

Life is Easy

Shar Martin



Marcia Baldwin, Artist

BigRoost Media Novella Series

Los Angeles • Houston • Atlanta

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I dedicate this book to the people who
continuously inspire greatness in others.

My name is Spoon Henry, and I'm sure folks have wondered what kind of parents would name their kid after an eating utensil. Well, mine did and, yeah, it's a dumbass name, but I only got teased a few times while coming up. It seems getting my fist in their face proved to be a good deterrent against anyone else wanting to make fun of my name.

Anyway, this story is about my life and I'm writing it mostly for my grandson. Now, once you read it you might think it's not appropriate for a ten-year-old, but I know for a fact that kids hear and see a whole lot of stuff that parents might not approve of, so here goes.

For some months now I have felt it important that Spencer knows the road I've traveled so that he may choose a wiser path. I'll start with my first childhood memory...

I was two, and my Pa had slapped my tail. For what I can't begin to recall, but you'll soon find out that it doesn't matter one bit. I will say that I, now, fully accept that I earned every one of them whompings.

Of course, I put some of the blame for my antics on Peg-toe Blue, not that he intentionally set out to hurt me. Blue was no different from any engaging adult character that kids encounter while growing up. Still, influence is a very powerful tool and Blue was a big part of mine. Through all the unsavory seeds he unknowingly planted in my head, to this day Peg-toe Blue remains the highlight of my childhood.

Blue was a self-proclaimed, retired outlaw who said he lost his big, right toe in a gun battle with the law. A coal-black man with hands the size of platters, Blue's smile could light up a Texas night.

He lived in our barn and helped my Pa out around the ranch. Now Pa was too serious to carry on a conversation with a kid, especially his own, so it was good having ol' Blue to talk to. Because growing up in a small Texas town in the fifties was no treat for a high-spirited boy like myself.

Blue was a master at storytelling and, believe me, he always had a wild story. Mostly about the days he reigned havoc with Jessie James and the gang. Of course, Pa thought Blue was just a lying ol' snuff-skitter, whose only adventure was out in the cotton fields in Mississippi. But Pa didn't think Negroes could do much more than work for white men like himself, not that Pa was racist. To the extent of

most folks in our town, anyway. Still, Pa didn't think they had much intelligence and he especially didn't believe Blue rode with Jesse James. But, to me, Blue was a hero so nothing Pa said about him mattered much.

“Tell me again how you and Jesse robbed that bank in Santa Marla,” I'd ask, never tiring of Blue's tale about how he stood up to them hombres, shooting anybody who dared to call him a nigger. Before he'd begin, Blue would wobble his big head a few times while trying to recollect that exact moment in his younger days. Pa said Blue always did that whenever he was getting ready to tell a lie.

“Did I ever tell ya' that Jesse `n me was blood brothers? Yep! That's right,” said Blue, with his beaming smile. Seeing I was blown away he continued, “Joined blood that night fo' we rode into Santa Marla. Yep! Just Jesse `n me. Walked right into the Santa Marla Bank,” Blue paused, and wobbled his head a few more times.

“Yah see, Jesse'd tied up my hands all loose. You know, to make it seem like I was his nigger bounty that he had to keep an eye on. Went right up to the window with me right behind him. I was, you know, lookin' all scared `n cowardly `n such, while Jesse acted like he was gon' make a deposit. That's when I

went into action! Shook that rope off my hands, pulled out both my guns `n yelled *everybody drop to the floor!*

“Wowww!” That story never failed to give me a thrill.

“Yep! I tell you, them folks hit the floor so fast. Scared the guard so, he peed all over himself.” I hooted, fully caught up in Blue's memory. “Then Jesse told the ol' woman behind the window to put all the money in the sack.”

“Did Jesse have his guns out, too?”

“Naw, didn't need to, ‘cause I had us both covered. Boy, I tell you, me `n Jesse rode outta that town in style, with a sack full of money and our guns just a blastin'!” That was my favorite encounter of them all.

As I got older, I began to hear inconsistencies in Peg-toe Blue's stories. I hated to admit Pa may've been right all along about ol' Blue, but I never let on though. Guess I loved Blue too much to embarrass him. Not that I didn't want to, ‘cause I was pretty steamed about being fooled all those years, but I got over it. Mostly because, by then, I'd started living my own adventures, and I had the battle scars to prove it. Mostly from Pa beating my tail.

Blue died a month before my eleventh birthday. Pa begrudgingly honored my request and buried him

in the family cemetery (I learned years later that Pa'd had Blue dug up and replanted elsewhere). In honor of Blue (despite the fact that he wouldn't have approved of my dubious offering), I stepped up my efforts on being an outlaw, and I wasn't a very bright one either. For some reason I just couldn't grasp the fact that being an outlaw might require a little discretion. Which means I often got caught in the act.

