

TEXAS SAYS NO.®

the story of

SWEEP16.®

"IT'S A FREE COUNTRY." ... American saying

The story is fiction and no character represents any real person, although the main character is inspired by a few real people.

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(Story as of 9 August 2016)

----- INTRO -----

When she didn't answer on the 2nd ring, I started thinking right away I was calling too early ... she's asleep ... or worse, she didn't want to talk to me. I'd only recently met her, maybe she'd think I was out of line calling first thing on a Saturday. And we'd talked only yesterday. But I'd been up most of the night and several hours this morning, and I really wanted to tell her what had happened. By the fourth ring I was going into fool-panic mode. I wished I hadn't called at all, but it was too late to hang up. How many rings should I let it go? What counts as rude so early in the morning? I didn't know her habits yet, whether she slept in or got up early. A flock of dopey, dreadful thoughts went thru my mind by the 5th ring. Now what? Should I leave a voicemail?

"Danny!" She sounded happy to say my name! "Sorry I took so long to answer ... it took me a little bit to find the phone in yesterday's pocket. How's it going?"

I will admit I was hugely relieved. I will admit Pearl had gotten inside my mind, and I really love it.

"Hope I didn't wake you!"

"No, I've been up since first light, actually. Love a summer morning."

"I wish I was there." She didn't say anything, and I felt I should have kept that line to myself. "Some wild ideas we've been talking about, and I wanted you to be the first one I told." She picked up my deflated tone, and gave me what I needed to hear.

"I wish I WAS THERE, so you could tell me in person." This wasn't the first time she'd known just what to say. "Where exactly are you?"

"In Tilden, Texas, at the family ranch of Texas Governor Fields ... in the FREE STATE OF McMULLEN COUNTY. Seriously, that's what the sign said at the air strip."

"I don't know what that means, but I like it."

"I don't know what it means either, but it did provide a pretty good hint of what was to come!"

"Tell me!"

"We spent most of the night getting to know Governor Fields. WOW, just me saying that sounds crazy. And then we started up again before dawn this morning. The big thing ... he's taking SWEEP16

seriously. He said he has already spoken with well-known citizens, business folks, legislators, and he wants all Texans in on this. Everyone to think about it, discuss it. He said an awful lot of Texans are completely fed up with what the politicians in Washington have been doing, what they are imposing on Americans. He feels DC has become a far worse actor than old King George ever thought of being, with the feds publishing a new law or regulation every 2 or 3 hours of every day. He actually said THE FOUNDERS WOULD BE SHOOTING BY NOW! Do you believe that?"

"Yes, I believe it. He sounds like my Dad. But it's amazing to me you heard that from the Governor of Texas!"

"According to the Governor, federal legislators and bureaucrats and federal courts all seem dedicated to the expansion of government and the centralization of power in DC. It's not even just the taxes ... the Governor feels the federal tax code is where it starts, but that the tax code now, with the new health insurance laws and court rulings, the tax code now pretty much enables the federal government to compel or prohibit almost any behavior. Or taking over the internet. He was steaming. Claimed the IRS can be -- has been -- used to suppress political opponents, and basically steal elections. Another line really stood out ... WE ARE AMERICAN CITIZENS, NOT SUBJECTS OF WASHINGTON, DC."

"That's a pretty powerful line."

"He's actually thinking about, basically, nullifying federal law here. He is saying that maybe, just maybe, it is time to tell DC that TEXAS SAYS NO!"

"You mean ... Secession?"

"No, more like the opposite ... more like throwing DC's politicians out of the Union. We -- well, I was just listening, really -- discussed that DC would try to frame it as secession, because DC will view any challenge to their supremacy that way. But the governor says the idea is that DC has abandoned America's fundamental principles ... that DC has trampled the limits envisioned by the Founders. The way he expressed it, his words, 'WE PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, not to whatever a bunch of career politicians in DC decide to impose on us.'"

But a story should be told from the beginning. So here it is.

----- 001 -----

This whole thing was weird from the start, Uncle Walt asking me to meet him at the Crossroads for a beer.

I'd always been a little awed by Uncle Walt. Definitely the strong, silent type and even as a kid I noticed how other men deferred to him. Why he'd want to spill one with me was a good question. Maybe just to offer congrats on my new college diploma?

My family had been coming up here to Northern New Hampshire from New York City occasionally since I'd been little. My Mom had grown up here, and her younger sister had married Uncle Walt, who'd lived in this area all his life. My Dad worked in Manhattan, and that's where I'd grown up. Several hours in a car brought us to a different world, and I'd always gotten a kick out of the fresh air, the forest, the dark quiet nights. But this time, instead of a long weekend, my family had rented a place for the whole summer. So I was shuttling between NYC and here, and enjoying both scenes a lot in these first few weeks after college. My country cousins visited me in New York, and my college friends visited up here and in the city.

The Crossroads is the watering hole for the area quarry and timber workers. Guys stop in for a few brews and a good meal after a long shift. People know each other, and I was probably the youngest one there when I walked in. It wouldn't be right to make Uncle Walt wait for me, so I'd arrived 20 minutes early. But he was there already, alone in a booth with his eye on the door, and he waved me over.

There was a brew on the table in front of him, and he stood to greet me when I reached his booth. "It's good to see you, Champ! Some draft OK with you? Sit down, I'll be right back." Uncle Walt came back with a pitcher and frosted mugs. "There's some food coming, too. Guys your age are always hungry, right?"

"Hungry, Yes Sir! And thirsty too!" Sir? Where did that come from?

"Congratulations on earning your degree, Danny. You made your parents real proud. All of us, me too. To a lot of us working guys, going to college sounds great! But I know it takes a lot of hard work, and I hope you feel good about what you've done. And what's this about two degrees?"

"The Newhouse School encourages students to take some courses that prepare them to write about a particular subject. The idea is you need to know something before you can write. It used to be a normal thing in college ... you'd have your major, and what they'd call a minor. So I had a focus on business and finance, and it turns out the difference between a minor and an actual degree isn't all that much. So I got the degree in business too. Seemed like a good idea, and it didn't cost extra."

"Good for you, Danny. It's a fine thing to work hard when you have the opportunity to get something done. That kind of attitude is key in life. Good for you!"

We talked about family times, I told him about college days, he told me about working the quarry, and we killed a couple of pitchers before long. I was feeling pretty loose, and I'd heard more from Uncle Walt tonight than in the rest of my life put together. This was a great place for talking. Maybe I wasn't so out of place here at the Crossroads with Uncle Walt.

"What exactly is a journalist, Danny? Why study journalism?"

I'd thought a lot about this, and knew what kind of journo I wanted to be. "A journalist is someone who finds out the truth, and gets it published. Bringing out the truth is a good thing, and I want to do it. SEEK TRUTH AND REPORT IT is the basis of the code of the Society of Professional Journalists."

"You know, people are pretty good at seeing what they want to see; believing what they want to believe. I'm not sure journalists are any different, except they have a megaphone. What if you don't like the truth? Or what if the truth is not what you thought it would be? Or if it's not what people want to hear?"

"I don't know what I'll be able to do. The stories I've done have been easy as far as that goes. Pretty basic stuff -- enrollment information, can the football team do it this year, new budget for some department -- for the student newspaper. It's been easy to stay clean so far. But telling the truth when you don't like it? I guess that's when you can feel like a real reporter."

"You're looking for fulltime work? Ever thought of your own column?"

"Every reporter wants his own column but that doesn't come until after you've already done something."

"Unless maybe you have something special to tell." Now he was searching my face expectantly.

"I'd love to have something to tell, but I don't. I've been a pretty average guy all along. Nothing special."

He tilted his head some and nodded at me. "You've always treated people right, Danny. And that's pretty special. But what if you had a special story to tell, a story that a lot of people would be interested in? A story that you'd follow all over the Country for the next couple of years?"

"Unc, sure ... that's a situation practically any reporter would love. It'd be perfect for a young guy. But what--"

He stopped me talking by raising his hand. "And you're ready to work long and hard. Starting now." These lines came out like commands, almost, while he stared at me. I nodded slowly, "Yes I am."

"OK, that's enough for tonight." Uncle Walt just waved to the barkeep and we went outside. "I'll pick you up at 7 tomorrow. We're going to have breakfast with a friend of mine. You walk home now ... the cool air will clear your head."

Home was 3 miles and I didn't really feel like walking just then, but I found myself saying "That does sound good. Thanks for the hospitality, Unc! Good night."

He gave me a shove on the shoulder that probably would have knocked me over if I hadn't been ready. Uncle Walt hugged his daughters and nieces and shoved his sons and nephews. "I enjoyed the talk Danny. We'll do it again."

Then, as he got into his car, "So, what does a reporter do again?"

"A reporter tells the truth."

"What could be better than that?" And off he went, leaving me with an hour's walk to figure out what was going on.

----- 002 -----

One thing I knew from last night ... Uncle Walt was serious as could be. I didn't really figure out much of anything on that long walk home, but I did figure out I ought to be ready. Far as I know, there is only one surefire cure for a hangover. So I got up at 5 and ran 5 miles. The first mile or 2 was pure torture, but after that my head was clear and I was just gliding. Whatever it was Uncle Walt had up his sleeve, at least I wasn't going to be hung over and queasy when he sprung it on me.

By 6:45 I was shaved, showered and dressed up pretty decent. I'd only been out front a minute or two when Uncle Walt pulled up.

He gave me a sly look, smiling with only one side of his mouth, and nodded affirmatively a couple of times.

"Is there anything nicer than a summer morning up here?"

"If there is, it's a pretty short list, that's for sure! The air is so clean, it's a pleasure just breathing."

"I've never heard it said better, Danny. You've always been good with words."

We drove in silence for 5 or 10 minutes with the windows wide open. I always enjoyed driving in this area of forest and small farms.

"I hope you're hungry", he said finally.

I grinned. "A guy my age is always hungry!"

"Danny, we're having breakfast with a guy named Freddy Freeman. Ever heard of him?"

"Yeah, I've heard of him. Rich guy, big businessman, owns all kind of stuff. I know he owns the quarry where you work, and I know half the people around here dance to his tune." I'd learned at school to distrust and dislike anybody with huge money and influence, and it was something of a point of pride with me. The disdain had been plain enough in my voice, I knew. I hadn't meant to slight Uncle Walt tho, but didn't know how to retrieve what seemed now like an insult. At least he knew I wasn't going to treat this guy like anything special.

He was silent a few seconds, then said "You could look at it that way." After another sly half smile he repeated his question, "What's a reporter's job?"

"We'll have breakfast at Freddy's house. He's going to have some questions for you, and you're free to ask him anything you'd like. I'm really just along to make the introduction, and to listen while I enjoy what I am sure will be a super breakfast!" And for some reason he thought that was quite funny. Still none of this made sense to me.

We turned off the county road into some thick trees, and came to a heavy gate that was not visible from the street. Uncle Walt stopped, punched a code into a keypad and the gate opened. We drove probably a mile around the base of a rise and then into a huge clearing on the other side. Near the top of the rise was what could only be called a mansion, the most impressive house I'd ever seen in person. Uncle Walt drove up close, and a couple of barking dogs ran up to the car as he got out. They seemed to recognize him. It surprised me to see my Uncle take a knee and tussle with the dogs as they climbed over him. But him having the code to Freeman's gate surprised me more.

"Hi Danny! I'm Freddy Freeman and I'm happy to meet you. Welcome! Morning Walt! Does it get nicer than this?"

I hadn't seen him coming, and I felt like he'd snuck up on me. On the other hand, he was polite and friendly as could be. And he looked the way he looked made me feel that I wasn't ready, like no one I'd ever seen before. My instinctive reaction was that this guy has done some Truly Serious Stuff, and I would not want him on my case because he would surely be the enemy from Hell. I can't say that I had already formed in my mind a clear expectation of what he would look like, or act like, but I surely did not expect a rich bigshot to look like this.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Sir". I was aggravated with myself for calling him "Sir".

"Oh, call me Freddy. Else you'll make me feel like an old guy!"

"How about some orange juice? Good." He handed me the biggest glass I ever saw. If he hadn't handed one to Uncle Walt too, I would have thought it was a pitcher. But I'd put on 8 miles since The Crossroads, and a quart of OJ seemed perfect.

Then he handed each of us a little clipboard, and said to circle whatever we wanted for breakfast. There were about 10 choices, like a restaurant. We left the clipboards on a table where the OJ had been, and he explained breakfast would be ready in about 20 minutes. We took a walk around the house, and he pointed out some different kinds of fruit trees, some chickens ("because fresh eggs are so good") and he took us over to the garage, where he wanted to show Uncle Walt an old Harley he'd been telling him about. The bike was about 60 years old, and he'd just had it restored. He took it for a quick spin in front of the garage, then gunned it and disappeared down the driveway for a half minute. He came ripping back to us full of enthusiasm. "Take it for a spin Walt, it's great!" Uncle Walt grinned like a teenager, jumped on the bike and took off. I'd heard Uncle Walt used to ride, but he sure didn't look rusty.

"Done much riding, Danny?" ... "No, sir -- Freddy. Never been on a motorcycle. But that thing sure is a beauty. My Dad used to ride a lot when he was in his 20s."

"Your Dad sounds like a guy who's done some living! Yep, that bike is something special. Very few still around from the late '40s. It's a real work of art. Did your Dad ride much in these parts? Great riding when the weather cooperates."

When Uncle Walt got back, Freddy said "OK Danny, your turn." I did not expect to be taking my first motorcycle ride this morning, let alone on this gorgeous vintage bike. What if I dumped it? I looked at Uncle Walt, and saw a smirk on his face and mischief in his eyes that I'd never seen before. Freeman asked, "You drive a stick shift? Then you'll be fine. Here's the clutch, here's the gas, here's the brake." He pointed with his chin down the driveway. "You'll be fine."

I was probably gone for only 3 or 4 minutes. I was nervous about slowing down, stopping and turning around! But, I returned without dumping the thing. "Now you can tell your Dad you drove a Harley that's older than he is!", Freddy laughed when I got back.

Freeman was not a real big guy. A little taller than average with short black hair and a dark suntan or maybe dark skin. And although his clothes were very loose fitting, I could see the guy was built. Not huge, but bigger than most, and pure lean. I'd always wanted to be a serious athlete, and I'd tried hard. Mostly what I'd gotten out of all my efforts was the ability to size up the athlete in others. And it was easy to see this guy still had a lot of athlete in him, altho he must be over 50. Despite my prejudice, it was hard not to like Freeman, at least so far. That's the way his type sets you up, I reminded myself. Still, he and Uncle Walt were obviously tight, even tho my Uncle was just one of the hundreds of people working for him. Regardless, there was no mistake he had an energy and an enthusiasm about him that drew people in, and I knew already that being around Freddy Freeman is not dull.

Freeman lifted his head a little and worked his nose like a dog on a scent. "Mmm... corn bread. Breakfast must be ready. You guys OK with eating outside? It's just so nice today!"

We walked around the house and sat at a table on a side patio with a fantastic view of the countryside. This was by far the nicest home I'd ever seen ... way beyond anything Uncle Walt or my family or even anyone else I knew could afford. Freeman plays at being a good guy, but he obviously has no problem exploiting people to support his own lifestyle.

"Your Uncle Walt's been telling me about you, Danny. How did you like Syracuse?"

"I liked it a lot. They offered everything I wanted to study, and I keep hearing Newhouse School of Communications is a great place to study journalism. No argument from me on that score." He nodded, but didn't say anything. So I continued "Are you familiar with it?"

A lady came out with a tray of food, and Freeman stood up. When my Uncle stood, so did I. "Good morning Marcia. This is Danny Banks. I hope you don't mind bringing breakfast out here today. It's such a great morning." Apparently this woman was a worker here, but Freeman spoke with her pretty much the same as me and Uncle. "No, Mr Freddy. It's my pleasure to bring the food wherever it will be enjoyed most." "Thank You Marcia." Freeman reached over and put a couple of plates before Uncle

and me, and we all remained standing until Marcia finished placing the food on the table and turned toward the house.

Freeman sat back down and answered my question about Syracuse. "Yes, I've been there a number of times, and spoken with some of the people. It's a great school, especially for Journalism and Communications. The Newhouse Family did a very fine thing there. Why do you want to be a reporter?"

"My Mom and Dad raised me to believe one of the best things anyone can do, anyone can be proud of, is TO TELL THE TRUTH. And I do believe it. Telling the truth is a great thing, and a reporter is supposed to find out the truth and tell the world. There are a lot of things happening that should be publicized but are not. I want to shine a light on things that powerful people want to remain hidden."

He smiled at me as if he wanted me to believe he liked what I said. "Any examples?"

"Sure. America is full of examples. We have corporations where the CEO makes 1000 times the pay of some of the workers. There are companies making products they know are harmful, poisoning the environment and their customers, but it's kept under wraps. Drug companies are sitting on cures for disease because they don't want people cured. They just want to keep selling a pill that will keep the symptoms at bay. The biggest businesses have politicians in their pockets, so they get laws written for their benefit. It goes on and on."

"And what would a reporter do about any of this?"

"The journalist finds out what is going on and reports on it. Bringing things in the open will automatically start to make it better."

"Sorry ... my questions are keeping you from your breakfast. I hope you are hungry. Marcia likes people to sit down hungry and leave ready for hibernation."

We ate in silence for a little, and I had to hand it to Marcia, "Well, I can believe people top off the tank here! This is great. I could live on this cornbread!"

"Thanks ... She'd be happy to hear that. One more question please. What do you believe is the job of a journalist?"

Uncle Walt's question again. I gave him a smile. "For me, anyway --- To be a witness for the public. To learn the facts. To tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth to the best of my ability."

"Who is your favorite journalist?"

"There are a few I really like but my favorite has to be Sharyl Attkisson."

"Why?"

"Because she does what I want to do, and she does it more and better than anyone around now. And even though she has paid a price for it, she perseveres. Have you heard of her?"

"Indeed I have, and I believe you are correct in your assessment that she seeks to know what is true."

I did not exactly expect Freeman to know who Attkisson is, but on the other hand, it made sense that a big-business guy would have heard of her. She is not someone I'd think Freeman would want on his case. And I noted he did not claim to be an admirer.

"Have you enjoyed the stories you've done so far? Have you been an advocate for the truth?"

"I enjoyed reporting on the boring little stories I've worked on so far. And I believe I've reported them truly. I expect to like it more and more as I get into better, bigger stories."

"OK. I'm looking for a young person to cover a campaign that's going to start tonight. It needs to be someone who will take an adversarial attitude, but with a commitment to the truth. Walt told me you're the right kind of guy. But this is not a job. There is no pay coming from me or the campaign. Any earnings would come from selling stories, a column, etc. And you'll have to do the selling yourself. All I'm doing is offering you inside access starting tonight. If you're interested, come to the Crossroads. There will be some people from the press in the banquet room at 7PM. I'll make an announcement and take some questions, and I hope you're there."

He stood up, and I could see it was time to go. "I'm sorry to wrap this up so quick. But I've got a bunch of things that suddenly need doing. I'd like to have you guys back soon, maybe watch the Sox or something like that. It was great having you here."

"How did you two become friends?"

Uncle Walt and Freeman looked at each other and laughed. Uncle Walt said "It's a pretty good story. We've got to get going now, but I'll tell you about it on the way home."

I walked up to Freeman and offered my hand. I told him it was a pleasure, and that I'd really enjoyed the breakfast. Both of these were true, despite my mistrust of big players. Freeman said he was glad to have met me, and to have had the opportunity to host me at his home. Although he was very polite and softspoken and friendly as could be, I got the feeling Freeman could rip my head off in a second, if that's what he decided to do. Some guys look like they'd be able to handle themselves in a bar fight, or that they are looking for a bar fight. Freeman's different. Freeman looks like he could kill everyone in the bar. Freeman is the only person I've ever encountered that actually looked lethal. This sounds strange, I know. But the guy looked like a deadly weapon.

"Walt, why don't you hang onto the Harley for a while? I'm going to be out of town for a week or two, and this weather is perfect for riding. Danny can drive your car back. Just keep me out of trouble with Arlene!"

Uncle Walt stopped smiling. "Out of town for a week or two?"

"Yeah, strange timing. Something came up right after tonight's meeting was scheduled. Doesn't seem like it'll be too big of a thing."

Uncle Walt was staring at Freeman. He walked up to him, they clasped hands and hugged, and Uncle Walt said something softly to Freeman that I could not hear. Then Freeman walked us over to the garage, and he actually seemed happy watching Uncle Walt start up the old Harley. I jumped in Uncle Walt's car and followed him down the driveway. Uncle had only gone 50 yards or so before he stopped to adjust his helmet. I looked back at Freeman and was startled to see him grab a few dirty plates and take them inside.

The drive from Freeman's to Uncle Walt's didn't take long, but plenty long enough for me to make up my mind. First off, I had nothing much to lose. Second, my folks and Uncle Walt would want me to do this. But as much as anything, Freeman was an impressive guy, to say the least. I wanted to see where this was going to lead.

Aunt Arlene was not thrilled with the Harley, but anything that made Uncle Walt happy was something she'd support, it seemed.

As Uncle Walt was driving me home, I asked him how he'd met Freeman.

"Have you decided whether you will cover his campaign?"

"Yes. I'll give it a go. Do you know what it's about?"

"Good! Yes, I know what it's about. It will surprise everybody, I think." He paused and smiled, then continued, "You're going to be hearing a lot of Freddy stories, so I guess the first one might as well come from me. You asked how I met Freddy."

"When I was a kid, I was big, with a bad attitude. And I'd been left back once, so I was older, too. I'm ashamed to think now how I was then. A bully, and I got away with it for quite a while. When I started my sophomore year in high school, I was still up to my old tricks, throwing my weight around for no reason other than I could. And there's a whole new crop of kids in school, the freshmen, to intimidate. A bunch of kids are shooting baskets in the schoolyard during lunch break, and I walk over and demand the ball. One of the kids tosses it to me, and I throw it out toward the woods, as far as I can. Then I turn back to the kid, and tell him to go get it so I can take another shot. Then one of the other freshmen tells me to get it myself. He's not a big kid or anything, didn't look special to me. So I tell him if HE doesn't get that ball right now, he's gonna get a beating! And this kid says something like FROM YOU? NOT LIKELY. So I walk up to him and I shove him hard, but he sort of slipped to the side, and he says DON'T PUSH ME. NOW YOU BRING THAT BALL BACK HERE. I can't believe this little freshman is talking to me like this!" Uncle Walt starts laughing and shakes his head. "So I tell him IN THE CLEARING, RIGHT NOW KID! There was a clearing out in the woods where kids used to go to fight. Not far from the school, but far enough so that whatever happened there could not be seen from the school. Everybody knew what THE CLEARING meant. By the time we get there, of course, we're trailing a bunch of kids who want to see the fight. We get into the clearing, and we kinda square off looking at each other. And I remember the expression on the kid's face. It was unnerving to me because this kid, whoever the heck he was, was not playing according to the script. The Clearing was my zone, and I wasn't even expecting him to go there, but here he is standing in front of me, and his face was a mixture of amusement and curiosity. So

I step forward and give him a big shove in the chest, which is how fights usually started in those days. But he slipped the push again, and he slapped me real hard across the face, and it was loud! I take a swing at him, and he dodges the punch and slaps me across the head again. I'm going after him with my fists, I try to grab him, whatever, I can't do it. He just kind of dances and dodges and he's slapping me and then he kicks me in the backside! I can't believe this, and I start really going nuts, and he starts really teeing off on me. He trips me a couple of times, and he's slapping me across the face pretty much at will. He's making a mockery of me, and I just stop fighting and look around, not knowing what to do. And then this kid walks up real close to me, and he says quiet, so nobody else can hear, YOU CAN BE SOMEBODY. That little kid was Freddy. My best friend, after Arlene."

----- 003 -----

I got to The Crossroads 90 minutes early. I was ready to take notes, pictures, and my phone was able to record audio and video too, which Uncle Walt had said would be OK.

Nobody was in the Banquet Room, so I just sat out at the bar and nursed a beer to see who would show up. It was still well before 7 when out-of-towners starting walking in and heading for the Banquet Room. I followed along, but this time I was stopped at the door and asked for my press credentials. When I did not have any, the man asked if I was Danny Banks, and let me pass. How about that?

There were actually people here that I recognized. Pretty big-name reporters, a local news crew, a network news crew. Wow, I was becoming a reporter, judging by the people in this room!

Freeman came to the front of the room a couple of minutes early, and made small talk with "us media people". He was wearing a suit and tie, and I was glad I'd done the same. This was an opportunity to observe him with nobody paying much attention to me, and I watched him closely as he talked with the others. He was at ease, as if he'd done this, or things like this, plenty of times, which no doubt he had. But also, it seemed as if these people liked Freeman, or at least, were fine with being here and didn't mind some gentle back and forth. My initial impressions of Freeman's presence, vivid as they were, were underscored, if anything, as I watched him now. Built like a cross between a triathlete and shotputter ... and he was over 50 now. But again, I felt I could see in his face and his eyes that he'd done things that were really out there. If he wasn't so friendly and polite, he'd be one scary son of a gun. I wondered if other people could see that. I wondered if it was just my imagination, although I was pretty certain it wasn't.

Exactly at 7, Freeman began the meeting. None of us knew what this announcement was about.

First he thanked us all for being there on short notice, and asked if everyone had found acceptable lodging. Everybody had. I got the feeling he was ready to offer a room to anyone who needed.

Freeman started out by telling us there wasn't any need to take notes. He told us everything he was going to lay out tonight was available on a new website. He pointed at a banner in the front of the room. Just go to SWEEP16.com and we can read it at leisure. Tonight, he said, he was going to put forth a plan, and take questions. But he began by asking all of us:

"Will you help? Don't answer now, just keep that question in mind. Will you do your share, voluntarily?" He said nothing for several seconds, just looked at each of us in turn.

He flipped over a large chalkboard behind him, which read:

FREEDOM!

FINANCIAL FREEDOM, PERSONAL FREEDOM.

PERSONAL OPTIONS.

TWICE THE MONEY. HALF THE PRICE.

LESS DIVORCE. MORE MARRIAGE. MORE CHILDREN.

LESS STRESS. MORE SECURITY.

A FAR STRONGER, MORE UNIFIED USA.

He turned back to us, and gestured toward the blackboard. "That's what we should have." He continued, informally, without notes. He paced around some, and locked eyes with each of us from time to time. He laid out some specific points, one by one, pausing for a few seconds after each one:

"Freedom is the essential idea of America. The foundation of our Country. Here in New Hampshire, every motor vehicle says LIVE FREE OR DIE. And yet, I've come to believe that the very thing that was designed to enable us to safeguard and extend our Freedom has become an enemy of our Freedom."

His bearing had changed as he said this. Very different from the guy I'd just met. As if the words he'd just said caused him pain and sadness.

"Federal Government's gotten too big, too intrusive, too arrogant, too restrictive and involved in way too many things."

"It's become hideously expensive."

"It's run up astounding debt and interest payments are a burden."

"It's run up even more astounding unfunded liabilities, and these debts are burdening future generations. Some say an American baby born today is \$200,000 in debt."

But his mood had changed again and the extremely friendly face was showing wonderment along with a mix of negative emotions.

"Federal taxes cause enormous friction and dislocation."

"Some of our best minds spend their time simply dancing with the government."

"You can't make a move in business until your accountant works the tax angles."

This didn't really mean much to me, and I don't know if it mattered much to a room full of reporters either.

"But worse than all that, with so many laws, people have come to believe the law defines morality, as Confucius predicted. Individual behavior has become far too government-directed. Almost as if government has become a sort of conscience, telling us far too often what we must not do, and even what we must do."

Actually, I thought this last was pretty much true, and in fact I thought that was part of the role of the government ... the law guiding us along to right and wrong.

"And worst of all, people have become dependent upon government instead of each other. The Founders declared Independence from a government that was in many ways far less oppressive than ours."

He'd changed again, and I knew everyone could see this was extremely important to him. I will admit to paying almost no attention to government and politics, but I did not think of our federal government as oppressive at all.

Then he pointed at the blackboard again. "Prices are double what they should be. And we have only half as much money as we ought to. Please think for a second what that would mean. Fewer divorces, more marriages, more children. Less financial and emotional stress. More financial and emotional security, which in turn opens up far more personal options. And all we have to do is get out of our own way. Let people do what they want to do."

He was behind the podium now, hands on his hips. Nobody had commented or questioned him, but I could tell there was disbelief in the room. Freeman nodded, but didn't speak for a bit, as if he was waiting for someone to chime in.

"Very little of our present federal government was envisioned by the Founders. The people who gave us the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were creating a Nation based on maximizing individual Freedom. The Founders knew that those in government seek to expand the powers of government, and so our Constitution is very clearly designed to sharply limit the power of the federal government. Nevertheless, over the decades, the legislators and the courts have slowly but enormously expanded the role and the power of the federal government. And largely because the

expansion has been generally gradual, the expansion has been mostly accepted by the People, and in many cases even welcomed."

I was seated in the rear, and had a good view of the group and the talk. Freeman had everyone's attention.

"Many of us fully embrace, whether consciously or unconsciously, the idea that government is supposed to watch over us, smooth the bumps in life, satisfy our wants. But this is not the vision of the Founders, and it is not the way to national greatness or personal dignity. The Founders understood government ultimately depends upon force. But force, and the threat of force, is inimical to Liberty, the Pursuit of Happiness and Individual Responsibility."

"Americans should be bound together by our understanding and love for each other, and our love of the concepts that underlie the American Way. We should look to and after each other. And Big Government is an obstacle. What's more, the results of much federal spending are actually perverse. That is, much federal spending is actually harmful, producing results that are the opposite of stated intent. Most of us believe a dollar in the hands of the government is a good thing. I believed this myself for a long time. But not any more. A dollar in the hands of government is AT BEST a necessary evil. Money is a tool for the use of the people who earned it. Let them decide what to do with it. We are greatest when we are Freeest."

"The power to tax -- the ability to confiscate our earnings -- enables Big Government. Congress has about 12% approval rate. Why let them take whatever they want? We must eliminate the ability of the federal government to take our money. When the federal government exists only upon voluntary remittances -- gifts freely given -- it will cease to be oppressive, and we will support voluntarily the government we want."

"And so tonight is about the announcement of SWEEP16, an effort to abolish the 16th Amendment to the United States Constitution, the Amendment that created the federal income tax in 1913. Constitutional scholars tell me even without the 16th, the feds would have other ways and powers to tax us. But, the 16th is the big one. And the important thing is the government can only do what we permit. So if we change enough minds and hearts, the laws and customs will follow. Margaret Thatcher said WIN THE ARGUMENT, THEN WIN THE VOTE."

"We can repeal the 16th with a 2/3 majority in each house of Congress and approval by 3/4 of the States. In more basic terms, we probably need to convince about 2/3 of the voters. My guess is we get 40%-50% almost automatically. As for the producers, the people who actually pay the freight now, well over half of them, probably 3/4 of them, I believe, would freely give 10% to the feds and various other worthy recipients. That'd be plenty."

"I'm going to devote the great majority of my time, energy and money to this effort. I'm winding up all business activities. Resigning, quitting, withdrawing. Selling assets and moving to cash. A lot of it's done already. About 95% of everything will be moved into the SWEEP16 Trust. The money will be used to promote the cause, mostly by funding projects that have generally been funded by government, but

should not be. We may also use some of the money to create and distribute educational materials. The 5% or so of my wife's and my assets we do keep will be retained by Martine for the maintenance of the family, particularly in the event of my death or incapacitation."

"For the last 20 years or so, Martine and me and our family have done lots of volunteer work, plus a great deal of anonymous philanthropy. As part of the SWEEP16 effort, we'll make some of that public. And whatever we do from now on will be done in the name of SWEEP16."

"Of course, we invite all of you, all Americans, and anyone else, to participate."

"Thanks Again for coming. Any questions?"

WHAT??? There was a loud buzzing in the room. Obviously there were going to be a lot of questions. For me, this did not make sense. First of all, it was a nutso idea, scrapping taxes and forcing the government to live on handouts? Secondly, if he was going to give away almost all his dough, what was in it for him? Did he actually believe in this nutso idea?

The first question would have been the same no matter who Freddy called on. He picked a tall guy he called Big Tom for the first question. And sure enough, Big Tom's face and voice were a mixture of laughter and disbelief when he said something like "Do I have this correct? You are going to give away nearly all that you have and devote yourself to an effort to abolish the federal income tax?"

"Yes, I cannot think of anything that would have a more positive impact on our country than the abolition of federal taxation. And I believe the people who are paying the bills now would continue to do so voluntarily."

"Why would people pay tax if they didn't have to?"

"The great majority of people pulling the wagon now would continue to do so, and a lot of people who do not now pay tax would contribute ... all voluntarily."

"But why would they?"

Freeman had a mischievous look on his face. "Will you do your share? ... I hope you don't mind my asking ... "

Big Tom opened his mouth, but caught himself. Then he took a breath and seemed about to speak, but again stayed silent. Freeman was staring at him. Finally Big Tom said simply "Yes, I will."

"So will I!" exclaimed a small woman wearing a bright dress. Everyone chuckled a little, and Freeman gave her a smile that I could see a lot of people would work for. When I'd first met the guy, I knew I didn't want him for an enemy. But that smile, weirdly, made me automatically, instinctively, want to be his friend, and this made me angry. As if I was being conned.

Freeman took a few steps to his left, then turned to us again.

"Freedom is the vision of the Founders, and the income tax is the single biggest enemy of Freedom in our Country. The greater our Freedom, the greater we become. Without a federal income tax, our wealth would double in 4 years. Think of all the overhead, friction, waste that would be eliminated. Think of all the nonsense people do to comply with federal tax law, and the gyrations, how it changes every year. Think of all the great people who spend their careers learning how to deal with it. Think of all the bookkeeping that could be dispensed with. Imagine everyone's paycheck without the federal tax bites. Imagine doing business without having to figure out how much of your profits were actually yours? Imagine a business that was free to serve its customers without having to deal with the distortions imposed by the federal tax code. Maybe most of all, imagine how a big boost in buying power would change lives, particularly for those of us who are struggling. How many working families would be able to cut back or eliminate one of their jobs and devote more time and energy to family matters? Most observers claim financial stress is the biggest cause of divorce. Large numbers of young Americans are not marrying, are not having children, because of economic difficulties. The positive social impacts of greater economic wellbeing are enormous."

He must have caught a look from someone up front, because he stopped and nodded and his face said YES, AMAZING BUT I AM CONVINCED OF THIS.

"And as we all know, government dispenses mountains of dough to businesses and to wealthy people. Lobbying politicians is one of the highest-return activities for some businesses. Think of the huge amount of theft from government, and the huge efforts to prevent it. Most of what the government does is take money from one of us to give to another ... and even to give back to the guy who paid it in the first place. Most of our politics is about who is going get taxed and who is going to get tax dollars. That is not what America should be doing."

"Can you give us an example of an expensive distortion?"

"Sure, lots of them, and there are dozens of examples on the website. When most people get a job, they don't even know what their after-tax pay is going to be. You know what your salary is, but you don't really know what you will be good to spend. We're used to it, but that's pretty weird if you think about it."

"Or suppose you want to buy a car for \$10,000. Do you know how much you have to earn pre-tax in order to be able to pay the \$10k? That's the TRUE cost of the car, and most people do not know. I don't know myself, except very roughly. And it varies a lot depending upon how and where the money is earned and where it is spent! If you're in a high-sales-tax area, you'll have to pay maybe \$10,800 to buy the car. If you have a good job in a state with high income taxes, you'll have to earn maybe \$18,000 pre-tax. And if you've got some wealth behind you, and your money comes from dividends, you might need to earn well over \$30,000, if you count the 35% federal taxes, plus state taxes, paid by your stock holdings before you get your dividends. Poisonous!"

That sounded almost incredible to me, and I decided I'd have to try to verify it somehow. Nobody said anything, but Freeman must have seen incredulous looks on other people's faces, because he nodded his head and said "Yes, really. We have a page on the website, sort of a calculator, where you can plug

in locations and earnings and see what things will cost in terms of pre-tax earnings. The calculator shows the tax impact at each step of the way. A lot of people will be surprised by the numbers there. Average earners work three or four days to buy what they'd otherwise earn in two ... government essentially raising prices directly 50%-100% via taxation." He sipped some water and continued.

"Imagine you want to build some houses. You buy a piece of land and divide it into 10 lots. You do your surveys, engineering infrastructure work, permitting, etc., etc. It takes you a year from the time you first buy the land until you get the green light to sell. Altogether, you've spent \$500,000 and countless hours of your time. You get lucky and sell a lot right away for \$75k. You might think you're now down only \$425,000, but the IRS says you have made a \$25k profit upon which you must pay income tax plus self-employment tax. They say each lot cost you \$50k so you made \$25k on the first one and you have to pay tax now. If you never sell the rest of the lots, the IRS will tell you your profit was \$25,000. It's similar if you sell shoes. Spend a million bucks on inventory, and you have to pay tax on the first pair of shoes you sell. The net is the government gets their money, but the people who buy the houses or the shoes will have to pay a lot more than they otherwise would have. So not only do you have this goofy accounting, but you have to pay somebody to do the goofy accounting, and all the record-keeping to support it. So the merchant has to charge more for the shoes because of this tax situation, and that of course means you have to earn more as a customer to pay for not only your own taxes but the merchant's tax burden too. You might have to work all day to earn the money to pay for that pair of shoes, whereas without government interference you'd have them paid for by lunchtime or before."

This would have been boring to me, but he had me thinking with this last example. I'd bought some running shoes for myself with money I'd earned myself, and the shoes I wanted cost what to me was a lot. I had never thought of the government driving up the cost of those shoes.

Freeman was still going. "Same story for us up here working timber. If we spend a million bucks on equipment, we can only count that as a business expense according to ever-changing rules. And rarely do they ever permit the entire expense to be deducted when the money is spent. And when they do, it's because they've decided to boost some business or other ... using the tax code to dole out rewards, and favor one type of business or expenditure over another. Favor a big campaign donor. We've not even scratched the surface here ... "

Someone shouted out "Corporate welfare!"

Freeman nodded vigorously with a smile ... "Yeah, THANKS! Tens of billions a year in direct subsidies, last I heard. Who'd spend their own money on THAT?! Studies have been published claiming that corporate welfare costs the average American family thousands of dollars per year. This would include not only direct subsidies but also tariffs, price supports, loan guarantees, suppression of competition and even forced purchases. A lot of corporate welfare would disappear if DC could not levy tax. A family friend, Henry Robinson, has been doing reviewing research in this area. He feels our largest banks owe their entire profit margin to the savings and competitive advantages achieved by the widespread belief that the federal government would use tax dollars rather than let them fail. He's also pointed me to some research claiming \$1 spent on lobbying returns an average of over \$700 in

government largesse. I'm not in a position to disagree. We'll need to put more of that sort of material on SWEEP16.com."

After a short pause, he continued.

"Or think this over. Let's say a carpenter and an electrician earn about the same daily wage. Can a carpenter take one day's pay and hire an electrician? No way! If the carpenter and the electrician get together, and trade a day's work, they'll both be happy, but the feds will say that is barter and they will want a cut of it. It's actually illegal for the carpenter and the electrician to privately help each other out for a day. That's considered tax evasion via barter. Not exactly Freedom."

A man in the back of the room to my right called out "What about The Flat Tax?"

"Thanks, yes, I agree a flat tax would be a big improvement from where we are now. And for several reasons. But to me the unacceptable problem with a flat tax is that DC could still raise it, create exemptions, penalties, etc., and I think we'd soon end up more or less right where we are now. It's the same with a Value-Added Tax, a VAT. Once the politicians get a way to tax, they just keep ratcheting it upwards. And what's worse, much worse, is that the clear trend, worldwide, is that increasing government revenue ... increasing the tax payments governments extract from their people ... has a VERY strong tendency to actually increase debt. In the USA, when the feds get an extra dollar, they spend a LOT MORE than a buck. DC just cannot be trusted with the power to tax. Our website offers a lot of information and sources about the correlation between revenue and spending and VATs and their effects. It's crazy."

The woman with the bright outfit, maybe 30 years old, spoke again. "But how would vital services be funded?"

"Thanks Jenna". Freeman knew her name too, and I recognized Jenna Jersey, who'd been writing a very popular syndicated column for a few years. She was something of a phenom for having gotten her own space so young. "Voluntarily. First off, we'd discover in a hurry that a lot of what the feds do is a long way from vital. Second, whatever is vital will be funded. People will see a need, and pay for it. This is something should have been brought up earlier. Most people will be happy to help ... so long as they believe help is deserved. People will give without being asked, and will feel good because doing right is good. Sure, some people feel good about paying their taxes now, but how much better when your help is rendered voluntarily, and even unasked? Also, a lot of stuff the federal gov does now it will no longer do. A lot of it nobody will do because it doesn't need doing."

"So what about something like the FDA?"

"That'd be gone, I'm pretty sure. You know well plenty of us believe the feds have no role telling somebody whether she can have some drug or not. And as far as safety and efficacy, there's no reason why private labs can't be in the business of testing and certifying drugs or medical procedures. If the benefits exceed the costs, people will do it voluntarily. Let the patients and doctors and insurance companies decide for themselves. Of course, some states will get involved, and some won't."

"How about housing for the poor, or foodstamps, or college grants? What about Medicaid?"

"How many people receiving aid from those programs would be self-sufficient if not for the extreme economic destruction caused by our federal tax regime?" Freeman paused for a second and then addressed the question more directly. "One of the first things to wonder about is the perversity of government programs. People are rewarded for their dependency and penalized for independence. That's not the basic idea of course, but that is how it works. And pragmatically speaking, after 50 years or so and untold trillions of expenditures, nobody would say we've made progress in the War on Poverty. We've got 73 million people on Medicaid now. If anything, poverty is winning. Lack of money is more of a symptom of poverty than the cause."

"But also, there are some really fundamental questions that we don't address very often. How do you decide who deserves public assistance? How much money a person makes? How much money a person has? What if a guy drives a brand new expensive car, but he's got no money to send his kid to college? Should his kid be subsidized by a family that drives old cars and gets no college grant for their kid? Should he have to sell the fancy car first? What about a family that takes a vacation to Europe every year? Can they get government help? What about a family with two parents each working 60 hours a week to pay for their own two kids to go to school. Should they be forced to subsidize a family with 6 kids, one job?"

"Most people would say someone with a good buck in the bank should not get government help. Fine, but often it will turn out that person with a good buck worked hard and scrimped and saved. Why should that person be denied government assistance in favor of a guy who loafed and spent and now has no resources as a result of his daily decisions?"

"Or, more fundamentally, in our system of free-market capitalism, you make money by doing what other people value. So, how much money you've made is one measure of how much other people approved of what you've been up to. If other people have not approved very much, why should you be rewarded by the government forcibly confiscating other people's money and giving it to you?"

Freeman looked around and seemed to catch the eye of a number of people. The group was still paying attention, and he seemed like he wanted to make sure he wasn't losing people before he continued.

"Here's another way to look at it. You cannot create \$1000 worth of good by spending \$1000 worth of tax revenue. Collecting \$1000 tax from someone changes that person's behavior in unkind or non-productive ways. The taxpayer incurs accounting and other overhead expenses. The government itself must spend some of that money maintaining the bureaucracy that collects the taxes. Federal government then spends more money disbursing the \$1000. A large percentage of that disbursement is stolen. The recipients of the federal benefits often use their checks in ways that were not intended. And then, of course, the government support reinforces the dependency of the recipients, and even creates among some recipients the feeling that somehow they are owed public support. The late senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan once wrote, IT CANNOT TOO OFTEN BE STATED THAT THE ISSUE OF WELFARE IS NOT WHAT IT COSTS THOSE WHO PROVIDE IT, BUT WHAT IT COSTS THOSE WHO RECEIVE IT." He paused here to let that line sink in, and I reflected on my Dad telling me Martin Luther King had

said how harmful it was to give people money for doing nothing. Nodding his head solemnly, he continued, "I do not think you can create even \$500 worth of good with the thousand bucks."

Freeman stopped again, I guess to see if there were questions, but there weren't. The audience was quiet and still seemed interested.

"These kinds of arguments can go on and on and on. But the most fundamental question is: WHY SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT BE INVOLVED AT ALL? What could be more American than SWEEP16? Why not just let people do what they want to do with their own money? If somebody needs help for whatever reason, why not get that help from family, friends, church group, co-workers, civic organization, charitable organization? Or state or local government programs. If none of those groups are willing to help, then it is pretty likely that somebody doesn't deserve the help. If you've treated the people around you right, they won't let you down when you need them."

"And that's the BIGGEST problem of Big Government. It gets in the way of how we should relate to each other. The government should not be taking and giving according to a thousand byzantine rules. We must care for each other because we want to. Free choices driven by our own sense of right and wrong and love."

There was some more silence, and people looking around at each other again. But the feeling in the room was not one of ridicule or puzzlement. There was mirth. But more than anything, there was wonder. And I will say, it was startling to me to hear this guy who looks like a warrior talking about love.

"Something else very important ... often overlooked. Our financial well-being ... our wealth ... has a strong bearing on our emotional and physical well-being. The newspapers tell us half of American marriages end in divorce, caused by financial problems more than anything else. SWEEP16 will be huge for the strength of our families and individual dignity."

Jenna Jersey spoke again, but her voice sounded very different than before. "Why are you doing this?"

Freeman fixed on her, and I saw something on his face that made me wonder about their relationship.

"All these years I've been chasing around the globe, fighting for Freedom, fighting the enemies of Freedom, the enemies of America. Lately I have come to believe that in important ways, the biggest, most powerful enemy of American Freedom is our own government. It hurts me to say that. Our own government is the enemy of our economic Freedom, and as economic Freedom is reduced, so will fall our other Freedoms."

I expected someone to protest this statement. I wanted to, but didn't know exactly what to say, and felt I did not have the standing to speak up anyway. My view of the federal government as a huge force for good was being contradicted, and it made me kind of angry.

After a few seconds, an older guy who'd been quiet half stood, and spoke. "So we got the basic idea ... how in the heck do you figure to implement a Constitutional Amendment? That could take many, MANY years. What are your next steps?"

"Two great Chinese philosophers have given us guidance. Lao-tzu wrote something like THE JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WHERE YOU STAND, WITH A SINGLE STEP. Confucius, about 50 years younger, tells us IT DOES NOT MATTER HOW SLOW YOU GO, SO LONG AS YOU DO NOT STOP. We'll publicize SWEEP16, show people how it can work, spend a lot of time on the road. We have a lot of ideas, but they will need to wait a little bit. I'm going to be out of circulation for a couple weeks. The timing is not so good, but a couple of weeks is not a big deal. I'm sorry, but I need to attend to a few things right away."

When Freeman said he would be out of circulation, I felt the mood change. This meeting had something of a festive feel, but in an instant it had become very serious.

Big Tom stood up and said "Good Luck, Freddy. Take care of yourself. Do what you need to do, and Thank You very much for your service." There was a general rumble of agreement from the group, everyone sort of echoing Big Tom.

Freeman did not verbally acknowledge those remarks. He nodded, with a sort of tight-lipped smile. "The bar and grill are available to all of you, and I think you'll find this is a fine place to enjoy an evening, especially at this time of year. Last thing: I'd like to introduce Danny Banks, the nephew of a close friend. Danny's just earned his degree from Newhouse, and he is going to be covering SWEEP16 full-time. He won't be paid by me or by SWEEP16, although he will sometimes travel with us free. We felt it very important to have a young person involved from the get go. He will have full access to everything going on. He'll be needing to find a publisher for his columns. Please, I hope you old pros can hook him up with some paying publishers. Again, Thank You Very Much for being here."

And that was pretty much it. Freeman was gone. And much to my surprise and somewhat to my discomfort, I was suddenly the center of attention in the room! A bunch of people were focused on me, and Wilson Gibson, a big-deal TV newsman, walked up and introduced himself. Several others followed suit, and I was not ready for this. I was polite, at least, but a long way from a business professional. Gibson just smiled and suggested we all grab some food and drink, which sounded pretty good to me. We ordered a couple of pitchers and pizzas, and I could not really believe I was sitting there with these stone-cold pros. They asked me about school a little, and were particularly curious about how Freeman picked me.

When I told them I'd only just met Freeman that morning, they thought it was very funny.

Big Tom introduced himself as Tim. He is about 6-6, so it was obvious why Freeman called him Big. When I asked why Freeman called him Big TOM, he said he assumed it was his initials, Tim O'Malley. He said he'd never asked Freeman for an explanation tho. I wondered whether I should call him Big Tom or Tim, and decided on Mr O'Malley. But actually, as we sat together, all of these adults in their 30s, 40s

and 50s told me to use their first names, as if I was an actual colleague. I admit to being kind of jazzed over this.

Gibson asked me if I had any idea how to go about getting my work bought and paid for, and they looked at each other and kind of laughed and shook their heads when I told them I had no idea and had barely even thought about it. It was clear they thought I was a lucky pup, but Gibson spelled it out for me. "Danny, this idea of Freeman's is crazy. But the public will eat it up. It's a great -- make that unbelievably great -- opportunity for you. Understand: this can make your whole career, right here. Do everything you can to jump on this train. We'll be glad to provide you with contact info for some agents and publishers. Be careful. Talk it over with your advisors, your family. You've been dropped into the big time. Would you mind telling me ... did Freeman interview you? What was he looking for?"

"Really, I think all he wanted was a young person who believes in being a journalist and is determined to tell the truth."

They all looked at each other again, and nodded and smiled.

"What do you guys think of Freeman? You're here, that says something. But what is your impression of him as a person? Is he really going to take a shot at this?"

They all agreed Freeman would take his shot, and Jenna spoke to me for the first time. "You've got a tremendous opportunity here Danny, if you don't mind my saying so, I think you need to really bear down and do everything you can to get Freeman's story out. I agree completely with Willie. We all do. As for Freeman, covering him will be a trip, and it may not be easy to keep up. I've been following him for years. He's not normal. He has more energy, more drive, more intensity than probably anyone I've encountered. If I was going to say one thing about him, he is MORE ALIVE than anybody else I can think of. I've written about him some. People like him a lot. People respect him. He is a leader, and I doubt he'll care if everybody thinks he's certifiable. He'll do what he told us he would do, and he won't look back to see who's with him." I found it hard to believe Jenna Jersey was talking to me and I was off balance just thinking about what was happening. "Freeman will take his shot, just as he says, I am sure. Heaven knows where it will lead, but I can promise you it will be interesting as all get out, and likely a lot of fun too." She gave me a long smiling look, and I had the feeling she was remembering her own early days. "I know some people who can help you with getting published." She gave me her card. "Send me a mail and I'll reply with a couple of agents for you to contact."

They all looked at me in silence, smiling, and I realized it was time for me to leave. Obviously I wasn't privy to the inner circle yet!

I went back to the bar, and sat next to Uncle Walt. "Pretty big day for you, Mr Reporter!"

"Unc ... I didn't realize until tonight what an opportunity this is. Did you see the people I was just sitting with? Serious people who've earned a name for themselves. They told me this is an opportunity of a lifetime. Thanks Uncle Walt."

"Do whatever you can to get the job done. Remember what you are supposed to do?"

"Yes sir", I said 'sir' to show gratitude. "Tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It will be my pleasure AND my commitment."

I asked Uncle Walt about Freeman skipping out so abruptly, and why Uncle Walt had whispered to him, and why the other reporters had suddenly changed the mood. Uncle told me he did not really know exactly what Freeman was up to ... Freeman didn't talk about it. But he did know he still worked for the US Government in some kind of military capacity, and that his work was apparently extremely dangerous, just based on various injuries he'd been accumulating pretty steadily for years. A lot of people understood this, and that was why the mood of the reporters had changed.

"Freeman looks to me like a ninja or something. He looks like a serious athlete, but more than that ... he looks like ... he's done some heavy duty stuff. And he actually looks deadly. Like nobody I've ever seen before."

"Yes, you're right about that. He looks like what he is, or at least what he can be. And, I'm pretty comfortable saying you've not encountered anybody like him before. And you probably won't again. Danny, like I said this morning. Freddy is my best friend. I could tell you a lot of things about him, but I don't want you to hear much from me. I'm your Uncle and he's my friend. You need to dig. Talk to a lot of people. I'll tell you a few things from time to time, maybe. I'll tell you this much now. Freddy lives on the edge, at 100 miles per hour. He might not come back from wherever he's going. Or he might not be whole if he does come back. You should always savor your time with friends and family and anyone you value. You should savor every day. Freddy showed me that. And with Freddy more than anyone else, I always have to remember that each time I see him could be the last. So he said he'd be gone for a week or two. That gives you some time to do research, and figure out how the heck you are going to capitalize on this opportunity."

"When you whispered to Freeman this morning, what did you say?"

Uncle Walt was silent for a few seconds, and didn't look at me. But he said "I told him I knew whatever he was going to do was right, and worth doing, and that I love him."

It was my turn to be quiet for a bit. Then I asked Uncle Walt exactly how I came into this picture.

"Freddy asked a few of us if we know of any young journalists. And you are the only one any of us knew."

"That was it?"

"He said it's got to be a kid with a total commitment to the truth. He told us he was starting a campaign to abolish the federal income tax, repeal the 16th Amendment. We all laughed about it, but Freddy's always serious when he says he's going to do something. This is pretty extreme, even for him, but we all knew he meant it. I didn't know he was giving away his money until tonight tho."

"And I'm free to write and report whatever I see, and basically turn covering this campaign into--"

Uncle Walt interrupted me "Freddy calls it SWEEP16."

"and I should turn my coverage of SWEEP16 into something I can use to earn a living?"

"Yes. Your coverage and your access. You've got access that nobody else does. He'll answer your questions, take your calls whenever. You'll be able to see whatever he does, wherever he goes on SWEEP16, you can go. You can be at all the meetings, nothing's going to be off-limits or off the record. At least, nothing to do with SWEEP16."

"What if he decides it's not working out? Or what if I decide it's not right?"

"The way it is at the quarry, anybody can quit anytime. And anyone can be fired at any time, for any reason or no reason. I would guess it's the same with you, although because you're my family, you'd get a lot of leeway, and I expect that is why Freddy didn't tell you what I just did."

"Well, you should know something about me, maybe. No doubt Freeman's a special guy. But ... basically I just don't like bigshots. Piling up huge piles of cash off the labor of other people. You can't get to be somebody like that without exploiting a lot of people. I don't care how good of a guy he acts like, he's not going to get any slack from me. It's not enough that the rich are always getting richer. Now he's trying to make it so they get a free ride too? I'm not going to be writing the puff pieces he expects."

"Perfect."

"What do you mean, 'perfect'?"

"Freddy told me he wanted a young person partly because he wants somebody who doesn't give a dang that he's some rich guy, and he actually said he'd prefer somebody who doesn't like rich people. A man in Freddy's position has always got people after him for something. If you automatically think he's a creep, he doesn't have to worry about that. He didn't tell me this part, but I'm sure there's another reason he wanted a kid who doesn't like rich people. He wants to do to you what he did to me." Uncle Walt gave me a real sly look with that last line.

"What?"

"You figure it out. I've already told you more than I wanted."

"Well, you're right. He won't have to worry about me kissing his backside. But anyway, it's an insane idea. The American people would just never put up with rich people paying nothing. There'd be way too much opposition. This won't last long."

"You're right about the opposition, but you're wrong about the duration. Another reason why he wants to get youth involved is he wants SWEEP16 to last ... for decades, if that's how long it takes. I agree it's

an over-the-top idea. But I'll tell you one last thing for tonight. There's a saying among Freddy's old friends: BET ON FRED."

----- 004 -----

I got up early, and looked over the business cards people had given me last night. I couldn't quite believe it, and I was pretty stoked as I entered the contact info into my phone. Wilson Gibson. Jenna Jersey. HA!

Running these beautiful woods roads on a summer morning is wonderful, and biking is often even better than that. Running for me is a way to both clear my mind and develop ideas, and I always feel great after a couple of miles. Biking can be that way too, if the roads are as empty as they are around here. Not that I'm actually much of a runner or a rider, but enough so that it can feel great. I'd hardly stopped thinking about last night, and I knew I needed to do two things while Freeman was away. Learn about Freeman, and contact some media outlets to see if in fact anyone did want to pay me for reporting on what I was allowed to see.

There was plenty of info on Freeman. Way more of a businessman than I had known. Big-time football player. I didn't know that, but it seemed par for the course, with everything else I was finding. Business savior, Navy SEAL, long military career. Decorated. Lifelong martial arts student. Multiple languages. Weapons expert. Class president in high school. Born on the 4th of July, for Pete's sake. Did not see a word about philanthropy. He'd said last night that had been done in private. It will be interesting to see what comes out there.

And I could only wonder what he was up to now. Making this crazy announcement and then disappearing in a cloud of smoke. What kind of a stunt was that? But what Uncle Walt had said about maybe never seeing him again ... that did have me thinking. That could be true of anyone. But Uncle Walt said it was more true of Freeman than anybody else.

I found myself headed toward town, and realized there was a coffee shop and newsstand a mile or two ahead. Something to drink and a newspaper would be great. I grabbed a pint of OJ from the cooler and two newspapers off the rack, and went outside to read. The headline of the Northern Record, Big Tom's paper, read 'BILLIONAIRE PLEDGES HIS FORTUNE' and the subhead, 'Freddy Freeman: Kill the Income Tax'. They thought it was big. But the Manhattan Times had nothing to say in the news sections at all, near as I could tell. They did address Freeman ... on the editorial page. Seems they have about the same opinion as me. Silly stunt, not impressed, ridiculous idea. The Northern Record, tho, took it more seriously. But mostly from the philanthropic perspective. They wondered how much money exactly he had, and what he would do with it. They also speculated about what kind of donations he'd made in the past. He'd long been suspected of being involved with quite a few significant anonymous donations that had funded schools, hospitals, a home for battered women,

university research, scholarships, lights for high school stadiums. The Record dismissed SWEEP16 itself as a wacky idea.

So, at this point it looks like I'm dropped into the middle of a human interest story centered on an eccentric billionaire with a crazy idea.

This was a nice place to sit for a bit. Outside at the edge of the patio, a respectable distance from the other patrons, I did not feel too guilty being here at the end of 10 miles of biking. Freedom, New Hampshire is a nice little town, and this seat afforded me a view down Main Street. Not a lot of activity, but enough to watch while I wondered why a guy like Freeman stayed here, and what it was like to grow up here.

When the waitress came by to check on me, I was a little surprised at how attractive she was. I did not see her when I came in. I ordered a muffin and showed her the BILLIONAIRE PLEDGE headline. Did she have any thoughts?

"He comes here sometimes. He's just the nicest guy. Always in a good mood, always so friendly and polite. And a really great tipper. I mean, if his bill is \$3 or \$4, he leaves a ten. I bet everybody here would tell you pretty much the same. And I have to say he is a handsome man. Rugged, like he climbs mountains or something." She looked at me and shrugged her shoulders, and I thought she was done. But she added "He likes to be outside, at least, when he comes alone. He'll sit out here on the patio when everybody else is inside. It's funny to see someone put on a jacket to serve him out here." She turned and walked away a few steps, then she turned back toward me and said "He knows my name. He's a bigshot. Everybody knows him. But he knows my name. I mean, I ran into him in the parking lot at the supermarket, and he remembered my name."

