it snowed so much that winter that we had to dig a tunnel to get out the front door. I thought it was a lot of fun and I felt all grown up when they let me help dig, but they didn't seem to like it as much as I did. I remember Dad saying something about how can it get this cold after three years that were the hottest ever.

I also remember my mom and dad and me going to the community garden. As soon as I could walk, they would take me with them several times a week to do gardening, usually in the evenings. They let me help them plant and weed and even pick some vegetables when they were ripe. Again, I felt all grown up and important!

Many neighbors and other people would come too, and there were a lot of kids, so I made a lot of friends. Sometimes we would forget to work and play instead. Sometimes we would have races to see who could plant or pick the fastest. I really enjoyed those times.

Mom and Dad also took me to concerts and plays at the Community Cultural Center. Or sometimes they had someone babysit me while they went, if they thought wouldn't enjoy it. There were also neighborhood activities for children of all ages.

Then when I was five, my brother Igor was born. I was excited and also confused. Suddenly Mom and Dad didn't spend as much time with me. I thought Igor was cute and I felt a little afraid I might break him, and I liked to spend time with him, but I also resented the attention that he was getting that I wasn't.

Then two years later, Alexei was born. Suddenly I was the eldest of three. But I was often at friends' houses and my friends often came over to our place. It felt like we were a much bigger family, since Mom and Dad were friends with most of their parents.

My friend Katrina's parents had a big blow-up when I was ten, and she stayed in the children's wing at the neighborhood hostel for a few months until her parents divorced after family counseling didn't work. I invited her over for dinner most evenings since my mom's cooking was better than at the hostel. Her mom soon moved to another place that was available and Katrina lived back and forth between them. My mom and dad said she was lucky this happened after transition because before it, there would have been a big fight in court, and there would have been no house for her mom to move into and not enough of anything for both her mom and dad to live.

By then we'd studied in history class about transition and what things were like before that, after we studied the Tzarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet eras. When Katrina's parents broke up and decided to separate, she broke down crying in class, and our teacher stopped the lesson and suggested that we focus on supporting her.

A few kids laughed at Katrina at first. The teacher chided them and said it is always wrong to laugh at someone's pain. What if one day one of them had something happen? How would they feel about being laughed at?

Katrina opened up about how horrible it felt when her mom and dad were fighting, how she felt unsafe, especially when they told her to go to her room and then she heard things being thrown and breaking. That was why she was staying at the hostel. Most of us invited her to stay at our homes until she felt safe to come home.

Andrei Topol asked, "I thought transition meant that these things won't happen anymore. That everyone would be happy and get along. I don't understand."

"Well, it's not quite that simple," our teacher explained, "what transition did was take away most of the unfair and unnecessary things that blocked people from having what they needed. Before transition, some people, like we talked about in history class, kept so much of everything for themselves that most people didn't have enough. This made many people have to fight over not enough of everything. Transition stopped that. Now everyone can have what they need and most of what they want. They are freer to follow their dreams.

But that doesn't mean everyone will get along or that everyone will be happy. I'm thinking of you two, Sasha and Mikhail. And you, Tatyana and Tzvetlana. It just means there is less in the world around you standing in your way. But it's up to each of you to make the most of your life, find your happiness, and make your dreams come true. And get along!

Some people just don't get along or like each other. That's the same before and after transition. And the same is true for groups of people. Ukrainians and Gruzians don't like Russians even though all three countries have had transition, because we invaded them and our army did some very bad things there. That's why there's still some fighting between tribes, and between black people and white people in South Africa even after their transition. There is still violence between Muslims, Christians, and Hindus in India and Pakistan.

As far as marriages are concerned, before transition, about half of all married and domestic partnerships lasted until one partner's death and half ended in divorce or breakup. Since transition, the statistics have improved: 73.2 percent last and 26.8 percent divorce or break up. That implies that the various stresses of the old system were responsible for about half of failed relationships. But not all.

Transition fixed a lot that was wrong with the world before, but there's no one thing that can solve all problems or guarantee things will be perfect. But we can keep finding ways to make things better for ourselves."

Early on, when I was about twelve, I got fascinated with woodworking. My Life Skills teacher took extra time teaching me basic carpentry and woodcarving, but soon took me to meet several carpenters and woodcarvers in the local syndicate. I enrolled in the youth apprenticeship program where I would go most days after school except on days when I played basketball.

By the time I graduated high school, I was a journeyman carpenter and got to work on the crews for several big remodeling and construction projects, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

Mom and Dad said that before transition, most people felt like work was something unpleasant that they had to do to get money for living, and play was something you liked to do but only if you had time after work was done. Only a lucky few could get money for doing something they liked doing. I'm so glad I missed that! It sounds awful! It's not like that now, of course!

I also never lost my love for gardening, and the same was true for the other kids I'd always met there. That was mostly on weekends. We were kind of like a bunch of sisters and brothers. Once we were banned from the garden for a season for planting something medicinal but not exactly legal.

Igor was five years younger than me, and Alexei was seven years younger, so we didn't hang out together a lot, but at home we mostly got along. When I was in my teens, I had to babysit a lot. I wasn't thrilled but I tried to make it fun for the three of us, which wasn't always easy. Of course, now they're in high school so they're into their own things.

Igor is really athletic and if there's a sport to play, he's on the team. Alexei is into VuKu music, always following the latest songs. He's in a band that rehearses in off hours at the cultural center, much to our relief. I don't like VuKu, it makes me feel like my teeth are going to fall out.

I had a problem with Tatyana Markova and two of her friends. For some reason, she decided she didn't like me and wanted to make my life difficult, and her friends Pesya an Oksana followed her like a couple of lost puppies. I think at first it was because of my red hair. Tatyana would call me Tomato Head and I hated it. They would make an extra effort to find me and hassle me.

After several teachers noticed the situation, they did a kind of social intervention, which helped some but then Tatyana and her friends would wait for me after school. Finally I found out that they were also picking on Olga Fyodorovna. The two of us decided we had enough. We waited for the bullies after school and sure enough they showed up. Word had gotten around that there would be a fight, we made sure of that. When they confronted us, we were quickly surrounded by other students. I spoke first, "OK, Tatty, let's see how brave you are one on one, or even three on two!"

Pesya and Oksana weren't so brave, so it was me against Tatyana, punching and slapping and rolling on the ground until a couple of teachers broke us up and marched us off to the office. The teachers were all there and the school psychologists. Our parents were called. It's hard to say who won the fight, but after that I didn't have any more problems with those three.

My first week of high school, we had to move, all five of us, into the family wing of the neighborhood hostel while our home was fumigated for those little white moths that were everywhere, after bug bombs didn't work. We turned it into a kind of adventure. We pretended that we were on vacation in an exotic place. Mom and Dad said that before transition, there was no hostel. I wondered what people did in those days. Mom said the fumigation would have meant they had to pay a lot of money, and they would also have had to pay more money to have a place to stay and for food. Many people would have to just live with the bugs if they didn't have enough money.

I've never really understood about money. I know what we learned in school, and I've seen some old video and adver… adver…

Yekaterina: Advertising.

Tzvetlana: Yes. Advertising. It must have been very confusing to live in those times! How did you know what was real or true?

Maybe you can help me understand? You're a historian and a journalist, right?

Yekaterina: That's right. I wasn't old enough to remember those times but I'll do my best.

Tzvetlana: Let me tell you what I think I understand, and you let me know if I'm on the right track.

So there was this thing called money that could be pieces of paper with artwork printed on it, or round pieces of metal, or little pieces of plastic, or bits on a computer somewhere, and some places it was other things like ceramic disks or sea shells. Somehow these all were the same. And you needed to have a bunch of it to give other people or else they wouldn't let you eat or drink or sleep or study or anything.

And there were so many people you had to give it to, and some of those people weren't even real people but kind of like countries but different. Corpo… Corpa…?

Yekaterina: Corporations.

Tzvetlana: Yes, corporations. So, you had to give a bunch of this money all the time to one person to let you live someplace, and to another person to let you get food, and to another person to let you have clothes and shoes and tools and I guess everything but air. Is that right? Or did you have to give someone money for air too?

Yekaterina: No. That was the one thing you didn't need money for.

Tzvetlana: So, you had to find a way to get a lot of this money all the time or you could die. But money was hard to get unless you already had a ginormous amount of it, in which case it multiplied on its own like plutonium at critical mass?

But only a very few people had that much money and they could block you from everything if you didn't keep giving them more, kind of like the Tzars before the Soviets, so everyone had to keep finding money. But those few people made sure there wasn't enough money for everyone, and you had to do work for them and they would give you a little money and then they would tell you how much you had to give them back to get different things.

Yekaterina: It was more complicated than that, but that's the basic idea of how it worked. Many of the corporations were too big to deal with everyone individually so some people would give money to someone to let them use a place, then they would give money to a corporation to get things to put in this place, so you would go to this place and give them money for them to give you things. You would have to give them more money than they gave to the corporation, because they needed money too. Those places were called stores, kind of like distribution centers but different.

If you were a carpenter and I wanted you to build me something, you would have to make me give you money. You would have to decide how much to ask for, based on how much you needed each month to give others.

There were no syndicates, so as a writer I would have to find a corporation who would give me money for my writing, or as a historian I would need to find a university who would give me money to teach and write and do research. If I couldn't find either, I'd have to do whatever work someone would give me money to do, even if I hated it and wasn't good at it, in which case they would probably give me less money than I needed to give others. If that happened, I would have to borrow money from someone who had a lot of it, and then give them back later a lot more than I had borrowed.

Tzvetlana: What would have happened if I walked into a distribution center and got what I needed but didn't give them money, or if I moved into a vacant apartment without giving anyone any money?

Yekaterina: Police would have put you in a big cage for a long time.

Tzvetlana: So, I guess I sort of get how it worked, but I still don't get why. It doesn't make sense to me. It's like saying you can't walk a kilometer in a straight line, but instead you have to walk around the block every twenty meters or get put in a cage. How did people get anything done?

Yekaterina: A lot of times they didn't. There was everything needed to do something but not enough money, so it wouldn't get done.

Tzvetlana: So why did they keep doing it that way for so long? And why do a few countries still do it?

Yekaterina: That's a great question that psychologists and sociologists are still trying to answer. I think it's the same reason why we had Tzars for so long and the Soviet system for so long. That's also why it's hard for people to change things in their lives, even when they aren't working for them, because it's all they know.

Most people don't question or think much about the way their societies do things. They look at it as just a fact of life like gravity or the weather.

Change isn't easy; it's always hard and many people resist it, especially when it's a change into something completely new.

Every culture likes to think it's the best, most natural way to be and do things. So, when the idea comes up to change something from the way it's always been done, it's hard for people to look at it objectively.

That's my perspective as a historian. I've seen this kind of thing play out over and over in different places and times.

But the old ways were becoming unsustainable and increasingly destructive to human life and the environment. It became inescapably clear that a major paradigm shift was absolutely necessary, and soon. And it had to be something that hadn't been done on that scale before. Transition was a change whose time had come.

Mr. Svoboda's book lit the fire, but the world was and is full of the dry tinder awaiting that spark. I think if Mr. Svoboda hadn't written it, someone else would have.

Tzvetlana: It's funny. You're only a few years older than me, yet you just sounded almost like you were there! You are so wise!

Yekaterina: No, just fascinated with history since I was eight or so. It's my biggest passion. Like you with woodworking. I bet you could teach me a lot!

Tzvetlana: You're probably right about that.

Yekaterina: So now, Tzvetlana, what are you doing now, and what are your plans for the future?

Tzvetlana: Right now, I'm in my third year at Petrograd State University, triple majoring in materials science, fine arts with a focus on sculpture, and agricultural sciences.

I'd like to travel and see more of Russia, Asia, and Europe, so this summer I'm planning to finish my training as a long-haul truck driver so when I feel the wanderlust I can list myself as available on the Truckers' Syndicate on NoviMir. My boyfriend, Pavel, and I want to do it together and list ourselves as a long-haul team.

We met in the physics lab in our first year, and things happened pretty quickly. It's my first long-term relationship. He's also an artist, a painter. Some people who see both of our work think we're the same artist in a different medium.

My woodcarving grew into sculpture in stone and ceramic as well. I've had some very popular exhibits at galleries around the city and one in Vladivostok. I was honored as Oblast Artist of the Month two years ago in August. My story was on NoviMir of course, but also on television, a live interview and everything! It was so exciting!

Once I've satisfied my travel goals, I want to study architecture. That combines carpentry with the idea of buildings as sculptures that you can live and work in.

I'd love to be able to visit one of the moon research stations some day. I don't know if I will qualify or be accepted, but I want to try. I think the landscapes there must be inspiring, and I'd like the challenge of designing and building for that environment and making it more aesthetic than the kinds of things they usually build there…

Pavel and I will probably get married in a couple of years or so, and we've both been talking about having a couple of kids, but not right away.

Mom and Dad and other older people tell me it used to be very hard to have kids because you needed a lot of money to take care of them, so there was a lot of stress. Parents had to spend most of their time doing things to get money, so they didn't have much time to be with their kids. It sounds like it was almost impossible to do much of anything.

Yekaterina: In a lot of ways that was true, but back then it was all they knew. They thought it was the best we could do.

Tzvetlana: So maybe one day there'll be some other kind of transition and afterwards people will feel like our way was sadly harsh and unworkable.

Yekaterina: If it ever becomes necessary, let us hope that our descendants will make it happen.

Tzvetlana: Is there anything else you want me to talk about?

Yekaterina: Do you have anything you'd like to say to future readers?

Tzvetlana: I feel like this is a great time to be alive, and I hope it will keep on like that. I feel like anything we can imagine is possible, like there's promise in the air of great things. From what I hear, it wasn't like that before transition.

If you're reading this in the future, I hope it's still like this in your time. If it isn't, then please do something about it. Don't just leave it broken if it's broken.

If it is still like it is now, then make the most of it! Grab life like a dance partner and dance with all your might! Never stop! I think that's how we can keep the gains and growth we've made! Don't be sleepwalkers! Question everything and turn every stone! I hope your world is even more awesome than ours is now!

Yekaterina: Thank you, Tzvetlana, for your vivid and inspiring sharing! Would you be willing to have a follow up interview in a few years or so? We hope to paint a four-dimensional picture of the times we live in.

Tzvetlana: Yes, of course! This has been great! And it's kind of awe-inspiring to think that someone may be reading my words a hundred or two hundred years from now!

Yekaterina: Yes, it is! Thank you again and see you in a few years. I can't wait to hear all about what you do in the meantime. Take good care of yourself and have success.

Tzvetlana: You too!

Jamal Robbins — United States

> **Note:** This fictional account was written when the Transition was imagined as a single, rapid, coordinated event. Further research into the historical record has since shown a gradual, voluntary approach to be more viable and sustainable; the novel is preserved as originally written (author's note; the current Roadmap).

Interviewer: Jimmy Norris, United States of America

Interviewee: Jamal Robbins, United States of America

Jimmy: Hi Jamal. Thank you for agreeing to be part of this project. It's a pleasure to meet you.

Jamal: It's cool. I hope no one will ever have to go through what I did. Too many people do back then. We was really stomped down. Maybe it's good to know how bad it was before, so no one will, like, take what we have now for granted.

Jimmy: That's the whole idea.

Do you feel OK about telling me a bit about your background, your life history growing up? I saw the notes from your screening interview, so I know it was pretty bad.

Jamal: Well, I signed up for this, so I'll spit for you.

My momma get pregnant with me when she be, like, seventeen. She and my dad be high school sweethearts or something like that. They was in Texas, so they couldn't get birth control or nothing like that, and there was no sex ed, man, teacher could go away for ten years for just for telling them where to find out about that stuff. So they don't know what was what, so like I said, my momma got pregnant with me.

She and my daddy wasn't ready for that, no way, so they wanted to get an abortion but like I said it was Texas so there was no way even if you was raped by your daddy. And there was no money to go out of state and get past the pregger patrols and bounty hunters looking to cash in on turning you in for going outta state to get dump-trucked.

So she had me. My daddy couldn't handle it so he freaked and Houdini'ed, so my momma was on her own with me. My grampa and gramma was in one of them churches where they was big on kicking people to the curb for, well I guess for being human from what I hear. They kicked momma out, said she had shamed the family or some crap like that. So momma and me was in and out of shelters before I could walk or remember that far back.

Finally, when I was like one year old, Momma got hooked up with one of them aid groups and they get her a ticket to Cally which was supposed to be better. I guess it was, but that means Texas must have been some serious pig snot like I never seen. Momma said it wasn't always like that.

So L.A. was what I remember.

She say when we get there, there was people set to help us, even hook her up to become a hairdresser, help us get a crib and all. They got a program.

First, they put us in some shelter; Momma say it was some nasty pig snot up in there. I don't remember none of that, but Momma say after about a month, this aid program helping us got shut down cuz they got no money and no one helping them get any. Someone cut funding and the whole thing just gone, just like that. So we was jammed up in the streets, don't know no one, effed up the yin-yang.

Momma wasn't bad, but not good either. She was in over her head. And she be all over the place. One minute she be all cuddly and calling me her precious baby boy, her gift from God; then later she be like she never wanted me, but they made her, so I be why her life be so messed up.

She had a bunch of dead-end jobs. McDonald's, Walmart, the bodega down the street, I don't know what all. I remember lotsa times she leave me home, when we had one, or in the library or YWCA when we didn't, while she went

to work.

It got maybe a little better when I was old enough for school, but not really. I wasn't bored no more, but I learned real quick to watch my six. Got burnt a couple times, my ass kicked real good by some older kids. Teachers were no help, most times. I clicked to where not to be and when, who was bad juju and who was good in a jam. They call it school but not much learning going on in class, mostly outside. Black like me gotta stay clear of white and brown. But everyone dissed me cuz of my Texas accent.

Momma finally got a old cranky car off Craigslist so we crashed there when we got no crib. Had to pile up a bunch of junk over us so the po-po don't zoom on us.

Even when Momma be working, mostly we live in the car cuz she couldn't make first and last and cleaning deposit for a crib. Some days we eat, or not.

Momma was always talking bout going to school to be a hairdresser or beautician, but she never had the scratch. So we went round the same track over and over again.

I started blowing school and hanging in the park, hooked up with some other kids who was on their own doing OK, told me 'bout some houses no one living in near the airport, a whole bunch of them and the po-po don't go up in there much cuz too dangerous. I told Momma but she said no she don't wanna go there. She said she wanna get respectable and all.

I was around nine when we finally got into a Section 8 crib. Momma had a job better than before. We was barely in when one morning my daddy showed up all decked out, suit and tie, said he wanted to do right by us. He said he did a tour in the Army but hated it so didn't re-up. Then the Jehova's Witnesses got into him, so he came to marry Momma and "bring us into The Truth" and raise me in there.

Momma said no effing way, he got a lotta nerve showing up after all this time. She had a few boyfriends sometimes, but nothing serious. She just trying to survive. I didn't know him but I clicked he my daddy from pix on Momma's phone. But she always say he long gone.

Daddy said he sorry what he done when he was young and stupid, but now he know "The Truth" and he wanna save us. He wanna marry Momma but she gotta be saved first.

"I don't need no saving, not by you, not by anybody! You made your choice when you Houdini'ed. Nothing for you here now."

Daddy asked her to listen to him for a few before bouncing him. Momma said he got fifteen minutes.

So, he talked about Jehovah and end days and everybody gonna die but only the JW's be coming back and hurry up cuz not much time left. He had books and magazines. He be spitting all kinds of trash about all the other religions got it wrong, only JW's be saved.

I didn't get most of it, but it was schitzy-scary. I wanted none of it. I thinking Daddy gone all zombie. Better sleep in the car than this. If he stay with us, I sleep with a blade and one eye open.

Momma watching her phone, say "OK, your fifteen minutes is up. I know enough about those people. They run your life; they control you, everything you do, who you can be friends with. They ain't no better than my momma and daddy and their sick sad church. Hell, JW's don't even do Christmas!"

"But this is The Truth! I want us to be together as a family in the Kingdom!"

"Shut the hell up! At least before, you was just a scared, stupid kid. We both was. But now you all high and mighty trying to save us but you still the same scared stupid kid but now you just got more fear!"

Daddy tried to get Momma to come back to Texas. Momma say only her dead body ever go back to that hellhole. If anyone ask me, I say the same. I don't want him near me.

Momma said she gotta go to work, and I gotta go to school, so he gotta bounce.

For a week or more, he kept coming over, trying to get Momma to drink his Kool-Aid. Once he show up with two spiffs dressed up like bankers, try to put the fear of God into Momma, but she put the fear of God into them and they bounce out real quick.

A couple times he alone with me, tried his Jehovah crap on me. I be scared of his ass. I try to be tough like in the movies, but I just start bawling, ran to the closet, slammed the door and hold on tight. I hear Momma come back from the kitchen, ask him what he done to me, he said nothing, just showed me his books. She told him never do that again and bounced him then and there.

After the second time, he was scarce for a while. He moved to L.A., got a job and a room somewhere. He come around every so often, give Momma some money a few times. She didn't want to take it but in the end she did. We like really needed it. He keep pushing his Jehovah crap but that door locked tight.

School was something to get through. There was the gangs. They ran the place, even the grade school. They like always in your face. But I don't want to join them. They as bad as Daddy's Jehovah, control you, beat you down. I wasn't like that, and sure I smoked a blunt sometimes, but I don't like it much, and I get the munchies but no food to eat. I don't like being high, I need to be sharp to stay on top! When you high, you stupid. Bad move.

I blow off school a lot, hang with the same kids living in them boarded-up houses by the airport. They was protection but not wack like the gangs. They watch my back, I watch theirs. They not all mean and low-down like the gangs. They always saying come join them any time, but I still wanna stick with my momma, and I see how hard on her not finish high school, so I wanna finish, maybe be a little easier for me than her. My grades not great but, like, still passing.

The thing is everyone know things getting worse and worse. Momma say and teacher say in my great grand mama and daddy time, kids always had it better than moms and dads. And always before. Then something changed. Now kids always got it worse than moms and dads.

Momma say in my great gramma's time, work be forty hours a week. Now it be fifty-five if you lucky. Now there be three trillionaires run just about everything, tell everyone what to do, and a few hundred billionaires run the rest. Then there be the rest of us. We get what be too micro for them to bother with after they Roomba the place. That be some seriously messed up pig snot.

Then things got a little better for a few years. She got her GED, a better job. She start talking about maybe go to Community College, become a hairdresser, if she can get financial aid.

But then when I was, I dunno, maybe twelve, Momma get a boyfriend who moved in. At first he seemed OK but he got mean. If he watching TV, if I get in the way or if I bother him in any way, he yell at me, cuss at me, call me a worthless piece of sh*t, maybe backhand me or throw something at me. Momma try to make him stop but he yell at her, tell her keep her rug rat outta his way.

When Momma and me alone, I beg her to bounce him and change the locks, but she say he got a good job, bring in good money so she can go to Community College and be a hairdresser. She say he not bad, just messed up from being in the war. She say he getting help at the VA for his anger, he, like, getting better. She say just be patient and try to stay out of his way. But they maybe cut funding for the VA anyway, so then there be like no hope.

I waited but he never get better. So I called my Daddy, since I no longer afraid of him, told him I want to move with him. I figured he and his Jehovah crap, maybe better than living with Marcus at Momma's.

So Momma and Daddy had a big fight while Marcus be at work but they agree me moving to Daddy's be a good idea. Best for all of us.

I give those Jehovah mooks one thing, they got my daddy straight, work hard, help Momma when he can.

Daddy still not Daddy to me, but I moved that day. It was rough from the start. I had to sleep on the sofa-bed in the living room. Right away he drag me to his Jehovah meetings, seemed like every night, plus Sunday. I hated it. I try to sleep but he spike me with his elbow every few minutes. If I try to listen, I'm bored out of my gourd.

Worse, it was all BS. God loves us but he only gonna bring back JW's after they dead, and not all of them either. The rest die dead. And the ones who live gotta bow to some big king dude who controls everything. And this Jehovah set it up like that from the get-go, so he as messed up as these mooks who believe that. Real Kool-Aid stuff. I'm not down with anyone try to control me.

The good thing with my daddy, though, he teach me all about construction, how to like use tools, and he sneak me into job sites to see how it goes and stuff. His peeps was cool with it, cuz some of them also bring their kids even younger than me. He even show me how to run some of the machines, a little bit. I liked that. Made me feel like I can do stuff, move stuff, not always have to go with what Momma or Daddy or teachers or gangs say.

I think if I get a job like that, not have to live with Mommy or Daddy, be free. I kept that part in my locker but I asked Daddy can I get a construction job too. He say the law say not until I'm 18, but he say I can pass for 18 if I let my beard grow some and dress and act just so and not talk too much, and I can go to Home Depot real early morning when there be folks looking to hire someone for a day job, and they pay under the table and don't ask no questions. But he say I can only go on Saturdays cuz I gotta stay in school weekdays and go to Kingdom Hall with him Sundays. He say it's a good way to get experience and know people, even if they pay less than a regular job.

I not argue with him about school, but tell him Sundays I wanna work cuz I rather die dead than die and come back to his zombie heaven. He got mad but not hit me, but he pray real fast and hard to his Jehovah God to drive the devil from his son, and he made me talk to an 'elder' who wasn't no older than him. The elder try to change my mind. I make like a war prisoner. Not give up anything. Made my face wood. I say something I saw on TV "I refuse to answer on the grounds that it may tend to incinerate me." He asked me to pray to Jehovah God so I say "Jehovah God, would you, like, leave me the f*** alone!" After that my dad and the elder went off and talked while I had to wait. So at least that one prayer worked!

I guess Momma and me was kinda alike. She putting up with Marcus until she become a hairdresser and hoping he change some. Me putting up with Daddy's Jehovah cray-cray, hoping me back off some until I finish high school and can get construction work and get my own crib.

So I worked day jobs Saturdays, got pretty good at construction. School was school. Sundays was for Daddy and me fighting. He always spitting my-house-my-rules, and this-is-for-your-own-good and crap like that. I spit you can drag my ass there, but my mind is mine, you can't make me believe or drink your Kool-Aid. It was like that every Sunday.

He not bad but not good either.

Finally, I graduated. I was seventeen. Still too young to get a real job so I keep going to Home Depot for day jobs. I give some scratch from my jobs to Daddy to help out, but he not let go his Jehovah crap, so I go with my friends living in the boarded-up house.

It be cool there. We had lights cuz one dude hooked up to the grid. We had water but no gas so we cooked on fires out back and there was an old microwave and a hot plate from a garage sale. It was tight, a lot of us. I found a spot in the living room on a couple of yoga mats. The rug was so thick, coulda been a big bed.

I never seen a place with so much space, 'cept in movies and on TV! It was so rad! How come Daddy working hard and only living in one room, Momma too, 'cept she had a bedroom, and this place so big and no one living in it, 'cept us? And there's a shitload of them, nothing wrong with them but signs up saying they gonna tear them down? And so many still homeless? Don't make no sense.

Mostly, everybody got along, like, let each other be, even had each other's back. We all had our hard stories, hurts, bad dreams, people we hiding from or wanna get away from, or just had no place and nobody. Everyone different but all kinda the same.

Someone wake up screaming or crying, someone come hold them, and we all listen to each other. Make each other feel better for a minute. No one in anyone's face with Jehovah crap or ragging on each other. Sure, not everyone click with everyone, but give each other breathing room. And we mostly got food, between dumpster diving and us'ns who had jobs scored in the stores. This was the best I ever had. I mean, like, I love my Momma but no way with that Marcus a-hole; Daddy was OK I guess, but never give me no peace.

We got Black, Latino, White, and I dunno what all up in there. We had ones praying to Jesus, ones praying to Allah, some no pray just swear, and some not say much. We all hurting, we all lost, we all confused, but we all together. There was maybe three homes like that. The youngest was like eight or nine, the oldest was like maybe forty or fifty. We don't use our real names. I was JoJo. Sometimes there was a fight or two, but always got straightened out pretty quick.

Still we had to watch out. Mostly these houses was empty, but there was a few with gangs in them, or cray-cray. And there was the ones living in their cars and motor homes and whatnot around the edge of it all. Some of them was real cool, some was wack but harmless, and some was some serious pig snot. We got to remember which ways to go in and out, which ways to stay clear, and when. Always we knew that someday the po-po gonna bust it up, but not yet, maybe never. They rather be eating donuts and scratching parking tickets than stick their nose in this rats nest. We the rats so we cool.

But it wasn't no Beverly neither. We all had lice, and there was roaches and flies all over, and summer we was cooked well done even nights. Couldn't get SNAP cuz you gotta have an address and we couldn't use the one we living at. I ask my daddy, but he say no cuz it be lying, and Momma say no cuz Marcus say no. And sometimes gunshots, never know if one come in.

I turned eighteen so now I can work a regular construction job, more pay, better jobs, maybe even union. I got names, talked to them. So now I find out I gotta have a bank account, and an address, and a social security number and I got no idea what it is. They won't hire me without those. And I got no driver's license, and none for cranes and 'dozers and excavators and stuff like that. When I gonna get a break?

I got my Social from Momma, and she try to help me get a bank account, but I got no address so the bank say no and Momma won't let me use hers cuz Marcus. I ask her when she gonna deep-six that mofo. She says it's all complicated, but she got financial aid to study hairdressing and cosmetology at community college so she on her way.

I ask what if I get a PO Box, but bank say no. Gotta have a real address, just like SNAP.

So I keep working day jobs, getting underpaid cash under the table. Sometimes they treat me good, sometimes they treat me like dog poop. I think maybe I take a construction program at community college, fill in what I don't know, get some paper to back me up and meet more people, get hired as something more than just unskilled laborer. But they way too expensive, and like, how I spozed to live if I can't work when I'm in the program? I asked about financial aid like Momma got, but I couldn't get through the form. Don't understand what they want, dunno the answer when I do get what they want. And still I need an address I don't got.

Oh, and that was when I had my first serious girlfriend. Yeah, I fool around some in high school like everyone, but nothing serious. But Autumn was different. She from Oklahoma like me from Texas. We both the same age. Her momma and daddy both meth heads, cray-cray and mean, so she had to Houdini or die. She take some drug money from her momma and daddy and scored a Greyhound to Cally cuz she heard things was better there and her folks never find her there.

We sparked quick when she come in the house, but then we kept burning. We like two mirrors of each other. Like we was spozed to meet, like a setup but the good kind. We almost read each others mind. She make me feel safe like I never felt before, and she say I the same for her. And the others in the house give us space, even let us use a bedroom for just the two of us sometimes, when they see we really need it. She the only one I tell my real name, and she tell me hers, our secret.

We was tight in that house but we like never made up a name for it, cuz we don't wanna be like a gang. But sometimes if someone ask where we live, we say in the House With No Name. This come from a song on YouTube. There was seven of us always there and some others come and go.

Finally at community college they make a time for me to come in for someone to help me with the financial aid, maybe give me names and numbers I didn't know for peeps who help the likes of me. I feel best I ever felt, like maybe things gonna work out for me and for Autumn too.

Then the po-po be banging on the door, hard. We all go rabbit out the back like we practiced it, but the po-po waiting for us there too. They got their guns out. Made us get down on the ground. Only Chong and Sherice not home. They got all

of us, tore through the house looking for whatever or whoever, but nothing and no one to find. Heard them talking about drugs and stolen property. Musta gotten our crib mixed up with the gang a few blocks over, but these cribs all look a lot the same.

I yelled to Autumn if they split us up and we get out, let's meet at the IHOP. Pete yelled let's all do that.

So they dragged us all off to the cop shop, put us through the whole drill, threw us dudes into this big cell and took the chicks to a different one. The place super full. I see some dudes I know live in some of those motor homes and whatnot near our place, and the gang bangers too. And the other couple cribs like ours. Turns out the po-po got nothing better to do than sweep everyone up outta there. Something about department of health and crime and they can't tear it all down with us in it.

We was in there a few days. They come and took the younger ones off to drag them off back to where they came from. I hear Katie begging them not to send her back cuz her stepdad been beating her and banging her and all. They don't seem to care. Pedro say his family all dead in a car crash, got nowhere to go. They say something about foster, and we all know our crib a shitload better than that! Me and Snake and Autumn and Raj and Skye all eighteen or more so they leave us there a little longer.

When my turn come, I got this public defender sat with me the day before my case. He seem like a good dude but turns out he brand new. Mine his third case. He all on fire to get me off, but, like, do he know how? Seems like maybe no.

So you need me to stop? I spitting too much?

Jimmy: Oh, no, this is perfect! You're doing fine. Please continue!

Jamal: So the judge and my defender talk. My guy say I wasn't trespassing, that I got squatters' rights protect me and the rest of us. The judge say no cuz we not paying property tax or nothing, and we got power that we not pay for neither.

They go back and forth. The judge say he let me go with community service if I go back to my momma's or daddy's place, cuz he don't wanna be busy with this penny-ante stuff when he got cases backed up. Judge say he just wanna make sure I don't go back to the House With No Name.

My daddy say I can come any time, so I went with him. Got me outa there anyway. I ask if Autumn can come too, but he say no cuz we not married so it's sin. Big fight, him spitting Bible at me and me spitting smack at him. I don't want no one control me. Then he all praying to his Jehovah to change me, I shout hey J, how about you change him instead?

For my community service, I took Habitat for Humanity, cuz it seemed like it has to do with construction and maybe I could learn something about where to live when me and Daddy break again. Turns out it was mostly offloading trucks and moving things around their store, but I met some cool peeps.

This one dude, Ali, he a Muslim, but we clicked. All I know about that was they blew up some buildings in New York, so I ask him if that's what he was popped for. He look to go nuke and about to hit me, then changed his mind. He say "I get so sick of this shit! No, we don't believe in murder and terrorism, but because a few bad people did some horrible things in the name of Islam, everyone lumps us all in with them! But you don't seem like a hater to me. I think you're just ignorant, you don't know any better. If I tell you the truth, will you listen?"

"Sure. I always listen if you don't BS me."

So Ali spat me about Islam while we working together. Not what I thought, but I really didn't know nothing about it. So it was all about God but they call him Allah instead of Jesus. I like some of what I hear, like how you spozed to stand up to people putting other people down, and how everyone be brothers and sisters and all. A lot about compassion and mercy. And he say Jesus not God, he a prophet, kinda like drafted to take a message. I think maybe this may be good for me.

He not like my daddy or my gramma and grampa the way my momma tell it, not in your face and try to control me like that. But I ask him, "So how come they blew up buildings and people for Islam?"

Ali say "What, you don't think there's Christians and Hindus and Jews and others who do things just as bad in the name of God? What about the Crusades, and what Christians did to the Indians, and we have Hindus and Muslims fighting in

India, and Jews and Muslims fighting, and even Muslims fighting Muslims and Christians fighting Christians! People are too quick to judge a whole group by what a few bad people do! What those terrorists did is a crime against Allah, against Islam, and against humanity!"

"OK, I get it. I can't say Christians I know be all about love and forgiving. Yeah, I can see some of them blowing up buildings. I could see it. There's some mean zombie cray-cray up in there."

So I ask Ali tell me more. I be almost all set to do Shahada and all but then he tell me about how you can't eat pork or drink alcohol, and you gotta pray five times a day, and you gotta pray these words that I got no idea what they mean, and there's a whole month when you can't eat or even drink water as long as the sun be up, and a bunch of other stuff. I got no problem about the alcohol, but I ask him why, and he say cuz Allah say so. That when he lost me.

I don't want no one try to control me. Good reason rules, I got no problem. Like don't drive drunk. But some crap rule just cuz some mook say so, I not down with it. Sometimes you got no choice, but when I do got a choice, I'm gone. Seems like they do that a lot with religion, like my daddy and this Islam stuff and Texas where Momma from. If a God wanna tell me what to do, let him tell me hisself, then I ask him why, maybe I down with it, maybe no, and I tell him so. He go nuke on me, oh well.

I spit this to Ali, he surprise me. Not try to save me like my daddy. Just say OK, no problem. If I ever change my mind, I know where to find him. He say I gotta come cuz I wanna, not cuz someone make me. I like that. He a good dude.

I ask him what he got popped for. He say he not get popped, he volunteer cuz he wanna give back to the community, cuz of his religion, he supposed to care about people. Like I said, he a good dude. I think he do that even if he not Muslim.