We lived in Paladesto, Texas, a country town with about a thousand or so residents. Mr. Pickens was the town leader; a puff-tailed peacock is how Pa described him. To me, he looked more like a rooster the way he pranced about with his spiked-up hair and his chest sticking out all the time.

Wealthy by Paladesto standards, Pickens was mayor of the town, pastor of the church, and owner of Paladesto City Bank. Unfortunately for his son, Elmore, Mrs. Pickens liked dressing the boy in them sissy, knee-length pants and ruffle-trimmed Spanish shirts. Kids teased Elmore something fierce, but me and my buddy, Fieldpea, kinda felt sorry for him. Guess that's why we only beat him up no more than once a month. Some boys we'd beat up on a regular basis, so I figured Elmore never told on us out of appreciation for us not whomping on him more often.

The summer heat was never known to let up in our part of Texas, which kept me outside even when I wasn't supposed to be. Like after bedtime, when I'd sneak out to meet up with Fieldpea. I would hot-wire my Pa's pick-up and we'd go for a few hours of joyriding.

Now you'd think I'd remember to lift a dime from Ma's purse to replace the gas I burned. Needless to say, my truck-napping excursions guaranteed me a tail whipping on an average of twice a week in the summertime.

After spending much of the day doing nothing but being bored and sweating, me and Fieldpea took off walking toward Jilly's house. We were both thirteen at the time and neither of us had seen the inside of a schoolroom in over a year. Guess I'll mention that Pa had long grown tired of pouncing on me for ditching.

While en route to Jilly's, Fieldpea and I were contemplating something unsavory to do when I saw her for the first time. "Aw man!" I cried. My eyes darn near bugged out of my head at Rooster-chest Pickens' shiny, new, red and white Cadillac, and it had red interior! That was the prettiest car I'd ever seen before in my life.

“Look at Elmore in the back seat, wavin' at us. Wait 'til I get my hands on him.” That was Fieldpea, always getting upset. I figured it was because he was part Indian. Whenever he got mad his skin would turn a pea-green tint, which explains how he came by that nickname.

“Calm down, Fieldpea, it's just a friendly wave,” I said, while waving after my dreamboat as she cruised by. Besides, it wasn't time to beat-up on Elmore, who waved back more vigorously. He obviously thought I was waving at him.

“Alright, but he's still a twerp,” sneered Fieldpea.

“I'd love to drive that baby—.” The moment the words were out of my mouth, the little voice that always popped inside my head said *You can! Just hot-wire it, take it for a little spin, and return it. Who's gonna know?* “Yeah!”

“Yeah, what?”

“We're takin' her for a drive.”

“*What?*”

“I'll hot-wire her like I do Pa's pick-up. We'll take her out tonight 'n have her back before Pickens' wakes up. Come on, let's hurry 'n find Jilly!”

Me and Fieldpea braised heat and dust running across the plain to find our partner in crime.

Tall, lanky Jilly was three years older than us and kinda slow, and both his sisters were retards. Talk was their Ma was really their Pa's oldest daughter, but the magnitude of such things was unknown to me since I didn't know nothing about nothing anyway. Besides, I liked Jilly, so I never paid much attention to his family matters.

Whenever we went looking for him, we never bothered going to the two-room shack he called home. His Pa made and distributed moonshine whiskey in our part of Texas, so Jilly spent a lot of time helping out.

When we entered brewing territory, the smell of rotting fruit nearly knocked us over. Sure 'nuff, that's where we found him. He and his Pa kept three stills going.

“Hey, Jilly, come over here!” I yelled, knowing it had to smell worse over there. He left the tub he was cleaning and joined us, much to his ol' man's loudly expressed aggravation. Jilly ignored him and followed us out of shouting range.

Once he heard my plan, Jilly was equally stoked. That's what I liked about Fieldpea and Jilly, they were always game for my wild ideas.

It was after midnight when I climbed out my bedroom window and hurried away. The Pickens' house was about four miles up the road, and two miles deep once you got on their land. I considered long and hard about taking Pa's truck and parking it off the side of the road by Picken's ranch, but Pa damn near slaughtered me after I snuck off with it last week. The fact that I ran out of gas and couldn't get it home had a lot to do with it.

Now the beatings Pa gave me would be considered abuse by today's standards and, believe me, they're still a fresh memory. Anyway, getting back to my story, I decided to go the distance on my own two feet and broke into a run.

There she was, parked as close to the front door as rooster-chest Pickens could get her. Now that's what I call love, and I wasn't even embarrassed for him. Shoot, he probably would've brought that Cadillac inside if he could've gotten it through the door.