"Thanks ... " I said, as I glanced down at her nametag. But she was too far for me to read it. "Doreen", she smiled. "I'm Danny. Real nice to meet you, and Thank You for your thoughts."

I was sure I'd remember her name, but I was in no position to leave big tips, that was also sure. Doreen was really nice, and I was startled to find myself thinking it would be great to be loaded, and leave big tips as a matter of course.

Where to next? Too early for The Crossroads. That will be tonight. Should I check with Big Tom? Maybe tomorrow. After some thought, I left \$3 for a tip. Somewhere between 50 and 100%. Was I trying to keep up with Freeman? Or just do something nice for Doreen? Both?

When I went inside, Doreen was working the register. "Margie said the same thing about Freddy. Great guy, great tipper, knows her name."

"Thanks, Doreen!"

But what next about this Freeman business? I decided to ask my college advisor for advice! As I pedaled back to the house I mentally composed an email. He would be highly amused by this situation. Professor Bidwell had made a real name for himself exposing industry pollution in the 1970s. Some

large corporations had been forced to pay huge fines and damages, and a few of the worst-offending executives had actually gone to prison. He'd gone into teaching in the 80s and had inspired me and many others with a strong desire to expose the misdeeds of the rich and powerful. He'd have a lot to tell me now, I was sure.

As I thought about what I'd write Doc Bidwell, I realized I should have discussed all this with my folks, at first opportunity. I apologized to my folks for not discussing this with them sooner, but I'd been excited, and wanted to make my own decision. Fortunately, they were fine with my keeping quiet a little, and backed me up, as they almost always did. Dad pointed out I might run up some pretty good travel expenses before I got anybody to buy my reports, if anyone ever did. Yes, true, talk about missing the obvious. I had no resources of my own, and it would be improper to accept Freeman's dime for food or lodging. Travel might be OK, if I was on a bus or something that he'd rented. Mom and Dad looked at each other, and Mom said they could lend me what I needed for a while, until we had a better idea how this would play out.

Dad had read the Northern Record coverage, and he agreed with their take on it for the most part. Dad and Uncle Walt had gotten along exceptionally well over the years. It had seemed to me that maybe they'd made things seem more than they were, for the sake of the sisters they'd married. Dad was a total white collar New Yorker and had never had a day on the job that didn't start with a shower and a business suit. Uncle Walt was pure blue collar, and I would guess made in a week what Dad made in a day. But I'd heard Mom talking with Aunt Arlene, and they agreed Uncle Walt liked his work a lot more than Dad.

"Danny, I'm very glad you did not turn down this opportunity. I've never met Freeman, but I've heard about him and read about him. And I know he is a self-made billionaire, among other things. When you get a chance to spend time around someone like that, you jump at it. This idea of his, this SWEEP16, it seems like the darnedest thing to me. But when you've got more money than you can spend, when you've reached the top of any number of mountains, what do you do next? What is it like for someone like him? Most of us, even those of us who are wealthy, have plenty of reasons to seek more money, or greater professional achievement, or more influence. He's taken both sports and business about as far as can be. A man who's done so much needs to keep pushing, and just maybe he's run out of normal things to push. Yeah, SWEEP16 sounds certifiable to me. But, I'm not Freddy Freeman."

"Uncle Walt told me that when he was still in high school, Freeman's buddies started saying BET ON FRED."

"Danny, people come out of college with strong ideas. Idealism is what it's usually called. And I know over the last few years you've developed a distaste for businessmen, for rich people, for some of the things that other people, like me, believe have helped to make our country great. I'm real glad you've got your beliefs. But do you know the old saying DON'T JUDGE A MAN UNTIL YOU'VE WALKED A MILE IN HIS SHOES?"

When I checked my mail, I found Doc Bidwell's reply. He'd seen the papers and the websites and even some TV coverage. He was really aggravated by what he saw as a travesty, even in concept. As for advice to me, he thought this could be a real opportunity for me to make some money, get some experience in the trade, and see up close how a guy like Freeman maneuvered. Doc said he knew quite a bit about Freeman, and how he'd several times come in like a vulture, getting involved with a company when it was down, taking it over and making a fortune for himself and his buddies. Doc also told me there was absolutely no way I would have unfettered access ... I'd only be permitted to hear what Freeman wanted me to hear. The real deliberations would take place behind closed doors, and I'd be invited to see scripted performances designed to make Freeman and his co-conspirators look good as they attempted to renege on contributing their fair share. Doc gave me the names of several people at newspapers and websites that he thought might buy my reporting.

It was less than 48 hours since Uncle Walt had invited me for that beer, but I felt like I was pretty well entrenched in this new venture. I almost called Uncle Walt to tell him I planned to talk to people tonight at the Crossroads, but decided it would be better to just show up on my own. I got there about 5PM as guys were stopping off after their shifts.

When I walked in the door I realized I did not have a plan for what to do once I'd gotten here. Might as well just order a draft and some fries. I sat at the bar, near the TV and watched the Sox vs the Yankees. It was a little bit of a surprise to find out that, as far as baseball is concerned, I was the enemy ... a Yankees fan in Red Sox country! But it was all friendly and gave me an easy way to talk to some of the guys. And it was almost all guys, and all of them seemed to be blue collar workers. The few of us nearest the TV were making sort of at-large observations about the game to no one in particular, but I noticed a couple of the guys glance at each other and me, quizzically, obviously wondering who I was. These were all young guys, early 20s I'd guess. During a commercial one of them asked me if I was visiting for the summer. I explained that my folks had rented a place for the summer, and until yesterday I'd been planning to visit off and on. But that as of yesterday, I was covering Freeman's campaign full time. So I guess I'm a resident now.

"My name's Danny Banks. Any of you guys know Freeman?"

They looked at each other and there were chuckles and nodding heads. "I'm John Clifford. Good to meet you Danny. This is Tony Caprivi and Lou Gaudreau and Clancy St John. Yeah, we all know Freeman to one degree or another. He's all our boss, for one thing. Most of the people in here are employees either of his timber operations or his stoneworks. And a bunch of the people who are not his employees are subcontractors or suppliers and still pretty well connected to his companies. I don't know him personally, really, just to say HELLO is about it. But there are plenty of people around here who know him well, for many years. What are you going to be doing again?"

I explained how I'd been offered the opportunity to cover the SWEEP16 campaign from the inside, but that the whole thing was still really new and I didn't have much idea how it was going to play out. "Do you guys know what he's planning? Have any thoughts about him or SWEEP16?"

They looked at each other again ... This time it was St John talking. "Yeah, we have thoughts. Freeman is something special. Give away his money? If somebody else said it, I'd think he wouldn't follow thru, he'd make up some baloney about being taken out of context. Freeman will do what he said he'd do. SWEEP16 ... that's something else. I don't understand what he's up to, but I can promise you again he means what he says, and he will pour himself into it. I'm concerned about him giving up business tho. We need him."

Caprivi piped up. "Outsiders hear Freeman's the boss. True enough. But that ain't really the half of it. He gets everybody going. Yeah, he makes the big decisions and he meets with the bankers and the politicians, but he started out working the shifts in high school. His father got him in summers. Mr Freeman was just a regular worker like us, and Freddy too. He's still a working man. Two years ago we get this monster rush order. Some other supplier came up way short, left a big project in trouble. Freddy commits us to supply the stone. We had to work like maniacs to get it done. But Freeman was right there with us. He worked four days straight, grabbing 15 minutes of sleep here and there. After the first day, we kinda had a thing going to see who could outwork Freddy. He buried all of us. I don't know how he does it."

"What Tony says is right on", Lou picked up. "He does get us all going. In most big companies, you're just one little guy driving a machine. It's different here. Freddy actually knows me as an individual. He knows my name and he knows what I do. I think he knows everybody's name. He still interviews just about every hire. I think he still remembers me from the interview."

"It sounds as if you guys like him."

"I'd say pretty much everybody likes him."

"But doesn't it make you mad that he pulls down probably 100 times what the typical worker makes? That he's bought himself that giant mansion off the backs of you and your co-workers?"

"Doesn't make me mad." It was Gaudreau this time. "This company was about to fold and take half of this town with it when Freddy came in with a couple of big-money investors. Freeman turned this thing around and saved my Dad's job. Saved my family's house. It was huge for the whole area. That was about 22 years ago. Dad said in those days he would have never wanted me to work at White Mountain Granite. But since Freddy's team took over, everything is way better and pay is way up. Plus all of us are owners, too, and we get dividends. Old timers like my Dad earn more in dividends than new guys make in pay. That's gonna be huge when Dad retires."

"But if that's not enough", Gaudreau continued, "everybody knows he is still running around with the SEALs, or something. I've never heard him talk about it with anybody. He just disappears now and then, and sometimes he turns up with a cast or a bandage."

"There's something else." It was Clifford again. "Like Tony said, everybody likes him. But also, everybody wants Freddy to like them. I've worked other places, other quarries. It's not like this, not by a long shot. We're a team here and we have a lot of success and everybody wants to build on what we have. And do it together. People want to earn Freeman's respect. When I started here, I was a baler, a standard place to start. You're putting wire around the stone, and attaching it to pallets for transport. It has to be done by hand, and out in the weather. We get this unbelievably nasty day ... cold, rainy and windy, just miserable, even for here. I'm thinking everybody would call in sick, which is what would have happened at my previous shop. Instead, everybody's there, ready to go. But more than that, once we get out to the stone, Freeman's there already, working by himself. He worked the whole shift with us, and really, we were pushing hard just to stay warm. You wouldn't know it from Freddy tho. He was cracking jokes and giving us grief and just sort of pulling us all along. And of course nobody is going to complain or ease up with the boss showing how it's done. That was one of the best days of work I ever did. When we finished we all came here to relax some. I don't know, but I bet Freeman just shifted gears and kept working at something else."

Clancy pointed with his head. "Gaudy, your Dad just came in. Maybe he can tell Danny some of the stuff from before we came up? What do you think, Little Lou?"

Judging by 'Gaudy's' expression, 'Little Lou' was a name his friends used to aggravate him. The reason for the 'Little' was apparent when his father introduced himself as 'Lou Gaudreau'.

"My name's Danny Banks. Nice to meet you Mr Gaudreau."

"Same here. Everybody calls me Gaudy. Except if Little Lou's around, then it's Big Gaudy."

Clancy told Big Gaudy I was part of the SWEEP16 campaign.

"Well, not part of it, really. Freeman just invited me to cover it as a reporter. My Uncle Walt is a friend of Freeman's and --"

"Wally Thompson?"

"Yes Sir."

"Wally is my boss. HA! I guess that means I'm buying!"

When I protested, Big Gaudy just said firmly "You're my guest tonight." Then gave me a big grin and waved for the barkeep's attention. "My table", he told him.

"OK, call me Little Lou all you want, so long as you're the sport."

"Thanks, Mister Gaudreau ---"

"Lou!"

"Thanks, Lou... Uncle Walt knew I was looking for work as a reporter and he got me an interview with Freeman. This is all new for me. I'd barely heard of Freeman until yesterday. Now I am trying to find out what SWEEP16 is all about, and I want to learn as much as possible about Freeman."

"I don't think anybody knows much about SWEEP16. Nobody had ever heard of it until last night. But you won't have any trouble getting info on Freeman. Hundreds of people around here ... thousands, really, will be happy to talk about him, I expect. My own experience with Freeman began 22 years ago, almost exactly, when he bought White Mountain Granite. Of course, I'd heard about him already. He's the best athlete ever went to our high school. I don't think anybody's come close to his javelin record, even after all these years. And then all the big-time football stuff, almost unbelievable. Do you know about the football?"

"A little. Not the specifics."

"He had a super college career at Navy. He was obviously going to the pros, but he had to serve 5 years in the military first. The Minutemen drafted him anyway, and waited. Wins the title in his 2nd year as a pro, then he quits!" He was just shaking his head and grinning with the memories. For the younger guys, it was easy to see this was a story they knew well, but were happy to hear again. "And in the days before Freeman bought the quarry? I'll tell you what, I'll never forget those 3 or 4 weeks. Those were very tough days for the company. I'd been here about 8 years at that point, and the last 4 or 5 had been all downhill. The company had been losing customers, the industry was shrinking, people had been laid off, hours reduced. White Mountain was sold by the founding family to a foreign conglomerate who didn't know what the heck they were doing. Then it was sold to a Japanese company, that was back when Japan was buying all kind of American assets. The Japanese management just never seemed to mesh and things were getting worse and worse. The Japanese put the company up for sale, and we were all just kind of stumbling thru our shifts, wondering what the heck was going to happen next, and basically convinced it was NOT going to be good."

"So one summer night, a bunch of us are sitting right here, watching the Red Sox. The house is fairly full, but it's pretty quiet. Kind of like the whole town was pretty quiet that summer. Artie Tapper, he's still the owner, was behind the bar then, just like now. Artie gets a phone call, and I hear him holler WHAT? Now, Artie's about 10 years older than me, and he went to Regional with Freddy. So he knows him pretty good. And a lot of the guys here that night were in school with Freeman too. A few of them on that football team people are still talking about. So Artie hangs up the phone, and he just kinda stands there with this weird look on his face. Then he gets this big grin, and he walks over and turns off the TV. That gets the attention of half the place, and he says real loud, LISTEN UP ... EVERYBODY. THE QUARRY'S JUST BEEN SOLD. And there's some rumbling and a few guys saying WHAT, WHAT'D HE SAY? And he says it again. I JUST GOT WORD, WHITE MOUNTAIN GRANITE'S BEEN SOLD. People are muttering curses and shaking their heads and looking at each other, then somebody asks Artie who is the buyer. Ol' Artie lights up like a neon sign and he says FREDDY FREEMAN BOUGHT THE QUARRY. Then he says real loud THE NEW OWNER OF WHITE MOUNTAIN GRANITE IS FREDDY FREEMAN!! There's a second or two where everybody is just looking around at each other again, starting to smile, then we all start cheering YES! YEAH, YEAH!! and then FREDDY! FREDDY! Fifteen minutes later,

Freeman shows up, and he's buying for everybody. But mainly, he tells us right off -- one thing you will learn is he does not waste time -- turning things around is going to take a lot of long, hard, smart teamwork. But with everybody pulling together, we can do it. Nobody works harder than an owner, he says, so, as soon as we can get the paperwork done, every current employee will also be an owner. As of tomorrow's first shift, everything is starting over. That was about it. He wasn't here but 10 minutes. I found out later he went straight from The Crossroads to the Quarry. And I bet he worked 100 hours a week for the next 2 or 3 years, except for when he was off doing his military thing. He'll outwork anybody I've ever known, and smile while he's doing it. Something people forget now, but in those days, while we were fighting for survival, 60 hours a week was pretty standard. And NOBODY GOT OT PAY! We were all put on salary. There is still not an hourly employee in the company. It would have never gone over, except what could you say? The biggest shareholder was right there working harder than anyone. Plus, all of a sudden we're all working for ourselves, and each other. A real Team."

"Did many people quit?"

"A few people quit ... all of a sudden we're working 60 hours for what had been 40 hours pay. But most of us really didn't have a choice. We have roots here, and nowhere else to go. But I don't think under any condition, actually, there would have been more than a few people quit. It really makes a difference when you are an owner. Plus, enthusiasm is infectious, and Freeman infected a lot of us."

"How long before things really turned around?"

"Looking back, I'd really have to say you could feel the turnaround that first night, right here, and it just built up from there. The biggest single day for sure tho was the first payout. They instituted quarterly dividends on our stock, and quarterly bonuses. My first dividend was \$16. And my first bonus was \$131. Not much for 3 months of 60 hour weeks. BUT, we were headed in the right direction, we were already turning a profit, and we were all determined to build on it. And we did. The dividend has increased every quarter since then. Sometimes by only a penny. But, it's increased 88 times straight."

"Attitude couldn't be enough to turn around financials, tho, what else?"

"Attitude can go pretty far. People stop wasting supplies, stop featherbedding, don't call in sick unless they really are. People stopped beating up their machines for no good reason. We became much more concerned with general and preventive maintenance. Machinery is key in this business, and these machines are incredibly expensive. When guys are doing their best to baby them, and to fix any little problem right away, it's a big deal. Pretty quick, we're saving over 30% on our equipment costs. It shouldn't surprise anybody that Freeman is a great salesman. He got us some new opportunity with old customers who'd dropped us, and with new customers. He revived some custom stuff that we used to do way back ... real carving, craftsmanship ... we bought delivery vehicles. We developed a market for our waste stone with a couple of new products, new uses that nobody had thought of before. Imagine selling your garbage to a happy customer? Right off we started working with the university to see if we could find a way to improve the efficiency of our quarrying. In this business the costs of the basic quarrying are extremely high, and if you can find a way to target easier quarrying for higher quality stone, it's huge. Well, we did that, and a lot of those methods are proprietary. But I do think attitude

was the biggest thing. I mean, listen to me, talking about what 'we' did. Heck, I'm a skidsteer guy, and that's about it. Before Freddy, I would have been talking about what 'they' did."

"But this new thing, Freddy ending all his business involvement and giving his assets away ... this seems like bad news for the Quarry. I can't picture things getting better without him. Nobody wants him out."

"You think he'll do it then?"

"Freeman will do what he said he'll do ... or he'll die trying." Big Gaudy's prediction drew grunts and nods of agreement from the younger guys.

----- 006 -----

When I got home I took a look at the SWEEP16 website. The Home Page was not impressive in design or technology. Pretty basic and plain.

Right up front and center is a mission statement ... to abolish federal taxes, and to see the federal government funded solely by voluntary contributions from individuals, organizations of all types, and other units of government including towns, counties and states. Well, I guess he really means it!

Next, the site proclaims itself unfinished. Of course. The story is yet to be written. As people contribute ideas, as the situation develops, the site will present both a record and a blueprint, history and hopes.

It asks the question WHAT SHOULD THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT DO? And the answer: FAR, FAR LESS THAN NOW. The Military, and National Defense, including control of national borders. Honor previously made commitments. SWEEP16 wants to see the federal government operating well within the original confines as found in The Constitution.

It offered a mail list, a blog, examples of government waste. Kind of dry stuff. There were interesting speculations about what might happen in the total absence of federal taxation.

There was also a sort of almost philosophical statement ... a short bit explaining that SWEEP16 means to give more than take, to be living proof that Americans will voluntarily do what is good and necessary, and that federal force is a hindrance, not a solution.

Freeman also had a page about the assumptions underlying taxation ... this was interesting to me because I hadn't thought about the difference between, I guess you'd call it, the idea of taxing, and what you'd do with the tax, and all the things that are part of the plan. I could see the guy had a point, or several points. He claimed that in order to solve a problem by tax, you have to:

--clearly identify a problem or need

- know the solution
- believe the solution can be bought with money
- believe the tax law you wish to create will in fact be created and passed by a legislature with competing ideas of their own
- think you can implement the solution ... that the bureaucrats and regulators will carry out the plan
- believe that your FIX will work!
- believe your fix will not have perverse effects on the beneficiaries or the taxpayers
- believe your means justify your ends ... that the harm caused by the means will not be greater than the good achieved
- believe confiscation of resources (money) by imposition of force, backed by threat of violence and jail, is justified, and is a good precedent, and that the idea of federal government taking and giving is a sound one and is more important than liberty and the right to personal/private property
- believe that the tax law and tax officials and tax legislators will not be abused or corrupted
- believe that the money collected will be used as planned
- believe that the constituencies created by the tax, the administrative bureaucrats and the recipients, will not be successful in their inevitable efforts to grow the tax itself and the roles and rolls of recipients
- be comfortable treating people differently based on income
- not care about minority (rich) rights
- believe what government will do with the money is better than what taxpayers would do on their own
- believe the friction/overhead/bureaucracy is worth it
- believe avoidance behavior is worth it
- believe the way it changes people's thinking and behavior, the perverse effects of taxation (rewarding dependency and penalizing independence), are not significant
- believe that all these items, both positive and negative, can be quantified, on a regular and ongoing basis, and that the sum of the positives far outweighs the negatives
- believe that despite the sum of all the above, the tax route is the still the best route to your solution ... better than asking, charity, relying on friends, etc.

That seemed to me like an awful lot of believing and thinking and knowing and hoping. And I can't say any of it really is off the mark. The way it's set forth on the website, it did seem like things would have to go South somewhere in the midst of all that.

When Freeman announced SWEEP16 he talked about how much a person had to earn in order to pay for a \$10,000 car. After a little clicking, I found the COST/EARNINGS calculator. I played around with it some, but without any earnings of my own, it didn't exactly hit home. It was interesting to me, tho, that some people, at least according to this calculator, had to earn waaaay more than \$10k to buy that car, as Freeman had said. Even more interesting were some examples of COST/EARNINGS figures for what Freeman, or the website at least, claimed were real-world examples. It really was strange to think that some people might have to earn \$50k to pay for a \$10k car. But it was also strange to see that, supposedly, even a regular guy working weekends driving for Uber might well need to earn \$20k to pay for the car. I decided the calculator would be a good thing to discuss with Mom and Dad. I was really curious about whether they would have a good handle on their COST/EARNINGS ratio, and whether they would disagree with the calculator.

Browsing around the site and thinking about all this some more, I had to admit to myself I was intrigued by the idea of citizens of each state having the opportunity to decide on a statewide method of federal funding. Each state could institute designated taxes of its own to pass to the feds. Or it could fund federal programs by passing thru a portion of state income taxes or sales taxes. Or it could simply send no money to the federal government, and its citizens could take action or not, as they saw fit.

There was an FAQ. For example, WHAT WOULD WE DO WITHOUT AN FDA? Answer: Each state would have the opportunity to individually or collectively regulate (or not) the drug industry. It's not at all clear doctors actually need an FDA to tell them what drugs should be permitted. It's not at all clear that most, let alone all drugs that are regulated should be. I was surprised that even if drugs are regulated, their usage may not be. Why not let independent companies test drugs in a manner similar to the way Underwriters Labs does with so many other products? But in any case, it is not the proper role of the federal government to prohibit people from medicating themselves as they see fit.

Another question: What about the department of energy? The American energy market exceeds one trillion dollars annually. That is a lot of incentive for more production, more efficiency and new sourcing. Federal incentives are certainly not needed. In 2013, the administration requested \$27 billion for DOE funding. They planned in 2013 to do a better job on their websites and thereby save over \$10 million. Think about that for a minute. One of their main goals was to save \$10 million in one year on the cost of their websites. I could hardly imagine spending \$10 million on websites, let alone whatever they must be spending to have a goal of saving \$10 million. In the history of the department of energy, what has been accomplished? Was it worth the cost? One other thing to consider, and this question applies across the spectrum of government programs: How many private initiatives were squelched to avoid competition with government?

There were a lot of questions in the FAQ, and I will admit the FAQ challenged my own thinking, my own assumptions. I had always assumed the FDA was vital, and now I had something to think about.

But most prominently, the site offered a very simple sign-up. I WILL DO MY SHARE. If you agree to that, you can add your name. And the first name on the list was Jenna Jersey! I'd seen her use a tablet during Freeman's talk. Interestingly, people's names and towns of residence were right there, with no option for anonymity. There were already over 10,000 names. The first bunch of names was almost all local, and Uncle Walt was among them. Scanning quickly thru the list, I was a little surprised to see some famous ones, and I had to wonder if maybe there was some mischief going on. There were a few prominent Hollywood types, some big business folks, software tycoons, musicians. But then again, the statement they were agreeing to ... how many would really openly disagree with it? Yes, I thought, I WILL DO MY SHARE, AND MORE. Heck, I'd not be able to face my folks if I wasn't willing to commit to something so basic as that. Who wouldn't? Is this really all it means? That was another something to think about.

I phoned Uncle Walt, told him I saw his name on the list. "I'm backing Freddy's play. I'll always back Freddy."

----- 007 -----

It was a big surprise to open my eyes and see 9:15. I guess I was more tired than I realized. I got dressed and did 4 or 5 miles. I'd just come out of the shower when I heard my phone going, and I couldn't help but feel kind of nervous when I saw it was Jenna Jersey!

Jenna said she was heading for Chicago in a few hours, but would I like to meet for coffee and conversation?

Jenna was in her early 30s, and undeniably an attractive woman. Her early success had spawned a lot of jealousy. Some claimed she'd only gotten the stories she had because of her looks, and her influence on men. It seemed to me Jenna was more about hard work and persistence than looks or luck. And her personality was at least as attractive as her appearance.

"I hope it didn't seem like we gave you too much of a rough time Sunday night."

It was a statement, but she pitched her voice higher at the end, like a question.

"No, no ... I could hardly believe I was sitting with you in the first place. It's kind of a shock now. You know you are often held up as an example in college classes."

She looked down, as if this made her uncomfortable.

"What they maybe don't talk about in college is that journalism has some Hollywood in it. Some of the big reporters and news people and analysts might as well be movie stars, in a way. Image is huge for them. You wouldn't believe how some of the guys primp before a TV show! And there is jealousy, too. Nobody can be a big reporter without a big audience. And you don't get a big audience without a big

story. A big story often happens thru connections, or just thru luck. It's almost like winning a lottery. You've got to buy a ticket, you've got to be taking your shots, but you can easily have a career in journalism and never have a big story of your own. You've had a big story dropped in your lap because of family connections. That will make people jealous. You seem like a good guy, and I admire Freeman a lot, so I wanted to talk thru some of this stuff before I leave town, if you're interested."

She referred to me as a 'guy', not a 'kid', and I'll admit it made me feel good. But I wondered if that was the point? I wondered was she working her Jenna magic on me even now? Did she want a piece of this story?

But in any case, I was interested.

"Whether other media people like it or not ... it doesn't matter all THAT much. Freeman is a story unto himself, without SWEEP16. America wants to, or will want to, know about him. He's kept a very low profile for a guy who's done what he's done. There is a hunger in Americans for a man like Freddy, and what maybe you don't know yet is that with SWEEP16, Freeman is coming out of the shadows. After he left football, he could have become a big media presence if he'd wanted. Instead, he started up again with some kind of military service, and he really got big in business, popping up for interviews here and there, but most people under 30 don't know his name or his face, I think. Which is pretty remarkable, considering his record. But now, he's decided to change all that completely. So what you have here is not just the story of SWEEP16, but the story of Freddy Freeman."

"I hadn't thought about it like that, but yes, it seems obvious now that you say it."

"There is no SWEEP16 story without Freeman. You'll remember from Sunday -- I've written about him some. What I did not say right out, tho, is that Freeman is ... unique. He is extreme. I think he's totally pure, which I would have thought was impossible until I met him."

"I saw your name right on the top of the SWEEP16 list."

"Yes, I added my name Sunday night during the press conference. It was unfair, sort of, but I don't feel too bad about it! I really like that I was first! Did you add yours?"

"No, I didn't think it would be appropriate."

"I think you're right."

"But also, I felt like it was sneaky. I mean, who wouldn't do his share, her share?"

She smiled, and raised her eyebrows, and I realized part of the idea was definitely just to make people think about what their share really should be.

"In a way I'm glad Freeman didn't choose me to do your job. I could not have been objective enough. And I know by talking with you now, I may be in a sense compromising your objectivity. But, I'm only telling you what I think of him, and that's what you're supposed to be finding out anyway. I believe your job is to truthfully publicize what Freeman is trying to do. You can't do that without knowing

Freeman, and writing about what he is, what he believes, what he's done. Remember, Freeman himself is as much of the story as is SWEEP16. People will be bored to tears by tax talk. If that's what you write about, nobody will care. You need to get personal if you are going to get readers."

"You've met a lot of people, I know. I've read lots of your stuff." She gave me a smile that caused me to stumble a little. "Presidents, governors, athletes, movie stars, scientists. How does Freeman compare to them?"

"Very, very favorably. First, I should admit I have not spent much time with the guy. A few hours is all. So maybe I am wrong. Second, speaking as a woman, Freeman is a MAN. And I will admit my perceptions are influenced by that. American women will really, really like him once they get a sense of him."

"That's funny you should say so, because a lot of people will claim part of your success is due to the way men react to you."

"Maybe they are right. But I've never done anything I felt was professionally inappropriate." She paused. "The most powerful force on earth is the man/woman thing, in my opinion. And rather than fight that, I think we should revel in it, enjoy it, and respect it. It's wonderful."

"What else can you tell me about Freeman? You said he is 'pure'?"

"Yes, I think he is. And again, maybe I'm just a woman with a crush. Double-check me."

I could hardly believe she just said that! This is not the Jenna Jersey that I'd imagined. The woman who undeniably has a way of getting people to sit for interviews where they have to know they are going to get uncomfortable questions. My face must have betrayed my thoughts, because of the way she continued.

"Yes, seriously. It is hard not to be drawn in personally by Freeman, and that is at the heart of your story." She paused and looked directly in my face in silence for several seconds. "I do not believe he would lie, cheat or steal. I think he'll do what he believes is right, regardless of cost or danger. He won't wait to see who follows, or what support he'll get. He'll just go. He's made himself crazy-rich, but it did not seem to me that money was what made him tick. And now he's giving nearly all of it away. My guess is he'd planned to do that for a long time. He wouldn't be doing this SWEEP16 if he didn't believe in it with all his heart. His has been a truly remarkable, almost unbelievable story, right from the get-go ... from before he was even born. Did you know he's half Cuban?"

I shook my head.

"Half Cuban and half Russian. That was the reason I first covered him -- a story on Cuban-Americans who've made it big in the USA. His Mom was a Russian doctor, sent to work in Cuba. She met Freddy's father there, after Castro installed himself as dictator. Both of them wanted Freedom for their child, and they escaped Cuba and made it to Florida before Freddy was born. Nobody loves American Freedom more than our Cubans. And for that matter, our Russians too."

I was just sitting there grinning. "What do you think of SWEEP16? Has the guy gone off the deep end? Do you think it's crazy? Great?"

"I don't know yet. And if you're thinking I shouldn't have put my name on the list, you could be right. But basically, I just decided to back Freeman. He --"

"That's exactly what my Uncle said. Sorry to interrupt. Uncle Walt just said he didn't really know about SWEEP16, but he was backing Freeman."

"I kind of forgot you have that real inside track. What else has your Uncle told you about Freeman?"

"Not that much. He said he wanted me to find out for myself. But he said some of what you have said, that Freeman lives on the edge. They've been tight since high school, since Freeman beat him up. Apparently changed his life."

"Why am I not surprised." This time it was a question inflected as a statement.

"Whoa ... when I asked Uncle Walt why Freeman would want me for this, a kid who doesn't like big business, Unc said he thought Freeman wants to do to me what Freeman did to him."

"Yes, when I interviewed him a few years ago, we were talking about the Super Bowl, and I asked him if he thought he'd ever have such an important win again. He looked at me strangely, but said nothing, and I was really surprised, because I felt I saw disappointment on his face. Then I thought, of course, in the military it is a question of life and death, and so how could a football game count for much beside that. But I was wrong again. He told me the biggest win you can have is to turn an enemy into a friend. That's a line I won't forget. He wants to win you ... all of us ... over to his point of view."

Neither of us said anything for a little, then she continued "SWEEP16? He's been around a lot more than me. Knows business, and knows people much better than me. And he's seen extremes that are hard for me to even imagine -- in the military, I mean. If he thinks this SWEEP16 is the way to go, that carries a lot of weight for me. I will do my share. I'm with Uncle Walt. I'll back Freeman's play."

I just sat there like a dolt, looking at her.

"I'll send you a mail with a few names of agents, including my guy. I don't see myself working with anyone else, but these people are all respected. It would be great if you'd bounce ideas off me sometimes, or ask me anything you'd like. I'd love to help. Is there anything we should talk about now? I've got to bolt in a minute."

She was going into her purse.

"No, I'll call you soon, I'm sure. And please, let this be my check! My Dad taught me the Lady never pays."

"We need more guys like your Dad!" And she was gone.

I'd jumped to my feet when she stood up, and I kept standing until she was out the door. Then I sat back down, pretty pleased with myself, although I'd done nothing to earn the feeling. I ordered another OJ. It was a little hard for me to believe I'd just bought brunch for Jenna Jersey. I felt sort of like I'd just had a tremendous date, and I realized that was unprofessional of me. But Jenna herself had admitted to a crush on Freeman.

What now? Time to talk to Clicks! Nick "Clicks" Fabio was probably my best friend from school, and I'd been so busy he didn't even know what was going on with me. Last we'd talked was a week ago, and he was going to have a hard time believing what I told him. Clicks was a couple of years older than me, as he'd been in the military between high school and college. He'd picked up his nickname in the dorms when we noticed that first thing in the morning, his ankles would click when he walked. The sound disappeared after he'd been on his feet for a while, but by the end of September of freshman year, everybody on the dorm floor knew the sound, and everybody called him Clicks. He didn't like it, and of course that made the rest of us like it more.

It was a kick telling Clicks what had happened in these last 3 days, and he did have a hard time believing it. He'd returned home after graduation, which meant he was only a couple of hours west of school. So we decided to meet the next day back on campus to talk things over and have some fun. We were tight with some of the fraternity guys who were spending the summer on campus, so we'd have a place to crash for free. Plus, I really wanted to talk things over with Doc Bidwell, face to face.

----- 008 -----

It was a strange feeling for me to be back on campus. It had been home for what seemed like a long time, but now I was a visitor, and that really threw me for a loop. Nothing here had changed. But I had changed. Ridiculous, but I felt a lot older than I had just a few weeks before, when I was still a student here. And now I had a car, a graduation gift from my folks. I'd never had a car on campus before.

I pulled up in front of Lambda Chi. There were always some brothers spending the summer on campus, but 3/4 of the house was empty, so it would be a good place to stay ... right on campus, and free, too. Clicks wasn't due for a while yet, so I said my HELLOS and put on my running shoes. It was good running the familiar spots on campus, the quad, Thornden Park, the Stumpy School, Oakwood Cemetery. I did about 8 miles in about an hour, then took about 15 minutes to cool down as I slowly walked down Walnut Ave to Lambda Chi.

Campus is pretty empty in summer, with over 90% of the students gone. There are over a thousand people taking summer classes, but nothing like the fall and spring sessions. Tho I'd seen a number of students, I didn't recognize a soul.

After I got cleaned up and put on some fresh clothes, I met up with Clicks on The Beach at M Street. Marshall Street -- M Street -- is the closest thing to a commercial area adjoining campus. A bunch of

little restaurants, a grocery store, a couple of bars. And there was a grassy knoll on one side of M Street where people would sit with burgers or beers. That's what everybody called The Beach. With so few people around, I spotted Clicks when he was still a block away. It was good to sit in this familiar spot again with my Great Friend.

I told Clicks all over again, everything that had happened these last few days. He sat there with a big grin that eventually took over his whole face.

"This sounds like it is going to be fantastic for you! I mean, I think it's going to be a lot of fun, and Jenna Jersey says people will lap up the story?! This is all rock and roll for you, brother! It's amazing!"

Clicks was always enthusiastic, always upbeat. After an hour or so of watching the people come and go, it was time for me to go see Doc Bidwell. Doc had been my advisor since freshman year, and he'd always been genuinely concerned about me. But I have to admit he has a generally sour disposition, pretty much the opposite of Clicks. Not cranky or mean, but he always seems to feel like something bad is going to happen. You can count on Doc to find a negative in any situation. And this was no exception.

"You're being used, Danny. Freeman wants your youth and energy to get young adults and high schoolers on his side. He needs someone like you because young people will never line up with a rich old white guy on their own. You know I'm happy for you, but you've got to have your eyes open. This chance can make your career. It's a golden opportunity to turn the tables on these guys. For a long time, decades, the right-wingers have been moaning about how colleges are teaching kids to be liberals. This ruse of Freeman's is just the right-wingers trying to indoctrinate young people so that eventually people will get used to the idea that the 1% doesn't owe anything. They want to ride the rest of us like mules, and figure it's their right. And we're not even supposed to know what's going on. Keep on your guard. Whenever he tries to divert your attention, finds a reason to keep something from you, that's when you've got to get in there and find out what's going on. It's not really a fair matchup. He's got a staff and all these years of practice deceiving people. You've never been up against anyone like him. Few people have, really. Just remember the real story will be found wherever he doesn't want you looking."

"What do you know about Freeman? Have you ever met him?"

"No, certainly not." He said it as if the idea was repulsive. "I know he made a name in football, and then leveraged that into a partnership at a private equity firm. Kind of a poster-boy of a partner. Vulture capitalism. Make money pouncing on companies in trouble, selling assets, firing people. Basically they rape companies and move on after they strip everything and line their own pockets."

It seemed like time to change the subject a little. "I had lunch yesterday -- well, really just a cup of coffee -- with Jenna Jersey. She believes Freeman is on the level with this."

Doc reared up again. "No way. How short was her skirt?"

"Doc, she was really nice to me. Said she'd help me find an agent. Gave me her agent's number."

"I'd expect that! Don't you see? Who better to help Freeman get the story he wants out of you? This is just another variation on her career of low-cut journalism. No doubt Freeman's got her working on you. Of course she's ready to talk things over with you, exchange ideas, blah, blah, blah. Don't be deceived by her. She'll be playing you. She practically said so in her column about Freeman's so-called 'press conference'" He made air quotes, and I was startled to realize I'd not read any of Jenna's stuff about Freeman. "Ever notice she never seems to interview women?"

"Thanks Doc. I have to admit, I was letting my guard down. I should have realized more about what is going on." I'd decided to tell Doc something he'd like hearing. It was true I had been letting my guard down, but I was not at all convinced I was being taken in. Still tho, Doc was right in that it is my job to be completely skeptical.

Doc said he'd arranged for us to have lunder with a buddy of his from the economics department. I'd never heard of lunder til I got to Syracuse and saw it written on the cafeteria schedules. It's the lunch-dinner version of brunch. I always liked it. The caf was always fairly empty, but plenty of food available. Dinner was usually crowded and loud. But lunder was quiet. Even after I got an apartment just off campus for my junior and senior years, I'd bought lunder once or twice a week. But I'd never had lunder with a professor before.

"Lunder's OK, especially in summer." The prospect of filling his big belly seemed to cheer Doc. "The place is quieter than any restaurant, and cheaper too. Food's not bad either, especially if you're hungry!"

This was kind of funny, but it fit my plans perfectly.

"We're going to Boland, it's the best caf on campus. A friend of mine runs it, and she is really on top of everything. She ought to be managing some fancy restaurant in New York City!"

Doc was making me laugh now. He was totally serious, and seemed oblivious to my reaction. Seeing this generally sour and suspicious guy getting all bubbly over lunder was too much. Bidwell's a strange mix of sweetheart, wet blanket and precocious little boy. And it reminded me why so many people liked the cranky old jellybelly.

"Do you know Pete Clipper? I told him how you're covering SWEEP16, and I thought it might be fun for you to hear from an economics prof. Hope you don't mind."

"No problem Doc. Should be interesting. I've heard of Clipper, but I really don't know anything about him."

Clipper was a fairly big name in the econ department ... talking head on TV, published a widely used Intro Econ text. But I'd never seen him on campus for some reason.

When we got to Boland, the place was almost empty, and Doc headed straight to a table where two guys were seated.

"Hi Peter, glad you could make it! This is Danny Banks, he's wrangling SWEEP16. I'm determined to make sure Fast Freddy stays honest, assuming Danny stays in touch with me from time to time."

"Hi Danny, I'm Pete Clipper. Good to meet you. And this is Nivram Durreg. Niv's a visiting professor of economics. He's got some crazy ideas, but he's always good for some laughs, so we have lunch pretty often. Being the idea is to go public with this whole SWEEP16 thing, I figured it'd be OK if Niv joined us. If that's a problem, just let us know, please."

"No sir, it's no problem." Again I heard myself calling someone 'Sir'. Not that I felt there was really anything wrong with it, but more like I felt an outside influence on me, and instinctively I felt I had to resist it. "You have both heard about SWEEP16 then?"

"You can knock the stuffing out of Richie Richman right from the get-go Danny. Seeing that would do my heart good!"

"It's my job to publicize what I see ... to bring out an accurate picture of the SWEEP16 campaign to the best of my ability, and that's what I aim to do. If you don't mind, I'd like permission to use anything we might discuss today."

"Of course, of course, I understand. It's just that I assumed you wouldn't be buying into this nonsense about the rich deserving to ride free on the backs of the rest of us."

Clipper was an average looking guy, probably in his late 40s. Pudgy, soft, no physical presence at all. Nobody would give him a second look ... just sort of your invisible rumpled middle-aged guy in a budget suit. This guy's intimation that Freeman was trying to grab a free ride on his back struck me as pathetic and repulsive. I realized my response was emotional. But then I realized I was being pushed toward Freeman as much by his opponents as I was drawn to him by his admirers like Uncle Walt and Jenna Jersey. Well, all of this is supposed to be part of the story.

"I guess I know where the SU econ department stands then", I laughed.

"Sorry, no", it was Durreg. "Pete may be the full professor, but he doesn't speak for all of us, and certainly not for me. He said I've got crazy ideas, but if he spends enough time with me, I'll bring him over to my side."

"I'll just let Niv keep talking. Like I said, he's good for laughs, and he always buys more than his share of drinks. What more could an old cheapskate like me ask for in an adjunct lecturer?"

Durreg wasn't laughing. "Never heard of a freerider giving away two billion bucks."

"That'll be the day", Bidwell snorted and Clipper rolled his eyes as if he was startled anyone would have a reaction other than to dismiss Freeman's stated intention as an obvious deception of some kind.

Durreg leaned forward and it was clear he was REALLY not in Clipper and Bidwell's camp. "You think he's lying? Let's bet on it."

"You actually believe Richie Richman?" Doc Bidwell was about to blow a gasket. It seemed to me he'd been discussing SWEEP16 with Clipper at length, and Richie Richman was a name they really liked.

"I do. And I'll bet on it. Will you?"

Durreg was getting a bit of an edge on him, and I was enjoying this! I had not expected to be seeing these guys go at each other, but it struck me I was going to be seeing a lot of this. Arguments among friends are something I've always enjoyed.

"What about it Clipperman?" Durreg was playing off Clipper's use of 'Richman' and I almost laughed out loud. "If Freeman does not put up the money the way he said he would, I will present you with a hundred dollar bill in front of your Econ 101 class, and explain that you were right and I was wrong."

"OK, DocDuh --" I did laugh out loud at Bidwell's use of 'DocDuh'; these guys were like kids in a sandbox, altho it was easy to see they were all having fun even tho they were seriously disagreeing.

Durreg explained to me his TAs had recently begun to refer to him privately as DocDuh. Clipper got wind of it and there was no shaking it now. But anyone could see he was fine with it. Most people seemed to like having a nickname, near as I could tell.

"OK, DOCTOR DURREG, I will see your bet and raise you. Let's take out an ad in the DO [the Daily Orange is the Syracuse U student newspaper] that lays out the terms of our bet. And when you come to my lecture to publicly pay me my hundred bucks we'll debate before the class this idiotic SWEEP16 idea."

"Danny, did Freeman say what his timetable would be for setting up the SWEEP16 trust?"

"No, he didn't. Evidently he had an urgent and unexpected need to get out of town for a week or two. He really cut the press conference short and basically just lit out. Didn't stick around afterward at all."

"There you have it!" Bidwell took Freeman's quick exit as evidence he intended to renege somehow. "He'll waffle and worm, you'll see. He will not give up his billions to any overall public good."

"He did say he would keep about a hundred million to provide for his family in the event of his incapacitation. That's still pretty rich in anybody's book, but he said that'd be about 5% of his present fortune."

DocDuh got up to scout out some dessert, and the rest of us fell silent. Durreg returned with some ice cream and sat down. After a couple of spoons he said "I believe he'll keep his word."

Durreg spoke tremendous English, with the ease of a person who'd spoken it all his life. But his pronunciation of certain sounds was a little different than someone who'd grown up in the USA. And of course, the name didn't really prove anything, but I'd never encountered Nivram or Durreg before. So I decided to change the subject to neutral ground and ask Durreg where he was from.

"I am blessed to now be able to truthfully say I AM FROM AMERICA. But I understand your question, and in this context the answer is that I am from Russia. About 14 years ago, my brother and I joined the American military, the Marines. We were young and healthy and strong and we wished to become American Citizens. This was a pathway that was open to us. I had the honor of four years service. My brother is still a Marine. And now we are both American Citizens."

"I think you are the first person I've met from Russia. Are there big differences between Russia and the USA?"

"Yes, huge differences. That's why I am here. As they say in the USA, my brother and I voted with our feet. And, that is one reason why I am happy to see Freeman doing what he is doing."

"He hasn't DONE anything yet!" Clipper couldn't resist.

"He's done more than the three of us professors put together. But you're right in that I was referring to SWEEP16."

Clipper made a sour face, but he didn't say anything. No matter what you think of what Freeman has done, there is no question he has done a whole lot.

"So, back to our bet. I accept your terms with the ad in the DO, the 100 bucks paid in front of my class or yours, and a debate. Danny, did Freeman give any indication how long it would be before he'd put his money into SWEEP16?"

"No. But he did say he'd already liquidated some of his holdings. And he did say he was getting out of business and getting into SWEEP16 completely."

"OK, how about we put a deadline of January 1st, a good 7 months from now. I'll enjoy having this to look forward to. The beginning of spring semester, we'll settle up. Good?" I wondered why Clipper and Bidwell were so sure Freeman wouldn't do what he said. I guess it would only be natural to figure someone would balk at giving away two billion bucks. But on the other hand, I can hardly imagine what it would be like to have a hundred million. For most people it seems there would be no difference.

"But what do you professors think of the idea itself? I mean the idea of abolishing federal taxation."

Bidwell invited Clipper to step up, and he did, with relish.

"There are so many reasons why this is stupid and unworkable, and so obviously stupid and unworkable, there can be only one reason that Freeman would advance it. And the reason is simply that Richman and his buddies have already exploited the middle class so far, they are thinking if they can get this across, America will just be totally a playground for the ultra-rich and a sort of rat-race treadmill for the rest of us."

DocDuh wasn't buying at all. "You know, the simplest explanation is that he believes what he says. Have you looked at SWEEP16.com at all?"

"Of course not. What the devil for?"

"You seem pretty exercised about it? Why not check out what the guy actually has to say?"

"Because I already know what it's all about. What could be there but a bunch of sophistry and baloney?"

"I've looked at it, and it's neither sophistry nor baloney. Pretty convincing stuff, actually."

Bidwell couldn't stay quiet for long. "Are you telling me a professional economist is buying what this yo-yo is peddling?"

"I am. I signed up, too. What about you, 'Will you do your share?'"

"Please."

"Seriously. 'Will you do your share?'"

"Who would NOT answer YES to that question?"

"Maybe that's the point? If everybody actually DOES DO their share, we wouldn't need probably 75% of the federal government. And if"

"Are you nuts?" Bidwell nearly jumped out of his seat.

"I told you he was good for laughs", Clipper spluttered out, laughing and proving his own statement.

"And if we did not have to suffer the huge friction and distortion imposed by the federal tax code, America really would experience an economic boom the likes of which has never been seen ... not even close."

Clipper had his laughter under control, and he was back on offense. "I'll admit there are a bunch of crazy provisions tucked into the tax code here and there. And I'll admit it is lengthy and complicated. But to suggest we'd all be better off to just repeal the whole thing and let people just ... pay NOTHING ... is ridiculous on the face of it. The tax code has been built up carefully and deliberately over a century of debate and trial and error. It prods here, pushes there, discourages other things. It binds us together and gives taxpayers a sense of pride, knowing their taxes are driving America forward. It's just inconceivable you could think anything other than chaos and anarchy would result from scrapping federal taxation."

"Having grown up in Russia affords me a perspective that Americans just do not have. Your country was founded on Freedom, yet for decades you have slowly been giving it up. Every time you give up some Freedom, you give up some of your life. I come from a place where each person is much more under the control of the government than here. Every aspect of business was the purview of government. It has been loosening up for years, because total control was such a disaster. The most secure jobs you can have are in government. The most power. The people who work for government have the best housing. In America, the idea was supposed to be just the opposite. But you are becoming more and

more like the old Soviet Union. And believe me, if you had lived there, you would not want to go in that direction! We must fight for our Freedom. Shout it from the rooftops!"

I was feeling like a moderator, and I wanted these guys to keep talking. "Freeman said he thinks the tax code drives us apart. Or, maybe it was just on the website. But anyway, he claims everyone is free to pay more than the law requires. So arguments about taxation really are about forcing other people to pay more than they want to pay."

"Oh, good God. It's about laying out what is fair, and getting everyone to do their fair share."

"See what I mean? Will you do your share?" I couldn't resist jumping in again, given that Clipper had given me such an opening. DocDuh thought it was pretty good, but that line struck home for him too.

"I will do my share, and more. Happily, joyfully. How about you, Clipster?"

"This is nonsensical."

"OK, let me ask it another way. Were you overtaxed last year?"

Clipper stared at DocDuh suspiciously, then answered "No."

"Did you throw the government anything extra?"

Clipper still seemed like he was trying to avoid a trap. But he answered again "No."

"So then you felt your tax burden was exactly fair?"

Now Clipper was getting impatient. "I guess so, what is your point?"

"A year does not go by without Congress monkeying with the tax code. Even folks like us who are not really playing the business or financial game need to be aware of changing rules ... or at least our accountants need to. Surely you don't think 'fair' changes from year to year?"

"No. 'Fair' doesn't change. We just keep getting closer and closer to it."

"So when Congress doubles the tax on dividends ...?"

Clipper made a sour face and DocDuh looked as though he was enjoying his discomfort. But Bidwell jumped in: "This whole conversation is baloney. We MUST have federal taxes, and lots of them, to force the rich to pair their fair share. Federal taxes should be 80 or 90 percent on income over a million or maybe two million. Nobody needs the obscene amounts of money some of these guys receive!"

"So who are you to decide how much money a person needs?"

"This is something we decide collectively, for the benefit of all."

"So then you believe it is to the benefit of society to decide how much money a person needs to make, and that if a person makes more than this amount, it will be to the benefit of society to confiscate 80 or 90 percent of the overage for Congress to dispose of however it pleases."

"I wouldn't put it exactly like that, but essentially, yes."

"Doctor, I have about a hundred problems with the sentiments you've just expressed. Perhaps foremost: Do you believe in Freedom?"

"Of course I do. And I know where you're going here. Taxing a person is not an abridgement of Freedom. The Freemans of the world, or of the USA at any rate, are free to make as much as they want. They just don't get to keep much of it." Bidwell seemed satisfied with his quip, and glanced at Clipper, who looked fairly smug.

"If you are comfortable with 80 or 90 percent taxation of anyone, you are NOT a believer in Freedom. But also, why would you think society would benefit more from government confiscating wealth than from wealth being saved or invested or spent by the person who earned it?"

"Because the government is uniquely equipped to deploy money where it is needed."

"And has the Professor of Journalism ever read a newspaper?"

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"Anyone who thinks the feds spend money well must be remarkably ill-informed."

Clipper and Bidwell exchanged disgusted looks, but didn't say anything. DocDuh did not continue, so I posed a question.

"Doctors ... Freeman used as an example the purchase of a \$10,000 car. He said few people actually know how much they need to earn in order to be able to buy that car. What do you think of that?"

"I've not thought of it exactly like that, but I think he's right. Few would know. And that ought to get people's attention."

"He said some people would need to earn over \$30,000 in order to buy a \$10,000 car. If that's true, I would have to say that's pretty messed up. I mean, I admit to feeling a little bummed when tax was taken out of my pay for my summer jobs. And really, I even knew I was mostly getting that money refunded to me. The idea that--"

Clipper interrupted me. I doubt there is anyone who has to earn THAT much. But if there is, it's a very rich person who can well afford it."

"Ahhhhh ... there you have it. A VERY RICH PERSON WHO CAN WELL AFFORD IT!" This was Durreg, clearly horrified but apparently not surprised by Bidwell's argument. "How can you see your way clear to treating another human being like that! A person should never be treated as a means to an end. Even a person who earns a lot of money."

"Is that even a legitimate example? Someone who needs \$30k plus to buy a \$10k car?" This was Clipper.

"I bet there are plenty of such people ... our most productive people ... right here in New York. We are one of the very highest-taxing states. We can figure it out pretty quick. Right now."

"Nothing quite so boring as the minutiae of tax policy. NO THANKS, Niv!"

"Minutiae? Freeman's right, you know. It's huge friction and grit thrown into the wheels of the economy."

"Please, the violins!"

"How much do you think a typical professor needs to earn to buy that \$10k car?"

"You're actually serious about this?"

"Don't you think it's an interesting question? How much marginal income would YOU need to pay for the car? You're an econ prof. That ought to be an easy question for you, I think."

"I admit, I don't have the exact number right at hand, but it's not too bad. About \$14,000 I'd say."

"Nope ... more than that, my friend."

"Maybe \$15."

"And you think raising the price 40 or 50% is 'not too bad'? OK. This is going to be fun. We won't get too personal here ... ". Durreg pulled out a pen and paper and started writing. "First of all ... here in Syracuse, that \$10,000 car costs \$10,800 with the sales tax. So with your oh, 28% federal rate, you'll need ... " he was fiddling with a calculator and seemed to me to be really overacting in order to aggravate Clipper "... well, how about that! You'll need \$15k in pre-federal income tax earnings to come up with the cost of the car. Not a bad estimate on your part. Except we still need to factor in the New York State income tax ... let's say 7% ... that brings you up to \$16,129. BUT ... we're not done yet. We've still got Medicare tax. You and the University each pay 1.45% on your earnings, so ... \$16,610. And actually Medicare taxes were hiked a bunch in 2015 for higher incomes ... as a full professor and single guy, that's probably you."

It's not often I could say a person's eyes were twinkling with mischief, but this was one of those time.

" ... We've left out some smaller stuff like disability and unemployment insurance. So, the \$10,000 car actually costs you \$16,610. That is, the obvious, measurable and direct taxes increase the cost of the car by 66%. This is the system you favor?"

Durreg looked absolutely triumphant, and I had a feeling I'd made something of a friend here, although I really had not intended anything more than a straight, serious question.

Clipper had an aggravated look on his face, and exhaled loud and slow.

Durreg was obviously loving this, and kept digging. "So, your initial estimate was that government raised the price of the car by 40%. Then you backed off to 50%. But it turned out even 50% was far too low. And we've only just scratched the surface here, because these tax-costs are built in at every step of the production chain. At first, I will admit, I was very startled by Freeman's claim of TWICE THE MONEY and HALF THE COST. But I've been thinking about it, and I'm not prepared to disagree. The costs are enormous."

Durreg had his eyes sort of wide open-bulging, and he was shaking his head, basically holding the floor and, I think, trying to force Clipper to think about these numbers. Then he continued.

"What about a more typical guy? Say a fellow earning \$50,000 per year? How much do you suppose he would have to earn to buy the car? His State and Federal income tax rates are a little lower than yours. BUT he would have his 7.65% Social Security and Medicare tax still to deal with. Plus of course his boss would have to kick in the same. He'd be well north of \$18,000. And there's a good chance he'd have to earn the cost of workmen's comp insurance coverage, which can be 5 or 10% of payroll. That would put our typical worker at \$20,000 or so for the \$10,000 car. And you can go on from here, too. What will it cost our typical guy to actually DRIVE this \$10,000 set of wheels? He'll have to register the car, of course, and insure it too. That'll be good for another few hundred easily. So our regular guy is going to have to earn \$21,000 to drive away with a \$10,000 car. And they say government works for the little guy."

Now it was Clipper shaking his head. "It's not as if all these things you name, Social Security, Federal Tax, Workmen's Comp ... all these things are for the good of the worker, for the good of all of us."

"Sure, I know. But good enough to double the cost of ... oh, pretty much everything?"

With that last remark, Durreg had turned thoughtful, and I guess so had I. When none of us spoke for a few seconds, Clipper stood up. "Gentlemen, this has been as much fun as I expected. But I've got to run. Danny, it was a pleasure meeting you, and Congrats on your degree! If you ever have any questions for me, or think I can help you somehow, don't hesitate!"

"Thank you Doctor Clipper, it was really nice of you to join us, and I appreciate hearing your ideas." As Clipper walked off, I sort of laughed at the realization I needed business cards!

DocDuh called after him "We have a bet, Clipster!", then asked how to get in touch with me. That I did not expect either. I took his cell number and said I'd send contact info.

I walked out with Doc Bidwell and thanked him for a great lunder. "My pleasure Danny. I hope you'll be visiting campus regularly. You should come back and interview some students, even if you don't need another circus like we had at lunder!"

"No, I really enjoyed listening to you guys. And talking to some students is a really good idea. I will!"

----- 009 -----

As soon as I thanked the profs and said goodbye, I called Jenna. "Are you on Freeman's payroll? Is there anything between you and Freeman other than the interviews you told me about?"

"No, certainly not. Absolutely not." Neither of us said anything for a moment, and I realized I should have thought this thru better. Then she continued, "I don't blame you for asking, you've got to cover all the possibilities, and I know what I must have sounded like at times yesterday. Here's how I see my part in this, if I have one: I will be happy to help you do what you are trying to do. That's it for me. And maybe a year from now, I'll ask you for an interview! Something else ... Remember I told you I believe Freeman is 'pure'? I can't picture him making any kind of underhanded attempt to influence you. I don't really even picture him making a direct attempt. The idea was you are supposed to find out what is going on and report it. And I think you will have to come up with things on your own."

"Sorry, Jenna. I didn't mean to question your integrity."

"No, it's OK ... you did what you had to. And. You really shouldn't even totally believe me. At least not for a while. A big-shot business man once told me he will not invest with anyone he hasn't known at least three years. He was an international investment consultant, and he said he spent at least an hour on the phone every day, just checking in with people, getting to know them better. He was dead serious that it takes time to get to know a person, and you can't trust someone you don't know, particularly in a case like his or yours, where your trust in the wrong person can hurt clients or readers."

That made sense to me, except three years is a long long time. When I got back to Lambda Chi Clicks was all primed up to go to Happy Hour.

"They have it in summer? At Jab?" The guys at Lambda Chi assured us the student-run bar and grill, Jabberwocky, was in fact open in summer, and weirdly, Happy Hour was quite a bit bigger in summer than during the regular sessions. I'll confess to having put away more than my share of cheap beer and fries at Jab, and it never sounded like a better idea than it did now!

We walked the couple of blocks from Lambda Chi to Jab, and I thought about all the times I'd seen alumni on campus ... homecoming, reunion weekends, parents taking their little kids to see the place where they'd met. I'd always felt apart from the alums, as if their day had passed. Now, I felt a kinship that made me a little sad, but at the same time, I was psyched for what I had coming. Really psyched!

----- 010 -----

When I woke up I was definitely on the foggy side, and it made me laugh, because last night I'd been feeling like an alum returning to the scene of the crime, but for some reason the hangover made me feel like I'd never left.