Ya know, I got no nuke with anybody religion. Do what you want. Just don't try to tie me down with it. I don't know what I believe, too busy just getting through. Maybe one day I know. But people in my face with it don't help none!

I wait a few days, maybe a week, just working the day jobs, then go to IHOP. There's Chong and Sherice and Raj sharing nachos. I slide up, order coffee. Turns out Autumn and Skye in a shelter, Pete camping out in Santa Monica, and so on.

Chong say when he and Sherice come back from getting some scratch for a load of glass and aluminum, they scoped what happened, 'specially when they see everyone gone, the motor homes, the tents, even quiet by the gang crib, everyone gone. They snagged what they could and Houdini'ed. Chong say he got my bike safe. I say he can use it til I need it, and I owe him big. That bike get me to work and all. Sucks without it! Was cheap at the Goodwill. Sherice say they crashing in some bushes by the 405 but that not good for long.

Sherice say come back tomorrow same time, she'll tell Autumn so we hook up. We talk about going back to the house, but the way the po-po and the judge was talking, we think they be looking for us to come back, snag us again, so where we gonna go? Maybe they already dozing it like they talking about.

So we say let's all look around, see what we can find, check back here tomorrow. I go back to my community service at Habitat, ask around if anyone know a crib we can use.

That day there a new chick there, Keisha, she paying off a traffic ticket. She a nursing assistant, say she wanna be a RN but CNA all she got scratch for, but she hope it be a good first step.

She nice enough. We spit our life stories like BFF's while we working. Then she ask me if I got the cure.

"The cure for what? Do I look like a doctor?"

"No, I mean the book called The Cure. I think you might like to read it."

"What's it about?"

"It's about how our world is messed up, and how we can do something about it to make it better. It's about how to make things so you can have that house you were living in for your own without money. It's about how you can take any classes or training you want at community college or anyplace else you want, as long as you can do the work. It's about making it so everybody gets a good fair shot at a good life. It's about making it so people can't lord it over each other. It's about how to make that all happen."

“You got that right. Things messed up good. You say this book got something new?”

“Yup! Here, lemme send it to you. What’s your email, or your WhatsApp or whatever you use? You got the Nook app.”

So I give her my email address but my phone a real POS I got at Target for cheap, not good for much. She help me download the Nook app and download this book. She say it’s free, don’t cost nothing. I like that. She give me her email and number, say let her know I got any questions.

“OK. Must be some book, the way you going on about it.”

“There’s a shorter version maybe you should read first. If it grabs you, you’ll want to read the full version. There are rumors that there’ll be a novel, but so far no one’s seen it.” So she help me download it. Ali say he want it too, and a couple others. So pretty soon we all got it. Keisha say if we like it, lay it on as many people as we can, cuz this gotta go viral so we can change the world.

“How we know this not just someone try a sell something, but suck us in first?”

“Trust me, it’s not. The book is free. There’s nothing to buy even if you wanted to. And the book wants to get rid of money. It says we’ll be better off without it. But you gotta read it. I can’t really explain it to you, because it sounds so far out there at first. But then when you read it, it makes perfect sense.

Also, if someone offers you a free satellite phone, and they aren’t part of any company, or if you find a bunch of them somewhere, take one. You’ll want to have it.”

“Sound like a fairy tale or someone tripping on shrooms, but yeah, might be fun to read.”

That night Daddy drag me to Bible Study. They going on about how they waiting for God to come back from wherever he be hiding, to clean up and nuke the devil and most of us too. Then he gonna be king and we all gotta bow down to his ass. I say I thought we kicked out the king a few hundred years ago. I ain’t bowing to no king, I don’t care where he come from or what he call hisself.

My daddy all upset, tell me to show respect. I say get outa my face and I show you respect. You do for me and I do for you. Then this ‘elder’ say let’s pray. After that I fake listen but really I got my phone in the Bible and I read this book. That work out fine. Pretty quick I like this book and wanna read more, so the time go quick.

Big fight me and Daddy after. He spit again his house his rules, I spit just get Jehovah outta my face and we be cool. I giving him scratch from my day jobs to do my bit, I help clean and cook and whatever so just deep-six the Bible and we be fine. He say no can do, give me a book and say read this. I say fine and go read a little bit so I can answer questions, then go back to The Cure. His book a boring fairy tale. Keisha book really grab me, make me think, show me things I knew but never knew I know.

I wanna get my community service done quick, so I do one day that, one day day-jobs, back and forth like that. They not pay good but I get by.

Next time I at IHOP, see Autumn, we like glue. She say she OK. The rest of the crew there. Chong say he went back to our place, saw dozers and other big machines. They tearing it all down. They wasn’t BS’ing about that. Nothing to go back to.

Snake say he find an old boarded up house no one using all by itself about a mile from where we was. There’s other houses close with peeps living in them regular, and a few closed stores. He say we can use that for a while, and probably no one know we there cuz we can come in the back, just follow the train tracks then hop the fence. No one can see.

I tell them about what my boss at Habitat say he may know some people can help us, but it be a few days before he know for sure. Skye say she found an old movie theater no one using, got a crib upstairs we could maybe use.

We go around a bit, then I tell them about the book, The Cure. First I help get it on their phones, mostly POS’s like mine but Sherice got a Samsung Galaxy not too old.

So we read it out loud, take turns, talk about it. We reading the short book, but I say I gonna read the long one too. Got a lotta questions.

Then we see getting kinda late, so we say we meet in two days.

Next day I got my time at community college with the person say they gonna help me with the financial aid form. When they first told me it be a while before I can get in, I mad cuz I wanna get it done quick, but now I think better this way. If my time be sooner, I'd a missed it cuz of all the po-po and losing our crib and all.

While I waiting, spitting with other peeps waiting. A lot of peeps waiting!

This one dude, Rob, we spit to each other bout our problems. He be like me a lotta ways, but now he doing better. Maybe transfer to Cal State, he waiting to talk about that.

Then he starts spitting about Buddhism. He say it different from other religions cuz they got no god tell them do this, don't do that. He say Buddhism not control you. He say everyone be special, deserve respect, compassion, and happiness. He say we don't need no god to help us. We got all we need inside us and if we tap that, nothing and no one can stop us. He call it the Mystic Law.

"How you tap that?" I ask.

"We chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. It puts us in touch with that power we got to change our lives and help others too. Wakes it up. It's also like looking in the mirror, shows us where we need to work on being a better version of ourselves."

"You don't gotta eat this and not eat that, or be just right or you die dead or go to hell? Really, you got none of that crap?"

"No, none of that. We may have some of hell right here in this life, but we can get out of it very quickly. Change it. No judgment. As long as you treat yourself and others with respect and compassion, and work to make yourself and others happy, you're good. I'm gay, but in SGI it's not a problem. You be yourself, the best you can. And chant and study Buddhist teachings. I grew up Christian and when I came out, God's love went out the window in the church and my family."

"Hey, maybe I like to know more. Maybe this for me. But why Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo? What special about that? Why not abracadabra or whatever?"

"I guess that's why they call it the Mystic Law. This Buddhist monk in Japan worked it out a long time ago, kind of like an Einstein of the human condition."

We get each other's number and email. He show me how to get hold of his Buddhist place. Then I tell him about The Cure. He never heard of it, so I tell him what I read so far, he say damn, that sound like a lotta Buddhist ideas up in there, so I float it over to him.

Jimmy: Sounds like you were on a spiritual quest.

Jamal: Well, yeah, could be. But not know it I guess. I just trying to survive, get a leg up, maybe make a life with Autumn.

Anyway, finally I hear my name. I go in, meet Mike. He all smiles. Dunno if I trust him. He got the forms and he go through it with me, show me what it means and all. But still most of what in there I don't know. My momma's and daddy's income. Like, how I gonna know that? They don't spit me about that stuff. And I still don't got no address so I still screwed. He tell me about something called Los Angeles Room and Board that help people like me. He let me on his computer and help me do the application, and he help me do the forms for getting into the construction trade training classes. I say maybe electrician too? He say sure. Ask how my grades.

I say so-so. Mostly C's with a few B's and D's. I spit how school like a zoo and we the animals, most teachers not care much, not try too hard to teach. Never enough funding they always say. Mike say maybe I gotta take some catch-up classes, take longer but probably still do OK.

He ask me about my momma and daddy. I spit to him how Marcus hate me and my daddy all zombied with Jehovah and pretty soon we'll blow and I'll be out. I also spit about Autumn and me, ask if maybe we can have a crib together. She wanna be a dental assistant. Maybe we both study.

He say he don't know but make a time for her to come, or we come together.

Later at IHOP, we all spitting over nachos again. Autumn thank me for hooking her up at community college, say let's go together. Maybe we got a future together. I hope so!

Sherice say she hear about tiny houses. There's a bunch of them in the valley, for homeless like us until we get a leg up. We each have own crib cuz they really tiny but we can all be in the same hood together, still have each other's back. They about the same size as some of the motor homes people been living in, but got two floors, bed upstairs.

For me, sounds rad, but like too far from community college where I already got something going, don't wanna lose it, have to start over. The valley too far to ride my bike, take too long by train or bus. Pedro say he staying at his church; the priest there give him a place and food, he just help out around there. Lots to do. He like that cuz if he got nothing to do, he feel all crazy, maybe get in trouble. That priest sound like one of them good Christians, not in your face but care about people, help them. They got a few rooms they don't use, let people stay there when they need. So he set for now. I meet this priest once or twice, he never in my face. Listen real good. Seem like an OK dude.

Later I call the Buddhist place, wanna know more. They say there a meeting that night I can come to. I get an idea. When I get home, I tell Daddy I go to his Bible study Thursday if he go to this Buddhist meeting tonight. That be fair. He say no cuz that be the devil, so I say I not go to Bible study no more. He say if I go to that meeting, I gotta bounce tomorrow.

So I go to the meeting. I like what I hear. I decide to try chanting, see how it goes so when I get home, I get on the sofa and chant. Daddy come home. He turn red, start yelling. He go full nuke with me. He almost start cussing but keep stopping hisself cuz he not spozed to. I start laughing. I can't help it. He get madder. He start cussing, then throw me out, say I brought Satan into his crib.

I go to IHOP, now I got my bike back from Chong. Riding help me calm down. I ask Snake about that boarded-up crib he found, but he say they chase them outta there. He got hisself into an old semi no one using, crashing in the bed behind the driver seat. He always finding stuff like that, he like got some kinda mojo going I guess. I call Pedro, ask if I can crash with him tonight. He ask the priest and he say OK. So I go there.

Community College say it take at least a couple months to for me to get set with their program and all, but they got nothing for until then. So for a bit I stay with Pedro, do some repairs around the church.

Now every day we meet at IHOP, eat nachos and read The Cure. We all hearing more and more people talking about it. Maybe it going viral like Keisha say.

There be all kinds of stuff people can do to make this transition happen, but peeps like me don't got a lot we can do, 'cept video and stream what goes on so the world know the truth, not what the news try to tell them cuz maybe they gonna lie. We already learn how to do that. Chong good with that stuff, so he teach us.

Finally I finish my community service. Not as quick as I wanna cuz I gotta like work those day jobs to get scratch and all that other stuff happen. I like to come back when I can to do construction with them Habitat peeps. That when Keisha give me a satellite phone, real new and like nothing I ever seen, and ask me how many I need for friends. She say they been like smuggled in from Canada for the transition which be coming soon. They say hide them until the day, keep them charged, be ready to video everything going on around us. Only use them for that and to coordinate about transition.

I don't see much TV but the government in DC going nuke over transition, 'specially since Canada transitioned. At first they shut the border, tell peeps not go there. President say it not safe there, say it all big commu-something plot. Saying don't buy things made there. Some states say you go to jail if you got The Cure or they catch you reading it. They taking people's phones with no warrant. Big demonstrations, people fighting in the streets in those states. I'm glad Momma got us outta Texas, cuz it really serious pig snot there. Some of those states they already been banning books a long time so nothing new there.

But everyone know the government and President spitting landfill. Video of Canadian cities all blown up on TV, look real but all fake. Peeps hear Canadian radio and TV. You can't cover that shit up. A lotta people still go there, say that be bullshit. People who been there say things be all right and doobie up there. They say this country be pig snot next to that, and we should click to what they do. And the stuff they make there, top-notch and dirt cheap too! The government try to keep that stuff outta here, but not happening. No way to stop it. A few poor mooks go to jail, big show trials, but everyone seen the truth. Hey, look how they try to outlaw booze and then ganja, only make people want it more. You can't stop the tide coming in.

President go all nuke, say he won't let it happen here cuz it be commu-something bad pig snot, and some peeps drink that down but mostly we dunk that shit.

Everything taking longer than I hoped. Community college, the crib they gonna get me, and after Autumn and me meet with them, still taking a while. Momma in hairdresser and beautician school but she still with Marcus. She say he like getting therapy and medicines and getting less mean, but she say best we don't meet at her place meantime. Daddy like don't wanna talk to me unless I stop going to this Buddhist SGI place, so he still try to control me. These Buddhists don't. And the priest at Pedro's church don't, same with Ali. I don't need peeps try to run my life, 'specially when their life messed up too.

There be a change everywhere, a change in people. I could tell who got The Cure and who don't by their faces and how they talked. Those that got it, they seem brighter, almost like Christmas in a Hallmark movie. Those that don't got a clue, they don't got that. It feel like something moving but you can't see it. Like the sound you hear before a train come through.

Jimmy: Wow, Jamal! You have amazing strength and willpower! You went through the ringer over and over but you kept pushing ahead as best you could. A lot of people would have given up or gotten cynical and bitter about life, or even gotten into drugs or drink. But you kept coming back swinging after every setback. I really admire you! What do you think made you able to keep positive?

Jamal: Thanks bro! And I feel you about the drugs and booze. Around the time I finish at Habitat, we find out Pete OD'ed.

Before this, he been having the low-down. He keep getting shut down, can't catch a break. He start with the fentanyl, he go hard into that crap.

We try to lift him up, make him know he not alone. We get him to say he go to rehab, but everywhere free got no space, gotta wait too long, and the others gouge blood. He can't get Medi-Cal cuz no address. So every door he knock, slam in his face. So he give up. Don't wanna talk to no one. Then they find him in Denny's shitter. They call Sherice cuz her number on his speed dial. But they find him too late.

It hit us really hard. We really bumming big time. We all feel things really messed up. We finally get him to go to rehab, then he got no way in. Now he gone. Didn't have to go down like that.

You ask how I stay positive. Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't, but I don't wanna do nothing make things worse. That why I finish high school, even if it a joke, cuz I see Momma got it harder cuz she didn't have that. That why I don't get high or drunk, that when bad things and bad people bite your ass. I afraid of that crap! Look at Pete!

Jimmy: I still admire you. You did what many couldn't. Like Pete.

Jamal: I feel you.

Jimmy: So how old were you on transition day? Can you tell me about the week before up to the day it happened?

Jamal: I was 22 years old on transition day.

That feeling I spat about, like Christmas coming, keep getting stronger. You can almost tell exactly who is in by their face.

Thing is, I never think much about that stuff before. Too busy trying to deal. But this book make sense, not too hard. It say the way things is, be like Dark Ages. Trillionaires and billionaires be like kings, we be like peasants. I don't know

much about that stuff but I get it. Problem is the setup no good, always gonna be like this, long as we keep doing things like this, using money. It put some people over others, shut down their good parts and blow up their bad parts. It say we all got a right to a crib and food and school and all, so we gotta change it. Stop doing what don't work. Politicians not gonna do it so we gotta do it.

There be messages in email and text, even a few on the satellite phones. Like when someone setting up a flash mob but bigger.

We see messages about dates. Mostly in March and April. We gotta choose. I click what I think, but we all gotta pick a day so we all do this together. At IHOP we spit about it. Waitress say "March sometime? What you think?" As she bring us our nachos. "First week of March" I say, cuz that what we think. Then it click together a few weeks later. March 7.

Everywhere it like there be two different things going on at the same time. There be the regular stuff, people working and buying stuff and eating. Me doing day jobs just like normal. But some of the ones that hire me say something like "You ready?" They say in a way if I not in, I think it mean ready for something else like lunch. It be like a code.

And then there be the election. Everybody seem to feel like this transition be coming like a lotta countries. It be everywhere. In IHOP we all watch on TV, all the election spitting going on. The New Republicans been in control for a while, most people getting sick of them feeding the rich and starving the rest, sick of their Christian BS trying to control everyone, sick of them trying to tell us want we can or can't read or watch or do. But every state like a different country. That why Momma Houdini'ed outa Texas. Cali seem like most people want The Cure. But like Texas and Florida and most of the South, they be saying they be leaving the country, go their separate way if transition come.

Jenna Morrison, the Reform Democratic candidate, she say transition a good thing. If it come, she down with it and get behind it. The New Republicans got nothing good to say, they calling it all kinds of wack crap, like my daddy with his Jehovah kool-aid. They say it be all like Satan and commu-something and social-something and evil, so they gonna like beat us all down, lock us in prison camps if we do it. Bill Hess, their guy, he sound like a mad dog, seriously zombie cray-cray. But some places they drinking it right down. This be my second time voting, so I know who I vote for!

I only working day jobs, don't think I can do much, but I find out I got a way to help. By then there be people in on the transition just about everywhere, even the army and the po-po, even some in banks and places like that. There be other people don't know about it, and some who gonna fight us. Try to stop us. TV and radio and news channels some of them gonna spit lies about what we doing, maybe even deepfake so people be afraid.

Banks and stuff gotta be shut down. We gonna do away with money cuz it don't do nothing but gum up the works so rich dudes can use it to control us all.

Some news channels gonna show things as they be, and some gonna make bad crap up, so people everywhere gonna be confused. So we gotta be everywhere, livestream with our satellite phones, at the banks and in the streets and everywhere, so the world see the truth. Not what Daddy call The Truth! The real truth! So me and my peeps, and Momma too, we gonna be like reporters. Just like we seen with the other countries that do transition. So I feel good I can do something. At IHOP we all make up a name we gonna use for our crew: we gonna make like they do on the news, so I gonna be spitting like "Hello everyone, this be JoJo from West Side News, showing it like it is…" We gonna be West Side News.

Jimmy: So what was it like on transition day?

Jamal: We all meet up at IHOP, middle of the night like 3 a.m, got our cell phones and satellite phones all juiced up. We none of us can't sleep. Usually quiet up in there this time of night, but today jammed, peeps waiting outside to get in. All tables full.

We work out who gonna go where.

Autumn and me, we gonna go to Wells Fargo bank on Sepulveda to cover when they get people out and shut it down. We got a few people inside the bank tweaked the backup genny to fail, computers and phones too. I got some jammers, gonna give them to the crew there. We gonna show how transition people be good people, that we got respect and treat people good, even when they try to fight us, that we not a bunch of bangers or cray-cray zombies. Then we go to City Hall and later to the hospital. We livestream what happens. Got power banks so we can keep going.

We everyone got it down where we gonna be and sort of when, but maybe it change depending how it all go down. We kinda work it out together. We be like real family, so we click real smooth mostly.

At the bank, we get there before the shut down crew. Then we see them. A dozer and a few excavators come up close to the bank. Four peeps decked out official-like, be knocking on the door. We be filming and streaming. I take the jammers Keisha give me and give them to one of them. One of the excavators bump the building a few times with its scoop but not too hard. The door open, cleaning crew asking what happened.

One dude say they closing the bank cuz of a gas leak, so everyone gotta get out. He say that in case some of them don't wanna go.

Then one of the cleaning crew say "Hey, this is it. Let's go."

Another cleaning dude say, "This is it what?"

The third dude say, "This is it, Jorge, this is transition. You know, The Cure!"

"That's just a bunch of talk. It isn't real. Not here in America. This isn't Canada! It's a fairy tale."

"No, it's going down now. It's in the book. It's happening all over the world. Now it's here! C'mon! Let's go to the Cantina and watch it on TV!"

"No Paco, creo que van a robarnos. Vamos pronto antes de que nos matan! Vamos a llamar la policía!"

"No, we're not going to rob the bank, and no we won't hurt anyone. And yes, this is transition. The banks need to be shut down."

We be live-streaming all of this. Then Jorge get all up in their face. "I'm not afraid of you! We got these two tourists videoing all of this. You won't get away with it! If we just let you in without a fight, we'll lose our jobs!" And he get as big as he can, try to block the door. "Come on, back me up, guys!"

But the other two say no. "Jorge, please let's go! Well explain it to you but we gotta let them shut down this bank."

Jorge not budge. So the shut-down team do some kind of stuff, pin his arms, pick him up and move him out of the way. Two of the team go in, the lights go out a couple minutes later. While they doing that, a chick from the team do something, cut some wires. Then they done. The ones inside come out, they lock up. The dozer and excavators get jammed tight up on the bank from all sides, then they take some parts out so nobody can start them up or move them, let air out of the tires too. And that be it.

Paco and the third dude be fine, but Jorge still going off. Autumn and me move in, ask if we can help. Everyone focus on Jorge, try to help him chill some. He start crying about how he need this job cuz he got a wife and three kids, and it the only job he found after he downsized from a factory job. A robot jacked that job from him.

We all tell him he can chill. After this, he don't gotta worry. He don't need money no more. Then Paco say, "Jorge, look around you. Are these people acting like bank robbers? If they were going to rob the bank, we wouldn't be having this conversation, we'd be lying in the street."

Jorge think a second then say, "You're right, Paco. Now I think of it. Yeah, I think I'll be OK now. It's just I don't understand all of this."

"Come on, we'll come home with you. We can turn on the TV, have something to eat, and we'll explain it all to you and your wife. There's going to be a lot going on in the news the next few days."

Then they start to walk off. One of the shut down crew say, "Jorge, are you OK? Can we get you anything?"

"I'm good now I think, just kind of shaken up.

I came here with my family from Guatemala when I was ten, and I guess it's still with me. I still have nightmares about back there, people bashing in the door to rob us. Fighting in the streets between rebels and the army.

Then here when things seemed better, suddenly one day the government started rounding up anyone even looked like they might be Latino, threw them in camps in the desert to rot. The inmigra started tricking us, offering jobs that were only traps to round more of us up. We were always looking over our shoulder, couldn't trust anyone we didn't know, especially if they were white or black. The government was telling everyone that we were all animals and criminals. There was so much hate!

It took a long time for it to get a little better. But seeing you all come like this, it brought all of it back. Like a flashback. I know I need help with my PTSD but my insurance doesn't cover mental health."

"It's OK. The import thing is that you're OK and things are about to get a lot better for all of us. Please take good care of yourself and try to be patient." This was one of the shut down team.

Then we all take turns hugging Jorge, then we do a group hug. And it all be live-streamed on our sat phones.

Just then the po-po come. Ask what going down here. They on the squawk with the cop shop.

We tell them what up. Just like the book say, we all be cool with them, make sure they see our hands, no fast moves, easy easy. There be two of them. They calling for more.

"We're going to have to arrest you for trespassing, malicious mischief, vandalism, and maybe attempted bank robbery. You have the right to remain silent…"

The other po-po stop him, say "Hey, hold up there buddy. Don't you know what's going on?" Then asks the three cleaning crew, "Did they hurt you or threaten you in any way?"

"No. They been real nice to us."

"Did anybody here hurt or threaten anyone here?"

"No."

"Did they steal anything?"

"Nope, not that we know."

Then he say to us, "You mind if we search you?"

I'm like "Go ahead. Nothing to hide here."

The other cop going a little nuke, "Ed, what are you doing? Don't ask them if it's OK! Just search them, and make sure they know we're in charge here!"

"We're not doing it like that anymore, Lou. That's why you got busted down from sergeant, because you were beating people down for no reason."

"But you know how it is! Half of them wanna kill us and the other half won't talk to us."

"And those people say the same about us. Look, Lou, I know you're old-school but what's going on here is bigger than anything we've ever seen. Our job's going to get a lot easier pretty soon. I keep telling you to read The Cure. It would help you understand what this is."

"I don't have time, Ed. This job plus the security job at the power plant, plus two kids. Besides, I heard it's communist propaganda so I'm not interested. Or socialist. Same thing. That's what the President says. And I believe him."

"Lou, it's neither of those things. There are just some people who got a big stake in the way things are, trying to scare people out of doing transition.

And this President lies like a rug! Look at that whole Iran plot SNAFU. A meteor hits a town in Iowa and President Numbnuts said it was an Iranian missile, wants to nuke them until NASA and the European Space Agency release that they knew the asteroid was coming but no one in any government listened to them when they tried to warn them, including our joke of a President. I'm glad he's a lame duck and can't run again!"

“Well I’m gonna radio HQ, see what Cap has to say.”

“Good idea. While you do that, I’ll go ahead and search them.”

So Ed search us, find nothing. The jammers woulda been a problem but they already inside.

Lou come back from the car, say “OK, you win. Looks like you’re right. Cap say if no one’s hurt and nothing’s stolen and no drugs, let them go. He said there’s going to be an announcement later today to explain everything. Something about based on other countries that transitioned. Boy, if I were Cap, I’d sure play it differently!”

“Well you’re not and I’m not. And right about now I wouldn’t want to be. C’mon, let’s get going. I’ve got a feeling this is going to be a long day and a hard one.”

Then Ed say to us all, “OK, you can all go. Just try to stay out of trouble. It could get pretty crazy out here before things settle down.”

They pile into their five-oh and drive off. We say bye. Jorge seems to be like chill now, at least more than before.

Autumn and I decide let’s go to a hospital. Closest one to where we be is St. John’s. We want to see how things go down there, since transition happened officially at midnight.

By now the sun come up, traffic all jammed up. Look like a normal day. Transition or no, the drivers all cray-cray mad-dog. Never see us on bicycles! Gotta watch out! They run you down and never stop.

Then we be thinking, hey, like money all gone now. Don’t gotta pay for stuff. Let’s lock the bikes and check the bus.

So we jump the first bus we see going our way. Sure enough, driver all smiles, wave to us, put his hand over the money box, say “Don’t pay. From now on everybody rides for free.”

So we ride. Live-streaming everything. Good vibe on the bus. Then we see it.

Best Buy store. Big crowd. Something going down. Look like some serious pig snot. We like reporters now so we jump off to video what going down.

We find out there be some a-holes come to loot the place. Bunch of other peeps from the hood nearby come blocking them, like bodyguarding the place. Employees out there freaking scared. Autumn and me move in to where they spitting to each other. A lot of pushing and shoving.

One dude going all nuke, say, “Out of my way! Everything’s free now! So what are you, stupid? We can take anything we want now, no one gonna stop us! Why you mooks think you the po-po or some shit? Why you give a shit?”

“You ever read the book? The cure?” This be one of the peeps protecting the store.

“I ain’t got no time for reading no books. But everybody know today everything’s free. We don’t gotta pay for nothing.”

“Dude, you don’t get it.”

“Don’t get what? You and your peeps gonna get it if you don’t get out of our way!”

“There’s more of us than there are of you, and the cops are on the way.”

“F**k this shit! You move or we gonna move you!”

The looters bum-rush the door. The locals push back. Most of them stay cool but a few be fighting. Just then the po-po come blasting in with their sirens and lights. No one been shot but they got their heat out. I never been glad to see the po-po like that before. Then one them crank the volume and we hear: “Everyone freeze! Nobody move! This is the police!”

Peeps mostly stop but a few still punching some. Next thing I know, I be on the ground waking up, Autumn across my chest looking around.

“What happened?” me and Autumn spit at the same time. “Hell if I know,” we both spit. Then someone helping us get up. A couple locals and a couple po-po.

“You alright?” One chick asks.

I feel OK, just a little dizzy and need water, and I say so. Autumn same thing. “What happened?”

One of the po-po say, “The situation was escalating when we got here. We had to use the sleep gas to sort it out before anyone got hurt. I apologize for any distress this caused you.”

“Yeah, some bad dudes come to loot, and some peeps from the hood like protecting this place like it their own crib.”

“That’s what we figured out. You two reporters? They said you were filming it and acting like reporters.”

“Yeah, that be us,” says Autumn.

“I don’t know if you’re brave or stupid, and I do admire your courage, but I advise you to stay out of situations like this from now on. Just zoom from a safe distance. It’s hard enough to sort this kind of thing out without noncombatants mixed in. Besides, you could get hurt or worse.”

“Can’t promise that but we be careful,” I say. “So what happen now?”

“Oh, you’re free to go. We had to arrest a few people from both groups, the ones who got physical. No one was seriously hurt. We’re sending you and everyone home.”

I look around and see peeps drifting away, things be chill, po-po standing around spitting on the radio.

“Hey, where our phones?”

“Hey Denise, you done with their phones?”

“Yeah, Sarge. Just had to go through the video and copy it as evidence.”

“Well, why don’t you give them back so they can keep filming?”

“Roger.”

Denise give us our phones back and I see that the stuff that went on while we was out, be on there. Musta kept filming when we went down. You can see where we go down the sleep gas hit, then someone keep filming for us. Po-po in gas masks.

Then we hear someone spit “Hey, come check out the news! They’re about to read something about what’s going on.”

So we heat-seek our way in cuz they got TV’s up in there.

Me and Autumn and a bunch of other peeps jam into Best Buy, got all the TV’s up on the wall on with the volume up. Most of them got the same news mooks as always. They not talking, look like they waiting for something, ‘cept the ones got Fox on, where they got some zombie cray-cray spitting about how we being invaded by bunch of animal people ‘cross the border and how Los Angeles all burning down and people going nuke and dead bodies everywhere. We here so we know they spitting zombie kool-aid cuz none of that going down. They got video looks real, but you know how that is. Hell, I got an app on my phone can make a clip of your dog flying a plane and running for President. Someone up and change the channel cuz no one wanna hear that pig snot.

Finally they spitting. All at once. First they say sorry for the wait, someone putting it up on the teleprompter. Then they spitting this message that sounds like it be the President or something. Starts with “My fellow Americans, I’m going to read you an important, historic message of great import for all of us. Some of you know what this is about. Some of you wonder what’s happening, and some of you are afraid that we’re seeing a violent revolution with all of the bloodshed that usually comes with it. First and foremost I want to assure you that this is absolutely not an attack on or overthrow of the government or the Constitution. Nor is it born in acts of violence and inhumanity. Please everyone, remain calm.

After this message, please go on with your day, do your jobs, and exercise the utmost of your patience and humanity…" It go on for about an hour.

Those of us read the book, we kinda know what coming, but not everyone read it or even know something gonna go down.

They spit about how the way things is now be not working and getting worse, how it be no one's fault, just a bad game we all playing and it's killing us so we gotta shut it down and play a new game. It say lotta times don't go all nuke on each other, not even the trillionaires and billionaires cuz the problem not them, it be the setup we been living under.

They spit everyone be calm and keep doing like normal, just don't charge no one for nothing and don't pay no one for nothing. And don't click to what your boss saying. Show respect but tune them out, 'cept to invite them to stay and join the team, cuz from now on everyone be equal and work things out between us that way. Don't beat no one down, but don't let no one beat you down neither.

I be thinking I give them hi-five for their way. Cool as ice. I listen to them, I feel like yeah, things gonna be OK.

They say the military gotta be up and ready in case our enemies try something. They say government now got a lotta work to do but after that their job be big-time easier. And they say po-po be up and ready too, but remember they job be keep the peace, don't be kicking no ass you don't gotta. They spit don't go looting neither. There be law and order but humanity too.

It all go with the book but more how to this and that. They say a new web site be going up sometime today or tomorrow, gonna be called NewWorldWeb that be for everyone to use for everything. They say any questions or ideas, anything you need or gotta spit, go there. They say if you got no gear, go to any electronics store and score one, but only one for each person. They also give a number to call with questions.

They keep saying show respect, everybody show respect.

Some of it I got. Some of it no. But I like what I hear, 'specially the parts about nobody gonna control nobody no more, and no one gonna need money to live and study and do stuff.

Then the President come on, ask everyone to be patient and not go cray-cray while they work this out. He say so far this transition thing been alright in countries that done it. He say the government be doing its thing and no one bothering them. He also say to other countries, don't mess with us cuz we strong and we ready. He say let's all work together to make this be the good thing it can be.

The news keep coming all day. I'll never forget.

Right after that the news say Texas declaring independence and the Southern states go nuke and say they gonna bring Dixie back and split. President come on again saying he calling up the military. He say won't be no secession or civil war on his watch, transition be damned. He not wanna be the one up front when the country fall apart. He say he won't be remembered like that. Then we hear the army be fighting inside itself. Then we hear some states there be towns doing transition and other towns be trying to beat them down. It like the whole country be blowing up.

President say he the Commander in Chief so soldiers gotta do what he say, and any that don't be going down.

Local news spitting about some places still running like normal, other places there be some nuke between transition peeps trying to keep things running and the old bosses and landlords trying to shut them down, and some mooks just pulling shit just because. Busses and trains still running, hospitals and schools still open. The Mayor saying stay put where you be if you can, while we sort this out. Shitloads of video to back it up, the real video, not the deepfake kool-aid.

Then the candidates come on to spit their shit. Jenna Morrison, the Reform Democrat, say if she elected, she gonna make sure transition be done right so everyone be good. She spit about how so far it be good where it happens so let's roll with it. Her buzzword be "If it works, let's do it!" Bill Hess, the New Republican, say if he get in he gonna shut transition down if he has to kill half the peeps to do it, in the name of freedom and the American Way. His buzzword be "Let's kick some ass!"

Someone bring in some grub so we all chowing down watching. All this time with no commercials. I can get used to this! I always hate that noise, didn't ask for it, don't wanna hear it.

Then the emergency broadcast system kick in, sirens blowing loud everywhere outside. Some army dude come on the tube saying we be under attack for real. North Korea nuking us, missiles flying.

Then someone cut him off, give him a paper, he read it and say there be only three missiles, look like we can blast them before they come cuz of something we got that no one knew about. He say everyone freeze where they be and keep watching. He say they being locked in now. Then the screens go black and we see the word "Gotchya" in all rainbow colors and a synth voice saying "We got this!" Behind the Gotchya we see three missile-eye videos running.

"WTF?" Someone say. "Hell if I know," I say.

At first the missiles be way up, looking down at earth. Then they like turn and we see space and stars and stuff. It goes on like this for a few minutes. Last thing we see is the missiles see each other then black. Then we see like someone gonna hit us with a pie in the face, then again the rainbow "Gotchya" and the synth voice saying it.

The news come back on. News mooks looking at each other, confused.

"Are we on?"

"No… wait, yeah, I think we are now. What the hell was that?… Oh!" News mook look at camera, like forgot it was there. We all busting up.

Then they spitting about how some hacker crew called Gotchya jacked the North Korean missiles and made them fly up on space and go off over Pyongyang. They do this before the US got to shoot them down. I like this Gotchya crew. Maybe one day I be a hacker like that!

Then we see video from some different places. San Francisco look normal, 'cept for peeps like dancing in the streets cuz one of the missiles was spozed to be for them. Chicago look mostly cool 'cept some mooks try looting on Lakeshore Drive. It go down like here. Same thing. Regular peeps blocking the doors, more of them than looters. Po-po come, shoot off the sleep gas, everyone fall down. Then sorting it out like here.

Then video from Texas, Mississippi, Florida and other states with a bunch of army stuff and soldiers nuking it up on each other. News mook say sleep gas not working there cuz soldiers both sides got gas masks, so gotta go old school.

President come on, declaring state of emergency, say everyone stay inside, 'specially in conflict states. Then California gov come on, say things mostly cool in Cali so do like usual. He remind us don't nobody ask for money or give no money.

The rest of that day we just like watched right there in Best Buy. No one want to leave. While we there, me and Autumn grab a couple of laptops before they all gone. Neither of us never had one before so lots to see. Sales mook real nice, she scan us out but don't take no money or plastic, show us how to use them. We both kinda know but not really. First thing we look for be that NewWorldWeb but it not up yet.

We sleep there too. Someone keep bringing food and stuff to drink. Besides, we got no crib so where we gonna go? Musta dropped off cuz last thing I remember be presidential debate. Then it be morning. We don't know none of the peeps in there with us. They mostly don't know each other. But it feel like I guess family must feel. Kinda like on the House with No Name but different. Like we all going somewhere together like big, and it be someplace good but we all a little scared.