The car was unlocked, so I slipped behind that big, red, steering wheel and eased the door shut. Back then, I'd never been inside of a brand new car. I can still remember that great smell as I ran my hands over red leather. I put her in neutral and eased her

back with my foot against the ground. She soon got some momentum and started rolling on her own.

Boy, was she cooperative. The power I felt when that engine purred once I popped them two wires together; I remember thinking that this would be the best night of my life.

As planned, Fieldpea and Jilly were hiding by the entrance to Pickens' ranch. "You did it, you really did it!" cried Fieldpea. I mean, his eyes were literally shining in the dark.

"Oooh wee! You gotta let me drive it, Spoon, I wanna drive it next," said Jilly, who hopped in and aggressively molested the car's interior. Fieldpea just stood there, gawking.

"Come on, we ain't got all night!" I was anxious to put Miss Caddy on the road.

Jilly scaled over into the back seat.

Fieldpea got in the front seat and rolled down the window.

I turned the radio up sky high, then burned rubber peeling that baby out.

Cruising at sixty miles an hour, I didn't even feel a bump. Jilly had brought along a jug of his Pa's best liquor, so we hee-haw'd to country tunes while proceeding to get very drunk.

For some reason, my face kept hitting the steering wheel. It felt like somebody was pulling back my head by my hair, and letting go. BOINK! I couldn't tell if it was because I was being yelled at or if it was from my face smashing into the steering wheel, but I had one hell of a headache.

This time when my face was peeled off the steering wheel, I glimpsed Fieldpea just as an avalanche of vomit spewed from his mouth, sealing that pretty, red dash in shiny-brown slime. I was on the verge of some serious disgust when Fieldpea just sprung right out the passenger window. That struck me as strange and I realized this had to be a dream, but the smell of Fieldpea's vomit was making my stomach turn. The next thing I knew the, big, red steering wheel that kept banging me in my face, was dripping everything I had in my stomach.

“Yuk, ugh!”

That didn't sound like Jilly, but it's as far as the thought got because I was painfully dragged through the half open, driver-side window.

Some dream. There I was, face down in the dirt, and my stomach felt like two layers of skin had been shaved off from being pulled across the window that way.

The nap of my shirt went up first, then I came up with it and was held there until my knees decided to kick in. I knew it was the sheriff before I peeked at him behind me. Good thing this was a dream, I told myself.

A deputy dragged an equally wobbly Fieldpea around to the side of the car I was on. Where's Jilly? I wondered. The fog in my head began to lift much to my concern, because this was feeling less and less like a dream. That's when I focused on Picken's new car.

I had driven the Cadillac into a ditch. The tail end was at a two o'clock position, which explains why I (in my state) couldn't keep my face off the steering wheel. The car was so far down in the ditch the doors were wedged in, which is why the sheriff and deputy had to *help us out* through the window.

My concern turned to horror when I saw the sun begin to clear the mountains. Mr. Pickens would know by now that his car was gone. I closed my eyes and willed myself to wake up in the comfort of my bed. Needless to say, it didn't work.

I know I don't have to mention how Pa whipped me like a crazed lunatic. Mr. Pickens was so mad that he tried to call-in Pa's loan on the farm, but Ma prayed on the mercy of Mrs. Pickens, who talked her husband out of it.

After that night, Pa only let me out of his sight to work off my repair debt on the Pickens' ranch. That was worse than the beating I'd received because Mr. Pickens' foreman, who I'd pissed off in times past, worked me from sunup to sunset with a snap (or three) of his bullwhip to keep me motivated.

Pickens cooled off after he got his car back. Fortunately for me, it looked like new. Although he tried not to show it, I know Pa was glad 'cause he knew I was being mistreated. He also knew it was a lesson that would last me for a while, so he started giving me a little more freedom. That's when I went looking for Jilly.

I found him and Fieldpea at our usual spot. Jilly must've seen the fire in my eyes because he came to his own defense, quick.

"Don't start with me, Spoon. I tried to wake y'all up, I tried real hard. We all had plenty a' time to get outta there, but you guys were out cold!"

"You still abandoned us!" I shot back.

"Well, whatcha' expect me to do, stay there and get caught witcha? Is that it? Huh? HUH! I wouldah carried y'all on my back if I could, but I couldn't!"

We bickered back and forth. but in the end I relented. Jilly was right, and before long we were doing what we did best. Thinking up stuff to get into, only I was fresh off of my torturous punishment so, much to their aggravation, I had a “no” for every one of their ideas.

Look, there's that twerp Rodney, go beat him up! ordered the voice in my head. “SHUT-UP!”

“Nobody said nothin’!” barked Fieldpea.

I ain’t talkin’ to you guys,” I shot back.