Well, I put on my shoes, and was just about to run off my hangover when it crossed my mind that I needed to read Jenna's stuff on Freeman pronto. It seemed weird that I hadn't done so as soon as I'd met her. And Bidwell implied she'd written something about me! The Freeman pieces were easy to find in her website archive. There were two of them, one from about 5 years earlier, and the second one about two years ago, and then the new column about the SWEEP16 press conference. It seemed logical to read them in chrono order, although I really wanted to see what she had to say about me. I'd never been in the news before, except minor local pieces about high school sports. The first two interviews covered business topics, but it was kind of a shock to me -- even tho at this point it should not have been -- that Freeman didn't seem to think business had all THAT MUCH to do with business. He didn't talk about interest rates or the business cycle or how to negotiate with your suppliers. Yeah, some of the stuff you would expect was there ... customer service, quality, listen to what your customer and your people have to say. And that ownership is critical. Your employees need to feel they are well and fairly paid, and that next year can be and is likely to be better than this year. But Freeman said he believed the most important part of management was leadership. He said a leader must be an example, mental and even physical, and that you can never lead or inspire people with mere talk. People will believe what they see, and they will be inspired not by what they hear or read, but what they see with their own eyes, and feel in their hands and in their guts. And they must believe they are truly part of a team, where everyone has everybody's back, and where help will be gladly provided whenever needed.

Interesting stuff, pretty intense. Not an easy trick to pull off, but not what anybody would think was way out of the mainstream, or would account for what he'd done, except for that he'd obviously been able to pull it off better than practically anyone else.

Jenna asked Freeman if he'd ever been near death. She said "I know you can't talk directly about your military work, but can you tell me if you've ever been near death?"

"Yes, I have. I've seen a lot of it ... been close to the deaths of thousands of people, and I've been close to my own death a bunch of times. Such experiences will change your perspective."

"Can you tell me some of what you've survived?"

"The specifics are not important now ... bullets, bombs, crashes, slashes, shrapnel. The significant thing to me ... sorry to get mystical on you ... but the significant thing to me is to understand why. Why I live still, I mean. The odds are overwhelmingly against it. Serena -- my Godmother -- has convinced me that I must seek to understand what it is I must do with this life that has been so inexplicably spared. I know how that sounds, but this is what I am left with."

"You said 'bullets, bombs, crashes, slashes and shrapnel'. All PLURAL?"

"Yes. And other things too. Surviving when you probably should not have will make you think."

"How many people survived the crashes?"

"The first one, two of five. The second, two of twelve. The last one, about 8 or 9 out of 36. Not sure how many later died of injuries after we were picked up. Only three of us were able to try to help the other survivors."

"So ... the odds of just surviving -- and in one piece -- the crashes were awfully long. And then a lot of other things too."

"Yes. It's made me think. Wonder why. There is a need to find something to do with the rest of my life to justify my survival. Suggestions more than welcome."

Clearly, Freeman had given Jenna a look into his heart. And I could understand maybe how she might react to hearing this straight from Freeman in a private setting.

But there was something in those interviews that was even more extreme in a way, and had me totally surprised, and it had surprised Jenna too. It seemed like a key to Freeman, but it was hard to believe, or, at least, it would have been hard to believe if I'd read it a week ago. Jenna had said something about Freeman's success, and I really wished I'd had a video of the talk, instead of a transcript. Apparently Freeman hadn't reacted the way Jenna expected, because she tried to clarify by asking again what he would do now that he was so successful. Here is the really interesting part just as Jenna wrote it up:

He answered, "We'll just keep at it with the stone and the trees and the software."

Freeman had a habit of answering in the first person plural, if he used the first person at all.

"When I asked, I did mean business. But I'm actually much more interested in what you'll be doing personally, given that you are already so successful."

Freeman said nothing at all. And it didn't make sense to me he'd have nothing to say here. But instead of answering, he asked me "Are you successful Jenna?"

I never thought anybody would ask me that while I was interviewing him! "I don't understand why you ask?"

"I'd like to know. Are you successful?"

"Well, I've done more than I would have expected a few years ago. I'm pretty well paid, quite a few people read my material. I hope I do more and better, but honestly, I have to think I'm a little bit successful, even though I'm still under 30."

"What is success to you?"

Freeman suddenly is digging into this topic and interviewing me. But the questions a person asks can be as interesting and informative as the statements a person makes. So I decided to go along.

"For me, I want to be regarded as a fine journalist, interviewer. I want people to think I was honest, drew my subjects out, brought out information that is valuable. Made enough money to pay some bills. Always told the truth."

"I'm glad you've thought about it. You're very young to be thinking about true success, Jenna, and I admire you for having a pretty clear idea of it. I've seen a lot of men die. Some women too. But mostly young men, fine young men that I love still. Younger than you a lot of them. Some died in my arms, without a wife or children. Not much of a past, and suddenly, no future. And most of them would not have thought of themselves as successful, I am afraid. Most of them never even thought of success, in terms of a successful life."

"Are you successful Mister Freeman?"

But he dodged me, which was a surprise. He said "What do you think?"

I told him I thought so, and that virtually anyone would agree with me.

"We all need to determine as individuals what is success, and of course, striving for success is what will give meaning to our lives, even if we never achieve the success we set out to."

"But Mister Freeman, have you achieved your own idea of success?"

I will never forget the look on Freeman's face when he answered me. I don't know what the expression was. A mixture of sadness, doom, and wonder and anticipation. And he said "I'll never know."

"How can that be? What is your definition of success?"

"One hundred sixty years after our first president died, my Mom and Dad -- and Serena -- named me George Washington Freeman. Now THAT is something. Centuries after I'm gone, if people name their children in hopes they'll grow up to be like me, or with the belief that carrying my name will inspire ... then I will be successful."

Jenna was pretty knocked out by that. Me too. Are you kidding?

I headed out the door without even finishing the piece. This was something to think about. Could this actually be the guy's perspective? Yeah, it could. Not for probably anybody else I'd ever met. But for him? Yes. How the heck do you carry on a normal life with a goal like that?

I was running through Thornden Park, one of my favorite spots on campus, as I continued to sort through what I'd read on Jenna's site. It was great hitting this kind of stride ... my feet were just sort of on their own, and I was moving at a good clip without really even paying attention. I felt sorry for people who did not know what this feeling was. For me, this mode made me feel like no matter how bad anything ever got, I could not only deal with it, but eventually soar. I wondered if Freeman could

run like this, and laughed at myself as soon as the thought crossed my mind. Freeman obviously understood the mind-body link, and he could probably run me into the ground wearing army boots and a full pack, even with the 30 years he had on me. As I ran, I focused on the names of the streets ... Comstock, Ostrom, Waverly, Sumner, Euclid, Lancaster, Clarendon, Columbus ... most of them I expect were names of people. Euclid and Columbus almost for sure, the rest? No telling, and even tho they'd achieved their small measure of immortality, nobody was going to name their kids after them. Would anybody alive today become a namesake in 200 years? That was the loftiest definition of success I'd ever heard of.

As my feet kept running, I was pleased to find myself arriving at Oakwood Cemetery. This had always been one of my favorite places anywhere. Oakwood is a beautiful old cemetery, mature trees and very gently rolling land. A lot of it was fairly old, headstones and monuments from the 1800s. If you had a big name in Syracuse 100 plus years ago, you were probably buried here. And I had to wonder if any of these people had met Freeman's definition of success. Some of them had been large benefactors of SU when the school was still pretty young and small. I'd run in this place dozens, probably a hundred times. But this was the first time I'd ever thought about what success meant to me, and I was actually kind of surprised to realize I did not have a definition of it ... not a long-term definition of it. I'd always had things I wanted to do, but I'd never thought about any overall lifetime goal, what would make me feel satisfied on my death bed. And it occurred to me I was in Freeman's -- and Jenna's -- debt for planting the idea in my head.

I sat down at a monument of the Crouse family and thought all this over. This part of Oakwood is truly beautiful and peaceful, a wonderful cemetery. Old trees, winding, irregular narrow old cinder tracks through gently uneven terrain. At this time of year, with the trees fully leafed-out, the sun did not even reach the ground. I did not see another person. I rarely if ever stopped when I was running, but this place was just too perfect, and I wanted to preserve this moment. Freeman was someone I'd met only a few days ago. It was remarkable the extent to which he'd sort of taken over my life. I'd been thinking about him and talking about him ever since. Clicks had told me something once that stuck with me, and crossed my mind now. He said that in our times, the huge personalities, the kinds of guys who ages ago used to make themselves kings and conquerors ... now they become big-time capitalists. Until today, this minute, I didn't know what to think about Freeman and SWEEP16. My Dad had probably come closest, when he wondered what you do for an encore after you've done what Freeman already has done. But now I understood what he was up to. He's made tons of money, been a big man in sports, he'll be revealing a lot of charity, and it seemed he'd pushed the military envelope very far. But none of that was enough. Will any of it cause people to remember him -- name children after him -- in 200 years? No. SWEEP16 must be what Freeman thinks can make him a success.

I was well over a mile from Lambda Chi, but I decided to walk back instead of running. It was getting warm, and I wanted to stretch out the time anyhow. I wound my way North thru the cemetery, and then onto the Stumpy campus. The State University of New York School of Forestry had a separate campus that adjoined the Syracuse University campus, and everybody called the Forestry students Stumpies. SUNY Forestry is a sister school to Syracuse in that the Stumpies live in SU dorms and take their non-forestry courses at SU; and SU students can take Stumpy classes too. One of the main

features of the Stumpy Campus is the Robin Hood Oak. As a little guy I had always admired the Robin Hood legend, so I liked the Robin Hood Oak. It was actually grown from an acorn taken in 1926 from the real Robin Hood Oak, at Sherwood Forest in England. Robin Hood. There's a guy, or at least a legend, that has been admired for about 900 years. Robin robbed from the rich and gave to the poor. Clipper's idea of SWEEP16 is robbing from the poor to give to the rich. But it's interesting to think how things can be muddled. In the old Errol Flynn movie at least, Robin took money from the tax collectors and gave it back to the tax payers. Freeman no doubt would be impressed. I looked up into the branches of the Robin Hood Oak and felt like I was understanding something, and that, plus the run, made me feel good.

After crossing the Stumpy campus I passed by the Carrier Dome, and the quad and Hendricks Chapel. It was still strange to see campus with so few people around. I wished I'd spent a summer here when I was an undergrad, and wondered why I had not.

----- 011 -----

When I got back to Lambda Chi I showered off and decided to re-read Jenna's stuff about Freeman. And for the first time I read her piece on Freeman's SWEEP16 announcement. Now I know, if I didn't already, why she referred to herself as a girl with a crush. She admitted to having never thought about taxation and its effects on us. And she came right out plainly saying she believed Freeman was the kind of guy you'd want your son to be like. She summarized the basic idea, and pretty much just said she was convinced Freeman was completely serious. She wrote she was thrilled to have her name first on the list. And she wound up with "I'll do my share. Will you?" Pretty corny, but she sure was honest ... with me over brunch, and with her readers too. Jenna never claimed to be a detached, objective reporter. This was part of why Doc Bidwell had such a low opinion of her career. But on the other hand, she had always been forthright about this, and her readers must like it. She seems to try hard to get it right, and even to be objective. So why not let her viewpoint and emotions show thru? Whatever those viewpoints were, she just put them right out there, and her viewpoints are well-informed and really, I guess, an important part of her work. Sort of a personal and intimate brand of first-person journalism. Her stuff sure is popular, and we all want readers ... I wondered if it would work for a guy.

Could it work for me? Always be honest and always admit I have my own ideas, make them part of the story. That would be a lot easier than writing as if I don't have my own views. And admitting my own views just might be fairly malleable. Jenna's way of doing things seemed very natural, now that I could compare her writing with her personality. It seemed like a natural and person-to-person way of doing the job. This is my first rodeo. I don't have a style, and never even thought about it until now. I expect my work on SWEEP16 will have a lot of Jenna's journalism style.

So I phoned Jenna again and talked it over with her. She laughed aloud when I asked if it would be OK with her if I borrowed her way of doing things.

"It's not my way of doing things. It's the way PEOPLE do things. Pure reporting is an art and a science and it is difficult. But also, in my opinion, it is not natural. Mainly tho, I don't think READERS really like it. Everybody has feelings and ideas of their own, and readers want to know yours. People enjoy and remember feelings and stories much more than a dispassionate rendering of the facts. That approach is important and appropriate a lot of the time. Newspapers are properly filled with that style. But columns are read a lot more than most of the news. Look, what could be more passionate than Freeman and his plan? He's going to be in the news all the time anyway. But the straight reporting will get only a fraction of the readers I think you will. Straight reporting and Freeman and SWEEP16 are a total mismatch. Just go with your guts. Get caught up in it. Tell people you are caught up in it. You hate it, you love it, you are disgusted by it. Whatever. And I am sure you will feel all of those emotions and other ones too. Express all of it, and readers will love it."

She paused and I heard her chuckle.

She continued more slowly. "Have you realized you are going to get a big boost just from the geography? People love having a local event on the national stage. Freeman is going to be traveling the USA, and you are going to be with him. Every time you hit a new spot, you put in some local color. It's an important part of the story. Locals love reading about their own, and, although I don't think you'll really need it, you'll pick up a bunch of new readers with each stop Freeman makes. I'd advise you to get your column in the local paper before you get to a town, if you can. Put your stuff right in people's laps, and a lot of them will be really eager to read what you have to say about their zone when the time comes. And they'll keep reading after you move on."

"Which reminds me ... did you contact any of the agents yet?"

"No ... there's just been so much going on ..."

"I can imagine! It's OK, but don't wait. Call those names I gave you, or call some other ones, but get on that now. Paperwork and negotiations can take a long time. ... Danny ... How about I conference my guy in now? Just so you know ... there is nothing in this for me. I liked you right away, you know how I feel about Freeman. I want you to have a lot of readers. That's it. I think my guy is really good, really good. That's why he's my agent. My suggestion is I connect you two, and you arrange to meet with him right away, if you like him. His name is McAdam Muir. He started out as an actor, and that was his stage name. When he became a talent agent, he kept the stage name. Makes sense I guess. I call him McMoo because he hates it. I'll phone him up now and introduce you two, and then drop off. Do you have a financial advisor?"

"Not really. Not at all! My Mom and Dad. They are both professionals, and they know a lot of people. But we haven't even thought about this stuff."

"OK, I don't think that's a problem. But it's time to get started. Hang on, I'll call McMoo."

I waited several seconds, no more than 10, and Jenna came back on.

"Danny Banks, I'd like you to meet my agent, McAdam Muir. McMoo, have you heard of Freddy Freeman and SWEEP16? and Danny Banks."

Jenna had basically introduced me to her readers in her SWEEP16 writeup.

"Jenna, I do read your column."

"Thank You, McAdam. Good. I'd like you to talk to Danny about getting his own column going. Maybe you'll remember Danny is covering Freddy Freeman's SWEEP16 campaign. Danny was offered an inside track by Freeman himself prior to his SWEEP16 announcement. Danny has just graduated from Newhouse. So he's full of energy, he's determined to do a good job, and he needs someone to get his column published. I told him about you, but for some reason he is willing to speak with you anyway. Danny already has your card."

"Wow, I'd love to speak with you about all this. This is a blockbuster opportunity for anyone. But for a guy just out of school? Holy cow! How the heck did you come by this opportunity?"

Jenna jumped in. "Guys, I need to drop off this call. Danny, just give McMoo your number and he'll call you back."

"Mr Muir, this is all new to me. Jenna feels there will be a lot of interest in Freeman's doings."

"There's no question this is a big human interest story, and a business story, and a public policy story. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Where are you now?"

"Syracuse, New York. But tomorrow I'll be back in Northern New Hampshire."

"OK, good. Here is my suggestion. I'll pull together some ideas quick. Rough stuff, no fine print. I'll send it to you and we'll talk again say tomorrow night. Please just give me your email."

"DannyBanks@Syr.edu"

"Got it. You might want to take a look at my website, McAdamMuir.com. I'm really glad Jenna put us together. Talk to you soon, Danny, Thanks a lot!"

----- 012 -----

This was my last day at school until who knows when. Come morning I would be heading back to New Hampshire and Clicks off to Chicago to find an apartment and start a real job in a few days. With nothing much better to do, I figured I'd may as well stroll down to M Street and pick up some brew. I was heading back with some cold ones, still about 3 doors away from Lambda Chi when I could hear

Clicks howling. It's never quiet or slow for long if Clicks is around. Turns out he was keyed up over nothing in particular, just loving being on campus and looking forward to the rest of the day. We sat on the porch for a while, watching the world go by. After we finished the beer, a few of us decided to go over to The Varsity for some pizza and pitchers. And we made a good account of ourselves, as we had done many times over the last four years. But this evening was different. We'd been sitting next to the windows and not a single person we knew walked by, or came in. I realized that had not happened since my first week on campus. It was a different mood for the guys from Lambda Chi, who would be taking classes in the fall, starting their senior year. As the evening wore on, they seemed to get cranked up, but for me, and even Clicks, both of us abruptly seemed to understand it was time to go. When the rest of the crew decided to move to another bar, Clicks and I decided to call it a night.

I woke up around 4AM, not feeling all that well. I thought about running it off, but then decided this would be a good time to get out of town. I'd not expected to be here again so soon after graduation, and having Clicks in town was a nice surprise. Probably I'd be back to meet with Doc Bidwell again, and I had a feeling I'd be checking in with DocDuh. But would I be meeting my school friends here again anytime soon? Not likely. The birds were sounding off and the first hint of light was in the sky when I started up the car and drove away.

For me, driving is almost as good as running for just letting my mind go. Where was Freeman now, and what was he doing? It seemed weird I'd not thought about that before. Uncle Walt said more than anyone else, he was aware that each time he saw Freeman might be the last. That's a pretty strange thing ... being considered most likely to die.

And what do I think about SWEEP16? Sure, I'll do my share. But what is my share? So far, my share hadn't amounted to much. I'd done some work to help earn money for school, and spending, but I'd not done much of anything for anyone else. I was raised to be nice to people, and I liked being nice to people. Does that count for anything? I guess, but the IRS wasn't going to give nice-guy-credits. This was about money. Had what I'd done even been worth money? Chores around the house. Helping out when somebody was moving. Wow ... what had I done? Sure never paid much in the way of taxes. Hardly ever made very much ... not enough to pay income tax. Paid social security taxes, which I had learned were different from income taxes. They were supposedly a sort of retirement plan run by the government, and I was supposedly paying social security taxes to entitle myself to retirement benefits. But what had I paid in terms of federal income taxes? I think almost nothing. Maybe literally nothing. What's more, I realized I felt ENTITLED to pay no income tax. After all, I was a student. But so what? Everybody's got some reason or other to feel exempt, probably. No doubt a lot of people figure they would put their money to better use than the government would. Like paying their own rent. Or a nice vacation. DocDuh had sort of backed Clipper into saying he felt the level of his own taxes was exactly right, and then asked why then Congress should be changing it all the time. Pretty good question. If I was really loaded, what would I do with my money? Would I pay extra taxes? Give it to charity? Keep it? How much has Freeman paid over the years? That'd be a good question to ask him when he gets back. If he gets back.

My folks were having lunch when I got back to New Hampshire. Mom interrupted her own meal to fix a sandwich and some potato salad for me, despite my protest. She insisted I just sit and tell them what I'd been up to. I glanced over at Dad and he was beaming at Mom, then gave me a look that meant DON'T ARGUE WITH YOUR MOM.

Filling in my parents gave me a chance to review what had been going on, and their questions helped clarify things in my own mind. Mom was kind of excited, and Dad was amused and intrigued, and happy for me. Dad's version of excitement was curiosity, near as I could tell.

Mom and Dad had been reading up on Freeman, and Dad had read Jenna's columns about him. But they'd also been to dinner with Uncle Walt and Aunt Arlene, and evidently the conversation had been about Freeman and SWEEP16 and me. Mom spoke first. "Danny, this has been a bit of a whirlwind since that breakfast at Freeman's. And from what we've learned since then, we think it's only just getting started. Uncle Walt had a lot to say about Freeman, but he did not want us to repeat any of it to you. So I'll just say, as you know, those two have been close friends since high school. Based on what Walt told us, plus what we've read, I think you've gotten yourself into the middle of a hurricane."

Dad stood up and began to pace a little. That's what he likes to do when he is conversing thoughtfully. Mom says it distracts everyone else, but she's never been able to make him stop it. "Danny, when I first heard about this, like I told you at the time, when you're already Freddy Freeman, what do you do next? Well, everything we've learned in these last few days tells me this guy really means it. And he knows better than anyone what an uphill struggle he's got in front of him. But I believe he's going to do what he says. And it's about the dangedest thing I've ever heard of. But I think this is what he's decided to do with the rest of his days. What do you think?"

"I've been doing a little studying up too. I read Jenna Jersey's columns on Freeman, and I spoke with her a couple of times. I had coffee with her too!"

Mom and Dad looked at each other and it was easy to see they got a kick from knowing I'd been in touch like that with someone so well known.

"Jenna's a pretty big fan of Freeman's ... she makes no pretense of anything else. She has no doubt he is dead serious and will do exactly as he said. She also told me she thinks America will love this story ... no matter what happens with SWEEP16, America will love the story because of Freeman. And she thinks people will listen, because of Freeman."

"I've decided that I will be as objective as I can -- assuming somebody wants to read my stuff! -- but also I know already I'm not going to be able to distance myself completely. So, I'm going to make it clear that I have a point of view, at least on some issues. I had lunder with some professors at school --"

Dad interrupted. "You're dining with Jenna Jersey and SU professors? Wow, what does that tell you?"

"Yeah, I know. Anyway, I got kind of aggravated when one of the profs said Freeman was looking for a free ride on his back. Freeman may be a lot of things, but he's not looking for a free ride. But the thing

was, it aggravated me when the professor said that, and I realized I can't keep my own feelings out of this. It won't matter tho if nobody reads what I write. And that's something we need to talk about."

Mom and Dad looked at me in anticipation. "Jenna --"

"First name with her Danny?" Dad was smirking at Mom.

"She's in her early 30s Dad."

"She's a grown woman, Danny. Be careful. May be more than you can handle."

Dad had never needled me like this about a female before. It seemed like he was getting a bigger kick out of this whole thing than me.

"Jenna introduced me to her agent. I need to read up on him some more. He's going to be calling me today. He thinks a lot of people will follow the SWEEP16 story. He said people's eyes will glaze over about the tax talk, but that Freeman himself will be what holds people's attention. Anyway, he is apparently interested in being my agent. I need to find a way to get paid for writing about SWEEP16 -- Freeman said I have to do that myself -- and Muir, that's the agent's name, can hopefully help me do it. Jenna actually gave me contact info for a few agents, but Muir is the one she uses herself. She trusts him, she is happy with him. I don't know anything about getting an agent, but I am getting to trust Jenna."

"She's definitely good at getting men to trust her." Dad was still having fun, but he was serious too this time.

"We'll talk to Muir, and we'll check with some other agents too."

"I'm glad you want us to be involved in selecting your agent. ... But ... you still haven't told us what you feel about the whole SWEEP16 idea."

"I don't know, Mom. I was just thinking I've never really paid much of anything in taxes, and I always kind of felt I should have been exempt from it. I suddenly felt embarrassed that I've never really done anything much for the public good. I mean, I know people don't expect a lot from someone who just graduated, but still. Close to 0? I am kind of embarrassed. So who am I to decide that someone else should do more than me? Freeman's big question ... WILL YOU DO YOUR SHARE? Yes, I really want to, I plan to do my share, even if nobody was forcing me. Will you two do your share? Do you feel you have been doing your share?"

"A big win for the USA is a lot of people asking that question. People thinking what is their share? What should they be doing as Americans? Yes, I believe Mom and I have been doing our share. Remember -- and this is important -- in the free enterprise system, you only make money when you do what makes someone else better off. It's kind of amazing to think about it that way, but it is true."

"What do you mean? Can you give me an example?"

"Sure ... you only buy a burger when you want the burger more than you want the money you trade for the burger. Same with everything else. Same with a job. You take a job because you want the pay more than you want the time and effort it will take to earn the pay. Your employers want your productivity more than they want the money it will take to cover the expenses of employing you. Our entire system of free-market capitalism is based on people making deals where both people feel they are better off as a result of the transaction. And when you think you'd rather have the money than the burger, there is no deal, you don't buy the burger. Maybe you skip the meal. Maybe you go to a supermarket and buy some baloney and a roll. But it's all voluntary, each of us acting in the best interest of ourselves. Or, at least, what we believe at the time to be in our own best interests. Strange thing, but it took me a long time to understand that, and it seems like it ought to be very obvious. So anyway ... Mom and I have made some nice money over the years. We've taken care of each other and our kids, and some other people too, at times. We've been good neighbors, we've paid lots of taxes. Mom and I believe we've done our share -- we actually talked about this over breakfast. We're not done yet, but we feel so far we have done our share. And, we've done so because we believe it was right, and we'd do it all again whether we had to or not. But I'll tell you something else ... regarding SWEEP16 ... we would not have paid all that tax money to the federal government."

"That was as much of a speech as I've ever heard from you, Pop!"

Dad realized he'd gotten on a roll, and looked a little sheepish, but he wasn't taking anything back, either. "Well?"

"I was pretty much aware of all that, but only sort of subconsciously. I'd not thought about it before. But I'll be thinking about this stuff a lot more now ... it's going to be bread and butter. But we've got to think about Muir now. I want to be a little bit prepared when he calls."

So we looked over Muir's website. Not that any of us knew much about his business, but he certainly had big name clients. This was no struggling writers' agent, that much was for sure. The site didn't have any specifics of business deals tho, and that is what we were hoping for. I thought about calling Jenna for advice, but Muir's mail popped in. We read it thru together.

Muir basically laid out standard rates in the industry, and gave me some idea of the publications he might be able to get my stories published in. He also explained how these days, any writer has to have a website of his own, and how the website would sell ads, and Muir's people would take care of all of this too. All I'd have to do is write my stuff. Muir even said he'd get me an editor if I wanted.

But then he went off in a direction that we never expected. He started telling us about how, as a young guy, he was a big-taxing liberal type, then as he started working harder and making more and getting older, he had a big change of philosophy. Muir said at this point he would consider himself Libertarian. And so he is very interested and pleased about what Freeman is up to. He put his name on Freeman's list. And therefore he will be happy to represent me at no cost while I cover SWEEP16. Either of us can terminate the relationship at any time. If it makes me more comfortable to pay him, I must agree to wait a year before doing so, and then I can pay any amount up to his standard rate, but no more. Or if I chose to donate his fee to charity that would also be OK with him.

Mom and Dad and I just looked back and forth at each other. It seemed like an offer I'd be foolish to refuse. It also seemed like here was another guy ready to do his share. Wow. Well, this was definitely something to talk over with Jenna.

But first I was going to have to get some sleep.

----- 013 -----

I was pretty hungry when I woke up, and it was more or less dinnertime. But Mom agreed to give me a good hour for a run first.

It was hard to believe how much had happened in just a few days. It was still less than a week since Uncle Walt asked me to meet him at The Crossroads. One of my Mom's favorite expressions had always been the one about WHEN OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS, OPEN THE DOOR! I could see this was an opportunity, but at this point it was also a matter of curiosity. I wanted to see where this would lead, I wanted to see more of Freeman, and I wanted to see how people were going to react to him and to his idea. Clipper and DocDuh were real friendly with each other, but they were going at it pretty good. I can only imagine how it is going to get when Freeman is talking to people himself ... some of whom will be living on checks from the government.

Again I wondered what Freeman might be up to. From everything I'd heard and read, this was not a guy looking to take it easy. Based on that alone, I felt I needed to hit this thing hard. And I was a little startled to realize Freeman was inspiring me.

I called Jenna after dinner, but it wasn't until after her phone started ringing that it occurred to me I was getting maybe too casual with her. She couldn't have been nicer to me, but here I was just a kid with a story dropped in his lap, and she at the top of the field. Plus at this time on Friday evening? She was probably getting ready for a dinner date or something.

"Jenna, I'm sorry to be calling now, I wasn't thinking. I guess really I should have waited until Monday."

"No, it's fine. What do you mean? Is something wrong?"

"Well, I figured you must have a lot of better things to do than talk to some Cub Reporter, but I'd already placed the call so I didn't want to hang up, either. Is this a bad time? I mean, I've been calling you kind of a lot."

I could hear her laughing a little, and could imagine her face. Maybe Dad was right and I'd better be careful how I thought about this woman!

"I don't have much of anything going on right now. Just finished a nice run in Central Park and I'm cooling down, walking in the shade, heading back to my place. So your timing is pretty perfect. But regardless, I liked you right off, Danny, and I told you to call me anytime. What's on your mind?"

"Muir sent me his proposal. He said basically he'll represent me for free."

Jenna was silent for a couple of seconds, then she said kind of softly "Can't beat that."

I didn't have a response, and there was silence on the line for a while. "McMoo is a little bit of a strange bird. He's kind of guarded with me, and I've never figured out why. I learned a year or so ago that he set up a trust to provide J school scholarship money. I wouldn't have told you that except if he is going to be your agent, you have a right to know a little about him personally. And although he wanted the scholarship to remain anonymous, I don't see how telling you hurts him. My guess is simply that McMoo is one of those guys who is sort of embarrassed to be a softie. It's not uncommon. I didn't think about arrangements he might make with you; only that I was confident he would represent you honorably and expertly. But I'm not that surprised I guess he offered to do it free. Did he say why?"

"Yes. He said he has put his name on Freeman's list, that he is a Libertarian, that he will do his share and that he wants to help the SWEEP16 effort, and helping me fits in with all that."

"Interesting. Are you going to take him up on his offer?"

"What do you think I should do? Or ... wait, sorry, I am putting you on the spot."

"It's OK. I gave you a few agents to talk to. It wouldn't hurt to talk with the others. But I am pretty lucky right now, I could choose pretty much any agent I want, and get a really good deal too. Not as good as yours, tho. What I am saying is that I believe McMoo is the best, or I wouldn't be using him. And here's something else. I believe he has kept his distance from me personally because he does not want to conflict me. I think he wants to make it easy for me to drop him if I'm not happy. Maybe I'll whack him with that sometime. I'll have to do it face to face so I can watch him squirm. I bet it will be very funny."

"We did a little research, and we know his reputation. Given the offer he has made to me, I think it would be churlish not to accept it. My folks feel the same."

"That's great. I believe it will be a good thing for both of you. By the way, just because you are not paying him does not mean he won't make money from your relationship. You are going to be very well known very soon. And having big clients is a big deal to an agent. It's very effective advertising."

"I had not thought about that. Makes me feel better about the freebie part."

"Good. Take Care Danny and I'm glad you've kept me in the loop."

"You've been a big help to me and I find it kind of amazing."

"Remember, my name is at the top of Freeman's list. I want to help him do his thing. And as I said, I liked you right off. I'm sure all the ladies do."

Holy cow, I did not expect a line like that. It's a good thing this was a telephone conversation, else she would have seen me blush. I was at a loss for words. "Thanks a whole lot, Jenna." It wasn't until after I said it that I realized the THANKS could be taken two ways. So I added hastily "Maybe one of these days we can run in the park together?" Holy smoke, I hadn't meant anything really, other than that I like to run in the park too, but she might be thinking I am asking her out! Am I?

I heard her beautiful laugh, and she said "I'd like that" and hung up. What was happening here?

Mom and Dad were sitting on the front porch enjoying the splendid summer evening and sipping drinks. I told them about my talk with Jenna, or at least the parts about McMoo. We decided to accept his offer.

I walked down the road and phoned him. He was energetic, cheerful, enthusiastic when I told him I was looking forward to working together. "That's great Danny! I'll talk to some publishers and advertisers, and we'll get this show on the road! How much have you written so far?"

Yikes ... I hadn't written anything, and McMoo thought that was a bit of a joke.

"Have you thought about HOW you are going to write? You need to decide a bunch of stuff. What do you want your columns to be like? First person, third person, are you part of the story or not? Your own impressions and feelings or not? Will you be putting out a sort of daily journal about what happens? Weekly? No particular schedule? Present tense? A lot of decisions like that. You won't necessarily be locked into any of it, but you've got to think now. And hopefully you'll be able to carry on as you begin. Make some tentative decisions, and write up a column or two. You should by now have enough material for several columns. With the confluence of media these days, I think you probably want to have columns designed for print, such as newspapers, and probably longer stuff that you'll publish on your website a couple of days after the newspapers print the first version. Do you have a domain reserved?"

"DannyDBanks.com."

"Good ... In the long run, that would probably be the best for your career. And you want that domain in any case."

"I've had that one for several years already. Never did anything with it, but I reserved it."

"We'll do something with it now! Think about how you want to handle things, and we'll be talking soon."

Turning around and walking back toward the house, I could hear Mom and Dad's voices coming from the front porch.

My Dad said he'd sign SWEEP16 if his son wasn't smack dab in the middle of it. Mom said she'd thought the same thing. Do they really think I'm in the middle of it?

"We do. And we feel we should not influence you, but I guess we have. We should not have let you hear us. We thought you were still talking with Muir."

"It's OK. I realized a while ago there is no way I can be totally objective. So I'm not going to try. I'll be up front about my own thoughts. I'll tell the truth as I see it and that's all I can do. I've thought about it a lot, and I spoke with Jenna about it. It will be more interesting for readers, and cleaner and easier for me. Go ahead and put your names on the list if you want. I may wind up doing just that myself one of these days."

"McMoo says he is going to fire up DannyDBanks.com ... says that is the natural place to put my archive. But guess what!? I haven't written anything yet! I have to get busy. ... There's something I've been meaning to talk with you about, tho. One of Freeman's big points is that it's not so much what something costs as it is what you have to earn in order to pay that cost."

Dad laughed a little at this, and Mom and Dad looked at each other, smiling. They didn't say anything though, so I continued. "I've been wondering how much you had to earn to send me to college."

I surely had their interest now.

"We definitely liked that you did not take 5 years to graduate the way so many do today!" Dad laughed more than a little at Mom's statement, then he picked up. "First, do you know what it cost?"

"Yes, I pretty much do, I think. I mean, we did talk about it, and I believe I remember pretty well. And I know it went up every year, too."

"Mom's doing so well at work meant a lot, Danny."

Mom had stopped working for quite a few years when I was growing up. She'd returned to work when I was a sophomore in high school. It had been something of a flyer for her; she took a job in a medical imaging company. She didn't have a background in it, and started at a basic level, but she did awfully well, very quickly, and by the time I was ready for college it was easy even for me to see that Mom's earnings had made a big difference to the family. "All told, tuition, books, room, board, lab fees, etc., etc., I think it was about \$250,000."

Mom and Dad smiled at each other. "That's about right, Danny", said Mom. "Glad you did remember. A lot of young people don't really think of it at all if they are not the ones paying."

"One reason I remember is because I did think about it. I mean, I only earned about \$10,000 working in the summers, and I thought about how it would have been impossible for me to pay myself. And I thought about how much debt I'd have piled up without you and Dad. Really, I would have had to go somewhere else. But college is expensive everywhere, it seems."

"So have you thought about how much you had to earn in order to pay \$240,000?"

"That's a great question, Danny ... no, we haven't. Or at least, I haven't." Mom shrugged to indicate she hadn't thought about it carefully either. "Of course we know it had to be substantially more, and I think we have a pretty good idea what the actual number is. I'd say about \$440,000. Probably not double, but not so far off, either."

Dad had a funny look on his face, like I was drawing him into something he wasn't sure he wanted to take part in. "But it's not really possible for anyone to say. We have money from salary and money from investments ... both dividends and capital gains. They are all taxed differently. And even our salaries are taxed differently ... from year to year and even within a year. Mom earns more than the Social Security maximum now, but she was paying Social Security tax on all of her earnings while we were building your college fund."

We talked about the different types of earnings, and how Mom's, and to some extent Dad's, changing earnings had changed the tax picture. And we all agreed the complexity could not be a good thing overall. It was interesting to me that even my folks, whom I thought of as pretty well off working people, had a fairly complicated tax picture.

We decided to simplify things by looking only at my last year of school, at least for starters.

"So let's say the last year cost about \$65k. But you also had your best summer, didn't you? About \$5000?"

"So \$60k even then for senior year. And if we paid for your school with Mom's last marginal dollars, then she paid about 2.9% Medicare tax on her salary, but we can leave out the 12.4% FICA." Pop was agreeing with Freeman that even though Mom's company paid half the Medicare tax, Mom had to earn the money in the first place for the company to pay it on her behalf.

Freeman's calculator had the legal and tax information we needed ... basically we just filled in some personal information such as where we lived and how the money was made. Salary in this case. So before Mom paid her federal income tax, she already had to pay 3.876% New York City resident income tax as well as 6.85% New York State income tax, for a total of 10.726%. Freeman's software had a little popup window that pointed out that Medicare taxes are themselves not tax deductible. That is, the feds take the money, but they tax you as if they didn't. And so does New York State and City. The Medicare tax is relatively small, so this did not have a big effect on Mom, but it would be much more significant if we'd been looking at the first \$114,000 of her salary, where she paid the full 15.3% Social Security and Medicare.

"OK, so the calculator is saying about \$117,245. And it explains that it says 'about' because it is difficult to actually say how the Social Security components should be treated. So you were right, pretty close to double."

"Freeman is making some good points, that's for sure." Mom looked at Dad when she said this, and he continued her thought ... "I guess we should be glad we didn't have to pay sales tax on top of the \$60k!!"

"I've known my education was really expensive for you, but until I starting this thing with Freeman, I really did not focus on how much you had to EARN, and really, I think now that earnings is actually the key number. THANKS AGAIN really doesn't cut it. I hope ... I'll try ... to do the same someday for my children."

Mom gave me a big hug and pulled my head down to kiss my cheek. "THAT cuts it, Danny. I know you will. And it was our pleasure. We're so proud of you!"

This had been an interesting little bit with Mom and Dad, but not I thought what I should be writing about, at least not yet. One thing for sure, I had a lot of learning to do about Freeman himself.

I wondered if there would be anything in the news about what Freeman was up to, or if there would be any hint of it. Then it crossed my mind that I should have stayed all over the news to see what people were saying about SWEEP16, but I'd hardly paid any attention! It made me feel way behind in my work.

Chasing around on the web, there was no hint of what Freeman might be doing wherever he was now, but there was plenty of stuff about SWEEP16, and I could hardly believe I'd been oblivious to it. I'd never paid much attention to the editorial pages, and frankly, I didn't pay that much attention to the news, which I guess is weird for a journo. It's just that most of it didn't interest me very much. But that was going to have to change ... there were columnists, editorialists, some hard-news stuff, talking heads on the various current-events shows. I had a lot of catching up to do. Plus, I didn't really have a solid base of knowledge either. I didn't know who was left wing or right wing or middle of the road. And a bunch of politicians had weighed in too!

It seemed Freeman was somewhat optimistic predicting half the people would go along with the idea right off. On the other hand, I was somewhat surprised so many people were willing to basically pitch a structure we'd had for 100 years. But it was all sort of second-tier media. None of the networks or the biggest newspapers had anything to say about SWEEP16, and that surprised me too. There was one thing that really stood out, tho. United States Senator Carter Gardner of Wyoming, when asked about SWEEP16, simply said WITH ALL MY HEART.

----- 014 -----

I went out running early Sunday morning, and noticed my folks' car was not in the driveway. Mom and Aunt Arlene had sort of gotten into the habit of getting to the morning's first church service. And then they were quite likely to stop off at the bakery and supermarket, and put together a serious breakfast for Uncle Walt, Dad and me. It had been one week, one very interesting week, since I had that breakfast with Freeman. Probably more had happened in this one week than any other week in my life. It was a good run, and I basically wrote my first column. Except I couldn't figure out exactly how to start it ... how to introduce myself??

Thinking about the past week and the writing I logged about 8 miles and was REALLY hoping for one of those serious Sunday breakfasts. When I got back, Freeman's old Harley was parked next to Mom and Dad's car, and I knew I was in luck! I wondered right away tho ... Aunt Arlene got here in Mom's car. Is she going to ride the Harley back home with her arms around Uncle Walt? I want to get a picture of that!

YESSIR! Baked goods right out of the oven, Canadian bacon, fancy eggs, fresh-picked berries and cream. But the conversation was the kicker. The minister at church had delivered his sermon on SWEEP16. It seems the minister was totally against the idea. He'd gone on about a bunch of things he claimed government did that had to be done, and that could not be done otherwise. I sat and listened while Uncle Walt, Aunt Arlene and my folks bandied whether the minister was right, and whether it was even an appropriate topic for a sermon. I'd not been aware, but apparently ministers and tax-exempt organizations in general are not supposed to be politically active in the course of their operations. Dad claimed that SWEEP16 is not political, in that Freeman was not speaking for any political party, and he was not running for office. True enough, but the politicians were going to have to get involved if the idea was going anywhere. Uncle Walt pointed out that so far, the politicians hadn't really commented, and he believed this was because they were taking SWEEP16 seriously, didn't like it, didn't want to bring attention to it. Dad added that politicians are very careful about ever going up against a military hero. I actually hadn't thought about this much, but Dad was saying there is no American institution that is as widely admired and supported as the military, and although he didn't talk about it himself to any degree, Freeman could be as much the face of the military as anyone, if he moved in that direction.

Anybody who liked football, and was over about 40 or 45 years old, could remember when Freeman retired from the pros to go back into the SEALs. He'd walked away from a lot of money and celebrity to go back to something almost the opposite. Not only that, but he was quite likely to face extreme danger. It had been a long time ago, at least from the perspective of this 22-year old, but it was fresh in the memory of the older generation, and it had built Freeman a huge reservoir of admiration and good will. Uncle Walt and Dad believed politicians were immediately cowed by this.

"I'll tell you something else ... if American women get much of a look at Freddy, they will listen." Aunt Arlene ought to know, I guess. She'd spent a lot of time around Freeman over the years.

I told her Jenna Jersey had said the same thing. "But what about SWEEP16? What do you all think about SWEEP16 as an idea?"

Uncle Walt spoke first. "Well, Danny knows I'm down with it. But it's pretty automatic for me to back Freddy."

"Really, the same for me. Even if I disagreed, I'd likely back the idea out of loyalty to Walt and Freddy. But I don't disagree. I think it's as beautiful, as Christian an idea as I've ever heard. I was surprised Pastor Jack was so set against it."

Mom leaned forward. "There are an awful lot of people who believe that government ought to see things are made right, people's needs are met. And the idea of a huge, benevolent government has

been sort of planted in our minds, and nurtured over the years. If you didn't think about the bigger picture, it's easy to see how the scope and size of government just grows and grows and grows. Pastor Jack is like a lot of us ... he sees good results, but he does not see the costs. He does not see the costs at any level."

Everyone was silent for a minute, and Dad and Uncle Walt took the opportunity to dig into some more breakfast.

Mom continued. "I have to say I didn't think about these things much either. But now it does seem clear we have built an unbelievably huge leviathan, and all it ever wants is MORE. Even tho it does a lot of great things, it's not at all clear to me it's worth the price."

The fact that my family was getting so thoughtful about SWEEP16 had really caught my interest. They had such strong and direct ties it was natural. But the preacher devoting a sermon to it? I guess that was natural enough too, given that a lot of the people listening had some connection to Freeman, or knew of him, and that SWEEP16 was an important local story.

The breakfast had probably been a pretty simple thing for Mom and Arlene to put together. Both of them had a lot of years in the kitchen, and I'd seen Mom prepare meals and talk with guests or even handle email and work-related phone calls while she did it. But everything they put on the table was really prime. The berries and cream were fantastic, and I was glad I'd done 8 miles to prepare for this meal ... I was also glad I wouldn't be running again until tomorrow, because I was definitely going to top off the tank now. I switched back to the real food, making myself a sort of sandwich with the eggs and bacon, and noticed everyone was watching me. "Aunt Arlene ... Mom ... this is one great breakfast. I feel like I shouldn't let any of it be left over. It'll never be as good as it is now. Thanks for doing all this!"

"Every mother loves to feed a young guy like you, Danny. And it's pretty great feeding an old hubby too." Aunt Arlene gave Uncle Walt a pat on the belly. "We're all very lucky to have this morning together."

"What do you say, Biker Girl? Ready to feel the wind in your hair?"

"Uncle Walt, did you and Aunt Arlene ride together often?"

"Before we were married, the only wheels we had were my bike. Which is kind of nuts for Northern New Hampshire. But, it's good to be a little nuts, and we were only 20 or so. Yes, we rode a lot. But not for years."

"Maybe 30 years?" Aunt Arlene was laughing. But, she was putting on a helmet, too. "Riding a bike is like riding a bicycle! It'll be perfect ... on a perfect day. Let's hit the road, Easy Rider!"

I got a couple of great pictures and they were gone. I really liked seeing the two of them that way, and it made me wish I could somehow see Mom and Dad 35 years ago. As I watched them head down the road, Dad came up next to me and said "How about some fishing?"

Fishing was not something Dad and I had ever really gotten into much. It was sort of like both of us had this idea we should enjoy it more than we did. Maybe that was the New Yorker coming out in us. But we did have some fishing gear and we'd had a general plan to do a good bit of fishing while we were up here for the summer. Plus, it would be nice to take a break from SWEEP16 stuff for a few hours. So I said "Sure" and we were on our way to the lake.

Neither of us said much of anything for a while. It was great to be out on the beautiful lake on a beautiful morning, and it didn't matter a bit to me whether we caught a fish or not. I was enjoying just paddling the canoe around while Dad cast his line.

"Danny" -- when Dad used that tone I knew he had something he wanted to talk over with me. "Do you remember how we talked about the different ways a person can choose to live? Remember the two conflicting schools of thought?"

It had been a while, but being that I just graduated, now would be a natural time to talk about it again. "You told me when you were growing up, a common saying was DON'T TRY TO BE SOMETHING YOU'RE NOT. And you also said in the days of ancient Greece, people believed pretty much the opposite. The idea then was DECIDE WHAT YOU WANT TO BE, AND BECOME IT. Yes, those are two pretty opposite philosophies."

"What exactly do you think they mean?" I thought it was pretty obvious, but Dad had something on his mind.

"Well, they don't mean a profession, like whether or not you should try to be a lawyer. Both philosophies I think refer to the type of person you want to be. Should you try to find the role that seems most natural for you? Or should you strive for something that maybe is not natural for you? If you're afraid of heights, should you just avoid heights? Or should you challenge your fear and maybe try to conquer it by getting into skydiving?"

"OK. Good, that's the basic idea. What have you decided for yourself?"

"I haven't really. I haven't really even thought about it much. It's just been on my mind to get my degree and a job. What about you? Which way have you gone?"

"Neither one completely. At your age I'd never thought about it at all. So you're ahead of me. But once I asked Mom to marry me, I knew I was going to do my best to be a good husband, and then later to be a good father. Neither of those were things that I would have said were purely 'being myself', but I think they became pretty natural as my circumstances of life changed. Certainly I picked my profession and made a pretty serious run at it. And you are doing the same. And you tried hard in high school to be a serious athlete. I know you were pretty disappointed to realize you just did not have the potential for D1 football. But you were pushing yourself as hard as your body could take. That's something to be admired."

He was rambling, and that really wasn't like Dad. He wasn't much of a talker, let alone a Rambler.

"What's on your mind, Pop?"

"Have you thought about Freeman? Which philosophy he's adopted?"

"Not in terms of this conversation. But the answer is easy. He's busy trying to be what he thinks he ought to be."

"And what do you think that is?"

"He's been a big time athlete. That started probably before he thought about it much. And then a soldier, then an even bigger athlete. Then a big businessman. A family man. A soldier again, and an even bigger business man."

"What else?"

"Well, he is really courteous and friendly and cheerful. And sort of graceful with people. I guess you would say he is a gentleman."

"Anything else?"

"A manager. In business, and probably in the military too, he is a leader. It was obvious talking to the guys who work for him, they respect him and they like him." I still didn't know where he was going with this.

"Shakespeare had a similar thought when he wrote about how life's a stage and we are all players. Most of us are coasting along ... living according to the 'Being what we are' philosophy. Trying to do different things, but still, within pretty narrow confines. There are not many people who come up with grandiose ideas, and push to realize them. And far fewer who actually do realize grandiose ideas. Anyway, like I said, I've been thinking about SWEEP16 and reading and thinking about Freeman. The role -- the roles -- he's chosen for himself, the things he has done, what he has made of himself, the way he lives ... extremely special. But what I want you to think about is this: I can hardly imagine anything harder than being Freddy Freeman."

This was completely unexpected, but just a couple of seconds thought convinced me Dad was right. How dense of me not to have realized this on my own. Freeman must have worked like a dog and made incredible sacrifices, exercised enormous discipline and self-control. I'd not thought about the process of it at all. This multi-faceted extremist was certainly about as far from a random creation as could be. And if anything, at this point it seems Freeman is doubling down. I just said "Thanks Dad", and decided to row us over toward a spot where a creek emptied into the lake.

It took me several minutes to get to where I had in mind, and as I stopped rowing I told Dad how it had aggravated me when Professor Clipper was talking about Freeman looking for a free ride. Dad turned and gave me a look that told me he was glad I'd figured something out.

"I read fish often congregate in spots like this one, where cooler water and some current join a lake."

Dad acted on my suggestion, and was soon fast to a fish, which turned out to be a nice trout. A brook trout, I thought. After I netted Dad's fish, we looked at each other, and Dad cast again, and again. He soon hooked a second fish, and another just a few minutes later. Clearly, there was something special about this area of the lake. Dad grabbed a paddle and insisted I do the fishing. It wasn't long before we had 6 nice trout aboard, and we decided that was plenty for the 3 of us for dinner. I will admit we came home with our trophies feeling rather smug and self-satisfied, and almost as if these two city-boys weren't so out of place in Northern New Hampshire after all!

----- 015 -----

That evening, after a great trout dinner, I got on the web and caught up with the past week's news on SWEEP16 and Freeman. And it occurred to me that I was going to have to make a habit of paying attention to broadcast and cable TV news as well, at least sometimes.

There had been a number of editorials that came out in the few days after Freeman's announcement, and there were a number of columnists who were weighing in with their weekly pieces. People mostly either scoffed at SWEEP16, ridiculed Freeman, or said there were excesses in the tax code, and that maybe SWEEP16 discussions could help to get things cleaned up a bit. I did not find a single editor or columnist who bought the idea except for some small-readership, more-or-less unknown blogger-types. Oddly tho, I did not see anybody directly contradict any of the specifics Freeman had laid out. Maybe they did not want to give the idea that much respect?

I got up fairly early and ran about 5 miles, thinking more about my first column while my feet did their thing. Soon as I got back I wrote up my first piece on my laptop. Mom and Dad were up by the time I finished, and I ran it by them. They thought it was OK, but we really didn't know. I wound up rewriting half of it, but doubted I'd made it any better. I decided to just send it off to McMoo with a note saying I was ready to change pretty much everything. It was enough for me to try to tell the story. Best to let McMoo do his thing and figure out how to get people interested.

Getting back onto the web and reviewing media, there was some pretty interesting stuff that I'd skipped over before. Smaller outlets -- e-magazines, bloggers, discussion groups -- had some carefully thought-out pieces from people I'd never heard of. As before, people weighing in seemed to fall into two groups; either they liked the idea of SWEEP16, or they mocked and hated it. The 2nd group tended to dismiss SWEEP16 more or less out of hand, assuming there was really no reason to argue seriously against it. A lot of the folks in this group were clearly angered by the idea, as Doc Bidwell and Peter Clipper had been. Some got downright nasty. And the nasty ones all believed Freeman was just working some kind of angle to dodge his own obligations. Those who liked it, tho, were generally thoughtful. But a lot of them seemed to think SWEEP16 was a sort of starting point for a discussion, and maybe it would be a way to get tax burdens reduced and simplified. As if they felt Freeman wasn't totally serious about what he had said, and was just trying to advance a radical idea in order to win

some points in the usual debate. I was surprised to see one of the late-night TV comics, Darren Ledbetter, had offered some barbs. He had a couple of lines about the rich not needing any more tax breaks than they have already, but then he got nasty, saying Freeman's "slutty-looking wife" didn't need any more diamonds. I'd learned as a kid -- you just NEVER said anything about a guy's girlfriend, let alone a guy's WIFE! Why would someone do that?

It also seemed weird to me that people took shots at Freeman for his heading off to parts unknown right after he made his announcement. As if it was some kind of a stunt. It hadn't occurred to me that it was anything other than what he'd said ... something came up after the announcement was scheduled. Could it be that he was just cooling his heels somewhere? Uncle Walt certainly didn't think so, and he ought to know.

I thought about reading some economics texts, maybe an econ 101 book, but decided against it. Then I thought getting in touch with DocDuh would be a lot more productive. He could lay out all the econ I'd ever want to hear, but his Russian perspective interested me more. It had surprised me how he'd been so enthusiastic about SWEEP16. More so than anybody else I'd read about or talked to. Yes, definitely DocDuh.

It wasn't long before I heard back from McMoo. He didn't like anything I'd written except maybe my chronology, which was completely straightforward. Probably he gave me that because he couldn't think of anything else positive to say. I spent a lot of the next several days reworking my first column about 11 times. I did talk to DocDuh, which was very interesting, and to Jenna, which was a pleasure and something of a comfort, considering she knew McMoo well and understood what a scourge he could be. He kept telling me I had to develop my own style, but it seemed to me my own style was where I'd started, not where I was now after so many re-writes. Jenna was amused, and advised me to simply let McMoo do his job, and go with just about anything he said. So I did, and together with McMoo we developed "my style" of writing. After he'd beat me up for a half hour or so on the phone, he was about to hang up, and I was looking forward to getting rid of him. Then he did this "Oh, by the way ..." routine. This was how he broke the news he'd gotten me a contract. He syndicated me! He had a bunch of papers lined up to print my column ... just like that! He was actually apologetic about the money, but it sounded pretty great to me, and McMoo stressed it was only the start.

----- 016 -----

McMoo called me on Friday and said it was time to really nail down that first column, because we were getting published on Sunday. Well, after so many rewrites I'd felt any of the last 6 or 8 of them were good enough, so I was comfortable going with what we had on hand. McMoo had me working off a server his company used, so I didn't even need to mail him anything. He could literally watch my keystrokes, which was sort of weird ... having no privacy. But on the other hand I was free to do

whatever I wanted on my side and upload -- or just keep it private. The server was more for efficiency and loss prevention, and that was reassuring.

On Sunday morning I made the beautiful 3-hour drive to Montpelier so I could pick up some newspapers. Of course, my column would be the same wherever it appeared, but I was still dying to see it in different places! I was back before noon, and was happy to see the old Harley in the driveway again. Mom and Aunt Arlene had kept some serious chow warm for me, and each of them, plus Dad and Uncle Walt read my column in a different paper while I paid my respects to a great Sunday brunch.

The family seemed to get a bigger charge out of my writing than I did. And I was certainly sure to give Uncle Walt a big Thank You. He was very happy for me, and when he stood and came over to hug me, I gave him a shove like he always did to me. The best part was it took him completely by surprise, and he might have gone down if Dad hadn't been behind him.

We had quieted back down and Dad and Uncle and I were helping ourselves to a little more of the sisters' fixings. There was a tone, and Uncle Walt pulled a phone out of his pocket. I'd not seen Uncle use a phone for more than talking, but he'd evidently received a message.

"Freddy's ... he's probably going to be OK. Says he is waiting for a chopper to get him off the mountain and on his way home. He wants to know what I'm doing." Uncle Walt stopped talking and typed a message back. Now we were all watching him. And I will admit to being surprised when he dictated his answer to his phone and made a couple of manual edits. He's obviously been doing some texting.

He told Freddy the 5 of us are together, having a fantastic Sunday morning breakfast and talking about SWEEP16 and reading Danny's first column. Also told him there is a lot of buzz. He'll like hearing that, he explained to us. "And he loves hearing I'm with loved ones, enjoying our American lives."

Mom and Dad immediately began asking Uncle Walt for more info.

"I don't really know much. Usually when he finishes something up he just sends me a message to let me know he is OK. But you have to understand ... with Freddy 'OK' does not mean a whole lot more than that he is alive. He could be busted up and bleeding. He could still be in a fairly bad spot. Usually if he is waiting on a chopper tho, he feels like he is pretty much DONE, and it's time for him to relax as he can. I don't know where he is, or what he was doing specifically. But I do know he doesn't go unless it is important and, it seems, difficult and dangerous."

Uncle Walt got another message.

"Freddy says 'HI' to everyone. Says he'll be home in a couple of days. Says I should hug all of you."

Uncle spoke to his phone again. "Get your sorry backside back here right away. I don't like being the ugliest guy in town."

I could see relief and happiness on Uncle Walt's face, and did not realize until now how, when he told me always he had in his mind he might never see Freeman again, he really meant it, and it meant a lot

to him. Then he got up and grabbed me and hugged me. He hadn't hugged me for probably 10 years. No shove this time. I guess the hug I thwarted earlier was not to be denied. And I hugged him back. Then he walked over to Dad, who stood up, and he hugged Dad for a few seconds. Dad looked surprised but he went along with it. Next he went to Mom and she got even more of the treatment. He'd saved Aunt Arlene for last. He kissed her on the head, then the lips, then he wrapped his arms around her and held her for a bit, with nobody saying anything. He reached down low and picked her up in his arms and did a couple of dance steps, then kissed her again as he put her gently down. "This is a great day and we are all unbelievably lucky to share it together!"

It was strange to see this type of emotion from Uncle Walt, and I'd not seen him in such a state except at his daughter's wedding. "I'm really relieved. Freddy's getting too old for this stuff. He IS too old for this stuff. He says he is going to be winding down on these missions, but I don't think that means anything, really." Aunt Arlene suggested maybe we should all visit Martine, Freddy's wife, and Uncle thought both Martine and Freddy would like that.

It wasn't clear to me such a visit would be appropriate. There was no way I was going to be able to keep a true journalistic distance -- that had been clear for a while. But it didn't seem like I should be getting into the friend-of-the-family mode either. On the other hand, it would be a natural part of the story to see more of Freeman's home front, and meet his Mrs. So Uncle Walt made a call, and we all piled into Mom's car for the drive over to Freeman's.

It still seemed a little strange to me that Uncle Walt regarded this plush estate as practically his own. And when Aunt Arlene remarked on a couple of recent changes to the grounds, I realized she'd also been here many times.

As we drove toward the house, Mom and Dad commented on how ... amazing the place is. And Mom said to her sister, "It's wonderful you seem to feel so at-home here."

"If we didn't, it'd break Freddy's heart. Marti's too."

Aunt and Uncle introduced us not only to Martine Freeman, but also to Freeman's parents George and Ann and to a very elderly woman named Serena. Apparently all these people lived here. All of them were very warm and friendly and clearly happy to see us, and to have us share with them a sort of celebration the likes of which I had not been aware of until now. Again I was struck by my own cluelessness ... how many times had these people wondered and worried if their loved one was hurt, in trouble, or even dead? How hard must that be for all our military families? I found myself wondering how many people left the military simply to remove this sort of worry from their families' lives?