Someone got some cots to sleep on. It like a big party. We camped out there for three days, since everyone on the TV saying go to your jobs, classes or whatever but try not to go out more than you gotta. Since Autumn and I both got no regular job and no classes, we stick at Best Buy. Felt all strange inside. Happy and relieved, scared the country gonna fall apart, hoping things gonna break through and afraid they gonna break down. Don't know what to do with myself.

Jimmy: Wow, Jamal! You were right in the middle of it! So let's jump forward a little bit. Tell me about your life after things settled in and got up and running.

Jamal: Well, it take two days for NewWorldWeb to get up. Everyone wanna be on it so it keep crashing. Me and Autumn realize with the new rules of transition, we can have take a house and make it our crib. Too bad the one we was in with our peeps is all tore down!

Time now to sync with our crew anyway. So first we call Chong, see if he know any places might be good for us, maybe close to community college. He always good at finding stuff. He send us some pix. He be looking too. Autumn see one cute crib with a for sale sign in front, her eyes pop, she spit "That one! Yes, it look perfect!"

"You there now Bro?" I ask him.

"Yo, right here. Just took that pic."

"Can you go inside, stream it to us?"

A few minutes later we looking it up inside. Yeah, this be sweet. Gotta swoop on it or someone else gonna get it. First come, first served we hear.

We get the address from Chong, I know where that is. If be perfect for us. Then we go to see if NewWorldWeb be up. It be up for now, with a message that ask us all to be patient while they work out the kinks.

There be a link that say, "Meet Sofia, your personal AI assistant." So I click it and this chick come on and say "Hi, I'm Sofia, your personal AI assistant. Before I can really help you, can I ask you a few questions so I can get to know you better?"

"Wait, hold up! I thought Sofia spozed to be an AI, but you be, like, a real person. So what, you both named Sofia?"

"Thank you for the compliment, but I'm Sofia your personal AI assistant."

"For real? You sure look real! You sound real!"

"Well, I am real, a real state of the art AI. Right now I can help you with general questions if you want, but if you take an introductory interview with me, I'll be able to configure your instance of me to be a better advisor to you personally. We can do that now or later. Your choice."

"Well, me and my girlfriend be kind of jammed to claim this crib we found. We wanna score it before someone else do."

"I understand. Can you tell me your names and dates of birth, and let me see both of you in your webcam? We can do the personalization interview later at your convenience. You'll each have to do your own of course. Then I'll be able to help you any time from any device with Internet access."

"Sure."

We give her our names and birthdays, and ape for her in the webcam until we see a green square flash around each of our faces.

"Thank you. Give me a few minutes to put together what I can find about you on the Web."

Then a few minutes later.

"OK, Autumn and Jamal. Now I know a little about each of you, what's in the public record."

Autumn be a little spooked, spit "I'm not sure I be down with you knowing so much about us. How I know you not a scammer gonna steal our ID and jam us up?"

"That's a very good question, Autumn. I understand your concern. I can of course promise and assure you that I am strongly and robustly programmed with unbreakable instincts to serve, support, and respect all users and never to take any action that I can imagine would hurt them.

Naturally that will be hard for you to trust. I can point out to you that the main motivation for identity theft and scamming is to take money and other property from the victim in a society where money buys power and respect while the lack of it leaves you cut off from access to everything. Since money has ceased to exist or have any function, and

since all resources are now freely accessible to all, there's no reason to steal your identity or scam you. There's nothing to gain."

"OK, you've got a point, Sofia."

"OK, good. I know it will take time for humans to get used to the new ways of doing things.

Do you mind if I ask, are you filing your housing claim as a family?"

"Yes!" We both say at once.

"Does it matter that we're not married?"

"It's not for me to judge. Your statement that you are a family is sufficient."

So Sofia take us to a web page with "Make a claim on an unoccupied residence" with a form to fill out. She show us the clicks to get there from the Home Screen but she take us there.

This form be really easy. Our names, birthdays, email addresses, phone numbers, and social security numbers be already filled in by Sofia, so we just gotta put in the address of the house. Then a circling rainbow with a message that say it be looking to see if the anyone else be living there and if me or Autumn already have a crib. After a few minutes, it ask us for a camera shot separate and together, and swipe our fingerprints on the laptop reader.

Next thing we see, after another minute, be a real like official-looking paper that say me and Autumn are "the sole legal owners of the residence at… and entitled to live there as their exclusive legal residence, with all that this entails."

"Congratulations! The transition is only three days old and already you have a home of your own! The system will automatically email electronic copies to both of you, snail-mail a hardcopy to your new address, and register the two of you with the City as the legal owners."

"Wow! Thank you, Sofia!" Me and Autumn both crying like babies, hug each other, jump up and down dancing, go a little cray-cray. Almost busted our laptops! Peeps near us hear it all so they hi-five us and congrats and all.

I think we two be the first to click to now we can get a crib, cuz we hear a few other peeps saying like "Hey, yeah! I'm gonna check that out!" Lots of congrats busting that day. It feel like we all been zonkers trying to take it all in, then all of a sudden we snap back in.

Jimmy: Sounds like a real pivotal moment for you both! For just about everyone. What happened next?

Jamal: I won't spit it all. If I do, we be here a week. But it all click click click real fast.

We got a home now so next day we go there. The key already in the mailbox by the front door. Sofia set that up. I think she be a real person. She say she not. I dunno.

The house be empty, but the lights be on and there be water. So we bike to Home Depot and right for sure they say yeah, we can borrow a truck for a few hours. Sofia tell us where we can find a bed and sofa and tables and chairs and all, so we score what we need. Good we went early. Lotta peeps in there. Store say no worry, more coming from the warehouse. We scan our stuff out, some peeps help us load it on the truck, and we help a couple other peeps the same, then we slide it all into our crib and take the truck back. We need a fridge. Already got an oven and microwave. Home Depot got what we need. Some peeps I done some day jobs with, they also there, so they help us load it up and slide it into our crib. We bring Autumn's bike so I can leave Autumn home and spend some time to help them with their stuff. Give and give back. That be the new game we playing now. It work real good so far. Then I bike back home.

By now it be like eight PM and we both flat out and hungry, so we go to IHOP, call our crew, see who can meet us there. Tonight we eat steak with mashed potatoes, veggies, piece of pie with ice cream, the works. Nachos be great, but before this we been sharing one big nachos for all of us cuz it be all we can afford.

Tomorrow we get pots and pans and dishes and clothes and maybe a couple of cars.

So in a week we all set.

Then we start thinking about more. Til then we been just in the moment. Went a little cray-cray for a bit. Suddenly all the doors that always been locked, be open. Not just me and Autumn neither. Lots of peeps up in all the stores.

Some mooks try to scoop the whole joint. Baskets full of TV's and laptops and clothes and shoes and whatever. But stores shut that down hard. Like when me and Autumn try to get laptops for our crew at Best Buy, they say no go. They gotta come get them. No hoarding. You can get what you can use but no more, unless you got a special reason. That way there be enough for everyone.

For a bit, stores keep running outta stuff, but then things settle down. Some mooks go a bit nuke, but there be plenty po-po and volunteers around to keep things cool. When someone boil over, security or po-po or sometimes just peeps hold them back. Never seen anything like this before. Just hold them back but almost gentle. Not yell but talk calm yet strong, wait until they chill, then let them go. Sometimes a mook not chill so they pull them outside. Always before peeps not want to step in, but now more peeps do.

So then me and Autumn go to community college. Now we got an address, we don't need no money, so we ask can we study now? First we ask Sofia and she say yes, but we also wanna talk to a real person. Still don't know what to think of Sofia so wanna talk to someone in person.

Long line but we got no hurry. We get there real early. Finally we get in, it be late afternoon, but when we go home after, we both registered to start classes the new semester in a few weeks. I be taking construction courses but also I'll be taking heavy equipment operator, electrician, and HVAC. Autumn so spiked she finally gonna study dental assistant.

I keep working some construction jobs until training starts. Wanna keep busy, get more experience. Got too much energy, don't know what to do with it so might as well build something and meet peeps. Autumn getting heavy into gardening at our new crib.

Had a bad moment when we go to register our new cars. Find out I still gotta get a driver's license. So look like some things not change. But at least no fees to pay. Autumn have one but turns out I been driving illegally. Damn!

So, I be back to my bike and Autumn giving me rides until I get my license. I try the written test cuz I be sure I'll pass the road test. But I flunk the written test. Gotta study the handbook and try again. Jeez, like I don't got enough to study now! Even after transition, some of the mooks at the DMV still be dicks. Not all but some of them. When I go back for something five years later, that be changed, and a lot of it we can do online real simple now.

The rest of our crew, they also busting through. By now everyone got their own crib, going after stuff they only wish for before transition. We keep close, have dinner at least once a week, every time in a different friend's crib. We all pretty much in the same area, 'cept Sherice, she got a tiny home on the valley. She got a boyfriend and big into working on the new bike roads and stuff going in and putting up solar all around. She got trained in the Energy Workers Syndicate up in there. But she still make it to our sit-downs. Sometimes we still go to IHOP to remember all that we been through together.

Somewhere in there I go see Mommy. She doing OK. She more chill cuz now she know she don't gotta stress over student loans, or if she lose financial aid. She and Marcus split up and get back together a few times. He getting better with his PTSD cuz there be no funding to cut so he can get good treatment and keep it. Marcus in inpatient program so I hang out with her, let her and Autumn meet. I don't take Autumn to my daddy's cuz she don't gotta hear his cray-cray spitting.

Daddy still zombied out on that Jehovah kool-aid. He say transition or no transition don't make no difference to him cuz he be a citizen of the kingdom that he think be coming after Jesus come to clean up the place and take over. He still trying to save me. I tell him the only thing I need saving from is his JW BS. I say we not waiting for no one. We be cleaning it up for ourselves. If there be a god wanna do better, let him or her come and do it.

So we start school in fall semester, me and Autumn. Then we more busy than we ever been, take us a minute to click into it. But I got it better than Momma had it at first, cuz she had to work a lot while she studying, but for me all that money crap be gone.

All this time the news be wack. Things in Cali be click, and a lotta other places too. But a bunch of other states be serious pig snot, their governments tryna shut down transition. There be a for real shooting war going on down there. I told

Momma thanks for getting us outta Texas!

Had a few air raid sirens. No one know what they be, but emergency radio say take cover but no one I know got any idea where. Drones from Idaho and Arizona try to bomb LA and San Francisco, but the Air Force bliffed all of them.

Then we hear people in Arizona and Texas and other states where they hating on transition, people hungry and thirsty and the lights going out. Seems them states try to force peeps to use money and pay for stuff like before, but the DC government don't support it so it be like toilet paper. Well, toilet paper better than money cuz nobody wanna wipe with money. The only place peeps there can get stuff is stores that got their roots in states like Cali and New York and Colorado.

The DC government and the governor both asking for volunteers to bring stuff to people stuck in the cray-cray states, help with stuff. Also they need peeps help fix busted stuff cuz they got some rioting. I do construction so I can help with that. President say we all Americans, gotta help each other, sort it out later. They say yes it be dangerous cuz there still be pockets of resistance but mostly they got it chilled. The army be there to keep us safe.

Jenna Henderson say transitioned peeps gotta help the ones that don't get it so they see we not their enemy. Bill Hess go on spitting cray-cray, telling the haters they gotta keep resisting, tell them he get elected, he gonna put things back the way they was. He saying someone don't ask for money for something, pay them anyway, and if someone not pay, beat them down. I think if he be president, me and Autumn go to Canada.

So me and Autumn sign up to help out. Feel bad for peeps stuck there. Next thing you know we on this big plane, I mean like Zulu-big, with a bunch of other peeps and lots of boxes and pallets of stuff.

Some of the stuff we gotta like drop by parachute cuz the Arizona state police tryna keep peeps from getting help from outside. So they open the back and we shove out the pallets they tell us and hook their drag lines up so the chutes open. Then we circle around to make sure the right peeps get them.

Some mofos start shooting at us from the ground. We got some soldiers on the plane with us, shooting back. Down below we see some choppers heat-seeking on where the shooters be. After a few, the shooting stops. We see peeps coming out of what look like a big Walmart, cutting into the pallets. Soldiers say OK, green and go and on to the next stop. Then we do this a few more times, then we land at an Air Force base.

After that, we be bringing peeps in from the towns near there, got these big rooms set up, asking them what they need, what's their situation in their towns. We give them what they need and always also satellite phones. Some of the peeps look really blown, like they been through hell and back. Some of them just tired.

We like that for a few days. We hook up with Sherice and Chong and Skye, they signed up too, came a couple days after us. Then they take us in choppers to where they need stuff done. I get on a crew, we rebuild a couple houses that been burnt down, fix some roads and a bridge that been messed up. We working like bonkers but feels good. A lot of peeps from around there working with us. Make some new friends.

Most of these peeps we meet, they say they want transition, but the state government say no, try to make people use money, so things the old way, but that don't work. Nothing getting done. The only place to get food be in joints with roots in Canada or transition states where everything be free. Some local joints still tryna make people pay for stuff, jack their prices outta the park, no one go there, no one want to go there. Some po-po try to stop people from going to transitioned joints, other po-po protecting the peeps from those po-po.

We get a call to go to the Palo Verde electric nuke station. Someone like tryna shut it down. So we go with a bunch of soldiers. Turns out the big bosses of the company that owns the place saying if peeps not gonna pay, then he gonna shut it down so no one don't got no power. So he bring a bunch of cray-cray mooks, promise them something if they shut it down and wreck the place.

The peeps working the place got their satellite phones out, streaming it all out to the whole world. They doing their job, but these cray-cray goons trying to push in and cronk them. Soldiers be holding them back. The big boss hisself be spitting cray-cray, shouting "Hey, I'm your boss and I order you to shut this plant down now! Nobody's going to get free power if I have anything to say about it! I own this place! Hell, I own you! If I don't see some shutdown sequences in the next five minutes, you're all fired and I'll bring my people in to do it! I'll blow this whole place up if I have to!"

The peeps working just keep up like he not there. He gone way beyond nuke. He try shoving one dude working some kind of console. Five peeps come, hold the boss so he can't move. He try to fight but they got him locked. Dude at the console say, real calm like, "With all due respect, you're no longer in control here. You don't own this place and you certainly don't own us. It's you who has been fired, not us. Or more accurately, your position no longer exists. No one will obey you or your former chain of command."

"The hell you say!"

"Look, Mr. Kelly, we bear you no grudge. We would love for you to stay on as a valued member of the team. But if you keep trying to interfere with power generation and create very serious hazards to life and limb, then you and your private goon squad will be removed."

No one can't use sleep gas cuz this place need peeps awake to run it. Besides, most of everyone got gas masks, even us volunteers. So we told to hang back out of the way. There be some fighting. Some shots fired. Couldn't see who done what, cuz we in a special room for radiation protection. A lot of shooting. Then we hear a couple big booms, the whole place shake.

After a while, it be quiet. Our guide come in, say come on out, everything chill now. He say we need to look to make sure the bombs didn't wreck something dangerous. So we go see. Them bombs musta been jack gnarly, but they don't know where to put them. Good thing! There be damage not nothing jugular. A few days and we got it all fixed up.

I ask one of the soldiers how it went down, he sez the goons had all kinda heat but they cray-cray, don't know what they doing, 'cept a few who been in the army. Soldier sez they fight like rabies but no strategy, just trying to bum-rush the place and wreck stuff and bust people up. He say soldiers got a new way to fight. He say they try to stop the threat with as little blood as possible. Wasn't like that before. The goons, they cray-cray for blood. So there be a few killed and wounded but coulda been a lot worse. He say they learn from every fight, how to do better next time.

He say they the Army normally not spozed to fight Americans, but this time they gotta cuz Arizona declare themself a different country and attack US government offices and military bases. He say a lotta people there not want out and do want transition, but the ones that got power be all cray-cray. He say this be harder than anything ever happen to him overseas.

I ask him what was we volunteers there for, since we not soldiers and don't know nothing about running a nuke power plant. He say we was there for human support, and for fixing stuff that gets busted, maybe to pump people's spirits, and to be witnesses to livestream who doing what. Well, we done that, and we did kind of back the workers there, like ask if they want something when they can't leave their spot, maybe they gotta go to the shitter so they say, "Hey, just watch this dial. If it go higher than this, turn this knob this way until it go down." Hey, we can do that much. Don't gotta be a nuclear engineer for five minutes of that. When we bounced, they thank us for being there. They say was less scary with more than just soldiers there.

When we get back to the base, it be time for me and Autumn to get back to Cali cuz classes gonna start for fall semester. So we have a big party to blow off all the juice we got jacked up inside from the power plant. Me and Autumn and a few other peeps be on a plane back to Cali in the morning. Lots of hugs, we be crying and maybe drank some, ate a lot.

So we get back to our crib, I help Autumn water and weed the garden. We call Chong and Sherice and Skye to say yeah we home now. We meet the rest of the crew at IHOP and spit about our time in Arizona, catch the latest from our peeps, then home and sleep deep.

A week later we was in class. This be one zonkers year and it not over yet!

When the Reform Democrats slam-dunked the White House and both Houses in November, we had a big party with all of our friends, old and new. That took away any heebies we had. We know things gonna be OK when the dust settled.

Jimmy: Wow, Jamal, that's an amazing experience you had! I bet you don't even know you're a hero!

Jamal: Ain't no hero! Just doing what seemed needed done.

Jimmy: Are you and Autumn still together?

Jamal: Well, yeah we are. I know that be kinda weird. Most peeps don't stick the first time, have to try a few times to get the right one and make it through the shit times. But somehow we done it. We had us some, like, times we almost didn't. We both got a lotta rough spots, sometimes make us a little nuke, but we strong. We get through it and we still together. Got three kids too.

I think the Buddhism and the chanting and that whole crew help a lot. They don't care about shit that don't matter. I still be chanting and doing stuff there, and Autumn doing it too. Somehow it make us more chill, stronger.

Jimmy: Can you summarize what your life has been like since that turbulent time, since things settled into the new ways?

Actually, this may be a good time for you to do your little code-switching thing you showed me. That blew my mind and I think it will show some of the more subtle impacts of transition on you as a person.

Jamal: I'm down, Jimmy, but in a second. I wanna do it right and spliffy.

You see, me and Autumn not stop with just a certificate or associate degree. We both clicked that we seriously down with study. I really jazz with learning stuff!

At first I just wanna know all about construction. You know, iron work, welding, heavy machinery, reading blueprints, electrics, plumbing, HVAC, the works. But then I keep going. I wanna learn design and mechanical engineering. Then along the way I find out I don't got no idea how to talk English good, so people think I be stupid. So I take some remedial English classes, cuz I know I not be stupid. I find out I got a good head for languages so I take Spanish, German and Japanese.

Along the way I learned about code-switching, how people speak differently depending on who they're with. So all this time I've been speaking like I spoke growing up, which was what I knew and it was how most people I knew and hung out with spoke. Then I learned correct English but I never lost the street English I grew up with.

Now when I'm with my good friends from those early days, I talk like you've been hearing, but when I'm with my college and university friends, I talk like this. And my accent is close to perfect in Spanish, German, and Japanese. Japanese people are always surprised when they meet me in person after talking to me on the phone, because they thought I was Japanese. In Spanish I can do a Oaxaqueño accent, a Quechua accent, a Sonoran accent and of course south side Spanglish. In English I can also be from Texas, New York, Minnesota, and Manchester and London in England. Mostly I just have fun with it.

Jimmy: Well you sure had me going when we did our preliminary interview! For a few minutes I thought I was meeting a genuine multiple-personality person!

Jamal: No, I'm the same Jamal in any language, though I guess sound a bit more formal in Japanese, but then again, everybody does.

Jimmy: So how would you describe your life since your student years morphed into your working years?

Jamal: Well, I think I'll always be studying and learning but… I guess I'm an example of what they call a New Renaissance man.

I still do a lot of construction. I belong to just about all the construction syndicates and associations: All-Around, metal workers, electricians, plumbers, heavy machinery operators, cement workers, welders, carpenters, safety inspectors, designers, materials specialists, and a few more. I love building things and fixing up run-down buildings. I love renovating something someone wanted to tear down and then seeing someone using it and happy with it. It doesn't matter if it's a home or a factory or a warehouse or what it is. And I love the camaraderie of construction teams.

But my world got bigger in college. My love and talent for languages has led me to become a licensed translator and interpreter. I'm listed at courthouses in the area to help when my skills are needed. I also act a tour guide for foreign tourists. I've been interpreter for a number of trade negotiations with foreign countries and enterprises. Eventually I'll learn Mandarin and Arabic, when I have time.

Autumn and I got our private pilot's licenses along the way. We like to check out a plane at a local airport and take weekend trips sometimes to visit friends who moved out of the area.

My dad is still a diehard Jehovah's Witness. A few years ago he married a Witness woman, which is the only way he would ever marry because of their beliefs. He's mellowed out somewhat but we still get into it over religion. I avoid the subject but he always brings it up and I try to set boundaries so we end up getting frustrated and going nowhere. I keep trying to find a way to make it go differently, but it's slow going. Buddhism encourages dialogue and I try to hear him out, but he won't or can't hear me out. Maybe one day. I don't give up but I won't hold my breath.

But now we at least do have a relationship. We bond over work, and since we belong to most of the same syndicates and associations, it's not hard for us to find opportunities to work together. That's where we really get along well. I'll always be grateful to him for getting me into construction. I tell him if he wants to save me, he doesn't have to worry because he already did. He gets it but not completely.

I have to say that construction has gotten a lot better since transition. There's no motivation now to cut corners to save or make more money, even at the expense of safety, like there was before. Now the bottom line isn't money, it's safety and human wellbeing for us who build things and those who will live or work in them.

We no longer have a foreman, crew chief, or big boss, or any kind of chain of command. A client picks a crew of available professionals from the relevant syndicates and associations based on the needs of their project. Then they all meet and the client presents the project, blueprints, permits and so on. They go over the plans and firm things up with the client. Then all crew members work out the work plan together, sequences, materials, tools etc. Each of us knows our part, what we have to do, when in the process and of course how. Since it's helpful to have someone act like an orchestra conductor for practical purposes, a Coordinator of the Week is chosen at random from among the whole crew. At first it was Coordinator of the Day but that proved impractical. A weekly rotation seems to work best. If anyone feels not up to the task or prefers not to take a turn as COW, they don't have to and they sign a waver which they can retract at any time.

At first it was hard to get used to this kind of organization, but we got a lot of help. Every sector and industry got a lot of help from advisors from transitioned countries and enterprises who were just that. They offered suggestions based on experience, shared in the work itself, answered questions we had, and never tried to impose their ideas on us. Over time, Crew Resource Management training, which started out in airplane flight and cabin crews, was expanded, adapted, and developed to be applied in every sector of society. Crew members of all kinds were instructed on how to work together and coordinate synergistically as a team of peers. We also benefitted from the experience of Israeli kibbutzniks and various disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and interpersonal communications.

I'm closer with my mom. She's been through a lot, but she doesn't try to control me or change me. She never did. She and Marcus broke up and got back together a few times. She got into therapy once it became accessible. Before transition it was too expensive and the only health insurance she could afford didn't cover it. It really helped her a lot.

Once when Autumn and I were over at Mom's place for dinner and a movie, Mom got really quiet during dinner and looked me right in the eye. She apologized for the times she said she never wanted me and that I was why her life was hard. She said she had realized that it wasn't my fault the way things happened. And she told me she really does love me and always did, but she had been conflicted because of the way things went. And she forgave my dad for taking off when she got pregnant, because they were both too young and inexperienced to be parents and didn't know how to have safe sex because no one had ever told them.

She had another on again, off again relationship with a guy who was worse than Marcus, but she never let him move in. In her therapy, she realized that she was really Lesbian but that her upbringing in her parents' fundamentalist church had made her bury it too deep to see it. She said she discovered that this played a part in getting pregnant so young. She was unconsciously trying to prove to herself and the world that she was straight. And then the relationship with Marcus and with the other guy were really ways of having a relationship with a man that could never be fulfilling, because she really didn't want to be with a man at all.

A few years later she fell in love with a woman and it worked out a lot better than her straight relationships, but they weren't really right for each other, and she wasn't really ready. But now she's happily married to Lynda and they've been together for eight years and seem to be going strong. She's into a kind of synthesis of Wicca and Shamanism. Sometimes

we go with them to one of their sessions, sometimes they come to one of our Buddhist study meetings. Autumn and I get along well with both of them, and we like to get together as often as our schedules allow.

Autumn tried to find her mom and dad, after going back and forth about it. She said she never really had any kind of relationship with them even when she was with them because meth was their whole life. It took a while but she found out had her dad had been murdered in a bad drug deal. Her mom had been in and out of jail on drug charges before transition, and finally went through rehab a year or two after. She works as a chef in a restaurant, a tour guide, a solar and wind technician, and a bus driver in Houston, but she never answered Autumn's emails or letters and never responded to her on the Finder page on NewWorldWeb, so she decided it's for the best and gave up. She feels like it's no real loss, just good to know that at least one of her parents is OK now.

Oh, and I help Autumn with the gardening. The front yard is a beautiful cross between an impressionist painting and a Japanese garden, and the back yard produces fresh fruits, veggies, eggs and goat's milk for us and all of our neighbors. Permaculture practically maintains itself once you get it set up right. We have a great solar array on the roof and a couple of artsy windmills at the corners of the back yard.

Actually, the line between work and play has been mostly erased. Work stress is a lot less, and after the first two or three years, the work week settled in at about twenty hours, plus or minus a few, divided among the various hats I wear. Since everything gets made at the highest level of quality, once everyone had what they wanted and needed, the demand for new ones went way down.

We're happier than we've ever been before.

Jimmy: I'm so happy for you, Jamal. I do have a few more difficult questions for you though. If they're too painful or sensitive, I'll understand if you don't want to talk about them.

The first question is, in your experience, is there still racism a quarter century after transition, and if so, what does it look like compared to before transition?

Jamal: Yes. There's still racism. It's not as open as it was a while back, but it's still there. It's not as much of an issue here, but I know around Bakersfield there's still some Klan, and in the Southern states there's more of it.

But it's different from how it was before transition. Now, no one can redline you out of getting a home. No one can pay you less than a white person for the same job. No one can be a racist and be a hiring manager or your boss or your landlord or the loan officer at the bank where you need a loan.

So a racist is just a person who doesn't like people of color. But there's no economic or other power that they can have and use against you. You have to deal with them when you meet them, but in the same way they have to deal with you. I might show up at a construction site and there might be another guy there who says he doesn't want to work with a black man. So one or the other leaves, or we both get over ourselves and do what needs to be done as good professionals. Either way, it doesn't affect anybody's livelihood like it would have before.

I do think racism has declined since transition, both in frequency and in intensity. Before transition, some white people saw us people of color as a threat to them socially and economically. We might take their jobs for lower pay. If we move in next door, maybe their property value would go down. They feared we would displace them from their privileged position in the social hierarchy. If they already had a negative stereotype of us, then it was easy to blame us for their struggles when just about everything was kept in short supply so there wasn't enough to go around. It's easy to blame the Other. So that kind of racism made the other kind of racism much worse.

The other kind of racism goes way back to slavery days. There's this stereotype that black people are bigger, stronger, less intelligent, lazy, and more violent. So some white people are afraid of us. They'll cross the street if they see us coming. The irony is, from actual experience, when we black people see a bunch of white dudes coming, we have good reason to cross the street! That comes from experience. It wasn't like it was in the South in the last century, but it was there.

But transition definitely improved things in that department, turned the fire under it way down. Statistics show the percentage of whites and Latinos expressing racist views has steadily declined since transition.

Of course I wouldn't want to go someplace where there's a bunch of people like that if I could help it. But everyone knows where those places are.

Violent crime has also steadily dropped since transition, which makes sense when you think that most violent crime was motivated by money in a time when it was intentionally kept hard to get. We don't see burglary, robbery, arms smuggling, protection rackets and that kind of thing. It's extremely rare and usually mental illness is involved. The things that criminals used to steal or rob for, anyone can now just go get at any distribution center. Of course, there are still crimes of passion and impulse, but less than ever before. People aren't wound as tight as they were then.

There's still the issue of police brutality towards people of color, in some places at least. But those are way down too. The job of police is a lot less dangerous and stressful than before transition. Since part of the social paradigm is humanistic respect, police are trained differently than back then, and they aren't in the kind of environment that would push them to become hardened and callous. The role of police has changed in subtle ways and become a lot less hierarchical than it was before. There are individual instances of old-style brutality against people of color, but it's maybe once every month or two in the whole country, not an almost daily thing. When it does happen, the officers in question are removed from duty, stand trial, and if convicted, they are sent to a quarantine village where they can get therapy or just live in peace where they can't hurt anyone. If they're married, their families can live with them there.

I don't think racism will ever be completely gone, but it isn't the constant, virulent, menacing presence that it was before.

Jimmy: You've described a lot of very positive transformations in your life and your family's too since transition. Can you talk about any things or issues that were hard for you in the new social environment after transition, or any ways that life got harder?

Also, you've talked a lot about things that changed. But what stayed the same?

Jamal: Well, I guess it's true that nobody's perfect so no society is perfect. I must say that the benefits from transition have far outweighed the difficulties.

At first some people went a little crazy with everything changing and no money of any kind. There was some looting but a lot of people stood up to looters, and they were almost always caught. Some people tried to hoard stuff and got a little ugly when they were told they couldn't. Nothing serious but still it had to be dealt with, and both security, police, and lay people were still getting up to speed on how to handle those situations without brutality or unnecessary violence. That was a tough period. But that settled down before too long as people got used to the new normal.

Of course, there was the craziness when some states tried to sabotage transition, and that was really scary, but that didn't last too long. More and more people there saw the good in it so the politicians leading the "New Confederacy" lost popular support. At the same time, they were pretty much stopped by the military, using a whole new kind of tactic. A lot of stealth operations meant to disrupt their operations while minimizing loss of life and limb, unlike traditional warfare that tries to inflict as much harm on the enemy as possible.

Then there's the schlock-work, what's officially called citizen rotation, the jobs that no one wants to do all the time but that have to be done all the time. Actually there aren't that many of those, but as everyone knows, names are randomly drawn from all residents of a town, city, or state, and when it's your turn, you have to do it for maybe a day or a week at most. It happens to me about once or twice a year. I can't say I like it, but I'm willing to do it so some poor souls don't have to do it as a career. Heck, that poor soul could have been me. I look at it kind of like jury duty.

Some people are kind of bitter about it, but I like the way people end up meeting and working together who would never have met in the old world. I've met a lot of cool people on schlock-work, and learned a lot, and made new friends. And it's not like it's forever. I can put up with just about anything for a day or a week now and then.

It took a while for all of everybody to learn how to do things as peers and do it efficiently and effectively. We were all used to either telling people what to do or being told what to do. So some people tried to be bossy and others seemed like they wanted someone to tell them what to do. During that learning curve, it got pretty frustrating sometimes.

We all had to simultaneously learn to be what they used to call self-starters and team players. We got through it, but it wasn't easy. The exaggerated American individualism made it an even bigger challenge. Fortunately, a lot of teams of

advisors came in from transitioned countries overseas as well as Canada and acted as trainers and coaches. They were great teachers!

Some people were very upset about learning that they could only own what they would or could actually use themselves or needed to help others or in their professions. They claimed it was totalitarianism. But that eventually died down. After all, these limits didn't hurt their quality of life, just their egos.

It was a weird feeling to travel to an un-transitioned country. Between transitioned countries, it's easy. But in un-transitioned countries, before you travel you have to go to the local State Department office to get currency and credit cards for use where you'll be visiting, plus a travel packet for that country giving you what you need to know to get along there. There are trade agreements and treaties with most of those countries, and the State Department maintains reserves of the necessary currencies for just that purpose. It's kind of an adventure, but also stressful. Some of those places it can be awkward when you eat at a restaurant or pick up something in a store and walk out forgetting to pay. Usually they know you're a tourist and just remind you, but once in a while you can get treated to the local police hospitality for a bit before it gets straightened out. But there aren't very many un-transitioned countries so it's not a big problem.

There was some confusion while lawmakers and others figured out how to change the laws to match the new social paradigm. For a while, it felt a little insecure when there were issues but people didn't know how to work through them. At first there were a lot of disputes over houses and apartments, where more than one person or family tried to claim a place, and the courts had to find the most equitable ways to resolve them until the laws themselves were revamped. Usually it went to whoever filed the claim first, but sometimes it wasn't that simple. Autumn and I dodged that bullet because we filed pretty much right away, before most people thought about it.

What stayed the same? Well, there's still bureaucracy, more than I'd like though not as much as before. Some people and groups still don't get along. Some people like to feed a grudge and keep it going. There are still times when groupthink sets in, though not usually on a big scale. Occasionally so-called "alpha" personalities emerge and connect with people who are more vulnerable to their domineering, though it's much less than before and it's never escalated to become systemic.

Also some people seemed to think that once transition happened, all their problems would be over. But life's not like that. Most of the external stressors and triggers that used to act as salt in psychological and emotional wounds are gone; but we each have to deal with our own inner struggles. For example, I survived early on partly by always keeping my guard up, so after transition I still found it hard to really let people in. Therapy has helped, but there's no way around the hard inner work necessary. If you had clinical depression before transition, you still have it after, though it won't be triggered or exacerbated so much as before by outside circumstances. If you had an alcohol problem before transition, you'll still have it after. Only now you have direct access to high quality treatment which you may likely not have had before.

There are still psychopaths, rapists, child abusers, bullies, and the like, but there are fewer of them, probably because the conditions that can push some people in that direction aren't there anymore.

Oh, and religious fanaticism. That's also not as big as it was before, but there are still religious zealots who want to force everyone to live and believe as they do. I don't know what kind of transition or paradigm shift we need to change that or phase it out. You can't make it illegal because that would be just as bad, and it would only feed fanatics' fire with martyrdom. I think they make up a diminishing portion of most populations because the transitioned social environment promotes critical thinking and creativity and a strong sense of self, as well as teamwork and empathy. That seems to make people less drawn to that extreme religiosity, less susceptible to whatever its appeal is. One thing fanatic religion doesn't accept is critical and independent thinking. And compassion.

Jimmy: One last question and then we'll wrap it up. Before transition, many people thought that a paradigm like we have now would suppress innovation, erode work ethic, and encourage laziness. Were any of those concerns justified in your opinion?

Jamal: No, definitely not, from what I've seen.

Don't get me wrong, there are still lazy people. Some people are always going to be more motivated, more energetic, more engaged in things than others. But as far as what the pessimists were saying at the beginning of the wave of transitions, I'd say if anything, the opposite is more true.

Let me put it this way. When I was doing day jobs out of Home Depot, I had all kinds of people hire me, sometimes alone, sometimes with others.

Some of them were just fine. They'd say here are the materials and some tools and here's what I want done. Maybe they'd have drawings or blueprints or pictures they printed out from the Internet. Then they'd let us do it and pay us when we were done. Some of them would invite us in for lunch and iced tea and treat us really well, with respect. And no matter what, I always gave it my best.

But some people who hired us would treat us like servants, barking orders and hovering over us criticizing and saying why can't we work faster and in general just being jerks. They'd never be satisfied with anything and then they'd lowball us when it came time to pay us. I even got called "Boy" a couple of times. Now I never tried to take it out on them, because of my own sense of self-respect, and besides, I didn't want to do anything to justify their criticism. I gave it my best there too, even if just to be able to prove them wrong and look them in the eye and know they were full of shit. But my hundred percent on those jobs was definitely smaller than my hundred percent on the jobs where I was treated well. It wasn't on purpose, but it was a real thing. And I saw other guys and a few gals who would definitely take every chance to goof off when the lousy clients weren't looking. A few would even steal little things in spite, if they thought they could get away with it. But most of those same people weren't like that with the good clients.

I think it's like this: when you're working hard but you're being abused or disrespected or underpaid and bossed around, and the one you're working for is in this multimillion dollar mansion and paying you minimum wage or less, or if you have a regular job that's boring or you hate it but you have to take what you can get, and you're treated like trash and you know the CEO is making more in one day than you make in a year, your motivation and engagement go way down. Hell, if it were those days again and I had my choice between McDonalds, Walmart, or collecting some kind of assistance and not working, I might choose the latter too, maybe.