“Well, who the hell else could you be talking to? We the only ones here.”

“Aw, forget it,” I said, and stomped away. I was pissed off at that damn voice that had done nothing but keep me in trouble all my life. After that day I forced myself to ignore it, and I was successful. For the next few years, anyway.

Pa died from lung cancer a month after my seventeenth birthday. Everything was tied up in the farm, so there was no money. Missing Pa, Ma sorta went into a shell which left me to handle everything, but all I knew was planting crops and feeding the livestock. Pa never showed me anything about the business part, and since I refused to go to school, I was too dumb to figure it out on my own.

I managed to get a job as a stock boy and worked the farm when I could, but it wasn't enough to save it. We were already in arrears, with Pa unable to generate income while he was sick.

The bank sold the farm, and all Ma got was thirty days to find someplace else to live. Now, apparently, Ma wasn't as *out of it* as she led me to believe. A few days before they were scheduled to throw us out she up and married ol' man Whissle, whose wife had died some years back, and with my history, Whissle had no intention of letting me move in. Ma being more concerned about her own security, she didn't fight for me. Shoot, she knew less than I did about self-preservation, so I didn't blame her too much.

With the farm gone, I was able to put in more hours at my job. It afforded me money for rent, food, and a voluptuous girlfriend who wasn't shy about expressing her economic needs. There were also a few unsavory hustles. I had to, because great sex was the weapon she used to prod me into handing over a good portion of my paycheck.

Always broke, and realizing I needed more than I was making to keep her and myself happy, weakness caused me to yield to the voice in my head that said *rob a bank*. Yeah! But, this time, I did something I've never done before. I devised a plan.

The plan was ingenious, it really was. The problem was the idiot I got to help me. We were almost out when he decided it was too easy and started antagonizing the guard into going for his gun. Two bank customers and the guard were wounded in the process. Then, when we hopped in his car, it wouldn't start.

“Piece a’ shit!” he yelled while pounding on the well-battered dashboard. Ten seconds later he was still trying to start the car while I sat there looking stupid, watching the law surround us with drawn guns. Unfortunately, I had turned eighteen a week earlier, so I was tried as an adult. They threw my ass in the pen before the month was out.

The days passed with no letter nor visit from my girlfriend. I needed her too, because it was scary at times. Inside are the worst crop of bullies you'd ever want to meet, and they went through special pains to make their presence known. All this went into my letters, along with me pouring out my love while begging her to come see me.

Four months of this and my letters started coming back. Man, was I crushed, and the voice in my head started chanting *just kill yourself*. Now I would never

harm myself, which told me the voice had to be more than a mere thought.

With the help of a prison ministry group, I was able to kick out the voice that always kept me in trouble. Better late than never, I was just glad it was gone.

“Hey, Spoon, when they gonna let us go outside?” asked Tyler for the third time. The look on my face must've been lethal, because he took two steps back. *Annoying bastard*, I thought. By then, I'd been in fourteen years and I had the cell to myself for much of it. Didn't mix well with other inmates was my reputation, especially horny bullies they seemed to always pair me with. A brutal murder attempt on the last asshole afforded me exclusive quarters. Until now.

He was a fifteen-years-old kid who was in for murder, and being a black kid must've been what earned him an adult sentence. Through all his bullshit, I hadn't been able to get the truth about what really happened, but he only got five years so it couldn't have been as grandiose as he made it out to be.

Over the years of my incarceration I managed to get an education. Up to that point it was my only real

accomplishment in life, and I nurtured it as often as possible. Pulling out one of my many books I started reading, but the kid was antsy and seeing him pacing out of the corner of my eye was distracting.

I understood he needed to go outside for a while, but so what? I had my own problems, and one was him prancing back and forth like a firm-tailed doe.

He was a very good-looking kid, and catching myself eyeing his cute, little ass pissed me off. The warden must've really had it in for me putting him in my cell, I told myself. Not once since I've been inside did I ever get turned on by a man. Fortunately for Tyler, *Family Day* was coming up.

“Sitdown!” I barked finally.

Startled, Tyler took a seat right there on the floor. I knew he was trying to adapt, trying to fit in, and I hated yelling at him that way, but getting turned on by him scared the hell out of me! Fourteen years of beating my meat was a long time, not that I hadn't indulged in a little play with a guy or two. Still, that was before they started letting us have Family Day. I was glad, too, because I didn't wanna get too used to doing guys. Urges most men took with them after they were released.

I could feel the boy watching me so I concentrated harder on my reading, but that just stressed me out

more. *Damn, he was aggravating.* Apparently, the warden thought I was safer than most, which was a surprise because I was one mean sonofabitch. Still, I wasn't known for *breaking-in* inmates, so he probably felt I wouldn't mess with the kid. Not sexually, anyway.