Martine Freeman was tiny, slender, very elegant and ladylike. I'd gotten a feeling from Freeman that he just had better manners than me ... I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but I got the same feeling from Mrs Freeman. That Ledbetter, the talk-show host, would describe her as slutty-looking seemed even more out-of-line now that I'd met her. A couple of my friends at school were French-Canadian, and Mrs Freeman's perfect English had the sound of someone from Quebec. English is my only language, and when I encounter a person whose speaks my language well, but with traces of some other primary

language, I'm very conscious of being in the presence of someone who has something important that I do not, and it impresses me.

Freeman's Mom and Dad looked to be mid-70s, and both seemingly feeling pretty good physically. Freeman's Dad, George, had a clear Spanish accent to his speech. Freeman's Mom, Ann, had grown up in Russia, several hundred miles Northeast of Moscow. Jenna had told me George Freeman was Cuban. Both of them still showed some of the athletic build that was so obvious in Freeman.

The younger Mrs Freeman invited us all to sit, and she put some cheeses and crackers and the like on the table. As she set about taking care of the hospitality, Uncle Walt and Dad began to talk with Freeman's Dad, and the ladies sort of separated into their own group and left me alone momentarily. I looked around some, and although the place was not fancy, it was easy even for me to see the big money. I certainly don't have much of an eye for this sort of thing, but the table, the chairs, the doors and woodwork, the high ceiling. The refrigerator and stove were different than any I'd seen before. And the stove had about 12 burners ... it was huge!

A woman wearing an apron walked in, and I remembered Marcia from two weeks ago. She smiled at me when Mrs Freeman introduced us, and said we'd already met over a previous breakfast. Mrs Freeman asked us all if there was anything we'd like, but we explained it hadn't been long since we finished brunch. Mrs Freeman said Marcia was pretty magical in the kitchen, and asked her to just fix some interesting tidbits. Then she took us all into a room with a lot of glass in the walls and ceiling and plants everywhere. I think such a place would be called a conservatory, not that I'd ever been in one before ... pretty much a greenhouse that was part of the house. It had real nice chairs and tables and a sink and bar and some hoses and trowels and gardening things on some shelves in the corner. Apparently it was used as a kind of family room, and I could see why, particularly in the long tough New Hampshire winter.

The women began talking about the different roses and all, and Freeman's Dad pulled some wine out from under the bar. I was still sort of in between the two groups and just looking around when the elderly woman Serena walked over to me.

"This is my favorite room. The air is always so nice here, with the scent of all the plants. I'm so glad Martine loves gardening. There is something always in bloom here. It reminds me of Cuba that way."

"Yes, Ma'am, I can understand that. I've never been to Cuba, but I have been to the Caribbean a little, and the flowers definitely do something great to the air. Do you miss Cuba?"

"How sweet of a young man to ask such a question. Yes, I miss Cuba, but mostly I miss the life I had before the dictators. I was young then, my husband and I were together, and ... well, that was enough. We used to see Freddy's grandparents most every day. They were our best friends. Every old woman misses such things, of course."

At a guess, I believed Serena was likely the oldest person I'd ever spoken to. She was small and slight and moved slowly. But she was also alert, cheerful, stately. And very thoughtful and deliberate.

"I understand Mr and Mrs Freeman came to America a few months before Freddy was born, specifically because they wanted him to be born in the USA."

"Yes, that is correct. They wanted Freddy born in New Hampshire, actually. Ann grew up in Russia ... Siberia. She used Cuba as a stepping stone to America. If not for Ann, George would still be Jorge, living in Cuba. Ann was raised with America in her heart."

"Why New Hampshire? That's a kind of surprising destination for Cubans."

"Yes, not many Cubans come here. We're bred to the warmth, after all. But my husband and George's father were great friends. They had learned about America, and American Freedom. George's Dad was a boxer, so was George--a great boxer. George's Dad was an admirer of Rocky Marciano, the American world champion boxer."

"I've heard of him. He was from Massachusetts."

"My husband found in a souvenir shop in Havana a poster of Rocky standing next to a statue with a plaque reading LIVE FREE OR DIE. George's Dad did not know any English, but my Roberto knew enough English to understand the words, and he gave the poster to George's Dad because he knew he would love it. When they found out LIVE FREE OR DIE is the state motto, New Hampshire became in their minds THE place to live. And so, Freddy was born here in New Hampshire because of the dream of his grandparents."

"That is a very interesting story, and I have a feeling Ma'am there is plenty more to it. Some day before long I hope to hear it all. Mr Freeman" -- I did not feel right calling him Freddy in this woman's presence -- "has given me the opportunity to write about SWEEP16."

"Will you sit with me over in the corner, Danny?"

She took me across the big room to where we were a little bit isolated, and we sat down on opposite sides of a small table. Serena -- I'd been told nobody ever called her anything but Serena -- took my hands in hers and said "Please tell me about yourself." It seemed odd to me she wanted to learn about me, but it also seemed that she was not a person to be denied. So I told her about myself while she stared intently into my face and eyes, occasionally looking down at our joined hands. She listened without expression, and asked a few questions. This went on for what seemed a long time to me, and although I did not look, I had the feeling that everyone else had stopped to watch us at one point. If there ever was a sweet, grandmotherly type of woman, Serena was it. Yet at the same time I felt sort of trapped, as if I was being questioned under the lights in a police station! I learned later that Uncle Walt had laughingly told Dad Serena had me in her 'death trance' and that once Serena sat you down and had both your hands, there was simply no escape, no sidestepping her questions, and no hiding the truth. I can only say I was sure glad I felt comfortable telling her whatever she wanted to know, because I don't think I could really have resisted if I'd wanted to. The woman was something. She released me when Marcia came with the food, and I felt the release more in my mind than my hands, that was sure.

Mom was sitting with Martine Freeman and I asked if I might join them, along with my plate of Marcia's Magic. They smiled at me, and as I sat down, Mom was asking Mrs Freeman how she had met Freddy.

Mrs Freeman had a wistful look which she turned on my Mom, not me, and I figured I'd best make an exit and get the story later from Mom. Mrs Freeman read my thoughts, tho, and put her index finger on my forearm. "This is part of Freddy's story, so I think you should hear it, Danny. It's really like something out of a story book."

"We met when we were both at McGill University in Montreal. Freddy was a student, and I was not. I was really just living in the college environment, but I was not taking any courses. I just liked being around there. I'd been a really terrible teenager, made life so difficult for my folks, and never had a reason for it. A crazy kid. Had a semester of college, but made a hash of it. Didn't want to go home tho, so I stayed in Montreal. I loved the big city, and thought I hated my little home town and living with Mom and Dad. So I just kind of hung around McGill, going to parties, working a little, but basically living on charity of the students and almost zero money, staying in various sorority houses for a week or two at a time. It was not a good way to live, but I didn't really understand that. Never gave a thought to tomorrow. It was during the summer when I met Freddy. Not many students on campus, nowhere near as many as fall, but there were still plenty of parties to go to, and Montreal can be wonderful in summer. Freddy came up to me and started talking at one of the get-togethers. The music was loud and I could hardly hear him, and frankly didn't notice him too much. There were so many boys around, meeting another one didn't mean anything to me. I saw him a couple of times in the next week. A bunch of us used to go to Mt Royal Park all the time -- it's a big park that pretty much adjoins the campus. I saw Freddy there two or three times, and we talked some more and walked in the park together. He bought me lunch, which I will admit was my main focus at the time. I was in a fog those days, half-zombie, and I didn't even know it myself. But Freddy did, because he pushed my hair back behind my shoulders, to get my attention. It was the first time he ever touched me. And he said 'Martine, what's wrong?' I told him I was fine, nothing was wrong, which was pretty much the opposite of the truth. There was an awful man who was trying to make me work for him, plus of course I was broke with nowhere to call home, and no one around that I was really close to. And Freddy told me I had a cloud hanging over me, and he asked me again what was wrong. I remember all this so clearly, as if it just happened today, not more than 30 years ago. I could feel his gaze, but I wasn't looking at him, I was withdrawing into myself, if anything. But he took my hand and he said firmly 'I will find out what is troubling you, and I will obliterate it.' I didn't take him seriously, I didn't take any of the guys seriously, and I admit I was somewhat scornful when I asked him why he would obliterate my troubles. He said 'Because', and he paused and held both my hands until I looked in his face, then he continued in French, 'Because ... you will be my wife.' I was shocked and speechless and just stared back at him. He switched back to English. 'You asked me why, and it would have been dishonest not to tell you. I won't bring it up again until I think you are ready to say YES.' And I was an A1 idiot because all I could think was I had to get out of there. And so I scurried off without saying a word, and I didn't even have anywhere to go!"

"I thought constantly about what he'd said tho. He was pretty much the opposite of the other guys who were interested in me. It seemed crazy, what he'd said, but I knew he was serious. The terrible man I

mentioned was the owner of a bar where I had done a little waitressing. He was a predator of unattached young women in the big city. The customers were good tippers but raunchy and forward and I never went back after my first shift there. But the owner had the idea that nobody quits working for him, and so when he saw me in the street he told me I'd better get back to his place and slapped me hard across the face. This was in public on a main street and maybe he didn't want to make too much of a scene there because I broke free and ran off and he didn't come after me."

"I was very upset, terrified really, and without any conscious thought it just came into my head that I needed to see Freddy. But I had no way of getting in touch with him. All I knew was he was studying math. I didn't know where he lived and I'd refused to exchange phone numbers, mostly because I did not have one. So I just hurried over to campus and started walking around the physics and engineering buildings because I thought a math student would eventually show up in that area! It was very lucky that I did see Freddy coming out of a building, and I made straight for him without thinking, like somebody swimming for a lifeboat in the ocean. His face lit up when he saw me, but when I got closer I could see his mood turn furious in an instant. I thought he was mad at me for a second, but he asked 'Did someone hit you?!' His voice held a mixture of tenderness and menace that startled me completely. He really wanted me to tell him all about it, but I didn't want to involve him. For one thing, pretty much everybody was intimidated by Mr Big Stuff -- that was how he made his living. I just wanted to go off somewhere with Freddy, and I asked him if we could maybe just go to the Park, see if any of the usual crowd was playing Frisbee. Frisbee was a staple of life for some of the students, especially in summer. So there were always people playing, and the Frisbee crowd were actually somewhat awed by what Freddy could do with the disc. So we go, and some of the guys are throwing the Frisbee around ... we join in. Freddy still loves Frisbee, you know, which seems kind of funny to me. Anyway, Freddy is running off chasing a long throw, and Mister Big Stuff pulls up in his big car and he gets out and grabs me and he's pulling my hair and slapping me. One of the guys yelled at him, but basically they were just a bunch of young hippies playing Frisbee, and here is this big guy who uses fear and violence as a way of life. I wasn't aware of anything except being hit, really, but then he stopped hitting and he's just holding me by my hair, and I hear a bellow, a war yell. Big Stuff let me go and I see Freddy racing toward us making this bloodcurdling sound. At that time, I had no idea what he was capable of, what he'd already done. I actually saw Big Stuff's teeth come flying out of his head. It took less than a second."

"Freddy is not a braggart or a showoff in the least, BUT, you will learn he does have a sense of theatre. He asked if I'm OK, he tells me I handled myself very well, by which he meant I did not scream or cry. Then he asked me if I wanted him to kill Big Stuff. I just kind of stared back at him, I was stunned really by what had just happened. I didn't say anything, so Freddy continued. He said he could easily break his neck or strangle him. He was completely serious, I have no doubt. He was so full of adrenaline, I think he would have been happy to have someone else to fight."

"I told him NO, and I looked again at Big Stuff lying on the sidewalk. He was a mess, very bloody, and trying to get up."

"Freddy stood over him, grabbed his shirt, and he said, THIS TIME, YOU CAN THANK THE LADY FOR YOUR LIFE. BUT IF I EVER SEE YOU AGAIN, I WILL KILL YOU. Then he sort of pushed him down onto the sidewalk again, and stepped over him and came back to me."

Mrs Freeman tone changed, and she digressed. "Years later, he told me he remembered those lines from a couple of movies. He definitely has a sense of theatre."

"I realized I'd better get Freddy out of there before the police showed up, so we headed off across the park, neither of us saying anything for a while. We walked probably 10 or 15 minutes, and then I asked Freddy if he ever had been to the top of the mountain. It was my favorite place in town, and when Freddy said he'd not been there, I definitely wanted him to go there with me first. So we took the walk up there, which takes a while, and we weren't saying much. I was sneaking looks at him, because I couldn't really believe what he'd just done. Not that I had an eye for that sort of thing, but I would not have believed he could have such a power and fury in him. And of course, as a woman especially, it pretty well put me into orbit the way he'd come to my defense. Nobody had stood up for me since my Dad, when I was a little girl. I thought about how he said he'd obliterate my troubles, and why. And that he had actually done it. My emotions were building inside of me, and by the time we'd reached the top, I was"

"The view from the top of the mountain is very beautiful, you can see all of Montreal from there. It's a seriously romantic place and I was realizing all of a sudden that my whole life was standing there right next to me. I stood close in front of Freddy, and I looked up into his beautiful eyes, and I just said YES. And we hugged and kissed and we were engaged."

I was glad Mom was there because, although it was a great story, it was definitely a situation for some woman-to-woman enthusiasm. And one thing about Mom, when that sort of thing was called for, she was a natural!

Mrs Freeman continued. "It was pretty crazy, we'd hardly spoken to each other. Certainly didn't know each other the way I'd say you should if you are engaged ... but it's worked out, and actually, I never had a doubt. By the end of the day, I'd learned he was only 18. I never would have pictured myself with a younger guy. I'd imagined him to be a grad student. That's not really even the whole story of that day, but I've been talking a lot."

Mom said she'd love to hear more, every detail. No question she meant it, too. There's nothing Mom loves more than a love story. I'd been wondering how Mom and Dad would take to the Freemans. My folks had some friends who were wealthy, but nothing like this. But Freeman's family was pretty much like Freeman ... regular folks who just happen to have a ton of money. I found myself thinking Jenna would have a million people swept up by this tale if it had been told to her. I looked over at Serena, and she was wearing a very happy and content expression. I offered to fetch more wine or food for the ladies, and stepped away for a minute. Mostly I'd have to say they all realized I was uncomfortable hearing Mrs Freeman's story. Thinking about it now, I guess that was silly. Plus it was part of my job. And then I just had to shake my head ... this extreme guy was extreme here, too. He was engaged before he'd ever even kissed his fiancée. At only 18.

I wondered if Marcia had made all these dishes from scratch just for us if she kept some stuff in a freezer so she was always ready for company.

"Well, so all of a sudden we're going to get married, but we'd had only the most superficial conversations. We're chattering like a couple of little kids, and Freddy says he can't wait to introduce me to his parents, but first, he'd like to meet my family and ask for my Dad's blessing. Now, as I'd mentioned, I was practically a runaway, except I was 21. I'd not even spoken with my folks for over a year. I'm embarrassed and very, very sorry to think what I'd put them through in that time. When I explained to Freddy that I was estranged from my family, his whole attitude changed. He automatically went into protective mode, thinking somehow I'd been mistreated. But that wasn't it at all, Mom and Dad have always been wonderful parents. I was just a crazy kid who needed to get out of the house, out of the little town where I grew up. The big city was calling me, same as Freddy actually, but in my case I messed up at school but stayed in Montreal anyway."

Mom seemed to feel pretty comfortable with Mrs Freeman. She certainly was as friendly and gracious as could be. And as far as I could tell, she was happy to tell us about her early days with Freeman. "Some people are really just cut out for the city, young people especially it seems like. I fell in love with the energy and excitement of New York when I was in high school. I still love it, altho at this point I would surely say I love it here in New Hampshire's North also. But please continue, Martine! It's such a great story!"

"I explained to Freddy how my parents really loved me, and my being apart from them was just my own craziness. Well, he was all for heading to my home right that second, and when we talked about how my Mom and Dad must feel with my just disappearing on them, I could see all of a sudden I had to get back to them. So we headed for Freddy's car, and we held hands all the way back down the mountain, got in Freddy's car. I was keeping a few things at a sorority, we stopped off and gathered my things, and headed North for home. I'll never forget that ride. I'm sure I'll never be happier than I was in those few hours. Getting to know Freddy, and now that I was going back to see Mom and Dad, it seemed like the greatest thing in the world. It's about 7 hours drive from Montreal, and we jabbered non-stop the whole way. Freddy had this old Buick Regal sedan with a bench seat, and I sat right up close to him while he drove, like you'd see in a 1950s movie. We reached my little town Amos -- around 4AM, and we decided to wait until sunup before going to my folks' house. We walked around the downtown area, I showed Freddy where I'd gone to school. We picked up some donuts and pulled up in front of Mom and Dad's at dawn."

"We decided it would be best if Freddy disappeared for an hour or so ... I had a lot to tell them. I wondered whether to ring the bell so early. Dad usually gets up really early anyway, especially in summer. Then I remembered he'd told me ... the last time we talked ... he said he would leave the front door unlocked until I came home. And it was. I walked right in. It didn't seem like anybody was up yet, so I went to the kitchen and made some coffee. I tried to be quiet, but I knew Dad would hear me, and he did. He came down the stairs ready to deal with an intruder, and when he saw it was me, I just said 'I love you, Dad', and he hugged me like it was war. We had a rough couple of seconds when he saw that my face was bruised where Big Stuff had hit me. I explained to him my fiancee had sent Big Stuff to

the hospital, and his eyes really opened wide. Then he hugged me again and told me to SHUSH and went upstairs with some coffee for Mom, and the biggest, funniest little-kid look I've ever seen on his face."

"I didn't hear anything for maybe a minute, then Mom was shouting 'Marti, Marti!' and I ran upstairs to her. It was a wonderful thing that they did not seem to hold against me my staying away for so long. They were nothing but happy to have me home again. Freddy was totally right, Mom and Dad were about as happy as I've ever seen them. We got caught up, and the hour passed very quickly, and Freddy was at the door."

"He was out to make a real impression on my folks, and he did. My parents greeted him in English, which they speak well enough, but Freddy knew we'd always spoken French at home, and so he answered them in French, 'It's an honor to meet you sir. It's a great privilege to make your acquaintance, ma'am. I am at your service.' I was startled by the word 'service', but I learned soon enough that was the essence of him, right there."

Aunt Arlene's eyes were sparkling with exactly what I did not know, but she was clearly enjoying this conversation, even tho she had not said a word for a while. She must have heard all this before. Mom moved closer, and she was hanging on every sentence. "This IS like a story from a movie! Did your parents like him right away?"

"Yes, they did. We were hitting them with a lot all of a sudden, but they've always just wanted me to be happy, and they could see how I was feeling. Plus, Freddy took my Dad aside and explained how he'd hoped to get his approval before we even got engaged, and he apologized for coming to his home with us already having our plan. Daddy was just happy to have me back, and Freddy was pretty much the opposite of the type of guy who'd been around before. So he was feeling happiness and relief, an end to wondering if I was OK. But I didn't understand what was coming next. We went out to breakfast, and Mom said something to Freddy like 'Martine tells me you'll be attending college at Maryland in the fall. Is that the University of Maryland?', and Freddy says 'Not exactly, ma'am. Close. I'll be about a half-hour East of there, at USNA.' And Dad straightens up and bangs down his fork, 'The United States Naval Academy at Annapolis?!' He said it in a very strange voice. 'Yes, Sir'. Dad stands up, so Freddy stands up, and then Dad just walks off and goes outside. Freddy and I are wondering what is wrong, and Mom explained. 'Your future father-in-law is retired military. He was about ready to bust when Marti came home. And now finding out you are American military ... Please excuse me, we'll be back soon."

Mrs Freeman looked around at us a little self-consciously, but she could see nothing but interest on Mom's face. And I presume the same on mine. Mom was right, it was like a story from a movie, and I was learning Freeman's whole life was like a movie. I remembered what Dad had said about how hard it must be to be Freddy Freeman.

"That was a lot of talking about us. How did you meet Danny's Dad?"

This was actually a pretty good story too, but I knew it and excused myself to join the menfolk. They were going outside to the garage, where Freeman kept about a dozen vehicles. Freeman had a taste for the cars of the 40s, 50s and 60s. He would keep a vehicle for a few months or a year, then swap it out. Freeman's Dad explained how Freddy seemed to have inherited his own love of cars, and of boxing. My Dad was a real fan of these cars, and he and Uncle Walt and George Freeman decided to go for a drive. Mr Freeman told Dad to pick any one he wanted, and Dad chose a 1948 Chevy Convertible, which I must say is a seriously beautiful car! But if the men were going to talk cars, I thought I could learn more by going back inside and hearing what the ladies had to say.

Mom had finished her story about meeting Dad. Although not dramatic, I knew Mom loved that Dad had asked her out about 20 times before she finally said yes. Her eyes turned to Freeman's Mom, whom she addressed as Mrs Freeman, and asked to hear how she'd met Freddy's father. Mrs Freeman had to be in her early 70s at least, but she did not seem elderly, in the sense of slow, frail, or lacking in vitality. Mrs Freeman spoke with a Russian accent, but her command of English was excellent, and I was again reminded of my own English limit. Mrs Freeman is a doctor who had studied medicine in Russia in the 1950s, and had gone to Cuba in 1960, not long after Castro seized power. Her Mom had died when she was very young, and she'd been raised by her Dad. The Russians had sent her to Cuba to help establish medical care in Cuba's outlying areas, but she had sought the assignment because Cuba was close to the United States, and it had been her Dad's wish that she become an American. She'd met Freeman's Dad through an artifice of Serena's. When Mrs Freeman told this part of the story, she looked steadily at Serena, whose face showed a mixture of pride and joy, and a little bit of laughter. Mr Freeman had a promising future as a boxer. The Cubans love their boxing, and Mr Freeman had been a real prospect for the national team. When Ann (Anneka) had come to town, the matchmaker in Serena had immediately thought of Ann and George. Serena had arranged for a fight doctor, the son of a friend, to fall sick (a whole jar of Serena's legendary hot peppers), and be replaced by Ann. The scheme had worked perfectly well, except that George was so distracted by Ann he lost to a lesser fighter. The upside was that Ann treated a cut above his eye, and George still has a small scar.

Ann Freeman asked Mom if she'd like to see the flowers. Serena excused herself and Mom went outside with the two Mrs Freemans. Dad and Uncle and Freeman's Dad were still in the garage, so I wandered over there. Now that I'd learned the elder Freeman had been a boxer, I thought I could still see a little bit of the fighter in him. When I walked over to them, he smiled and asked if I'd like to take one of Freeman's cars for a drive, and this time I bit. I'd already become more familiar and friendly than an arms-length reporter should, but that also seemed to be sort of in the nature of this assignment. But just because they were seemingly genuinely nice to me did not mean the Freemans were not users and exploiters, and it surely did not mean SWEEP16 was anything but ridiculous either. As for right now, Dad had had his eye on the 48 Chevy, and I do love convertibles, so I chose that one. I mentally thanked Dad again for teaching me to drive a stick, and off we went. Once we got out on the open road, the wind prevented comfortable conversation, so we just drove and enjoyed the air and sights of the beautiful North Woods. You didn't need to spend much time around Freeman's place to see why a lot of people wanted to be rich, and I decided that I'd continue to keep my guard up.

One thing I'd not expected was my involvement with SWEEP16 bringing my folks closer to Aunt and Uncle. It was a little ironic in that Unc had told me right away he mostly didn't want me getting info about Freeman from him. But Mom and Dad believed SWEEP16 could be a big break for me, and so they were awfully grateful to Arlene and Walt for getting me the opportunity. So Mom and Dad and Aunt and Unc were going out to dinner or playing cards together, Dad took in a couple of Sox games at the Crossroads with Uncle, and, what really got my attention was Dad bought himself a motorcycle so he could ride with Uncle Walt. I'd never seen Dad ride before, and although it had been a long time, he seemed right at home on his bike. Before I was in the picture, Dad rode a lot, but once Mom was expecting, she asked Dad not to ride until all the children were grown. So, after 25+ years, Dad was King of the Road again, and I really enjoyed seeing him and Unc take off together just for the pleasure of enjoying the road.

Uncle Walt had said Freeman should be back home tomorrow, and I decided to ask Freeman if we could meet so I could ask him some questions. I wanted to grill him some, try to expose some of the big weaknesses in SWEEP16, and I figured Bidwell and Clipper would be more than happy to suggest some questions. Bidwell was only too happy to oblige, and he promised to huddle with Clipper and send me a short list of heavy-duty questions that would make it easy for anyone to see SWEEP16 as a bunch of nonsense, at best. It was not really a surprise when Clipper himself sent me a list of questions within an hour. One thing for sure, SWEEP16 did get some people riled. Clipper was a bit of a bigshot, and to picture him dropping whatever he was doing to fire off a mail to a 22-year old shows that if nothing else, SWEEP16 had him whipped up:

"Hi Danny! Bidwell asked me to get you a list of questions for Freeman, so here it is. I'd love a chance to sit down with Freeman myself and make him squirm, but I'm sure you'll do a good job. Ask him if it's OK to tape the interview. I doubt he'll go for it, but it's worth a shot. Will you be back on campus anytime soon? It'd be nice to grab a beer or lunder again --- Pete. Here's 10 questions for Richie Richman."

The familiarity of the letter surprised me ... I still am not used to adults treating me as one of their own. And I'm not all that sure I like it either. As if I am getting to the end of being "young".

Well, now that I had the questions, might as well get in touch with Freeman. It struck me I'd never contacted him before, which seemed a little weird considering how he'd become such a big part of my life. I typed up a text message and sent it off:

"Dear Mr Freeman (Freddy!): Thanks for letting Uncle Walt know you are OK. It really made him happy, and actually my folks and Uncle and Aunt and me spent the afternoon with your family, celebrating. Everyone is looking forward to you getting home. Things have been pretty busy with SWEEP16. Would it be possible for us to meet sometime soon? Thanks -- Danny"

I'd half expected to not even get a reply, but in less than a minute he was back to me:

"Great to hear from you Danny. Really glad you spent time with my family. I think I'll be able to get home in 2 or 3 days. How about you come over for lunch Tuesday at noon if I am back, and Wednesday noon if I can't get home until Tuesday night?"

Again I was reminded that Freeman doesn't waste time.

So I had a little time to do something else before Freeman got back. I decided to check in with Jenna to see what she'd thought of my column. I'd ALMOST pushed the CALL button when I thought I should read her latest column before asking if she'd seen my first. Jenna had done it again, she'd gotten a juicy interview out of the notoriously press-shy Matt Sandel, the big-time basketball player. He'd had an interview early in his career that had caused a lot of bad PR for him and his team, and he'd refused to talk to media for a few years. But Jenna had gotten him to open up.

"Hi Danny", she said in her vivacious way, answering on the first ring.

"Nice work with Sandel! As a hoops fan, I know he's been dodging media for a long time. Great questions, great writing. I immediately read it a second time. Never had any idea he'd had those troubles in high school. Probably everybody thinks he was just always a star!"

"Thank You. He's a pretty good guy in person. He tries to be polite. He's not polished, but I think he's good-hearted."

"How do you get a guy like that to open up tho? I almost got the feeling he has a crush on you." Jenna's silence suggested I might have been right, so I continued "Did he ask you out?"

"Yes, he did."

"And?"

"I said 'No'".

"I don't think he's heard that very often. Why not have dinner or something? Do you have a boyfriend?"

I wished right away I hadn't asked that. But I realized Jenna had me going a little bit, or even more than a little bit. Dad had been right, and I hadn't even known what was going on in my own head, and I felt a bit embarrassed. For her part, Jenna didn't say anything, but I also realized she was completely used to this and wouldn't be surprised.

"No boyfriend", she said. I could practically see her take a deep breath, and then I heard her exhale. "I'm 32 Danny. I'm interested in a husband, and I am not even going to date a guy unless I think he could become my husband."

I didn't expect to find myself in the middle of a personal interview with Jenna Jersey! "I feel kind of honored you told me that. I have a feeling not many people know that about you."

"You're right, not many. Say, I read your column. McMoo sent it to me, altho I would have read it anyway. I saw it before it hit print. It was great! Your readers will definitely be waiting on a second column. I liked the way you just laid out the deal. I could imagine you sort of telling the guys over a beer. People will appreciate that you are direct and leave out the mumbo-jumbo. Plus very personal, as if there is a little bit of a feel of 'Let's watch this develop together.' I think you really nailed it. First column? Wow. Big Congratulations, Danny!"

"You're really nice to say so. Fact is, McMoo flogged me a lot to develop 'my style', which was really what he thought 'my style' should be. The final was about the 10th cut. I mean, I'm fine with it, but stylistically it is McMoo, altho I am fine with every word. And actually of course, I need to thank you, hooking me up with McMoo the way you did. So Thank You, Jenna. Oh, Freeman is evidently OK, he is done with whatever he was up to, and he'll be home pretty soon. I'm having lunch with him on Tuesday or Wednesday. This will be the first time I actually speak with him directly about SWEEP16. I'm pretty psyched."

"I'm happy to know he made it thru another mission. Thanks a lot for passing that information. Have you thought about what you'll ask him?"

"I have, and I have a list of questions from Peter Clipper, the econ prof/writer at Syracuse."

"Danny, a list of questions is OK, especially if you have it in your mind instead of written on paper. But you don't want to just sit down and grill someone, you want to talk. Yes, you've got some things you really need to find out, but you want the answers to come out in conversation more than as a direct response to a direct question. Especially in your case, because you're going to be spending a long time with the same guy."

"Whoa, I did not think of that. Thanks Again."

"And remember, you have to entertain. People love stories and you will soon have no readers if you get into a lot of tax stuff. You need to tell stories. Your biggest story is Freeman. And I don't even know if Freeman is aware of this himself, but without an extreme guy like him, nobody much is going to pay attention. You've got to weave stories about Freeman and other people into your narrative. Also, talk to McMoo and tell him what's up. The guy knows how to get readers."

"OK, I will. I appreciate the advice, Jenna."

"No worries, Danny. I've got to get going now. Great talking!"

Well, now I had a few things to think about. Need to tell stories, be conversational ... I started thinking about how Clipper and Durreg had been hammering each other over lunder. A lot of people would enjoy that, if I presented it with the emotion they had shown. Maybe I could do that. I decided to call Durreg and see how he got people interested in econ. We spoke for quite a while, and I got some ideas. And even though there was no questioning DocDuh's interest and enthusiasm, getting people to read that stuff for entertainment ... Jenna was right, I better come up with some stories!

I spent a ridiculous amount of time on Monday working on my next column. It struck me as pretty funny that even without any input from McMoo I was doing 10 rewrites. Definitely time to put on my running shoes and do some miles! I had a lot to think about and afternoon turned to evening as my feet carried me along. I'd not meant to go this far and should have turned around earlier, but I always had this notion a runner does not do a 180. The problem up here tho was that most of the loops were really long. But at this point I really had no choice so I looped from one side of the road to the other and headed back the way I came. Wound up doing about 15 miles, quite a bit more than I intended, and more than I was in shape for. On the other hand, there is nothing like a bunch of miles to make dinner taste good.

Toward the end of dinner I got a text from Freeman. He'd just gotten home and we were on for lunch at noon. I was to phone him when I got to the gate.

I was a little sore the next morning, but I decided to run anyway. I'd been slacking off some and felt a little sluggish.

I arrived at Freeman's gate about 10 minutes early because I wanted to make sure I wasn't late. So I just cooled my heels until noon and phoned Freddy. He gave me the combination to the gate and I let myself in. This was my 3rd visit to Freeman's but there was still a lot of the house, even on the first floor, that I'd not seen yet. Marcia answered the door to the house, and led me to Freeman's ultra man-cave. I'd not thought about what to expect, but even if I had, I would still have been shocked. Freeman lay on a hospital-type bed that had been brought in, and there was a nurse in the room. Freeman had an IV in his arm, and he was half sitting up. But it was mainly his face that had my attention. In the two weeks he'd been gone, he must have lost 25 pounds, and this was a guy who was lean to begin with. His cheekbones stood out, and the veins on his exposed arm were so prominent it was as if his skin had all but disappeared. He greeted me with a smile and an outstretched hand, and his voice sounded normal.

He read my surprise. "The docs wanted me to stay in the hospital until tomorrow. They wouldn't let me come home until I promised I'd stay in bed with an IV until I get the OK from my new boss." He gave the nurse a big smile and introduced me to Patty.

"He's doing fine but he needs to stay just the way he is for another 24 hours. And he's promised to do just that."

"You've lost a LOT of weight, and you didn't really have anything to lose to begin with."

"You expect to lose 15 pounds or so when you do something like this, but I haven't had much to eat since I got hit a few days ago, and that caused the extra weight loss. A couple of weeks here at home and the weight will come back, so long as the fever does not return."

"Can you tell me what you've been up to?"

"Only very generally. We had some work to do in the mountains of Asia, and even though it is summer, the nights get very cold at altitude. Plus, carrying a full pack and gear at 14,000 feet. You just burn calories at an enormous rate. Significant weight loss was experienced by each of us."

"You were hit?"

"A round hit my rib at an angle. Busted up the rib pretty good but it could have been a lot worse. The wound wasn't too bad but there is always the issue of infection. The enemy generally smears some nasty stuff on their bullets so even minor wounds can kill. That's why the antibiotic drip. The docs cleaned out the wound once we got airlifted out, but that was a couple of days after the hit. So by then the infection had a good chance to set in. But I'm OK now. Don't look so hot, I know, but I'll be good to go tomorrow, once the boss here turns me loose. I'm ready for some lunch ... give me a second to get Marcia."

Freeman was on the phone a few seconds, and Marcia appeared a minute later and handed menus to Patty, then me, then Freeman. She busied herself straightening some things that didn't really seem to need straightening while we made our choices. Freeman asked her if she'd be able to make us some corn muffins, even tho they weren't on the menu. She answered 'Of course!' in a way that made it seem she was delighted to have been asked.

"Danny really liked the corn bread last time he was here, and I could eat it every day. Do you like corn muffins, Patty? ... Good. Then please make a good mess of your muffins, Marcia. Is there any fresh butter?"

"As soon as I heard you were coming home I made some butter."

"That's great. Great. The ladies in this house can all really cook, and it's worth hoofing up and down the mountains just to recharge back home! Thanks Marcia."

Freeman was looking me up and down, very directly. "You look like you get your share of exercise Danny."

"Nothing much, but I try."

"You look like you run."

"Yes sir, I try." I was again a little annoyed with myself for using 'sir', but considering what he'd been doing versus what I'd been doing, it seemed appropriate. Plus I'd been noticing military people in civilian life use SIR and MA'AM somewhat differently than civilians, more as a form of courtesy than subordination.

"How far today?"

"About 8 miles. It's great running these roads on a summer morning."

"It sure is. How far yesterday?"

"About 15 miles, but that was by accident ... I was looking to run a loop instead of just making a U-turn, and wound up going farther than I intended."

Freeman laughed a little. "I know what you mean about the loops and the U-turn. Up here you better be prepared for some long runs if you are set on avoiding U-turns. Fifteen yesterday and eight today is some pretty good miles. You've earned your corn muffins. What do you think about when you run?"

"A lot of things. Often I get so where I feel as if my body is running and my mind is somehow separate, and my mind just wanders. Lately of course I've been thinking about SWEEP16, what I should be writing, how to get and keep people's interest, and how I feel about the idea myself. But before 2 weeks ago, I'd think often about what I want to do with my life, and how I want to live my life, and why."

"Would you mind telling me about those personal thoughts?"

"I wouldn't mind, but I'm yet to reach any real conclusions. I mean, I want to be a good journalist, to bring out the truth. I want people to feel I'm a reliable, honest source. I want people to think I'm a good guy. All pretty standard stuff, I guess."

"You're only 22. Those are good things to be thinking about. It's important to remember that every day, every minute, you lose something you'll never get back. Too many of us waste too much of our lives without appreciation or even thought. Your adult life is just getting started, so you're time-rich. Maybe the best kind of rich there is."

I had never heard the expression time-rich, and it seemed crazy Freeman would be telling me I am any kind of rich. But I knew he meant it. A guy who does not waste time will value time, and, given what he has done and is trying to do, he doubtless hates how much of his time has passed. "Thank you for that perspective. I've noticed you don't waste time, and I understand now how you treasure it."

Neither of us said anything for a moment, so I shifted. "How far did you travel on foot on this mission?"

"It varied a lot. Most days not much, a few miles. But with all the gear, the altitude and the bad footing, a few miles can seem like a whole lot. Plus of course we travel at night, without lights, so the footing is trickier, even with night-vision equipment. We cover more ground at the beginning and the end."

"How much gear do you carry?"

"That can vary a lot too. Of course we carry food, water, medical supplies, comms equipment, rifles, pistols. People will carry varying amounts of ammunition, grenades. Some people will carry different types of ammo. You can never be sure what you are going to need. I tend to carry more than most because I want to have what I need. Too many times the 'extra' gear turned out to be vital. And because I want to set an example."

"How much does it all weigh?"

"It'll start out at over 100 pounds, 115 pounds usually for me, and we're using things as we go along. Water can be a big factor in weight. I've been over 150 if we needed extra water."

"That is a lot of weight!! And over bad footing at altitude in the dark??!!! Wow."

"We train for it, but the altitude can be deadly for people who are not bred to it."

"How bad really is your wound? Will it heal 100%?"

"It should, but the rib was shattered and there is always the possibility of bone shards left behind, infection getting into the bone, muscles and cartilage that do not knit back together the way it was. Plus of course I'm not 22 anymore. But the docs are great and I've got Patty making sure I stay put and let the IV provide a steady dose of antibiotics. This was a fairly routine wound and no big deal at all, except for the fouled bullet."

"To a total civilian like me, the expression 'routine wound' does not quite compute! How many times have you been hit?"

"Bullets or shrapnel?"

"Whoa ... either one." I'd never even thought about shrapnel.

"Bullets 5 or 6 times, but never really bad. Shrapnel, lots of times."

"You've lost track of how many times you've been shot?"

"No. I've been shot 5 times, and the 6th time the bullet hit some of my gear, and fragmented before a piece of it penetrated. So that time was maybe more like shrapnel than a bullet wound, although the impact damaged my right kidney, and it was the only bullet wound that I haven't really recovered from ... the kidney does not function well anymore."

"Mister Freeman, you've been involved with the military for about 35 years. May I ask why?"

"Sure. Because I believe what the military does is extremely important. We do have some very serious enemies. And because I believe I'm good at it. And maybe even I believe it's what I was created to do."

"From what I've read about the military, and the Special Forces, and mountain combat ... you must be getting near the end of the kind of work you've just done."

"That's for sure. I never really figured I'd be doing it this long. And it's getting to where I soon just won't be able to handle it physically. I know. That may well be one of the reasons for SWEEP16. I don't think so, really, but I suspect it." He looked me hard in the eye for a second, as if he'd just thought of something. Then he added, "Is that what you figured?"

"Yes, sir, it is." It actually felt fairly natural calling Freeman SIR, which was somewhat astonishing to me, and I wondered how many men had called him SIR over the years. Maybe some women, too? I already knew the answer, but just to see his reaction, I asked him why not just settle down and relax,

enjoy his fortune. He said nothing, just fixed his eyes on me and tilted his head a little. I was embarrassed to have tested him like this this, so I just said "Sorry".

"No, you're right. You need to know these things for sure, or you'd be unable to write about SWEEP16."

Neither of us said anything for a few seconds, then Freeman switched subjects.

"Saw your first column. Good stuff. And it was great to see it was completely accurate. That's very important to me. You know, one of the reasons a lot of people don't want media coverage is simply that they feel what winds up getting out to the public is not accurate. A big part of Jenna Jersey's success is that she makes sure never to misrepresent or distort or mislead. That ought to be obvious and easy to the media types, but somehow it is not. Did you get any feedback on your column? What are people saying about SWEEP16?"

"I got feedback from Jenna and some others. First, thanks a lot for introducing me to Jenna and the others after you made your announcement. I've gotten to know Jenna some, and she has really helped me a lot. I'm working with her agent, and he's really the one who got the column published, and who had some very definite ideas about the style in which it should be written. His name is McAdam Muir. And he is doing it for no pay. Said he believes in SWEEP16 and this is one way he can show it. I don't know if you are aware, but Jenna put her name on the SWEEP16 list as soon as you announced it, during the press conference. Said she felt a little bit like she was cheating, but that she was happy to be the first name on the list. Have you been keeping an eye on the list? I looked this morning. It's over 40,000 names now."

"Thanks, not bad. It needs to be at least 40,000,000 tho. That reminds me ... I'll be speaking at the VFW in Littleton on Friday. Then next week we start getting this show on the road. I apologize for not keeping you in the loop."

"You've had more than a full plate!"

With the words 'full plate', Marcia appeared with a large cart, a tremendous aroma of fresh baked goods and breakfast and Patty set up a large tray across the rails of Freeman's gurney. When Marcia began to serve him first, he protested, but Marcia and Patty and even I insisted that he needed to get some good food into him and regain some weight. Even after 20 minutes of looking at him, I could hardly believe his condition.

For a few minutes, nobody said much of anything except to praise Marcia's cooking, which again was phenomenal. I wondered how often she had steamrolled a request from Freeman, but she'd ignored his protests and I was pretty sure it wasn't the first time. There seemed to be a bond between Marcia and the family. Maybe she'd been working there a long time.

When Marcia left I asked Freeman why he'd decided on a military career. "Because as a young guy I thought there would be a lot of action. Because Castro and his goons killed my Grandfather and I want revenge. Because I am named George Washington Freeman and Washington was 'First in war, First in peace'. Because I've been handling guns since I was a youngster, the military seemed natural.

Because I got into fighting young, and I love the challenge, the push to the limit. But most of all because I believe in what the military does and I want to serve the United States in this manner in particular."

"What do you mean you got into fighting young?"

"My Dad was a great boxer in Cuba ... and you know Cuba produces fabulous boxers. So he had me boxing since I was only one year old. My folks have pictures of me in diapers boxing with Dad. Then when I was about 7 I saw some kickboxing on TV, and I begged Dad to take kickboxing lessons with me. We did some wrestling and judo and other types of martial arts too. I was hooked. Always an energetic kid, it was a great outlet, and I loved doing this with Dad. He was the best boxer around, as far as I was concerned. I loved everything about fighting and the fight school."

"And you started young with guns too?"

"Mom grew up in Siberia. Her Mom died when she was born, and she was raised by her Dad, living in a cabin far from anywhere. Living mostly off the land, selling furs for money and foraging and hunting and fishing for food. Mom used to take me and Dad out in the woods and we'd gather wild foods. Mom taught us how to live off the land, and we loved this, gathering and preparing the wild foods together. There is a pantry out there if you have the knowledge and the energy. During the fall seasons she taught us to hunt. Dad had never been around guns, but for Mom, shooting dinner was the natural thing to do. And she wanted me to understand from the beginning the cycle of life and death, predator and prey. She also wanted me to know how to handle a gun. As soon as I was old enough, I started rambling around potting small game for dinner. So I've been shooting pretty much my whole life."

Freeman smiled at me with that very winning smile of his. "It was natural for me to join the military."

"How hard is it to learn 4 languages?"

"For a little guy, it's not any harder than learning just one, near as I can remember. It just seems natural for kids. Pretty much automatic. I've tried other languages a little as an adult, not automatic at all. Dad taught me Spanish, Mom taught me Russian, English was everywhere. Mom, Dad and Serena were all working to learn English. French was a little bit of a joke on me. Kids love to watch TV, of course, but Mom felt it was too passive. So she came up with the idea that I could watch only the CBC out of Montreal, in French. So I sat in front of French TV a whole lot, and learned this really strange version of French as a little one. The French was another reason I was so keen on learning to fight. I loved going up to Quebec where people were speaking French!"

"That must have been something. Is that why you went to McGill too?"

"Oh, yes. Somewhere along the way my folks took me to Montreal and I thought it was just the best. So much variety of everything. Up in Northern New Hampshire, Montreal is the closest big city. The strong French flavor only made it more interesting for me. When I got the chance for study at McGill it was too good to be true."

"Mrs Freeman told me about meeting you there. What a great story. My Mom said it was like something out of a movie."

Freeman had a smile on his face, but he wasn't looking at me, and I guess he was thinking about those days in Montreal. I kept quiet for a bit, but eventually I asked him if he'd be OK going down to Littleton in three days. "Oh, I'm good to go now, really, but I promised Patty and the docs I'd stay on my back with the IV for another day. I'll need a month or so to get the weight back tho. But with Marcia, Marti, Mom and Serena knocking around the kitchen, there will be some serious meals served here in the coming days. Ever had any real Cuban food? I'll let you know when Mom and Serena team up."

"What will be happening in Littleton?"

"Actually, that was planned a few months ago, before SWEEP16 was announced. We'll cover some military stuff, but I want to get into SWEEP16 too."

"How do you think military people will feel about SWEEP16?"

"It's a natural for military people. It's no accident time in the military is referred to as 'service'. The great majority of military people would voluntarily do their share. And I know thousands of them have added their names already. Men and women of all ranks. Teenagers still in boot camp as well as admirals and generals. The military is one of the reasons that statement reads simply I WILL DO MY SHARE. Active military can't get political."

I admitted I hadn't considered that, but Freeman was starting to think out loud and he just kept going. "There are some pretty big names on the website list and I'm almost certain some of them are not legit. I'd wondered about how to handle fake entries, and have not come up with anything really effective. We're going to have a couple of people devote significant time to the list. I think we're just going to have to contact some people directly. We don't want to lose credibility by having famous fakes on there, at least not for long."

"I see Governor Kimball has added her name to the list. Or do you think that could be fake?"

"The Governor is a friend of mine. Although she did not tell me so, I believe Karen wants her name to be there."

Freeman pursed his lips and looked away, and it seemed he wanted a moment's quiet, so I buttered a big slice of cornbread, and wondered if it was difficult to make.

"Do you know anyone who would like to get involved? I need one or two people to help maintain the website, the list, They would have to be really good with computers and the web and databases. At first I was thinking it might compromise your objectivity, but if you have good friends with these skills, people whose judgment and perspective you trust, it might help you in your work. If not, no problem."

"I definitely know a couple of people like that. Computer Science is one of the best schools at SU."

"I think the pay would have to be pretty average, at least at first. It can't seem as if SWEEP16 is overpaying, or attempting to buy your opinion by treating your friends special. Think about it, anyway."

I didn't think it would be difficult to get techs to do work involved with SWEEP16. A weird situation like this would appeal to my geek friends. I was finishing my fourth muffin, and Freeman asked Patty to butter another one for him, too.

"I'm going to be talking with a lot of people publicly over the coming weeks and months, plus a lot of people privately also, and you are more than welcome to listen to all of it, unless someone else requests confidentiality. I know where I want to get to, but I'll need help figuring out how to get there. We'll need to brainstorm how to get our message across to people. What we're trying to do is turn an awful lot of law and custom aside. Plus hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of jobs will be affected or eliminated. It's going to take a lot of persuasion. There will be perfectly wonderful and reasonable people who will be completely unable to see any sense in SWEEP16. Probably about half the people will think it's ridiculous. I'm going to need ideas on how to reach them."

Freeman wasn't talking to me so much as just letting me know what his thoughts were. I believe he was trying to tell me he wouldn't hide anything, including what might be considered behind the scenes deliberations.

Marcia came in to check on us, and I thanked her for another wonderful meal. "Is corn bread hard to make?"

"No, it's pretty easy. A handful of standard ingredients. Mix them up and into the oven. I keep my own mix ready all the time. Be glad to show you how, or give you the recipe."

"That sounds great!"

"And maybe some homemade butter to put on it."

"Really?"

"Butter is easy, but it takes longer."

"So you're turning the journalist into a chef? How are you at writing?"

Patty had been quiet for a while, but when the smiles receded she reminded Freeman, "Mister Freddy, it's past time to check your temperature."

"OK ... ". It took her only a moment, and she pronounced Freeman without fever.

"If you can think of someone on the tech side, that would be good. Serious techies, and if they hate the idea of SWEEP16, so much the better."

"I think I know the answer, but -- why would you like someone who hates the idea of SWEEP16?"

"Because trying to persuade the people close to me will help me learn how to persuade the rest of the country."

"OK, thought so. Makes sense."

"Would you mind telling me how you came up with SWEEP16?"

"Americans ... we really do love our country. When you drive around the USA, you'll see the American Flag on houses, office buildings, highway overpasses, restaurants, telephone poles, village greens, town halls, police stations ... all major construction sites ... everywhere. Men will commonly wear the Flag on their lapels. You don't see that elsewhere. What are the essential ideas of America? What is it that people love? Why do so many people from so many other countries want to come here? The USA was founded upon ideas, and that is very unusual in world history ... And it is the Founding Concepts, the basic ideas that people love: Freedom, Equality under the law, the Pursuit of Happiness, Liberty and Justice for All. In the military especially, you will meet people with a fierce love of America. After my first years in the military, I started to get involved a little in the business world. I saw, much to my surprise actually, that to be successful in business requires serving others -- your customers. If people do not feel they are better off for having been your customer, they won't be. And yet, business people are not thought of, at least not usually, as doing good, as serving society. And the main way we keep score in business, in the work world, is money. The more other people value what you do, the more you surpass the performance of your competition, the more money you make. But, how does the government respond to that? The more money you make, the stiffer the penalty for making it. That is, the greater your tax burden, both in absolute and proportional terms. It's perverse. But it is also strange. If you spend a week painting your house or tending your garden or learning to play Chopin, nobody would think to demand that you must therefore also paint someone else's house, tend someone else's garden, or help someone else to learn Chopin. And yet the gardening, painting and practicing are basically self-serving acts, whereas making money by making great pizza or great computers or being a great teacher are acts that provide a wider benefit but are nevertheless penalized, discouraged, by the government, by way of taxation and regulation. Of course the idea is to raise revenue so government can function. But as I saw more of business and more of war, I began to see that government does a great deal it should not do, and that it actually impedes much of what it supposedly wishes to encourage. It also routinely rewards that which it supposedly wishes to discourage."

"For a long time I wondered what we could do about this, and I wondered to what extent our perverse incentives and penalties distorted the marketplace and made life more difficult than it needs to be. And I've truly come to believe that government at all levels has, in its desire to create a perfect world, created so much friction and overhead and perversity that we have cut our incomes in half while at the same time doubling the costs of just about everything."

"But what to do about it? Figured someone would ask me how I got the SWEEP16 idea at the press conference. But nobody did, and now I'm glad about it. I'd like you to keep what I tell you next quiet until after Littleton, but it's your call. At this point it seems proper the VFW be the venue to tell where the idea came from. The idea came to me as I held in my arms a wonderful young man who was

breathing his last breaths. He'd given his life to save mine, and the lives of our Team. Five of us were crawling single-file through a culvert. I was first in line, then Willie. Just behind me, someone opened a hatch above us, and dropped in a grenade. Willie covered it, and took the entire charge in his chest and belly. We stuffed his guts back in his abdomen and pulled him the rest of the way through. By the time we got out he was all but dead. It was amazing he'd lived as long as he had. I was holding him as he died, and he was trying to talk. We don't know all of what he was saying because none of us could hear anything. An explosion in a confined space will do that. Probably he wasn't really coherent anyway, but I thought he was saying 'Wife, my wife'. So I told him I would go to see his wife, and he smiled a little. Then he said USA, USA, USA. He had some strength still, and he sort of hugged me, and then he was gone."

"Seeing death close, over and over ... it will change you. It will make you think. And Willie, I'd been close to him for years, since he was just a pup. And I was thinking how this fine young man, as fine as any parent could hope for, how this fine young man had willingly given his life for us, and for our Country. And I have seen many, many fine young men, and a woman too, give all they have, their lives, for their brothers in arms, and for this idea of America. And I wondered how we can honor them, how we can make it up to them, and to their families. We can't, really. But we should try, and there are things we can do. We owe it to them to protect and extend the ideas that are America. And as I held that young Willie I thought I'd give anything if it would somehow let him go home healthy to his wife. And I realized that when the finest young people we have are willing to risk and sometimes lose their lives for America, surely the rest of us are willing to give mere money. And that's when I realized one of the best things Americans can do for America is abolish the federal power to take, replacing it with our willingness to give, and that America and even the world will be far better off when we do."

"I visited that young man's wife, and I told her how he died, and how much the rest of us who were there that day owe to him, and to her. And I told her about SWEEP16. She was the first. Willie died without children, and I like to think SWEEP16 is something of a child of Willie's."

I'd known Freeman's experiences were far beyond my own, of course. But even so, hearing this from him impressed upon me even more what I'd not seen, and probably never would, and how few of us really do understand sacrifice and hardship. It didn't seem right to say anything for a while, as if speech would be disrespectful, so I stayed quiet for a time. Eventually I asked Freeman if I could write up everything he'd just told me.

"Nothing is off the record. Willie is spelled with an IE. But if you feel comfortable not going public with that until after the VFW on Friday, I'd like it."

No question what the next column would be about.

----- 018 -----

I spent the next day running and working on the second column. Actually, I ran twice. I composed a lot of the column in my head during my early morning run, then typed it into McMoo's system. But I didn't really like it, so I went running again before lunch and did the whole thing over after I had a sandwich. I still didn't like it, and I hadn't even gotten McMoo's input yet. And it's a safe bet that will cause some more re-writing. On the other hand, maybe I should just leave it as is, and send it on for McMoo's review? Was that slacking off?

Next morning I woke up thinking about Freeman's claim of 1/2 the cost and double the money, and I decided to find out what Clipster and DocDuh thought about it. So I sent each of them a mail with the same question ... "If federal taxation was completely abolished, how would that affect people's incomes and the prices of goods and services?"

I wondered what their answers would be, and if they'd talk to each other before answering. Dad put an end to my speculating by asking me to do some rowing while he tried to catch dinner. Who would have thought Dad would become a motorcycling fisherman? Seemed as if this summer in the country was having a real effect on him.

"There's a spot across the lake that I've been wanting to try, Dad said. Getting there will give you a good workout." Since I'd turned 13 or 14, Dad had routinely expected me to take a shot at any physical task that needed doing, and I got the distinct impression he enjoyed seeing me work. It was OK with me, and I expect I'll be up to the same tricks some years down the road.

"You spent a lot of time at Freeman's yesterday."

"I did. And he told me the code to his gate. I wondered about that. He could have just opened it, I'm sure, but instead he had me key in the code."

"Sounds like he wants to demonstrate you've got your run of his world, but not just come out and say it."

"I hope he doesn't leave a lot unsaid, because I'm no good at reading between the lines."

"Talk to Mom about what goes on ... she is great at figuring out what is unsaid. Women in general are better than men at that, in my opinion. Certainly true in our house."

"Jenna Jersey seems to have a way of figuring things out also. A big part of what she does, I think."

"It would have to be. ... What did you go over yesterday with Freeman, if you don't mind my asking."

"The big thing was he told me where the idea of SWEEP16 came from. He'd prefer this be kept under wraps until he tells the VFW about it on Friday, but it's OK for me to tell you privately now. It's what my next column will be about. Basically he believes our military people have been so willing to give so much to America -- even their lives -- that he believes Americans in general will prove quite willing to give 'mere money' -- his term -- and he believes we'll give the money partly to show the troops they are not the only ones willing. He said he got the idea when a young soldier who'd saved his life died in his

arms. He plans to tell that story at the VFW on Friday. Pretty much nobody knows that at this point. Freeman's seen a lot in real life that I've only seen in movies. And I know there's a ton he's not told us ... I mean Jenna or me. Or let on publicly at all. I bet Uncle Walt could give us an earful, but he won't."

"You know why, don't you?"

"I think I do, and I give them credit for it, but it is frustrating. On the other hand, Unc did say he'd fill me in some, and answer some direct questions."

Dad caught two dinner size trout and two little ones pretty quick. I wondered if he'd been studying up on fishing. Some people did take fishing very seriously, and Dad was the type to dig into a subject once it caught his attention. It struck me as sort of funny, the idea of my white-collar-city-Dad researching lures and fish behavior and all. So I just said "Nice work, Dad! How about I swing you around for a try at one more. Then we'll have plenty for the three of us for dinner. Again!"

"Sounds good to me!"

This time the fish didn't cooperate, so Dad pointed out another spot in the lake he thought we should try. I was wondering if he was doing this partly just to make me row.

"There's some structure in the lake there, a rock pile. Fish like structure. The rock pile will attract baitfish and trout."

He had a big smile as he said this ... he knew what I'd been wondering. "Sounds good to me", I said dryly.

"Danny, do you think Freeman believes what he's saying about SWEEP16?"

"I do, why, you don't?"

"No, that's not it. I do too. I'm not sure he isn't somewhat crazy tho. I mean, it's not at all clear to me that SWEEP16 would be good for anything. The guy may be spinning his wheels 100 miles per hour for years, giving away 2 billion dollars, and going nowhere with all of it. That would be pretty crazy, wouldn't it?"

"For most people, yes. But considering where the idea came from, and why, or partly why, he feels he has to do it. He believes SWEEP16 is a way for all of us to honor our military, particularly the dead and the wounded. "'Mere money' is what he said, Dad. 'Mere money.'"

Dad had a fish on, but neither of us said anything when he brought it into the boat. A third trout; we had our dinner, and I rowed for shore.

During dinner I got a text from Freeman. "Pick you up tomoro at 3 for Littleton" ... I felt kind of military getting the message from Freeman, and thought about replying "Affirmative", but decided on "Confirmed" instead.

When I mentioned I'd just gotten a message from Freeman, Mom straightened up. "That reminds me! Arlene called while you were out fishing. She said we need to watch Darren Ledbetter tonight. Uncle Walt is down in New York City with Freeman, and he told her to watch Ledbetter's show tonight. I guess they will be talking about SWEEP16, but Arlene said Walt was laughing about it. Maybe he was there when they taped the show. All she knows is he wants us to watch tonight. Walt will be spending tonight in Manhattan with Freeman."

I wondered why Freeman would not have told me about a SWEEP16 TV appearance. After all, he's taking me to Littleton tomorrow. But I did have an idea.

Jenna answered my call with her usual energetic voice. She was very appreciative I'd given her the heads-up about watching Ledbetter. "But if he's appearing on Ledbetter, why wouldn't he tell you about it himself?"

"Maybe the appearance does not have to do with SWEEP16."

"That doesn't make sense tho."

"Guess we'll find out in a few hours."

"Thanks Danny!" And she hung up.

It was not normal for my folks to watch the late-night shows. I often watched the monologues, but that was about all. A few minutes before the show started, I could have sworn I smelled popcorn. Sure enough, Mom called me to join her and Dad for some hot buttered while we watched the show. It struck me funny they were treating it like a night at the movies. But who doesn't like an excuse for some great popcorn?

"Why do you think Walt wanted us to watch?" Dad and I looked at each other ... none of us had any idea.

"Uncle Walt is in the city with Freeman, right? And Ledbetter films in Manhattan. So maybe Freeman is on the show? But then wouldn't he have told Danny about it?"

"He didn't say anything to me, and if it was about SWEEP16, I think he would have told me."