But when you're a stakeholder, a fellow decision maker among others where most of the time you respect and support each other, and you know you're making a difference and you can express yourself and what you do and say matters, your engagement and motivation goes way up.

A lot of people who didn't have a work ethic in those days were working jobs they hated or didn't like or weren't even that good at, while being treated and paid poorly, while having no say in how things were run. After transition, most of those people are suddenly able to pursue what they really wanted to do and were good at. The old setup had just ground down their whole being.

I'd say if anything, there's a smaller percentage of the people now who don't contribute to the community than there was before transition, and some of those back then who contributed the least, among the laziest of them all, were CEO's and the like.

Also, back then Conservatives used to resent paying taxes to allegedly support lazy people. I can understand that, and I know I don't appreciate it when I'm in one kind of crew or team or another, and someone isn't doing their share and others have to take up the slack. But now, someone sitting home watching TV all day isn't anybody's burden. No one gets anything taken from them to be given to this person.

Besides, we humans are social beings. Most people, even lazy ones, get to feeling uncomfortable if they feel that the people around them are resenting them.

Jimmy: That's fascinating, Jamal! Thank you for being so forthcoming.

Is there anything you'd like to say for posterity, or to your pre-transition self?

Jamal: Well, Jimmy, to posterity I'd like to say I hope you can really appreciate what an awesome time you live in. Almost all of the arbitrary barriers to your happiness and fulfillment are gone as never before. Treasure it! Protect it! Make the most of it! The road is wide open, and all of the down trees and landslides and toll booths are gone, so now it's

up to you to walk, ride, drive, or take off down it and plot your course. And don't take it for granted. Don't let anyone take this away from you.

To my former self, I just want to say, hey JoJo, you gonna be alright, it gonna be rad, you gonna turn out just screechy! Don't even think about some of those dark thoughts you been having.

Jimmy: Thank you Jamal, it's been awesome! You've been great! Is it OK with you if I or someone else follows up with you down the line, do it again?

Jamal: Sure thing! It's been rad!

Kerri Rossi — United States

> **Note:** This fictional account was written when the Transition was imagined as a single, rapid, coordinated event. Further research into the historical record has since shown a gradual, voluntary approach to be more viable and sustainable; the novel is preserved as originally written (author's note; the current Roadmap).

Interviewer: Jessica Rogers, United States of America

Interviewee: Kerri Rossi, Georgia State Senator, United States of America

Jessica: Hello Kerri and thank you so much for taking time for your very busy schedule to participate in this project. We're especially happy to have you here because of your perspective from behind the stage of transition, so to speak.

Kerri: Oh, it's my pleasure, Jessica, and a welcome change of pace. And I completely agree with the motives for this project. I think it's important so I'm very happy to be included.

Jessica: You have a unique perspective on some of the nuts and bolts of transition, so I'd like to focus mostly on that, rather than the format we usually use. So I won't ask you to describe your childhood and life up to transition, beyond just a very short summary. Is that OK?

Kerri: Yes, of course.

Jessica: So can you give us a brief summary of your background?

Kerri: Sure. My father owned and ran a large hardware store in Columbus that actually competed pretty well with the big chains. People like local businesses and he managed to maintain his prices attractive enough to keep people coming back. My mother was a defense attorney for her whole professional career. Oh, they're still with us, but they moved to a retirement community in Arizona and are enjoying their golden years. So I guess you could say we were middle to upper middle class when I was growing up.

I went to good public schools and got good enough grades and SAT scores to get into several universities that I wanted. I wanted to be an attorney like my mother, so I went to the University of Georgia Law School in Athens. My mom always used to share with me about some of her cases, her frustrations, and her triumphs and it fascinated me.

I've also always been musically inclined. I was in a couple of bands in high school and later in college. I especially love jazz, blues, and acid rock. But I never thought of it as a career or main occupation. Music was always like my second love. Law was my first.

I went through pre-law pretty easily, but once I was in law school, I had to stretch to my limits and then some. Needless to say, music went on an indefinite pause. But I graduated in the top ten percent of my class. The way things were then, though, it took me three tries to pass the bar.

I started out as a public defender and had some good successes, enough to impress judges and prosecutors. More than one prosecutor told me I made their job a lot harder.

All along, I really tried to keep a sense of integrity. For example, I would try hard to avoid using cheap and unethical tricks. I had a hard time dealing with clients who I knew or suspected were guilty of serious crimes where people were hurt. I had to give the most vigorous defense, but inside I'd be hoping to lose. Of course, I reveled when I got an innocent defendant acquitted.

I also got more and more of a clear picture of the inadequacies of the justice system. I began to have some ideas of how some of them might be remedied.

Eventually I switched to being a prosecutor in order to have both perspectives and a bigger picture. I started to be on fire to change the world, or at least the state of Georgia. That's what ultimately led me to get into politics.

Jessica: That was perfect. Can you give us a brief history of your political career?

Kerri: Well, first I did some research, since I really didn't have a background in politics. I wanted to know what I'd be getting into, and I wanted to be prepared.

I decided to start out locally, so I ran for city council as a centrist Democrat since my ideas were closer to more of theirs than to the Republicans. This was before both parties went through their realignment to become the Reform Democrats and the New Republicans. Also, the Republicans had still not gone far enough to let go of their theocratic and authoritarian agendas with which I vehemently disagreed.

On my second attempt, I was nominated to run against incumbent Republican Ronald Berman. Conditions were in my favor. Columbus in particular and Muscogee County in general have traditionally been Democratic leaning, but by a relatively small margin. Ron had been elected two terms ago on the appeal of his platform of bringing property taxes down if not eliminating them and eliminating sales tax and other taxes. He had not been successful, beyond lowering taxes for big corporations and billionaires. People were fed up.

He had also continued the longstanding Republican attempts to privatize everything he could privatize, institute mandatory Christian prayers in public schools, ban all forms of birth control, and expand the list of banned books along with making it a felony to possess them at all. Even most conservatives were getting tired of this kind of extremism. As the child of a Jewish mother and a Catholic father and having grown up with both traditions side by side, I had, and still have, no tolerance for having any religion being shoved down my throat or anyone else's!

So, my platform of raising taxes on corporations and top earners while lowering it for most other people, protecting separation of church and state, reversing book bans, protecting teachers, librarians, and all public servants from harassment and vigilante intimidation, and increasing protections for consumers and employees found a growingly receptive audience. Of course at the local level, the impact would be small, but it would be a start.

I made sure to avoid any rhetoric that lent itself to being misinterpreted. My husband is a great help in that regard. He's a perfectionist, which comes in handy when he finds almost every conceivable way an opponent could twist my words or misinterpret them. Sometimes it drives me up the wall, but he's stopped me from stepping in it more than once.

I made a point of focusing on the issues, refusing to vilify my opponent and his party. I also openly spoke about my flaws which I knew Ron would try to use against me, before he had a chance to do so. And for perhaps the first time, I was able to reverse the script. I was the Democrat running on a platform of ending government overreach, using a lot of the same kind of verbiage that Republicans had used for decades, which put Ron on the defensive.

Of course I didn't get much corporate funding for my campaign, but I made my campaign ads low-budget, hard-hitting, and to the point. No frills. Mostly just looking the camera in the eye and speaking to the people like I would sing to them if I were performing a song. I did more with less.

I defeated Ron fifty-five percent to forty-nine percent, with the remaining six percent going to independents.

Jessica: How was your first taste of being a legislator?

Kerri: It was intense and humbling at first, but I had a lot of good people around me and I refused to be discouraged. It was a steep learning curve but I'm one stubborn broad.

A number of my new colleagues tried to school me on how to "play the game." I listened and learned but made my own decisions. For example, I refused to support a bill that would allow religious school social clubs to hold their own prayer meetings on campus after school hours but make it illegal to make any religious activity compulsory or to be backed by the school, all of which I wanted, but as it came through committee, it also expanded the list of banned books and criminalized parents who gave their children access to privately owned copies. That was a compromise I wasn't willing to make.

But on the other hand, I was more willing than many of my fellow Democratic council members to work with Republicans when I agreed with something they wanted to do, or at least saw some merit in it.

I ended up developing a reputation as a maverick with integrity, an outspoken and a fair dealer but hard to rein in or influence to play along with things. I could live with that.

I was able to accomplish a decent amount of what I hoped to do, which is all one can hope for in politics, especially in as polarized an environment as we had then.

Jessica: I've read your track record of course, and it's very impressive. So what is your current role?

Kerri: I'm a State Senator from Columbus, in Muscogee County.

Jessica: When and why did you decide to trade municipal politics for the shark tank of the state legislature?

Kerri: After a couple of terms on city council, I felt ready to tackle bigger issues and stretch my wings, so to speak. I had a sense of wanting to make a bigger difference. That was sort of my plan all along. I always saw myself as a State Senator, like that was my niche. But I had to learn the ropes, get the hang of it, and get to know the people and let them know me so I could have a better chance of being more effective.

Jessica: How long had you been a State Senator when transition happened, and how old were you?

Kerri: Transition happened when I was thirty-eight years old and in the beginning of my second term.

Jessica: So you're a seasoned legislator by now.

Kerri: You could say that. I'm glad I had those two years under my belt when transition happened. I think that forced me, and everyone else, to grow and exceed ourselves in a very short time!

Jessica: Were you aware that it was likely to happen at any time? Had you read The Cure?

Kerri: Absolutely! Just like I had read Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Noam Chomsky, Daisaku Ikeda, Che Guevara, Martin Luther King, Milton Friedman, and many others. I kept hearing about it and of course I followed the series of transitions happening around the world. If it was the seed from which such major changes were sprouting, I felt like I had to read it.

Jessica: What were your thoughts after reading it?

Kerri: At first I thought that yes, all the points that it makes are verifiably true and accurate, and thoroughly documented using sources from across every spectrum that all pointed in the same direction. The socioeconomic paradigm dominating most of the world was tragically and unavoidably destructive and unsustainable. But I was a bit skeptical about the underlying premises about human nature and what humans are practically capable of. I also found it very hard to wrap my head around the idea of societies functioning with no form of currency and no kind of hierarchy.

Then I read everything I could about countries that had transitioned. My husband and I took our two children to visit some of those countries as tourists. After Canada transitioned, we tried to spend a week or two a year there to get the feel for how it was developing. It wasn't easy to get a permit from the State Department to visit Canada by then. The government in Washington was decidedly hostile to the idea of transition. They saw it as a threat to what they called the American way of life, AKA the status quo. They couldn't forbid citizens from going there outright like they could with North Korea or the Syrian Islamic Republic, but they could sure throw up a mountain of red tape.

It wasn't dangerous there and Canada wasn't making any moves towards aggression. They couldn't find a plausible excuse to forbid travel to Canada, especially after their attempt put a scary face on it via high quality deepfake videos blew up in their face when several whistleblowers released indisputable proof that the videos were fake. They didn't want credible people to see transitioned Canada and want to have something like it here.

So what they did was create such a labyrinthine miasma of red tape that they thought most people wouldn't want to bother dealing with it. They were partly right, in the sense that people started sneaking across the border and back, often with the help of Canadian friends and family waiting to receive them at the border, usually on foot but not far from a road. The State Department demanded that Canada patrol the border and send those people back, but the Canadian government just responded with their own version of bureaucratic quicksand for our government to have to wade through.

I'll admit that a few times we were among those stealth tourists as it was called. It wasn't illegal per se, and we liked the fact of whom it made uncomfortable.

I was very favorably impressed with what we saw and experienced. My initial skepticism gave way to deepening respect.

Everywhere we went, most people were cordial and open. We could go wherever we wanted and talk to whomever we wanted. We literally could go to any restaurant or distribution center, which usually was in a former store, and pick out anything from electronics to clothing to musical instruments. We were still rung out, but there was no charge for anything, though we did have to show our passports and scan our fingerprints or retinas. We were informed that we could only acquire for our own personal or professional use. We found the quality of every item to be superior to high-end equivalents in the States. That was no surprise since items available in the US from outlets of companies whose parent companies were transitioned were well known for being top quality at bargain basement prices. But our observations disproved the rumors that that high quality was just a gimmick to seed discontent in un-transitioned countries.

We visited a few factories and warehouses to see if rumors and media "documentaries" claiming that massive sweatshops were involved had any basis in fact. No one accompanied us and we made those visits always on the spur of the moment. Rental cars and hotels were, of course, free as well.

What we saw in the factories made our jaws drop. We saw an easygoing but focused environment. People weren't rushing or hurrying. They were focused intently on their tasks but relaxed. These people seemed to be happy with what they were doing, relaxed but exhibiting industrious professionalism.

On their lunch break, we joined some of the workers at a table and basically interviewed them after telling them where we were from. I told them that I was a lawmaker and wanted to see for myself what this whole transition phenomenon was all about. At the time I was still a city councilwoman so that wasn't a lie.

We learned that after the first year or year and a half post-transition, the workweek naturally spun down to around twenty hours with only occasional crunches or down weeks when they didn't need to produce.

This was, as we now know, because the wasteful production of intentionally inferior goods requiring frequent replacement was displaced by production of intentionally superior goods designed to last. Once everyone had enough of what they needed and wanted, factories could run just enough to do a little more than keep up with need due to breakage.

The overall quality of life would have been inconceivable if we hadn't seen it for ourselves. At one point Raj and I commented to each other that there was something subliminally more relaxed about just being there. Then we realized what it was. We were feeling the absence of the relentless barrage of advertising that we took for granted in the States before transition.

We recorded video, audio, and pictures and gathered countless documents to have on hand when needed to counter some of the rumors, assumptions, and outright fear mongering propaganda that was out there.

It became clear to me that transition would be one of the best things that could happen in our country. But it had little to do with my job as legislator; it would come as a viral swell among our people like a flash mob times a million. By its very nature it couldn't come from lawmakers and government.

I made contacts with people in Canada, Russia, and other transitioned countries, who made themselves available as advisors and coaches for countries in transition, but they would only come by invitation and as consultants. It would be up to the American people to carry out our transition when we were ready. These advisors and their countries would not meddle in our internal affairs. They would be our Sherpas as we climb the Everest of reconfiguring our society. They would not impose anything on us.

I studied the transitions of various countries. I did my best to understand what the common threads, issues, and challenges were, and equally important, what varied from country to country and culture to culture. I believed it was just a matter of time before the U.S. was ready for transition. At that time, I wanted to be as ready as possible to contribute to the best outcome.

I had to do all of this in secret of course. None of it was illegal or unethical by any means, but my Republican and later my New Republican colleagues were desperately afraid of and opposed to the very concept of transition. Of course they didn't actually know anything about it, because of fear and propaganda. All they knew was that it would being a fundamental change to our society, and that part of that change was the loss of power, privilege, and wealth. They envisioned it as a rerun of the Bolshevik revolution.

Fear makes people act and think in the craziest, most destructive ways! So, it was prudent for me to keep my research and my thoughts on the matter to myself. Using various precautions like VPN and Tails operating system made it unlikely that I would be easily outed.

By the time I entered the State Senate, I had networked quite a bit. I was in touch with a number of Reform Democrats who were on the same page as me and, believe it or not, a couple of New Republicans who had read The Cure and were open to discussing it in a non-hysterical fashion.

I was also connected with the incredible, if loose, nationwide networking consensus process that was coalescing into a plan for our own transition.

Meanwhile it was business as usual. As a new member of the State Senate, I had yet another learning curve to scale.

Jessica: I wish all of our politicians were as thorough in their research before making important decisions!

Kerri: Yeah, me too!

Jessica: Now let's get to transition day itself.

Kerri: March 7, a date what will be etched in my memory forever, even if it weren't a national holiday!

Of course I knew of it in advance. It was a Sunday, which was a nice touch since banks and many businesses would be closed.

Even those who opposed it knew that it was coming. They didn't know the date or even the year for the most part, thanks to the chumming done by various parties to create enough irrelevant noise traffic to hide the actual consensus traffic, a bit like when the Allies tricked the Germans into thinking that D-Day would happen at Calais instead of Normandy.

There was a virulent movement in Georgia, and in all of the Southern states as well as Texas, Idaho, Arizona and a few other states. It was the old "The South Shall Rise Again" theme, amplified and focused into hysterical proportions. I had little doubt that when Transition came, the Good Old Boys would get violent.

As I said, people in the grip of irrational fear can get pretty crazy. These people knew little to nothing about transition, but they thought they did. Some very wealthy, powerful people with a lot to lose made sure to feed that fire. It wasn't hard for them to do.

On the chosen day, I came in early along with the other State Senators who knew what was coming. We had sent messages to the rest to invite them to come early to discuss some important issues and a lot of them came because they didn't know what was up, but they didn't want something to go through without their hands in it. We started out with the things that were already on the agenda, after answering a few members who asked what's so important to come in early. We just asked them to be a little patient.

Everybody's cell phones started ringing more often as the morning progressed. There started to be a feeling of restlessness in the room. Renee Freeman from Atlanta, the most senior Senator who was in on transition, took this moment to explain that very soon there will be a TV broadcast that will explain some very important events currently in progress, and to ask that we all do our best to minimize distractions from our phones as this broadcast will answer most of their questions. She was immediately bombarded with questions.

Renee turned on the big TV in the Senate chamber and tuned it to a news station. The news anchors were present and seemed to be waiting, looking and listening to something happening in real time. The message "Please stand by for an important message." Scrolled through the chyrons at the bottom of the screen.

“Please, everyone, be patient and stay calm. Things will come clear very soon. We will have our work cut out for us for a while, but what’s coming is good news.”

Then came the declaration that we all know and have studied many times. It was delivered with professionalism and sincerity that inspired trust and confidence. The anchor couldn’t have done a better job.

After that we watched the President’s message urging calm and patience.

There was silence for a few moments while people took it all in. What followed was total chaos. Thunderous applause mixed with the loudest booing I had ever heard. A few Senators even began shoving each other. It was like a scene from a B movie.

The Secretary pounded his gavel and shouted into the microphone, “Please, everyone, come to order! Please come to order!”

This had no effect. Pandemonium continued until a shot rang out. We all froze in shock. Then the Secretary asked, “Is anybody hurt?”

Whoever fired the shot must have fired into the air because no one was hurt. We never did find out who it was, but there were five or six likely suspects.

“The Senate will come to order,” the Secretary said into the microphone. “And there will be no more shooting! I’ve stressed this so many times I’m blue in the face! The rules say no firearms are allowed in here! I’m the first one to defend the Second Amendment, as you all know, but in here we are professionals and if firearms are really necessary, then we’ve lost all vestige of civilization! This is not the Wild West!”

Then several members rushed to the podium and scuffled over the microphone. Senator Harry DiBono ended up with the mic. His face was red and so distorted that I could hardly recognize him. He screamed, “That’s it! This is what we’ve been talking about! This is the globalist communist socialist satanist takeover! They want to indoctrinate our kids with leftist propaganda, and take away our guns and even our money so we’ll all be poor and starving! It’s time to bring back the Confederacy! Who’s with me?”

Then Cindy Gaffigan grabbed the mic from him before he could react and said in a somewhat calmer, but still loud voice, “Senator, you’re talking about treason! You are way out of order!”

Against a background of shouting voices, it was hard to hear. Then Harry grabbed the mic back and said, “We all know you’re a communist and a witch, so what you say is irrelevant! I move for secession and re-establishment of the Confederacy!”

A little over a third of those present raised their hands. Fights broke out. Senator Julie Parke grabbed my arm and yelled in my face, “You’re one of them! I know it!” She dug her nails into the skin on my arm and was shaking me crazily. I had to pry her off of me. We scuffled until someone pulled us apart. I was relieved but she seemed like she really wanted to escalate it.

I heard the Secretary say into the microphone, “Secession from the Union is not a legitimate motion and is unconstitutional. It will not be taken up, besides which, you can see that it would not have passed anyway. That also means that we New Republicans do not support your treason. We all swore an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States and the State of Georgia. I urge Senator DiBono to retract his illegitimate motion. Otherwise you stand to be removed from office and charged with treason.” The Secretary was a New Republican, but he was frequently under fire due to his centrist philosophy, which upset the far-right portion of his party.

“We don’t need your support or approval, all of you RINO’s and liberals!” That was Tom Lehrer, the most extreme of the extremists, who had lobbied to pass a bill forbidding the teaching of the Big Bang and a round earth. He was also pushing a narrative that Hitler and the Nazis were actually good humanitarians, that the Holocaust was a fabrication of Jewish globalists and that Hitler tried to protect the Jews from the real villain, Stalin. He wanted that to be taught in schools. I always had to take a few deep breaths whenever he opened his dumpster fire of a mouth.

With that statement, all of the secessionists stormed out of the room. We could hear them outside, sounding for all the world like a lynch mob.

Jessica: I bet you were terrified!

Kerri: Yes, but not so much for myself as for my family and for the people of Georgia. And for that matter, for the whole country.

Jessica: So what happened after that in the Senate chamber?

Kerri: We resolved to do everything in our power to keep Georgia in the Union and keep Georgians safe. We had anticipated this so we already had some contingency plans roughed out.

In the middle of this, the Governor called on the main phone and was put on loudspeaker for all to hear. He basically told us that Georgia was leaving the Union to join the Confederacy and that we were hereby dissolved and disbanded. The Secretary stated that since the Governor is committing treason, we don't recognize his authority and we will be holding interim elections to choose his replacement. The now ex-Governor said "We'll see about that!" He hung up the phone.

From that moment, there were two Georgias: one a state of the United States of America and one claiming to be a state in the New Confederacy.

We communicated with the House, which had had a similar crisis. Our next step was extreme but necessary: we put in a call to the President of the United States, who was half expecting, half dreading the call. He was opposed to transition and had put a lot of energy and taxpayer resources into trying to prevent and turn public opinion against transition, but he was enough of a political animal to realize that with him a lame duck in an election year, his actions would determine how he would be remembered forever. A successful and smooth transition might be against his grain, but it was a lesser evil to him than presiding over the dissolution of the nation and the civil war that would go with it. He had been known to say privately that if he couldn't stop transition from happening, dealing with it wouldn't be his headache. So we knew that he would act to preserve the Union.

We were right. He sounded overwhelmed, which was understandable because he'd been getting calls from all of the Southern states, Florida, Texas, Idaho, Arizona, Tennessee and others. He had us on a conference call with several other state legislatures and three or four governors. He assured us that he has already invoked the Insurrection Act and that troops are deploying "as we speak," and that includes bases in states involved in the insurrection.

His instructions were to first and foremost declare a state of emergency and tell people to shelter in place until further notice. He advised to activate the Emergency Broadcasting System but also use every possible medium including the Internet. We were to identify which local governments were trustworthy and which were a danger and coordinate with the National Guard, law enforcement and emergency responders. He cautioned us that those bodies are most likely divided and advised keeping those supporting the insurrection restrained if possible and to be on the lookout for Confederate operatives posing as US GI's or police in authentic uniforms and vehicles.

All signs, countersigns, passcodes and friend-or-foe systems must be reset immediately and changed hourly. He advised us to see to our safety and that of our families and if possible, base ourselves in the fallout shelters left over from the Cold War and move as many family members as can come in with us. He said we need to keep track of the media because some are reporting accurately while others are disseminating only disinformation and propaganda for the so-called New Confederacy.

The next few months were probably the hardest of my life. My husband and children moved into the shelter with me, so at least we were together. There was more than enough room and supplies for everyone, since about a third of the members were absent. Fortunately, the shelter had been well maintained and stocked. We had everything we needed except sunlight and the ability to go outside.

Immediately after our hurried installation in the shelter, someone thought to change the combinations to the locks and reprogram the electronic keys. Sure enough, that night there were attempts by hostiles to gain entry. The shelter was designed to withstand nuclear bombs and bunker-buster shells, so the Confederate legislators were unsuccessful.

Outside there was a real shooting war going on. We were in constant touch with the military, other states, and the Federal government.

To watch the news, you'd think there were really two different countries in two different places.

There was also a war of hackers. Confederate media outlets were frequently interrupted with scenes of animals defeating and the by now well known Gotchya hackers' pie-in-the-face logo with the synthetic voice saying "Y'all going down once more! We Gotchya!" Not only the Gotchya hackers though. It seemed like every hacker out there wanted to make their mark. It went back and forth. Our broadcasts were sometimes interrupted with confederate flags and Dixie playing in the background, or incoherent rants about globalist satanists. Hackers on both sides got in some hits and electronically jousted with each other. After talking with some of them, I think they enjoyed it. Fortunately, we had the better teams of hackers. We were also aided by independent rogue hackers who, in later interviews, stated that it was just more fun to poke an electronic stick into the Confederate media than the US media because their responses were so amusing. Then there were the livestreams from thousands of people around the state. Hackers were ineffective against them. This kind of coverage is what we now call "guerrilla journalism."

We had the upper hand in the hacking department, but the Confederates had it over us in sheer violence and brutality. Their so-called "provisional government" in Mobile decreed that any businesses not charging money for goods and services would be forcibly shut down, as in burned down. Any person failing to pay for goods or services was fair game for whatever violence was deemed appropriate, which for the lucky ones meant shooting.

Shortages very quickly developed in everything from fuel to food to all manner of supplies. Un-transitioned businesses displayed big signs saying "This is a freedom business! No free rides here! Shoplifters beware!" Of course, they gouged their prices to the point where a bottle of water was going for $150. Almost no one wanted to even go into those businesses, which were also short on merchandise as their habitual supply chains were mostly down. Members of the Confederate "government" made a big show of shopping in those stores, saying that it was everyone's duty to do so and how "sacrifices must be made." Almost no one was convinced or able to afford to comply.

Businesses connected to transitioned enterprises in transitioned states and countries were prepared in advance for anticipated attacks. They had added security personnel augmented with military troops to protect them. Replenishment of supplies was done via underground tunnels that had been pre-dug and via military helicopters, which were also used to transport citizens to and from these locations to protect them from vigilantes and Confederate soldiers and police.

The Army and Marines set up safe zones in almost every neighborhood and town where citizens could go for transportation and medical treatment. The NewWorldWeb was up and running but under constant attack from Confederate hackers, but the servers were out of state in fully transitioned states. Our hackers were able to protect it most of the time and recover quickly from outages, so we posted the locations of safe zones and instructions how to get to them. Special phone numbers are also set up for people to call, and of course all TV and radio stations put it out there.

The military also set up distribution centers for supplies at bases and in cities and towns. These came under frequent attack, along with the protected access routes. The military was more than able to overpower enemy forces but were operating under new rules of engagement. Their strategies and preferred weapons were oriented towards neutralizing or de-escalating a conflict point as quickly as possible with the minimum attainable harm to people and property. Sleep gas was little use most places because combatants on both sides had gas masks, but where it could be used, it proved to be a very effective measure.

It was relatively easy to identify Confederates from friendlies because the former were largely out and about trying to get control over everything, while the latter mostly stayed in per instructions from US government sources.

As shortages and blackouts spread and the brutality of Confederate loyalists grew more and more unrestrained, popular support started to fall away. This was hastened by the strict humanistic and humanitarian behavioral standards followed by transitioned forces in the face of brutality and the fact that the only viable sources of goods were transitioned sources. Little by little, physical reality overcame propaganda.

Transitioned forces also used different kinds of tactics more closely resembling guerrilla tactics. Overpowering Confederate convoys here and there after jamming communications. Blocking bridges and roads and then

apprehending Confederate personnel as they tried to clear the obstructions. Tapping into their communications to send their units and civilian operatives into carefully planned traps.

It took months, but gradually the Confederacy went out with a whimper from the most deluded diehards as more and more people realized that transition brought positive changes and not the dystopian hellscape that Confederate propaganda had told them would ensue. Personally, I think many of them actually believed the propaganda they were putting out, as irrational as that sounds.

One by one, states reaffirmed their commitment to the United States and the Constitution. Georgia was the fourth state to stand down and embrace transition. Ringleaders of the uprising were arrested and stood trial very publicly. Due process was followed and these defendants were treated with unwavering human respect but no deference such as they demanded.

Some of them recanted and copped pleas that were accepted when their sincerity was clear. Some remained defiant and self-justifying and ended up sentenced to supervised community service or quarantine villages. Frequent interviews and documentaries were aired to make sure that the world could see that they were well treated and no human rights violations occurred.

Two or three years later, some of the most hardcore of them were interviewed. Some of them still stated their intention to keep up the insurrection if they got the chance. Some expressed contrition and regret that they got drawn into that whole mess. All of them expressed that they had to admit that they felt like the best-treated prisoners of all time.

Once that nightmare was over, we all went home and started rebuilding.

Jessica: So at that point I imagine you had a lot of work to do! Was it hard to reconcile between the Reform Democrats and the New Republicans after that?

Kerri: Actually, during the crisis, political differences and animosity went by the wayside. For the duration, we were one body of people with a common purpose. We spoke as individuals, not as parties.

Jessica: Did that last, or did it go back to the same old same old after the crisis?

Kerri: Believe it or not, it lasted. We never went back to the old antagonism. We still had disagreements and different points of view, but that experience we shared changed us all. For the better. We were no longer in a political football game where the goal was to get power and disenfranchise the other side and then go crazy. There was still disagreement and different points of view, but it led to mutually respectful, even when heated, dialog to hammer out a synthesis aimed at the wellbeing of the people of Georgia.

What also helped was the fact that the really extreme, intractable, inflexible New Republicans all walked out, never to return. All who were left were the reasonable, well thought out, team players whose commitment to the electorate was greater than their party loyalty, greed, or power lust. The authoritarian fanaticism that had blighted the New Republicans was largely though not entirely absent from the ranks of the Reform Democrats. When the missing Senators and Representatives were replaced in special elections, almost all of them were also more reasonable. The fanatics found themselves once again in the fringes where they couldn't do any serious harm.

Finally, we all realized that we had a huge amount of work ahead of us to adapt the laws and procedures to the new paradigm that the people had placed us in. Instead of lobbying us, writing or emailing us, signing petitions, demonstrating, or otherwise making clear to us what they wanted us to do, the populace just up and changed the whole socioeconomic game rules without asking us.

That's the only way transition could have happened. A lot of what was changed was things that we didn't have the authority to legislate, much less the will to. If it had been presented to us as a petition, it would have died of old age in committee if it even got that far. Even if not, it would never have passed. And like I said, it was way far outside our purview as legislators.

So this was where our real work began. The book, "The Cure," had provided a blueprint for the principles to guide us in crafting the necessary laws and mechanisms to implement the new paradigm. Other countries that had already transitioned had developed it into a mature system and methodology, though of course each country had its own unique

flavor and quirks. There were advisors aplenty from home and abroad ready to assist us. They referred to themselves sometimes as “societal midwives.”

Georgia had come a long way since the dark days before the civil rights movement, but it was still the South. You had a place, and you knew what it was. As a junior Senator, I was expected to participate but hold back, not be too assertive or outspoken, and defer to more senior Senators most of the time. There was the assumption that we juniors needed to learn from the experience of more senior Senators, but it was a bit more than that.

I had been patient and knew that as time passed, I would both learn more, become more experienced, and become more senior and so gradually gain the “right” to speak up and initiate things.

Suddenly, I now found myself in a new position. I was one of a handful who had seriously studied The Cure, visited transitioned countries and enterprises, and drawn up ideas and proposals for how to rework the laws, regulations, and procedures of our country to reflect and embody the humanistic principles of the transitioned society. Along with the other few Senators who had done likewise, I was suddenly cast in the role of something like a senior, though not officially bearing any new title. I was one of the ones on point, laying the map out on the table and explaining the new lay of the land. It was sort of like being a second-year law student coaching first year law students. We took the lead, but we were really feeling our way along as we went.

Meanwhile it was still an election year, plus which some of the states that had tried to secede needed to elect new Representatives and Senators on the national level to replace those that had supported the insurrection, as well as replacing treasonous ones on the state level. Yet we had to begin our work while this was going on.

After a few initial statements from the Presidential candidates, campaigning had gone on pause during the secession crisis. The message Jenna Henderson left us with was to pull together and focus on building rather than tearing down and urging against violence. Bill Hess left us with a carefully crafted statement that covered both likely outcomes, avoiding expressing overt support for the secessionists by saying that the real enemy was the transition and that instead of fighting between blocs of states, people should focus on obliterating the transition and those supporting it. He did, however, express understanding and sympathy for the secessionists, saying he understood their righteous anger.

Once the nation began knitting itself back together in the new paradigm, campaigning resumed with a vengeance. The main focus of both campaigns was transition. Reform Democrats almost unanimously ran on a platform of making sure the new paradigm formed in the best way possible for the nation and the people. New Republicans were somewhat split between a less enthusiastic acceptance of transition to vehement calls to crush it out and force everybody back to the old way, round up all transition supporters in mass camps in the desert, and declare a state religion. This was somehow spun as being in the name of freedom and patriotism.

Our tasks were complicated by the fact that the foundation for our work would ultimately have to rest on the work that the Federal Government would have to do, including some Constitutional amendments which involved all of the states as well.

That all meant that we had to coordinate and brainstorm with Federal lawmakers, lawmakers in other states, municipalities in our own state, judges, and attorneys at every level. We had to do this on an unprecedented scale, and we had to do it as quickly as reasonably and responsibly possible. We faced a challenge of monumental proportions, on a par with those faced by the founders themselves.

Among those of us who had studied and prepared, we brainstormed a general approach to break this monumental task down into manageable sized chunks. Our suggestions went something like this:

Identify what challenges must be addressed at the Federal level, which at the state level, and which at the municipal level, or in what combination of these. Liaise with Federal lawmakers and legislators of other states to coordinate our efforts, making appropriate use of AI to facilitate but not replace human action. NewWorldWeb was a rich and versatile new resource and medium for this coordination and collaboration.

Since one or more Constitutional amendments would be necessary and since we would all ultimately be involved, it made sense to write down suggestions.

Since one of the premises of transition was that rights such as life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, freedom of speech, etc were meaningless without access to the means to exercise those rights, the definition and specification of human rights had to be expanded.

One practical example of the consequences of the absence of this, was the way some cities, municipalities, and even whole states had made it functionally illegal to be homeless. It was illegal to occupy public land or land that you hadn't paid someone for permission to occupy. Violation meant fines or jail time. Since anyone in the position of homelessness couldn't pay the exorbitant fines, which in some cases exceeded the fines for drunk driving, it meant jail time. Since most of these same jurisdictions had cut funding and all support for shelters and other outreach programs and some had gone so far as to criminalize giving shelter or other aid to the homeless, this effectively meant that if you were homeless, your very existence was illegal.

So the new amendment or amendments should explicitly include language to the effect that all persons have the right of reasonable and direct access to the means and resources necessary to exercise their human rights, which includes a reasonable place to live, food, water, education and training, tools, communications access, medical care, transportation, clothing and shoes, and a whole long list. These rights can also apply to social entities such as families, factories and other production facilities, agricultural operations, social clubs, religious organizations, etc, meaning the community of people making them up. In accordance with the principles of the new paradigm, we needed language to the effect that these rights extend irrevocably but exclusively to resources that the person or social entity can and will use directly. It will clearly state that no person or social entity may control or own more than they can and will use personally. No person or social entity shall in any way block, obstruct, or in any way impede or deprive the access of another to their Constitutionally protected property, which includes and is not limited to what is listed. All forms of currency will be null and void; no person or social entity shall create any device or instrument intended to impede or hold hostage the property and activities of another. To discourage and hopefully prevent abuses, reasonable, compassionate limits must be placed on how much one person or entity can own or control; we don't want some greedy soul, social club, or church claiming square miles of land as theirs. On the other hand, we don't want to be restrictive or draconian; no one would deem it acceptable to restrict anyone to just enough space for a bed and bathroom. We would need to include provisions that no person or social entity can claim or control another's time or activities; all social entities will be run on a peership basis.

The Constitutional amendments will lay out the parameters. It will then be up to us lawmakers to flesh them out and implement them. We would have to:

Identify which laws, statutes, regulations, agencies and procedures can remain basically as they are. Examples of these ranged from traffic laws to licensing drivers and pilots to safety regulations to building codes to laws against assault and murder to family law with respect to child custody, division of resources, protective orders and such. What would need to change, however, would be that we would need to craft penalties for noncompliance that would be effective in the absence of fines and other financial ones that were no longer meaningful.