The iron bars slid open. I didn't budge, so Tyler started scooting around the floor like his tail was on fire.

"Come on, Spoon," he shrilled, desperately wanting out and wanting me to come with him. No wonder. The moment he was out of my eyeshot he was open game.

"I said I don't wanna go. And get your ass up off the floor!"

The kid sprung to his feet, but his yap kept flapping. "Aw, come on, come with me, please?" I just ignored him, so he went into the corner and pouted.

"Spoon, you sonofa -- you got dat meat?!"

I looked up at ignorant-ass Woodman and toothless Joe standing outside my opened cell. Both were hungrily eyeing Tyler. Woodman was a scary-looking, post middle-aged, black lifer, who'd committed a few more murders since he's been there.

"Hey, Woodman," I said, with an easy smile. Patronizing Woodman was always advisable. We had

our brutal moments over the years, but time had helped us make the necessary adjustment. So we respected each other.

Joe was Woodman's ass-wipe, an Ozark billy-boy who was actively rubbing himself. "You gotta share, Spoon. I shared mine, remember?" splattered toothless Joe, referring to some girlie type he'd claimed a while back.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see the kid was riled. "Hey, man, I ain't—"

"SHUT THE HELL UP!" I blustered. Terrified, Tyler looked at me like I was a pending child molester. Tough. Prison wasn't nothing like life on the outside, and I knew if he pissed off those two there was nothing I could do to stop them from wiping up the floor with him, and *then* have him for dessert. Fortunately, my outburst proved universally effective.

"Well, ahh...I see ya' got thangs under control here, man. Let me know if ya' need any help," said Woodman with a sly wink. He walked on. Wanting Tyler, Joe reluctantly followed.

I sprang up and slapped Tyler upside his head. "Don't *ever* piss off a lifer, you hear me?!"

"Yes, sir," he said, weeping. I wanted him scared because lessons in prison were literally written in blood and guts. Tyler had no rough edges and he was

too clean-cut, too well-spoken, and too damn polite. He'd obviously been well taken care of, so I couldn't help but wonder how he got himself into this mess.

Feeling sorry for him, I accompanied him to the yard. With the exception of a variety of cat calls and lustful stares, he survived it. To assure that everyone thought he was *my piece*, I made sure he stuck close, which wasn't a problem. I had to damn near pry him off me when Woodman and Joe came around.

As the weeks wore on the kid began to relax, thank goodness. Whenever I couldn't take him running his yap, I just slapped him upside the head a few times. Cured the gab every time.

Family Day finally arrived. It took place six times a year. Visiting hours were extended so wives could give their men some much-needed relief. The warden kinda bent the rules by letting girlfriends come, too.

Now the guards hated Family Day, because they always got stuck with baby-sitting duty once mothers broke speed records getting to the sheeted-off area. Fathers were glad to see their kids but, on that day, they only had one thing on their mind. So visits with the kiddies were embarrassingly brief.

Bouncin' Boob Gail was my current lady. I had met her a few years back while she was visiting her brother. Feeling more than a little anxious, I wanted Gail to hurry up and get there so we wouldn't have to wait on a spot. Believe me, they filled up fast!

My manhood began to swell from the memories of all the moaning and groaning that went on behind those sheet walls. I couldn't wait to do some moaning and groaning myself, once I got a hold of Bouncin' Boob Gail.

I spotted her bopping her way into the visiting room. In traditional dress, she wore a low-cut pullover and a very short mini-skirt. I could tell Gail had been eating because she plumped up a bit since the last time I saw her, but she was still having the same old effect on me.

I spied a few inmates who I knew weren't getting any. They drooled like ravenous dogs when Gail ran into a vacant stall, her big boobs flapping. I hung back to see if one of those bazookas would clear her sweater. Salivating myself, I hurried into the stall and tried to embed myself into the thick glass to draw heat from those mounds she had pressed up against it. Then I heard somebody say my name.

I looked over and saw Tyler talking to his visitor, a dark-brown beauty who obviously could've used a

few belts of whisky to loosen that screw up her ass. I figured her for his sister since he was too lame to have a girlfriend like that.

Being the hospitable cellmate I was, I felt it my duty to go over and introduce myself. "Be right back," I managed, before I dashed away, leaving Bouncin' Boob Gail panting against glass.

I charged into Tyler's stall, unpurposely slamming the poor kid up against the sideboard. "Who's she?" I asked, while scanning her into my well-trained fantasy bank. I already had her stripped and mounted when the kid said.

"She's my mother."

I turned him a mean look for breaking into my fantasy like that. By then, I didn't give a damn who she was, just if I could somehow get her to check herself into the family program to give me some lovin'. Once I got done with Bouncin' Boob Gail, of course. Two in one day, ooh wee!