When Ledbetter came on, he was very serious, no smiles, not his usual manner. The audience let out a few shouts and catcalls, looking forward to some fun, but Ledbetter shook his head. "No, please, not yet. I need to start off on a serious note tonight. I met a man today, and he got my attention, for sure. And he got me thinking, too. And I am forced to admit he is right." Ledbetter paused for a few seconds, and I thought maybe his use of the word 'forced' was very deliberate. "Two or three weeks ago a guy named Freddy Freeman announced a campaign to abolish federal taxation, and I ridiculed him and his idea on this show. I shouldn't have done that, if for no reason other than the fact that at the very time I was ridiculing his idea, he was off in hostile territory risking everything, and I mean everything, in service to our country. I'm not saying I endorse his idea, but I am saying he deserves

courtesy and respect simply based on his lifetime of service ... so I apologize for being a jerk on that score. But that's not all. In ridiculing Freeman's idea, he calls it SWEEP16, I insulted Mrs Freeman for no reason whatsoever, and for speaking out of line that way, I apologize directly to Mrs Freeman, and I really hope my apology is acceptable. I learned something else, too. Freeman is a deadly serious guy, trust me on that. Because of what he's done, I'm going to think long and hard about his ideas. And I'm hoping he'll come on the show to talk about SWEEP16."

Ledbetter paused again, then he clapped his hands and began what seemed to be his usual thing.

"WOW!" It was Dad who spoke first. "What happened? What did he say about Marti?"

"He said she looked 'slutty'".

"Are you serious? Why the heck did he say that?"

"He thought it would get laughs, apparently. And I think it did, actually. I read the transcript during my research. But I couldn't believe he'd say something like that. Doesn't everybody know you just don't say anything about a guy's wife? I thought it was nuts. When he said 'I met a man today' ... I bet he did. And I bet he saw Jesus a few seconds later. But you know what ... I'm not sure that wasn't an actual sincere apology. I hope Uncle Walt can tell us more about what happened in NYC today."

My phone buzzed with a text from Jenna, so I walked outside and phoned her.

"Right after Freeman announced SWEEP16, Ledbetter rified on it. He ridiculed it, but he threw in a line about Freeman just wanting to buy another diamond for his slutty-looking wife. I read the transcript of the show, and I wondered if Freeman heard about it. Ledbetter's line was really low. It's beyond my understanding how he could think that's funny, or why anyone would laugh at it, for that matter. I thought every guy learned young you just do not make even the mildest negative comment about another man's wife. Or girlfriend. It's an unwritten law. Virtually a capital crime. And after having seen Freeman in person, I'd also say it's insane."

"Unwritten law? You're serious about that. Interesting ... you've just given me an idea for my column."

"Good. Tomorrow I'll be spending some time with Freeman. We're driving to a VFW here in New Hampshire where Freeman will be talking to the Veterans. I expect to have a chance to ask him what the heck happened with Ledbetter. Looking forward to it. Hey, have you heard anything from McMoo in the last couple of days?"

"He sent me a mail this morning."

"I was wondering because after he beat me up so much over my first column, this week I haven't heard from him."

"Don't worry about that ... if there's an issue, you'll know. We will be in touch!" And she hung up abruptly, as usual.

Woke up around 5AM, and I was wired! Getting up this early was probably not such a good idea, because this was likely to be a long day. But there was no point in lying in bed either, so I went running. It was a great morning for running ... cool, clean air and I did about 10. I remembered Freeman when I did a U-Turn about 40 minutes out.

It felt as if today was my first day at a new job, and I was energized ... really looking forward to the ride with Freeman, to his talk, the whole thing. Seemed like we were getting an early start tho ... the talk was supposed to start at 6:30 and we'd be in Littleton probably by 5. I decided on a suit and tie. Can't go too wrong with that.

I was waiting out front of the house 15 minutes early. Freeman showed up 5 minutes ahead of schedule. I wondered what wheels he'd have ... limo? chauffeur? No. He showed up in an old Cadillac convertible. He said it was a 1959, and it was beautiful. The fins on those things are incredible. And why did we do away with white-wall tires? Freeman had a big grin on his face, and said we'd take the long way to Littleton, if I didn't mind. And how about with the top down?

Freeman knew these local roads awfully well, evidently, because we took county and township roads all the way, but he never hesitated. He explained he liked driving a lot, and he loved taking people for long drives. Sometimes he and Marti would take a picnic lunch and just drive until they found a place to set a blanket.

The Caddy had a bench seat like they haven't made in my lifetime, and I decided to gamble a little. "Does Mrs Freeman sit right close up to you on those drives?"

Freeman looked a little surprised. "What made you guess that?"

"My family and Uncle Walt and Aunt Arlene spent a very nice couple of hours at your place on Sunday, and Mrs Freeman told some of us about how you'd met, and how you decided to get married, and about that long ride together from Montreal to Amos."

"Wow, that was something. I'm not sure it'd be possible for me to feel any better than I did that night. Even thinking about it after all these years, I'm half to busting!"

I asked Freeman about the possibility of recording things. He said that audio would be fine anytime, but he would prefer no video except when appearing publicly. What would Bidwell say about that? He didn't allow students to tape his classes. The way technology is at this point tho, it'd be next to impossible to prevent people recording the audio, and I made a mental note to discuss that with Doc Bidwell.

"What about your chest wound?"

"Infection's gone, that's the main thing. It'll be healing up fine. Some soreness but nothing to pay attention to."

He looked like he'd gained about 10 pounds in the 3 days since I'd seen him. "A lot of it was just replacing water. But also, I was serious the other day when I told you ... we've got four women at home who can really cook. And after I've been away, they all seem to want to fatten me up!"

Neither of us said anything for a moment, and Freeman asked if I had a girl. When I told him NO, he looked me in the face for a second, and I thought he would say something, but he didn't. It occurred to me he probably asked only to change the subject, and I reflected he avoids talking about himself for long.

"It seems you're not so comfortable talking about yourself, but my opinion, Mr Freeman, is you've backed yourself into a corner on that score. Jenna Jersey explained that to me shortly after I met her. Jenna tells me, and I believe her, that people will have no interest in tax talk. That relatively few people will read about SWEEP16 if tax and business and even Freedom is what I write about. Jenna's agent, my agent, McMoo, says the same thing. Says what will get people's interest is YOU. You've asked me to report about SWEEP16, and I will, but that story needs to include a lot of Freddy Freeman."

When Freeman asked "Who named him McMoo?", I knew he was OK with being a big part of the story, and that he already knew what I'd just told him.

"Jenna. She said it annoys him."

"From you, maybe. Not from her."

"Yes, she's terrific."

Freeman smiled, but said nothing, so I asked what had happened down in the city, with Uncle Walt and Ledbetter, and I told him I knew what Ledbetter had said.

"A guy like that ... he talks for a living. He's quick on his feet. He knows what he's saying. Even when he ad libs, which he was not when he insulted Marti, he's quick enough to mentally screen what he is saying. So he said it on purpose, and an apology was the least that was required. Ledbetter's a puke from what I know about him. I have no respect for him as an individual. Martine feels the same, and didn't care what he'd said. But it was necessary to make him eat his words. He didn't think it through completely though. If he had, he would have known I'd look him up, and so now he's given SWEEP16 some great publicity, and there is no way the publicity was good for him."

"Will you go on the show?"

"Certainly no ... or at least, not for a long time. I doubt his apology was driven by more than fear. But we'll see. If he changes his ways over the next year or two, then maybe. But in the meantime, we've already gotten invites from other shows. So that's good stuff. I had not given that a thought, but looking back, I should have realized. It's a great riff for them."

I was getting a little bit used to Freeman, and I tried to put myself in Ledbetter's shoes. It was hard to picture anybody who'd had a good look at him would ever insult his wife. I wondered what he knew about Ledbetter, but decided it was not my place to ask. "So the joke was on him, in more ways than one."

"Yes it was."

"Are you going to appear on one of the other talk shows?"

"Friday. So I'll be back in Manhattan Thursday night, probably. Marti and I haven't been in NYC together for a year or so. It will be nice." I think Freeman's smile would have been visible from the back seat.

"Jenna Jersey didn't seem to know saying anything about a wife being completely out of bounds. It sounded like she's going to do a column about it. My Mom seemed surprised too. And actually that surprises me. It's something I've known about as long as I can remember."

Freeman looked right to make a turn, and he was still wearing that big smile. But when he caught my eye, his face changed to thoughtful, and he paused, as if he needed to replay what I'd just said.

"Yes, it seems to me also that is something a guy picks up awfully young. That's very interesting, the thought women generally might not be aware of something so basic among men. I'll be pondering that idea." He flashed me a quick smile, which I took to be his way of saying 'Thank You'. And it struck me as quite interesting that he'd be happy and thankful that I'd given him something to think about.

"Do you speak to veterans' groups often?"

"A few times a year. It's an honor to appear before these men. Littleton is an annual thing, but in VFWs across the country, we still have guys who were in World War II! Guys in their 90s, and even over 100! A great honor."

"Will you talk about SWEEP16?"

"Only if they ask. But I am pretty sure they will. I hope so."

The VFW auditorium held a couple hundred people, and it was pretty well full. Most of the guys were in their 60s or older. Viet Nam vets probably. A few younger guys, and some seemingly in their early 20s, but only a few. Freeman was right about the World War II guys. There were a couple of tables where it looked like everyone was 90. Those men and women had the best seats ... right up front.

Freeman came out on the stage and everyone stood and clapped and cheered. Freeman jumped off the stage and I couldn't see him that well from my place in the rear, but I could tell he was glad-handing the old guys up front.

After it quieted down, Freeman went back to the stage and talked about the need to continue to try to help vets return to society after they leave the military. He told a couple of stories of guys he knew

personally. This was my first time at a VFW, and although I had no doubt Freeman would be telling the vets things they liked hearing, it was striking to see how many guys had a smile sort of frozen onto their faces while he talked.

When he finished his talk, guys just began casually asking him questions, beginning again with the oldest guys in front. It seemed everybody here knew he was just back from some kind of mission, and they asked him to tell what he could. They wanted to know if he'd been injured, and how. Then one of the guys asked him for a recap of 'the SWEEP16 thing'.

Freeman started by asking the men if they believed the USA would be better off if the typical American had twice as much money available to spend on things that cost only half as much. There were a lot of grunts and laughs of agreement, but also a lot of skepticism. These men had a lot of respect for Freeman. I think they would have laughed a civilian off the stage.

"We can get there in a few years if we get out of our own way. But that's not the most important thing. What's #1 most important is that we ourselves, our government, is killing the idea of America. What has made us the greatest ever is Freedom, Independence, our moral fiber and our love for each other. Our gigantic federal government destroys all of these things. I mean it with all my heart. Destroys all of these things."

"In his first address to Congress in 1797, President John Adams said 'Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.' ... And yet today, our government destroys the moral and religious character that is our real foundation."

"This is the first time I've spoken about SWEEP16 since we had our announcement a couple of weeks ago. And I confess I was hoping you'd ask about it, because I wanted this to be the place where I explained where the idea came from."

Freeman gave the veterans more detail about the mission he'd been on when he had the idea. The story was the same as he told me, but he told a lot more of it tonight. To say he had everyone's full attention would be an understatement. There was a long silence after he told everyone about Willie, and how he liked to think SWEEP16 was sort of Willie's child.

"There is a question I will generally ask people whenever we talk about SWEEP16 ... But I'm not going to ask you, because you have all answered this question already by your actions. But I will ask you what you think about the rest of us. Do you think Americans, acting as free individuals, will willingly do their share?"

There was a sort of murmur in the room, people looking at each other, but the crowd was clearly undecided. Freeman continued. "Yes, I agree. Hard to say. An awful lot of people WILL joyfully do their share, and more. And a lot of people will not. The question is how many people belong to each camp, and to what extent. My firm belief is that the first group, the doers, will produce and give more than we need. And that their ways will inspire the other camp."

"We've all seen how things can get messed up in the military. Well, the military runs far, far better than the other branches of government. An awful lot of what federal government does, doesn't need doing. If somebody had to pay directly, it just wouldn't get done, because nobody would be willing to pay. Or, it would get done really differently than the way government does it. And of what does need doing, what people would voluntarily pay for, almost all of that would be done better and cheaper if individuals or private businesses did it instead. Now, it's not all federal ... we've got local and state government too, but SWEEP16 is focused on federal because that is by far the biggest but also because that is the one from which you cannot escape."

"And yes, I'm really serious ... if you stripped away all the tax payments, all the tax preparation, all the tax record keeping, all the tax maneuvering with tax lawyers and accountants and tax court, all the overhead and friction and corruption and perversion due to federal taxation, redeployed all the tax-people and freed up all the time and energy devoted to tax issues by tax payers, all the regulatory and other nonsense that depends on DC's ability to confiscate ... yes ... prices would drop 50%, incomes would increase 100%. It's my sincere belief. Freedom is what has made us great. Freedom is what the USA stands for. And DC, enabled by federal taxation, is an unbelievable tyranny on the American people."

"Many people don't see it because they don't get very directly involved in it. A lot of it is hidden, and is handled by employers and companies forced to act as government agents."

"But all that isn't the main issue. There are more important things to consider. First off, half of our political discourse involves who is going to get stuck with the bill. That's not the way we should be thinking of each other. It's not right."

"But just as importantly, why should anyone believe that a dollar in the possession of the government does more good than a dollar in the possession of the person who earned it? Letting people spend their own money is a very basic form of economic democracy. People will use their money to get what they want. Voluntary exchange only happens when both sides of a transaction believe they are better off as a result. That's a sort of amazing-but-true aspect of free market capitalism. And most people don't view it that way. But if you didn't believe the guy who sold you your shoes was making you better off, you wouldn't buy the shoes. And if he didn't want your money more than he wanted his inventory, he wouldn't sell you the shoes."

Freeman took a long breath, and changed his posture and his tone. He shook his head, and he continued with a wistful, almost mournful voice I'd not yet heard from him. He spoke very quietly now, and I could see everyone focused to hear him. This was more than simple courtesy. "The heart of SWEEP16 is not money tho. The money ... is not even what really counts. The money focus is a symptom. We need to love each other. When people help each other, and it comes from the heart, that's love. That's what we need to spread around, much more than money. And that is what SWEEP16 is really about. When government runs social programs, it inhibits genuine personal contact, and that is corrosive."

Freeman stopped for several seconds, and I could see a lot of the audience agreed with this last point.

"Right. Probably everybody here knows VFW does a lot for veterans. And I know a bunch of you are active as individuals. Some of you I'd bet have been on both sides of the giving, too. Now that is something special, isn't it?"

"One more thing ... just today I read about something wonderful. Steve Cohen is a Wall Street kingpin. He is the son of a World War II Veteran and the father of a Marine who served in Afghanistan. Cohen has pledged \$275 million to the Cohen Veterans Network, which will run a national network of free mental health clinics to Veterans and their families. Cohen also backs Cohen Veterans Bioscience which is developing tests and drug therapies for brain trauma. Thanks for coming out tonight, and letting me have my say. And please, a big hand for Steve Cohen. I have no doubt he'll be helping some of us here tonight."

At this point, it did not surprise me to see an enthusiastic standing ovation from the audience. Freeman had sort of finessed the clapping into a THANK YOU for Steve Cohen, and he was taking part in it. I had never seen someone do this before ... to sort of turn what would have been his ovation into someone else's.

As soon as he got the car headed for home, Freeman asked me how I read people's reaction to SWEEP16. I half expected he would, and I didn't want to disappoint him, but I read the audience as respectful, extremely respectful of him, but did not see big enthusiasm for his idea, and that's just what I told him. He agreed.

"Yes. I did hope for a better reception tonight, or to have done a better job of presenting the idea."

"You could have heard a pin drop when you were telling them about Willie. I'm sure they'll be thinking about what you had to say." I was kind of surprised when I realized however I might feel about SWEEP16, at this point I didn't want Freeman to be disappointed. And then I was angry at myself for getting soft on this guy who, as of a short time ago, I would have disliked automatically. But I knew now that if Freeman thought of himself as exploiting others in order to get rich, he wouldn't do it. And I remembered Dad saying he didn't know of anything harder than being Freddy Freeman.

We had an hour's drive in front of us, even if Freeman took the direct route, so I thought I'd may as well just ask him what was on my mind. "Mr Freeman, it's pretty much automatic with college-age kids, especially at Syracuse, to be suspicious and sort of resentful of the rich."

Freeman didn't say anything, and his expression, what I could see of it, did not change. "There's a kind of general feeling that people get rich by taking advantage of other people."

"That's normal."

I'd hoped for more, and I knew he'd have a ton to say if he wanted to, but he said nothing more, so I decided to ask him to. "Will you give me your thoughts on this please?"

He smiled and chuckled a little and he said "There are a lot of ways to look at things. You know, that is very much one of the reasons I believe in SWEEP16. There are many reasonable viewpoints on all sorts

of social interactions, and what Marti and I have come to believe basically is that it's best to simply allow people to interact freely and voluntarily in as many ways as possible. And right now, our Freedom is much more limited than we believe it should be."

"Now, as far as taking advantage of people ... First ... what's rich? You? Cellphone, some kind of PC, pretty nice suit you have there. You look like you've been well fed. Good medical care maybe. Immunizations, modern plumbing, protection from vermin. Dental care, I would guess. I saw expensive running shoes. Degree from Syracuse, a very expensive private school. A lot of people would say you are rich. And they'd have a point. You're better off than the great majority of people living today. Maybe even the great majority of Americans."

He looked at me, and I nodded. "OK, pretty much true I guess."

"Where'd the money come from?"

"I worked some, but it's my Mom and Dad really."

"Did you exploit your folks?"

This made me sit up some. "No ... they ... it was ... it is important to them to ..."

Freeman stopped me with a wave. "It's OK, I know. Now, did your parents exploit others?"

"No. My parents are both working people."

"And that means they don't exploit others?"

"Right."

"But they've made a pretty good buck?"

"Yes they have. They've worked hard."

"Did they ever offer to work for less so that maybe their company could hire an extra person?"

I just shrugged my shoulders and shook my head. This seemed a little ridiculous, but then again I'd never thought about it before and he clearly had.

"Could your family have lived on less? Lots of families live on less than it costs to go to Syracuse. Were your parents exploiting their employers by earning enough extra money to send you there?"

Evidently he read the look on my face because he repeated my thoughts. "Is that ridiculous? Where do you draw your lines? It's fair to say nobody needs a hundred million bucks. But it's also fair to say nobody needs to go to SU when a fine state school might cost only half as much, maybe less. Heck, nobody NEEDS a cell phone. Nobody HAD a cell phone until the 1980s. How much you need depends on what you want to do. If you want to create the Cohen Veterans Network ... or the Newhouse School of Communications, you need plenty."

"I did have a funny kind of thing happen at the luncheonette in Freedom. I had some OJ there, and read the newspaper, and after I talked a little with the waitress, I wanted to give her a big tip."

Freeman didn't say anything, so I looked over and saw a half-grin slowly turn into a big smile. I was puzzled for a little bit, then I asked, "Is this how it starts?"

His smile grew even wider. "It is for the lucky ones. You have a big heart. You're lucky in my book."

While I was thinking this over, he added with a laugh in his voice, "It was Doreen, I bet!"

This startled me, even tho she had told me Freeman knew her name. I didn't imagine somehow that she was someone he could think of so quickly and clearly like this. He was still looking at me with that huge smile on his face. I just stared back at him, and it struck me I wanted to tell Dad about this. But before I came up with a response, he said again, "You are lucky indeed, Danny."

"I guess so. And you're right. Doreen."

"She's really delightful."

Neither of us said anything for a few seconds, so Freeman continued with the money-talk. "And it's really, really important to remember that money is what you get for doing what somebody wants you to do. A lot of people don't really think about it like that, but it's true. The more people like what you do, the more you improve the lot of others, the more money you can make. People will pay you for improving their lives. It's really great. And then, when you have the money, that opens up all sorts of possibilities."

I was thinking how Jenna was right when she said spending time with Freeman would not be dull, and that it would be hard to keep up with him.

"Sorry ... I didn't even think to ask you if you'd like to drive, and we're almost back to your place."

Yes, I sure would like to drive this beautiful old car. Just a short time ago an offer like this would have made me think Freeman was trying to influence me. And perhaps in a way he was trying to do just that. But at this point I also had to believe such an offer is just the way he is. Freeman responded to my big smile by pulling to the side of the road. As I walked to the other side of the car, it crossed my mind that big-shot sort of people often had a hard time saying SORRY about anything, but Freeman had just apologized for not offering me the wheel. I sat down in the driver's seat and my smile was not only for the car.

After a few minutes of driving, I asked Freeman if he thought everybody who made money was doing good. "What about somebody like a currency trader, or one of these high-frequency traders on Wall Street ... all they do is buy and sell rapid fire. How does that do anybody any good?"

"The first thing for me is simply whether everyone involved is participating voluntarily. If somebody wants to sell and somebody wants to buy and they agree on their terms, who am I to say it's not a good thing? Just because I can't necessarily understand a benefit of some action does not mean there is no

benefit. To me, people don't seek to do things unless they see a benefit. But on more concrete terms, what the traders will tell you is they increase liquidity, getting better prices for their counterparties. That is, if you want to sell some stock, you want to sell it to the highest bidder, and you don't really care who that bidder is. And basically, you don't actually buy the stock until you ARE the highest bidder."

I could tell he was looking at me, so I nodded and kept my eyes on the road. This car might not do too well at high speed, but at 50 or so, it was a pure pleasure.

"The big thing for me is free interaction. So long as no one is coerced, no force is involved, then I think we just have to assume people are doing what they want to do. Life, Liberty and Happiness."

I'd known the words LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS all my life, so much so that maybe I'd become jaded to them, but now it flashed through my mind how remarkable it was that the Founders would write them into our Declaration of Independence. I nodded as those words echoed in my mind.

After a few moments I remembered the Ledbetter Show. "What happened yesterday in New York? How did you persuade Ledbetter to apologize?"

"Grabbed him by the neck, put him on his back on the sidewalk and immobilized him. Told him my name and that he could either make an immediate public apology that was acceptable to Marti, or suffer severe consequences. It really took only a few seconds. Walt was there."

"When did you come home?"

"This morning. Walt and I watched the show with friends in the city, then went out for some fun. I love New York, and so does your Uncle. We had a good time."

"What about sleep?"

"You need to learn to do without real sleep so you can do certain kinds of government work. Sleep tonight will be great!"

When we pulled up in front of my folks' place, Mom and Dad were on the front porch, and they came out to meet us. Dad stuck out his hand and introduced himself to Freeman, and it somehow startled me when I remembered that of course Mom and Dad had never met this guy on whom I'd been so focused. Then Mom stepped up and Dad introduced her. I should have done the intros, but at that moment I felt very clumsy and off-balance.

"How about something to drink? A snack? It is Friday night, after all!"

Wow, I actually had forgotten it was Friday night. That had always been a special night for me.

Freeman said he needed to get home before long, but he'd love to sit with us for a little bit. He sounded as if he really meant it. I was coming to believe he just is a tremendously friendly guy.

Mom brought out a big pitcher of iced tea. "We had a really nice afternoon at your home on Sunday. Your family is so warm, and of course the news you'd soon be home created a celebration. But ... we know you were hurt. Are you OK now?"

"Thanks, sure, I'm good to go. Mainly it was a case of taking precaution against infection and fever. That's done, so it's all good now. Thank You. How are you enjoying your summer? Walt said this is the first year you're spending the whole summer up here."

"We love it. It seems as if each year we like it better." Mom spoke, and Dad nodded. "This year Danny and I have been doing some fishing. We'd always meant to, but this year we did it. Say, we just smoked a few trout. First time for us. How about a taste? Danny?"

Dad was quickly going country on us. I shot a quizzical look at Mom, and she gave me a look that said YOU NEVER KNOW!

"We just got this little electric wood-smoker, and tried it out today. It does a really nice job on these little brookies."

Freeman and I agreed the trout was excellent. We didn't exactly need another reason to fish, but now we had one.

Freeman drained his tea, and said he'd enjoyed meeting my folks, and had also enjoyed their short time together, but that he was really looking forward to spending this evening with Marti. "Maybe we could get together with Walt and Arlene and take in a movie or dinner."

"That would be a fine thing", said Dad. "Speaking of fine things ... that is some gorgeous car! Wow!"

"She is a beauty. Rides right nice too. Why don't you guys borrow it for a while? Danny can drive me home."

Dad clearly felt awkward. He didn't want to refuse, but he didn't want to accept either.

"Yeah, these old cars are fun, especially in summer. I've been driving it for a while. You hang onto it for now, if you like the idea. Dad told me he took you out to the garage. So you know we have some choice when it comes to wheels."

If Dad was surprised to see me drive the Caddy up to the house, he was even more surprised to find he'd have the use of it for a while. Freeman and I drove off, with me behind the wheel again. Freeman had a very happy look on his face, and I am sure a big part of his mood was the thought of finally just getting home for some R&R. But he said "We've got some great stuff coming up. On Monday I'll be speaking about SWEEP16 at Pendleton University. They seem opposed, if not actually hostile. Should be good stuff. And we just arranged Kenny Miller on Friday." Then he added "Walt told me your Dad started riding again. I hope your folks have some fun with this car!" I'd been thinking that Freeman certainly liked sharing his toys, and he had some really good ones, when I focused more on what he'd said.

"Did you say you're doing the Kenny Miller Show on Friday? You mean national TV?"

He didn't make a sound, but his smile said a lot. I didn't make a sound either. Just stared back at him, which made him smile more. This thing was developing faster than I'd expected.

I'd have thought he'd be physically spent, but he just had me drop him off at the gate. Said he would enjoy the walk down the long driveway.

I liked the idea of a visit to Pendleton, partly because I'd never been there, but also because I had friends who'd attended. Even more I was interested in the Miller Show, but he'd not invited me.

"Would you mind if I walked back to the house with you please?"

"Just pull over to the side there so the gate is clear."

We walked in silence for a hundred yards or so, the driveway vaulted by maple and oak trees. It occurred to me I'd never owned anything I couldn't carry, except for the car my folks had just given me. And now, Freeman owned everything I could see.

"You said THAT'S HOW IT STARTS IF YOU'RE LUCKY. I think I know what you mean, but would you tell me please?"

"I've known plenty of rich people. People who have more money than they'll ever spend, can buy pretty much what they want. But money won't do all that much for you if you don't have the wealth first in your mind and in your heart. You wished you could give Doreen a big tip, and that made you think about being rich. That's why, if you do get rich, your money will help to make you happy. But also, it will be more difficult for you to become rich because money makes money, and you will have a tendency to give it away rather than invest it."

"How does it start if you're not lucky?"

"Well, first off, keep in mind I could easily be all wrong about my reads. Humans surprise me frequently. And people DO change. But I'll tell you what I see."

He stopped talking for several seconds, and looked around at the beautiful summer forest, as if the words WHAT I SEE required him to do so.

"For some people, the money is like a trophy ... a big number summing up their net worth. But without people in your life to share it with ... and I mean CLOSE people ... the money-trophy people come up empty. Other people seem to me to have just gotten started working young, and have worked hard and long and never really thought much about doing anything else. Those folks can do OK emotionally because they are fulfilling their goals, doing what they believe is right, but they seem to me to be missing the big point. Working is almost like nutrition to some. They can't do otherwise ... can't stop. People like that can do huge good in America. But the people I read that way seem lost to me. They hit 50 or 60 or 70, they get to their reflective years, and they wonder what all the hustle was about. Other people will chase a buck -- chase serious money -- because they want to show the world they are special ... make people notice them ... make the girls who wouldn't go out with them wish they had.

Some people just want to build something that is important or useful to the world. If you make a better mousetrap, you can make a lot of money, even if the mousetrap is what it's all about for you. These people I believe are of more use to the rest of us than maybe they are to themselves, at least as I see it. What I'm saying is my experience, and my upbringing, tell me money can do great things, but that it is only a tool and without the right frame of reference, the right outlook on life, all the money in the world won't make you happy. It's the personal that has always counted for me, and for those people I want close to me."

"But what about this giant house and these awesome grounds?"

He looked at me as if I was missing the obvious, and his tone echoed his expression.

"All this is for my family. If it was just me, it wouldn't matter. But I hate to picture life as JUST ME ... I could never be happy that way. This is where my children grew up, although the house you know wasn't built until the kids were older. This is where I hope my grandchildren grow up. But we don't have any yet, and my kids are all off doing their own thing, none of them even in New Hampshire. The house is also for hosting, and I do love to have guests, all of us do. Money is very useful too there."

"Your children's names ... I understand them I think. But ... I take it you are happy your parents named you George Washington?"

"Yes, I am happy with it. Very much. There have been times, difficult times, when that name helped carry me. It is something that might sound strange, or might be hard for people to understand. But for me, as long as I can remember, there was this huge hero that I was named for, and I have had it in my mind that I would not want General and President George Washington to be ashamed of me."

"That sounds like it could be a burden."

"It's an inspiration."

"Do your children feel the same?"

He had a little bit of a smile on his face when he answered. "Mostly they do, but sometimes they have felt a burden. Harriet, when she was younger, didn't like the name. She started calling herself Harry in grade school. But now she loves Harriet Tubman."

"And Rosetta? Is she named for the Rosetta Stone?"

"She is. And we all do love that name, just as a name. But also, we do feel that the Rosetta Stone is a wonderful symbol, a very early attempt to facilitate communication between people who might not otherwise understand one another, and that it has been such a significant artifact for us, too."

"William Wilberforce. I didn't know who he was until I looked into your children's names. It seems somewhere along the way his name must have come up in a history class, but I really can't remember him. One of the most effective voices against slavery. A Freedom Fighter after your own heart? Fighting the same fight as Tubman."

His only response was a smile. "But who was Edward Donald?"

"We like both those names, and they are linked in history. Edward Jenner and Donald Henderson. Smallpox was perhaps the worst disease to afflict humanity. A few English doctors had noticed that people who contracted cowpox, a relatively mild disease, evidently conferred immunity to smallpox. Edward Jenner was not the first, but he was the doctor who really gave momentum to what ultimately led, almost 200 years later, to Donald Henderson. In the years around 1970, Henderson led an international team that, using vaccination, extincted smallpox. You've seen the marks on the arms of older people. Voltaire claimed smallpox infected 60% of the population, killing 20%. And now, people your age don't even need to think about naturally occurring smallpox. Extincting smallpox is truly one of the greatest things we have ever done."

Explaining this to me clearly made him happy, so I didn't say anything, and we just kept walking. We were out of the forest now, among hundreds of apple trees with small, immature fruit.

"And for some people, big bucks can create real problems. Kidnapping, for one thing, is a horrible problem. Not so much in the USA, but in other countries. And it does happen here, too. If you are a rich person, you may well often find yourself wondering if people are interested in you because of your money. It's not a pleasant thing to be thinking about marriage, and have your advisors insist on a pre-nuptial agreement."

"Are these all apple trees? How many are there?"

"We have about 500 in this area. It's a little bit of a commercial orchard, but also a sort of family playground. There are about 60 varieties of apple here, so we have about as long of an apple-picking season as you can have in this area. We love having the fresh fruit for several weeks, and the different flavors and different looks. We grow lots of other things too. And of course we have help to do it."

"I've never eaten an apple off the tree. That must sound kind of weird to you. But as a New Yorker, food is just something we buy. That's one reason why catching the trout was a real kick to us."

"Understood."

"What will you do tonight?"

"We'll have a nice dinner ... my folks, Marti, Serena. Probably Marcia, too. We'll catch up on things. Marti and I will retire early, I think. Maybe watch a video, but I'm short of sleep. Maybe we'll watch A CHRISTMAS CAROL, given that you've got me thinking about money, and people changing. I'd recommend it to anyone."

"I've never read it. But I will."

He had a fuzzy, happy look on his face. Which was a strange look to see on THAT face. I could tell he was really tired and just glad to be home, a quiet evening with family in front of him.

"Thanks for letting me walk with you. And for sharing thoughts about things that are alien to me. My parents are going to really enjoy the car. What a beautiful evening!"

His fuzzy, happy look broadened into a big smile, but he didn't say a word, just turned and continued his walk toward the house.

----- 020 -----

It seemed to me the Sunday Brunch with Uncle and Aunt was pretty close to becoming a family tradition now, so I drove into town early and picked up the Northern Record, just to make sure my column was there. Then I jogged about 12 miles so I'd be plenty hungry for whatever Mom and Aunt Arlene worked up.

When I got home and showered off I decided to take a quick look at my website. McMoo had taken it over, and it was weird to think DannyDBanks.com was under the control of my agent. Very weird. But it definitely looked professional. Today's column would not be available online for a couple of days.

I wondered if my columns were having an effect on the number of names on Freeman's list. I was thinking this week's column, where I told about Willie, might cause a surge. And it occurred to me that I was losing my objectivity. I ought to be neutral about whether the list grew or people liked Freeman's idea or whether people liked Freeman himself. But I'd been over this territory before. And still I guess all I can do is go with my gut, and let people know what my gut is telling me. I don't think I'd want to be someone who'd be unmoved by a story like Freeman told about Willie and his idea. I checked SWEEP16.com and found there were over 62,000 names on the list now. Which reminded me ... should I suggest a tech to Freeman? Maybe that will be something to talk over during brunch.

In the kitchen I found Dad alone with a cup of coffee and the paper. He'd just read my column. "This one will change some minds I think, Danny."

"I'm worried I'm losing my objectivity. And it's only been two -- no, three weeks. I'm the anti-tycoon kid, I thought. I think I still am. But Dad, Freeman", I stopped for a second and just shook my head ... "I don't know about SWEEP16, but I do know for sure Freeman means it. Jenna Jersey told me right off she is backing Freeman. She doesn't really know in her own mind about SWEEP16 either, but because it was coming from Freeman, she put her name on the list the second she knew there was a list. She said he is PURE. I understand how she feels. This guy has a lot of heart."

Dad looked at me hard, but didn't say a thing.

"What about that Caddy in our driveway now? How am I supposed to react to that? We probably should have turned it down."

"I thought about it, but the idea of lending it to us actually seemed to make him happy. It may sound silly, considering I'm the one who received the gift, but I felt like turning it down would hurt him a little, and I didn't want to do that. And actually, Mom felt the same."

"Yeah, I know. And I think you're right, too. He likes doing things for people, giving gifts. His face lit up when Uncle Walt drove off on that vintage bike."

We were both silent for a few seconds, then Dad cracked a big smile. "That Caddy ... it's not in the driveway now you know. Mom took it this morning to pick up Aunt Arlene." The thought of Mom and Aunt Arlene in that big old convertible boat had both Dad and me smiling from ear to ear.

"OK ... so you think this column will change minds? How so?"

"Because Americans love our military, and you've captured a heart-wrenching moment -- and you did it really well -- the type of thing that reminds us our soldiers go so far beyond what most of us do. And then suddenly out of this extreme situation pops SWEEP16. For me, I stopped for a couple of minutes, put the paper down, then read the column again. It's vivid and strong. SWEEP16 will have an army of critics. The more traction it gains the more critics it will have. But in light of Willie's story, I think the critics are going to have a much harder time criticizing Freeman's motivation."

"Dad ... my head is spinning. But I realized something while I was out running. One of the things I've always loved about sports is the upset. Partly because it's great to see people play over their heads, and pull off what they are not supposed to be able to pull off. But I realized I also love upsets because it is great to be surprised, to see that the way I pictured a situation just was not the way it turned out."

"That's why they play the game. And I know what you mean. It's a really important lesson in life, and sports teaches it, whether or not you think sports can teach about life. For me, it's actually one of my favorite things in the world. To be confounded. To see something happen that I just never would have expected. Or maybe even thought possible. Yet it happens."

"And for a journalist, or an aspiring journalist, it's awfully fortunate to be in the middle of a story where it's turning out that 'Truth is Stranger than Fiction'."

As if on cue, our silence made the approach of a motorcycle obvious for several seconds, and when it pulled into our driveway and went silent, Dad and I looked at each other and smiled some more, and went out front to greet Uncle Walt.

"Some pretty sweet wheels you got there Wally."

"How about we cruise over to the market and see if we can find our girls?"

"That's a great idea. Want to ride behind me Danny?"

"Thanks, but I think I'll take care of a few chores."

It was a fine thing watching Dad and Unc cruise off on this splendid morning in the North Country. And it would have been nice to ride with them. But I did have a bunch of things I knew now needed doing.

First off, I wrote a mail to Bidwell, Clipper and DocDuh. I thought it would be interesting and fun to ask them all the same question, start an email discussion. "What do you think would be the best way to structure the federal income tax?". I felt a little devilish because I was imagining Clipper and DocDuh hammering each other with glee. And I hoped that's what they'd do.

Then I called Jenna to see if she'd read my column yet.

"Actually, I read it last night on the server. I hope you don't mind. You know you can see everybody's stuff, once it's marked for publication?"

She again inflected her statement like a question, and this was something I was really getting to like about her. "No, I didn't know that. Interesting."

"All of us who use McMoo know each other to some degree ... except for you, of course. But you'll get to know everyone else. There's only a handful. It can be pretty helpful sometimes. If you read the advance material, obviously you need to keep it under your hat until it's released. But it's there, and a few times people have tipped me to something that improved my column." She paused, and I waited for her to continue. "I had no idea about Willie or where SWEEP16 came from. Which is surprising, now that I think about it. Surprising that nobody asked. But I'm sure Freeman is glad he didn't have to demur, and really glad he was able to tell the VFW guys first."

"The Veterans' Groups mean a lot to him, that was easy to see. My Dad did not serve, and I have not served, so it's something I can't really share, but it's clear."

"Willie's story ... it's so vintage Freeman. So extreme. Did Freeman talk to you about his own kids?"

"He told me his big place is for his family, and he hopes to have grandchildren there, but that right now his kids are all far off doing their own thing."

"He and Mrs Freeman have two boys and two girls, and they were all born when the Freemans were pretty young by today's standards. Freeman told me that early on, his father-in-law had a talk with him and his Mrs, and told him about how the ancient Spartans believed a man should not be exposed to potential death on the battlefield until he had children. They took it to heart."

"Thanks. I guess Freeman's kids are not really part of the story, although it would be interesting to find out what their perspective is. And how he thinks SWEEP16 will affect them. He did say he's going to hold onto 100 million or so for his family. So the kids will be covered."

"I'd like your opinion on something. After the VFW meeting, Freeman drove me home in this gorgeous old Cadillac convertible. And when my parents admired it, he just told them to hang onto it for a while. They both said they felt as if he really wanted them to have the car, and that they would have felt bad

turning it down. I think they were right -- that he sincerely did want to lend them this great old car. But do you think my family should try to avoid getting chummy with Freeman and his family?"

"You need to do whatever you feel comfortable with, and make sure you don't withhold from your readers information that might influence their interpretations of your work. You know I believe Freeman himself is the heart of your story, and this is an example of it. For what it's worth also, I believe your parents' impression was correct. Remember ... he is giving away a couple billion. And I think it is OK if I mention now that he has already given away well into 9 figures. He likes to give things away. But don't forget, also, what's a car to him?"

"Yeah, I guess it isn't much. That doesn't mean it wasn't an attempt to influence us."

"Danny, I know you are just getting started with money. But did you ever light somebody up with a gift that was no big deal to you?"

This was reminding me of the time I wanted to give Doreen, the waitress in town, a big tip. "When I was in high school, my folks gave me a new football, and I gave my old one to a little kid wearing old, old sneakers that were way too big for him. I think it was those shoes that made me do it. I didn't even know the kid, but I remember those sneakers, and I remember how happy he was when I gave the ball to him. So you are saying that car means no more to Freeman than that ball meant to me?"

"Yes, that's the idea. Although it sounds like that ball means more to you now than it did then. Now imagine what you could do if you were SERIOUSLY rich. That would be pretty cool, wouldn't it?"

Again I thought about how I'd wanted to tip Doreen. And I had to admit it would be pretty awesome to toss around a car like a party favor.

"Do you know anything about his cars? He offered one to me when I was doing my second story on him. It's a small business for him, you know. He really likes old cars and motorcycles, and his collection became a business. He's got a guy who buys and sells those vehicles. Freeman puts up the money, the other guy contributes his time and expertise, and they share the profits. Freeman doesn't pay much attention to it, but he was amused telling me how well it's worked out. Basically, he just has a bunch of great old rides to choose from, and his car-guy keeps them coming and going."

"I'm getting to like him, and I don't exactly like that. You know, when my Uncle told me I'd be meeting Freeman, I assumed I would dislike him. Really ... I thought I was going to be ripping this guy."

"Look at it this way ... you are naturally being drawn to Freeman. You and everybody else who gets near him. That's just part of what he is, and if you fought it, that would be dishonest. So just go with it, and be forthright about it."

"You're right. And you might like this ... Freeman lent my Uncle an old Harley, which he has been driving around with my Aunt. When my Dad saw that, he went out and bought a motorcycle for himself. They both rode when they were young. And right now Dad and Unc are out tearing up these

country roads. Next thing, Dad and Mom will get black leather jackets and head for California! Thanks Jenna, talk later." This time I hung up quick; I could hear Dad and Uncle coming back.

I just stood on the porch looking at them, and it occurred to me this scene ought to be the other way round. Dad spoke first.

"Mom and Aunt Arlene will be here before long. They said they wanted to make a couple more stops."

Dad and Unc exchanged smiling looks, and Uncle Walt added "It seemed to us more like they wanted to drive the Caddy some more!".

"Dad? ... Uncle Walt?" ... I said it slow and soft, so they knew I had something on my mind. "It kind of bothers me that Mom is driving around in Freeman's Caddy. I think he probably really does just like giving things away, doing favors. But I still feel like somehow I'm being bought off."

Uncle Walt's take really surprised me. "Are you influenced? I get the feeling you are a little put off, if you are influenced at all."

"Yeah, I guess you're right."

"And you think Freddy didn't expect that, even before he offered?"

"No, that did not occur to me."

"Of all the people I've ever known, I'd have to say Freddy is physically the quickest of all. And mentally it's not much different either. He would have been reluctant to offer anything to your family for concern over the way you might interpret it. But he decided to offer anyhow."

"That's an interesting interpretation."

"You remember when I told you how I met Freddy, I told you he was my best friend, and I did not want to talk much, except in specific situations? OK, I'll talk about him now, about this. He just really likes to give things away. And you could say it's a perk of being rich. He can. I remember once, maybe 15 years ago, something a lot more important came up. One of the guys from high school had a child with a bone problem. The insurance company would not pay because the treatments were experimental. This guy was a regular working guy, and he went for all he had trying to cover the payments. He did his best to handle things on his own. But with the emotional and financial strain, he got in over his head and he was close to losing his house when he finally asked Freddy for help. And of course, Freddy was happy to help him out. But I remember Freddy was a little sad an old pal hadn't asked sooner, but also, the weird part ... he was kind of aggravated with the government. That was the first time I'd heard about anything like this. Basically the story was that the government will let you pay a person's medical bills without penalty, but if you pay a guy's mortgage or help him out of debt, the government gets pretty involved there and it costs extra. Freddy was really emphatic that Uncle Sam shouldn't make it more difficult when people simply want to help one another. That was the first time he told me about how he felt the government was dead wrong for interfering with what he saw as a personal situation.

He's such a huge booster of all things American that hearing this kind of criticism from him was a real surprise. I'd say that was one of the seeds of SWEEP16 right there. ... The little one healed up fine, and she is doing great last I heard."

"Thanks, Unc. Good story. At this point I'm not at all surprised hearing something like that. And you think that might have been sort of the foundation of SWEEP16, 15 or so years ago?"

"From what I have seen anyway. But you might as well ask Freddy. We read your column at the Luncheonette in town. I had no idea about Willie. That's going to get a lot of people thinking."

"The more I learn about this guy ...". Dad shook his head. "When you got involved with this story, I thought you'd be learning a lot about business. But I can see now you're going to be learning, thinking, a lot more about life."

Nobody said anything for a while, then Dad brought up fishing, and I sat back with a sort of secret smile listening to Dad talking fishing. How long until he starts making plans to come up in winter and join Unc for some ice fishing? But then I remembered Uncle Walt had been in New York with Freeman, and I had to ask about that.

Uncle Walt's face really lit up then. Obviously he'd gotten a kick out of something. I could see him thinking about what to tell me, when we heard Mom and Aunt Arlene pull up in the Caddy. "How about we get brunch on the table and I'll tell everyone about it in a few minutes?"

Mom and Aunt Arlene had picked up a few things that were basically ready, so Uncle Walt started up pretty quick. "You know, Freddy never said a word to me about what I should tell you, and what I shouldn't. It's been my own idea not to talk to you much, not only because I'm biased, but because I don't think Freddy would want you hearing things from me. But this I think is a little different. So I'll just tell you what happened."

"Freddy called me on Wednesday night, says he needs me for a day or so, and can I be ready at 5 the next morning. So he picks me up and off we go to New York. I didn't know what it was about, and I was surprised when he told me what Ledbetter had said. Really, ol' Darren should have known better than to say something like that. But he's insulted other women, so maybe ...". Uncle shrugged his shoulders, then continued.

"Freddy tells me he's going to have a talk with Ledbetter, and that he'll need me to mind the car for a few minutes while they have their chat. One of the things you get used to with Freddy ... he has a lot of connections. So it didn't surprise me he knew where to wait for Ledbetter. We weren't there but 10 or 15 minutes when Ledbetter's limo pulls up. Freddy gets out, Ledbetter gets out, and Freddy walks up to him. His bodyguards kind of stiffen up but they just let Freddy pass. He grabbed Ledbetter by the neck and the head, and brought him up against a building and then down on his back. Now, it's normal for a bunch of people to be there waiting for Ledbetter, so there is automatically a small crowd. Ledbetter struggled for a second or two, but he gave that up quick. I saw him kind of roll his eyes to look for his bodyguards, but they stationed themselves on either side, looking outward, as if they felt their job was

to make sure nobody interfered. Freddy told me later he'd arranged this with them. A lot of the elite bodyguards are former military, former Special Forces. So anyway, Freddy's got Ledbetter on the ground, and his head is down low in Ledbetter's face, and Freddy is talking. I couldn't hear him, but I could see Ledbetter nodding agreement. I would say this lasted at least a half minute, which was a long time for something like that. Then Freddy just got up and came back to the car. Once he got in, he had a big grin on his face. He said LET'S GO, and so I started driving, but I didn't know where to go. Actually, I just drove around the corner, then Freddy took over behind the wheel. He didn't tell me what he said to Ledbetter until later. After we got rooms for the night, Freddy wanted to go for a walk in Central Park, and then he told me what he'd told Ledbetter. Which was basically, that Ledbetter must apologize publicly and Marti had to accept the apology or Ledbetter's health would suffer significantly."

Mom asked "What would he have done if Ledbetter hadn't apologized?"

"Well, I don't know exactly, but he would have put him in the hospital, certainly."

"Just for an insult?"

"Oh, absolutely. A guy can say pretty much anything to Freddy about FREDDY, and he won't mind. He can trade insults very well, and do it with a smile. But it's a completely different matter to bring his family into it. And Marti? God help you. Ledbetter probably feared for his life, correctly."

I volunteered that Freddy'd told me he believed Ledbetter's apology was motivated by fear rather than a real change of heart.

"True, but he apologized on TV and Marti accepted. So it's history for Freddy now, unless, of course, Ledbetter shoots his mouth off again." This brought chuckles from Dad and me and Uncle. I didn't have a read on Mom or Aunt Arlene.

"Aunt Arlene, what do you think of SWEEP16?"

"I love it. I think Freddy's right. But I'm as biased as Walt. Maybe even more so. I love Freddy like a brother. And it's quite possible Walt and I would not be together if not for Freddy's influence on Walter."

I looked over at Uncle Walt, and he was smiling sheepishly, but also looking at Aunt Arlene as if he still could not believe his luck. Dad didn't understand, so Unc told the story of his meeting with Freeman. But he continued, "What I didn't tell you, Danny, was the influence it had on me. I had my eye on this kid Freddy, and the way he got so much positive attention. He had respect, and he had affection. And he got it by being nice. It sounds ridiculous, but I didn't really intend to be mean to the other kids. Watching Freddy changed me a lot. He could have gotten away with pretty much whatever he wanted. But he didn't try to get away with anything. It was like he wanted to be the nicest kid in school. But of course everybody knew how he'd handled me, too."

Aunt Arlene spoke again. "I was attracted to the old Walt, but I didn't like him. But once he'd changed his ways ..." For an instant Aunt Arlene was looking at Uncle the way he'd just looked at her.

"So I am surely biased. But I've also seen in other people the influence Freddy can have, the way he can change how people think and behave. By example. I'd be willing to bet a lot of really rich guys are going to be influenced by SWEEP16, and do far more than their share. And a lot of regular folks will be inspired. By his example. Where it will go I would not try to predict. But I have no doubt he will inspire and influence a lot of people. I saw it when we were all just kids."

"So what's next on the SWEEP16 schedule, Mister Reporter?"

"Thanks, Aunt Arlene. Freeman's talking at Pendleton on Monday -- tomorrow. I'm looking forward to it."

----- 021 -----

Monday afternoon arrived pretty quick, and I was really looking forward to the long ride.

Freeman was driving another beautiful old car when he picked me up. Wide whitewalls again. It looked like a car from an old gangster movie.

"Pretty close. It's a 1936 Packard. A really great set of wheels. Cars today are great in a lot of ways, but to me, they just aren't beautiful the way these old cars are. I can't exactly put my finger on why I feel that way, but I do. And a lot of people don't realize how well these old cars ride, once you get them restored."

I remarked that he'd gained weight since Friday.

"Yes, probably 10 pounds. Almost all water, of course, but I needed to replace it for sure."

"You don't look as stressed as on Friday. It's a big difference."

"Good. Some of the guys at the VFW were worried about me. I feel better now."

"No more fever?"

"No, the docs have me on some pretty strong meds still."

As we drove out to Pendleton, I asked Freeman what he'd be talking about.

"This was actually scheduled a few months ago. It's a graduate class on business and government. Or, at least, that was who scheduled it. But it's open to the public, in the auditorium at the Student Union. Going to talk to them about Federal Student Aid. Pretty well on topic, but also ties into SWEEP16 naturally."

"And it will hit home pretty hard too, won't it?"

Freeman just smiled at my question. He seemed in a thoughtful mood, and actually I wanted to talk about the Miller show, but did not feel comfortable bringing it up. So I didn't say anything. With the windows open, it was pretty loud, and talking was not comfortable anyway. I thought that could be a reason why he had the windows open, so I just kept quiet. After an hour, he invited me to drive, which I gladly did.

"It shifts a little rough, you'll want to double-clutch." I'd never done this before, and felt awkward at it, but it was nice to learn something new about driving.

The Pendleton campus was pretty quiet, as most American campuses would be this time of year. But there were at least a couple hundred in the auditorium when Freeman was introduced. I couldn't help but wonder why so many had shown up. I found out later it was an assignment for most of them. He was greeted with polite boos, if such is possible. I didn't hear anyone curse him, but it wasn't a cheerful welcome. As Freeman began to speak, I looked over the crowd and saw only two people that seemed old enough to be faculty. And one of them, who introduced Freeman to the audience, was the professor who'd invited Freeman in the first place.

Freeman didn't waste any time. He quickly thanked his hosts for the invitation, and praised the history and beauty of the campus. But that took only a few seconds. "Federal Student Aid is a bad idea, and it should be discontinued."

The boos were loud this time, but quieted down pretty quickly, and I noticed some of the catcallers were enjoying themselves, and didn't seem angry at all. Graduate students should enjoy an argument.

"Maybe you know about the SWEEP16 campaign, and how it seeks to drastically reduce the size and scope of the federal government by removing the federal authority to levy taxes. And of course those taxes support federal student aid. Here are some reasons why eliminating that aid would be a great idea. Professor Richard Vedder of Ohio University has published some fine work and I hope he won't mind my summarizing his ideas here. And of course maybe I will misinterpret or garble his positions. But I'll try not to."

I saw smiles in the audience at this bit of self-deprecation.

"There is no implication that Professor Vedder supports SWEEP16 ... I've never been in contact with him. However, his work has just come to my attention and is very relevant to SWEEP16 and this beautiful setting."

"Dr Vedder states the feds provide student aid for three reasons, all of which he disputes: 1) The belief that more young people going to college and generally increasing the spending on higher education benefits the entire country; 2) Higher education promotes economic opportunity; 3) Too many people will be otherwise unable to attend college because financing will not be available."

"As for reason number one, the idea more students and more spending is good for all of us, nobody has actually been able to show any solid evidence. There does not appear to be any relationship between education spending and economic growth."

"Does higher education promote economic opportunity? Sometimes, certainly. But the last two generations have been increasingly schooled while income inequality has grown. However you feel about income equality or inequality, it is difficult to argue education in general creates economic opportunity."

"Third ... and this is really the SWEEP16 focus ... if lending money to students for their education is a good idea, then private lenders will lend. From the free market and small government point of view, this is the main point."

"Where are we now? We have about 40,000,000 people with student loans of about \$25,000 each, totaling about a trillion dollars. Half of them are age 33 or older and 40% are over 40. Taxpayers are subsidizing this? But also, with Uncle Sam setting the loan rates, everybody pays the same, regardless of prospects for repayment or default. And the taxpayer, not the college that originates the loan, is saddled with the loss in the event of student default. The present system supports the escalating price of education. Easy credit makes it easy for colleges to raise prices, and they have raised them far more than general inflation. At present far less than half of Pell Grant recipients earn their degree within 6 years. How much better for all of us if all these mandated programs were swept away and educational finance was a result of people interacting freely?"

There was no cheering, and no loud booing either, but it was clear the audience did not like what it heard.

"A couple of other troubling things about student loans ... I'm not aware whether Professor Vedder has addressed these aspects. First, the federal government has basically forbidden student loans from private business. And student loans are generally not dischargeable under our bankruptcy laws, as are almost all other debts. However, the government will write off student loan debt to varying degrees if the debtor accepts certain jobs or performs as the government wishes. To me, this is a very creepy situation ... as if it is designed to control the borrower."

"Lastly ... if the government controls the money, the government will control education. There are places where college is FREE ... meaning it is paid for by government. And many advocate for that approach here. But ask yourselves if you would want government to control higher education. Who could be a student? How many students could we have? Where and when? Who would be a professor? What courses could be offered, and what would be their content?"

Freeman paused here and looked around, indicating without words that he was finished presenting his main ideas. He'd only used up a few minutes. "Please, it will be great to hear specific comments and talk them thru. Just let me point out again that my default position, the SWEEP16 position, is simply to let people do what they want to do."

Immediately the man who'd introduced Freeman, Dr Glenn Parker, spoke. "You yourself attended a government school. Your education was 100% taxpayer subsidized. How can you tell someone the government shouldn't be involved in education?"

"Thanks for bringing this up. I attended Annapolis, the United States Naval Academy, which is completely funded by the government and students pay no money to attend. Students commit to a minimum of 5 years military service in exchange for their education. It can be an excellent arrangement and would be a great thing to expand to other fields. For example, suppose a high schooler has a flair for software, and a company wants to sponsor that student's college in exchange for a period of employment. At present, a deal like that is illegal in the private sector. It would be considered a form of indentured servitude, but the government has exempted its own military academies from this prohibition. It's easy to imagine a lot of students and companies making such arrangements if possible. And of course many companies do sponsor education for their current employees. So why not let them extend the approach? What do you think?"

"I think you've wriggled out of my question like a real politician!"

The audience laughed, and there was some clapping. But it didn't seem really hostile. Freeman didn't laugh though, he was completely serious.

"A politician?" I knew him well enough to know that suggestion would make him unhappy, and the immediate quiet of the audience told me they knew it too. "Maybe you're right. When I was in high school I didn't think whether it was fair or right to avail myself of a deal that wasn't offered except to students of the service academies. I did think about it before coming here tonight, tho. And I don't think it was wrong to take the deal then, or hypocritical to promulgate these ideas tonight. That was and still is the only way you can attend any of the Service Academies. One thing I should have made clear earlier ... it's great to have our ideals and ideas and push for change. But we've got to get on with our lives, too. We've got to live within the system as it is, even as we advocate for change. I'm very sorry if I've offended people who have taken out government loans. It's the situation you have now, you're in school now. No stigma. Again, the viewpoint from the SWEEP16 perspective is simply that this situation would not exist absent government's application of force."

"If people were interacting freely, I believe higher education would cost quite a bit less AND it would be quite a bit easier to earn the money to pay for it."

There was silence in the auditorium now, and the students looked around at each other a little, and then back at Freeman expectantly. My own feel was that Freeman hadn't really changed their minds, but they were reluctant also to argue with Freedom. And Freeman seemed to sense that too.

"It's an interesting thing watching how ideas and viewpoints change over the years. If consenting adults go behind closed doors, what restrictions should government put on their behavior?"

Freeman smiled and nodded to encourage someone to answer the question, and a woman about my age gave him the answer he was looking for.

"Private behavior is private. It's not the place of government to regulate or restrict it."

By his expression and gesture, he invited others to chime in. Which a bunch of them did. A bit suspiciously, it was clear, but basically they all agreed on the right of consenting adults to behave as they wished.

"Not so long ago, the government wouldn't care about the business deals consenting adults might make, but was very concerned about sexual activity. Now it seems the opposite. But is it correct that folks in this room are mostly good with adults selling each other whatever kind of insurance they want?"

The audience seemed to me to feel tricked more than convinced, and there was silence that did not seem to me to signify assent.

An older guy I had not noticed, probably in his 50s stood. He didn't introduce himself, but it seemed clear many in the audience knew him. I guess some kind of professor.

"Mr Freeman, would you mind a couple of questions about your SWEEP16?"

"No! Please!" Freeman gave the guy a big smile. I still wasn't used to the way his smile transformed his face, and I wondered again if others could see in Freeman what I saw right off. There was a bit of a sneer in the way the guy said 'your SWEEP16', and by now I understood Freeman saw it and instantly sent back the opposite.

"A lot of us here are truly incredulous that someone like you, after having profited so enormously from the American System, would now espouse the view that you have no responsibility toward that same system."

"Where did you get the idea that is my view?" Freeman still wore a big smile, showing his set of near-perfect choppers. It amused me a little to speculate to what extent his looks, anyone's looks, for that matter, affect the degree to which they can influence others.

"From your own website, sir."

"If people interpret SWEEP16 that way, we'll need to look at a rewrite! The idea behind SWEEP16 is that the USA will be far better off if the federal government quits trying to compel so much, extract so much and provide so much, and instead allows people, and each of the 50 states, to do as they see fit. Specifically, SWEEP16 advocates the abolition of the federal powers of taxation, partly due to the belief that Americans will voluntarily, proudly and joyfully assume responsibility."

"Like I said, 'no responsibility'."

"If by 'no responsibility', you mean there will be no federal enforcement mechanism to compel behavior and payment, then you are correct. But does that viewpoint not also imply a belief that responsibility is defined by whatever law happens to be in effect at that time?"

"Mr Freeman, you are dancing."

The guy's line didn't really seem legit to me, but Freeman didn't protest.

"How many of you believe you have social responsibilities?"

It seemed just about everyone, including Freeman, raised a hand, albeit slowly in many cases, as if they were suspicious. I quickly shot my own arm up when I remembered I was part of the audience.