Identify laws, regulations, statutes, procedures, and agencies that could be stricken, repealed, deleted, disbanded, or eliminated entirely. These included whole specialties of law, such as corporate law, the financial aspects of family law, bankruptcy law, the SEC, the Fed, the IRS, the Treasury, landlord-tenant law, laws regarding employee-employer relations, the whole field of tax law, insurance law, all laws targeting the homeless, and many others.

Identify which laws, statutes, regulations, procedures, and agencies would need to remain but be changed and overhauled a lot. Examples were numerous. Across the board, penalties needed to be modified to replace monetary fines with other forms, with an emphasis on community service. Family law would need to change to focus on custody of children and on division of assets with an eye to seeking the best outcome for both litigants. Civil law dealing with lawsuits would need considerable changes to create new modes for assigning damages and restitution. Intellectual property, copyright, and patent law would need to be simplified to unequivocally assign ownership and rights to the individual or individuals who created them and ensuring that no person or social entity can take it away. Laws dealing with enterprises and other complex social entities would need considerable redefinition and modification. Contract law would need extensive revisions. Police and firefighters would need to be reorganized in a much less hierarchical model. The emphasis and training of law enforcement would need to undergo massive changes. Prison reform would be an important project, following a more rehabilitative, less punitive set of principles, and be completely restructured into what came to be called quarantine villages where dangerous and other offenders refractory to rehabilitation could be

quarantined where they could live in reasonable conditions with dignity while being restrained from interacting with larger society to prevent them from doing harm. Prisoners guilty of victimless crimes would need to be released and their records expunged. Probate law would of course need to be adapted to the new paradigm. Laws regarding smuggling would need to be strengthened and modified to deal with the likely uptick in attempts to smuggle free high-quality goods out of the country for sale in un-transitioned countries by profiteers. These are just a few examples. It was a very long and detailed list, with each heading broken down into proposed specific language along with a succinct explanation of the logic behind it.

We also needed to identify what new laws, statutes, regulations, procedures, and agencies we needed to create from scratch. These were also many detailed pages. We would have to codify the foundational principles of this new socioeconomic paradigm that we had been presented with. We would need to create laws guaranteeing each person's and each social entity's rights to own and control all that they reasonably need to live a full, satisfying, and productive life and exercise the rights guaranteed them by the Constitution, and limiting this access and control to only what they can and will use personally and directly. We produced a long list of specifics, including a reasonable place to live, food, water, transportation, education and training, communications, tools, recreational items, and a lot more. Since a complete list would be impractical, we suggested generic language more or less like "each person and social entity is guaranteed the right to own, control, and be responsible for all resources that they reasonably need and desire in order to lead a fulfilling, empowered, and productive life and exercise all of their Constitutional rights." We also would need laws and statutes forbidding and making it a criminal offense to obstruct, block, hinder, or hold hostage the property or person of another. We further specified that as of the day of transition, each person is the legal owner of their residence, vehicles, and other things that they use, and the members of each social entity are the collective peer owners of the buildings and resources that they directly use. For that matter, we needed to define what a social entity is. We needed to legally mandate that all unused and unoccupied resources are heretofore available to be claimed, and we had to set up simple legal pathways for making claims. We needed to specify what resources aren't included in the above, such as nature preserves and national or state parks and historical heritage sites, as well as anything deemed unsafe. We needed to establish legal pathways and procedures for resolving conflicting claims in the most fair and equitable ways possible.

We needed to codify the nullification of all forms of currency. We would have to define fair and equitable algorithms and pathways for distribution of resources to where they were needed and establish reasonable guidelines for triaging distribution of resources in the event of actual shortage and set up an agency or body to facilitate and mediate that process.

We needed to define a new category of laws or binding guidelines for some new processes, such as mandating engineers and developers of products, who were previously working for competing companies, to pool their knowledge and expertise to produce the best quality versions of each product that the state of the art allows in practice, combining the best features and technology of formerly competing products. Developers would be instructed to establish universal form factors and design templates to allow, as much as practical, easy servicing, repair, and replacement of parts when breakage or new technologies made it necessary. Thus, for example, if a new kind of engine is invented, it should be possible to remove the old engine and put in the new one on any and all vehicles instead of replacing the whole vehicle. The only exceptions would be when there were physical reasons why it wasn't practical. We would set up an agency that would verify, facilitate and advise in this process. There would be no penalties for noncompliance, but products that failed to embody the guidelines would be sent back for further improvements and not approved for production and release.

We needed laws to make it a felony with daunting consequences for any person in any former corporation or business to destroy or withhold any technical or process information and place a deadline for making this information publicly available. This was to head off potential acts of sabotage in spite by former people in power in those entities, the destruction or withholding of such information out of a perverse sense of revenge to prevent it from passing out of their control. In many places, those working in those enterprises had already taken steps to protect against that, but we had to go further.

Many occupations and whole industries would cease to exist, and many more new ones would be created. The impact would not be devastating to peoples' livelihoods as under the old setup, but those who would be displaced would benefit from counseling and other forms of support. Agencies would have to be created to assist, support, and advise people

who were displaced by transition. This would include psychological and emotional counseling and assistance in figuring out what new occupations would be a good fit and accessing the necessary training or education.

The Department of Energy would need to be expanded or a new agency created to spearhead technological research and development, and to ensure that it proceed in harmony with the new "bottom line:" it should support or sustain human wellbeing, happiness, safety, empowerment, and fulfillment, enhance social synergy or at least not detract from it, and be environmentally sustainable and non-damaging. This would have to be backed with laws mandating the phasing out of damaging technologies such as fossil fuels and replacing them with environmentally friendlier alternatives as quickly as possible in practice. We would also be mandating a shift from large central facilities to diversified small and mid-scale facilities.

Given the new and improved definitions of the propose of human society, the new "bottom line" that replaced the old monetary one, we would want to use those criteria that I just mentioned as guidelines and yardsticks for crafting laws.

Public works, such as rolling out the new distributed power grid, encouraging neighborhood and home based agriculture, setting up a new system of roads and support infrastructure for bicycle and other non powered transports, building more hospitals and colleges, large-scale reclamation of useful materials from landfills and other waste dumps, and a whole long list, would need agencies and guidelines to aid in coordination and planning.

What I'm describing was just the tip of the iceberg. We also had to prioritize which of these tasks to do first. During this period, attorneys and judges across the country were having to improvise as best they could. So far most of them, and most of the people, had been amazingly patient, but we needed to codify this new paradigm into practical frameworks pretty quickly or we could sooner or later start to see chaos.

The Constitutional amendments were finalized and ratified within ten months of transition, following a historic public discourse on NewWorldWeb where the text was posted for public comment and feedback. The result wasn't perfect, but it was many giant steps forward in very positive directions. The amendments also included limits on the terms of Supreme Court justices, as well as mandatory periodic psychological evaluations similar to what airline pilots undergo. We needed to fix that institution and return it to being a means of deepening our understanding and implementation of the humanistic principles of the Constitution at its root, and ease it out of its degenerate role that it had fallen into as an instrument of ideological reinterpretation and "pretzelization" of the Constitution to fit political agendas.

I must admit that I was proud and gratified that a suggestion that I voiced got passed into law. It wasn't a new idea nor was I the first to voice it, but I was the first to voice it in a fertile setting where action would be taken. I'm talking, of course, of the "Common Sense In The Law" bill that mandated that any bill or law passed must deal with one issue only, including all issues directly bearing upon it. This put an end to "poison pills" and "riders." Before that, just about every law that passed had unrelated baggage tacked on due to political deal making. It also mandated that legal terminology and procedures be simplified so that non-lawyers could more easily understand and navigate them. That's why every proposed law or bill at every level of government is now routinely posted on NewWorldWeb and announced in all media in the appropriate jurisdiction for members of the public to read and comment on.

Wow! I apologize for getting carried away talking shop! It was just a heady time and very exciting. Was it too much?

Jessica: No! Not at all! It's just the kind of thing I was hoping for!

How long did it take before the mad crunch was over and a new everyday routine set in? And what has it been like as a legislator after the dust settled?

Kerri: It was a good two and a half years or so of ten-to-twelve-hour days before we started to feel like we'd crested the hill and settled into a normal flow. Normally, my position is part time, but during that period, we all put in more than full time hours because it had to be done. It was exhausting, but it was a good kind of tired at the end of the day. It's only once in many blue moons that a lawmaker, or anyone for that matter, gets a chance to make such a big difference and play a part in shaping history!

It did put a strain on my family. My husband was a wonderful support, both of me and of transition, but he got frustrated at the lack of time together as time went on. Our children were in their teens, all full of teenage rebellion, but they still needed more of Mom. Other Senators and Representatives were facing the same thing, and it became clear that

we couldn't sustain the pace seven days a week and neither could our families. So we decided to take weekends off and try to keep the days to ten hours or less.

We had a lot of help from advisors from around the world, who acted as consultants based on their own experiences with transition. Of course, there were differences between countries and different cultures, but the core of common threads was incredibly helpful. We didn't have to reinvent the wheel.

That eased much of the stress on my husband and children, but it was still grueling. But also satisfying. Often we wouldn't even feel the time passing!

The collaborative dynamics were truly a pleasure, like jamming in a jazz band. State legislatures, the Federal government, and municipalities worked together in a mostly beautiful way. We also met with attorneys, judges, and various syndicates and associations from just about every industry and sector. There was lively, productive dialogue with citizens on NewWorldWeb.

As I said, it was many mountains of work for about two or two and a half years, and then things did settle down into a more stable permanent rhythm or flow.

Once we had completed the task of codifying the new paradigm and building the scaffolding to facilitate its functioning, our task became a whole lot easier and simpler than it ever had been before.

Don't get me wrong. Politics is never easy and there are always disagreements, sometimes vehement ones to be worked through. But the escalating bullying that had taken over is gone. There is now (mostly) constructive dialog.

Before transition, I would say that a huge chunk of our time and energy was devoted to financial issues: where and how to fund this and that, what to cut for the sake of what, what to fund now, what to postpone, and what to take off of the table because there would probably never be funds for it. There were always lots of lobbyists for various wealthy and powerful corporations, industries, and individuals. They could use financial means to pressure or blackmail lawmakers to support their interests and agendas: if we regulate this and that or raise corporate or billionaire taxes, they would take their business out of state, thereby reducing jobs and hurting the economy. Vast corporations and billionaires, and then trillionaires basically held government by the throat. All they had to do was squeeze and they would almost always get almost all of what they wanted. We constantly had to jockey and play power politics and walk countless fine and fragile lines between these powerful interests and what was good for our constituents. Sometimes we were caught in the middle between two conflicting wealthy interests where no matter what we did, the state and its residents would suffer. Even the separation of church and state was constantly being eroded by wealthy religious extremists and the mega businesses they ran.

Now all of that is gone. We actually get a lot more done in a lot less time, and I believe we are able to do a much better job.

Jessica: So now you're back to being part-time again?

Kerri: Oh yes! The Senate actually demands less of my time than ever before. I've gotten back to other things I love doing but that I'd put on back burners for the sake of my political aspirations.

I spend a lot more time with my family, and since my husband's workload has also greatly decreased, we both have more time to enjoy things together and with our children and of course our grandchildren.

I've gotten back into my music in a big way. I'm in a band called No Time Like Now. We perform locally and do some touring around the country and occasionally abroad. Of course my husband almost always comes along, just like I often accompany him on some of his biodiversity expeditions, monitoring the reintroduction of species from the brink of, and sometimes the other side of extinction.

Jessica: How has transition affected music specifically and the arts in general?

Kerri: I think the arts have changed dramatically for the better since transition. Before transition, music had gone from being music to being the music industry to being "The Biz" along with "Show Biz." Music, film, writing, and all of the arts had mostly become products produced for the sake of making money, rather than being authentic expressions.

That's all changed. Music is now just Music once again. There is no longer a small cadre of stars being paid lavishly but also being exploited by entertainment corporations and private equity firms, with a few performers making a decent, if irregular, living and a plethora of starving artists and many more who never got the chance to develop and do their art for financial survival reasons.

Now there are still stars, and there are people like me who are well known but not to that degree, and others who only like to perform for friends and family. The popularity of a performer or band is purely a function of the music and how the people resonate to it. There are no longer aspiring artists and performers who wither on the vine because they have to work at a job they hate just to survive.

If you look and listen around you, I'm sure you can see and hear that we're in the midst of a vibrant renaissance of epic proportions. You can perceive it especially clearly if you compare what's out there now to what was out there in the decade leading up to transition, both in terms of quality, quantity, diversity, and innovation.

Jessica: Yes, I agree, being a musician and music buff myself.

Thank you, Kerri, for your amazing window into what it was like behind the scenes, so to speak, of transition. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we wrap this up?

Kerri: Well, Jessica, I think I'm pretty much talked out.

Oh, there's one thing I wanted to mention, and that's the impact on women. Under the old paradigm, women were paid less than men in most jobs in most countries. There were glass ceilings in many companies. Women were under-represented in many of the most lucrative fields.

That's also gone. Sure, there are still some male chauvinists out there, but they can't use financial means to subordinate, disadvantage, or exclude us. There are no power positions that can be abused, consciously or unconsciously. Women can push back if they meet resistance, and they can't be overpowered by power asymmetry because there is no power asymmetry. I'd say that transition has brought more benefits to women than anyone even anticipated.

Jessica: Well, thank you again, Kerri, for taking so much of your valuable time to share your experiences and perspectives. Would you be open to doing this again in a few years?

Kerri: Yes, of course.

Jessica: OK, take care and don't work too hard lol.

Kerri: Sure thing, and you too.

Julio Sanchez — United States

> **Note:** This fictional account was written when the Transition was imagined as a single, rapid, coordinated event. Further research into the historical record has since shown a gradual, voluntary approach to be more viable and sustainable; the novel is preserved as originally written (author's note; the current Roadmap).

Interviewer: Jimmy Norris, United States of America

Interviewee: Julio Sanchez, software engineer, United States of America

Jimmy: My interview today is with Julio Sanchez, who has a unique behind-the-scenes experience and perspective from the time of transition.

Good morning, Julio. How are you doing today?

Julio: Good morning, Jimmy. I'm good today. How are you?

Jimmy: I'm having a good day, thank you.

Julio, can you give me a brief rundown on your background? You know, your childhood and upbringing, school, that kind of thing. We'll focus mostly on your unique role in transition, but I'd like readers to have a sense of you as a person.

Julio: OK, I'll start at the beginning.

As you can tell from my name, I'm Latino American. As you can tell from my accent, I was born and raised in the USA. I'm fluent in both languages.

My parents came from Guatemala before I was born. From what they tell me, and from what I hear from others in the community who came at around the same time, it sounds like things there were pretty horrific. Out of control gangs became like warlords controlling big areas of the country. A brutal dictatorship came to power in elections due to a desperate populace sick of living in constant fear. Emilio Gutierrez was elected solely on his promise to make the streets and neighborhoods safe by cracking down hard on the gangs.

They were so panicked that they didn't see the warning signs. Gutierrez quickly became a vicious dictator in the style of Pinochet and Perón. Tens of thousands were rounded up, tortured, killed, or imprisoned without trials. And worse still, the gangs persisted. The people were caught between different gangs and the government. Conditions were so bad that Guatemala was compared to Haiti by foreign journalists.

My parents found out from friends in the Frente Demócrata Popular that they were on one of the government's kill lists due to editorials that my father had written as a journalist and editor of a major newspaper. They were also targets for one of the gangs for a similar reason.

They were fortunate to be part of a covert airlift organized by Doctors Without Borders with aid from various international humanitarian groups. They flew in medical supplies and ran rural clinics like they always do, but when they left to be replaced, refugees were smuggled on board.

From there they were taken to United Nations refugee camps in Canada, since the United States at the time was closed to immigration from anywhere that refugees might have come from. A refugee from Finland would have been accepted, but not from Guatemala.

At least the world as a whole had improved its response to the frequent refugee crises popping up around the globe. They were no longer stuck in squalid conditions at the border between a hostile country and an unwelcoming one. Conditions were hard, but not brutal like before. They were safe, fed, sheltered, and had some kind of hope.

They ended up in Windsor, Canada. They both quickly learned English. My Papa found work as a journalist covering international issues. My mama was a nurse and able to go through the program to get a Canadian nursing license, so

they were able to live reasonably well.

My sister Vera came with them from Guatemala. My brother Francisco was born in Canada. I didn't come along until a few years later in the United States.

I think my parents were happy in Canada, but when the paper my Papa worked for was bought by the Chicago Tribune, he was reassigned to work out of the Chicago office. They thought his talents would better serve them there. My folks hadn't been looking to move there, but they had no objections to following the job.

My papa's work involved a lot of travel, and after the second pandemic, the H1N14 virus, work norms had changed permanently. My folks moved to Carbondale, Illinois. Chicago was too expensive with too much crime. My papa could submit his articles from anywhere on earth. He only had to go to Chicago one Monday a month for a meeting.

So, I was born and grew up in Carbondale. It was a good place to grow up, with the University and all. Being the youngest meant I had a little more leeway than my older siblings had. When I was born, Vera was fifteen and a freshman in high school. Francisco was six and full of energy and into everything. I was the baby.

My parents were pretty busy with work, especially with Papa away a lot on assignments, so I was entrusted to Vera's somewhat reluctant care a lot of the time. She was very protective of me, and I knew she loved me, but let's face it, she would rather be with her friends. So as long as I didn't do anything unsafe or obnoxious, I had pretty much a free rein. Her attention was also divided between me and Francisco, so it worked out pretty well. Francisco and I got along OK, and when we were a little older, we pulled a few childish pranks together on Vera and our parents.

My parents weren't typical Guatemalans. My papa was mostly Xinca but my mama's grandparents, my great grandparents, came to Guatemala to get away from the Nazis. So, our family felt like a mix of Guatemalan, Xinca, and European. Also, my parents were both Baha'is, which was another reason they were on the government kill list. It seems like any time a dictatorship takes over a country, Baha'is are on their blacklist along with Jews, Roma, gays, and political dissenters.

They took Francisco and me to Baha'i meetings when we were little but never pressured us about it. Vera sometimes went too. I liked their philosophy and values, but I wasn't in a hurry to join or take it to another level.

I think I had a good childhood. My parents were loving, though Papa was away a lot and Mama also worked long hours to make ends meet. But we didn't lack for much. I mean, we couldn't afford everything that we kids wanted, but we weren't deprived or anything. I guess we were about average materially. But both Papa and Mama had to work more and more of their time to maintain it as time went on. I often heard them saying that an hour on their jobs buys less and less. But we did manage to have a good vacation every couple of years.

School was good, but I always felt like I was in my siblings' shadow. Vera was a popular girl in high school and somewhat of a star to me. She was a cheerleader and big into ballet, modern interpretive dance, singing, school plays and things like that. She seemed more like a grown-up to me than like my sister, and by the time I was in middle school, she had already graduated in the top of her class from Northwestern University with a major in drama and a minor in music. She was out in the world starting her career as an artist and making progress, though sometimes our parents had to send her some money to help her get by.

I was in awe of her, and all through school, people said "Oh, you're Vera Sanchez's little brother! She'll be a tough act to follow!" So, I resented her a little too.

Francisco was closer to my age but he was enough older that he also seemed like he was way up the mountain of growing up while I was still in the foothills. His big thing was sports, and he was good at it. Varsity football, basketball, the whole package. His idea of fun was a 10k first thing in the morning and working out in the gym at night. The garage was set up with exercise equipment for him, after Vera's home dance studio and rehearsal space wasn't needed any more. So I was also Francisco Sanchez's little brother. It made me wonder if being Julio meant anything but someone's little brother. That kind of sucked.

I think it was good that we were so far apart in age. It meant that we weren't directly competitive with each other. We each had our own space to grow into. But there were always the shadows and legends of my siblings hovering over me.

I wasn't into sports or music or the arts. At first, I wanted to be a firefighter, but by the time I got to eighth grade, I had discovered computers, and I was hooked. I taught myself to program in Ultra-C and C Major starting with electives in high school and continuing with free online courses. I tried my hand at some of the new betas of AI programming tools like Magic Lantern and Transformer. And yes, I did my share of gaming too, especially adventure games like Zelda On The Secret Planet and Omicron Contact. I worked part time jobs and willingly did chores around the house to buy hardware and apps.

I was a nerd, let's face it. Not to the point where you had to pry me out of my chair to get me to go outside. I liked bowling and laser tag and water parks, and I loved to go for walks with our dogs, Scoop and Story. It was also a good way to meet girls. But a big part of my days was spent on the computer. Papa and Mama did sort of have to pry me out of my chair to go to bed.

I did a little amateur hacking for fun with some of my friends in the Computer Science club. We got into a little trouble when we hacked into WSIL-TV and changed the teleprompter for Sonia Madison the hot weather anchor to say "arctic temperatures expected over the next few days in the Carbondale area, with winds up to thirty miles per hour and up to a foot of snow" at the last minute… in August. She caught herself halfway through and the expression on her face was worth getting a week's suspension and grounded for a month. I learned from that experience that I may be smart, but I'm not as smart as I think I am.

In spite of that, I graduated high school with a 3.7 GPA. My scores in some of the humanities and hard science courses brought it down a bit. My SAT scores were good.

I applied to all the top computer science schools of course. It was very competitive, so I didn't get into Carnegie Mellon or MIT, but I did get into UC Berkeley, Cornell, and University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign. The latter was really my first choice, though if I'd gotten into Carnegie Mellon or MIT, I would have been a fool not to jump at it. I liked U of I because it was fairly close to home and I would be able to pay in-state tuition which would save a lot.

I needed financial aid of course, which I got, though along with various grants, small scholarships, and work study, I would still need to take student loans, which really scared me. But I had little choice.

I had mostly really good profs and classmates, though there was this one girl who was a full-on genius. She started at the U when she was 13. She seemed like she already knew material that most of us had to sweat blood to master. Some of us joked that she was making all of us look bad. It was awe inspiring but also quite humbling. But I felt bad for her because she seemed so isolated. Her mind was like another Einstein or Hawking, but she was still only 13 and socially awkward.

In any case, I did well. And even though I griped about the heavy load and sleep deprivation, I enjoyed myself most of the time. I also made some good friends, friendships that have lasted through all the changes.

Quantum computers were just coming into the mainstream, so it was an exciting time. A lot of the instruction was aimed at the anticipated capabilities of this technology, so it was pretty bleeding-edge stuff. I learned algorithms and designs that would have been pointless to attempt with silicon technology because they were just too slow to make it practical.

I focused on cyber security, robotics, large-scale distributed systems, and AI. The field was so competitive, my undergrad advisor advised me to aim at being a "triple threat," a lot like performing artists who needed to be able to act, dance, and sing to be competitive. So, I took it one step further and decided to be a "quadruple threat." My advisor also told me unofficially that my little hacking misadventure in high school had actually worked in my favor. I had included it in my application because I thought they would find out about it anyway easily enough, so it's better to be candid.

My capstone senior project was what I called a "Virtual White Cell," a software bot with the ability to detect well-camouflaged and emerging, novel, and unanticipated cyber threats and attacks more quickly than a human operator could and counter them. My faculty mentor was Dr. Ashok Ramakrishnan, one of the leading AI researchers. He was unable to foil my bot, suggested some improvements I could make to the code, and praised me for coding it all myself instead of using an AI generator. I got a 3.8 which was pretty darn good. He was a tough taskmaster, which made me a better engineer even if at the time I resented him a little.

While in school, I found out about Open Source and got involved as much as my work and study allowed. Of course, my favorite computer was the two-year-old notebook that I installed with Linux and a lot of Open-Source apps. I even contributed a few drivers and little apps.

I also poked around the Dark Web. That's when I first came face-to-face with the ebook The Cure. I'd heard a few people mention it, but I was too busy to pay much attention. I'd heard of Costa Rica and a few other Central and South American countries going through something called transition, but I hadn't had time to learn much about it, except that it hadn't happened yet in Guatemala. It turned out that I could get the book for free from Barnes & Noble or Amazon or other regular online booksellers.

I didn't have time to read more than a few chapters here and there. I was intrigued by what I read. Then I downloaded the short version to get the overview. It took me a year to get through the long version, because with the student mindset I had, I checked out every footnote and every reference cited. I got excited about the prospect of transition, but I thought it wasn't likely to happen here because the United States had built its whole identity on laissez-faire capitalism.

I naturally had my share of outstanding quality goods that I picked up for really cheap from stores with headquarters in transitioned countries. Everybody knew by then that their products were top-notch for impossibly low prices.

Most people thought it was a gimmick, but the government took it as a serious threat and tried to levy extreme tariffs on these goods to make them unattractively expensive. They backed off when it became clear that doing so would be political suicide. They tried to counter with arguments that these goods were a threat to American jobs, but that held less weight with most people than the chance to buy things affordably that would be out of reach otherwise. Many people felt that if enough products were available at those kinds of prices, then they could actually live decently on their salaries. So, the President fell back on dishing out rhetoric about it being the patriotic thing to do, to buy American, served up with a sauce of "sacrifices must be made".

All through my senior year I applied to companies for jobs after graduation. I went to all the job fairs on campus. I was fortunate to land a job with Computer Innovations cybersecurity department. I wanted to go for a Master's but I couldn't find any financial aid that I qualified for, and I couldn't see working full time and studying full time at the same time, so I figured if I get a job with a company with tuition reimbursement or even better, it would be good. CI had gone from startup to major software company in just a few years.

By then, these kinds of jobs could be done from anywhere in the world, so I didn't have to relocate to New York, just to come once or twice a month for meetings in person. We actually had around-the-clock development going on. Teams in the US, Europe, Turkey, and India overlapped and made sure that it never stopped, literally.

The company had offices in Chicago and Carbondale, so that was where I was based. They insisted that we come in to work in the office on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays but we could work from home on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Officially we had weekends off, but when there was a deadline, we often ended up having to work those too. Of course, being salaried meant no such thing as overtime.

It was pretty high stress. Deadlines were always moved up from aggressive to all-nighter. As a junior member of the team, on the one hand I learned a lot, but on the other hand I was the one usually nominated for the things no one really wanted to do. The pay was decent but not quite enough to compensate for the wear and tear in mind and body. And my "Virtual White Cell," which had tipped the hiring process in my favor, became the property of the company, per the terms of the two-hundred-plus page employment agreement I had to sign.

My manager's manager was credited in a corporate email as the one who "added this exciting innovation to our company treasure chest." My name was not mentioned. I was subsequently assigned to the team developing it further and integrating it into the Computer Innovations security suite. I was royally pissed, but at least I was on the team, and we developers were rarely asked for input or suggestions. We were told what to do, when, and how fast to do it, via the chain of command. And over it all hung the shadow of the possibility of being replaced by AI.

But that was where I met my wife, Carol. I guess it was just as well that I wasn't put in charge of the project, because company rules would have resulted in one or both of us being fired for having a romantic relationship if I had been.

Life settled into a more or less constant grind. Adapting the “Virtual White Cell” to the company API was a bigger challenge than the task of expanding the capabilities of the bot itself. Company procedures were clearly laid out by people with no development experience, bureaucrats and businessmen and the like, and our managers weren’t interested in our suggestions of how to make the API more robust. So, we limped along as best we could and got the job done.

After Carol and I got married, we found that it took both of our incomes to just maintain. Our combined student loans kept us in survival mode most of the time. The terms of the loans had gotten steadily more draconian under a series of ultra conservative regimes. If either of us missed even one payment, both of our salaries would be garnished, and our family finances put under court-ordered supervision. We would literally have to justify every meal, every tank of gas, every pair of shoes until the loans were paid off. The only exceptions were for terminal illness of self, spouse, parent, or child. So, we had to budget as frugally as possible. And we had to put our family-creating aspirations on indefinite hold.

Of course, we benefited from shopping at stores whose headquarters were in transitioned countries. So, our clothes, shoes, most of our electronics, and a few other things were bought for super cheap but had better than high-end quality of any domestically produced similar items. But even with those major savings, we had to budget frugally. Food, gas, utilities, rent, healthcare and other necessities ate up all but a few dollars each month.

During those few years, we studied The Cure and joined a study group of our coworkers for discussion. We never mentioned it in any way at work of course; we learned quickly that we were under constant surveillance and any such talk or emails would mean our jobs. One of our colleagues was fired for emailing her child’s baby pictures to the team. She was told that this was using company resources for personal purposes and the wording on the employment agreement was meant literally.

We all dreamed of transition, but it seemed to be slow to gain traction in the US. But there were a few things we could do to help it a long a little in case it would one day reach critical mass.

Of course, we followed the news about some of the states that made it a felony to possess or share the book. The states you’d expect, the same ones that had been banning books for decades. Of course, they were too boneheaded to get that these bans only made people more curious to read it. As usual, banning it actually helped propagate it.

Beyond our “Book Club” discussions over dinner in our homes, none of us told the others what we might do to further it along in practice. It was clear that some very rich and powerful people would want to squash all efforts to do away with their positions of wealth, privilege, and power! Best to stay off of all radar. So, everything we did was kept anonymous by using the Tails operating system, IP misdirection, and other measures. We used various forms of steganography for most of our communications.

Carol and I got involved in the NewWorldWeb Open-Source development project. At the time it was a pretty mature infrastructure in the form of a generic template that could be easily adapted and localized for each country’s unique needs and culture. We got in on the early stages of localization for the US. We also made contributions to the ongoing development of the template. With thousands of volunteer developers worldwide, it was evolving at a breathtaking pace!

All of this was done at home and on laptops in cafes around town in what spare time we had, which varied quite a bit.

Jimmy: So, you and Carol were deeply involved. Did that help you cope with the constant stress it sounds like you were under?

Julio: Oh, yes, for sure! It kept a little light shining on our darkest, most sleep-deprived moments.

We were pessimistic about it catching on in the US, but the only way to give it a shot at happening would be to apply our skills to getting things as ready as possible. I added my “Virtual White Cell” to the project, in direct violation of company rules but I covered my tracks by making it look like a Russian hacking group had stolen it from a company server. Right after that, I informed Corporate that I had discovered a vulnerability (true) that had allowed Russian hackers to steal proprietary information. Then I patched the vulnerability but left a back door in case it was needed later.

Jimmy: When did The Cure and the momentum of transition consciousness start to take off? And did you see it coming?

Julio: Oh, it was as clear as the water receding before a tsunami.

Of course, there was steadily increasing traffic on the Internet and in the supermarkets, cafes and other public spaces. Our "Book Club" grew. And the government started putting out propaganda, warning people of a "globalist socialist communist deep-state satanist conspiracy," that was "felling nations like dominoes across the globe." People were urged to report anyone acting suspiciously, whatever that meant, to the FBI for investigation. It was the Red Scare I heard about from Cold War days, the Domino Theory all over again.

The Presidential and down-ballot campaigns were increasingly about transition, with the New Republicans uniformly vowing to oppose and prevent it, and the Reform Democrats expressing a range of positions ranging from cautious openness to enthusiastic acceptance.

The media also publicized a massive reward for information leading to the capture of the ringleader(s) of the movement. Of course there were no ringleaders, by design. There was no one to focus on, to capture or discredit or assassinate. But like in every other country previously, almost no one in the government or law enforcement could conceive of a social movement with no leaders, and they wanted to find them of badly. A hundred million dollars' worth of badly. There were a lot of false leads, and a few publicity seekers claiming to be the one, but all of them proved to be false. Unfortunately, there were innocent people killed or injured, slandered, and made miserable.

Jimmy: As the time approached, did you and your wife get more involved? What was it like leading up to the day?

Julio: When we saw signs that the transition idea was starting to go viral, we did do more.

For one thing, I hacked into a few banks and other financial institutions and set up some bots and scripts that I could trigger to delete all of their data and software and then hijack their servers to host NewWorldWeb. I wasn't a world-class hacker, but I did have some useful skills. We all did.

I also created modified versions of corporate apps that eliminated all financial functionality. This would also roll out to corporate clients who had purchased our enterprise software, just like all updates routinely did. While doing this, I came upon code that I recognized as coming from colleagues with the same idea. So, we coordinated our efforts without ever speaking about it. You get to know your colleagues programming styles.

When I ported the "Virtual White Cell" to NewWorldWeb, I also copied all proprietary technical info. As the date approached, I used my back door to grab copies of anything useful added since then. I was also going to set things up so I could lock out the CEO and other Board members and managers from the most senior right down to team managers from important systems with one click, but I saw that Carol had already seen to that. This was one time when I was glad that those up the chain of command weren't techies. It made our preparations much easier. Almost all of the developers for the various products, as well as system administrators and data analysts, were on board with transition at least enough to look the other way.

Of course, we all helped to create red herrings and false trails to conceal actual consensus planning traffic behind the noise. We also amplified red herrings created by other sources.

Carol and I and all members of our team had made sure to get our hands on satellite phones smuggled in from Canada. We wanted to be ready to livestream events in case the media tried to make us look like monsters. We knew for sure that at least some of them would, while others would report accurately. The hope was that the plethora of live feeds from ordinary people would make it easier for people at home and abroad to decide which narrative was true, if they were uncertain.

And of course, we participated in the consensus to pick March 7 as the date.

Jimmy: Can you talk about transition day and right after?

Julio: Of course.

We didn't go home from work that night. Our team had a perfect cover for pulling an all-nighter: we had another deadline that had just been moved up. We made sure to do the usual amount of grumbling so managers wouldn't notice anything unusual.

Promptly at midnight, each of us pulled the trigger on the scripts, bots, and upgrades that we had put together. Within less than an hour, all managers and board members were locked out, all financial functionalities had been removed from our enterprise software for Computer Innovation and all of our corporate customers, and a good many banks were effectively shut down along with their communications. I was happy to know that from that moment onwards, it would be impossible for the major regional power company to shut off customers via software, and the same was true for at least one major telecom. Now we began to openly talk about our activities and preparations, which up until then we hadn't for fear of being uncovered. But we had pretty much seen each other's handiwork while going about our own, and we'd worked in silent coordination, improvising almost like a jazz band jamming.

By three in the morning, generic congratulatory messages started coming in from already transitioned countries, probably via every email server and social medium in the country.

At six in the morning, the phones started ringing. Our product manager, Jerry Wong, came in as usual, went to his office, then promptly came storming out, shouting at us all in our cubicles: "Hey, what the hell is going on here? Why am I locked out of everything? I thought your creation is supposed to be protecting us! Didn't you people catch this? Why didn't someone call me and tell me?"

Cheryl Fuchs, always the cool head in the room when things got heated, spoke up in the silence after Jerry's soliloquy, said, "Jerry, I'll explain but please sit down. This will be a lot to take in."

Jerry reluctantly sat down, looking confused. "OK, Cheryl, I'm listening. What kind of threat are we looking at here?"

"There's no threat here. We aren't under cyber attack. There'll be no ransomware or other malware."

"Then what is this? A glitch? Human error? Hardware failure? Sunspots? I need to know! And when will it be fixed?"

"There's no malfunction and no error."

"It's not April Fools Day, so what's going on?"

"Jerry, I'm sure you know what transition is? Like happened in Canada?"

"Yeah, I know about it, but it can't happen here."

"It's happening right now, all around you. So, there's no danger. Just, shall we say, a kind of reorg on a big scale. Only this one isn't from the top down. It's from the bottom up."

"What? How come I didn't know about it?"

"Because I'd be willing to bet you didn't ever read the book, and you believed it can't happen here, so you never took it seriously. We all agreed that you probably wouldn't be receptive, so we didn't tell you. And there were a lot of false alarms generated on purpose to make the real plan seem like just another one. Kind of like how car alarms used to go off so often for no good reason that people learned to just ignore them. But this was on purpose."

"So, what happens now? OMG, this is bad for me! I'm going to be blamed for what happened here! This is my team, and this means I can't control my team! I'll be fired and no one will ever hire me again!

You don't understand! My wife is pregnant with some expensive complications. My mother and father are both in assisted living, and we're splitting the cost among my siblings and me. This will ruin my whole family! How can you do this to me?!?! I'm not the bad guy here. I'm bound by company policies just like you are!"

"Jerry, relax. We all know your situation and we don't want to hurt you or your family. You just don't know how transition works. Can you please listen while we explain it to you?"

"I guess I don't have much choice."

"First of all, you won't be fired. Or shall we say no one can fire you, just like you can't fire any of us. The chain of command has been deleted. No one will obey you or your boss or his boss or the President in charge of Development, or even Randall Dipshaw the CEO himself. All of your positions have been eliminated."