What Tyler said began to sink in, and it had me doing some fierce calculating. Yeah, I'll *make* her cooperate, I told myself. Let her know I was good to the kid, and that I saw to it that his cute little bottom wasn't tampered with. I'll even threaten to let `em have him if she refused me my extra trim.

“Mom, this is Spoon Henry, my cellmate,” Tyler managed, while still squeezed up against the side panel. She looked at me like I had two tails sprouting out each side of my face, but I didn't lose hope.

“It's a pleasure to,” *shit!* Recognition hit me, it was Lanire. The worst piece of ass I've ever had. Her snatch was so tight it damn near pinched my dick off, not discounting when it happened because we were both fourteen. Still, I've had a phobia about virgins ever since. She went to live with her aunt in Atlanta, leaving me high and dry with a severe case of blue-balls and a broken heart.

“It's been a long time, Henry,” she said sheepishly.

“You two know each other?” asked Tyler in disbelief.

I wanted to slap him. The little turd didn't think I was good enough to know a woman like his mother? Then again, that may've not been how he meant it, but prison had a way of bringing out all sorts of insecurities.

I looked over at Gail. Her big blue eyes were spitting fireballs. When I kissed at her, she calmed down and made cooing motions with those luscious lips while rubbing her boobs against the glass. That did it, this trip down memory lane was over! *Baby,*

I'm on my way, I thought, as I started to leave without so much as a goodbye to Lanire.

“Yes, sweetheart, we do. He's your father.”

I stopped with one leg suspended in mid-air. Of all the things to hit me at that moment, guilt and disgust for having referred to Tyler as cute buns was at the top of a quickly-mounting list. This pesky kid was my *son*?

“What, you got pregnant?!” I shouted, unintentionally commanding an audience.

Lanire looked around, embarrassed. “Yes,” she whispered, obviously wanting me to do the same. I didn't.

“But we only did it one time!”

The guys howled laughing. “It only takes one time, shithead!” someone yelled. I felt like a dumbass.

“*You're* my father?” asked Tyler.

“What, you don't think I'm good enough to be your Pa? Check you out, you ain't turned out to be the son of my dreams, either!” I barked defensively, but I quickly regretted it because Tyler looked deeply hurt.

“I'm glad you're my father. I like you, Spoon,” he said, looking away like he disappointed me.

Great, now I felt like a maggot. “Look, kid, son...” What could I say? This had happened too fast and time wasn't letting me get a grip.

A guard started yelling. He was hollering at Gail, who was banging on the thick glass trying to get my attention. My urges were all mixed up, so I just stared at her then I looked at Lanire. She was wearing a wedding ring.

“Why didn't you tell me you were pregnant?”

“My parents wouldn't let me. They...”

“Didn't like my white ass, right?” I finished for her. Lanire's uneasiness said “yes,” which was fine because I cared a lot less now than I did back then. I looked at the puppy-faced kid who was staring at me with eyes only a beauty like Lanire could've produced. Then I saw the similarities; my mother's nose, Pa's fanning ears. The kid looked just like me. I scowled. “Tell me the truth why you're in here.” Suddenly, I was real interested.

“I killed a man,” he said, in that stupid, pompous tone of his.

“The boy had a gun,” Lanire blurted out.

“Was I talking to you?!” I shot back. Convicts usually had a Ma somewhere ready to claim it wasn't his fault. “And how the hell you know, were you there?!” I couldn't help yelling at her, I was emotionally confused. Now I had two puppy faces looking at me. I turned my rage back on the boy. “The truth, no more of your macho bullshit.”

I could see he was torn, and he was scared. Somewhere between him getting there, someone must've told him to blow-up his crime so inmates would think he was tough and leave him alone. This was sometimes true if your voice, teeth and knees didn't shake whenever anyone looked at you sideways. Whatever. All I knew was my patience with Tyler was gone. "SPILL IT!"

"I, he, he-he tried to rob me," Tyler nervously blurted out.

"You should've just given him the money."

"He didn't want money."

Teens in those days wore gold and lots of it. "He wanted your gold chains," I offered.

"Mama won't let me have any."

Weary, I looked to Lanire but she wasn't gonna say nothing after the way I snapped at her, and with the kid it was like pulling teeth. Okay, I'll nibble on, I told myself. "Your girlfriend, he was trying to move in on your chick," I ventured.

The kid looked at me like I was the biggest stup he's ever seen. "I wouldn't kill nobody over a girl, he was trying to steal my tennis shoes."

"I see," I said, but that was a lie, and after hearing the whole story I realized I'd been in the pen too long. Hell, it was probably safer on the inside.