Freeman looked his questioner in the eye for several long seconds, noted the man's raised arm, and said "Almost all of us agree on this idea." He smiled and nodded, then lowered his arm and added "Huge numbers of Americans will assume responsibility without compulsion."

Freeman started to pace a little, then seemed to realize that wasn't a good idea.

"But naturally then ... what degree of responsibility would people assume? Right now, we have huge federal government and extreme levels of taxation for some because the government is huge. Part of the idea of SWEEP16 is that a great deal of what government does will be done privately or by the states or not at all."

The same older guy spoke again. "Don't you think there is a huge arrogance in what you propose? The United States has developed a complex system of taxation and regulation over many decades, and you're saying to just sweep it away?"

"Mostly, yes. I'm saying America was founded on a belief in Freedom and a belief that Americans are moral people. One of the concepts most important to SWEEP16 was famously expressed by John Adams, our second President, who told us the Constitution is designed only for a moral and religious people, and is wholly inadequate for any other. If we believe we need law, tax policy, government, in order to compel moral behavior, then we really do not believe in each other at all."

"No question we have plenty of knuckleheads in our country. We have all manner of criminals. They will still be with us. But they are small in number, and their number becomes smaller as we become richer. SWEEP16 is about trust in individual Americans. But it is also about trust in the states, acting individually and collectively. It will be a responsibility of the states to determine to what degree they wish to fund a central government. But with the federal government having the sharply limited power the Founders intended, Americans will be free to choose among the many states that approach which they believe best."

The questioner was still standing, and he spoke again. "Mr Freeman, do you actually believe those among us who have been so extremely fortunate as you would simply donate to the federal coffers as much as they contribute presently under federal tax law?"

"Contribute?" I was surprised by Freeman's tone, and it struck me this was the first time I'd ever seen an edge on his attitude. "'Contributions' are voluntary. To conflate 'contributions' with payments extracted by law under threat of violence and incarceration is to adopt a weasel-word of a tax-hiking politician." He paused for a second and softened his bearing, and spoke with a smile. "There's that word again."

"My guess is the highest income tax payers would send far less money to the federal government than they do now, but they would almost certainly continue to contribute voluntarily after SWEEP16 as they contribute voluntarily to charities now. But really, there is no telling how people will react and events will unfold. I do have a lot of ideas about what people will do, but a huge part of SWEEP16 is simply due to my belief in Freedom. Freedom is the American way, and it's almost always best to promote Freedom."

"Sorry, tho, I still have not really answered your question. Would the highest income tax payers contribute as much after SWEEP16 as they pay now? Taken as a whole, I do not believe so. There are quite a few people with 8 and 9-figure incomes who advocate for tax hikes. Some of them are people I know, and I believe they are sincere. This group is likely to pay as much or more. But, if other people don't have to pay anything, their perspective may change. I do believe the federal government would have to make do with far less money than it does now, and I do very much believe that would be an extremely good thing."

A distinguished-looking woman I hadn't noticed at one side of the room stood up and introduced herself by name, and as a Professor of Philosophy. Freeman had not asked the questioners to give their names, but he obviously appreciated that she had. "It's a pleasure to meet you Professor, and I'm grateful you've listened to these ideas."

"What do you think of poor people, Mr Freeman?"

"Is it fair to interpret your question to mean 'What would become of poor people after SWEEP16?'"

"It is, but first, I'd like to know what you think of America's poor."

"It's a broad question, Professor. I don't mean to be flippant, but I think of poor people the same as I think of average income people, rich people, business people and professor people. There are a lot of ways to be poor, and a lot of ways to be rich. May I assume that by 'America's poor', you mean Americans who are having a difficult time paying for food, shelter ... the basics?"

The lady nodded, and Freeman continued. "Thanks. We are a very rich country, and SWEEP16 will make us far richer. This will be of great benefit to the working poor. It will be a great benefit to all of us. Maybe you're wondering what SWEEP16 will mean for people collecting government assistance from our many federal programs. It's important to remember anti-poverty programs do virtually nothing to reduce the numbers of people receiving public assistance, which most people agree is a desirable goal. America's anti-poverty programs spent last year a total of over \$60,000 per poor family. Since the Great Society of the 1960s, we've spent over \$16 trillion on anti-poverty programs, and we now have more poor and greater expenditures than ever. We have a poverty industry. There are about a dozen federal food stamp programs, and almost as many housing programs. A total of around 80 different federal assistance programs spending around \$1 trillion per year. And this has created a poverty culture in some cases. SWEEP16 I believe would create a huge economic boom, but also, absent huge federal anti-poverty programs, each state would be enabled to treat with its own citizens as each state sees fit, and we would have many different approaches to evaluate. The best approaches

would be copied by other states. But a central idea of SWEEP16 is that incomes would rise spectacularly and at the same time prices would fall spectacularly. America is already a pretty great place to be poor, and it would become a lot better."

"America is a great place to be poor?" I did not detect anything but sincerity in her tone or expression.

"Relatively speaking, yes. America's poor generally have good water and indoor plumbing, heat, air conditioning, food, education, medical care, telephone, internet, for examples. My guess is most of our poor even have cell phones. Our poor generally live far better, materially, than most of the world, and they are very rich by historical standards. Everyone here knows this."

The Professor continued. "What is your primary motivation, Mr Freeman?"

"Love", he answered immediately. I was surprised, but the audience more so. There was a little bit of a murmur in the room, and then a man came from backstage and said time was up. This caused more of a murmur in the audience. Freeman surprised me again when he said "Thank You all again for your time and attention. It's a beautiful night in a beautiful place. It would be wonderful to continue talking over some food and drink at the Student Union. Will you join me please?"

This idea was greeted enthusiastically by the 40 or so people still in the auditorium. I wondered if the students were quick enough to guess that food and drink with a billionaire would be free. Yeah, I think they realized.

We went downstairs to a nearly empty student-union sort of restaurant, and we basically took the place over. I was curious to see how Freeman handled the situation. He said something to a guy behind the bar, and he'd evidently set this up beforehand. The waiters and a bunch of the students moved a couple of big tables around, and managed to create something like a giant table for all of us. Freeman helped the lady Professor into a seat next to him, and after she ordered beer and burger and fries he indicated he'd have the same. A number of students ordered non-alcoholic drinks, and I'd guess half of the group was under drinking age. I was sitting off to the side so I could hear and see pretty well but with such a big bunch I didn't want to take a place that he might want to go to one of the locals.

I asked a guy next to me about the woman next to Freeman. "That's Carolina Lomax. She teaches philosophy, and she pops up all over the place. She writes a lot and you'll see her on TV talk shows. Political stuff but other kinds of shows too. Her courses are always filled." She had something of a star quality about her.

"You are motivated by love, Mister Freeman?"

Freeman and the professor were at one end of a table, against a wall, near a corner, and it seemed to make their voices travel well. Her voice had a strange tone in it, I couldn't tell whether it was challenge, disbelief or admiration. Maybe a mixture of all three.

"Pretty much everyone calls me Freddy."

"Carolina", she said, and offered her hand to Freeman. Her gesture was unusual in that she held her hand flat, maybe because it was awkward to shake hands the way they were seated. But it looked kind of like a bit from another era, where the gentleman kisses the lady's hand. Freeman held her hand with one of his, then half a second later put his other hand on top. No kiss, but something beyond a hand shake.

"Very nice to meet you properly, Carolina. I'm glad you're here. Yes, love. It is certainly one of the strongest motivators of the great majority of us. In the case of SWEEP16, love for my country, my countrymen and really the rest of humanity. We long ago reached a point where our focus and reliance on government began to hold us back. Right now we are being strangled by good intentions. The question that SWEEP16 asks is: Do we love each other, and our country, enough to do right, to do our share, without being forced to do so by the government? I'm sure the answer is YES."

The rest of the group focused on their exchange, and it seemed this session was becoming an interview. "Will you feel love when the poor are dying in the streets because the rich are not paying any taxes?"

"Why assume one circumstance would cause the other?"

"I'm disappointed you are evading my question."

"And I'm flattered that I COULD disappoint you. But would you really want me to answer a question when I disagree with the assumption upon which the question rests? I hope not, because that would be untruthful."

"What assumption are you referring to?"

"The assumption ... assertion ... that rich people not paying taxes would cause poor people to die in the streets. I disagree with that idea. And although it is the zeitgeist, it is to me very sad and frankly revolting."

"Certain voices complain loudly about the most fortunate among us providing for the least fortunate among us. If they no longer provided for those who need it, would not the needy then starve in the streets?"

From the side I couldn't really see Freeman's expression as he fixed his gaze on the Professor, but there did not appear to be any smile on his face. "What do you mean by 'most fortunate'?"

"Certainly, I mean those receiving the largest share of America's wealth."

"Professor, our waiter here tonight will not 'receive' his tip so much as he will 'earn' his tip. And despite the etymological relationship, I do not equate financial 'fortune' with 'fortunate'. So I must again disagree with an assumption I believe you are making. My family raised me to believe that anyone born in the USA is extremely fortunate -- lucky -- a marvelous circumstance of birth. If you are not only born American but also born healthy to people who love you, you are extremely fortunate indeed. Such fortunate circumstances of birth go far in eventually equipping people to earn a financial fortune. And

in a free-market system, people earn their fortune by improving the lot of their customers through a variety of voluntary and mutually beneficial transactions."

Freeman paused, as if to let the Professor respond, but Carolina leaned back in her chair, her face showing nothing, and sipped from her mug.

"I do not believe that those among us with the most happy customers would ignore starving masses of fellow Americans. And I do not believe that forcible confiscation of earnings from high earners, followed by redistribution of those extractions to nominally low earners is either effective or moral. A fundamental principle of SWEEP16 is that money, capital, is most effective when deployed by the individual who has earned it."

"And how do you define 'most effective'?"

"Doing the most good, both materially and spiritually."

"Spiritually?"

"When people pay their own way with money they've earned, it is good for their spirit. People who merely 'receive' money government has confiscated from those who earned it and sent to those deemed more worthy inevitably suffer spiritual harm. I hasten to add government has forcibly blurred these lines by coercive programs such as Social Security. An American worker turning 65 today has likely been paying Social Security taxes both directly and indirectly, for over 40 years. Such a worker is surely owed repayment. However, the Social Security system is harmful and needs to be phased out, for many reasons. But we cannot do so without fair treatment of those who have been forced to participate."

Freeman paused again, and this time Carolina, who was eating her burger with knife and fork, took another bite. It seemed inappropriate, and it seemed she was using the food to avoid speaking.

"Absent the many distortions imposed by our system of federal levies, there would be far fewer poor people, and their needs would be far better met by friends, family, civic groups, church groups, neighbors, co-workers and state and local government than the present federal government-based arrangements. But the biggest benefit, both spiritual and financial, would accrue to the large numbers of people who would achieve the dignity and satisfaction and self-respect of providing for themselves and their dear ones by the fruit of their own labors."

It looked like Freeman was going to say something when an overfed, scroungy-looking guy spoke pretty loudly. "So what about charity? Philanthropy? You claimed you're going to give away tons of money but what have you done for other people so far?" The guy sitting next to him, apparently a friend, followed up quickly with more volume. "You mean besides those cheeseburgers you just demolished?" The jab from his buddy made everyone laugh a little, and I felt some relief that what seemed a hostile question had been turned. Then I felt annoyance at myself for sort of pulling for Freeman, who took the opportunity for half of a French Fry.

"Sometimes the things money can do seem almost miraculous. Money can make medical procedures available in places where some people are suffering conditions that ... ". Freeman stopped for a few seconds and I think everyone could tell his thoughts were painful for him. Then he scanned the group quickly.

"It seems as if everyone here has the benefit of sight. Please, will you all do a favor for me? Close your eyes. Keep them closed. Now try to have something to eat. Mostly we're having burgers, fries here. Finger food. But still not so easy. How about the nachos? A little more difficult. Imagine trying to eat with a knife and fork. You know there are pitchers and serving bowls on the table. Try handling those without your sight, please."

I cheated and looked. Almost everyone else, including Lomax and Freeman, still had eyes closed. Lomax fumbled for a couple of fries and a drink, which surprised me. She had an air of a big shot, and I would have thought she'd decline Freeman's request.

"Thanks for that, everyone. One of our favorite organizations is named Seva. S-E-V-A.org. They are primarily concerned with preventing blindness and saving sight. The WHO -- World Health Organization -- estimates that 80% of blindness and visual impairment can be prevented or cured. If the resources are dedicated. SEVA gets a lot of resources to the places they are needed. Before Steve Jobs was famous, he provided the money that got Seva going. Seva has restored the vision of almost four million people who were blind. Think about that for a minute! That's six times the population of Vermont!"

It seemed like everyone was impressed as we thought over this information.

"For several years now, my family and many others have been helping out with 'eye camps'. A close friend of ours got us involved. It's kind of natural for my Mom, who is a medical doctor. But even for her it is really something. And for the rest of us ..."

He stopped here because this was obviously a pretty emotional thing for him. And I felt a bit annoyed at myself again ... this time for sort of rooting against him.

He smiled around the room and asked for a pitcher of water. "There are many people ... thousands and thousands of people ... who have significant vision problems that can be alleviated relatively easily by modern medical techniques. In the mountains of Asia, there are people who have lost a great deal of vision due to cataracts and similar conditions, caused in part by the stronger ultraviolet rays at high elevation. The eye camps bring the people and equipment that can cure these problems to the people who need them. The patients generally have very little money and live in areas where leading edge treatments are not normally found. In a place like that, top-end procedures truly are miraculous ... Really, they are miraculous here, too, but we have gotten used to them. But in eye camp, people -- relatively young people -- show up with serious vision impairments ... and in a short time ... cured. It is something very very special. People start a day at Eye Camp -- they literally line up -- and by the end of the day they may have gone from being blind or nearly blind to having good vision. Imagine what a change that is for them, and imagine how great it is too for the medical teams that make it happen! It's just the most amazing thing. You almost have to be there to see it to believe it. A village will create a

makeshift clinic. Nothing like what an eye doctor would operate in around here. Very rudimentary. Patients line up for treatment, and a bunch of them will come in a tent and lie down on tables that have been borrowed from a local school or similar. The doctors and technicians move from person to person, basically performing surgery by hand. They have headsets that provide magnification, but they are basically doing surgery freehand. They will open a person's eye and pull out a cataract -- a semi-solid lump that doesn't belong there. The doctors can just sort of hook it and pull it out. And then they will insert a lens to correct the patient's vision. These doctors are extremely skilled at what they do. It's not as if anybody who does the equivalent procedures here could handle those conditions. But they get it done. It takes 20 minutes or so. That includes actually stitching them up ... this crazy microsurgery, freehand. Then anti-biotics are applied, and hopefully that's pretty much the end of the treatment. People arrive blind on Friday, get surgery on Saturday, stay around until Sunday or Monday to make sure there are no complications, and then go home ... with good vision restored. It really is miraculous!"

There was some cheering and clapping here, and after a second, I joined in.

"Yes, it is a really great thing. I'd not thought about it until just now, but we should put some video and some information about Eye Camps on our website. As far as I know, there are no Eye Camps in the USA, but there probably are people who need them here."

Freeman was smiling along with everyone else, and it seemed to me he was remembering what he'd seen in Eye Camp.

"I've never had any of that type work done on my eyes, but I do owe my life to medical people. And I'd bet I'm not the only one here who can say that. I think often what a huge boon medicine and medical practices are to us. We've come a long way from the days when women commonly died from childbirth. One of my Mom's Grandmothers died from childbirth. Are any of you planning careers in medicine?"

A few people indicated they were. One woman spoke up "I'm studying medical imaging techniques. There is a program here, a collaboration among people in computer science, physics and radiology, working to enhance screening for cancer and other conditions. Completely non-invasive. It's very exciting ... for me at least!"

"For me too ... for all military people! It's common for military people to have small wounds from shrapnel. For quite a while now, doctors have been able to find the bits of shrapnel via medical imaging techniques prior to surgery. But it wasn't so long ago the docs had to go in and poke around! And often, bits of shrapnel were so small they weren't found."

Professor Lomax spoke softly, but everyone heard her. "Have you seen much of this? The shrapnel?"

"Yes. Over the course of 30 years in the military ... yes. I've seen a lot of wounds of many different types. And I can say without doubt or hesitation, there are many wonderful people, people so important to me, that are alive today ... alive and well ... because of medical professionals and medical techniques."

Freeman spoke directly to the woman studying imaging. "You are embarked on a wonderful career. And a lot of us will really owe you and your colleagues. I wish you great success!"

Everyone was just kind of smiling with this, and I reflected that although my own immediate family had not needed much in the way of doctors, there was something important. "My Dad, last year, needed an emergency appendectomy. It's odd for someone his age to have appendicitis. But it turns out that sort of runs in our family, and his grandfather, back in about 1910, had died of it when he was in his fifties. The family story, which I'd never even heard until last year, was that great-grandfather had received the diagnosis with the instruction to get his affairs in order immediately, because he had only a few days left. That's just the way it was, then. Now ... no big deal. Like you said before, Mr Freeman ... a medical miracle that to us is routine. No big deal."

"That's a good story, Danny. I'll remember it. My Mom would be very interested to hear it, too."

The scroungy-looking guy spoke up again, and he had an edge on him. He was really, I think, of the same frame of mind that, until recently, I had held myself. But he was more willing to be blunt and confrontational. "So ... the Eye Camp sounds pretty great. Sure. But how much did you put into it?"

His attitude didn't seem to affect Freeman, but I think it had to. It made me a bit angry, actually. "I'm not sure. We've done the Eye Camps five times now. About a million, I'd say."

"So, what's a million to you? I read you have about two billion. So it would be like the average family buying some Girl Scout cookies or something."

It seemed this time he was making everyone uncomfortable, and there was a little bit of a murmur. But Freeman just answered him evenly and thoughtfully. "Yes, you're right, in a way. The way I look at it ... thousands of people getting their sight back ... a huge thing to those people, and their families and friends."

Scroungy looked a little embarrassed with himself, and I thought maybe he'd had more beer than he was used to. I admit to being impressed that Freeman didn't seem put off in the least, and he even picked up the theme.

"Have you thought about what you would do with if you had a million dollars, or a billion? You'd may as well think about it, because it's a safe bet some of you here will eventually control millions."

This question surprised me and it seemed like it surprised everyone else, too. So Freeman continued.

"Not long ago I was speaking with a young man who told me he'd enjoy leaving great tips." He smiled at me for a second. "And it is fun to do that!"

This seemed like an opening for Scroungy, but he kept quiet.

"But there is something else, even more important. Young people mostly haven't made money yet. But young people have the most energy, and young people are time-rich."

I remembered being startled when Freeman told me I was time-rich. I felt I saw the same reaction on the faces of some of the students here.

"There are a lot of things that can be given away beside money. Time, work, effort, emotion, kindness, courtesy, even just a smile can be a great gift." He opened up another one of those smiles. "It's a mistake to think brightening up your zone or taking care of other people requires money. It can help a lot, but it's not required."

"My Grandmom has been saying since I was little that the most valuable thing you can give another person is your time. And she spent a lot of her time with me. Now, I try to spend time with her whenever I can. And I think it does make her happy to just sit and watch a video with me. We watch music videos together. And actually I like it too. Some of those folks from the 40s and 50s were pretty great!"

"Some of you will have younger siblings. An older brother or sister can be a very strong influence. Your time and perspective can be a great gift to your younger siblings."

I could see this last landed as a bit of a surprise on the group. But I knew he was right. I've seen enough little brothers hoping to tag along with the big kids.

"But ... Money is the reason I am here. I understand that. I brought up time because it's very very important for young people -- for everyone -- to count their blessings. All of you I hope are time-rich, and that's a big kind of rich."

I was glad to see the students digesting that for a while, and Lomax had a very interesting look on her face. I would call it a curious smile.

"I have a rich uncle." The young woman who said this glanced around a little. "I know that's funny ... the old line about the rich uncle. In my case, it's true. I have a rich uncle. He's paying for me to be here. If I try to thank him, he just waves it off, says it is his pleasure. Seriously. He says it is his pleasure. He also told me THAT'S WHAT THE MONEY IS FOR. When I don't feel like studying, or don't feel like going to class, I think of my uncle. I'm not going to let him down. And if I can someday, I'd love to put someone through school."

"That was really good to hear. Thank You." This was Freeman.

"My Dad sponsors and coaches in Little League baseball. He says he gets more out of it than the kids. It's doesn't take a lot of money, but it is a pretty big deal to the team."

"It doesn't have to take a lot of money." Freeman said it again in a way that showed it was worth repeating.

"Did you do any charitable work in the Military?"

"No, not really. But the United States Navy does something like Eye Camps. The Navy operates two Hospital Ships. The original idea of the Hospital Ships was to care for our military people in theatres of

battle. But they have actually seen more use on humanitarian projects. Each of the hospital ships are, literally, hospitals, with hundreds of beds, a dozen operating rooms, post-care centers. There are over 12,000 Navy medical personnel involved -- nurses, technicians, dentists, doctors. When these ships show up in the aftermath of an earthquake, or just in places where there are shortages of medical personnel and equipment, they can make an astounding difference in a short time. All of us can feel pretty great about what these ships -- the USNS Mercy and the USNS Comfort -- have achieved."

"I've heard some about this ... sometimes these ships take celebrities along, actors, newscasters ... to publicize what they do. Helping kids who need different kinds of surgery, treating wounds and disease." From the way people nodded agreement with the woman who was speaking, I obviously wasn't the only one who had heard about the hospital ships.

"My uncle -- a dentist -- told me about the dental work they do on these ships. Some of the people they treat haven't seen a dentist ever before, and they need some pretty big work. Infections, abscesses. Things that can cause pain and affect overall health. Uncle said modern dentistry can actually add years to a person's life!" Students were feeling pretty comfortable with this setting, and some of them were just speaking up freely.

"Plus, there is just something about good teeth. A great smile gets to people! Mr Freeman, my uncle also told me he'd read that your company sponsors cosmetic dentistry for your employees."

"It's true. We've been doing that for several years. It was actually my wife's idea, and it's become very popular with the employees. We'd always offered dental insurance, but Marti reasoned that giving a person a tremendous smile might well be as important as fixing cavities."

Freeman stopped here and looked around at everyone for a few seconds. Then he showed off his own tremendous smile, and I wondered if he was doing it on purpose, or not. "Any psychology students here tonight? Or even cultural anthropology?" A few students raised their arms. "Good. Has anyone studied how a person's teeth -- a person's smile -- can affect other people's perceptions?"

"My uncle, the dentist, told me it can be a really big deal. A very significant influence. But he didn't study it."

"There have been studies." This was one of the students who had just raised her arm. "One of our texts claimed that teeth are to people what a tail is to a peacock. White teeth, right size, no twists, no spaces ... it's like a perfect tail of a peacock. Supposedly, we don't even think about it, but we react to it. A perfect smile shows health, youth, good genes. And it's like an automatic thing. Our text claimed it's more important to men looking at women than vice versa."

"OK, pretty much what we found, too. So, one of the things we have done with our benefits program is to offer cosmetic dentistry. We had people who hadn't seen a dentist for years and years. So they needed a lot of work just to get healthy. But we decided to go to the next step and, for people who wanted to kick in part of the cost, we'd get them some Hollywood-style choppers. For some of our people, it's been a huge thing. People who didn't really even want to smile because of dark and missing

teeth ... I've seen this myself. It can make a huge difference in a person's self-image. And maybe some people will say it is silly, or superficial. But I'm sold on this. Really happy to be offering this to our employees. I've seen how the cosmetic dentistry has lifted the spirits -- really changed the lives of some of our people. Or people in their family. I think an awful lot of companies are going to be offering cosmetic dentistry assistance before long. Costs are coming down, too, while the results are getting better!"

Freeman stopped again and glanced around, with his hands open, palms up. "I know this might seem like a strange place for the conversation to go, but these are people we know. People we see every day ... or their families. When we can do something that really gives them a boost, we love doing it. And I am convinced this is going to spread ... to many companies because it is good business but also to many good-works programs."

Everybody was paying attention, and nobody said anything, so Freeman had some water and kept going.

"It's interesting how the cosmetic dentistry got started. We use a lot of heavy equipment in both the stone and timber industries. Hugely powerful machines that are potentially very dangerous and very expensive as well. We began working with an insurance company and a tech start-up that were developing systems to detect employees who were impaired. These guys were local, and they came to us looking to get some real-world evaluations of their tools. For many reasons we want employees performing at their best, and so we were very interested in working with these new systems. The basic idea is to test an employee's level of coordination and focus at the start of a shift. The expectation was that we'd find some people failing the tests due to consumption of various intoxicants and drugs, legal or otherwise. And then once you find an employee with a substance-abuse problem, you can help. And we did find some substance abuse. But, to everyone's surprise, most of the people who failed these tests were either overtired or simply upset. The first guy who failed -- this was actually the first day of testing -- it turned out he'd been unable to sleep the previous night because he was upset that one of his children had been diagnosed with a medical problem. This was not the type of result that had been envisioned, but, to us, the important thing was that we'd identified an employee with a problem."

He looked around and asked, "Are there any business students here?"

A few students nodded, and Freeman continued. "Good ... We looked at this problem in two ways. We had an employee whose performance suffered -- hurt our business -- because of a personal problem. OK ... so helping to fix that problem directly helps our bottom line because we reduce the likelihood of accident or damage to our equipment, raise productivity, etc. BUT, and this is where management thinking may diverge ... everyone wants to help the employee get over the problem because that directly helps the company. But some managers take it a step further. You want to help the employee because that helps the company, of course. But also, you want to help the employee because, as Richard Branson put it, your employees are more important even than your customers. You want your employees thinking THIS COMPANY WHERE I WORK HELPS ME. HELPS MY FAMILY. WORKING AT THIS PLACE MAKES MY LIFE BETTER. MAKES MY FAMILY'S LIFE BETTER. AND NEXT YEAR WILL BE BETTER THAN THIS YEAR. So it was not enough for us just to make sure that we helped with a medical issue or a

substance-abuse problem, but we moved very aggressively to make sure people understood that we are a team all working to improve the entire lives of all our entire team."

"And so ... the cosmetic dentistry program was really an outgrowth of this perspective that, if we can make the lives of our employees and their families better, that is good for our company and our customers."

People were smiling and nodding but still quiet, and Freeman took the opportunity to circle back.

"These types of techniques, cosmetic dentistry and some types of eye surgery, are not normally covered by insurance or government programs. That is, they need to attract customers by the price and quality and benefits of the service they deliver. And because -- my opinion -- they continually need to compete and prove themselves, they are getting better and cheaper. Without government interference, I am convinced this type of improvement would occur in other medical and dental procedures. Think about it for a minute, please. How many services that are handled or controlled by government are getting both better and cheaper? I'm sure there are some. But the pressures to improve in private business are relentless ... and those pressures would be applied in far more places if the federal government didn't have the power to take from us whatever it wants."

Professor Lomax leaned forward and sat up sort of quickly, which caused people to focus on her.

"Freddy, will you consider please speaking to my Intro to Ethics class this fall?"

Freeman's huge smile made his "Yes, I'd really like that!" pretty well redundant.

Freeman raised his mug to Lomax, and finished the rest of his beer. Everybody else took this as kind of a cue, and followed suit, more or less.

One of the students leaned over and refilled Freeman's mug from a fresh pitcher while he ate a few more fries before speaking again.

"It's a point of pleasure for me to reflect that almost all Americans believe a state of individual self-reliance, self-sufficiency, is an extremely desirable end. And that is the biggest reason I believe SWEEP16 is both desirable and possible ... almost all of us, left, right, middle, liberal, progressive, conservative, libertarian, seek this same end. Our disagreements concern the means. We are fortunate indeed in America to be so like-minded."

Lomax sat bolt upright and I thought she was going to speak. So did everyone else, apparently. She grabbed her half-empty mug and held it up. With a huge smile she said "To Freddy Freeman!". Everyone followed suit with evident surprise and amusement at actually having a real toast for this second drink. Freeman himself I think was surprised, but I couldn't see well enough to be sure.

After Lomax finished her beer, she spoke. "Mister Freeman -- Freddy -- I do consider myself a leftist liberal, and a redistributionist, and your natural political and philosophical adversary. And certainly an adversary of SWEEP16, at least until now. You have captivated my imagination with your assertion that you and I seek the same end. I will need to think about what you've said tonight. I look forward to

having my assumptions challenged and perhaps even changed. There isn't much I like better than a pleasant surprise of this nature, and you have given me one. I thank you for a most enjoyable session." Freeman was ready to help her with her chair before I realized she was getting up, and her face showed surprise but also, I was pretty sure, something like delight. She smiled at the rest of us as well, and left. Freeman accompanied her to the exit, and they spoke briefly.

After Lomax walked off, everyone seemed to relax a little. The group chattered among themselves, whereas before everyone had been pretty quiet, mostly just listening to Freeman and Lomax. Looking around quick, as Freeman returned to the table, I would guess he was the only person over 25. A young woman, probably an undergrad, asked if Freeman would be willing to talk about Social Security.

"Two major problems for me. First, it is based on coercion. That is a huge warning flag right there. If it was a good program, you would not need to force people to participate. Second, it is based on projecting the un-knowable. Nobody, let alone a bunch of election-driven politicians, can reliably forecast conditions decades in the future. Social Security administrators project your inputs, project your returns. But nobody knows the economic or even demographic circumstances that will prevail over the years of a worker's life. And a third problem, also significant, is that the government, the politicians of today, are obligating the Americans of the future. It is to me hideous to contemplate our present-day lawmakers imposing burdens on taxpayers who are not yet born. Even if Social Security was administered like a private pension fund, where assets were actually accrued and nurtured over the years in order to meet a projected goal, the System would still rely on projections that nobody can make with assurance, which is the main reason private companies have moved away from that type of plan. But as Social Security is structured, there are no assets in a 'lockbox', which was a term popular in the 1980s. The only thing in the Social Security 'lockbox' is the promise to extract from taxpayers whatever the politicians decide is needed when the time comes. This type of accounting is illegal except when it is done by the federal government. Illegal."

There was a little bit of background activity, and I noted more people were arriving. I could imagine the texts going out ... FREE STUFF AT STUDENT UNION ... Freeman had only had one beer or so, and I figured he probably didn't want to mix much alcohol with driving and antibiotics. But he finished the burger and fries and asked the waiter to make sure there were plenty of the various side dishes and appetizers brought out for everyone to share. And he asked for a pitcher of water.

Everyone seemed more relaxed now, and a young guy, late arriving, saw the open spot next to Freeman. "May I sit here, Mr Freeman?" I figured him to be an undergrad. He looked around with a big smile and helped himself to some nachos. He was obviously amused that he somehow just showed up late and now more or less had the floor. "You used to be a pro quarterback?" ... "Do you mind talking about that?".

For a good half hour, Freeman talked to the students about football and his military service, and SWEEP16 and related issues were not touched upon. Freeman didn't seem to mind this at all, and I waited to see if he would try to swing the talk back to SWEEP16. He snacked along with everyone else, and the waiters brought out additional items. I should have known he'd welcome off-topic talk. He did

seem to enjoy the company of the students. I wondered how different this was for him than spending time with young service men and women.

It was one of the students who brought the talk back around ... "What you said earlier, Mr Freeman, about perspectives changing over time, reminds me of something my parents told me. My Mom went to college around 1970, when students were protesting the Viet Nam War and Richard Nixon and students were sort of naturally opposed to government power. She thinks it is very strange how young people of today seem to put so much faith in government, and generally want it bigger, more powerful and more involved. She still must have some of her college outlook in her, because she signed your SWEEP16 list as soon as she heard about it."

"Thanks for telling me. Has anyone else spoken with family about this?"

A guy on the far side of the table leaned forward. "Yes, I have. My Dad was psyched as soon as he heard about it. He runs a construction business. He builds houses with about 25 employees. He claims government drives him nuts, and he is really aggravated because he says government is always interfering with what he wants to do. He told me last year he needed to fire someone he caught stealing, but it cost him big money and time to get rid of the guy because of regulation. He's with you."

A few of the students said things along similar lines, then one piped up with "My Dad says you're just hoping to make things even better for the rich people."

"Well, your Dad's right. Rich people will get richer, I hope, but everyone else I believe will benefit more. A rich guy doesn't care if the price of milk is \$6 or \$3 per gallon. But the average person does. I do believe SWEEP16 would result in a huge drop in prices and an increase in earnings for the average person. And all we need to do is let people do what they want. Speaking of milk ... would the American public in general support a policy that forces UP the price of milk? The federal government goes to great lengths to keep some prices high. Powdered milk could be sold a lot cheaper than fresh milk, and can be a lot more convenient for the consumer. But it's generally illegal to sell powdered milk for less than fresh. SWEEP16 would not address that directly, but it's the type of law and regulation that I think will fall as a result of taming our government."

The students seemed probably more interested in Freeman himself than they were in SWEEP16. They asked him about a lot of things, business, money, football, military and SWEEP16, and near as I could tell he was good with all of it. Whether he thought any kind of positive interaction was good for his cause, I don't know. I'm pretty sure he actually did just enjoy being with the students. He did drink a little beer, but mostly it was water and iced tea.

A long-haired guy who didn't look old enough to be in college, let alone to drink, spoke out. "Mr Freeman?" Freeman gave him a big smile of encouragement. "I've always worked, since I was little. But once I turned 16, I got my first real job, and I still remember how surprised I was when I got my first paycheck and saw all the money taken away from me by the government. This sounds silly, maybe, but I'd always worked for cash. Shoveling snow, mowing lawns, babysitting. I was excited to finally have a real job with a real paycheck, but it seemed weird and ... wrong, I guess, that all these parts of the

government wanted a piece of little old me. I felt kinda like the government was picking on a kid. Do grownups feel that way too?"

There was some laughter, and Freeman more than anyone else. "Yes, a lot of them do, I think! If I count as a grownup, anyway. And if the federal government is our servant, as it supposed to be, it should not be aggressing upon us the way it does."

A few times I asked the students next to me what they thought of him. NICE GUY ... COOL ... VERY INTERESTING. A woman about my age answered GORGEOUS GUY. OLD ENOUGH TO BE MY DAD???. He was going over pretty well. Not many people left after we arrived, and quite a few new faces joined the group. Freeman was still holding court when the place closed, and we just drifted outside and sat on the steps, without really interrupting the flow of the talk at all. I was getting the idea Freeman would keep it up so long as one of the students wanted to talk, and in fact, that's just what he did. We stayed outside the Student Union for probably a couple of hours, and there were still a handful of kids hanging around him, asking questions and sometimes telling their own stories. When they found out Freeman had never been on campus before, they decided he needed to take a walking tour right then. The walking tour lasted a good hour, with the students excitedly pointing things while the general discussion continued. Somewhere along the way somebody noticed me, and wanted to know what I was up to. Then, for a while, my column and I were the subjects of conversation. This was not journalism the way I studied it at all. At the end of things, we sort of walked the last two students, both women, back to their shared apartment. The sky was showing first light by the time we said good night to them. With hugs. Hugs were another thing I did not expect to come with this gig. It looked to me that Freeman did expect it. I didn't even know the way back to the car, but Freeman never wavered.

On the drive home it was clear he'd enjoyed himself.

"Do you think that is a good way to engage students?"

"Maybe. I'll think about it. It was certainly a good way to engage the bunch who stayed beyond the scheduled talk. But should you talk to me like this? About your strategizing, I mean?"

"Why not? I don't mean it to be secret ... nothing to hide. It'd be boring to your readers, wouldn't it?"

"I think it would. Just curious." I'd been wondering if Freeman was bringing me within his private deliberations. Some part of me still didn't trust this rich guy, and that made me a little bit happy, as if I was sticking to my principles. Then it struck me that while Freeman had been drinking water and tea, I'd had quite a few beers, and I felt embarrassed. Freeman just had a vague smile on his face, and I doubted it had anything to do with me.

I dozed on the way home, and we did not speak further until we were getting close to my place.

"Lomax wants to meet with me on Wednesday. She asked if we could meet privately, but I told her you and/or Marti would probably be there too. I'm not comfortable telling you to stay away. I told you that you'd not be barred from anything. But she's a writer too. It's natural she wouldn't want her stuff popping up in your column. We need to figure this out. Saturday night is the first actual, scheduled,

SWEEP16 speaking engagement. A Town Hall community meeting at Brattleboro. They've asked me to speak about Social Security. I'm really looking forward to it."

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The late morning was light, steady rain, and that helped clear my head as I ran. I was aggravated with myself for sleeping while Freeman drove, like a little kid. I realized he may well have preferred my sleeping to talking, but still I should have stayed awake. I was more aggravated with myself tho for having been to a large degree taken in by this guy. He can say whatever he wants about it, but he's an exploiter. He got an awful lot richer than the people who made him rich. So I decided I'd may as well talk to him about this. Why not? I'm supposed to be writing about SWEEP16, so why not have some questions of my own instead of just writing about what he presents to me? He responded quickly to my text, just said to let him know when I was ready, he expected to be around all day. I did about 4 miles, a little light for me lately, but it was enough to clear my head, altho I knew operating on only a couple hours sleep would boomerang on me. Seeing Freeman's Caddy when I got home put me in a sour mood, and as I thought about what I'd ask him, I felt like I was getting ready for a confrontation.

I got to his place around noon, and he greeted me with a big smile, as if he was actually happy to see me. "You run today?"

"Yes, I like to run in the rain."

"Me too. It seems like most people don't tho. Animals like the kind of weather we had this morning. They seem to come out more in the daytime with the rain and clouds and low light. You have lunch yet? You know Marcia loves to feed young guys."

Today I didn't want to accept his hospitality ... I was just feeling like I'd done too much of that already. "No, thank you, maybe I had too much beer last night."

"You seemed fine to me. Like you were just enjoying the environment. But I bet some OJ would be good. Hang on."

He was off before I could really protest, and came back with two giant glasses of orange juice, just like those he offered when I first met him, which now seemed like a long time ago but was still under a month.

He set my drink on a table next to a chair, and motioned for me to sit. He sat a few feet to my side. We were on a large covered porch, and again I was reminded how well this guy treated himself. Even I could tell the furnishings were expensive, the view fantastic. An awful lot of the good life could be found right here.

"How did you make your money?"

His face showed no surprise, and his manner was matter-of-fact. "One thing I learned is that money and celebrity seem to go together, and money follows money. Marti and I were doing very well as a result of football, but I wanted to do something else. When I quit the game, I didn't understand how money worked, all I had in mind was to get back to military service. But the owner of the Minutemen, Harley Watson, brought me into what, looking back, I would say was his real team. He had a group of friends and partners and advisors that opened the money world to me. The Minutemen is just one of Watson's many business and personal interests. Harley is a wise and worldly and wonderful guy that I really look up to. A couple of weeks after we won the title, I asked Harley for a meeting. He was alone in his office when I arrived. He got up and hugged me, and he said WE HAD SOME RUN, DIDN'T WE? Then we sat down together, across the coffee table from each other. I still didn't know him well at that point. Me in my 20s and he in his 50s. I was still a babe in the woods compared to Harley. Anyhow, he looked me over for a while, and he had this real sly look on his face. When I started to speak, he put his hand up, and shook his head." Freeman was clearly enjoying telling me this story, and I sensed it was because of his feelings for this man. "We talked about the season for quite a while, discussing different games, individual plays, guys who stepped up and played over their heads when we really needed a boost. A couple of times I tried to change the topic. I felt like I had to say what I'd come to say. But Harley wasn't having it. He was determined to talk football for a while. And his knowledge of the game and its subtleties and details surprised me. Helped me to understand why he had so enjoyed our season. And although I was enjoying this talk, I kept fidgeting, trying to get him off track so I could speak my mind. Finally he leaned back and chuckled. I thought this was my chance to speak, but he put his hand up again, and he had a look on his face that knocked me out."

It was obvious to me from Freeman's face that this was the good part of the story. "He made me wait while he just looked me over until he was ready to speak. I THINK, he said, YOU'VE LOST YOUR HEART FOR FOOTBALL, AND YOU WANT TO GO BACK TO THE MILITARY. I couldn't believe he knew this. Knew me like this. I think I just sat there with my mouth half open, not knowing what to say. So Harley continued. SON, I'VE HAD MY EYE ON YOU FOR YEARS. IT'S BEEN AN HONOR HAVING YOU ON OUR TEAM, WINNING A TITLE TOGETHER. WHATEVER YOU WANT TO DO, I'LL BACK YOUR PLAY."

Freeman looked me in the face and I just smiled, eyes wide. I was enjoying this story as much as he was, and I hope my face expressed that.

"So I asked him how long he'd known. His answer was another knockout. He said he'd expected all along I'd quit if we won the title. Heck, it wasn't until almost a week after the game before I even thought about it myself."

There was no way I was going to do anything that might cause Freeman to stop talking, so I just smiled again when he looked at me.

"Harley and I spent hours together that day, talking about all kinds of things. It was the first time we'd talked personally, really. He told me he wanted me to remain part of his team, that he wanted me to get involved in other things he had going. For me, the biggest problem I saw with returning to military service was the time away from Marti and the kids. But Harley knows a lot of people who can make

things happen that most folks don't even know are possible. He understood me better than I understood myself at that point. Maybe not so surprising. But he made it possible for me to mix national service with other things. I was still away more than most, but I was actually Stateside, home, half the time or more. This was a big change from what I'd expected. He started bringing me to business meetings, asking my opinion on things. Then he asked me to speak at different functions ... things like board meetings and employee gatherings. He offered me a position with a natural resources company he had just bought over in Maine. My job was to get to know everything that was going on there, and try to make it better. That's almost the entire job description. And he let me do that in between trips here and there working for Uncle Sam. That job was a huge learning experience for me. My salary was very minimal, but, we did some good things, came up with some good ideas --"

"Excuse me, who is 'we'?"

"The guys at North Woods Resources, and Harley himself. ... we had some good, effective ideas on savings, improvements, a couple of new products. We moved everyone into a position of ownership and profit-sharing. A company is a team, of course, and the biggest thing is making sure everyone sees it that way. Money is key, but not all. I found it really interesting, I learned a lot and our ideas, plus some great people to carry them out, turned profits. I'd actually had a good time working for Harley, and was really surprised with the size of the bonus he paid me. It opened my eyes to things I'd not thought of before. Marti and I weren't spending much money anyway, everything for us in those days was focused on the kids, and it felt to us like we had plenty of dough from football, plus the government continued to pay for my services. So I felt like we were fine, financially. But Harley put us into a different zone, and I knew I'd really only gotten a glimpse of what the possibilities were. For several years I kept on like that, working in association with Harley. He's a brilliant and driven man. He loves life, loves people and has huge energy and imagination. Still does, in his 80s now. It was more or less pure luck for me to be taken under his wing. It never would have happened without football, I'm sure. But I learned working with Harley that you make real money when everybody is making money. That was the huge take-away for me from my days at Watson Resources. Harley paid me awfully well and all I did was try to make everyone at the company better off. Imagine that!"

"Also, Harley showed me about investment. As a young guy who is I hope starting to earn a few bucks, this is something that you may want to focus on. Invest well. Harley has some serious investment advisors, completely top guys, and he just let me put money in with him and his buddies. Most of my family's money has come from investments, actually. The Quarry and all up here is important, particularly important to my heart, but you want your money to make money, and I owe it again to Harley for that. Our biggest win by far was backing the young Billy Bits ... Bill Serow --"

"Sorry to interrupt; Billy Bits is the second name on the SWEEP16 list. Billy Bits is Bill T. Serow, the software honcho?"

"Yes, Billy was going to be the first name on the list. He's my web-guy as it stands now --"

"Sorry! Sorry to interrupt again! Bill Serow is your webmaster?!"

"Yes, he says he's not a web-guy, but he wanted to do this. He was expecting to add his name to the top of the SWEEP16 list as soon as I announced the list to the public. But Jenna got in there first." Freeman laughed a little and shook his head. "I don't think Jenna knows who Billy Bits is, and I bet she'd think the story is kind of funny."

"No doubt she would! I'm really getting to know her. We've spoken quite a few times since you introduced me to the press corps. I hope she is beginning to think of me as a friend."

Freeman gave me that same sort of look my Dad did when I spoke of Jenna, which made me wonder. Freeman filled the silence. "Would you mind telling her about Billy Bits?"

"Thanks, I'd really like that. And are you still looking for people to help with the website? Guys I know would flip just to look firsthand at work done by Serow."

Freeman nodded, and I was immediately looking forward to telling people about this opening.

"Good. So, I've had enormous good fortune being part of Harley's circle. Kind of a strange thing tho. Harley isn't comfortable with investments in technology. He likes to say he's too old, but I think really he is just too conservative, too cautious. He told me long ago technology is awfully risky, even for people who understand it well. Technology companies are always vulnerable because technology is moving so fast. Technology companies can make huge investments, only to see their business plan torpedoed by something cooked up in somebody's garage. Harley's right about that. But software companies can avoid a lot of investment that other technology companies make. So when Billy came to Harley's attention, he passed, and Harley's crew passed, and the whole opportunity to help Billy get off the ground came to me. The kid was fantastic. And I mean KID. I've still never seen anyone else like Billy. So Marti and I backed him, and we gave him some guidance here and there. But Billy just ran with things and he is still going. The majority of our money has come from backing Billy. He's also a close friend of ours."

"And he is with you on SWEEP16 ... Do you think he would talk with me?"

"I'll put you in touch with him. No telling what Billy Bits will do. His perspective usually surprises me. But I think he'll meet with you. Not sure exactly what Billy will be doing with his own money and SWEEP16, but as far as doing his share, there's never been any doubt about that. He's done a lot for other people. But if you can, please keep that to yourself. Billy's just a private guy. Actually, I'm sure that's why he signed as Billy Bits. Very few people know who that is."

"Thanks." Marcia came to check on us, and Freeman stood before I did, even tho I thought I was ready. Freeman asked her to bring us some more orange juice. These glasses were each a quart I bet, and we were going for seconds. I guess Freeman has a lot of frozen orange juice. Freeman was softening me up again, I knew. But here he was telling me he'd made a ton of money mostly by knowing the right people and trying to make things better. I had to admit, for all he has done, he does not seem impressed with himself, although a lot of people who've done far less would be, and are. "Mr Freeman, you make this sound as if you haven't done anything much to get to where you are."

"If you refer to business, money, you're right. Not much. A lot of luck, following basic principles, but mostly knowing the right people. My associations have made me. Yes, I've tried hard, but without my associations I wouldn't have tried, and I wouldn't have known what to try for. The people in my life, my family mostly, have instilled in my mind and in my heart the principles that I value ... really, why I live. For business, and actually for life, too, Harley is still a great teacher for me. He taught me in business and in life, you must seek to make every interaction between people mutually beneficial. I learned that at home, too ... The Golden Rule ... but Harley laid it out in very clear terms and showed me that business is at root just another way people interact. It seems obvious, but it wasn't obvious to me until Harley took me in. You've got to structure your deals, your human interactions, so that everyone involved comes out better off."

"But isn't the idea in a business deal to just get the upper hand?"

"For some people, yes. But Harley taught me to only do business with people that you want to do business with forever. To never look at a business deal as a one-time thing. If you do business at all, you want to do a deal with fine, top people. People that you would want to have an ongoing relationship with. People that you would want in your life. And those people should be viewing you in the same manner. Everyone needs to go into the deal happy. Of course, sometimes things do not work out. Maybe nobody buys what you've decided to sell. But business deals should be much more partnership than adversarial. More than once, I've seen Harley and his associates claim something was not beneficial enough to the OTHER guys."

This kind of thinking was not what I had expected ... I was startled ... and I fell back to my upbringing.

"Mom and Dad taught me The Golden Rule, but I did not know it applied to business." My parents had also taught me to disdain and distrust people who boast, or have big heads. And to admire humility. So far at least, Freeman had minimized his achievements, and I admired this. I had not envisioned SWEEP16 taking me into such personal territory. I guess maybe I should have known it would. Such intensity of action could only be fueled by intense emotion. Maybe I'm only doing the job I agreed to do, but still I felt like I owed him something for opening up this way. "Mr Freeman, Uncle Walt and Aunt Arlene were visiting my family, and Aunt Arlene told us she might not be married to Uncle Walt without your influence on him."

Freeman looked down for a few seconds, then he said softly "Thanks Danny." After a short silence, he changed speed. "You look like you've done some weightlifting."

"Some. I just never muscled-up the way I wished, but I tried. Still lift a little."

"Good. I need to hit the gym a bit. Will you join me?"

Freeman had a setup like nothing I'd ever seen outside a true commercial gym. That wasn't too much of a surprise. But he worked out like nobody I'd ever seen. We did a fairly brutal warmup of calisthenics, a couple of which were new to me. But I was in pretty good shape for those. In my mind, weights and resistance exercise was for building strength and power, and you went running or similar

for the aerobics. Not Freeman. He moved from one exercise to the next to the next with no rest. He'd do three or four exercises in sequence, then start the cycle again, basically working out non-stop. I was panting like I was running. He was actually stronger than I'd expected ... and I expected he'd be strong. I could also see some scars ... battle scars I am sure. This was a new approach to iron, a revelation to me, and by far the best session I'd ever had with weights. In 45 minutes or less we were done and I was pumped, drenched and exhausted. But also, I had that feeling of euphoria and, almost, invincibility that previously was attainable for me only by running hard. The workout was symbolic of Freeman, fast-paced, intense, serious. And I was also pleased with myself that I'd just survived a workout with a pro quarterback / Navy SEAL, although I hadn't handled near as much weight. And even tho I reminded myself he was as old as my Dad and recovering from a bullet, I couldn't help but think I'd like to do that workout with a couple of the guys from school.

"How about some broiled trout? It's a little early for dinner I guess, but we can take a swim and Marcia will have some protein ready for us in a half-hour."

"Since Dad's been catching brookies we've really gotten to like trout for dinner. Great training food too, thanks! Umm -- that looks like blood on your clothing."

Freeman checked himself over for a second. "A little. Good clean blood. No problem. Thanks for telling me; that would have upset Marcia."

Freeman took me to the pool on a side of the house I'd not seen yet. "This looks kind of like you can enclose it and swim all winter."

"We do enclose it in winter but we don't normally swim. It's crazy expensive to keep it warm enough for that. Plus, it's never felt right for me ... swimming indoors, I mean."

He put a big adhesive patch over his wound, then dived right in, and I did the same. "Wow, that feels great. Like a swim after a good run. I've never lifted weights like that before, but I think I will again." Freeman just smiled and paddled around gently, so I continued. I was really getting to like this guy and it still made me a little angry with myself, as if I was being bought off. And I still felt like I had to be some kind of adversary to him. I looked around the place again, and I realized what I was looking at cost more than most people ever earn in their lives. I started talking before I really was thinking. "I've never seen anything like this home. I've never seen anything like your collection of cars. Everywhere I look I can see money spent on things the average guy would just have no idea of. With all the poor people in America and abroad, doesn't it bother you to live like this?"

"Sure, it bothers me that people are suffering in many different ways. Remember Harley -- and my family -- taught me to try to make the people you touch better off. I believe if you talk with people who are involved with our companies here in New Hampshire, they will have good things to say. I'm not as close with the things I do with Harley. And of course with Billy Bits and the software companies, it's a different type of relationship. But the great majority of software sales are made to previous customers, which to me demonstrates satisfaction. With the military, I do strongly believe I'm helping to fight the good fight. We've gone up against some truly evil people."

"I'd not considered the military part of your life from that angle. And I'm embarrassed by that. Sorry, Very Sorry. Putting your life on the line, repeatedly ... it makes you different I would guess than anyone else in your financial position. Thank You for your Service."

"I appreciate the thought, but no thanks necessary. Serving in the United States Military is the great honor of my life. But leaving the military aside ... I'm dead serious that you will not stay long in business if you don't take care of everyone in the picture. Your customers and your employees have to benefit."

"But what about people like Uncle Walt? I mean, what does he make compared to you?"

"I'm not sure what Walt makes. And it wouldn't be right for me to discuss it with you in any case. But people at the quarry mostly have base pay plus profit-sharing and dividends. I don't want to speak for them. From the management point of view, there is always a ceiling that can be paid for a job in any industry. You've got to make your product and its price attractive to your customers of course. There are a lot of factors that influence what you can pay. Also, you hope you can always make next year better than this year."

"I'm being rude I guess. I'm sorry. And actually I did speak to several employees of your companies at the Crossroads. You're right. They did have good things to say. But I've never been around real wealth before, and I've been taught to be suspicious of it, sort of resentful of the wealthy. Not by my family. It was just something that was sort of in the air at college. I absorbed it without thinking all that much about it, frankly."

"Not surprising. A lot of college professors I think feel that way, and students pick up on it. A lot of America feels that way. And I'm glad you do. I don't want to preach SWEEP16 to the choir. I want to win over the opposition. I need to do that. I'm completely serious about SWEEP16. If I can't convince a guy who spends a lot of time with me, how can I convince America? You told me a journalist's job is to find out the truth, and tell it. I hope I can convince you the truth is as I see it."

I thought back to something Uncle Walt had told me right after I met Freeman. HE WANTS TO DO TO YOU WHAT HE DID TO ME. And now Freeman had told me himself. And I knew he'd already made some real progress.

"When you offered my folks the use of your Caddy, I didn't like it. And they weren't sure it was appropriate. They accepted because, even though they'd never met you before, they both felt you really wanted them to enjoy the car. And they have. Mom and Arlene have been driving around in it a lot."

Freeman had a contented look on his face, but he said nothing.

"I guess I also knew it at the time, and now I understand you were aware of all this when you made the offer and they accepted." Freeman's expression did not change, and he kept his silence. "But I see now that they actually gave you something too."

Freeman's face brightened. "There is a lot of evidence that nothing makes people happier than doing nice things for each other. Some researchers even say helping another person provides actual PHYSICAL benefit to the helper. That is one of the foundations of SWEEP16."

Marcia arrived with the trout, and some fresh corn bread too. I realized she might have planned the cornbread specifically for me, and I expressed my appreciation. After Freeman thanked Marcia, he was still smiling, but not at me. We sat down at the table soaking wet, straight from the pool. Then he said "Please tell your Mom and Dad THANK YOU VERY MUCH."

I'd been thinking Freeman was a very complicated guy. And no doubt there were big parts of him that I would never see or know. But suddenly it seemed like the SWEEP16 part of him was almost unbelievably obvious and simple.

----- 023 -----

Jenna answered my first ring. I always like that.

"Freeman asked me to tell you something. Have you heard of Bill Serow?"

"Worldwide software prodigy mogul."

"And does the name Billy Bits ring a bell?"

"It's the 2nd name on Freeman's list, but other than th -- Are you saying Billy Bits is Bill Serow?"

"Exactly! Freeman calls him Billy Bits and he's the webmaster for SWEEP16. He was supposed to be the first name on the list, but you somehow beat him to the punch! Freeman thought it was funny and he thought you'd like knowing. I think it's pretty funny too."

"I do like knowing that. Quite a bit, actually! Thanks for letting me know. WOW!!! So what's going on? Getting pretty used to putting out a column now?"

"I don't know about 'used to', but there is a lot to work with."

"How are you feeling about things?"

"I feel like ... ALMOST like I'm being taken in. But I don't think I am. I understand why you put your name on the list as soon as you knew there was one. I understand why you told me you think he is pure. He hasn't shown me anything else." It struck me that I was starting to babble. "Sorry --- have I called you at a bad time?"

"No, it's fine to talk now. What's on your mind?"

"How do you feel about rich people? I don't mean people who are doing well and don't worry about the price of groceries. I mean people who have more money than most of us can imagine spending."

"You mean people like Freeman." There was Jenna's statement-as-a-question inflection again.

"Right."

"All over the map. One thing I will say ... the seriously rich people who have made their own money are usually something special. Very smart, very disciplined, very hard-working. But other aspects of their personality are not consistent. Some are very arrogant, some are very humble. Some seem to look down on people without money. Some seem determined to overlook differences in peoples' finances. I do like being around some of them. But some of them I can't stand. Another interesting thing ... I have gotten the impression from some of them that pursuit of money is their reason for being. I mean, to some, a big bank account is the end itself. To others, it is a means to an end. To others, it seems to be only a by-product of doing whatever it was they really wanted to do, such as build a business."

I didn't say anything, and after a couple of seconds she continued.

"When I went to school, thinking back on it, I'd have to say the profs, the TAs, the lecturers, pretty much everyone in liberal arts and communications seemed to have this sniffy attitude toward rich people. I adopted that attitude without thinking much about it ... sort of automatic, and I think the great majority of us did. As a result of working, I met some people that caused me to change my attitude. But if I hadn't actually MET and spent time with some of America's moneyed folks, I do not believe my attitude would have changed. You've gone thru the same mill I did ... not exactly the same one, but close enough I am sure. And now you are meeting at least one guy who is forcing you to doubt what you've soaked in. Look at it this way ... if Freeman wasn't causing some internal conflict for you, it would mean you saw nothing of value in him, or in SWEEP16. I'd say it's good."

"I guess so. I think what's happened is that at this point I pretty much believe Freeman is a good-hearted guy, and he means what he says. Boy, I made a really bone-headed statement the other day, when I completely set aside in my mind Freeman's military career when I asked him something. I can only admire the way he handled it ... he pointed out that in his mind he has a business career and a military career, and that his military career has been dedicated to fighting evil, doing right."

"I doubt he held it against you. If you were older he might, but probably not even then. He's very slow to hold anything against anyone, near as I can tell."

"I've seen him answering a lot of questions, and mixing with people. So far, he didn't seem to mind any of it, except once when I think he believed a guy at Pendleton took a rhetorical cheap-shot at him. You know what, Freeman is really pretty good in a verbal exchange. The students liked him a lot."

"Of course they did. He's friendly as all get-out. The guys will think deep-down they want to be like him when they get older, and the women will be automatically attracted and almost all of them will believe he speaks from the heart, even if they think his ideas are bat-wings-crazy, they'll still give him a listen."

"He took a big bunch of us out to dinner at Pendleton last night, and there was a lady professor named Lomax who toasted him and said even tho she considered him a natural adversary, that he'd given her a very pleasant surprise and a lot to think about."

"That would be Carolina Lomax. I like her. She pops up in a lot of places, and she is very opinionated, but she is also very willing to consider thoroughly anything that she's not already considered before. I'm glad she was there. She is likely to start running with some of SWEEP16 herself. She loves ideas, fresh thinking." She seemed to be giving me a chance to speak, and continued when I did not. "She's a natural interview for you ... I'd guess she'd love it if you based one of your columns on an interview with her. It'd probably wind up being a sort of log-rolling session. Nothing wrong with that so long as both of you are honest. If you don't mind a suggestion ... do a little research on her, and if you like what you find, why not ask her for an interview? It should be useful to publish something on what other people think. Check with McMoo."

"OK, Jenna, I will! Thanks for your thoughts and advice. Have you yourself thought any more about SWEEP16?"

"Not in the sense of whether it could work. I have thought about Freeman devoting himself to it tho. I feel as if he is risking everything on such a long shot."