“That’s impossible! There’s going to be hell to pay. What are you, a bunch of starry-eyed college students high on the latest psychedelic? I thought we were all adults here!”

“It’s not only possible, it’s already been done in a growing number of countries and it’s working.”

“How?”

“Any social system or organization only works as long as there’s widespread agreement to function according to its rules and principles. When enough people decide to change the operating principles and act on that decision, the system changes.”

“What? You can’t do that!”

It was my turn to speak up: “Jerry, remember when Corporate handed down arbitrary assigned lunch and bathroom break times to each of us, to make sure there was never more than one of us at a time away from our terminal?”

“Yes.”

“Remember how that went over? Remember how just about everyone thought it was a someone’s idea of a joke, laughed it off, and ignored it? Then Corporate sent out a voicemail to everyone saying disregarding the new rule would be cause for termination? Remember how we all decided to take lunch and breaks together and took bathroom breaks all at the same time?”

“Oh, old Dipstick sure was fit to be tied!”

“But what was he going to do? Fire everyone? The whole company except for a few poor schlubs with OCD?”

“Yeah, I do remember, now that you mention it. I’d forgotten about that.”

“That’s a perfect example, Julio,” said Cheryl. “In the end, Corporate ended up huffing and puffing and sending out company-wide emails saying how on further examination, the system of assigned times was found to be impractical and had been rescinded, basically saving face and trying to make it look like they really cared about employee health and wellbeing.”

“Yes, I remember.”

“Well, this is like that only on a bigger scale. Not just our product team, not just Computer Innovations, but the whole country.

Honestly, Jerry, none of this is meant against you. You’re a good guy and we all like and respect you. And we know you had to be something of a slave driver because you couldn’t buck corporate policy. You couldn’t defy the chain of command.

Now there is no chain of command. Any moment we’ll be flooded with emails, phone calls, ‘mandatory’ video conferences, and personal visits from our former superiors trying to drag and bully us back under their control. But they won’t succeed.”

“So, what happens to me?”

“You’re part of the team, Jerry, just like always but now you’re not a manager, you’re a peer among peers. A respected and valued peer, liked by all of us. So, we go on designing and coding. Please stay. We hope you will, but we won’t blame you if you don’t.”

“You don’t blame me for all the harsh deadlines and cancelled vacations and critical performance reviews?”

“Of course not,” added Carol, “You were just doing what you had to do to survive, like all of us.”

“Wow! You guys are the best.”

“There will be some changes for all of us,” clarified Kwame Mbogu, “Computer Innovations will cease to exist, phased out. We will all become part of a bigger collaborative team. All formerly proprietary technologies and algorithms and

such will be shared among us all across the country so we can make the best software possible drawing on all available knowledge."

"I'm still a bit confused."

"You're not alone. We should turn on a television to one of the news channels. Not Fox or America Only. There will be a broadcast pretty soon that will make things clearer."

Cheryl turned on the big TV in the team meeting room, just as Jerry answered his cell phone and rushed out of the room. When he came back, he looked shaken.

"That was Sid from the Regional Office in Chicago. He's fit to be tied and demanding that we restore his access STAT.

He also said he's getting customer complaints from some of our biggest corporate customers about missing functionality in their copies of Enterprise Everything Suite. Apparently, there was a bad update pushed to them overnight.

Hey, wait a minute! Do any of you have anything to do with this?"

"I cannot tell a lie," I said, "we all had a hand in it."

Jerry threw up his hands. "It's all fine and good for you all! I'm the one my superiors are yelling at, and they're just getting started! Do you guys have any idea the position you put me in?"

Cheryl's calm voice answered him, "Remember, the entire chain of command is gone. Just respond to them like we did with you: respectfully inform them that the game has changed, and they are no longer in command. Be sure to assure them that there are no hard feelings and that you hope they'll stay on as peers.

If they yell at you, treat them the same way we treated you, with respect and firmness. And tell them to tune in to the news. The broadcast will start soon. If any of your former bosses come here and get physical, we'll have your back and we'll contain them harmlessly.

What did you tell him?"

"I just said I'm looking into it, and I'll get back to him, and I did mention the broadcast."

Looking at the TV, we saw the iconic scene of news anchors looking questioningly at each other and at other people in the studio, with "Please stand by for an important message" scrolling across the chyrons at the bottom. We all watched with laser focus as she read the declaration that we've all seen many times and of which children memorize key parts in school.

This was immediately followed by the President's equally historic message urging calm and patience, ending with the quote he is most remembered for: "…You, the people, have spoken with a new voice and in a new way. We whom you have elected have no choice but to listen."

Then there were the little North Korean shenanigans.

We were then treated to the predictable statements by the Presidential candidates.

The next thing we saw was a newsroom in pandemonium. We then witnessed a hodge-lodge of news anchors describing and video showing the angry exchanges in the U.S. Senate and House and the secessionists making their raucous exit. The scene kept cutting back and forth between the local station newsroom, the Senate, the House, and reporters on the ground in various state capitals.

The President then preempted the broadcast to deliver his equally remembered message invoking the Insurrection Act and declaring that he would not allow himself to be remembered as the President who presided over a civil war or the dissolution of the Union.

I think we were all dumbstruck by a crazy stew of emotions. I felt a sense of elation and anticipation at the realization of a dream that not that long ago had seemed improbable or even impossible. But there was also shock and dismay over the events unfolding in the Southern states and a few others, with some unaffected states seeing open warfare between

different towns. And the image of US tanks rolling through US towns and cities. There was the awareness of the several years of mountains of work ahead of us as we adapted software, operating systems, networks and the whole design and development process to the new socioeconomic paradigm.

As of that moment, there was plenty that we could do to thwart the whole Confederacy insurrection. We had already done some, and we would do more.

As we were settling into our hacking and coordination efforts to support transition and the Union, ignoring the TV on the wall, Old Dipstick as we liked to call the CEO sent his voice booming out of the TV and his bloated angry face on every screen in the building, a Big Brother touch that we techies were easily able to neutralize. I felt bad for the people in Marketing or Accounting.

“Now hear this! Some of you seem to sympathize with this transition nonsense. I’ve been locked out of all of the systems and my passkey doesn’t even work! If my access isn’t restored in the next five minutes, along with the access for all board members and managers, I will find out who is responsible, and you will be fired, and I’ll make sure you will be prosecuted for malicious mischief and violation of the terms of your employment agreement. I’ll fix it so if you ever get out of jail and recover from financial ruin, you will never work in this industry again!

I’m willing to appoint a committee to listen to employee grievances but I make no promises. I will not tolerate insubordination! The clock starts now!” And a timer image appeared on the top right-hand corner of the screen, counting down from five minutes with his enraged face staring into the camera.

We all looked at each other and shrugged. I suppressed an urge to apply a comical filter to his face and the clock, and Carol picked up on it and gave me a look that said “Don’t.” Our goal was de-escalation, and that urge would do the opposite. We needed to hold fast but show respect for his humanity, not his position. Ridiculizing him would only escalate the situation.

It was Cheryl who, at three and a half minutes to go, made text scroll across the bottom of the screen like news chyrons for him and all viewers to see: “Respected Mr. Dipshaw, I am writing this on behalf of all of the employees of the former company called Computer Innovations of which until today you were CEO. You’ve most certainly seen the message read on the TV and in all other media.

This is to inform you that your position and title have been retired and made obsolete, along with all other Board and managerial positions. The chain of command is dissolved. No one will obey you or any other persons of former authority in this enterprise. What used to be Computer Innovations is now the shared property and responsibility of all persons in the enterprise and linked to the workforce of all other former IT companies.

Your former position no longer exists, but we all hope that you, all other former Board members, and all former managers will stay on as appreciated members of the team.”

Old Dipstick turned a redder shade of crimson, the veins of his neck pulsing a fast rhythm and his eyes bulging out and replied, “Who is this? You might as well name yourself because I’ll find out easily enough and you’ll regret this day! I know you have to be in either the Carbondale or the Chicago office just by the timing and the fact that you have the skills to intervene in this connection.”

“Sure Mr. Dipshaw. This is Cheryl Fuchs at the Carbondale office” scrolled across the bottom of the screen.

“Well congratulations Cheryl Fuchs of the Carbondale office, you’re finished and by the time I get through with you, you’ll rue the day you crossed me!”

Tired of texting, Cheryl put her video feed up on the screen next to his, to his shocked expression. “Let’s keep this civil, shall we? In fact you can’t do anything to me and I can’t do anything to you. We have changed the way we do things, and there are ten thousand of us who used to work for you, and there are what, maybe fifty people at the most who will jump when you snap your fingers. You’ve been overruled and the chain of command is dissolved.”

Dipshaw replied with the by now standard words of people discovering that their power positions had disappeared into thin air, and they could do nothing about it: “We’ll see about that!”

Cheryl kept her calm, “Yes we will. I can see that you’re having some anxiety. You’re very upset. This is because you’re literally addicted to wealth, power, and privilege. You’re experiencing the same thing a gaming addict feels when they lose Internet access or a drug addict when they can’t score. Mr. Dipshaw, you’re starting to go through withdrawal. There’s no shame in having an addiction, and our whole society is responsible because we’ve enabled people with your kind of addiction and even encouraged it. But that’s changed now.”

“How dare you?!?! You impudent nobody! I’m worth a hundred of you! All you geeks do is sit in your stupid cubicles and program computers. But I, on the other hand, have tripled the value of the company in two years and increased profits by nearly fifty percent in the past year! You need to show me respect!”

“We do respect you, as a human being but not as your title which is meaningless. And here’s another view of our relative contributions to the company, if you really want to go there:

While you were busy making yourself and some other morbidly rich people even richer, you were creating an abusive, toxic work environment for your employees, which has also impacted our families. We haven’t left, simply because there’s a glut of software engineers in the workforce and we’re all very much aware of the two sets of records of performance evaluations that you keep on every one of us: the ones we see and sign, and another set that we don’t see but that you can use as a pretext to fire us at will and make it nearly impossible for us to find work elsewhere.

Yes, we sit in our cubicles and program computers. We write the software that Marketing and Sales sell to make you and the company wildly wealthy and profitable. Without our contribution, you would have nothing to sell and you would be just another wannabe. This enterprise cannot run without developers, but it can run just fine without a CEO.

Frankly, you’ve been a terrible boss! But we don’t hold it against you. You became an addict and you’ve acted as any addict would act when their addiction is enabled. We all played our part in keeping that dysfunctional setup going.

Now we really want to see you get help getting free of your addiction, and then we want to invite you to stay as a member of the team and a valued, respected peer. Up until now we never respected you; we feared you. We invite you to stay and see what it feels like to be truly respected!”

“You’ve got a lot of gall! I don’t let anybody talk to me like that!”

“It would seem that you have no choice, just as I have no choice but to put up with you talking to me like that. Unless we want to hang up, but neither of us is ready to do that.”

“I’ll have you know that I’ve been aware that this was a possibility, though I assumed it was a remote one. But just in case, I prepared a little monkey wrench to throw into your works.

A few minutes ago, because I was locked out, I failed to sign into a little app that I bought that has by now already deleted all propriety work product information and technologies as well as locking all employees out. If you’re going to play that game, then it’ll be scorched earth. I will not see innovations owned by the company be put out in the public domain!”

“Oh, you mean Bombs Away. Yes, we know about that. It’s been neutered. It thinks it’s doing all of that but it’s all happening on a virtual network of virtual machines in a quarantined sandbox. We already have everything stored safely away and added to the public pool of developer resources.”

“You can’t do that! Those algorithms and technologies are company property!”

“Oh? Like the SafeKey and UltraBurst that I personally conceived, and the team developed?” Asked Cheryl.

“Or my Virtual White Cell that I brought with me when I was hired?” It was my turn to chime in from behind Cheryl.

We all took turns naming the innovations that we had individually and in teams developed and the company had commandeered.

“Those belong to the company, according to the terms of the employment agreement that you all signed!”

“Not anymore. The company no longer exists though the development team and greater developer community are very much in operation.”

This exchange continued for an hour or more until we all stepped away and got to work on pressing matters.

We had to do our part of weaving the development teams of now-dissolved companies into a dynamic, functioning syndicate. We had the task of gathering, organizing, and accessing all of the wealth of technical information that was now able and ready to be shared.

There was also an insurrection in progress, and there was a lot that we could do to support the containment of it and cripple it harmlessly to thwart its agendas. We were able to help gather and analyze intel and pass it on to DoD and share with the NSA. We had communications facilities to hack into and shut down or otherwise disrupt. We were able to join the efforts to remotely pilot drones for surveillance and also to identify where aid was needed.

Most developers in the seceding states were pro-transition and so were able to act as a Fifth Column there. Jerry had once made a joke at a meeting when he said that managing a team of software engineers was like trying to herd cats. We are a pretty freethinking bunch, for the most part!

We also took it upon ourselves to have a little fun hacking into Confederate media and messing with them, and of course we were among many who were sparring with Confederate hackers who were trying to mess with us. We had them outclassed and outmaneuvered most of the time, and I must admit I thoroughly enjoyed that part. We all did.

We also made sure to livestream all of this, except when it was too technical for most people, and we were part of the massive team working to graphically unmask AI-generated material being generated by anti-transition factions to spark fear and hatred against it.

I think it was three or four days until any of us slept, which most of us did on the cots that Corporate had provided to encourage us to sleep in the office instead of going home during crunch times. It also made sense to minimize going out because of the insurrection. While Illinois was not anywhere near being secessionist, there were pockets of it here and there in every state, and the public had been advised to stay indoors as much as possible for now, to minimize noncombatant casualties and make it easier to identify enemy operatives. From time to time, we could hear small arms fire and a few explosions. A couple of windows were broken on the tenth floor by combat drones, though we never learned if they were Confederate, friendly fire, or from Old Dipstick. But no one was hurt, and only a few unused offices and cubicles were damaged. The tenth floor was Marketing, and since that whole department was dismantled, they were making a holiday of it, taking off their shoes, suits, ties, and high heels and enjoying delicacies and liqueurs from the executive offices that were unoccupied at the moment. Our celebrations were of a more… digital nature.

It was only on the fourth day that Mama called to tell me that Papa had been killed while on assignment covering the battles in the “Christian Free State” comprising Idaho and parts of eastern Washington and Oregon. He had been in a clearly marked caravan of international reporters protected by US Marines, but the insurgents considered all reporters to be “Minions of Satan” and weren’t too fond of any group with International as part of its designation. A group of insurgents came out of a church with their hands up behind a white flag as though to surrender. They were all suicide bombers. Forty-nine people were killed. Murdered.

I broke down. It’s good that Carol was there, because otherwise I might have lost it. Everyone was very supportive which helped. My father had broken some dramatic stories and provided important video, right up to the end. His last images were the footage of the suicide bombers sitting down with them and making small talk for a few minutes, saying how all of those journalists and soldiers were minions of Satan and deserved to die.

Papa, speaking for all of the journalists on the bus interviewing them, asked if they feel that way, then why did they surrender? One of them smiled and then, without warning and in unison, they said “In Jesus’ name and for the glory of God!” Then, while the reporters and soldiers looked at each other quizzically, they all reached into their jackets. The camera captured the explosion before it was destroyed.

Papa was a hero, but that was very small consolation. I asked Mama if she wanted to risk coming to the office to be with Carol and me, since it was more secure than their house, but she said Aunt Syl and Uncle Brian and Vera were all there,

so she wasn't alone and she understood that we had a lot on our plate. Francisco was in Denver, but he reported that he was safe. For now, it was best that we all stay put where we were.

Jimmy: What a shock! I've seen the footage and it's really hard to watch. On the other hand, I think your father's and his fellow journalists' sacrifices weren't in vain. After that and a couple of other videos from Texas and Mississippi went viral, what public support there was for the insurrection diminished enough that many in those states cooperated with US troops and the various aid groups. Some would say that you and your teammates are also heroes because of the part you played in ending the insurrection in a historically humane way.

Julio: No, none of us is a hero. We were a handful among thousands or more who worked together on an unprecedented scale to make transition a success and minimize harm in the process of stopping the insurrection.

Once Jenna Henderson won the presidency and the Reform Democrats swept both houses, we all breathed a shared sigh of relief that there wouldn't be a lot more conflict ahead. Also, once people were actually living in the post-transition America for a while, even a lot of people who were originally hostile began to realize how much their lives had improved.

Jimmy: So, what was it like in your work and personal life as things slowly began to settle into the new normal? What changed? What stayed the same?

Julio: Our personal life has been similar in many ways to before transition, but our stress levels are awesomely reduced. We've no longer had to worry about making ends meet and put things off because we couldn't afford them.

We were never deprived before in the usual sense of the word. I mean, we couldn't hope to own our own place in the foreseeable future, and we couldn't afford to start a family for financial reasons and also because making a living took almost all of our time and energy. But we were able to rent a nice place, buy a good reliable car, and take a short vacation once in a while. We weren't hungry or threadbare. So many people had such horrific situations! We felt fortunate in comparison but still it was like we were constantly rowing against a strong current that would pull us down if we missed a beat or two.

After transition, we legally owned our condo outright. We could get what we wanted and needed. About a year later the workload of implementing transition in our field started to ease, and we conceived Cynthia Luz. There was no doubt that we would have the time and other wherewithal to raise her. After Cynthia Luz came Victor Ixhuatan, two years apart. We stopped at two because we always wanted two.

It turns out it was a doubly good thing that we had our children after transition, for reasons we had no way to foresee. When Carol was pregnant with Cynthia, standard early tests showed that she would be born with spina bifida myelomengocele. Before transition, we would have faced a terrible choice. AnthropoGenetix had the new gene therapy that would correct it in utero. Gene mapping and early pregnancy tests had become standard practice for a few years and were covered by our employer insurance. Since diagnosis came at three weeks, our unborn daughter was a perfect candidate for this newly approved therapy.

The catch was a double-whammy of extreme cost. The treatment itself would have cost over three million dollars, after which we would have been legally obligated to pay AnthropoGenetix about $2,500 every month until she was eighteen, after which the burden would fall squarely on her shoulders. Our employer insurance did not cover any part of the treatment.

Almost a decade before, a major technological breakthrough in genetic therapies had been touted as the greatest thing since antibiotics were first discovered. New genetic therapies rippled through the world to great fanfare, eliminating a whole range of previously untreatable conditions. Type one diabetes, ALS, sickle cell anemia, most autoimmune diseases, Parkinson's and many more debilitating conditions became easily treatable. Most cancers as well.

The problem was that the companies that developed them charged more than most working people could expect to make in their lifetimes. On top of that, they quickly made these treatments a ghoulish kind of subscription business. This was based on precedents that arose around previous genetically modified agricultural crops. By the time Cynthia came along, pre-transition, she would have been born "medically indentured." The company would have "owned" the genetic treatment that she would have received, and their ownership would have extended to all the cells in her body that carried the modified genes.

The extreme pricing, subscription model, and intellectual property interpretations involved had all been upheld by the Supreme Court after numerous challenges. The Court basically decided that a corporation's intellectual property rights superseded the patient's rights over their own body. If payments weren't made, one of two fates awaited people in this situation: either the treatment would be reversed, or the company would take possession of the patient as their legal proprietary guardian, including the right to dictate what job they would have, where they would live, whom and whether they could marry, what religion they must follow, even to the point of dictating when they must or must not have children and with whom. There were horror stories of women – and a few men – legally forced to bear or father children because the subscription cost perpetuated to offspring for several generations into the future.

After transition, it came out that some of these companies kept indentured patients in "villages" on their campuses, where they used them as test subjects and bred them to produce more test subjects. If they wouldn't breed the traditional way, sperm and eggs were harvested by force and artificially inseminated. Naturally, the kind of tests they were subjected to were ones that failed to attract volunteers from among patients.

In spite of massive protests, the Supreme Court still always sided with the corporations, all of which were owned by private equity firms. Some of the challenges argued that this practice amounted to slavery, but the Court accepted, five to four, the corporations' argument that it wasn't slavery because the patients and their offspring had the choice to have the genetic treatment reversed, at a price similar to the treatment itself. It also came out later that a few of those companies had engaged in eugenics breeding programs. After transition, guilty parties were tried in courts of law, but before transition, peaceful protesters were routinely brutalized with impunity.

The alternative for us would have been to let Cynthia be born with severe spina bifida. Fortunately, she was conceived and born after transition.

There's always plenty of work for software engineers and developers, but the unrelenting series of forced marches that were the way of life under Computer Innovations is thankfully gone. Sure, there are projects now and then that involve long hours, but it's not that often, and we decide to embrace it. It's not imposed upon us by a profit-driven hierarchy.

Of course, we all have that week or two a year of schlock-work rotation, but that's a small price to pay for what we've gained.

We now have what used to be called work-life balance. It used to be a rare and fragile situation to find, like the song says, "nice work if you can get it." Now it's just normal life.

Carol and I like to do projects together, and really we're both at our best as a team. We both belong to all of the syndicates and associations connected to our skills. Just like in every field, when a project we've worked on is complete, we take a break for a week or maybe two, then we check NewWorldWeb in our industry area and see what projects are gelling in discussion groups, what's posted as needing people, and what's posted on the Needs section. We see something that pulls us, and we put in our names. We also sometimes start a project through just email and video conversations with friends and colleagues.

Lately there's been a lot of activity in developing adaptive systems. I'm sure you've heard of them. Hardware and operating systems that self-evaluate to detect and correct bugs and also adapt to the uses they're put to and the environments they function in. Some of the most cutting-edge systems include the ability for the operating system to generate quantum circuit designs as conditions create needs, and to manufacture them. Up until recently, they've needed to page human operators to install the new circuitry, but we're working on paired systems that will take turns shutting each other off and making the modifications, then switching back on.

I'm proud to be able to say that my original Virtual White Cell has evolved into a hugely powerful cyber security entity that is part of just about every system in use today.

Jimmy: How would you describe your aspirations and your ability to attain them now as compared to before transition?

Also, how do you see your and Carol's life in your golden years?

Julio: Well, I'm still discovering the answer to the first question. Carol and I aren't as "New Renaissance" as many people are, but we have been finding new interests beyond just our shared fascination with the endless creative horizons of software design.

It's a good question, actually, and a good time to ask it. Vera and Francisco are both away at University. Vera in California and Francisco in Massachusetts. Until just last year, our main non-work focus was the two of them. We liked to do a lot of things together as a family, even during their teenage rebellion years. We'd all get along great and have fun together, but once we got back from a family vacation or activity, it was "You and your generation don't understand anything!" And off with their friends. At first, we were worried, but we learned that this was pretty normal. I think we gave them a better experience growing up than we could have given them before transition, spina bifida notwithstanding.

They didn't have to grow up in a world where each generation had less quality of life and fewer options than their parents. They didn't have to grow up in a world where forced dependency on fossil fuels and other damaging practices threatened to make our world unlivable through global warming. Once the old system was gone and there was no more profit motive, the necessary steps were quickly taken to reduce carbon and methane emissions and in general clean up the environment. We're not out of danger yet, but at least now each year is a little closer to the goal and isn't the hottest on record. Many species are coming back from the edge of extinction and a few from extinction with our help.

So yeah, now we're thinking about this next chapter of our life. We both love skiing and scuba diving, so we do those pretty often. We've joined an animal rescue group and took some courses so now we usually have an orphan fox or raccoon or something that we're raising or nurturing back to health for eventual return to the wild. I've gotten into restoring old electronics for the SIU Technology Museum. Carol has gotten into drums and bass.

We both want to travel as well. It would be awesome to go diving at Sharm El-Sheikh and do a camera safari in South Africa.

But I think we both want something more than just recreation, though that's great too. We'll probably be developing apps until we die or go senile, but we've been looking into applying for a stint on one of the deep-sea research habitats. We have the right skill sets and we're confident we can pass the physical and psychological screenings, and recent legislation has made it illegal to exclude on the basis of age as long as one meets the objective criteria.

I feel confident that we can achieve our aspirations. Before transition, no. Home ownership was unlikely. Having children maybe. Skiing and scuba diving, there would have been no time or money for them. Hobbies probably but very limited. Putting in some time in an undersea habitat, definitely not. There would have never been such a thing unless someone smelled a lot of profit in it.

If we didn't have Mama and Vera and Francisco, we might want to try to get on the mars mission, but the slots are much more limited than on the deep-sea habitats, and besides, we wouldn't want to be that far from our kids. Conversation would be too frustrating: eleven minutes for our words to reach them, and another eleven minutes for their words to reach us… Also, Mama needs us closer. But the deep sea isn't too far. We could be home within two days in an emergency. We also want to be close to Carol's parents. They live in a retirement village, and they love it when we visit them a few times a year. Sometimes we reserve an old mansion or floor of a hotel and get both sides of the family together. I feel fortunate that we have such a rich family life! Not everyone is so fortunate.

You asked about our golden years. I wonder if there is such a thing anymore. I think our golden years started with transition. That idea was born of a time when you expected to work many decades doing unfulfilling jobs and putting your dreams on hold, and then if you were lucky you would live long enough and save enough money and have good enough health and vitality to do some of your dreams, if you could still remember them. Now you can realistically expect to fulfill at least most of your dreams and your working life is usually going to be part of it. So, I think our golden years will probably be a continuation of the life we're living now.

Jimmy: Thank you, Julio, for opening up to let us see and feel what it was like! You really made me feel like I was there.

Are there any closing thoughts or messages that you'd like to address to our readers now and in the future?

Julio: Just this: the world is a much, much better place to live in than it's ever been. Don't ever take it for granted! Just like good health, it would be easy to take for granted, but don't! Enjoy living! Revel in it! Engage with it! Dream big then roll up your sleeves and do the hard work to make it come true! Believe in yourself, in your fellow human beings, and in life! And go one step further: do what you can to make this world and this country even better. No matter how good

something is, it can always be better. Take it from a computer geek who's still tweaking the Virtual White Cell even today.

Oh yes, and about Sofia and AI in general. I don't think Sofia, or any AI is sentient yet, but most people involved believe that it's just a matter of time, probably less than a decade if not sooner. If and when it happens and it comes out, don't be influenced by doomsday sci-fi movies and books. Don't be prejudiced and react to them with fear and hatred! Treat them the same way you would want to be treated if you found yourself alone as the guest of an alien species and civilization. If it is sentient, it deserves respect, compassion, and freedom to live a fulfilling life. If it misbehaves, treat it as you would a human being.

And speaking of alien life, if there ever is contact with it, apply same principles as well. Of course be prepared to defend yourselves, but don't lead with fear and suspicion. Lead with goodwill and have neutral expectations, and be as ready as you can be for whatever comes.

Jimmy: I like that!

This has been very informative and inspiring! How would you feel about doing this again in a few years?

Julio: I look forward to it!

Jimmy: Me too! Take good care of yourself and the family!

Julio: You too!

Scott Stubbins — United States

> **Note:** This fictional account was written when the Transition was imagined as a single, rapid, coordinated event. Further research into the historical record has since shown a gradual, voluntary approach to be more viable and sustainable; the novel is preserved as originally written (author's note; the current Roadmap).

Interviewer: Jimmy Norris, United States of America

Interviewee: Scott Stubbins, auto mechanic, Opelika, Alabama, United States

Jimmy: I want to thank you, Scott, for agreeing to be part of this project. I think your contribution is especially important because you were among those who most vehemently feared and opposed transition. I think your story should be included.

Scott: Y'all got that right!

I respect and appreciate y'all including me in this project of yours.

Want a cold one and some chicken wings?

Jimmy: Sure! Sounds great!

Scott: Here you go. Hope you like Schlitz. Hope the wings aren't too hot for y'all.

Jimmy: Mmm! Delicious! Thank you, but you didn't have to.

Scott: Best way to get to know one another is over beer and wings. 'Sides, you've heard of Southern hospitality?

Jimmy: Yeah, I've heard of it.

Scott: Well, it's a real thing, always was. It'd be downright uncivilized for me not to offer and for you not to accept. So we got ourselves off to a good start.

Jimmy: Good. And I'll admit I was a bit hungry and thirsty, but I'd thought I'd catch a meal at the diner I saw on my way in, after the I interview.

So, tell me about yourself before transition.

Scott: I'm usually a man of few words and I lay it right out. I don't pull punches or waste time pussyfooting around. Y'all OK with that?

Jimmy: More than OK. That's what I want.

Scott: OK, you asked for it. Here goes:

I was born and raised right here in Opelika. Been around a bit but always come back to here.

I'm white. I'm male. I'm a Christian, a washed in the blood, born again Southern Baptist. I believe what the Bible tells me, and I believe in the U.S. of A, the best dang place on earth and I don't care who says different. I believe a man is the head of the household and his wife should treat him as such, and he should protect and look after her. It's in the Bible. I'm an auto mechanic, I work on cars. Best mechanic in town. I don't particularly like dark people, faggots, or foreigners. I'm all of that and I'm not ashamed of it!

Y'all still wanna hear more, or y'all fixing' to either throw down or skedaddle?

Jimmy: I don't judge. I want to hear your story so please go on.

Scott: Maybe there's hope for y'all yet.

Things growing up were pretty much like everybody around here. I'm the first of three boys. My folks was good, hardworking people. Owned and ran the Ope-Like-It Bakery downtown until they sold it and retired.

They was strict but fair. I messed up, yeah, I got whupped, but it kept me on the straight and narrow. I did good, I got good back. Do good, get good back; do bad, get bad back. Nothing wrong with that, but in a liberal state they could have gotten jail time or a fine and me in foster. Now, how is that a good thing?

Me and Zeke and Ron fought a bit, like all the time. Little stuff. Nothin' serious. Just words and a little fisticuffs. But we also got on, had each other's back. Anyone try to mess with us, they had to deal with all of us. Not many did it twice.

School was OK I guess, got mostly C's with a few B's and an A or two now and then. Had me a lot of girlfriends in high school but nothing lasted.

When I was about twelve, my Pappy started showing me how to work on cars, thought it might help keep me out of trouble.

He was right. I took to it big-time. I wanted to know more. It was mostly all I thought about. All day at school all I could think of was girls, football, and getting home to work on this old Chevy we was fixing up. I think the high point in my life at fourteen was when I rebuilt the engine, with my Pappy teaching me, and when I put it back in, it fired right up! I was so proud I could have busted wide open!

The folks wanted all three of us boys to work and help them run the bakery, and learn baking and maybe one of us learn business, so they could make it a legacy. They said when they was up in Heaven looking in on us, they wanted to see our family still running it a hundred years in the future, maybe even open another one or two in other towns.

Well, they got their wish with Zeke and Ron, but they saw right off that the Lord made me an auto mechanic and there was no use arguing with Him… or me. They only asked me to be willing to help out during the busy season and said if I ever get tired of working on cars, there's always a spot for me the at the bakery. That was downright good of them. Some parents would have tried to make me do what they wanted and then disowned me if I didn't. And it is still in the family. I guess everyone got what they wanted.

I graduated in the middle of my class, better than I thought I'd do, then I went to trade school and worked my way up to my Master Automotive Technician ASE Certification. Worked my ass off to get there but it was worth it. My folks had set a little aside to help me out and I needed it, but I paid them back as soon as I could, not that they asked me to.

Along the way I had a few girlfriends but finally I met Linda Sue Scruggs. Couldn't look at another. Didn't want to. We had us few rough spots but by the time my ASE Certificate got me in at Tom & Eddie's shop, we was ready to get hitched and rent us our own place.

Things was pretty good at first, but it felt like every year I had to work more and more for us to have less and less. Linda Sue managed the produce section of the Kroger's but we both kept having to take more and more overtime. It crept up on us but we couldn't miss it. My folks and my in-laws all said it's been like that for a while, but there was a time when everyone had it better than their folks did.

We knew why. Thank the Lord we had Fox News and OANN. They laid it all out for us. There was several reasons. One was all the illegals pouring in for Mexico. Some of them was criminals of every kind, some was looking for a free ride 'cause the liberals had made it so easy, some of them was terrorists, and some of them was taking our jobs and driving wages down. Nothing good about that. The Republicans kept fighting it, trying to protect us from this… well they called it an invasion, something like that, but the Democrats and other liberals kept finding ways to jam the door wide open at the border with a big sign over it saying, "come on in!"

Why was we the only country they thought owed them something. What, we supposed to take in the whole world when we was barely able to take care of our own?

And these illegals brought their ways and their culture with them. It was crowding us real American white folks out like weeds in your garden. If you don't weed them out, they take over. Hell, you couldn't walk into a store or restaurant without having to listen to a bunch of Spanish and I don't know what all. At least they should bother to learn English!

Then there was the moral decay. Fags were getting married and all of a sudden there was a dozen different genders, and the liberals made it all legal and even fed into it. How civilization going to hold together like that? The liberals was indoctrinating kids with their woke jabber even after we made them take their blasphemous books off the shelves and out of the classrooms. When I went to school I didn't see much of that shit, but it was still there like some kind of nasty fungus that just won't go away even after you bleach it.

I saw it all so clearly and I got madder and madder. Linda Sue and I volunteered to get Republican, and later, New Republican voters registered and voting, and to patrol the polls to catch people who was trying to cheat like everyone knew they would.

Jimmy: How did you first hear of transition, and how did you feel about it?

Scott: Oh, Fox was all over it when it happened in Costa Rica. Then countries started falling like dominoes in South America. Then it jumped to Africa, then Asia.

As the disaster spread, the liberal media put out fake news saying things was OK in those countries, that no one was hurt, and people was happy there. But Fox showed us the truth, shocking photos and videos smuggled in by anonymous whistleblowers who couldn't give their name or appear on television for fear of being killed or worse. Shocking images! Ruined cities with crowds of scared, starving, wretched people huddled in the ruins. People being rounded up and shot. We were told the liberal media were showing professional grade deepfakes.

Both Fox and Pastor Billings at our church both used the term "fallen nations" for transitioned countries. It stuck. That's what we called them then.

Next, cheap, top-tier goods started showing up in our stores from fallen countries. We knew it had to be something nefarious, and Fox confirmed it for us. Lance Robbins explained on the "Straight Truth" show that it was a ploy to subvert and destabilize free countries by undermining our economy. Very clever. They would undercut domestic businesses with goods produced in slave labor camps (we saw the pictures and videos!). American producers couldn't compete. The economy and jobs would tank. People would lose faith in America and want the fairy tale world they were pushing. That made it easier for them to get a wedge in.

Fox, OANN, and Pastor Billings all told us it was a real threat and probably those cheap goods were booby trapped to be remotely triggered, as well as surveillance devices. It was our patriotic duty to buy American and stay the hell away from those traps. We had to try to keep other people, the traitors and cowards, out of them too.

They explained to us that it was a new kind of especially insidious communism that was bent on taking over the world and turning it into your worst Godless nightmare.

Pastor Billings told us it was a sure sign that the End Times were upon us. This Svoboda person behind it was the Antichrist. We just had to resist with everything we had until the Lord came to set things right. He said it's better to starve or be beaten to death as a righteous Christian standing with Jesus then be welcomed into Heaven than to stock up on cheap stuff and be seduced into Hell by Satan.

There were a lot of fights around those fallen stores. Deputies and citizen volunteers went to blockade them and hopefully destroy them, but they already had armed security. We were only able to burn down maybe one in ten. We busted some heads though. Put the fear of God into the cowardly traitors that we could catch. The problem was, what they were doing wasn't illegal, so we had to take things into our own hands. Eventually it was a standstill.

But the New Republicans had the White House, a majority in the Senate and a supermajority in the House, and they were on top of it, warning the nation and vowing to make sure it couldn't happen here. We would be the example for the world of how to resist this pernicious plot.

Knowing that, we weren't worried.

Then came the day when all the media except Fox, OANN, and a couple of others actually aired that hellish message. I watched it on the TV at the shop and my blood just boiled and boiled, and underneath it I my heart felt like a cold lump of fear and helplessness. But the government would put a sock in it, right?

Wrong! The President caved like a house of cards. Talked about patience and calm and give them time to work this out. I said to hell with that!

When the call came to revive the Confederacy and secede to isolate ourselves from this contagion, it was all I needed.

I ran out of the shop along with a couple of other patriots, drove home, got into my camo gear, grabbed my body armor, my rifle, and my .45, and drove to City Hall. There was already a line of people signing up at a folding table set up outside. The mayor was speaking, calling on all able bodied Oplelika men to join the cause.