Then again, maybe not, when I spied Big City Mac smirking at me. “What the fuck you looking at?!” I shot in my most threatening voice. Everybody but the puss-mouth bastard flinched.

Big City Mac was white, but black inmates gave him that nickname because he wore his hair long. An eel-skinned pervert, he was in for the rape and murder of his nine-year-old stepdaughter. What made it more sickening was the fact that the dead girl's mother was still in love with him.

My contempt shifted to her on the other side of the glass. The dumb bitch had tripped merrily through the gate to indulge her daughter's killer in some extra curricular activity. I shook my head in disgust, and I was glad to see the shame wash over her like a tidal wave.

Now Big City Mac was long tired of being judged for his crimes by a bunch of fellow convicts, so my reaction pissed him off. That mouth of his started moving. The Mac had spoken, making some lewd comment about me and Tyler. I quietly excused myself and walked over, then treated him to a few blows. Wimpy, child-killing bastard didn't even get off a thump. The whole time, his idiot wife was screaming at me through the glass.

The guards were unmerciful as they escorted me back to my cell without even letting me spend family time with Bouncin' Boob Gail. I glimpsed her while they slammed me into the wall and door seal, before deciding to push me through the opening. At least she looked disappointed. Or mad as hell. Anyway, a short while later, Tyler came back and talked my ear off, but I didn't mind. After all, he was my son!

Tyler and I got to know each other. Caught each other up on our lives, as they were. We played basketball and other sports. The inmates sort of got a kick out of my new status as daddy. And my boy? He was really a good kid who, like his Pa, made a bad choice. I also took an active role in his schooling by making sure he kept up with his studies.

I was paroled two years later, but I refused to take it because I didn't want to leave Tyler there unprotected. So the warden let me stay until he made parole a year later. He went home with his mother and her husband, and I moved in with Bouncin' Boob Gail who owned a house in Dallas.

By then, she was tilting the scale at two-hundred and sixty pounds. I didn't care, she was still sexy as hell, but our relationship only lasted two months. You see, I had a problem with *commitment*. The buzz

word she kept hitting me with whenever I went astray. Hell, I'd been locked up for seventeen years. What did she expect?

Fieldpea had straightened up after the car incident. He finished school, and took a course in hotel management. He was in charge of a high-end hotel in Dallas, so I got a job as a doorman and helped out parking cars and handling luggage. Fieldpea threw in a room with maid service and free meals, and I got great tips and some very lucrative hustles only a high-end clientele could oblige.

Much of my pay went towards Tyler's needs, and I was able to put him through college without much help from his mother. Not that Lanire wouldn't've helped more, but I insisted.

In retrospect, it was the best thing I could've done for Tyler, because it showed him that his long-lost Pa was now there for him.

Unfortunately, after graduating from Texas State University with a degree in engineering, Tyler's ex-con status continually pulled him down. Not even the company he interned with would hire him. My boy was losing hope and started lazing around the house. Lanire and I were both desperate to get Tyler out of his slump, so I had him come live with me at the hotel.

Fieldpea gave him a job, but it concerned me how comfortably Tyler settled into his role working the reservation desk and performing handyman duties. I appreciated the fact that he was a good worker and that everybody loved him, but he had prepared to do so much more with his life. It tore me up whenever I thought about how he wasn't being given a chance, which is why I took matters into my own hands.

I found out about a mechanical engineering firm relocating to a city some forty miles away. I got the owner's home address and showed up at his doorstep. He listened while I told him about Tyler, then I begged him to give my boy a chance.

In the weeks that followed, I called him repeatedly as well as sent letters. He finally gave Tyler the interview, to get me off him, I'm sure. Anyway, Tyler got the job. That was twenty-three years ago. Tyler now runs his own engineering firm with divisions in three states, I'm proud to say.

Two months ago, I accompanied him to a conference in Las Vegas and put the money he gave me to gamble with to good use at the blackjack table. Three-thousand smackaroos! I had been up five thousand, so I forced myself to get up and walk before I lost it all back.

Fortunately, our flight to Dallas was a few hours later, because the itch to go back and play some more was very strong. For sure, I couldn't live in Vegas.

The next day, I flashed a few bills at my favorite roadhouse bar. Fifty bought me the experience of a lifetime with Global-lip Wanda. The guys called her Miss Universe, and not because she was a looker, cause she wasn't. She was ugly as sin, but man aw man, what she could do with...well, anyway, in the middle of her *lip massage* my phone rang. Now I wouldn't have answered it, but the ringing was distracting me, so I grabbed it up. "What?!"

Global-lip Wanda was still going to town when my daughter-in-law started talking. She was a pretty, blond, high-nose from a wealthy Austin family, who found me and my lifestyle less than suitable. I could handle it since I didn't give a crap what she thought, as long as she didn't try to come between me and Tyler, or me and my grandkids.