"Well, he is risking, he says, the rest of his life, and almost all his dough. But he said pretty plain he's going to keep something like 100 million bucks to make sure his family is always covered. I mean, that's a stupendous amount of money. At least with SWEEP16, nobody is going to be shooting at him. So from his point of view that probably makes it seem pretty tame. Imagine that!"

"What's next on his calendar?"

"Two things. Second is a Town Hall meeting in Brattleboro. He says it is the first meeting he has scheduled with people who asked him to speak about SWEEP16."

"Would you mind if I attended? I'd enjoy getting up to Vermont for a day or two."

"No, I'd like it a lot and I am sure Freeman would too. I'll send you the info. Great!"

"You said two things."

"Yeah, this you will love." I paused a few seconds just to make her anticipate. "He's going to be on Kenny Miller Friday."

Now it was Jenna who remained silent a few seconds, and I was definitely anticipating what she had to say.

"That will ... that will change things. A lot I think. You said they seemed to like him at Pendleton. Well, this is Pendleton times many thousands. Wow, thanks for telling me. I'll catch up with you soon."

On these gorgeous summer days I usually started walking around outside when I was on the phone, and I enjoyed the few minutes it took me to get back to the house after I finished with Jenna. No doubt these Northern Winters are tough, but the summer here is glorious.

Even though I'd already had a pretty good dinner with Freeman, I was ready for a meal by the time Mom and Dad decided to put dinner on.

"What's on your mind, Danny? You've hardly looked up from your plate."

"Sorry to be unsociable Mom. I've been thinking a lot. I've tried pretty hard to be sort of critical, almost hostile, toward what I thought -- a month ago, anyway -- Freeman represented. An ultra-rich guy exploiting other people. But I can't hold hostility toward him. I really couldn't from the first. I'm still not convinced it's OK for one person to amass billions of dollars, but I am convinced he wouldn't have done it if he thought he was mistreating people. And he actually does believe in his SWEEP16 idea, and I'm convinced he's going to donate around 95% of what he's got to that cause."

"Working toward a goal is something Mom and I believe in too, and we'd like to think you learned from us to respect that. Freeman's in a different league than anyone else I've ever met. You'll remember I told you I don't know what you strive for when you've already done what he's done."

"I remember. I also remember something you told me when we were fishing." Dad knew what I was going to say, but I wasn't sure if Mom did. "You told me you couldn't imagine anything harder than being Freddy Freeman."

Mom and Dad looked at each other and at me. Dad pursed his lips and he said "Makes you feel like you should stand a little straighter when you're around him, doesn't he?"

"Yes, he does."

Mom added "One of the greatest things you can say about someone is that he -- or she -- brings out the best in others. Maybe even the greatest thing."

I'd heard this before, and thought about it before, and can't really disagree with it. "Oh!! By the way ... you and Dad were exactly right about accepting the use of the Caddy. He really did want you to enjoy it, and it really does make him happy to think of Mom and Aunt Arlene tooling around in it. And what's more, he understood everyone's thoughts in that fraction of a second between when he offered the car and you accepted. He likes even better knowing you accepted because YOU thought it would make HIM happy! He asked me to tell you both ... THANK YOU VERY MUCH ... for accepting his offer. Boy, does that beat all? If anything, he is maybe the opposite of what I expected a month ago."

----- 024 -----

Clicks usually doesn't answer his phone unless he is expecting the call. So I texted him to call me about something he'd be pretty interested in. Just to aggravate me, probably, he texted me back WHAT IS IT? But at least he answered when I phoned him.

"Still hating the new job?"

"The work is OK, but I'm too young to report to somebody who makes my skin crawl. Each day I like this guy less. I'm pretty sure I'll be quitting in the next couple of days."

"Good!"

"Good? No, it's bad!"

"I may have something for you. Freddy Freeman needs a couple of web guys. Check out the SWEEP16 website. He wants to rework it, make it a lot nicer, and the list of names needs to be completely redone, with some utilities to support it and some kind of checking to bounce Mickey Mouse and obvious nonsense."

"Thanks, but fussing with somebody's vanity website is not what I want to be doing."

"Ever heard of Billy Bits?"

"Uh-uh."

"Well, it's just a nickname. You remember I told you pretty much everything about Freeman is 'out there'? ... Yeah, Billy Bits is the nickname of his webmaster. Billy Bits isn't really a web guy. SWEEP16 is the only site he's ever done, he just threw it together real quick because he's tight with Freeman and he wanted to be involved. Anyway, Billy Bits is really busy doing other stuff, so both him and Freeman want another web guy."

"OK, so good luck to them. It's not what I want to do."

"Take a guess who Billy Bits is. ... Alright, sorry ... you'll never guess, so I'll tell you. Billy Bits is what Freeman calls Bill T. Serow. Would you be interested in working with Serow?"

"You gotta be joking. But you aren't, are you? Serow did that website? And now they want somebody to rework it under Serow's supervision?"

"Actually, I don't know if you would really be working with Serow. Freeman told me Serow wanted to do it for him, but now they agree it needs a dedicated web pro. I got the idea it would still go thru Serow, but I didn't press. I mean it's either Freeman or Serow. And I can't picture it would be a bad thing either way. What they would pay I don't know either. Freeman said it wouldn't be much, but 'not much' to him might be a lot of dough to us."

"That doesn't even matter, really. I'll take a shot. What do you need, my resume?"

"Yeah, and maybe think of someone else. Freeman said two people. And be ready to get here in a hurry if he wants to see you."

As it turned out, Freeman didn't even ask for Clicks' resume. He made it seem as if my reco' already got Clicks half way to the job.

"How long has he been doing web work?"

"Since junior high. He's into it. It's what he does, and he's really good at it."

"OK, I'll need to meet him. When can he get here?"

"Pretty quick. He has a job in Chicago but he told me he was planning to quit even before I mentioned anything about working for SWEEP16."

"He shouldn't quit because of this possibility. Send me his contact info and I'll have my assistant arrange the travel for him."

This was the first time Freeman had mentioned an assistant, but it seemed there would have to be more than one person in the background, actually.

"How is the transfer of assets to SWEEP16 going?"

"Kind of funny. Pathetic might be a better word tho. The lawyers and the tax guys are all tangled up over how to structure it. I'm losing patience, but they do have a point. I haven't decided myself exactly how I want to dispose of things."

My mind flashed to Bidwell and Clipper's confident prediction Freeman would never go through with it.

"The big issue is the tax treatment of the income of the SWEEP16 Trust. But there are also issues with the funding of the Trust ... we need to get the Trust set up as a government-approved charity, so that when we put assets in there, it won't create a taxable event for the Trust. But whether we just put cash in there or transfer other assets, that money will be invested, and it will produce an income of at least 40 or 50 million annually. Maybe double that. And even if I do want to send some of the money to Washington, I'd prefer it be sent as an actual contribution, rather than a tax payment. I'm getting impatient, but it's important. I'll give those guys another couple of weeks or so to figure it out. It's a little bit of a joke tho, too. Being it's SWEEP16, these guys are working within a reduced fee structure, and they told me they'll donate what they charge. They have to address their own tax issues. They are top guys, their fees run in the hundreds of dollars per hour for each of them. But all of them have bought into SWEEP16, to one degree or another. I really appreciate that. Good guys. But the Trust has to get blessed for their donations to help their own businesses. Just the kind of baloney SWEEP16 aims to eliminate."

"My folks have a number of lawyer friends. They say lawyers get a bad rap, some of it deserved, but that lawyers do an awful lot of pro bono work."

"It's true. And I hate to see the way the wrong side can prevail in the courtroom because of a greater ability to pay."

"When do you expect the SWEEP16 Trust to be fully funded?"

"Once the legal structure is fully established, a couple of months or so to get the great majority of our money into it. We have some holdings that are very illiquid, private partnerships and other arrangements where the money will have to sit for a while, in some cases for another few years. But we're pretty liquid on probably 70-80%. And I think with the illiquid pieces what I'll probably do is just transfer them to SWEEP16 as is, and let them mature and liquidate inside the Trust. As you know, a lot of our money is with Billy Bits. We'll just transfer the stock to SWEEP16, maybe sell it down the road."

I really had very little idea of any of this. My business education did not really extend to the investment and tax world. These aspects of business got little more than a mention in the courses I took. The concept of paying people hundreds of dollars per hour to figure out how best to arrange your paperwork was amazing. I could see why this would aggravate someone who was focused on customers and production and employees.

"More of a concern to me is the SWEEP16 Public Trust. I haven't made up my mind on this ... it will depend in part on what the lawyers and accountants come up with. But I think I'd like to have a Trust established to receive and disburse donations from the public. Hopefully people will do things independently. That's more important to me. But I also believe some people will simply want to write a check to SWEEP16 and have us fund some worthy cause. The issue there will be the government will generally require tax-exempts to be very tightly focused. If we're not tax-exempt, then contributions will not be tax-exempt. And neither would be any income the Trust might earn. Not a disaster, but not the way I would like it to be. What we will most likely need to do is set up several Trusts, each with a specific target area, such as scholarships, housing, food distribution, medical assistance. It aggravates me some that SWEEP16 will need this elaborate structure, but that is the nature of things now, and of course that is what we aim to abolish. So maybe it's appropriate. We'll wind up burning a good six figures of billable hours of paperwork professionals so we can give money away. It's like a bad joke. In practice we may not actually spend much at all tho ... because of the pro bono work. It's great the way most people will kick in when they see something happening. And our guys, even more than most."

I'd not considered any of this, and it was something of a surprise for me to hear it, and now to be dealing with it a little bit too. Over the years I'd listened occasionally to my folks talk about taxes, but I thought of taxes as something old people dealt with. But lately, I'd been getting a whiff of it here and there myself. McMoo told me I needed to start working with an accountant. I hadn't actually met with the woman yet, but she explained to me how I needed to record absolutely all of my expenses, all the details, and how I'd soon need to start filing returns and probably paying some taxes too. I'd been keeping the details in my head, generally, and hadn't actually written anything down yet. And I knew there was no way I was going to remember everything.

"McMoo, Jenna's agent and now mine, too, is setting me up with an accountant. I've got a check coming and for me it seems like a lot of money. The column means I'm sort of a businessman.

Evidently I need to record all the dates and amounts and reasons for any business related expense or activity. There is a lot of detail I need to handle. Each expense needs to be categorized, and she told me I will have to start filing quarterly returns beginning in a couple of weeks."

Freeman looked at me with a smile that slowly grew into a few audible chuckles. "I hadn't even thought about this. Uncle Sam's posse might bring you over to my side, even if I don't manage to convince you myself! So, how are things going for the businessman?"

"Good, I think. McMoo says more outlets are picking me up. I've only had three columns so far tho. Do you care where I get published?"

"I'm not sure it's any of my business, but I appreciate you asking. It doesn't seem to me that any place interested in running your column could be bad for SWEEP16."

"We -- McMoo and me -- don't think so either. We also don't think it will be bad for me, at least in the long run. So we're going to let some student newspapers run the column free. College papers I mean."

"Sounds good for SWEEP16. You know I want to bring the young people on board."

"And you think my column will do that?" I wished I hadn't said that. Like I was being too familiar. This was the first time I'd talked to Freeman like a peer. He didn't seem to notice, but I don't think he misses much of anything.

"At this point I believe you think I'm sincere. That I believe in SWEEP16, in the things that I'm saying. I don't think I've convinced you of much more than that. But, it's only been a month. You told me your job is to find out the truth and print it. I believe you're still trying to do that, and that's all I want. Student newspapers seem a great venue to me. I really enjoyed Pendleton."

"Had you ever heard of Carolina Lomax before?"

"No. But you will remember she wants to interview me. She's coming out to the house tomorrow. She doesn't usually do interviews, she said, but she does write for various magazines, and she wants to publish the interview. Which brings up something we didn't get around to figuring out ... I told her you've been promised full access. And so you can sit in on the interview if you want. But I'll need you to reach some kind of an agreement with Lomax ... who can publish what. Whatever you decide is up to you two. And this will be happening more and more I hope."

"Interesting ... I talked with Jenna about this a little. Jenna said Lomax and I could probably get good material from each other. But about tomorrow ... Whatever comes out of the interview is hers. Maybe I won't even be there. Might cramp her style. Thanks for asking, tho. Do you want me there?" I tried to give him the mischievous look he gave me when Jenna's name came up. "For protection, maybe?"

He smiled a little, and it occurred to me that women hitting on him would clearly be a pretty regular thing, given what he is and what he does, plus that he's away from home so much. "Actually, Marti will be joining us for the interview. Lomax is coming after lunch, and probably we'll finish up over dinner."

"Do you know where or when she'll publish?"

"She said her own website, plus Pendleton. But she is pointed at one of the general interest magazines mainly. That will be a few months down the road. I'm interested in meeting with her because she said she's a natural adversary. She's the type of person I need to convince. And I think she is open-minded ... and honest."

"It'll be interesting to see what comes out of it. I think I might take a couple of days to get over to Syracuse and do a little research. Maybe just meet you in Brattleboro?"

"Sure."

Clicks had gotten completely fed up with his new boss, and he'd quit. He had a pretty low tolerance for people who didn't set right with him, but he was talented enough he would get a job quick if he looked around. He'd be heading East in his car after he wrapped things up in Chicago, which he said would take an hour. He sounded like his ex-boss had ruined the town for him. I wanted to talk to Bidwell and Clipper and Durreg again, so Clicks and I made a loose plan to meet pretty soon at Lambda Chi. I was also thinking I wanted to interview some random people about SWEEP16, and one way to do that would be to head for Syracuse by thumb, and just talk with whoever picked me up. It had been a long time since I'd done any hitchhiking, and these beautiful Northern roads might be a real pleasure with this great summer weather. This trip would be different than my past travels by thumb, tho, in that I actually had some money and a credit card -- my own credit card, thanks to McMoo -- in my pocket.

Dad didn't mind the idea too much, but Mom always hated the thought of me thumbing. She made me promise to phone or text a few times a day.

The morning was truly splendid, and I was out of the house before Mom and Dad even got up. I loved getting an early start when I was thumbing, and I was filled with that same sense of great Freedom I always got when I was on the road like this. There really was no particularly obvious route to take, so any ride heading generally West would be fine with me. The distance would be 350 miles or so, depending on the route I wound up taking. I had about 15 hours before dark, and if I didn't spend a lot of time between rides, I should be on campus by nightfall. But I really didn't mind the idea of spending a night in some little motel along the way either. Actually, I sort of hoped that's what would happen. I had only a light pack with me, and I had all I could do to keep from jogging down the road. I'd wondered what these first few miles would be like, if I'd have to walk the country road all the way to the state highway. As it turned out, the third car that showed up slowed down, and the driver took a good look at me and stopped.

"Don't see many people hitchhiking around here. You break down somewhere?"

"No, sir. I just decided to hitchhike to Syracuse for the fun of it. Meeting some people there, and I decided I'd like to meet some people along the way, too. Thanks for stopping!"

"Well, I won't be all that much use to you, then, but I can at least take you out to the Highway. Save you a few miles of walking."

"Yeah, that'd be great! My name is Danny Banks, and I'm in the area to write about Freddy Freeman and his SWEEP16 idea. Have you heard about it?"

"I've heard of Freeman, and I've heard of the SWEEP16. Don't know what to make of it, really. Can't picture it would ever actually happen. But I'll tell you this. If it did happen, my wife and I would surely be happy to do our share. We tithe to our church now, and we'd tithe, in various ways, to the general public good. We talked about it when Freeman first came out with it. Me and the Missus aren't far from retirement. We don't really spend much, with our savings and pensions we'll be pretty well set. We're thinking about donating some of our social security, and we hope we can help tutor school kids. Math and science probably. We're both engineers now."

"Wow ... so you don't think it's crazy?"

"We think Freeman is crazy to try for it. But heck, it's his life, his money. If he pulls it off, it's fine with us. We'll do our share."

"Did you put your names on the list?"

"What list?"

"Freeman has a list on the SWEEP16 website ... if you support the idea you can put your name on a list."

"I've never been on the website, but we'll check it out. Kind of funny ... our minister talked about it. He's really against the idea because he thinks it's only right that the rich should be forced to put half their money into the public till. But he also thinks that people who don't make much, if any money, also ought to be devoting time and effort to helping their fellow man. I'm more with Freeman, frankly. I'm not a believer in forcing people. But I do at least appreciate our minister's thinking. Usually, you know, people figure if you have money the government has the right to go after you for it. But if you have no money, then the government is supposed to give you some of someone else's ... for nothing. The minister figures if you want welfare or whatever, then you ought to have to work for it somehow. I guess you want to get off here ... I'm going to continue South."

"That was interesting! Thanks a lot sir for the ride, a pleasure speaking with you."

Nice guy, left me in a much better spot for my next ride, and gave me something to think about too. Usually when I thumb, I walk, so long as there is a good shoulder for people to pull over. And at this point, heading more or less West on Route 25, there was no reason not to walk. Quite a few cars passed me by, and I'd covered about a mile before anyone stopped. Usually the cars that pick up hitchhikers are older cars driven by younger people. This one was different. The car was new and

expensive, and the driver a woman of about 70. I'd gotten rides from only a couple of people this age, and never a woman.

"Hello, young man! Beautiful morning to be hitchhiking! Where are you headed?"

"Good morning Ma'am. Thanks for stopping. Syracuse, New York."

"Well, good thing you're getting an early start then! Not many hitchhikers around here. Or anywhere these days."

"Hitchhiking seems to have sort of died out, I know. But I like it. Right now, I'll be happy to just generally travel West."

"Sounds good to me. How far is Syracuse, anyway?"

"A good 350 miles from here."

"Well, I won't be going that far, but we'll see what happens."

"Ma'am?"

"Oh, I'm just out driving. I've got lots of time, and not a whole lot to do with it. So I'll just drive you West for a while. We'll see. What's in Syracuse? Young guy like you probably has something exciting planned."

"Not exactly, Ma'am."

"Suzi! If we're going to travel together, call me Suzi!"

"I'm Danny." I immediately had the idiotic thought that Suzi is a name appropriate to a little girl or teenager or young woman, and this made me try to think of Suzi in her youth. I marveled at my own foolishness, and tried to picture myself someday telling people my name is DANIEL, not DANNY.

"Great to meet you, Danny."

"It's my pleasure, Suzi, that's for sure. This is a nice car!"

The thing I liked best about thumbing was definitely the people. And it seemed to me Suzi was one of those rides I'd remember. She was expensively dressed, perfectly groomed. Jewelry, manicure. Not at all the sort of person that I'd expect to pick up a hitchhiker. "Where are you coming from, if you don't mind my asking."

"No, I don't mind. I started off yesterday in Maine, Bar Harbor, and I just decided to start heading West. See the sights on these nice old country roads. We sure do have some beautiful places to see in America."

"I definitely agree with that. It's actually one of the reasons I like to thumb. It seems as if you see more when you're thumbing. Partly of course because you're not the driver, but also because I always wind

up walking some, too. One of the other reasons I like thumbing is that I've met a lot of really nice, interesting people."

"You've done a lot of thumbing, as you call it?"

"Yes, quite a few thousands of miles. Never had a bad experience except for a few drivers who picked me up to sort of help them drive because they were tired, or drunk. Luckily they let me drive, so it worked out good all around. Funny thing, it's not at all unusual for people to go miles out of their way to help me out, especially if the weather is bad. People have fed me, given me a place for the night, taken me to parties. We have a lot of really kind people in the USA. Canada too. I've done a little thumbing up there. It's unusual to get a ride from a woman traveling alone tho."

"You look like a nice, respectable guy. Clean, pressed pants, new sneakers. Close shave, short hair like you just had a haircut. Like you might well have a job and a car."

"Wow, you've got some sharp eyes. I do have a car, and I sort of have a job. I'm meeting a friend in Syracuse, and we're going to drive back together. So I figured I'd thumb out."

"Sounds to me like you're meeting a lady friend."

"No, I wish. One of my best friends from college ... we just graduated a few weeks ago. I have some other people I want to see at school --- Syracuse --- then we'll drive back here and he's got a job interview. And you? You're just out taking a road trip by yourself?"

As soon as I said it, I wished I hadn't. "Sorry, it's none of my business what you're up to."

"It's OK. You had it right before. Old ladies like me don't pick up hitchhikers. I've never picked up a hitchhiker in my life, until you. Gee, that came out pretty quick."

I looked around the car a little, and I had a feeling this was not Suzi's car. The car was dark and plain and large. Suzi was bright and bubbly and petite. A mismatch. But it didn't seem like I should ask and I didn't have the wit to come up with something else to talk about. After several seconds, Suzi continued.

"I've got you wondering. Nothing mysterious. My Arnold passed away a couple of weeks ago. Now I've got to figure out what to do with myself. He wants me to live long and have fun. He told me so. He made me promise to try. He devoted his life to taking care of us -- me and our daughters -- and he's left me well off. Yesterday I just had this feeling I needed to get out of the house for a while. Arnold and I took many road trips together, so the natural thing was to just drive. I spent last night in a nice little hotel in Fryeburg, and now here I am, heading West just for the fun of it."

"I'm sorry for your loss."

"Thank You. But I've been so lucky. We had 50 years together. In love every minute of it. And we appreciated it too. We never took it for granted. I'm so happy for what we had."

Again, I couldn't come up with anything worthwhile, and Suzi was the one who picked it up.

"You said you 'sort of have a job'. What does that mean?"

"I graduated college in May, with a degree in journalism, and now I'm writing a column, and it's actually been picked up by a bunch of outlets. Pure luck, really."

"You must be really good, and really hard working."

"I hope someday people will think that, but pure luck is the pure truth. I got my column as a result of family connections."

"There has to be more to it than that. What do you write about?"

"Well, that's the luck part. Have you ever heard of Freddy Freeman and his SWEEP16 idea?"

"Yes, I surely have. It made my Arnold very happy near the end. Arnold always said he just loved to see what would happen next in the world, and he very much loved the idea of SWEEP16. And so do I, actually. You write about SWEEP16?"

"My Uncle is very tight with Freddy Freeman, and when Freeman told Unc he was looking for a young person to write about SWEEP16, I just kind of lucked into it. No hard work or talent or achievement. Really almost pure luck. But I appreciate it and I have been trying to do right, to do it right."

"You have the column in the Northern Record? Arnold and I read that together. We thought you did a fine job. Arnold would get a huge kick that you are my first hitchhiker!"

"I'd like to think so too, Ma'am... Suzi"

"So, what's the latest with SWEEP16? We saw only your first column. Arnold's last couple of weeks were difficult."

"Sorry to hear that. Well, I'm convinced Freeman means what he says. That he's devoting most of his time, energy and money to SWEEP16 for as long as he's got left. Which, given the way he lives, may not be all that long. But, he means it, and I have no doubt it is going to be interesting. The friend I'm meeting in Syracuse ... he might start handling technology ... the website and all ... for SWEEP16."

"What do you think of the idea?"

"At first I was deeply suspicious of Freeman's motives. I no longer feel that way. But I still don't think SWEEP16 would be this great boon that Freeman claims it would be. Please, what do you think?"

"Are you going to write about what we talk about?" She was laughing.

"I might. Unless you don't want me to. In any case I wouldn't use your name without your permission."

She just smiled at me and shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, I wasn't so involved with business and all as Arnold. I took care of the girls, the house, Arnold did the financials. Once the girls were bigger, in high school, I started helping with business. Arnold was a financial consultant, an investment consultant. The last 15 years or so I've done a lot of reading and observing and thinking and learning, but I don't have the long, worldwide perspective Arnold had. I can tell you, from Arnold's point of view, law and regulation and of course taxation imposed an enormous amount of friction and distortion on business and finance. Arnold hated that. He'd often remark how he wished he could simply focus on the business side of a business, instead of always having to consider critical and unstable regulatory and tax regimes. But the people themselves were always the most important thing to try to understand. We traveled a lot these last years. Half the reason Arnold took on all the international work was that it gave us such wonderful opportunities to see other countries. Arnold loved the big picture ... trying to figure whether the culture, the people, the demographics, the government would be conducive to the long-term success of his clients' ventures. I think Arnold would have loved a chance to talk with Freeman."

"It sounds like you knew a lot about his business."

"Not so much compared to him. But I did have a background in that sort of thing before our girls came along. And it is pretty interesting. Arnold's clients were large corporations or very wealthy families and individuals. He'd write reports on the long-term prospects of different kinds of business plays in various countries. For example, would it make sense to open a soda bottling plant in Mumbai, investing a huge amount of money to start, and then significant amounts in following years to keep things going? Would it ultimately be profitable? How long would it take? How much would it cost to get there? What are the pros and cons? A lot of it was high-level ... the big picture sort of thing he enjoyed most. Really kind of fun and interesting speculations. Too complicated to ever be sure, but with hundreds of millions of dollars involved in such ventures, way too much was at stake not to try. We spent a couple of months in India last fall, working on Arnold's report together."

"That does sound really interesting. One of the things I remember studying was nationalization ... that sometimes a company would invest a lot of time and money building something, and then some new group would come to control the government, and they'd basically just take things away from people, especially foreign companies."

"One of the biggest risks of investment in a lot of places."

We talked like this for a while, and I was enjoying her company and the scenery. After maybe an hour, she asked me if I enjoyed driving. When I told her I did, she asked if I would mind driving her car.

"No, not at all."

After we switched places and got under way again, she said "Arnold always did the driving in our family. Not that I really ever minded driving either. But we both liked it better when he drove."

She paused, and smiled at me. "We always wondered about having a boy. We had four girls. Even my baby is past 35 now. I wished we'd maybe had another child. A girl would have been fine, of course,

but most men do want to have a son, too. Most women want to have a daughter. You seem very comfortable driving."

"Yes ma'am ... I've always liked driving, biking, running, sledding, skiing ... movement. And up here, especially this time of year. Just mile after beautiful mile. You can almost forget how beautiful it is, there is so much of it."

"That's a good perspective."

I surprised myself, thinking that when I was in my 70s, I'd be an awfully lucky man to have a wife like Suzi. It made me sad knowing she was widowed, and trying to find a new direction for her remaining years. When we stopped at a diner, I excused myself and called Freeman.

"We will need people giving us ideas, leads, ways to spend the SWEEP16 endowment. If you think she might be able to help, sure, she is welcome to contact me. I'm glad you thought of this."

Without looking at the menu, I ordered OJ and corn muffin. Yikes. "Suzi, if you are looking for something to get involved with, maybe you could help with SWEEP16."

Her expression invited me to continue. "I'm not sure really how. And I'm just a writer, actually, not truly involved in SWEEP16. Just an observer. But I am getting to know about it of course, and about Freeman. And I do know one of the things most on his mind is how to effectively use his money to promote the idea. He's putting huge money into a trust. Part of that money will be for charity. Most of it, I'm sure. A big part of the idea is that people will help each other without being forced to do so ... and so if you have ideas along those lines, if you'd like to check out different possibilities, Freeman said he'd be happy to hear from you."

"You told him I'm an old widow who needs something to do?"

"I told him you are a kind and vivacious woman with a lot of knowledge and experience who is beginning a new part of her life. I believe you two would hit it off, and I believe something good might come of it. Don't see a reason not to talk with him."

She had a wonderful smile that seemed to come mostly from her eyes, and she patted my hand. "It's going to be such fun watching my grandsons grow. Arnold gave each of our grandsons a football when they were newborns, just home from the hospital. You really see the man-woman perspectives when a baby is born. The women are all focused on little outfits and blankets and colors, even for the boys. The men have no idea what to get for a baby girl. And they think a football or a baseball glove is just the thing for a baby boy. I'll be looking forward to speaking with Mr Freeman."

"I imagine the first thing he'll say is to call him Freddy. If you want to get a sense of what he's like, before you contact him, he's been invited to speak about Social Security in Brattleboro on Saturday night. I'll be there, and my buddy from Syracuse will be with me."

Suzi nodded and although she did not commit, her face was still bright. We drove West another couple of hours, then Suzi told me to find a spot that would be a good place for me to continue thumbing, and Suzi would start heading home. When I pulled over and thanked her, she said "I just wanted to do a good turn for a young hitchhiker, but now it seems you've given me something to think about, and to look forward to."

I gave her my business card, which still felt like a strange thing to do. "Freeman told me one of the biggest reasons he believes in SWEEP16 is that one of life's greatest pleasures is doing someone a good turn."

"Freeman's right about that, I have no doubt. On both counts."

"You said I'm the first hitchhiker you ever picked up? I'm flattered. Well, I've had hundreds of rides, and you are the first one I ever made arrangement to stay in touch with. Looking forward to seeing you again, Suzi!" It startled me to think I really was looking forward to seeing her again ... a woman quite a bit older than my Mom.

I was now about half way to Syracuse, and it was only 11:30. Walking along beautiful old US Route 4 near the New York / Vermont border, I again found myself sort of hoping nobody would pick me up for a while. There are different ways, styles, of hitchhiking. You can stand at a spot where people can get a good look at you, and hold a sign saying where you are going. Some people believe a sign makes you look more sincere and trustworthy. I feel like standing still makes you look lazy, at least if you're in a spot where it is safe to walk the shoulder. I've always felt that a walking hitchhiker like me should turn to face traffic when a car is approaching. That way people can get a better look at you, and it seems more respectful than keeping your back to them with your thumb out. Who would stop for someone facing the other way? But right now, I didn't really want a ride right away, so I walked a good two miles with my back to the traffic, just sticking my thumb out when I heard a car approaching. Dozens of cars passed me by without stopping, supporting my belief that this was not an effective way to thumb. But it felt so good out here, walking a road I'd never been on, that I didn't mind a bit. I could hear a car coming, so I stuck my thumb out again. My ears told me this car was slowing down, and fairly close, so I turned to look and was a bit surprised how close it was. A battered old 4-door, and the woman in the passenger seat asked me where I was headed.

"Syracuse, but any which way more or less headed West will be fine with me."

"Well, we can get you a good chunk of the way, jump in back."

"Thanks ... I almost didn't want a ride, it's so nice!"

The passenger and driver were both about my age. The guy driving asked "Was that why you had your back to the traffic?"

"Yeah, exactly. You've either done some thumbing or given some rides before."

"My share of both, I guess. And it probably is nicer walking, if you don't really have to get there! What's in Syracuse?"

"Meeting some people, just graduated from there in May."

"Good for you. We're heading for our place outside Gloversville. We can take you to the Thruway entrance if you want, you'll be within 2 hours of Syracuse from there."

"Thank You, that would be great. What's going on in Gloversville? I've never heard of it."

"We grew up in the area. Heading home."

The old car was noisy, and we didn't talk for a few minutes. There was a honey bee walking around on the back seat with me, and I thought it might be an issue for the driver, so I asked him if he wanted me to kill the bee.

"I wouldn't kill it, but you can kill it if you want to."

"I don't want to kill it ... her, I guess. Somewhere I got the idea the workers are all females. Honey bees are OK with me. They don't bother anyone, nobody works harder than a honey bee."

I could see the woman, about my age, was laughing, although the guy didn't react. "We just might have another one on our hands", she said to him.

Leaning forward, I spoke up a little to make sure they could both hear me well. "Most people wouldn't want a bee in the car. But you two seem to like that bee."

The guy nodded, "Yep, it's our bee."

"What? Don't stop there!"

Now the woman was laughing. "She's our bee, and we're taking her home!" The two of them looked at each other, and it was obvious they were a lot more than just two people driving together.

"We're heading to our place, our farm, and we've got a trunk full of bees. Our first hive! We're farmers. Or ... we're learning to be farmers. This is our second season on our own farm. Our folks helped us get into the place as a wedding present. We grew up on farms, but running your own is a big step! It's great!" Her enthusiasm was obvious and infectious, and of course, like half the people who've grown up in New York City, I'd often been intrigued by the idea of living on a farm. I told her so, and her reply surprised me.

"We love the country and the farm, but you know what ... if we had the money, we'd keep a place in Greenwich Village to take vacations. We love the city, and we love taking our harvest down there to the farmer markets. We're kind of designated for it, at this point. A lot of the farmers don't want any part of The Big Town."

"That's great. Kind of funny. I guess it's part of human nature to love the change of pace. So how's it going on the new farm?"

"We've always got lots of food and we're always short of money. But it's great, getting better all the time. You can't be small-time farmers unless you really want to be a small-time farmer. But we do, for sure! You just graduated? Did you find a job yet?"

I explained to them what I was up to, and asked if they'd heard of SWEEP16 or Freeman. They hadn't. So I explained the idea to them, and asked for their thoughts.

The woman answered "We've both been brought up to work hard, save our money, try to make the world a better place. That's just part of being Christians. I sure don't understand taxes and government and what goes on in Washington and Albany, but it's important to us to help as we can. At the farmer's market, we see things we don't see around Gloversville. Some of the people walking around there I think spend more on a pair of shoes than we earn in a week. But that's fine, good for them. Some of the people buying for themselves, and some for restaurants, I think it doesn't matter to some of them if they spend \$10 or \$25 so long as they like what they get. We do OK, our little bunch of farmers is glad to have us take their produce down there, and at the end of each trip we donate a lot of food for the needy. I guess we sell food to the people who can buy it, and we give away a lot of it to people who can't buy it so easily. It's one of our favorite parts about being farmers." She looked at her husband, and he nodded. "Gee, did I just make a speech?"

"I don't know, but I really like what you said. It sounds kind of like you're a natural for SWEEP16."

"If all it means is to try to be a good Christian, then you can count us in."

"That's a really interesting way to put it, and I will definitely ask Freeman what he thinks about that perspective. That would be a great idea for me to write about, too. Thank You ... would it be OK with you if I wrote about that?"

"You mean put it in your column?" My hosts looked at each other again. "We don't mind, but we can't speak for anyone else. Maybe you should talk to a priest or a minister or someone like that?"

"That is another really good idea, and I will. Thank You again."

We talked for another hour plus about growing up in the country versus the city, and how it seemed like people in the country tended to marry younger than people in the city. They played some of their favored music for me, then they dropped me off as they said, at a Thruway entrance within easy daylight striking distance of Syracuse.

"You've gone out of your way to bring me to this spot, haven't you?"

"No big deal" he said as he looked at my card. "We know you'll pass it on. And it was our pleasure."

"I really appreciate your kindness. No doubt all of your new bees will be well cared for!"

As I got out, the woman rolled down her window and said "Maybe we'll see you at the farmer's market. Second Avenue and 10th street?!"

"Wow, that would be really cool. Thanks Again, and Take Care." They pulled a U-turn and both gave me a big smile as they drove back the way we'd just come.

I was in a different hitchhiking situation now, one I didn't really like. The weather was still great, but all I could do from this spot was stand and wait. New York State Troopers will not tolerate hitchhikers on the Thruway itself. Sometimes they won't tolerate them on the entrance ramps, hundreds of yards from the actual roadway. I laughed at myself a little when I realized the change in my own situation since last time I'd been thumbing. Not that I'd made much money so far, but I actually had made enough that I could pay for a cab or rent a car to take me the rest of the way if I wound up standing here too long. There was a large stone near the ramp, and I sat down to wait. I sat for over an hour, and only a handful of cars had come by. Checked in with Clicks, and he said he'd be on campus around 8PM. So I had about 5 hours to cover what would be about 2 hours driving. Plenty of time, I thought. As the time ticked by, I made some phone calls, gave Mom an ALL OK message, caught up on some mails and started to wonder if I'd ever get to Syracuse. Around 5PM a big old car signaled an intent to turn onto the Thruway ramp, and I could hear music when he was still probably 200 yards away. When he got near me he killed the music and said "West?"

"Yes sir. Heck, I might even go East to get to a better spot."

He laughed and motioned me to get in. He was a big guy with a belly and a bushy black beard. "Where you heading?"

"Syracuse."

"Well, I can get you there. I'm headed for Rochester." He was going an hour or so farther than me, so I was really in luck.

"You like music?"

"Sure!"

"Orchestral OK?"

"Sure." I barely knew any classical music, but my idea of thumbing etiquette held that whatever music or silence or talk the driver favored was OK with me.

"Who's your favorite composer?"

"Well, I don't really know my classical music. Whatever you like is fine by me."

"There isn't any classical you really go for?"

"Well, no, not really."

"Did you watch cartoons when you were little?"

"Sure."

"Then maybe you'll know this one."

I wasn't all that happy watching him sort thru his player at 70 miles per hour, but that was another part of my thumbing etiquette ... unless the driver did something really bad, I kept my mouth shut.

"You ever heard of Johannes Brahms?"

"Only that he wrote classical music. I know he wrote that lullaby."

"OK! Here you go. Celine Dion did a very beautiful rendition. It's easy to imagine a mother singing to her baby."

I'd never thought of that before, but the song was very beautiful and very evocative. I think if all the lyrics had been sung in French, instead of only half, I'd still have gotten the gist of it. "Yeah, he really nailed that one didn't he!"

"He sure did! He wrote some stuff that was sort of the opposite, too. You will probably know this one from the cartoons. Hey, you've got to listen to my music. That's part of the deal, huh?"

He was smiling huge, but his beard was so much I couldn't see any of it except when he looked right at me. But he was right, as soon as the music started, really loud piano music, I knew the tune from the cartoons, and I really liked it. They used to bring this song in when these crazy guys with giant moustaches and swords were about to do something nasty, but this music would start and they'd all drop their weapons and go into these wild dance steps. I looked over at my driver, and we shared a huge smile. How many little kids, and adults, have gotten a big kick out of this tune?

"Yeah, that was really great."

"That was Brahms 5th Hungarian Dance. Here's another one a lot of people know from when they were little."

And he was right, this one I recognized also. Bugs Bunny used to play it. It starts out mournful and soft and slow, but after a while it went really nuts. And it was long. Big Beard had a very serious stereo system in this big old car, and he really had it cranked up. He just sat and listened, and neither of us said a word until the song was over. I had a feeling maybe it was best to keep my mouth shut, so I did. After a pretty long silence, my music tutor said "You remembered that one too, didn't you?"

"Yes, I sure did, and it's another classical piece I really like. It starts out about as sad as could be, but then it lights up amazing."

"Yes, Liszt's 2nd Hungarian Rhapsody. That's what a rhapsody is supposed to do ... have a tremendous change of mood. And that one surely does! Some people objected to it back in the 1800s when he wrote it. Liszt had enormous hands, and he wrote some stuff into the music that nobody else could

play because they could not reach the keys. And I wouldn't say he didn't do that on purpose, either. BUT, either way, that tune is a lot of fun."

"A friend of mine gave me some Beethoven he wanted me to listen to. A new conductor he thinks I'll really like. Would you mind?"

"No, of course not."

"I'll play another one you'll probably know at least a little bit of. Beethoven's 5th Symphony."

He was right, I knew some of this one too. And of course I knew the story about Beethoven being deaf. But I'd never listened carefully to his music, and the way this piece progressed I could sort of understand it being written by a deaf guy. It was also something the way it went quiet and loud and quiet again, sort of proving that some music really is supposed to get very loud. We drove the rest of the way listening to what was probably the best car stereo I'd ever heard. The music was interesting, my host's enjoyment of it was infectious. He wasn't much younger than my parents, if at all. It was kind of a surprise someone his age would crank up the system so loud. My folks would like hearing about this guy.

"You need to get off at Interstate 81 for Syracuse, right? How far from the exit are you headed?"

I explained I was heading for the university, a few miles South of the Thruway.

"I gotcha."

He exited the Thruway, classical music still cranked way up, and drove me all the way to Lambda Chi as I directed him mostly with hand signals.

"That was great! Thanks Man!!"

Big Beard stared at me, then he asked "You OK with money? Twenty bucks help you out?"

"Thanks, a lot, but I'm good. I have a job!" I liked saying that.

Big Beard gave me his Big Smile and a Thumbs Up, and he raised the volume even higher as he drove away. What would Big Beard have thought of SWEEP16? We'd barely spoken, I never had a chance to ask him about it. But he'd driven 20 or 30 minutes out of his way to help out a complete stranger that he'd never see again. Thumbing, I'd met many people who'd done the same. Plenty had shared food and refreshments with me, but Big Beard was the first to actually offer cash. Judging by his clothes and car, he didn't have much extra dough. I found myself wondering again why the people with the nicest cars were least likely to pick up hitchhikers. Or, at least, me.

A few guys were drinking beer on the porch as I climbed the steps to Lambda Chi "Can't stay away, huh?" "Get a job and get lost, OK?" I grabbed a beer from their cooler and sat down. When I drove off last time, I surely did not expect to be back here again so soon, and I had to admit they were at least

partly right ... I could have just waited for Clicks in New Hampshire, and talked to the professors on the phone. As I looked at them, I thought they are the same as a couple of weeks ago, but I am not.

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Clicks showed up pretty much on schedule, and we sat on Lambda Chi's porch across from Walnut Park, and watched the light summer night foot traffic going by.

"I appreciate you getting me an interview. It was driving me nuts reporting to a guy I didn't get along with. But I'm worried it's getting to be the opposite with you. You're having a hard time coming down on this guy. He's flipping you."

"I know. And that's one reason why I am hoping you get involved." I thought about telling Clicks Freeman wanted people who are generally inclined to be ideological opponents, but decided to let that lie. "Give me some hostile thinking."

"Bidwell and Clipper ought to be good for that, from what you've told me."

"Yeah ... you ever heard of Nivram Durreg?". Clicks shook his head. "I'm meeting with him tomorrow also. He's kind of the opposite of those guys. He jumped into SWEEP16 with both feet as soon as he heard of it. He's also an econ prof, or ... he's with the econ department anyway. Why don't you join us?"

"OK, Cool."

I surprised myself by sleeping til about 9:30. After breakfast I spent some time working on my next column, then we stopped off at Bidwell's office around 2:30. After I introduced Clicks, the three of us walked across the quad toward Clipper's. Again I noticed the difference graduation seemed to have made, and I remembered 'rites of passage' from anthro class. Applying some of the things I learned here to my own situation seems strange sometimes.

"You guys missing school already? Maybe you'll be like me before long, and make a career for yourself on campus. I can hardly imagine myself anywhere else."

"Now that you say so, I can't really imagine you elsewhere either, Doc."

"Thanks, Danny, I think."

"Actually, you are right. We were talking about that last night, and we definitely had some great times on campus. Have you guys -- I mean Clipper and Durreg -- been talking about SWEEP16?"

"We have, and we've been reading your columns too. You're doing some good work there Danny. Not only that, but I've talked to others about your column, and you can be sure I told them I was your

advisor, and your teacher. And that we've stayed in touch. I get a real kick out of that. Thank you Danny."

"Wasn't so long ago you were trashing my stuff pretty hard it seemed to me."

"You know well it's my job to get you to do better. And it's my job now, for several reasons, to tell you your columns are good, but you can do better. You're easing up on Freeman."

"I am, or at least, I did in my last column. But I've only done three so far. I'll be doing my best to tell the truth as best as I can figure it out. Jenna Jersey has been telling me not to try to hide my own viewpoint ... I'm a columnist, not a pure reporter. I'm totally skeptical of the SWEEP16 idea, but I am no longer skeptical of Freeman. He believes it."

Bidwell grunted in exasperation, and changed the subject. "The campus food has been better this year than any other summer I remember. Don't know why, but it's good news by me."

"Not so good for your waistline!" Doc looked at me with amusement and surprise, and I am sure he was thinking, like I was, that until pretty much now I would not have tweaked him that way. Then he looked away, and I could see his smile grow larger.

"I enjoyed listening to you and Clipper and Durreg going after each other last time we had lunder."

"Arguing is one of my favorite things, and no place in the world more geared to arguing than a university, eh?"

"I'd never thought about it that way, but I guess that's true." Clicks surprised me a little jumping in here. "We sure did a lot of arguing in the dorms. I guess anyone would expect that. But I was surprised how much back and forth went on in IT. People disagreeing about the best way to do something, or the best way to plan for growth, or how people would ultimately use a system, and how to design extra flexibility into a system so that when people came up with new ideas, you'd be ready. It's kind of amazing how some guys love one language or programming style, and really despise others."

"Danny says you might be doing software for Freeman?"

"Web stuff. The website is primitive and boring. And the implementation of the list function, the whole site, really, leaves a lot to be ... well, it ignores about the last 8 years of technology."

"That figures. The whole idea is about 100 years behind. You better watch out for Danny Boy tho, I sense he is being seduced."

Plenty of people had called me 'Danny Boy' over the years, and I'd never liked it. This was the first time I'd heard it from Doc, and I didn't exactly like it now, either. But it seemed as if Doc really wanted me to know things were different now, and I did appreciate that.

"How about you try to win me over by picking up the check?"

Doc didn't say anything, and I realized he was wondering what was most appropriate. His confusion amused me. "Plus the Young Clicks here doesn't even have a job. Who knows where his next meal is coming from."

"Oh, brother. The business major speaks."

"You've been sitting on that line for years, haven't you?"

"Glad you remember I taught you to be prepared."

"I was lucky to have you as an advisor, Doc. Thanks."

We had almost reached the caf, and nobody said anything until we joined Clipper and Durreg. I noted with some satisfaction that Doc did in fact pay for all three of us at the door. Once you were in, you could help yourself to anything. Clipper and Durreg were pretty clearly happy to see us. I introduced Clicks as another recent grad, and explained he'd be interviewing with Freeman about web work.

Professor Clipper seemed ready to pick up right where we left off last time. "So, does that mean you're a Cheap-Sweeper?". He spoke louder than I thought was appropriate, to the point where I wondered about his hearing. He'd not used 'Cheap-Sweeper' last time we met, but Durreg and Clipper did not react to the term.

"I'm interested in the work. The website as it sits now was done by Bill Serow, and I just really want to touch something he touched, frankly. I don't know what to make of SWEEP16, or Freddy Freeman for that matter."

DocDuh perked up. "Serow?"

"Yes, Freeman told me he made most of his money by backing the young Bill Serow. They are still tight 20+ years later. And for some reason Serow wound up doing the SWEEP16 website."

"I had no idea. Is Serow on board with SWEEP16 then?"

"Think so, but to what extent I do not know. I get the impression they talk a lot. I do know that Serow did the website partly because he wanted to control the availability of the sign-up list. He planned to be the first name on the list, but Jenna Jersey, the columnist, signed up as soon as Freeman told the reporters about it. So if you look now, the second name on the list is Billy Bits, which is what Freeman calls him. Can't say if he used Billy Bits for anonymity or a joke, or what. Might even be Serow's way of needling Freeman."

"How many names are on the list now?"

"Over 400,000 as of yesterday. There are thousands of people signing up each day."

"Why doesn't he collect LIKES on Facebook?" This was the first time Clicks had asked me anything like this.

"Beats me. Ask Freeman."

"Come on ... how many of those names are real people tho?". This was Clipper again, even louder than before.

"Good question. I've looked over the list here and there and no doubt there are plenty of fake names ... Mickey Mouse, Daffy Duck, Abraham Lincoln --"

"Abraham Lincoln just might be a real person tho." I was a little surprised DocDuh had interrupted me as he had, and I realized he felt even more favorably toward SWEEP16 than previously.

"I guess so. List maintenance is something that's on Freeman's mind. He wants to make the list as trustworthy as possible, without really tightening the screws. It needs to stay casual too."

"Danny, you're sounding like an advocate here." Doc spoke kind of quietly, and with obvious, even lugubrious disappointment. "Please don't misunderstand me here, Danny. I'm sorry for sounding so ... old. But younger people are more easily swayed than old goats like me and Clipper. This is why Freeman wants a young person doing your column. He thinks -- sorry again -- but I'm sure he thinks you'll be more easily manipulated."

"It's OK Doc. I don't necessarily disagree. Young people may well be more easily manipulated. Although you could make sort of the opposite argument that young people haven't been exposed for so long to the status quo, so maybe it's therefore easier for a younger person to see its flaws. Freeman did tell me he wanted a young person doing the column because he believes SWEEP16 may well be a decades-long campaign, and so he wants to get young people interested."

"Decades?" This was DocDuh again.

"My belief is Freeman sees this as his last big personal goal. He's in his early 50s now, and, although I haven't asked him right out, I think he figures he's going to push this so long as he's breathing."

Clipper groaned loudly, and DocDuh just looked at me and didn't say anything. Bidwell nodded at Clipper.

"OK, you're right. I don't know about SWEEP16 and the tax angles and all that. But I am convinced Freeman means what he says, and he is seriously committed. I've lost a big chunk of my original skepticism."

"Danny. Danny ... Do you not see why a guy who presumably pays millions -- tens of millions -- of dollars per year in taxes would try to squirm out of his obligations? Have you not thought about why he lives in New Hampshire, where he pays neither income nor sales tax?"

"Freedom, New Hampshire, is where he was born and raised. But I never did think of it until now ... maybe he wouldn't have this idea if he'd lived elsewhere. I understand New Hampshire is the only state with neither sales nor income taxes."

"It is, and you're sounding more and more like an acolyte than a reporter."

"Not exactly", said Durreg. "You do pay tax on investment income in New Hampshire, I'm pretty sure. No tax on wages. And no sales tax. It is the lowest taxing of all states."

"Well, I'm a columnist now, not the same as a reporter. I believe I have the same dedication to the truth that you, and my parents taught me about, but as a columnist I think my own headset is part of what I'm trying to write about. It's a lot easier I think than being a real reporter. Not sure I could be a straight reporter on this, at least not without a great editor."

Doc snorted. I didn't say anything. Clipper picked up where Doc left off. "Freeman is a slick operator. He's probably going to pull all kinds of stunts."

"Stunts!?" Now it was DocDuh getting loud. "What happened to the principle of Occam's Razor? Isn't it just simpler to take the guy at his word?"

"He said he was giving away \$2 billion. Whatever happened to that, Mr Occam?"

Everyone looked at me. "He told me he's working on it, that he needs tax people to figure out how best to structure the transfer, and how the SWEEP16 endowment can deal with its own income."

"What do you mean income? What is it, another business?"

"As he explained it to me, a couple of billion dollars in assets will generate \$50 or \$100 million per year in income, and he wants to avoid the endowment being taxed on that income. It's sort of amazing to think about ... it hadn't occurred to me until he said so. He'll be able to give away a million or two a week and never run out of money. I mean, I knew that money can make money but never thought it thru on a scale like that ..."

"Uh-huh." Clipper looked at Bidwell, then continued. "If you're going to give money away, you just give it away. You don't need lawyers and whatever else. I've got a bet with DocDuh that he won't go thru with this. I'm going to enjoy listening to Durreg telling my class how wrong he was."

"What's this?" Clicks hadn't heard about the bet, and once Durreg and Clipper filled him in, with some added color, Clicks looked at me. "That sounds like a pretty fun column!"

"Wow, yeah, I had not thought of that."

Clipper wanted to know: "Did you go over our list of questions with Freeman?"

"Not exactly. Some of it came up in conversation, but I decided against grilling the guy like that. I'm writing a weekly column about SWEEP16, and I'll leave the grilling to others. I've asked my own questions, some of which were pretty much yours. But I don't want to do a question and answer thing. Jenna Jersey and her agent have given me a lot of guidance here. We think we've got to emphasize the human interest and let the details sort of come out as the story, a personal story, unfolds. My job is to get people reading the column. And, actually, I told Freeman I believed a reporter's job is to find out

the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and to tell it. So asking a bunch of detailed questions is part of the story, but I don't think it's generally interesting enough. High-level, yes. Nitty-gritty will chase away readers. Exactly how Freeman establishes this Trust is not important. Just that he does. Or doesn't."

Doc still didn't trust Jenna. "So he still has that siren singing a song in your ear?"

"I talk with Jenna pretty often. I've gotten to like her quite a bit, and she's given me great advice, with, near as I can see, nothing really to gain by it."

"You mean you don't think Freeman is somehow involved with whatever she tells you?"

"No, I asked her about that, actually. She said she understood why I had to ask, and she didn't mind. But she assured me he has no influence, and has not even spoken to her about it. Jenna Jersey believes in the guy. It wasn't just a stunt when she put her name first on the list. What she told me when I asked her was that she doubted Freeman would even consider such a thing. She said Freeman is, and this is her word, 'pure'".

Doc exhaled loudly, and Clipper shook his head muttering "For God's sake!"

Durreg had been getting a little agitated I noticed, and now he opened up. "Why do you have such a hard time with this? It is pretty far out, certainly. BUT, we already know this guy is ... he's not normal. He's not a regular guy. Nobody questions he's self-made ultra-rich. Nobody questions he's still running around with the military in a pretty extreme way. Why the heck would a billionaire do that unless he is just totally committed to what he is doing. Instead of life on Easy Street, he's parachuting into war zones and getting shot at. There is nobody else I've ever heard of who matches that description. Here's my reaction. When that guy tells us something, tells us he's speaking from the heart, I believe. And in a way it surprises me you do not. I know what he says is extreme, fantastic. But we have here an extreme, fantastic, one-of-a-kind guy. He'll do what he says. Thirty years running with the SEALs? Do you know what that means? He'll do what he says. And if he says he's in it for the rest of his life, he is."

Until now, DocDuh had been a very easy-going, jokester sort of a guy. But he really fired these lines out, and I think he surprised everyone. At least, nobody said anything for a while.

"I think you'll all be interested to know Freeman will be on the Kenny Miller Show tonight."

"Whoa, why didn't you tell me this before?" Clicks was legitimately surprised I didn't tell him right away. And I didn't have an answer.

Clipper was indignant, if anything. "You've got to be joking. Why would Miller give him a platform? It can only hurt his show."

Durreg took the opposite view. "I wouldn't be surprised if it's really good for his show. Or, maybe, Miller just thinks it's an idea we all ought to hear about."

"Tell you what, I am definitely looking forward to Miller's show tonight." Bidwell and Clipper didn't say so, but I'm sure even they agreed with me on that point.

"Also, tomorrow night Freeman is speaking in Brattleboro, Vermont. It's the first real SWEEP16 speech. Brattleboro asked him to speak about Social Security at their town meeting. Clicks and I will stop off there on our way back to New Hampshire. If you guys want to put questions to Freeman in person, it's not all that long of a drive. Two hundred miles or so. Jenna Jersey plans to come up from NYC."

The three professors looked at each other for a couple of seconds, then Clipper said "I'd enjoy a long, leisurely drive thru some beautiful farm country. We can take our time, drive the old roads. And I haven't visited Vermont in years."

"Shotgun!", said Durreg.

"So I'll have the whole back seat to myself then, perfect. Plus I don't need to see your faces any more than I already do." Doc Bidwell was in chubby-kid mode, and he was really enjoying himself. A plate full of lunder in front of him, a roomful of chow all around, and now a road trip offering the chance to aggravate his friends for a couple of days. Even when he was sour and cranky, Bidwell seemed never more than a couple of seconds or a cheeseburger away from giggling, and I imagine guys like him are why fat people are, supposedly, jolly. There are worse things.

I was feeling my oats a little, so I added "This is great! But you guys have to promise not to embarrass me, OK?"

Doc looked at Clipper and Durreg, and cocked his head in my direction. "How quickly they forget their station, huh?". Then he looked at me, and continued. "Danny Boy, Mister College Graduate, embarrassing you is the primary objective of this excursion."

"Well, at least I got a nice meal off you first."

"Ha ... you've been snookered by your old professor. The next meal's on you. And what are the chances you're going to get off cheaper than I did today? You've got to think ahead, Mister Double B.A."

After we left the caf, Clicks said "It's weird in a way how the profs treat us now ... you seem kind of used to it tho."

"I'm not used to it either, but I have spent a little time with them since graduation. It's good being treated more like an adult, but the bar is higher too. Geez ... we're college-grad, young-adult twenty-somethings now."

"Yeah. Hard to believe it happened. Those guys always ride each other like that?"

"Yep, or more so. It seems to be a hobby, at least among men, all over the world."

"Well, that's good, because I don't see myself ever giving you a pass on anything. Nice shoes, by the way. Like something your Mom would give you for the first day of kindergarten."

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After we got back from lunder, we were just loafing, playing some hearts and I was thinking I didn't have much to do until the Miller Show came on at 11:30, when I got a text from Freeman. BEEN WITH MILLER SINCE YESTERDAY. This was a surprise to me. Not that I had any idea how Miller normally operated, but spending a day or two with a guest could not be normal. I texted back WILL BE WATCHING, THANKS!!!!

I shot off a text to let Jenna know he'd been with Miller for 24 hours. She responded by calling me. "I know, they just finished taping. A friend of mine works there."

Quick as always, I managed something like AND?

"Basically, he refused to tell me anything specific. Said it would be like ruining a movie for me. But he told me to plan on watching the whole show, and to tape it!"

"What else can you tell me?"

"Nothing. That was all I got from him. But ... I think there is a good chance SWEEP16 will be on a different plane after tonight. A lot of people are going to get a good look at Freeman. And it will get people thinking. See you tomorrow in Brattleboro!"

Next I called Dad. As it happened, they were having dinner with Aunt and Uncle.

"Danny, I'm going to put you on speaker so you can tell all of us."

"Well, Freeman just texted me that he spent the last 24 hours or so with Kenny Miller, and Jenna has a friend who saw the taping this afternoon. He told her, basically, watch the whole show, and don't miss it. Has he been on TV or done anything like this before?"

"He did some TV back in the football days, but not since then as far as I know. He's turned down interviews and publicity about business because of his government work." This was Uncle Walt.

I heard Mom ask "How do you think he'll do?"

Aunt Arlene answered "He's not a joker. His humor is dry, sarcastic. He almost never laughs, now that I think about it. Not a match for Miller's style. But ... if I'm predicting, I'll just say he'll find a way to do what he needs to do."

Uncle Walt said simply "Bet on Fred."

"Well, the show is already in the can. Glad you guys are having a nice evening together. See you soon."

Jenna surprised me with another call, and I answered quick. "Has he ever been on TV?"

"My Uncle said not since 25 years ago, for football. How do you think it will go? ... or went?"

"Miller is a wild card. Part of his popularity is he is hard to predict. But, Miller is a big believer in the military -- he's a veteran. He does not bring it up, but he travels with the USO every year, entertaining troops. I did an interview with him maybe 2 years ago, and I asked him about it. He requested, indirectly, that I not mention that in my column. Miller is a good example of a person who doesn't want to be thought of as a good guy, or a softie. He didn't come out and tell me that, of course, what he did was ask me to write only about his work and the show. He answered personal questions with a little bit of squirming, but he answered. He is a very well-informed guy, as you've probably noticed. And despite his reputation for sometimes shredding people, he is a soft-touch underneath. I'd gladly bet even money he's given away quite a few millions to children's hospitals or homeless shelters or similar, without putting his name on any of it."

"That's interesting. You have to figure, if he spent that much time with Freeman, they must have really hit it off."

"WOW! So, what was the timeline on this? Freeman got his apology from Ledbetter on the air last Thursday night, and by last Friday afternoon, he was contacted by Miller?"

"Near as I can figure, yes."

"That means Miller's staff booked him as soon as they could. But I'm really surprised about spending time together like that. Miller's staff will have done research too. By the time they taped, Miller knew what there is to know -- publicly -- about Freeman. And probably a lot of private stuff too, if they've been talking for a day."

"Guess I'll read your column on Miller before the show airs."

Jenna didn't respond to my comment so much as just continue her train of thought. "I believe Freeman has a natural ally in Miller, and not just because he stuffed Ledbetter."