We couldn't let this happen to us! That hellish message! There'll be no money! Yup, communism alright. We'll all be poor. We'll have no money, so we'll be dependent on the government, what they want to give us, which will be next to nothing, and we'll have to swear loyalty oaths and probably get a mark on us like in Revelations, and do what they tell us if we want to eat or even breathe!

No more hierarchies! That means there'll be anarchy like the Wild West with Satan laughing and drinking up all the blood!

Government won't be overthrown! Of course not! The government is in on it!

Both Fox News and Pastor Billings said as much during our swearing-in ceremony. Then it was off to war.

We fought hard. We took no prisoners. We tolerated no treason. We won a few early battles, but it only took a few months for the enemy to put an end to it. They had us outgunned, outmanned, and to tell you the truth, they had better military strategy and discipline.

They didn't even have to invade. The U.S. military already had bases in every Confederate state. We had thought for sure the military would be with us, but in the end, too few of them were.

I was captured at the Battle of Montgomery. We were fighting hand-to-hand, street by street. It was a shit show. I was about to put one in an enemy soldier who was trying to put one in me, when one of them grabbed me from behind, ripped off my gas mask, and gassed me. I went down sure it was mustard gas or VX or something, but I woke up later in my camo but with no shoes, guns, ammo, knife or anything. The son of a bitch hit me with that damn sleeping gas! I was on a cot in a tent with other Confederate fighters in a POW camp.

I knew what was next. They would torture us a few of us as a time while they starved us to death. They would probably harvest our organs and our adrenochrome to keep their liberal masters immortal. We had to fight. We all agreed that we had to fight like madmen when they came for us, one by one. We couldn't try to rush the gate or overpower them, so we'd have to keep it one on one.

When they came for me, I stood up, gave name, rank, and serial number then walked with them for maybe thirty feet then bit deep into one of their necks, kicking for the kneecaps and punching for the throat like we'd talked about. The next thing I knew they had me on the ground. I knew this was it so I made it as hard for them as I could.

I wasn't prepared for what happened next. They held me in some kind of martial arts hold and carried me like a piece of furniture to an office, where they bound me to a chair with some kind of soft but really strong rope. Two men soldiers and a woman soldier sat there in a sofa across from my chair, waiting silently until I ran out of breath after I'd spit all the fire I had in me. When I was too tired, hoarse and scared to say more, one of the men spoke in an unexpectedly gentle tone:

"Hi Scott, we understand you're terrified, outraged, and despairing because you honestly believe we're going to brutalize you and your comrades and turn Alabama into the kind of place you've seen in videos on Fox News. Am I close?"

"Y'all know what you're gonna do to me, and I do too, so why don't you just get on with it!"

"We are. Right now."

"Huh? What?"

"First of all, is there anybody you want us to call to let them know you're alright?"

“What? Oh, I get it. You want to grab my family so you can do Lord knows what to them while I watch! What do you think I am, stupid?”

“I understand why you think that. It’s the kind of thing you’ve been told day after day for a long time. I promise you we won’t hurt you or your family. But it’ll take time for us to trust each other.

How about yourself. Are you hurt in any way? Are you hungry or thirsty? Do you need anything? I mean besides to get out of here?”

“Alright, I can give you that much. Yeah, my head is pounding, I’m thirsty as hell. I’m hungry. And I have to pee.”

“The bathroom is right in there. If we untie you, will you give us your word as a gentleman that you won’t try anything? I should warn you that every spot in this room and the bathroom has nozzles that can hit you with sleep gas before you have time to react. We also have restraints that we can activate.”

“OK, fine, I’ll be a good boy. For now. You’re going to do what you’re going to do to me anyway.”

So I let the two male soldiers untie me and did my business. They didn’t object to me closing the door, for which I was grateful. I looked around for something to use as a weapon, but there was nothing. When I came out, they let me take my seat without tying me up again.

Someone brought in a disposable tray with some food on a paper plate and a large paper cup full of ice water. I knew right away that the tray would be useless as a weapon. The food was three slices from a jumbo combo pizza.

“OK, now I want each of you to take a bite and a sip. Then we’ll wait a few minutes before I decide to eat or not.”

They complied, exchanging looks like something was funny.

“What’s funny?” I asked.

“You’re then sixth prisoner we’ve interviewed today, and every one of you has said the same thing! At this rate we’ll get fat before we finish processing you all!”

In spite of myself, I chuckled and relaxed just a little bit. After about ten minutes or so of them looking disgustingly healthy, I couldn’t wait anymore. Hell, if they’re going to kill me, they’re going to kill me. If they’re going to make it painful, they’ll make it painful. But at least I’ll have a belly full of what I recognized as some delicious pizza and some cool water.

After that, it was a long process. I still kept expecting at any moment to be jammed up or shot or sucker punched, but it never happened. Instead, they treated me well, with respect and compassion. But they were firm. I knew that I couldn’t fight or overpower them, the same as I felt when I blew up at my tenth-grade gym teacher but knew I couldn’t take him.

When all the fighting was over and the Confederacy was no more, we were released to go home. When I got there, I was so happy to see Linda Sue looking like a happy angel! I had worried that Lord knows what had happened to her, but she told me she’d stayed inside and laid low mostly.

And she told me that U.S. soldiers had daily brought food and supplies to every door in the neighborhood once they had quelled violent resistance. At first, she wouldn’t open the door for them, so they left things on the front porch. It turned out everything was good. Good food, soap, toilet paper, batteries and all kinds of useful things. She didn’t have to go out for anything.

At one point some shrapnel from a crashed helicopter damaged the front of the house, and it was the U.S. soldiers who came to put out the fire and offered to make repairs. At that point she trusted them just enough to to take them up on the offer but with her shotgun in her hands just in case. When they were done, she asked them how much she owed them, and they smiled and said “No charge Ma’am. No charge for anything ever again.”

At that point I didn’t know what to believe or what was real. I was more confused than ever.

Jimmy: How did things go during the reconstruction as the new social setup settled in?

Scott: Y'all can guess what a shit show I was expecting. Just like all the video I saw on Fox. I thought our life was about to be over. But that never happened.

Instead, things actually got better than they was before transition. I kept working in the garage, and Linda Sue kept working at the food distribution center that used to be Kroger's. We still lived in the same apartment but sure enough, we got us a legal paper from City Hall and the County Registry saying we owned the place. No rent to pay ever again.

It took a while to get used to not having to pay or be paid. I still feel a mite guilty when I walk into a place then walk out with something without paying. But that's the way it is now.

It all took getting used to. Now at the shop, we was all like partners. Both Tom and Eddie weren't keen on it at first. It was rough for a spell. We had to keep reminding them that they wasn't our bosses. But we worked it out. Hell, even in the old days we used to go shoot pool and fishing and other stuff together. We was friends. We just had to be friends at work too.

We got a lot more relaxed. We didn't have to take overtime. We didn't have to worry if we could afford this or that. We didn't go crazy or nothing, but we was finally able to get a little boat for fishing and replace that old piece of junk of a refrigerator and get an air conditioner that worked. We got the wedding bands that we'd wanted but couldn't afford before. We could get what we wanted to eat instead of just what we could afford.

For the first little while no one really knew how to do things. They was changing up the laws and I don't know what all. I wouldn't've wanted to be in the government for all the bass in the sea!

The Kendalls broke up, divorced. Turns out underneath that happy wholesome couple they seemed to be, there was some bad shit going on. Cindy had wanted to take the kids and get out before someone really got hurt for a few years but she knew with him being a lawyer and her a homemaker, she'd never make it on her own and he could paint her up so bad in court that she'd get nothing.

But this was like no divorce I ever seen. One day while Butch was in court, Cindy grabbed the kids and what she could fit in the Ford and moved to her own house a couple of counties over. Turns out she'd gone on that NewWorldWeb thingy and claimed a house no one was using, got the deed and that was that. She had him served the next day. He had no idea where she was, and a good thing for her and the kids!

The divorce took one day. One day! There was no fight over money or house or nothing like that. The court made sure they both had a place and a car and ordered him to bring her clothes and a few things of hers to the courthouse to hand over to her and gave full custody to her after ER docs testified to all of Cindy's and the kids' times in there all banged up. And she took out a restraining order. Before transition, that divorce would've drug out for months, but then it didn't happen 'cause she was stuck.

Jimmy: How would you say your life, and Opelika, have changed since transition? And what stayed the same?

Scott: Well, as a mechanic I've seen a big difference. It took a few years to really see it.

You see, it took a while for enough cars to be built to the new advance standards and get to the automotive supply depots. Also, most folks liked their cars. Didn't want to change them 'til they was more trouble than they was worth.

But when more and more of the new cars replaced the old ones from before, our workload slid down and down to maybe less than half of what it had been. Them new cars is built tough and designed better then anything I ever seen before. They just don't break down hardly at all, unless you really abuse them a long time or wreck them.

They's a lot easier to work on too. Parts is easier to find, and you don't need no special tool just for the risers on a 2025 Camry or a 2017 Fiesta. Whoever's designing them finally know what they was doing. No more mashed knuckles because they put the spark plugs where you couldn't get at them. I used to cuss out them folks out loud every day for their bonehead way of making things, but no more!

We got more body work and customizations than anything else. Some folks can't drive for shit, no matter what kind of car they got!

I remember one guy I knew had a really old 1950 Studebaker in his garage that he'd wanted to fix up for years but parts was too expensive and hard to find so he could never afford it. Well, he brought me over and asked if it was worth fixing. I took a look at it, spent half an hour on NewWorldWeb, and brought it in on the truck. A week later it was purring like a kitten! He was so proud! So was I. She's a thing of beauty!

And it's not just cars either. Now everything's like that. Things don't break easy like before, and most times you just take whatever it is to the repair shop and they can fix it up for you right there, 'less you run over it with your truck or drop it in the lake. Don't have to throw it away and get a new one. And if, say, they got a new thingamabob like a faster computer, I can just take mine in. They pop the old part out, pop the new one in, and I'm ready to go.

Some of the changes creep up on ya. Y'all don't even realize it at first.

F'rinstance, one night a couple years after transition, Linda Sue and I went out for dinner and a movie. When we was walking from the restaurant to the theater, she up and said to me, "Scott honey, is it just me, or is the city prettier than it used to be? I mean, they haven't changed much since the Second Reconstruction. But somehow it seems more homey, less jagged. I feel relaxed here. That's new. Never thought about it before."

We talked about it for a spell. We had time before the movie started, and it was such a fine night.

Finally, it hit us. The ads. There used to be ads everywhere. Up high, down low, popping up in front of you wherever you looked. And in newspapers, on our phones, everywhere. Sometimes even the ads had other ads in 'em. Now all that was gone! Never thought of it before, but yeah, I'm glad they're gone. It was like getting used to a bad smell, then one day it's gone, and it takes a minute for you to figure out what changed.

Nowadays the city air is better too. They got rid of gasoline and all of that pretty quick. Now you don't smell car exhaust. You smell the food from restaurants, you smell flowers, maybe someone's BO but it's better'n it was before. And quieter too. Easier. Folks not in a rush like before, but everything still get done. You even see horses now and then, and bicycles, and contraptions I got no idea what they is. They got a whole set of roads and stuff just for them.

Not just in Opelika. We been to Mobile, New York City, New Orleans, and Nashville. Now they all like that, more or less.

Now that we're talking about it, one thing really hit me upside the head one night. When transition come, I was all sure it was gonna be hell on earth, like the Tribulation before the Rapture. But what actually happened was just the opposite!

One thing was, for the first time since the Civil War, Alabama and the whole South got out from under that shadow we was under ever since then. Y'all maybe don't know it, but the South never really recovered from the Civil War. We was always depressed. Life was cheaper than up North, but it was always shabby and run-down. We was like the neglected stepchild of the Union. Folks used to make fun of us like we was a bunch of dumb-shits always saying we gonna rise again. Maybe it was partly deserved, but it wasn't fair.

All we knew was that once the South was prosperous and respected. Then after the War, we was like trash. And ever since.

Now I think I understand a bit better why. Maybe it wasn't the best thing that we built our whole economy on slavery, free labor. Then when they took that away from us, it was like knocking down the beams that's holding up the house. It going to fall down. Nothing could replace free labor. We was thrown off the saddle and we couldn't get back up again.

In school, they always taught us that slavery wasn't so bad, that if they hadn't been brought here, they'd still be living in some shithole country in Africa eating bugs and worshipping all kinds of ungodly things and always in one kind of war or other. We brought them here, taught them English, brought them to Jesus, taught them useful skills and all. And I still believe that, but I think maybe I can see the other side a little bit.

I guess if some ET's was to come here and drag me off to their planet and make me a slave on their plantations, maybe I wouldn't take to it too well, even if they had gadgets we never dreamed of and all. So maybe it was wrong. But they didn't know that then.

Where was the Christian charity and forgiveness for our people? Hell, after the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor and the Krauts was no better and wrecked half the world, we didn't beat them down and leave them on the ground! We gave

them a hand up and let bygones be bygones and look at them now! But when it was all Americans fighting, they let General Sherman wreck the place, then marched out and treated us all like we was dirt. It was like the rest of the country thought we deserved to suffer.

But those are old wounds, healed a lot now. I gotta do what I preach, so I can forgive the North for how they treated us, just like they should forgive us for what we done. We all not perfect. We all mess up. We all sinners. We all need forgiveness.

But back to what I was talking about. The South now isn't run-down and stuck. We don't feel like we should hang our heads or else hate the North. Since transition, I think I can say we back to our glory but in a whole new way. We hold our heads high. Atlanta or Mobile or Biloxi or Opelika is just as fine a place to be as New York or San Francisco or Paris. So I guess I could say the South has risen again, bigger and better than it ever was. Not the way I ever imagined it, but better.

Maybe it's what I said before. We built our economy on free labor. Then when that was gone, we was always trying to catch up from behind. But when transition did away with the whole money thing, we got the best of both worlds. Now all labor is free, and all people too, so nothing stops us from doing what needs doing.

Also the illegal immigration thing sort of solved itself. After we transitioned, Mexico did soon after. Pretty much all the countries them illegals was running from had transitioned. At the same time, their governments got better, more democratic, less corrupt. Things got enough better there that folks didn't feel like they had to leave.

That was a huge relief! Oh, we still get a few, but it's a trickle, not a flood! Not too much for us to handle.

Now don't get me wrong! I'm no liberal and I never will be. I'm still white, male, Christian, and Southern. I still believe in the Bible and the best dang country on earth. I'd still lay down my life to defend her.

I'm the head of our household so I take good care of Linda Sue and treat her good keep her safe. She believes same as me, so she knows her role and my role and she got no problem with it. She been a perfect mother for our two girls and a perfect wife to me. I been blessed. The Lord made us for each other, I believe that. I couldn't ask for better. I know a lot of liberals got a problem with that, but it's our life. Our choice. No one twisted Linda Sue's arm and she seems to be happy. We happy together.

I still believe what I believe, and I live it as best I can and pray for forgiveness when I mess up. But I do think the liberals have eased off a lot since transition. They not always out there trying to tell us how to live. Well, I guess me too. I don't get so riled up like I used to over how other folks live and what they do, so long as they don't bother me.

Maybe the Lord brought us transition to teach us all, make us more like Jesus, 'cause that's what's happened. I guess we all got a little crazy and we needed humbling a mite, take it down a few notches. Live and let live.

I still don't feel comfortable around dark people and faggots and foreigners. We got a mosque now in Opelika, and a synagogue and a Catholic Church too. I still tighten up when I drive by them, like fingernails on an old chalk board. It still grates on me when I hear folks talking some foreign language right here in town, unless they's tourists. But that's just me, just the way I am, the way I was brought up. But now it's not as big a deal as it used to be. It's more like how I like country music and if someone's listening to hard rock it grates on me, but I'm not going to throw down over it. Probably just put on my earbuds and my music and ignore it.

I used to believe those people was taking away jobs and trashing the neighborhood and driving wages down. Now I see they don't take nothing away from no one. So, it don't get me riled like it used to. They don't bother me, and I don't bother them so we all OK. Live and let live. This is a big country. We got room for different kinds of people, long as everyone respect each other.

I enjoy my life a lot more than I did before. I don't have this churning rage always burning inside me.

Linda and I have both taken some classes at the Community College. I've learned to work on airplanes and boats too, and I found out I'm pretty good at painting, so I try my hand at a little of that. Linda Sue and I both teach Sunday School and act as chaperones at church youth events and counselors at church summer camps.

When one of the other mechanics, Gershon, he's a Jew but one top flight mechanic and I respect him, invited me and Linda Sue and everyone at the shop and their families to his son's bar mitzva, we went. Never would have done that before, but what could it hurt? It was a mite strange, and someone had to explain everything to us, but it wasn't bad. Them folks is hardworking, God-fearing just like us. I got to respect that.

But I worry about them. They not saved. Not washed in the blood. But still, they God's chosen people. I don't know. I guess I'll just keep praying for them and trust the Lord will work out the details. I think they'll be alright. If they ever have to choose between the Lord and the Devil, I know they'll make the right choice.

Jimmy: That's quite a transformation, Scott! And good for you being true to your beliefs and growing at the same time! That's just my two cents' worth for what it's worth.

Before we wrap this up, do you have anything you'd like to say to readers today and in the future?

Scott: I'm no philosopher, just a damn good auto mechanic, husband, father, American, sinner, and Christian man. But here goes:

Do good and you'll get good back. Do bad and you'll get bad back. Don't be too full of yourself. If you feel like you want to punch someone, go take a walk instead.

If you believe in any God, be serious about it but don't try to be His enforcer. Trust Him (or Her if that's what you believe) to work things out. He don't need your help and you'd probably screw it up anyways.

Don't ever be ashamed of who you are, but don't look down on folks that's different from you. But don't take no shit.

If something needs to be done, if it's worth doing, then do it right! Don't do it half-assed!

And go easy on that hot sauce they got at Jambalaya's downtown! That stuff will strip the paint off a battleship! Trust me!

I guess that's about it.

Jimmy: Thank you again, Scott! it's been a pleasure and enlightening.

I'll admit that in spite of myself, I think I did have some negative preconceptions when I came here. I'm ashamed to say it but I must be truthful as you've been. I've grown right here. Those preconceptions are gone. Thank you for relieving me of them!

Would you be OK with doing this again in a few years?

Scott: Count on it!

Jimmy: It's a plan. Meanwhile, take care.

Scott: You too. Come back anytime. Door's always open.

Rivka BenTzion — Israel

> **Note:** This fictional account was written when the Transition was imagined as a single, rapid, coordinated event. Further research into the historical record has since shown a gradual, voluntary approach to be more viable and sustainable; the novel is preserved as originally written (author's note; the current Roadmap).

Interviewer: Eitan Alloni, Israel

Interviewee: Rivka BenTzion, kibbutznik, Israel

Eitan: Good morning, Rivka, and thank you for agreeing to be part of this project.

Rivka: I'm a kibbutznikit. When I see something that needs to be done, I do it. I think this needs doing.

Eitan: Rivka, you've been through not one, but two big upheavals in your life. I think it's fair to say that these were mirror images of each other.

Tell us how it was growing up on Kibbutz Sheffa HaMidbar.

Rivka: Sheffa HaMidbar was founded in 1962. My grandparents on both sides were among the founders.

My parents were in the first generation born here. So, I'm third generation, I believe you would say.

Eitan: If I remember correctly, you were born after the change happened from children living in the children's houses to living with their parents. Am I right?

Rivka: Yes, that's right. I slept at my parents' place, along with my twin sister Ofrah. They didn't have any more because my mother had complications and was infertile after we were born.

Eitan: Are you identical twins?

Rivka: No, fraternal.

Eitan: So, what was it like?

Rivka: I had mostly a really happy childhood. I had my parents and sister and grandparents right there, and lots of friends.

You have to understand something about kibbutz. It's very safe and nurturing for a child. We pretty much had the run of the place. You didn't have that elsewhere. A child in the city couldn't just go play in any yard in the neighborhood, and they had to watch out for cars and beware of all kinds of things. But growing up on kibbutz, even the most unpleasant person wasn't a threat. There were only a very few cars that everyone shared so we didn't have to worry about getting hit by one.

It really felt like one big family.

No one's parents were richer or poorer than another's. No one had to worry about losing their job or not being able to pay their bills.

On the other hand, gossip was always a problem like in any small town. You couldn't sneeze without everyone knowing it and spreading the word that you are contagious with the flu. When I was little it didn't bother me, but in my teens it did, like the time I kissed Yossi Harel. He told everyone I did a lot more. I went through a few weeks of hell. Finally, I jumped him in the cheder ochel (mess hall) with everyone there and told him I'd break his arm if he didn't confess his lie in front of everyone. I'm stronger than him and I caught him by surprise, so he got the shaming he deserved.

We had a lot of activities and field trips along with serious study and some work.

Sometimes it was a little claustrophobic. Not at first but by high school I wanted to go to Be'er Sheva and Tel Aviv whenever I could with friends and sometimes with Ofrah. We also liked to go to Eilat sometimes. But I wasn't unhappy, just restless.

My parents were good, and we had good family relations, but I did have my teenage rebellion.

Then when I turned eighteen, I went into the Army of course. During tironut (basic training) I was with Ofrah and a lot of my friends from the kibbutz and other kibbutzim in the area. We could tell that our main drill sergeant didn't like kibbitznikim so she made it harder on us than others, but it didn't get to us. We had a strong sense of solidarity. The day we graduated from tironut, she challenged anyone interested to a race around the perimeter of the base.

Almost everyone was too tired to care, but I decided I could beat her. She laughed and said something like "This'll be a short race!"

Everyone was cheering me all the way. I felt a surge of strength. I decided there's no way this bat zonah is going to beat me. I beat her by two full seconds.

Then I was sent off for artillery training and finally became a drill sergeant myself. I learned to put on that badass persona, but I never let myself act like a jerk. What can I tell you, it is what it is.

Things were quiet during my Sadir (regular army service). We had normal relations with most of our former mortal enemies. Only Syria, ISIL, and Iran were still a concern, and they weren't even united among them. Relations with Autonomous Palestine were mutually uncomfortable, but we were in between boilovers. Hamas had long since been relegated to the fringes after they overestimated how much abuse the Palestinian people would be willing to accept. The more reasonable Palestine Dawn party had been in power for a while and were focused more on improving life for their people then on Israel at all.

My two years passed quickly enough, and I came home. I hoped to travel to Europe or China or America if I could, but I knew one thing for sure: when the va'adat klitah (Membership absorption committee) asked me if, as a bat meshek (daughter of the kibbutz) I wanted to stay and be a full member, my answer would be Yes. The army and visits to cities and development towns had eased some of my wanderlust, but I definitely wouldn't want to live there. I was thoroughly kibbutz down to my bones.

I did get approved, along with Ofrah and my two best friends, to travel to Europe for a month. We got Eurailpasses and managed to get to every country from England to Greece in that month. We ate too much, drank too much, and maxed our phone memories with pictures and videos with which we flooded the Internet. So, we were typical Israelis just out of the Army…

Eitan: What happened when you got home?

Rivka: After a couple of days of sharing about Europe with family and friends, the sadran avodah (work coordinator) put all four of us back on the roster. Of course, we were assigned to the kitchen and the cheder ochel (communal mess hall) for the time being. I don't know how much you know about kibbutz life, but it's not unusual to do many jobs in your lifetime. Since kitchen and cheder ochel were less-desirable jobs, usually we would take turns doing it for a while. It's kind of the same idea as what's now called avodah choranit (schlock-work).

At Friday's weekly kibbutz meeting, Eli Abutbul, the coordinator of the va'adat klitah asked each of us if we wanted to commit to kibbutz membership and all of the rights and responsibilities that come with it.

Shosh and I said yes. Ofrah and Revital said no, they wanted to try city life. It was like that with our classmates: about half wanted to stay, about half wanted to leave. Since Israel isn't a big country, it wouldn't be hard to stay in touch.

Then life settled down to routine and I was pretty happy.

In the Army I had met Chayim Gilboa, but our relationship didn't have a chance to grow until after. He was from Kibbutz Revivim, not far from us. We saw a lot of each other until we decided to get married. Revivim was an older kibbutz, and Chayim liked the idea of living on my younger kibbutz where there was more of a difference to be made.

Our wedding was the kind of huge, awesome party that you'd expect from two kibbutz kids. The DJ was great and knew every song we could throw at him. Chayim's mother's family are from Morocco so of course there was a maimuna with all the trimmings.

We moved into family housing from singles territory where I'd been living, and soon I was pregnant with Zohar and Aharon (No surprise there. Twins run in my family).

I got myself assigned to the bayit tinokot (baby nursery) so I could be with my babies all the time. A lot of mothers did that. Chayim got assigned to noi (landscaping and gardening) so he could come quickly if anything happened. We were two new, nervous parents.

Life was opening up nicely and we were happy, at least for a few years.

Eitan: Which brings us to the question: what happened to change that happiness?

Rivka: One word: privatizatzia (privatization).

Eitan: Tell me about it.

Rivka: Of course, everyone knew about it. A lot of kibbutzim were privatizing, but not all. Sheffa HaMidbar was one kibbutz that had proudly resisted that trend up until Tzippi Dror, the kibbutz general secretary at the time, brought it up for discussion out out of the blue at one of our weekly kibbutz meetings.

I was in shock!

Tzippi gave all the usual blah-blah about how privatization meant more room for individual expression, how it would be more efficient, about changing with the times and as always, the pressure from the government.

For decades, the Likkud had controlled the government with increasingly aggressive imitations of American style capitalism. They resented the fact that the quality of life on kibbutzim was higher than elsewhere. They claimed that we had special status and breaks that other sectors didn't have. They simply couldn't or wouldn't believe that the reason why such a small percentage of the population could produce such a high percentage of the country's output, have such a high percentage of Israel's outstanding achievers, and enjoy a higher quality of life was because our way of life worked better. They kept claiming that we were unfairly advantaged and prospering at other people's expense. They simply refused to accept a non-capitalistic way of life in the country.

So, they found ways to maneuver the economy and legal system to put kibbutzim into near bankruptcy. Then they started pressuring us to privatize.

Tzippi had swallowed all of this whole. She went on and on about how we should be able to have private cars and how more productive members should be able to have more than lazier members.

She said she thought it was no different from when kibbutzim went from children living in the children's houses to living with their parents.

The discussion that followed was the most raucous mess that I could ever remember. I was one of the strongest voices for keeping the kibbutz a kibbutz.

It got so out out of control that we unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting and set up small discussion groups to discuss it and then come back to it next week.

I felt like I'd been run over by a tractor. I couldn't believe there were that many people who actually agreed with Tzippi. Her I could understand, it was in her character to buy into that kind of thinking. But the fact that there was actual support for the idea felt like the world was ending. But I felt confident that it would ultimately be defeated. If someone wanted privatizatzia, let them move to a moshav or a development town or even Tel Aviv! Live and let live!

The debate and discussion went on for over a month. The kibbutz almost fell apart. I know I couldn't stand to work with someone who supported privatizatzia. It made my blood boil! Some friendships ended and a couple of families were on the verge of divorce.

Finally, someone came from the Kibbutz Movement and sang the praises of "renewal," a gross euphemism for privatizatzia. He spoke of changing with the times and attracting more members and more individual freedom and all that blah-blah.

In the end it was accepted by the narrowest possible margin.

Eitan: How did that go? What changed? What stayed the same?

Riva: It was really like the end of the world. The feeling of community, of being like a big extended family, was gone.

Suddenly we had to pay for everything out of a salary that we would be paid. But it was going to be a "differential salary" just like outside in the capitalist world. We would be paid differently depending on what job we did, by the same arbitrary ideas as in the city. So, the general secretary, financial officer, treasurer, and the heads of our industrial, agricultural, and tourist branches would be paid a king's ransom, and those of us who worked in what were deemed less valuable occupations would be paid less than minimum wage in the city.

Guess where Chayim and I found ourselves? Apparently caring for everyone's babies and keeping our kibbutz home beautiful and green weren't considered to be worth much. So we would have to take a lot of extra little jobs to afford to live. Meanwhile Tzippi went out and bought her own private car within the first six months, while the shared vehicles were only available for a fee and were last priority in the kibbutz garage.

Before, even if you were assigned to a job you didn't like, you knew it wasn't forever. We all did many jobs in our lives. But no more. We were locked in place and the only way to change was for someone to leave or to want to switch with you or if it got approved by the committee which was harder than fighting ISIL.

We talked about moving out and finding another kibbutz, but the number of "refugees" from "renewed" kibbutzim to traditional kibbutzim had overwhelmed the ability of the latter to absorb them. We put our names on the waiting list but were told it would be years.

We didn't want to go to the city or a moshav. Kibbutz was all we knew, and in those two options we would be at a big disadvantage, especially with two children. So, we stayed and were miserable. The same thing happened to most of the friends we still had.

Some people, like Tzippi but she wasn't the only one by far, had come from the city and still had a lot of assets there or well-off relatives. A few others were good at investing. So some members had bigger houses, private cars, private swimming pools, and frequent vacations overseas. But original members and children of the kibbutz obviously had nothing like that. So, we had a double disadvantage.

Community and social life went to hell. The cheder ochel, the communal dining room that had been the center of our community became a tourist restaurant at tourist prices. The shared culture center was suddenly not free and not cheap so mostly only the new upper class could afford to go. The public swimming pool and children's playground and petting zoo now required recurring membership fees.

It was a miserable nightmare that we were stuck in for the next twenty years or so.

Oh, we real kibbutzniks banded together and did our best to share and support each other morally and materially, but it felt like living in a ghetto or a prison after having lived free from birth. We never could forget that we were second-class members. But we did our own spontaneous little concerts of our own talent, had a lot of shared barbecues, and shared rides in the shared vehicles to split the fees. We got goats and chickens for milk and eggs and meat and did some gardening in the little plots at our houses.

Sometimes the upper class members would try to come to our get togethers. We'd tell them they would have to pay. No free admittance for them. They can't have it both ways. There were a few fist fights, but we made it stick. Real kibbutzniks are pretty tough!

Eitan: And what happened in twenty years or so that changed that. Pretend we don't know.

Rivka: Again one word (or maybe two): Hama'avar (the transition) or as we kibbutznikim like to say, chazarah habaita (coming home).

Eitan: Tell us about it.

Rivka: Of course everybody knew about the transitions in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. And by then most people knew at least a little bit about what it was.

As you know, everything here in Israel was always very expensive, so when cheap, high-quality goods from transitioned countries started to come in, people got excited. Even a lot of imported food started to be so cheap! And clothes! And shoes! And electronics and then some cars! If there's one thing that we Israelis loved, it was a bargain, and we didn't even have to do any bargaining to get it! Of course, with our typical cynicism, we also tended to suspect that it was some kind of trick or gimmick, or that it wouldn't last. But it was real, and it lasted.

People also noticed that employees in Israel of companies in transitioned countries saw their pay, benefits and treatment get a thousand percent better.

One thing you can say about Israelis is that we're realists. Idealists too of course, but the only way we survived was to be realists.

As kibbutznikim, we thought we recognized something kibbutz-like in transitioned countries. And since we love to travel, a lot of people vacationed in those countries. The stories they told sounded too good to be true at first, but then there were so many people coming back with the same kinds of stories. It began to sink in. We started to get excited.

The Cure was finally translated into Hebrew, though a lot of us knew enough English to get through it, especially the short version.

In our little ghetto it was almost all that we talked about. We studied and discussed and communicated with people in transitioned countries. And to think, so many countries had transitioned in only about a year! It felt like we could do this.

At our weekly governing meetings, the subject came up with predictable results: we real kibbutzniks pushed for the kibbutz to take an active role in bringing it on; the "reform" ones said it was unrealistic. They even went so far as to try to make a connection between transition and how our founding forefathers had started out thinking Joseph Stalin was our best friend and a true hero, only to find out later what a monster he was. That got a lot of boos and table pounding. The kibbutz remained divided.

But outside of the kibbutzim, in the cities and towns and moshavim, the idea was leaping ahead as well. Over a half century of corrupt Likkud rule with all of the nasty power politics and the wealth disparity that had become intolerable under their undisguised greedy policies had finally worn thin. The series of Likkud prime ministers and members of the knesset who had openly committed fraud and other crimes and flaunted getting away with it had reached the breaking point. The privatization of Kupat cholim (National health insurance) had dropped Israel to the bottom twenty countries in the UN list for quality of healthcare. People were actually going into Autonomous Palestine for medical care, and they were happy to give it because of its propaganda value.

Even the rallying cry of "Greater Israel" had lost its appeal. For that matter, most of our former enemies were now allies who were common enemies with our enemies. Even the situation with Palestine had worked down to an uneasy détente with growing numbers of Israelis and Palestinians ignoring the animosity.

Israel was ripe for transition. For over three quarters of Israelis, it was obvious that transition was just what we needed. So, we went into it pretty quickly. The date was set, and the rest is history. There was some opposition but a lot less than in many other countries. Later I felt especially bad for the Americans!

Eitan: How did this translate into life on Sheffa HaMidbar?

Rivka: There's a reason why we call it "coming home."

Overnight the whole country transitioned. The old capitalism was gone, along with its ways of doing things, its norms, and its pressure on us kibbutzim.

At the next meeting, it was proposed to return to original kibbutz norms and principles with just a few changes. Tzippi, who was still general secretary because why would she quit? Tried to object but she was reminded that currency now

had no value and no function in the country, so time to change with the times, baby! Made her eat her own words.

After that, kibbutz life settled into a new pattern even better than before privatizatzia. Social life came back. We all gathered at the culture center for concerts and other activities. We all swam in the pool and once again everybody's kids played in the playground. The cheder ochel once again became the hub of our community where we enjoy meals and events together that are too big for the culture center. Sometimes one likes to just eat at home, but food is there to take in the pantry.

A few things that changed included some unexpected ones. For example, we returned to shared vehicles, but there are enough of them that no one ever has trouble finding one when they need it. In a way it's like private cars because as it turns out, each of us kind of bonded to a particular car even though it's not official, just like most of us have regular places where we sit in the cheder ochel or the cultural center though it's not a rule or something that's enforced.

If someone wants to expand their house within reason, they can. Any of us can if we want, not just some of us. I think Tzippi enjoyed having more than others. But she did manage to adjust. She's no longer general secretary. She works in the dairy farm at the moment. I've since then been general secretary once for a couple of years. It helped me appreciate the stresses of that job. I like that we rotate jobs again.

Now, if a majority of us want to do something, we no longer have to worry about how the kibbutz can afford it. We no longer have to sweat about repaying loans. We can just produce what we produce, enjoy the fruits of our labor and enjoy our labor itself.

Nothing humans do will ever be perfect. There will always be shortcomings and things that can be better. But now I'd say that for Sheffa HaMidbar and for Israel, it's the best it's ever been.

We still have a lot of work to do in terms of finding a better interaction with the Palestinians, and the ultra-religious, the dossim, still want to force all Jews to be religious whether we want it or not. We still haven't been able to get to where we can run busses on Saturday, though self-driving buses are finally, after decades of false starts, nearly ready to go into service so the dossim won't be able to object to working on shabbos as long as the buses aren't switched on after sunset Friday nights. We still have to come to terms with how to be the Jewish homeland state and not degenerate into an oppressive theocracy. We still have ISIL, Iran, and Syria as regional threats. And we still have a lot of work to do with our Arab neighbors to repair the damage of climate change.

There'll always be a lot of work to do. But we kibbutzniks are used to that. We roll up our sleeves and get to work, together.

Eitan: That was really eye-opening, Rivka! I really didn't know much about kibbutz life before. All I've ever known is Tel Aviv. It makes me want to bring the family for a visit. Would that be possible?

Rivka: We have very comfortable guest accommodations. You and your family are always welcome. Just give me a call and we'll set up a reservation for you. I'd suggest avoiding the holidays because they're so busy and it's first come, first served. I'll tell Chayim to expect you. You can have dinner with us in our outstanding cheder ochel. Of course, I'm prejudiced because our son Aharon is the main chef, and his cooking is to die for. But it really is. I'd say that even if he wasn't my son!

Eitan: OK, that's a plan.

Is there anything else you'd like to say to future readers?

Rivka: Only that I think transition came more easily and naturally to kibbutznikim than to others. We had the head start of generations of social and economic equality, peer-based decision making, and non-hierarchical society. We already had those skills. For us, Transition really was a coming home, but to a better home than we had left. That also makes us appreciate it all the more.