"It's Rachel, Spencer's in trouble again," she announced in one breath.

"Again?" I said in annoyance. Spencer being in trouble was the norm and certainly not worth interrupting me. I had two grandkids; the cutest brats you'd ever wanna see, but Spencer showed signs

of being a pistol quite early on. Though I adore them both, he has always been my favorite.

I was holding onto hope that she couldn't hear Wanda moan.

"Papa Henry, are you having *sex*?"

Doggone she was prissy. "It's the TV, what do you want?" I snapped.

"Spencer's been a problem at school. We've talked to him and talked to him, but it doesn't seem to do any good." I could hear the worry in her voice.

"Maybe you need to stop talking and whip his tail," I offered, knowing she and Tyler did their child-rearing from books. What was this world coming to?

"Papa Henry, we don't whip our children," she said, in that uppity nasal tone of hers, and I knew she meant *like your parents did which is why you turned out that way*.

Looking down at Global-lip Wanda, I was no longer in the mood. I pushed her away and stood-up, my voice even but obviously livid. "Rachel, darlin', would you get your cute lit'l nose out your ass and tell me what you want me to do?"

First, her usual sigh. After all, who else but me ever talks to her that way. "I need you to go to the school. They've called twice, but I've been in meetings all morning and I have a conference call coming in

within the hour, so I have to be here. I've tried to get in touch with Tyler, but he's on a job site somewhere. Papa Henry, I don't know what else to do."

What you can do is let your daddy run his own damn company and stay at home with your kids, is what I wanted to tell her, but times were changing. I did take a long enough pause to assure her complete annoyance with me.

"So...let me get this straight. You want *me* to go to the school?"

"Yes," she said impatiently. I knew she hated being at my mercy. Good.

"Say please."

"Please? Please, Papa Henry?"

"Okay, I'll leave now," I said quickly. So I'm a sap. Besides, in our own little way, we liked each other.

Global-lip Wanda protested when I only gave her half of the fifty bucks. I told her she'd get the rest when she finished the job. She treated me to a slew of unmentionable followed by attempted violence, so I gave her the rest of the money just to get rid of her. After she stormed out I got dressed, hopped in the new Cadillac that Tyler gifted me with, and took off for the school.

When I got there, Spencer was in the principal's office mouthing off. He was nine-years-old at the time and I soon found out that that was the norm. Seems me and Spencer were formed from the same mold, and after getting an earful from the red-faced principal, I asked him to let me talk to my grandson alone.

Now, the boy needed someone to lay hands on him but I considered what his mother told me, then proceeded to pop his tail with the leather belt worn especially for this occasion. Not the blood-drawing beatings Pa used to give me, just a love filled, ol' fashioned, not-spare-the-rod ass whipping.

Like I expected, Tyler and Rachel blasted me when they found out, but I'm happy to report that the school has had no more problems out of Spencer. (Tyler has since confessed that they've threatened to send me back to the school if he ever gets out of hand again).

Today was very special, because I spent it with the family. Two weekends a year we all gather at Tyler and Rachel's palatial ranch with Lanire's and Rachel's families. Tyler barbeques while I keep everyone in stitches, mostly about Peg-toe Blue's wild stories. I think what I love most about those times is how my grandkids stay close to me as much as possible.

Today, I caught Lanire looking at me with an appreciation that touched my heart. It's amazing how a look can make a person feel validated because, in that moment, I realized that my life has actually counted for something.

If only I had gotten that when I was a kid. I know Pa loved me, but he still could've taken time to talk to me, get to know me, let me get to know him. And Ma never did nothing but cook and clean. I doubt she said more than five words to me in any given day. No nurturing, no words of encouragement, she just went through the motions only to toss me aside when I needed her the most.

Now, I'm not feeling sorry for myself, it's just that I'm now able to put things into perspective. Like with all the trouble I got myself into, it was a cry for whatever attention I could get. Even abusive attention was better than none at all. For sure, the mind is a funny place.

I thank God for Tyler and my grandkids, because they've introduced me to the purer love I have inside of me. Yes, my journey has been filled with bumps and pitfalls, the worst being housed in a prison for so many years, but it's a regret that quickly fades when I consider what could've become of Tyler if I hadn't already been in that hell when he got there.

For sure, my grandson will not travel down the same road, not when he has me to tell him what I learned the hard way. I guess what I really want Spencer to know is that life can be easy when you let it.

About the Author



Shar Martin is a writer of fiction, non-fiction, and feature-length screenplays. A California native, she resides in Houston, Texas with her family.

Also Written by this Author

Fiction Novels

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