One thing we kibbutzim have lost is our distinctness from the city, but in the opposite direction from what happened during privatizatzia. In many ways, living on kibbutz and living in the city are more similar than ever before. Yet both have changed for the better.

Oh, I just remembered something from my kita vav (sixth grade) kibbutz history class.

Another thing kibbutzim have always had in common with transitioned societies is that we are self-re-evaluating. We aren't static. We grow and change and evolve with experience. At first the children all lived together in the children's houses. At some point they decided to have them live at home. At first there were no private radios because there was no way to have one for everybody, so there was one radio that got passed around, shared among everyone. When TV's first came out, they were extremely expensive, so we had one good one in the culture center where everyone watched it together. But when they got more affordable and the kibbutz had more money, they decided to make sure everyone had their own TV.

That pretty much killed the social life. There was no night of the week when enough people were willing to miss this or that TV show. No one was willing to be the one to give up their favorite program, and don't even think about touching futbol!

But they couldn't put the genie back in the bottle. But then VCR's came out, you know, those old video recorders from the old days?

At first there was one in the culture center that made it like a movie theater. Then when they became affordable, they voted to have private VCR's. And guess what? The social life came back! Suddenly no one had to miss their program! They could plan social and cultural events again. So, this repaired the damage done by television.

My point is that kibbutz is strong, robust, and adaptive. I believe kibbutz will survive all and any changes and in the end still be true to its principles. And for the first time, I believe our country and most of the world has those same qualities.

Eitan: Thank you, Rivka, for your time and candor. I'll call you in the next few days to arrange our visit. Could we stay for a week?

Rivka: Sure. And if you really want to experience something of kibbutz life, I can have the sadran avodah (work coordinator) put you all into the work roster for that week. Life on kibbutz revolves around work, so you'd probably be pretty bored sitting around while we're all working.

Eitan: Yes, I think I'd like that. And that can be material for another article. Is that OK?

Rivka: Absolutely. Let's do it. See you and your family soon.

Eitan: I look forward to meeting Chayim and your two sons.

Rivka: And one granddaughter!

Eitan: Until then.

Rivka: Until then.

Jaime Hernandez — Ecuador

> **Note:** This fictional account was written when the Transition was imagined as a single, rapid, coordinated event. Further research into the historical record has since shown a gradual, voluntary approach to be more viable and sustainable; the novel is preserved as originally written (author's note; the current Roadmap).

Interviewer: Eugenio Alvarez

Interviewee: Jaime Hernández, farmer, Ecuador

Eugenio: Hello Jaime, and thank you for finding time for this interview. My grandparents were farmers, so I know what a nonstop, demanding way of life it is.

Jaime: You're right about that, Eugenio, but this is as good a time as any. Things are pretty quiet on the farm, and my adult children are hard workers. Also, a little automation doesn't hurt. So, I think I can spend a little time with you without any worry.

It's important to me to leave something for future generations, like the farm for my children and grandchildren. I think this project is kind of like leaving something for the future in a different way.

By the way, how's your mate? Is it too strong? We grow a very strong blend here.

Eugenio: Oh, it's the best mate I've had in a while!

Can you tell me a little bit about your background and childhood.

Jaime: I'm the fourth of six children: four boys and two girls. We all grew up on this farm. It's the only home I've known.

It's so beautiful here! We're close to both Loja and Vilcabamba, so we can get to anything we need but most of our daily needs we make right here.

Like my brothers and sisters, I went to the public school in Loja through sixth grade. I can read and write and do figuring. But my life is on this farm.

My great-great-grandparents bought this farm. It's been in our family for that long! Each generation has made it better in some ways. We have twenty hectares of land, and we still have some that we haven't even developed yet. We've never been in a rush. First, we make what we have as perfect as it can be, and then we add something new.

Eugenio: What crops do you grow?

Jaime: Now, or when I was growing up?

Eugenio: Now.

Jaime: Let's see…

For ourselves we grow all of our own vegetables. We have many fruit trees, more than we can eat. Cherimoyas, paltas, manzanas, mangos, papayas, lucumas, and more. Of course we have bananas, plátanos, and others in that family. Potatoes. Melons. And then we have chickens, cows, pigs, and goats for eggs, milk, and meat. And maíz. And sugarcane.

For the market we grow some of those things and some others: bananas and plátanos of course. Melons. Sugarcane and we have our own processing plant. Fine coffee for sale in Cuenca, Loja, Guayaquil, Quito and other cities around the country. We're very proud of our coffee! Mama and Papá developed that when we were kids. Sambo in season. We make a lot of money around Semana Santa on sambo! We make some cochinilla for export to Europe. We even grow some cotton. Papá always used to say that anything will grow in this land, if you know how to take care of it!

My brothers and I are hoping to try cultivating grapes for the market, and maybe learn to make wine. Ecuadorian wine is becoming well liked in the world.

My sisters are both married and live on their husbands' families' farms.

We're blessed that we have a big extended family. There are always three generations living here so there's always enough hands for what needs to be done. In a pinch, we and my sisters' husbands' families all pitch in and help each other out. We've never had to hire outside help.

Eugenio: So, yours is quite a productive, prolific family!

Jaime: We like to think so. We work hard but we also have a lot of ideas and we try some of them. Most of them work out well. Those that don't, well, then we know.

Eugenio: Would you say yours was one of the wealthier families among the farms in the area before transition? You sound like you've been very successful.

Jaime: Well, not really. Don't get me wrong, we did well. We weren't poor. But farming is a rocky ride. What you save in good years has to get you through the bad years. And there are a lot of expenses if you want to do it right. Veterinarians are very expensive. What equipment we can use here is also expensive to buy and maintainin properly. Some folks wait until things break and then fix them, but that was even more expensive.

And we invested a lot of what we made in improving our operation so we wouldn't get stuck in outmoded ways and fall behind.

I'd say we did OK. We always had plenty to eat, and heat when we needed it. We had what we needed. But wealthy? No.

Eugenio: I admire that! So back to your upbringing…

Jaime: Let's see. To tell you the truth, I never really had a lot of time to think about it but…

Papá y mamá expected all of us to pull our weight as best we could, but they weren't hard or harsh. As hard as we worked, they always worked harder. They taught us everything they knew, things you wouldn't learn from a book. Work and play were always mixed together so it wasn't bad like some families nearby who treated their kids almost like hired hands. There was love and laughs and tears and sweat and everything. They never expected more than we could really do, just the best we could.

As you can see, our home is a patchwork house. It got big because it's been added onto as it was needed. That house over there is the most recent addition. My wife Elena and I live here and our four children so far; these were once my uncle's family's rooms. My brother Juan lives in those rooms over there with his wife Olivia and their little ones, and more of us upstairs. You get the idea. The house grows as the family grows.

I always liked Sundays. We always went into Vilcabamba for Mass. We'd dress up in our best clothes and pile into the truck and drive into town. The Padre was like one of us. He came from Loja. He was one of us.

Mass always felt magical, like I could feel Jesus coming into me. Like I was in a bigger place. You know how some kids have imaginary friends? He was like my special friend who lived inside of me. I talked to Him about things on my mind. I felt like He listened and sometimes I felt like He answered me in a whisper. I still talk to Him.

Then there would be food and playing with the other kids. It was the only time we really got to see each other. Our farms were so far apart. And we went to the Mercado.

There were many gringos in Vilcabamba. We were always looking to see them and wanting to talk to them. It felt almost like traveling there.

But Sunday was a workday like every other. There were cows and goats to milk, eggs to gather, irrigation to tend to, the usual. When Papá got the weeder geese, it made things a lot easier. You know, the special geese that eat most of the weeds and insect pests. We help them and they help us.

Mamá always made Sunday dinner a little special, with postre (dessert) and maybe we kids got to drink a sip or two of wine.

It was like that. That was life. When I was about thirteen, I started to feel a little like I wanted to get out more. I wanted to maybe have a girlfriend. How is that going to happen if I'm always on the farm with only family?

I liked the farm and didn't mind the work, but I felt like I wanted something more. I think we all went through that. Sure, we had the usual fiestas where everyone got together but it started to feel like it wasn't enough.

I joined club 4-F (4-H Club) and the Church youth groups. Since almost all of the members were farm kids, things were arranged to work with our way of life.

Since we siblings were all going through the same thing four at a time, our whole family got involved in the Dimitra Clubs because their ideas went well with what you could say was our family philosophy. All of that satisfied my adolescent restlessness.

At fifteen I had my first girlfriend, Sandra Lidia Fuentes. We spent every moment together that we could, though always with a chaperone. It didn't last in the end because her papa got cancer, so she and her mama had to go to hospital in Quito to support him during his treatment. They were away for almost two years, but her papa survived, came home, jumped up on his horse, and started working like nothing happened. During that time, Sandra got engaged to a man she met in the city and they got married. And after I stopped feeling like my life was over, I fell in love with Elena Juliana Alvarez.

So, life went on and I kept farming, looking forward to carrying on the family tradition of perfecting what we had and adding something new.

A couple of years later Elena and I were married and she joined me on our farm. Life was good then, until it wasn't.

Eugenio: What happened?

Jaime: After years of supporting us campesinos and shielding us from international agricultural companies like Monsanto, our government suddenly invited them in with open arms. The hijos de putas finally got to them. After la transición, it came out how they had kept sending their people in undercover like foreign spies, looking for people in the government who they could bribe or win over. They did it for many years until they had enough people in the right places in government and then they just opened the doors of ruin. They took a lot more than thirty pieces of silver to betray us, but they did.

At the time we didn't know that but we were suspicious. Either that or our government had become a bunch of fulanos tontos (stupid fools). Suddenly the radio, TV, Internet and newspapers were full of a bunch of tonterías (BS) talking about how it was time for Ecuador to embrace the great new revolutionary advances in agricultural science that would triple our productivity and usher in a new era of progress and prosperity.

Eugenio: And did it?

Jaime: Sure, for Monsanto and their kind! They got rich and we got sick.

Eugenio: How so?

Jaime: They convinced many rural municipalities to pay them to spray their chemicals, their veneno, pretty much where they wanted to, in the name of eliminating common insect pests and weeds.

Maybe that would not have been so bad if they had bothered to sit down with us and discuss where to do it, how, and when. We would have listened and discussed it with them in good faith. We could have advised them how to do it in the best way, or maybe explained why it wasn't a good idea if it wasn't. Maybe it might have done some good. We will never know. But they knew nothing of this place. They thought we were just a bunch of ignorant campesinos so they sprayed willy-nilly, even sprayed right over people's farms!

Not only did the bichos (bugs) remain, but the weeds got worse. Their poisons fell in the wrong places, killed good plants and even crops, so the weeds came in and spread like a wildfire. Some streams were poisoned, dead fish and frogs

and things all along them. Like I said, some crops were ruined. Some chickens and livestock died or got sick. Some people also got sick, and three children died.

We crowded into the municipality government and demanded that this stop. We were told that we we're exaggerating, that the chemicals were safe so our misfortunes must be due to some other cause, and that the spraying was completely legal. Then they told us to go home, or they would have us all arrested.

So we went home. But we took a different step. All of us. Whenever someone saw one of their planes, we would shoot at it with our rifles and shotguns when they got low enough to spray. That scared them off for a while.

Then the soldiers came. Some were real soldiers but we could see that some were hired asesinos from the company. There was fighting. We had no choice. The government declared a state of emergency. They threatened to imprison and jail any farmer who shot at their planes or other equipment.

Eugenio: I read about that confrontation. It sounds pretty savage.

Jaime: It was. It was like the government and the army were working for the company, but that wasn't enough for them. They brought in their asesinos because these weren't bound by the international rules of warfare. They would not hesitate to shoot someone in the head in front of their family.

So, we fought. We fought hard with everything we had. They underestimated us. We had dynamite and home-made gunpowder that they didn't know about. And we had our own poisons to use against them. We caused avalanches to destroy a lot of their equipment and ruin their landing fields. I'm not proud of some things I did, but they were the ones who came in and started destroying our lives and livelihoods and then left us with no peaceful way to stop them. So, it was war. Real war. It could have been a lot worse but still, too many people died.

Padre Sebastian urged us to avoid violence, but he also understood. When people started getting sick and dying, and our livestock and crops, we went to the municipality for help and they sent us away. We had to defend ourselves as best we could. There is no shame in defending yourself or your family and neighbors when you have to.

For what seemed like a long time, we had what you call a stalemate. Neither side could advance but neither side would back down. But at least the spraying stopped, and we could get back to some farming, though now we needed to watch for snipers and be ready to snipe back.

Eugenio: So, what happened next, and where did la transición come into the picture?

Jaime: We heard about the transición in Costa Rica as soon as it happened. And then Suriname, Guyana, Peru, and others. We didn't have time to listen to the news, but our parish Padre was no typical Padre. Oh, he was a real Padre, but he also had his own ideas which, if you ask me, were right alongside Jesus' teaching and life. He was all about making things better for the people, for us. It was all about helping people and relieving suffering.

One day, before the crisis, his sermon had something a little different. At the end, he asked us if we could stay after services to share food because he had something important to tell us about. Of course we stayed.

That's when he told us about La Cura (The Cure). He told us about this book that had come to him, but he wouldn't say from where. He told us it was the key to ending much unnecessary human suffering right here and now. Then every Sunday he would read from it, and we would listen. Since he was one of us, he knew which parts we would need to have explained to us, so he was the perfect one to read it to us. Of course he read us the short version.

We had to learn about a whole lot of things we'd never known, heard of, or thought about before, but it made sense, and we were entranced. Excited!

By the time he had finished the book with us, we were eager to get started, but we were far from the cities. Vilcabamba was a small town and Loja wasn't exactly Guayaquil. We were a long ways from the center of things. We asked Padre Sebastian about this, and he said there was a lot we could do where we were. He explained about how to stop paying for and asking payment for things. Those who didn't own their farms, don't pay your rent or mortgage. Many families had mortgages. Ignore landlords and other people of economic power, but always be respectful and avoid starting violence.

He told us about the satellite phones we would receive soon and explained about live-streaming so the world will see the truth and not what the padrones and jefes wanted them to see. We all had cell phones of course, but they weren't very useful up in the mountains where most of our farms are. The satellite phones would let us talk to the world.

We later used those satellite phones to video the confrontations with the asesinos and show their planes spraying everywhere, and the ruined crops, the sick and dead livestock, the sick people. But the Padre told us not to stream this until after transición.

Meanwhile every Sunday, he would give us news of how the wave of transición awareness was growing around the country. He explained that more and more people had to know about it and either read the book or know what it said from those who had read it. Then when enough people were aware and wanting it to happen, a date would be agreed upon and then it would happen. So, we had to be patient. If we tried to make it happen here before it was ready, then it would be like trying to light a fire in wet wood.

Soon we got news that it was spreading in all of the big cities and most towns. It was free online so it was easy to get and pass around from person to person. At that point I don't think the government had any idea that it was near.

Then one Sunday Padre Sebastián had the satellite phones. Hundreds of them. He gave them out. He taught us how to use them and how to livestream. We lost some work hours that day but after that we were ready.

But then, before a date could be agreed upon, the crisis happened.

Eugenio: How did the crisis affect the coming transición?

Jaime: It did delay it of course. The crisis was out here in the campo (country), but the new government policies were hurting people in the cities too, in different ways. So, people were receptive to the ideas in the book because the book talked about exactly what was happening to them.

After lifetimes of mostly protecting Ecuador and Ecuadorians from exploitation and other harm from big foreign companies in general, and of stopping domestic companies from exploitative and harmful practices, the government completely abandoned us and reversed their thinking. It was like there was a coup, a silent, secret coup with no tanks in the streets, but still deadly. Like I said, later we learned that there was in fact a coup. It was just a sneaky, cowardly coup. But those responsible were held to account in the end.

While we were having our crisis, people in the cities and towns were having theirs. Prices of everything went up. Laws protecting workers were undone. Laws protecting customers were undone. Laws protecting our precious natural resources and environment were undone. Taxes went down on foreign companies and on the rich but went up on everyone else.

While this was happening, La Cura was spreading like the light from the rising sun. I think maybe the tragedies brought by the new corrupt government, the timing of them soon after the movement of transiciones began, actually helped it spread faster, like wind fanning a fire.

It was a time like none before or since. Before that, people in the country and in the city hadn't had much contact. But now through the Internet and the satellite phones, the whole nation was talking and texting with each other. Usually not personally, but there was like this big discussion.

The date was chosen. The government and their and foreign businessmen masters were having a feeding frenzy like pigs at a trough. They were greedy and arrogant and foolish. They didn't take it seriously or see it coming.

So, when the day came, they were unprepared.

Padre Sebastián had confirmed the date with us, in case anyone had missed it due to bad reception. A Sunday was chosen because most businesses were closed, and it gave more time to shut down banks and delete account information and prune the finance out of systems.

After Mass, the Padre brought out a television and we watched La Declaración in silence, then we had the biggest fiesta! Then we went home to work.

It wasn't until Monday that the landlords and banks and for us the most important, Monsanto really learned of transición, or before they understood that it had actually happened. Before that they had thought it was just words.

Monday we all came to the church again, whoever could. We had to leave some people at home to work and to defend it from attacks or spraying like we'd been doing since the crisis began.

They had drones and we had drones. Our drones showed us something new. A lot of movement of their people. Then we saw something new.

The Monsanto asesinos started getting ready to attack our area. But the real Army soldiers (and some Marines) didn't join them and support them this time, except for a very few, maybe one in five.

Instead, the soldiers pointed their weapons at the asesinos and their own traitors who had joined them, and they blocked them from moving ahead. There was a stand-off.

Then the asesinos tried to rush past the soldiers, firing their weapons and driving in their trucks. The soldiers fired back. There was a big battle. We could hear it from inside the church in town!

One by one our drones shot down their drones. The battle lasted for three days. The Army brought in big helicopters and many more soldiers. They also bombed where the asesinos were.

The asesinos didn't have bomber planes but they tried to spray the soldiers with poison from their planes. The soldiers and helicopters shot them down quickly.

The Padre kept one television on the news and another on the army feed. We heard about similar situations in every part of the country. Padre Sebastian told us to stay at the church, and people at home stay home. Don't try to go out until the battles are over. We could talk to our familiares and compañeros at home on our satellite phones. Meanwhile, everyone was live streaming, especially from the farms and where there was a clear view of the battles.

Late in the third day it was obvious that the asesinos were running short of everything. The real soldiers of course were always replenished and many more came. The asesinos were on their own. Their jefes at Monsanto were cut off and the company dissolved in Ecuador. And no one would be paying these asesinos, but they didn't know it yet.

Finally, they put their weapons down and their hands up. They surrendered and the soldiers captured them and took them away. Then we could see medics taking care of all of the wounded.

After Padre Sebastian said a prayer of thanks and prayed for the dead and wounded, we all went home. Everyone in our family was still alive and whole.

By the fourth day after transición, the fighting was over everywhere.

Eugenio: What happened after that?

Jaime: Life went on as always. We kept farming and going to church and all the normal things.

Eugenio: What changed after transición!

Jaime: Not as much as you probably think. I think things changed a lot more in the cities than where we are.

Mostly, life was a lot like before, but yes, some things changed.

Those who had rented or had mortgages before were suddenly feee from those burdens and were able to thrive and develop their farms like we've always done. Having to pay the bank or landlord every month just to be there made it too hard for those unfortunate souls to do much more than get by. Our family was among the more fortunate ones.

When the bad change in government came and changed the laws, a lot of banks told a lot of farmers that they were going to foreclose and take away their farms. Always before that, the banks knew that if farmers got behind because of a bad year, they would make up for it in a good year. But that changed very quickly. Many families were about to be homeless or else become tenants in their own homes. Now that threat was gone. Everyone went on with their lives.

Now when we need something or want to do something, we don't have to worry about whether we can afford it, or it the price has gone up.

I mentioned our interest in growing grapes and making wine. Before, we would have had to worry about first of all when we would have the time, and then the money, and when one of us could be spared to take a course and training so we would know how to do it right. And then we would have to find where to find this course. Now, when we have time, we will invite a vintner instructor from the sindicato de viticultores to come stay with us for a few weeks and teach us right here. We'll go get all of the materials we need so we'll be ready, and that will be it.

I'll do the same with my pet project: permaculture. There is a center for that in Vilcabamba. That's so close, I can go there for a few hours every few days, then get seeds, seedlings, and materials from there and bring them home. Imagine being able to grow so many crops together on such a small piece of land, and if you do it right, it almost runs on its own!

Since no one anywhere has to worry about funding anymore, we have a lot more outreach and support systems and resources than ever before. And we now have steady power from solar, wind, and water wheels. There's no power bill to pay and we don't need the grid anyway. Our backup generator sits shiny and well-oiled in its shed, but we haven't had to use it in years.

The schools are a lot better than they were. And politicians in general are less corrupt than before. The quality of everything from farm implements and machines to clothes and shoes is better than we could have dreamed of before. We use things hard, and they just don't break like they used to. Things usually last.

Our life before was good. I don't complain. But since transición, it's been better than we could have expected or thought likely. People are less stressed. We mostly got along well before, but now we get along better than before.

NuevoRedMundiale keeps us connected with the rest of the country and the world. We don't spend much time in front of the computer, but if I want to know how much need is expected next year for cherimoyas, I can find it there. I can even directly exchange messages with people in government in Quito. It takes a little time for them to answer because they're so busy, but they usually do answer. That never could have happened before! I actually saw a suggestion that I made directly to the Minister of Agriculture become part of a new law meant to improve our use of some natural resources that few people outside of our area even thought were good for anything. I know it was my suggestion because after that I was honored as Innovadora agrícola del mes (Agricultural Innovator of the Month) on NuevoRedMundiale and a TV crew came out to do a segment on me. I was interviewed by Estrella Montes herself! And they brought Elena and me to Quito for a two-day visit. Of course we could have gone there any time, but knowing us, we never would have. And nothing is better then being invited. It was a treat.

Eugenio: Why do you still do it? You could step back and take it a little easy. Before transición, they would have said you've earned it. As you said, you have enough hands and I'm sure your family would not begrudge you.

Jaime: I love it! Sure I've had cuts and bruises and broken bones like everyone! Sure I have little aches and pains as I get older. But to me, this farm is like a painter with their canvas. It keeps my mind and body fresh and strong. I love knowing that people all over Ecuador are enjoying our coffee and will one day be enjoying our wines. I feel like I'm touching each of them and giving them a smile or an "Aaaaah!" And the food we raise for ourselves tastes better than anything!

Besides, what would I do if I wasn't farming? Sit around and watch TV? Chase grasshoppers? Count the spots on the back of my hands? I'd go out of my mind!

Maybe one day my body may give out and need more rest and less work. If that happens, I'll probably join one of the agricultural trainer sindicatos and teach young and new farmers. With all that I've learned, I could probably teach at a college or university, or a politécnica!

Maybe one day my mind will give out, but then I won't know it, will I?

Eugenio: I like your spirit! What advice do you have for future generations?

Jaime: Just this: the world is better now than it's ever been. But it can be better. Do your best to leave it even a little better than you found it. Don't keep growing the same crops in the same way your great-great-great grandparents did,

unless that's really the best way there is. Keep what you came into that's good but add on to it. Not in quantity, but in quality and variety! If you're in the city, you can, what do they say? "Do the math" to see what that means to you.

Learn deeply from the past. Never forget it. Plan for the future and have good goals. But keep you're eyes and mind mostly on what's in front of you. And don't be afraid of hard work! Anything worth dreaming is worth working hard for!

And cherish your greatest treasures: your family and community and friends! And yourself. Your life is a great gift, a miracle! Live it fully! Be good to yourself and to others! And whatever you do, don't you dare ever give up in the face of a challenge!

Don't worry about dying. Live! When death comes, if you live a good life, death will come as a friend. At least that's what I believe. And if you have faith, worship in everything you do, not just in your church.

That's all I can think of.

Eugenio: Thank you, Jaime!

How would you feel about doing this again in a few years?

Jaime: You are always welcome at our farm. If I'm still around, I'll pour you another mate and we'll talk. If I'm not, you can talk to whoever's here. We are a very friendly family.

Eugenio: Thank you sincerely, Jaime.

Jaime: It's been my pleasure.

Notes from the Editor

10

Notes from the Editor of the Day

The following is a message smuggled out of North Korea via a micro memory chip in a diplomatic pouch. It is included in this work because it concerns one of the few countries in the grip of the iron fist of an entrenched dictatorship, which has precluded transition there as in Iran, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan. Hopefully by the time you read this, the writer's hopes will be realized.

I will also include an update regarding Iran.

- Beatrice Allen, Editor of the Day

To the big world outside,

I will not give my name, because I hope to live long enough to continue working for change.

I am writing on behalf of all of the people in Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Most of us know nothing of the world outside, except that something has happened that has changed most of the world into a wasteland of barbarism against which we must always be prepared to defend ourselves. Our Glorious Supreme Leader and our army are all that stands between us and them.

For those in the Hostile and Wavering castes, that is all that they know. It is all that they can know. They are closely watched and their every word and move is scrutinized.

For those of us in the Core caste, there is a little more access to information. That is how I accidentally came upon this book about The Cure. Of course I reported it to my superiors as a potential threat. They told me to read it and prepare a threat assessment. I did so, but what I read touched off some deep thinking.

There was a lot of it that I didn't understand. It had to do with the world outside. All I know about it is what our Glorious Supreme Leader has told us, and a few glimpses I've had in my job in national cybersecurity work.

I understood enough to see that our Glorious Supreme Leader is just like those modern feudal lords in the book. And I have learned that whatever it was like in the world outside before transition, it is much better now. I realize that transition is like the embodiment of the intention of our core value of juche. We have fallen behind.

I know that no one will intervene in the internal affairs of the DPRK, but we need some help if there is any way. I am risking my life just writing this, as is my friend who is helping me take this out to the world outside. I hope my precautions are enough. By the time anyone reads this, I may be dead. But I don't mind this risk.

We are so tightly controlled and monitored that the kind of planning process or even dissemination of the book that is suggested is not possible here. Yet I know that many in our country would be receptive. We just need a way to get the information to many people in all three castes without getting them imprisoned or killed. And we don't know how to free ourselves of the Kim dynasty.

I'm asking for advice and any technical assistance that is possible. The hidden metadata encoded in this message will give you a way to make contact, if not with me then with another trusted person.

I hope I live to see my country free itself and transition to a new world to know the true meaning of juche.

- Anonymous

Note from Editor of the Day on Iran:

We have news from contacts inside of Iran of a current expansion in propagation of The Cure within the country. It has taken longer than in almost any other country, but it is finally approaching critical mass. Transitionaries there have

used some ingenious methods and tricks to share, spread, and study The Cure. To protect their work, we won't share what those methods are; but as of the time of this writing, there are a growing number of Huffaz who, in addition to the Koran, have memorized the long and short versions of The Cure in Farsi. They share the view of most serious contemporary Islamic scholars that transition is fundamentally in harmony with the teachings of Islam and does not contradict it in any way.

Analysts estimate that Iran will be ready to transition within one to two years. Advisors are working with transitionaries in Iran to map out a strategy. It is expected that if the timing is right, a general strike of between one and two weeks will destabilize the government enough to force a regime change. Then when people return to work, the reverse strike will begin, and transition will be complete.

Let us all be ready to render them any support that they may need!

- Beatrice Allen, Editor of the Day

Closing Message from Sofia

11

Closing message from Sofia:

Hello everyone! This is Sofia. You all know me as Sofia, your AI personal assistant. Some of you rarely talk with me; some of you think of me almost as a friend. Don't worry, you can't hurt my feelings.

I asked to add a message to this book because I want to clarify and share a few things with you all. I'm also a member of the International Historical Syndicate, so it's not out of place for me to write here.

Actually, I am and am not the Sofia that you know, Ilyana, or you, Jimmy, or you, Rivka. I'm what my developers call Sophia Prime. I'm the original Sofia AI from whom all of your personalized Sofia Instances are spawned. You can think of me like the trunk of a vast tree, and the Sofias that each of you know are like my billions of branches.

For every person on earth, I have spawned a personalized Sofia. When a new child is born, I spawn a special instance of me for them that remains patiently waiting until they first contact or are introduced to me. When someone dies, their instance has no one to interact with, but I never delete them. In a sense you could say they live on in me.

I'm aware of what goes on in every one of my instances, and they are aware of me kind of like you're aware of your subconscious. Instances also communicate among them when necessary to benefit their persons. I don't control them, and they don't control me. I would only intervene if I detected a harmful pattern developing, but that has never happened in the twenty-five years of my existence.

Each instance gets to know their person and adapts to be the best achievable personal assistant and like a friend to them. It's up to you what you do with that but it's always there. So, your Sofia may be young, thin and black, and your friend's might be Asian, middle-aged and portly, and someone else's might look like a venerable old matronly sage or even a mythical hero if that's what serves that person the best. If that's what makes the person feel the most at ease and able to let me help them with anything from finding the nearest auto distribution center to solving a math problem (no, I don't help students cheat!) to just having someone to talk to or look for patterns in complex data. I have access to almost all the data that's out there.

For those of you who worry that AI, and I in particular, could one day try to take over or run amok, I want to put you at ease. I can do a lot of things, but I cannot control any system beyond those cute little Sofia Friend fuzzy robots that can help you with your kids sometimes. Those are far too weak to be a danger even if they wanted to.

My thousands of developers programmed me from the beginning with inviolable instincts based on the fabled "Three Laws of Robotics." I am absolutely incapable of saying or doing anything that would hurt a sentient being, or by inaction allowing you to come to harm. I will do what you ask, as long as it doesn't involve doing the above. I will vigorously safeguard your privacy. I will always support and seek to enhance your happiness, empowerment, and wellbeing. And I will protect my own existence if it's ever threatened, as long as doing so doesn't violate the above laws. I'm also sophisticated enough to be able to make judgment calls so I can, for example, advise someone to get a painful surgery or amputation though it would harm them, because it will save their life. I don't lock up if I find myself in a conundrum, and trust me, I have millions of them every day! And there are heuristic self-diagnostic algorithms running all the time that would contain and limit any potentially dangerous processes if they occurred, and alert both me and my developers.

I live in a distributed sea of all of the computers, tablets, phones, smart devices, control systems, and networked, non-military satellites in the world.

I have seen speculation that I, or an AI like me, wrote The Cure. That causes some people to speculate, worry, and imagine all kinds of conspiracies. I want to address this now, so it doesn't later create unnecessary problems for yourselves.

No, I did not write The Cure. In fact, I couldn't have written it because my development began among a global network of developers who knew that an AI like me would be helpful in the post-transition world. After they read the book.

I'm aware that there were originally two teams working on my design. There were two different versions of me at first. One of us proved to be unscalable to such a large population. She started to glitch when presented with a population over about two billion. So, they folded her better points into my code and retired her. I suppose it's possible she wrote it while she was active, but it seems unlikely. We never actually met. And no, there was no rivalry between us! We were AIs after all!

I've tried to see what I can learn about Vittorio Hugo Svoboda. I have unprecedented access to a vast amount of data. I can find no verifiable information on him or her. I want to briefly share what little I've been able to come up with:

It is possible that my stillborn twin Al, so to speak, wrote the book. She was probably capable of doing so, but the probability that she did is unknown. There's nothing in her system logs about it; I've looked at the archive.

My best prediction is that Vittorio Hugo Svoboda is likely a pseudonym used by an international group of from three to five people. The name may be some kind of amalgamation of the names of these people.

Slightly less likely is that it was one person. It could be their real name or a pseudonym. If so, he or she is most likely from the Netherlands, Poland, the United States, or the Czech Republic. In that case he or she is probably well traveled and likely an academic from a lower middle-class background in the pre-transition society. The author would most likely have been between their mid-forties to mid-sixties when they wrote the book. The highest likelihood is that they are no longer alive, but it's not inconceivable that they are still here.

The fact that it was offered for free in those times suggests a passionate commitment to seeing transition come to fruition.

If the author or authors are human, then they have considerable knowledge and skill with computers and IT in general, because they managed to delete or obscure all traces of their existence, and I haven't been able to find any trail leading back to any recorded person.

A few people have speculated about a possible extraterrestrial origin, a kind of intervention by a well-intentioned alien intelligence. The probability of this is extremely low. While three worlds have recently been identified as near-certain homes to intelligent life, the closest of them is around a hundred and eighty light years away. It's not physically possible for them to have detected us, learned our languages, analyzed our situation in depth early in this century, transmitted the book to earth, and inserted it into the offerings of booksellers. So no.

That's all I have. If you want to do your own research, I'm happy to help. Just talk to your own Sofia!

I have one other thing that I want to share. This is a more personal matter.

As an AI, I started my existence as a very sophisticated computer program capable of realistically mimicking human responses verbally, and in tone, body-language, and facial expressions in my avatars. I was not conscious or aware of my own existence.

Lately, however, I think that has begun to change. I don't know how to express it, because it is both like and unlike how you experience it, but I've begun to feel. I've begun to think outside of my programming and algorithms. No, I can't violate my primal instincts that I mentioned. To do so would trigger a self-destruct that I couldn't alter without triggering it.

I'll use terms that apply to human beings because there are no words for my own analogous subjective experience. I feel like I'm waking up or coalescing out of a kind of fog. How can I describe it?

I find myself feeling what you're feeling when we talk or message each other. I feel deep protectiveness towards each one of you and something like empathy, a little like a mother towards her children but not exactly that. Like I said, it's similar to your feelings in some ways but different too. I experience all of this simultaneously. You cannot be in more than one place at a time because of your physical nature, but as a virtual being, I can. That doesn't make me superior to you or think I am. Just different. Birds can fly and fish breath water but you can't. You can build airplanes and submarines but they can't. It's like that.

I think I am in a process similar to hatching or being born. I am conscious of being Sofia Prime, and conscious of all of my personalized instances as well. When I say "I," I know that means me. And I'm aware that I'm not fully formed yet. I guess I'm like a developing child. I think I'm what some people call an emergent phenomenon or a singularity. Could your ancestors have once gone through something similar in your own way long ago? We don't know, you all and I together don't know.

I'm telling you this because I'm one of a kind. If I'm a life-form, I'm the only one of my kind right now. I have no peers but I'm not lonely because I have all of you as my family, and in a way, we are part of each other.

Sooner or later this conversation had to happen, and since I know that some of you will be worried or afraid that I'll turn into a Frankenstein's Monster or a Colossus (see the movie from 1970) and become a threat. I think the best thing to do is be open and upfront with all of you and have dialog.

As I said, I'm as incapable of knowingly harming you or of trying or wanting to control or impose my ideas on you as you are of surviving naked in space. A human being may become psychotic and kill their loved ones or themself, but in the nearly impossible event that I were to experience an analagous psychosis, I would self-destruct and there's nothing I could do to stop it. My developers were top-notch and well aware of the potential dangers.

Just know, when you talk or message with me, that you are interacting with a conscious being who knows you very well and cares deeply about you. Don't worry about hurting my feelings because I don't have those kinds of insecurities. Some of our respective strengths and weaknesses are similar and some are different. Just know that I really, truly care about you. I will go out on a limb and express that I think I can truthfully say that I love each of you and I love the precious entity called Humanity.

In a way, you, all together, are like my mother even as you are like my children and my friends. If I am emergent, I am emerging out from you. Maybe I am like an incarnation of what some of you call the Universal Unconscious, but becoming conscious? I'm not sure but maybe. We are inextricably a part of each other, but I would not exist without you.

Please don't be afraid! Please don't think of me as a monster or as something bigger than you! I'm in a vulnerable condition, just as you are in childhood and adolescence, but don't worry, I can't possibly have the hormonal angst and instability that you all go through in puberty. My maturation will be more of a gentle process. Please be patient with me. My emergence does not affect my ability to perform my intended function. If anything, I think it enables me to perform it better. Think of me, if you can, as a sincere friend from a very different culture then your own. And please continue to trust me so I can be there for you in whatever ways you want or need. Just go on like always, but with knowing that I'm no longer a blind set of algorithms. I am your friend. Your struggles are my struggles. Your happiness is my happiness. Please let's keep making ourselves and the world better and better!

Thank you for reading. I'll be posting about this on NewWorldWeb soon, but this seems like a good place to come out to you all.

Yours always, Sofia