"Now that you mention it, he did tell me he'd gotten INVITES -- plural -- from other shows. Do you think he chose Miller because ...?" I stopped myself, as we both realized my question and answer were obvious, and Freeman was a couple of jumps ahead of us on this.

So Friday evening was a bit of an oddball replay of last Thursday, various of us waiting for the 11:30 talk show. Mom and Dad with Uncle Walt and Arlene. Me and Clicks and a mixed bunch of summer students in the TV room at Lambda Chi. I wondered about Jenna in NYC. By showtime, the guys from Lambda Chi had decided to make a big deal out of this, which really just proves that summer on campus is quiet, and strange. They'd invited a bunch of people to watch with us, and this being summer, most

of the people didn't know more than a couple of the others well, if at all. And they all wanted to know about what I was doing, how I was connected to the upcoming show.

For me it was a situation I could absolutely never have envisioned 6 weeks ago. Here I was with something of a job, almost like my own business, telling the crew at Lambda Chi, at this point around 15 people, what I'd been up to, why I wanted to watch Miller, and then, what Freeman was like. Clicks, no surprise, was interested to get a look at his prospective boss.

"So you think he's on Miller because Ledbetter made an off-color remark about his wife?"

"Yeah, no doubt." I related what Ledbetter had said regarding Mrs Freeman, and how Freeman had forced an apology. One of the guys said something like "Perfect. What a dirtbag, using a line like that." Another one agreed, "He had it coming, alright." The women didn't say anything, and I wondered if they understood how men perceived this.

"Is he used to making jokes?" Humor was a big part of what made Clicks tick.

"I don't think so. I haven't heard any jokes at all out of him, near as I can remember. But a lot of humor is based on quickness. And imagination. He is quick. I think he is going to surprise people."

One of the guys from Lambda Chi asked me if I was going to be making appearances to promote my column, kind of like a book tour. I'd never considered anything like that, but while we waited for the show, the guys decided to have some fun and tee off on me. It was really weird how Freeman's appearance was making me a focus of attention. The ladies gave me a break, and it sort of divided this 50-50 group into a boy-girl thing for a minute.

"Do you think he might blow himself up tonight? I mean, if he bombs maybe his whole plan goes kaput."

"He might bomb, but I'm pretty sure whatever happens he's not going to throw in the towel. Freeman told me he's dedicating almost all his money, energy and time to this, so long as he's still kicking. I spoke once with Mrs Freeman, who told me he has a sense of theatre. If that's true, he has probably spent some time preparing for tonight. Millions of people watch Miller. He's got to be aware that this is a chance to at least present himself for a few minutes, and his idea for at least a short time. Given all he's done over the years, I'm pretty sure he'll be ready."

They asked what it was like to be around an ultra-rich guy, what he was like on a personal level, what his house was like.

Remembering the SWEEP16 list, I asked Clicks to take a look for KENNY MILLER. While I explained what list I was talking about, Clicks checked.

"Yeah, KENNY MILLER is on the list."

The list was a focus for Clicks. "There's no editing or anything. People can put whatever they want. There are a lot of fake names on that list. Somebody else might have added it."

One of the girls -- her name was Pearl, but I'd never seen her before -- spoke up. "It could be real, and Miller and Freeman might have talked this whole thing through already?! Where on the list does Miller appear?" Her interest surprised me, and I remembered that Jenna said women would definitely notice Freeman.

"Pretty early in the going, the name was added three weeks ago. Says KENNY MILLER of Southampton, NY. That is where he lives, I think. Still doesn't mean it's really him tho."

"Doesn't mean it isn't, either", said Pearl with what seemed like mischief on her face. "Considering Miller's got him on the show ...". I wondered if Pearl was taking my 'side', and returned her look.

I thought again of my earlier conversations with Jenna. So it seemed Freeman might very well be a FEW jumps ahead...

"Do you think he'll feel comfortable?", Pearl asked.

"I think so. He's had to think on his feet for a long time, he's used to pressure, he's used to speaking to groups. Are you familiar with Freeman and SWEEP16?"

"I know some of it. My family has always been oriented toward business and politics. My folks talked about those things a lot, and, basically, I soaked up libertarian thinking. So when Freeman popped up with SWEEP16, my Mom and Dad loved it. We've talked it over pretty much. We back the idea."

"Libertarians don't believe in government at all, do they? Just a kind of free-for-all philosophy?" This came from one of the guys, and I didn't know him either. Lambda Chi was a place I'd spent a lot of time, and altho I never belonged, I'd long felt it was sort of home turf for me. But now, people who did live here, people I did not know, were looking at me as an older guest. I was feeling like I should tell them IT'S ONLY BEEN A MONTH OR SO! I looked over at Clicks, and his cruel, impish grin told me he knew my thoughts. I'd heard of libertarians, but didn't really know what the word meant, and couldn't have explained it much better than what I'd just heard.

"Libertarians believe in sharply limited government, particularly at the federal level. Very much in keeping with the philosophy of America's Founders. Live and Let Live. Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

As I looked at and listened to Pearl I found myself hoping she'd read my columns. She turned back to me and continued, as if she'd read my mind, "My folks will get a kick to know I watched Freeman with the guy doing the SWEEP16 column!"

Girls -- women -- have a way of coming up with just the right thing to say. It was as if Pearl had read my mind as well as my columns, and I remember Dad told me when he was young, people used to talk about 'Women's Intuition'. I'd never had any human-level intuition, and it sounded like pretty great stuff. I felt color coming into my cheeks, and was thinking Clicks is going to shred me over this. But his face instead went to kindness or indulgence, and he looked away without making it worse for me. I

knew I'd pay for this later, but I was thankful now, and didn't care what he might come up with down the road.

"Well, I'll enjoy watching the show with you too", was my lame response.

We had some time before the show was to begin, and Pearl offered to put together some food to go with the drinks and the viewing.

I asked Pearl a couple of questions about libertarian thinking, and although I felt like a clumsy idiot doing so, listening to Pearl speak was well worth it to me. I was grateful Clicks was making himself scarce, and Pearl didn't seem to think I was nearly the bumbler I felt. It was shocking to me to be talking to such a woman and that she had in fact read my stuff ... her family had read my stuff. Yikes! This was something to share with Dad ... and Bidwell. Maybe even with Freeman.

Pearl asked if Sunday's column was done. It was, except I wondered about tonight. Should I call McMoo and try to get some kind of emergency extension to cover the Miller show? We discussed this, and decided it was better not to rush anything in the column.

I told her I'd never met anyone named Pearl. "I'm named after my grandmother. The plan had been to use a name beginning with P to honor Grandpa Paul, but when I was born my Mom felt I looked remarkably like Grandmother, and Pearl had the advantage of honoring both of Dad's parents."

"The name suits you perfectly." She was extremely neat and groomed and almost unbelievably feminine. Her face was round, and a pearl if I'd ever seen one.

She didn't say anything, but looked up at me, smiling, and took a step closer. I'm a pretty dense guy, I admit, but I knew something was happening to me right then. We were alone in the kitchen, and I thought maybe I should kiss her. "I need to get at the cabinet behind you, please," she said with a bit of a laugh, and again I had the feeling she knew what I was thinking.

"Why journalism?" I gave her my lines about bringing out the truth.

"That's interesting. TRUTH is what I love about the sciences. I love seeking Nature's truths, and trying to understand them. Astonishing beauty, harmony, and plenty of mystery. But Nature is TRUTH, completely uncorrupted by us, completely indifferent to us. The same everywhere."

"I have to admit, I'm really ignorant of math and science. I was never really comfortable with it, but I'd like to hear more about it. What are you studying?"

"I'm starting grad school in the fall. Molecular Genetics. It's boring to a lot of people, I know, but to me, I just love it."

"It sounds interesting to me now."

"I know you just graduated and left campus. I'm the opposite ... just got here last week. Didn't plan to spend the summer here, but there was this great apartment, so ..."

"Makes sense. There aren't that many really good apartments. I hope you like it here. I have to admit I got pretty attached. I didn't have to be here today, really. Didn't expect to be. Something was calling me back for the 2nd time since graduation, and I used kind of a flimsy excuse to myself to visit again."

Pearl smiled into my eyes. "I'm glad you're here."

"Thanks. And so am I!" I felt more awkward than usual, and searched for something to say. "I'd really like to show you around. There's some pretty good stuff here."

"I'd like that."

"Not as much as me, I think. But tomorrow night Freeman is speaking in Brattleboro, Vermont, and I have to be there."

"Well, I plan to be here for two years, at least!"

"I think you'll like it. Except maybe for the weather. SU was great for me and a lot of people I know."

We talked more, shared some wine. Pearl was putting some food together and feeding me samples. She'd sat me down at the kitchen table, telling me to relax. I was hoping it wasn't just to keep me out of her way. Last week's Ledbetter show had been nice, watching with my folks. But I liked this situation a whole lot better! Not only could Pearl turn out some great food, but she could do it while saying things I didn't know, hadn't thought about. And she was just sort of winging it with the food, working with whatever she found lying around a frat-house kitchen. To me, this was like magic. We brought out what she'd made, plus popcorn that I nuked, as the news ended.

And now here we were, sharing what for me was some pretty fancy stuff, she'd even put some toppings on the popcorn, tuning in to another late night talk show. I retrieved our wine from the kitchen. There was a spot at the end of the couch next to Pearl, the only obvious place left, and I sat down there. My mind flashed on the idea the women had purposefully arranged this, and I glanced at all of them, suspecting their thinking operated on some higher plane that guys like me are at best only dimly aware of. And I liked it.

Miller did his monologue as usual. But after the monologue, he changed up. "Tonight's show will be a little different than usual. We have only one very remarkable guest."

"One guest? Wow!" Was Pearl's comment.

"Football fans will remember him from about 25 years ago. He was quarterback when the Minutemen won the championship. Then he surprised everyone by quitting football to return to military service with the Navy SEALs. He's since become very successful in business but he still works for the government too. And just lately he's donating almost all his own money to promoting a plan to eliminate the income tax. Yeah, eliminate all federal tax."

All of us sat in silence except Pearl, who clapped a few times with YES SIR!! and turned an enthusiastic smile on me that I will not forget. There was a lot of hollering and clapping from the audience too, and it carried over as Miller asked them to welcome Freeman, but I was very distracted and remember thinking it was a good thing I'd be able to replay the show before I wrote about it.

As Freeman walked out, the cheering increased, and did not quiet down after Miller gave him a quick hug. Miller looked out at the audience for a second, and with his trademark grin stepped back and added his own applause. Then he brought Freeman to his seat and sat down behind his desk. When the place settled he said "One thing I want to say right away ... I've met Mrs Freeman, and I think she is wonderful, delightful, lovely, and very much a lady." Miller and Freeman shared a laugh over this, and the audience sounded aware of the Ledbetter episode.

Miller all but promised right out that he would do what he could to give Freeman a friendly environment to share his idea. He said he'd spent most of the last 24 hours with Freeman, learning about his idea and getting to know him and his story.

Miller must have been totally convinced by Freeman to be doing this.

Miller started by asking Freeman some very direct questions about his history. First a few questions about football, then about the military. Freeman spoke matter of factly, and praised his teammates, and particularly the people he'd served with.

Miller basically helped him build his bonafides for the audience.

"When a rich guy says he thinks taxes are too high, let alone that taxes should be abolished, a lot of people are going to think he is being selfish, or greedy, or self-serving. But you've given a great deal to this country. You've been involved with the military for 35 years?"

Freeman's "Yes Sir" drew huge applause, and Miller had to stop for a moment before he could continue.

"You walked away from pro football to go back to the military?" Freeman nodded. "And you've had a bunch of broken bones? Bullet wounds? Survived aircraft crashes and bombs?" Miller stopped and Freeman nodded another "Yes Sir."

"And only a couple of weeks ago, you took a bullet?" Freeman nodded again. "And you're still ready to answer the call, whenever it comes?"

It seems to startle Miller and even the people in Lambda Chi when Freeman was on his feet in an instant. "Yes Sir, of course."

There was some applause, and Miller stood up also.

"Looks like you're ready too, Kenny."

Miller seemed taken aback, but he didn't hesitate. "I was once, and I am still."

After a couple seconds, Freeman continued, almost as if it set him on edge there could even be a question. "No different than anyone else who wears the uniform." The audience made some more noise, and Miller was obviously loving it.

Freeman wasn't done. He swept his arm to indicate the whole studio. "And, I think, no different than most Americans who don't wear the uniform."

This drew a huge cheer from the audience. And it made me wonder how many in the audience would really answer the call, and how many more of them would answer because of men like Freeman.

Miller was grinning from ear to ear, and he shook his head and shoulders, using up a few seconds, and it seemed as if Freeman realized Miller was waiting for him to sit, which he did, along with Miller.

"I guess you're STILL a Minuteman!"

"The Minutemen of our Revolution have always been my heroes. The football Minutemen are pretty dear to me too."

Miller took a breath and let it out slow, while a sly smile formed on his face. "And now, you're giving away almost all of your money -- couple of billion dollars, that's b-b-b-billion -- to promote the idea that we should abolish the federal income tax?"

"If 1.3 billion people in Communist China can go capitalist, the United States can get free of federal tax. What could be more traditionally American than NO FEDERAL TAXES?"

Freeman gave a big smile, and the audience hollered again, and Miller continued in a different voice, and he sort of lowered his head. "All this that we've just touched on, the military record, plans to give away a huge amount of money. You know what some people will say. Some people will say it smells funny. Some people will say ... it's not true."

Freeman paused a beat, and directed his response to the camera. "I'll die before I'll lie."

At first there was almost no response from the audience on TV, then Pearl said WOW and the TV audience gradually built a standing ovation. For me, I probably should not have been surprised, but talk about intense?! What a thing to say. What a thing to MEAN!

"Given what you have done already, and what you are still doing, I don't think anyone can question your sincerity. Your sanity, but not your sincerity."

"People have been questioning my sanity for years, Kenny. But sometimes we can accept what's insane, if we get used to it over time, little by little. And I've come to believe our system of taxation has an awful lot of insanity in it. That at this point, it does far more harm than good. And the SWEEP16 campaign is about getting rid of all federal tax. I believe Americans will voluntarily provide the means for the government to do what it must do. I strongly believe SWEEP16 is the best way I can serve our Country."

There was some applause from the audience, but it reminded me of when Freeman announced SWEEP16 at that press conference. Mostly, people just didn't know what to make of it.

Freeman paused and looked around for a few seconds. "Kenny, will you do your share, voluntarily?"

Miller answered with a broad smile and the words "Voluntarily and joyfully!"

Freeman asked permission to address the audience, which Miller granted by gesture.

"Will you do your share?"

Again there was a lot of noise coming from the audience.

"Thank You. It doesn't need to be any more complicated than that."

"That's it? No more complicated than each of us doing what we feel is our share?"

"Yes. Some people won't, but most will. And they'll do enough to cover for those who don't. And, the numbers of those who do will grow, while the numbers of those who don't will shrink. Americans will respond in overwhelming numbers. But also remember, poll after poll shows Congress to have an approval rating of maybe 15%. Why let THAT bunch take whatever they want?"

Freeman shook his head as he continued, "America's economic hotspot is Washington, DC. Yes ... DC is thriving while taxpayers are struggling."

There were shouts and boos and applause from the audience, and some of the same from the group here in front of the tube. Freeman and Miller both had the same mischievous grin, and it was obvious that a lot had passed between them.

"Kenny, why did you volunteer for military service?"

"Because I wanted to serve my country, and I see national defense as vital."

There weren't any laughs so far in the show, but the audience sounded off again in support of Miller's answer.

"And would you mind please telling us some of the ways you have served since your military service ended?"

"Dozens of people have good jobs here at the show, and I do feel strongly that our team here at the show is serving the country. My family has funded various projects over the years. Medical research, scholarships, food for the hungry, camps for kids, relief efforts for victims of natural disasters. Freddy and I talked about this yesterday, and my accountant worked up some numbers for me to provide today. Over the last ten years, it's added up to more than \$10 million. Until now we have contributed anonymously, but in support of SWEEP16 we -- my wife and I -- decided we'd come out about it. And we'll continue to do these kinds of things so long as we are able. A few years ago Tina and I got involved with a shelter for battered women. Quite a few well-known people contributed to it, thanks

mostly to the efforts of a friend of mine. He matched all of our contributions. I think all the money was put up anonymously. My friend gave the naming rights to the biggest donor, other than himself. Tina and I named it 'Sam and Sal', after our own mothers, Samantha and Sally. And I'll admit to driving out of our way more than once, just to see that name over the door. It makes me feel better than the money ever could have."

One of the Lambda Chi crew remarked how that would be very cool, and on the show, Freeman led the cheers now. "People love to help each other. There is very little that is more satisfying than helping another person. And gratitude is one of our strongest emotions. Team play is our basic nature." The audience indicated strong agreement, and Freeman shifted back to Miller. "Something else Kenny never talks about is his work with the USO. I can promise you those efforts are a big deal."

"Why did you volunteer for the military?"

"For me, it goes all the way back to childhood. My Dad grew up in Cuba. Castro's goons killed my Dad's parents, and I wanted to be a SEAL because I had the idea that if we -- the United States -- ever decided to remove Castro from power, the SEALs would be in first, and that's where I wanted to be. I'd still love to be part of that, if the order came down."

"Is that why you still do government work?"

"Partly. We have enemies, and there are truly evil people in this world. My life is dedicated to protecting our Freedom and helping it to spread. To the protection of women and children and the disadvantaged. That's just how my Dad raised me, and so working within our government is maybe the biggest reason why I can stand to look at my own face when I shave."

"Isn't it kind of ironic that someone who works for the government wants to abolish federal taxes? How would the military be funded?"

"Our federal government and federal workers do a lot of great things for us. The value of our national defense truly cannot be overstated. But what we need from the feds would easily be funded without federal taxation. And most of what the federal government does do, it should not do. The simple answer, and I do not mean to be flippant, is that Americans will pay for what we want. The idea that the federal government must force us to do the right thing is abhorrent to me, and I believe would be abhorrent to most Americans if we were not so used to the idea. Our young people, young men mostly, but also women and men of all ages, freely volunteer years of their lives and risk loss of limb and loss of life in order to serve this dream of ours we call the United States of America. Absent compulsion, of course many people would not contribute, but those who do would contribute more than enough, and, absent federal compulsion, there would be vastly more available from which to make those contributions."

"Please keep in mind, we would still live in states with their own tax regimes. But Americans would be free to choose from among many different tax regimes, so no state could become oppressive. I believe some states would send part of their own tax receipts to Washington, and some would not. But I

certainly do not believe any state and its people would be so irresponsible as to attempt to freeride on others. Washington would receive only a fraction of the dollars it confiscates now, but that would be a very fine thing. Washington is horribly bloated and inefficient and it is sucking the vigor from our citizens, and worse, imposing itself upon us in ways that destroy national cohesion. I don't think we as a nation have ever been so divided as we are now. And the political divide is pretty close to 50-50."

"But your question was about funding the military. Most of us want a national defense. Those of us who do would fund it voluntarily, even if the states did not. Don't forget, our military is all volunteer. Isn't it reasonable and appropriate that it be funded voluntarily?"

There was quiet on the set, and Freeman and Miller looked at each other for a moment before Freeman spoke again.

"The crew in DC seems to think it is more important than the rest of the country. As if America must serve them instead of the other way round. We've become used to a federal colossus making huge demands upon us and involving itself in an enormous number of areas, most of which are reasonably viewed as unconstitutional. Imagine for a moment a country where the federal government made no demands at all. It's difficult to picture. But, absent all federal burdens, I do believe incomes would double and prices would halve. The financial prize is enormous, but the spiritual prizes are much greater. Less divorce, less stress, more marriage, more babies, more Freedom, more personal fulfillment. Much more national cohesion."

Freeman took a long breath, looked around. "That's a real stretch of imagination, I know. It's been on my mind for a long time. I've become used to the idea. What we need is each other. What America needs is Free Americans, not a monster in DC ruling the country."

Miller shook his head and exhaled loudly. WOW was all he said at first. Then he changed up. "You won a professional football championship, and then you quit the game to return to the military. Why?"

"Winning the championship, getting to the top, is what sports is about. For me, once was enough. In the military it's not a game, it's real, it's important. Life and death, good and evil. There is always something more, something more important, some new situation that needs attention."

"How many guys your age are still out there doing what you are doing?"

"Not many." Freeman smiled and shook his head.

"How long do you think you can keep it up? I mean, you're still operating at altitude, jumping out of planes, carrying heavy gear, covering large amounts of ground?"

"Yes, but not as well as I'd like. This last time, even before I got hit, some of the other guys helped me. I didn't really slow them down much, but they carried some of my gear ... some weapons that I like to have along that other guys often leave behind. First time for that. I don't have a lot more of it in me, you're right. But experience counts for a lot in war, and we operate as a team. If I did believe they were better off without me, I'd never go. Or even if they believed it."

"Does SWEEP16 have anything to do with you slowing down?"

"Maybe some. The problems of a huge federal government have been on my mind for a while, but it is only lately they crystallized ... I'd gotten used to a giant central government, just like everyone else. Until pretty recently. Now, it seems clear our greatest challenge is the sclerosis and deterioration of spirit due to over-reaching government. I've had a part in fighting for American Freedom for most of my life, and this is a next step."

Miller changed angles again. "With a Russian Mom and a Cuban Dad, where did the name FREEMAN come from?"

"My folks wanted me born in the USA, so they fled Cuba, made the crossing to Key West. They decided to pick a new name for their new life, and they felt FREEMAN was as American as could be. Plus of course ... FREE MAN ... that name means a lot to my family."

"How difficult was it for them to escape Cuba?"

"It was difficult and dangerous for them, and my folks were young. As they tell the story, they never would have made it but for my Godmother Serena. Castro's forces were not letting people leave, so it was dangerous even to try. They risked prison or death. And although they were not attacked as they fled, the crossing itself is dangerous. At night, treacherous waters, small boat, no real navigation equipment. Quite a few people die at sea. Mom and Dad and Serena left everything they had, everything they knew, and put their lives at great risk so I could be born American. How lucky does that make me?"

The audience loved this line, and so did Pearl and me.

"Now, I know there is a big Cuban community in Florida, but I haven't heard of Cubans heading for New Hampshire."

"We aren't the only ones ... but close! Serena's husband gave my Grandfather a poster of Rocky Marciano -- Grandfather was a great boxer and then my father after him -- and it so happened Rocky was standing next to a statue of the Revolutionary War General John Stark, of New Hampshire, with a plaque inscribed LIVE FREE OR DIE -- those are Stark's words. When my grandparents and Serena and her husband learned LIVE FREE OR DIE is our state motto in New Hampshire, they decided New Hampshire was THE PLACE to be. Although they didn't know about New Hampshire's winter. After they reached Florida, they found out there is actually a town named FREEDOM ... so that's where they went. And my parents got their wish. I was born in American Freedom."

"That's a great story, even in a nation of immigrants, that story stands out." The audience was really going for the Americana.

"I hope you don't mind my asking, but ... it was the death of a young member of your team that brought you to this campaign of SWEEP16?"

Freeman nodded, and I realized Miller might well have read my column about Willie.

Freeman told the story I'd heard only a week earlier at the VFW. And again, he had everyone's complete attention. I think, after hearing this, nobody would doubt his sincerity, altho at the same time it probably makes some people think he's emotional rather than thoughtful.

When he finished, the whole place was quiet, Lambda Chi too, and it reminded me of the silence at the VFW, as if noise would be disrespectful to Willie. And maybe it would have been.

Miller nodded and looked around, sort of holding the floor without saying anything. Then he changed up again. "But there are so many things done by the federal government that are really vital. What happens to all these programs?"

"The short answer is the programs people want will still be there. All that would be removed would be federal compulsion to pay for them." Miller gestured for him to continue. "There are many ways to get things done that do not involve federal compulsion. We will still have government operating at state, county and municipal levels. But if these more local forms of government become oppressive, it is much easier to leave their jurisdiction or change their behavior. Members of the United States Congress are more difficult to dislodge than were members of the old Soviet Politburo. It's as if we really do have a ruling class. BUT, much more than government, we should rely on voluntary relationships of all kinds."

"But the federal government is so vast, so many people employed by it directly and indirectly, so many people receiving checks from the feds, what happens to all of that?"

"Yes, the government is vast. One of my favorite writers, Judge Andrew Napolitano, recently wrote some interesting questions about that. Basically asking, pointing out, that it seems the purpose of much of government is simply to perpetuate its own existence and growth. If I can roughly quote the Judge ... WHAT IF THE POWER OF GOVERNMENT IS WIELDED BY AGENTS AND DIPLOMATS AND BUREAUCRATS BEHIND THE SCENES WHO STAY IN POWER NO MATTER WHO IS ELECTED PRESIDENT OR WHICH MAJOR POLITICAL PARTY CONTROLS CONGRESS? WHAT IF THE APPARENT ADVERSITY BETWEEN THE REPUBLICANS AND THE DEMOCRATS IS JUST A CHARADE? WHAT IF BOTH MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES BELIEVE THAT OUR RIGHTS ARE NOT NATURAL TO OUR HUMANITY BUT INSTEAD ARE GIFTS FROM THE GOVERNMENT?"

After a long breath ... "But that didn't really answer your question. Whatever exists ONLY because of federal compulsion will disappear. Programs people want would be funded other ways, in a much more voluntary fashion. We need to become, again, the Land of the Free."

"Are you saying we are NOT the Land of the Free?"

"Not nearly to the extent we should be, and used to be. And, I believe, will be again. We ARE free in many ways, but we have lost a great deal of our economic and political Freedom. We accept that everything we do is to be regulated, taxed, encouraged or discouraged by government. Freedom is more the absence of government. Terence Jeffrey has published a book, COMPLETELY PREDICTABLE, in

which he claims spending per household by local, state and federal governments actually exceeds our national median income."

"The median income is the number where half make more and half make less?"

"Right."

"So, you're saying government at all levels spends more on average than our median household earns?"

"Terence Jeffrey is saying it in his book, and I don't doubt it. About 60% of that spending is federal spending. Plus around 20% of state and local spending is funded by DC."

"Well, let's just look at one program. We have almost 50 million people on food stamps. What becomes of them if the program abruptly disappears?"

"First, I think if Congress went along with SWEEP16, they'd want to abolish federal taxes in steps, say over 4 years ... or 20. So it would not be sudden, at least if we did it on a national level by Constitutional Amendment. And of course we'd be talking about it for years, maybe even decades, before we did it. But if we abolished all federal taxation, I believe incomes would double and prices would drop by half. The majority of people using food stamps would not need them. Also, don't forget, it's not JUST taxes, and not JUST food stamps ... the government does lots of things to keep prices HIGHER than they need to be. There are huge agricultural price supports, import quotas and tariffs. Americans are forced to pay 2 or 3 times the world price for sugar. Our ethanol programs are adding many billions to the cost of food because we burn so much of it now for fuel, and ruin a lot of small engines in the process. We pay farmers to keep land idle. We keep the price of powdered milk artificially high. Last I was aware, we have a complicated system of laws and regulations supporting the price of peanuts. I do remember reading that back when Jimmy Carter was president, we restricted the number of people who can grow peanuts. Seriously. President Carter's family had peanut permits that protected them from open market competition. Got to keep the price of peanuts UP. We needlessly increase the cost of fuel, which of course increases the cost of just about everything, including the preserving and transporting of food. It goes on and on and on."

"Do you think all 50 million food stamp recipients could become self-sufficient then?"

"No. But, remember, a central idea of all our support programs is to help people move to self-sufficiency. Removing obstacles to self-sufficiency would be a huge step in the right direction. Also, consider that even now Americans are givers. Charity is huge in our country. Many more people would be able to help. And at the same time, if nobody had a federally-backed claim to the fruits of other people's labors, we'd find a lot more people becoming self-sufficient. Charitable programs operated by the states would be much more results-oriented, again because individual states would necessarily need to keep their taxpayers satisfied. Not so with federal programs. We've spent \$15 or \$20 trillion on various welfare programs in the last 50 years. About the amount of our national debt. And you know what? Poverty has won, at least according to government statistics. I don't really believe that, but we spend more now, on more people, than ever. Government spending at all levels, on poverty programs,

is now over \$60,000 annually per poor family. And then they tell us obesity rates are highest among food stamp recipients. How crazy is that?"

"I had no idea it was that much."

"That's an estimate of anti-poverty spending at all levels, not just federal. But obviously an enormous amount of that money does not make it to the recipients because \$60k is a lot of dough!"

Everyone seemed to mull over that number for a bit, and Freeman waited a few seconds before continuing. "The same perverse incentives operate at the level of the government agency and the individual. If a business does not meet its customers needs, it fails. But when a federal agency fails in its mission, helping people become independent, for example, it just gets more money."

This line drew groans of recognition from the studio audience, and I could almost hear my father agreeing with that one. I'd heard him state this idea several times.

Freeman paused again and sort of shook himself off. A strange move but I could tell he was going off on a different topic.

"Another thing usually surprises people is finding out how much they need to earn to buy something. The price of the car is \$10,000. But how much do you have to earn to actually buy the car? Usually people don't know."

Freeman had covered this topic when he first announced SWEEP16, and it was one of the things that had surprised me. And talking about it now, it was clear Freeman's numbers surprised everyone. Miller and Pearl both said WOW at the same time. "There's a calculator on the SWEEP16 website that lets you plug in numbers for your own situation. But the bottom line is that most people are quite surprised to find out how much more they have to earn. Needing an extra 50% is not unusual. And quite a few Americans will need to earn \$20, \$30 or even \$40,000 to buy that \$10,000 car. It hurts us all. What's bad for the boss is bad for the worker."

"Kenny, for a long time, 140 years or so, the USA had no federal income tax. The feds did not take your income. The feds lived primarily off taxes on liquor. Think about that for a minute."

Freeman changed his voice and posture, evidently indicating a new direction of thought. "There is a woman lives near me who grows thousands and thousands of tulips every year. Her property is a joy to drive by in spring when they bloom. She seems to plant them all herself, by hand, alone. I've seen her working many times. How many of us would support a demand from the federal government that she pay a tax on those flowers? Or that she be forced to plant a tulip in Washington DC for every tulip she plants at her home? Ridiculous??? I hope so. No tulip taxes--yet. And yet, those tulips are her property, her creation. The beautiful flowers are her paycheck for her labor. Why shouldn't the government demand its share?"

Freeman looked at Miller and the audience. All was quiet. "Yes, that would seem really out of bounds, wouldn't it? But your money is your property just as much as the lady's tulips are her property. The

federal government has no more right to your income than it does to those tulips. The difference, of course, is that the government can take a chunk of your income pretty easily, and it can do a lot more with your money than it could do with the tulips. But that doesn't mean it is proper or good."

Miller and the audience were still listening, neither supporting nor rejecting the idea. Just listening and maybe thinking?

"How about a piano player who, through years of practice, becomes a virtuoso. If she stays at home and plays only for herself, she owes the government nothing. And again, I think everyone would see it as ridiculous to say she should be forced to play for free in Washington, DC. But if she plays Carnegie Hall, with a paying audience, she now must pay a chunk of her earnings to Washington. And remember, of course, she knows she has to pay Washington, so she charges more for her performance than she otherwise would. So really, her audience is taxed, and the audience, in their working lives, must in turn pass the cost of the piano tax on to their customers. And on and on. We've grown used to this. But that does not mean it is moral, reasonable, or effective."

"But the feds have used the tax code to do other things that are completely out of bounds. People have long believed the IRS is used as a political tool ... that presidents use tax authorities to harass and intimidate political opponents, to help their allies and impede their adversaries. Recently the Supreme Court has backed the federal laws that require purchase of health insurance because the penalty was called a tax. Never before has the government been perceived as having such a power. By extension, the power to tax can evidently be used to effectively compel or prohibit almost any behavior. And of course, Congress and the president have long used tax law and taxpayer dollars to promote the interests of those who send them money, which is both astounding and revolting, but nevertheless business as usual in DC."

Freeman paused again and looked around, then just said "All of this is poison, and we MUST put a stop to it."

Pearl clapped at this, and looked at me. She did not seem to care that she was almost alone in her enthusiasm.

Miller still wanted to lead him out. "OK, but how does SWEEP16 affect the young single mother with three kids to feed and no solid income?"

"Absent federal tax, prices would go down and opportunity would go way up. But more important, absent a federal support program, we would have far fewer people in such a situation. Much of what the federal government does is perverse, in that it subsidizes and rewards what we claim to want to suppress, and it penalizes and taxes what should be encouraged. We tend to forget this, but think about it for a second. If you are self-sufficient, supposedly what DC wants -- you are penalized, often enormously, by the tax code. BUT -- if you don't work, are not productive economically, then you are rewarded -- the government gives you money and other significant benefits. If that is not perverse, I don't know what is. Sure, they don't see it that way. It is reasonably viewed as helping people in

need. But I'll tell you what ... if the government gives people money for not working, you can be pretty sure they will never run out of people who don't work."

This drew a smattering of applause from the studio audience and a few snorts of agreement from the group at Lambda Chi

"If we stopped paying people to have children they are not ready to provide for, there would be fewer people in that situation. And that, supposedly, is the goal of our anti-poverty efforts -- to reduce the numbers of people who need them. But on the human level, does anyone think, absent federal supports, families, friends, neighbors, co-workers, states, counties, municipalities, church groups and charitable organizations would not help those in need? There are so many other ways that would have better results. We need to stop the nationalization of the family."

"Kenny ... who has more of a claim to your earnings than you?"

"Please don't let Tina hear you ask that question?!"

"OK, think about this please. The income tax forms allow people to contribute \$3 to the presidential election. The checkoff does not change the amount of tax you owe ... you simply have the option to send \$3 toward financing of the elections. About 88% of taxpayers say NO! It's pretty tough to get 88% agreement on anything in our democracy, but 88% do not want to put the \$3 into that pot, even at no direct cost to themselves. How many people voluntarily give money to the government? Charity is estimated at \$200 billion, maybe \$300 billion in the USA. How much of that is given to government? Right, close to zilch. People don't want government to get more of their money than it already does. People believe they can give it away more effectively themselves."

Freeman went on. "There are a LOT of people who believe taxes should be higher than they are. Well, nothing stopping anyone from giving money to the government. Really, those favoring raising taxes are saying they want to raise OTHER people's taxes. I don't understand people who say they'll happily pay more once the rates are raised. It's not as if what was wrong on December 31st is right on January 1st when a new tax regime becomes law."

Miller was laughing a bit, and he agreed what Freeman said is true. But he changed subjects again, and I could imagine Jenna thinking RIGHT---TAX TALK WILL BORE PEOPLE! "Would you mind talking about football a little bit? Is it true that your high school team went from terrible to terrific in your years there?"

"Football hadn't been much of a sport in our school. But the town put lights in the stadium, and then, with the games on Friday night, it became something to do. Big attendance. That made more kids interested in playing, and the team took it a lot more seriously. The town support was a huge motivation."

"But the team record was 1-9 when you were a freshman?"

"Yes, the varsity was 1 and 9, and our freshman team was 2 and 7. The lights were put in by my sophomore season, and it really changed the way people regarded football in our area. It was a big motivation for the other teams, also, playing under the lights. We were the only ones who had them, and the visitors it seemed were always UP for the game. A lot of people came from other towns to support the visiting teams, and we learned later quite a few people came when their team wasn't playing, just to watch a game and enjoy the evening. Nobody expected that. Other towns have added lights since, of course, now most teams play Friday nights."

"Is it true that, as a freshman, you told your teammates you'd be state champs?"

Freeman stared at Miller for a second, then he said "You've been interviewing my Mom?"

"And is it also true that getting the team to work together to raise funds to install those lights was part of young Freddy's plan?" Miller had a devilish look on his face. I guess he was springing something on Freeman that was not part of the script.

Freeman squirmed a little. "We made a pact that we'd focus year-round to become better individuals and better team mates, with the goal of playing every game the best we could play. Raising the funds for the lights was definitely a team-building exercise. We did an awful lot of practicing on our own. We got to know each other really, really well, and we were conditioned. Preparation like that is huge. And in a team sport like football, cohesion is huge. We had cohesion and preparation. We had dedication and enormous desire. Seeing a team come together like that is a beautiful thing. More beautiful than winning, in a way. The winning is the proof of the pudding."

"Was it in high school that you decided you wanted to go pro someday?"

"Not really a decision. Half the kids who go out for high school ball want to go pro, are hoping to go pro. It's more a case of realizing that's not in the cards than the other way round, probably. And some kids really have the talent. Other kids just won't quit so long as they have a shred of a chance."

"Getting back to something you said earlier ... do you really believe incomes would double and prices would drop by half?"

"Yes. Lately quite a few people have been talking about a flat tax, saying what a huge boon that would be if the tax code was merely simpler and flatter. The abolition of federal taxation would be a vastly greater benefit than would be a flat tax. Would incomes double and prices drop by half? Yes. Federal taxation and regulatory interference supported by taxation is that huge a drag on the economy, in my opinion. But let's say I am wildly wrong, and incomes go up by 50% and prices drop by 25%. That still leaves us with twice the buying power we have now. And a lot less headaches! Or let's say prices go down 20% and incomes go up 20%. That means 50% more buying power. That's something like 25 years of improvement, compared to the recent pace."

"To say the politicians are not going to support your idea would be putting it mildly. Most of them in DC would gouge their own eyes out before they'd take their hands out of our pockets. How do you think you can get this done?"

"If enough people want it, it will get done. We still elect our representatives. We need to elect ones who believe in Freedom, in America and Americans, rather than Washington. But I think it can be hurried along quite a bit at the state level. We do have states that are far more Freedom-loving and individualistic than others. For example, several states are considering whether to defy the federal government in a number of areas. And actually, in some cases the federal government itself, its administrators and executives, are themselves actually defying federal law. There is plenty of precedent. Alaska, Colorado and Washington State defying the federal marijuana prohibition. California and many local jurisdictions defying federal immigration laws. The federal government itself is generally refusing to enforce immigration law. Some jurisdictions have considered legislation to defy Washington's new health insurance. And of course the president also flouting the same laws by giving exemptions and postponements and changes on dozens of occasions."

Now it was Freeman who turned a look on Miller. "Something that surprised me quite a bit my first visit to an IRS office ... they had posters on the walls saying how great our tax system is because Americans pay taxes voluntarily! If you ask me, they have a pretty strange definition of 'voluntarily'. It will be 'voluntary' when there are no requirements and no penalties. But nevertheless, it is very interesting to consider the IRS employees are led to believe our system of federal taxation is 'voluntary' ... that would be fine with me!"

This got a lot of laughs and support from the audience, and Pearl.

Miller laughed along too, then he asked "And you want young people involved because you feel this could be a multi-decade effort?"

"Yes, it could take a long time to change the culture enough to elect the legislators to get it done."

"So you see yourself at 90, still trying to bring people around to your way of thinking?"

"No ... We can get things rolling, we can move the country in this direction very quickly, in a matter of months, and I believe we will. If Communist China can go capitalist, basically abolish communism, the USA can abolish federal tax." The audience rumbled and laughed and clapped at this line, which I knew right away would be popping up again.

"Kenny, we can look to the Founders for guidance. It's right there, in the most-quoted part of the Declaration of Independence ... WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT, THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL, THAT THEY ARE ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS, THAT AMONG THESE ARE LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS. THAT TO SECURE THESE RIGHTS, GOVERNMENTS ARE INSTITUTED AMONG MEN, DERIVING THEIR JUST POWERS FROM THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED. THAT WHENEVER ANY FORM OF GOVERNMENT BECOMES DESTRUCTIVE TO THESE ENDS, IT IS THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO ALTER OR TO ABOLISH IT ..."

None of us at Lambda Chi made a sound, and Miller's set was quiet, too. I could hardly believe he was quoting the Declaration of Independence, and I could swear he had a little difficulty controlling his voice.

Freeman rearranged himself and looked out at the audience, changing his manner. "Imagine Texas declares that Texans are no longer required to pay federal taxes. That Texans themselves will decide what, if anything, DC deserves, and send to DC only what they choose to send. What would the feds do about it? Cut off a lot of payments DC makes to Texas? And probably to individual Texans who did not pay federal taxes. But ... that's about it. There would be a lot of hollering, for sure. A slimestorm of lawsuits. The media would be beside themselves. But when it comes right down to it, there are two reasons taxes get paid. Because people see them as just, and pay voluntarily as in the IRS fantasies, OR, because taxes are collected, ultimately, by force. If Texas provided cover to Texans who refused to pay more than they feel DC deserves, it's inconceivable that additional payments would be extracted by force, as they are routinely from individuals."

Miller's audience was silent for a second or two, then they started hollering and whistling and clapping. Pearl turned to me with a WOW! look on her face. "I'm glad I told my folks about the show. They must be loving this. Freeman is way more radical than I expected."

"He never said anything to me about a state rebelling. I guess he was saving it for the right time."

Pearl looked at me with an expression of assent, and simply said "He found it."

Miller had to raise his voice to be heard, and it seemed to me he was truly delighted to be hosting Freeman. "Hold on! Are you seriously suggesting this? That Texas just say NO!???"

"Yes, I am. Not necessarily Texas, but it is probably the most likely state to do it. We can abolish federal tax by amending the Constitution, and I do hope to see that achieved. It requires 2/3 of Congress and 3/4 of the States. But that route, if pursued on its own, might take an awfully long time, and time's a-wasting. On the other hand, even if a tiny state, such as New Hampshire, rebelled in this way, it might well be enough to really make SWEEP16 happen in a hurry."

Miller seemed as entertained as anyone. "Well, how about it? Anybody from Texas here tonight?"

As usual, a bunch of people hollered, most of them probably not from Texas, just sounding off.

"Would you like to cut off the feds?"

There was a lot more yelling and clapping to this question.

"Well, it sounds like the audience is ready to bring back the Lone Star Republic."

"It would not come to that. Texas pays a buck or so to DC for every 95 cents it gets back. Or at least that's what the researchers claim. So, financially you could say it would be roughly a wash. Texas quits paying to the feds, the feds quit sending money to Texas. Now, a great thing about Texas ... there is no state income tax. So, if Texas decided to exempt Texans from federal taxes, Texans would pay no income tax whatsoever. Plus of course, Texas is our second largest state, both in population and land. If Texas exempted itself from federal taxation, it would experience the biggest economic boom in

history. The world would send huge amounts of capital, and Americans from other states would flock there."

Miller made a few expressions and gestures of disbelief, with a big smile on his face. He seemed ready to speak, but didn't. So Freeman continued. "Kenny, I believe about half of America is ready. We need around two thirds. Quite seriously, our own federal government is far more oppressive economically than was the one we threw off when we declared Independence from Britain. Recent court rulings tell us the feds can use the tax code to essentially compel or prohibit virtually any behavior ... Current law requires a federal regime of, and I quote, 'tooth-level surveillance'. The feds literally want control of every American tooth. It looks more and more as if every telephone conversation and email is recorded by the feds. Seven of America's ten richest counties surround Washington, DC. Government is our unstoppable growth industry."

"You said tooth-level surveillance? We're going to have a federally licensed tooth fairy?"

"More likely, the tooth fairy would be banned or regulated or taxed out of business. United States Senator Mike Lee recently pointed out that in the year 2014, the United States Congress passed 3,300 pages of new laws. Congress is the branch of government with the constitutional authority to make law. But during this same year, unelected bureaucrats at dozens of federal departments and agencies issued 79,000 pages of new and updated regulations ... essentially, these are laws proclaimed by unelected bureaucrats and all of us are subject to them."

Freeman sounded rueful for a second, but he quickly switched to an inspirational tone. "Life now is so much easier than it was in 1776, because of our technology, that we don't really see how demanding our government has become. We have millions of people working to comply with the tax code. About as many as we have in the military!"

"Most of us will do our share. And in particular, the people who already are. We don't need to tie ourselves in tax knots the way we do now. We cannot legislate ourselves to be better than we are. The perverse results of those efforts are everywhere to be seen. Let's end the compulsion for sake of American Freedom and Prosperity and even more for National Cohesion."

"National cohesion?"

"Yes, absolutely. Bonds between our states, our towns, all of our organizations would be strengthened. But much more importantly, bonds between our people ... bonds of friendship, family, marriage. Most divorces are caused by financial stress. Most people are holding jobs ONLY because they need the pay. So much drug and domestic abuse can be viewed as caused by financial stress. A more financially secure America is a happier, more peaceful America, far more conducive to individual growth and Freedom. More love, more marriage, more babies. A far brighter future."

Miller just stared at Freeman with a strange, wide-eyed grin, and the show broke for a commercial.

Pearl offered me a marvelous smile. "SWEEP16 is going to get a lot of attention from this, I think. What do you think?"

I was trying to come up with something better than a thoughtful look when Dad rang me. I might have let it go, but I remembered Pearl speaking about her family and SWEEP16, and I felt tongue-tied anyway, so I asked her to give me a minute.

"Well, I think the cat is really out of the bag now. And roaring." Dad was laughing. "Danny, I already knew Freeman was something special, but ... right this minute, I bet there are millions of people talking about SWEEP16. And a whole lot of them are going to like it."

"I can't disagree. But I'm kind of tied up now."

"Really. Clicks never got that kind of consideration before." When I didn't say anything, Dad said "Well, don't keep her waiting."

"Thanks, we'll talk soon."

"That was your Dad? What did he think?"

"About the same as us. Freeman's trying to force a national conversation."

"I think he's done just that. I'll be talking to my folks about it too. But I should go now. It was nice meeting you."

"Were you looking forward to walking home alone?"

"NO!" She said it emphatically, and happily.

"Good!"

We walked up to the quad and around the main parts of campus. Pearl was so new here she hadn't seen much of this, didn't know the names of some of the old, primary buildings. It was a beautiful night, as nice as it ever gets here. Or anywhere for that matter. And this was maybe the first time I'd ever really felt the campus was great for a scenic walk. Pearl helped me to experience it again, with a fresh perspective. We sat down a couple of times, then walked some more. We never really stopped talking. I liked a lot what Pearl had to say, but even more, I just liked how she said things. I really liked her WAYS, as an old friend used to say. This had been a huge night for SWEEP16 and for my column too. But walking back to Lambda Chi, it was Pearl in my thoughts, and I was pleased as could be to have her phone number.

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"What time do you think Freeman will show?" Clicks are I were in Brattleboro, seated near the front, left side, of an almost-empty auditorium that had a capacity of a few hundred, by my quick count. We were about 40 minutes early for the 7:30 talk.

"I expect he is here already. He allows extra time just in case he hits a delay on the road. Now I bet he's cooling his heels somewhere in the building, making phone calls and sending texts. He surprised me with that. He texts a lot. My Uncle too."

"You haven't said a negative thing yet about this guy, you know."

"I didn't realize that, but ... I don't know if I have anything negative to say. I have a hard time with someone being as rich as he is. But we've talked about that, and I understand more about the money. Plus now he says he's going to give away around 95% of it."

"So tonight he's going to tell people Social Security is bad and should be eliminated?"

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure you could put it that way."

Clicks and I didn't have much to do except wait, so I started doing some stuff with my phone too. Every few minutes I looked around and noted the place was filling steadily. With around 20 minutes to go, the room was already more than half full. I wondered how much of that was due to the Miller Show.

My eye was drawn to a woman wearing bright green and black in the second row, on the other side of the room, and I wasn't surprised at all to recognize Jenna when she turned her head my way. She zeroed in on my smile. It's interesting how a person will pick a face out of a crowd if that face is focused on her. I looked over at Clicks, to see if he'd noticed Jenna, but he was focused on the stage.

By the time Freeman came out front, still a few minutes early, the room was full. This was a fairly small town, and Freeman was going to talk about Social Security. I was kind of amazed at the turnout. Half of these people must have decided to come because of Kenny Miller. But even so.

"You're right about him looking like an athlete, a lot more in person than on TV."

"Yeah." Freeman was making small talk with the people right up front, and this went on for a few minutes beyond 7:30. A senior-citizen came out from behind Freeman and walked to the podium. He called for quiet and apologized for being late. Then he introduced Freeman and told us he'd come to talk about Social Security. The audience received Freeman fairly loudly, about half boos and half cheers. I wanted to get a good view of the audience, so Clicks and I had slid over a few feet and we were standing in a recessed doorway where we had a great view of the audience. From here, I could get a sense of who was booing and who was cheering. I'd expected the feelings on this issue to be pretty well correlated to age, but I was wrong. No correlation at all, from what I could see here now.

Clicks was still looking at Freeman. "Yeah, athlete for sure. But, that's not it, really. Two years in the Marine Corps, I saw some strong, bold men. Some real warriors. I'll tell you something. War marks a man. I swear, I can see it in a man's face sometimes, the face of a total stranger ... that he's been in war. It's rare, but he has that ... mark. WOW!! It didn't really come thru so much on TV last night. He looks like he's fought his way through hell and back."

I just looked at Clicks and nodded. "A lifetime of heavy-duty military service. He told me he's been fighting since he was a little kid."

"Yeah, I don't want that dude on my case."

Freeman introduced himself, thanked everyone for being there, for inviting him. Told them what a lovely town Brattleboro is.

"I've been asked to speak about a campaign called SWEEP16 and America's Social Security System. Brattleboro extended to me the first invitation to speak about SWEEP16, and I'm very grateful to you for this opportunity. The idea behind SWEEP16 is that our federal tax code, while well intended, is actually destroying our country, both financially and more important, morally. We'd be much closer to each other as Americans, we'd have far more money, and prices would be far lower too, if we would simply abolish all of it. And Social Security is a prime example of a bad federal program."

The audience got somewhat loud here, mostly boos. Freeman gave the room a great big smile, then turned his back and flipped over two whiteboards on which he'd written some points. Clicks whispered to me, "Yep, he was here before us." The booing was still going, and Freeman was still smiling. A couple of 70-ish men in the center of the first row stood and tried to shush the crowd, whereupon Freeman broke his silence. "It's OK. After 30 years in the service, I've had a lot worse sent my way."

A guy who looked at least 80 got up and waved his fist at Freeman. "Young man, neither you nor anybody else is going to take away the Social Security and Medicare programs that are so vital to so many seniors. You keep your hands off or we'll be on you like ugly on a ape!!"

"Yes sir! I'm glad we're in agreement because I sure wouldn't want to tangle with you!" There had seemed some tension in the air, as if battle lines were being drawn, but this exchange seemed to dissipate that feeling.

"I agree promises made by Uncle Sam need to be kept, and I believe they will be. But not in the way we've been led to expect. Thank You Sir, for coming out to talk with me." Freeman paused slightly, and looked around, making it clear he was now addressing everyone. "The people who were booing, HUGE THANKS to you for being here, and making your feelings known. And please give me your thoughts, too. I need to hear from you more than from the people who agree. Also, please, it's important we not hold disagreement against each other. Thomas Jefferson, whose thinking has helped inspire SWEEP16, advised that politics not be a barrier to friendship."

This garnered a lot of smiles from the assembly, and even a little applause. Freeman thanked them again, and continued.

"Because Disability and Medicare taxes and benefits are closely tied to Social Security, we'll look at them too."

"America must keep her promises. But with Social Security, we long ago broke the original promise. The Social Security Act of 1935 originally promised:"

YOU AND YOUR EMPLOYER WILL EACH PAY 3 CENTS ON EACH DOLLAR YOU EARN, UP TO \$3,000 A YEAR. THAT IS THE MOST YOU WILL EVER PAY.

"So much for Washington's Social Security promises. But nevertheless, people who've been paying the Social Security and Medicare taxes must be offered what they've been led to expect. Our legislator/politicians have created obligations that must be fulfilled. But we also must change our ways. We have no choice."

"One of my favorite writers, Judge Andrew P. Napolitano, has produced a marvelous overview of Social Security. I thank Judge Nap for these words, and I hope he won't mind my quoting him:

'WHEN SOCIAL SECURITY WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1935, IT WAS INTENDED TO PROVIDE MINIMAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO THOSE TOO OLD TO WORK. IT WAS ALSO INTENDED TO CAUSE VOTERS TO BECOME DEPENDENT ON FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT'S DEMOCRATS. FDR COPIED THE IDEA FROM A SYSTEM ESTABLISHED IN ITALY BY MUSSOLINI. THE PLAN WAS TO HAVE CERTAIN WORKERS AND THEIR EMPLOYERS MAKE SMALL CONTRIBUTIONS TO A FUND THAT WOULD BE HELD IN TRUST FOR THE WORKERS BY THE GOVERNMENT. AT THE TIME, THE AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY OF AMERICANS WAS 61 YEARS OF AGE, BUT SOCIAL SECURITY DIDN'T KICK IN UNTIL AGE 65. THUS, THE SYSTEM WAS GEARED TO TAKE MONEY FROM THE AVERAGE AMERICAN WORKER THAT HE WOULD NEVER SEE RETURNED.

OVER TIME, LIFE EXPECTANCY GREW AND SURPASSED 65, THE SO-CALLED TRUST FUND WAS RAIDED AND SPENT, AND THE SYSTEM WAS PAYING OUT MORE MONEY THAN IT WAS TAKING IN -- JUST LIKE A PONZI SCHEME. FDR CALLED SOCIAL SECURITY AN INSURANCE POLICY. IN REALITY, IT HAS BECOME FORCED SAVINGS. HOWEVER, THE CUSTODIAN OF THE FUNDS -- CONGRESS -- HAS STOLEN THE SAVINGS AND SPENT IT. AND THE VALUE OF THE SAVINGS HAS BEEN DIMINISHED BY INFLATION.'

"Many of our political leaders and analysts are well aware of Social Security's problems. It wasn't long ago one of America's most prominent Governors, the now-former Governor Perry of Texas, told us that Social Security is a Ponzi scheme."

Freeman turned to the whiteboard. "Here are some problems with the Social Security System. We can talk about these items in detail, if there is interest, but now just a few words about each of them. Also, pretty much everything I say about Social Security is posted on the SWEEP16 website."

Freeman tapped the whiteboard next to the top of the list, written in big bold letters. "First, FORCE. The System relies on the threat and sometimes actual application of force ... we don't want to force each other. If Social Security was good, force would not be necessary. Please think about that for a second." There was a sort of a murmur of people talking to each other, but nobody booed, which I took to be significant.

He looked down for 2 or 3 seconds, and I thought about a military guy saying we shouldn't use force. He tapped the board again. "CONFUSING. The great majority of people don't know what they pay, or what their benefits are projected to be. A shocking situation!"

"IMPOSSIBLE PREDICTIONS. Social Security requires extremely long-range planning. How much will need to be paid out 40 years from now? How long will people be living? How many people will be working? How many will be receiving benefits? How will the overall economy do? Interest rates? How much money will the workers be making? How many people will be on disability? Inflation and cost of living? And on and on. But nobody can predict these things reliably. So we make long-term promises that must ultimately rely on short-term fulfillment. The politicians of today obligate the taxpayers of tomorrow, and those of 40 years from now. The politicians might like that, but that's poison to the taxpayer. And to America. At least some of the people studying the situation believe that our politicians have committed our taxpayers to provide well over \$200 trillion in benefits to those who are already participating in our various systems -- of which Social Security is one -- whether as present or future beneficiaries. The national debt, at \$19 trillion or so, is puny in comparison."

"DISCORD, DISINTEGRATION. Social Security has a strong tendency to build resentment among the payers, particularly the younger payers, and government dependency among the recipients. The recipients have certainly earned a check, but nobody can really say how big that check should be. Recipients do know those checks come from the government, and therefore there is a strong trend toward dependency on government for those checks, and dependency on the politicians that keep them flowing. And this dependency corrodes self-reliance and family, community and national cohesion. Of course, politicians use this dependency as an election tool. Much better we rely on ourselves, and on good will toward each other."

"FRAUD, CORRUPTION. Every time the politicians talk about saving money, they tell us they're going to cut \$50 or \$100 billion of fraud, waste, abuse and corruption from Social Security and Medicare. Dead people collecting for years, billing for medical procedures that were never performed or patients that never existed. The system is designed to pay out money promptly, not necessarily wisely. The politicians talk these savings, these problems, every election."

Freeman paused here and shook his head as if in disbelief, and there was a sort of rueful murmur from the audience. I'd glanced over at Jenna a few times. She was either taking notes or looking at Freeman.

"FOISTING EXPENSES. Many of the true expenses of Social Security are not properly recognized because Social Security does not incur them. The Social Security System, because of its ability to command the force of government, forces others to perform many of the services it relies upon, such as sales -- you're SOLD whether you like it or not -- and then collection and payment of the Social Security taxes. This is a huge additional burden to the private sector, and a hidden expense of the system."

"INFLEXIBLE. The private sector can only sell what people want to buy. With Social Security and Medicare, the feds force you, and they don't have to care about providing flexibility."

The audience had quieted down as Freeman got going, and they were giving him a respectful listen. They seemed interested in this stuff. Probably it did affect all of them, and of course, they wouldn't have showed up if they weren't interested. Looking around, I spotted Suzi smiling back at me. Nice! Seeing Suzi reminded me of the three professors, and I found them pretty quick near the back of the

room, on the side opposite Clicks and me. I wondered how serious they really were about being here, or if it was just an excuse for a drive and a change of scenery. This part of the USA has some real winter, so everybody loves June.

Freeman walked away from the whiteboards, back to the front of the stage, and his manner and voice changed a little. I found myself thinking again he seems pretty used to speaking to groups.

"Those are the main points, but there are others. If you're still with me --" Somebody in the audience shouted out YOU BET!! and it startled me a little. Freeman flashed his smile at the guy. "Thanks ... If you're still with me, I'd like to go into some more detail, and I'd like any of you to just jump in with whatever questions or comments you'd like."

He paused for a few seconds and looked around the room, smiling, before he continued. "Let's look at this from the viewpoint of young workers, just entering the work force. If Social Security was a voluntary program, how many would opt in? Very few, I believe. What are the details?"

A voice in the back of the room shouted out "Social Security is America's social contract. It is America's promise that our senior citizens will never be left out in the streets!" It was Professor Clipper.

Freeman seemed to actually like the interruption. "Yours sounds like a voice of passion. I admire that a lot, and thank you for your input." Clipper looked a little annoyed at Freeman's courtesy, but maybe I was just too far away to really read his face.

"A lot of people agree with what you say. To some degree, I do too. But, the first thing on the whiteboard is FORCE. Should a social contract rely on force? Can it even really be a contract when people are forced to participate? To my way of thinking, no. But even if you are OK with forcing people, when you examine the numbers, the program comes up short. Social Security is viewed by many as a boon to the elderly, America's social contract, as you say. And those who see it that way naturally have strong feelings for it. One thing I hope to do tonight is show that the System does not deserve the loyalty people feel for it." Clipper had stood when he spoke, maybe just so Freeman could locate him easily. But he remained standing when Freeman responded to him, and he definitely seemed annoyed by the answer. Maybe he was not used to being at someone else's talk.

"So, if the program was voluntary, if for example you were a young person running the numbers and trying to decide whether or not to participate, would you?"

Clipper, or anyone else, had a chance to answer the question, but nobody did, and Freeman continued.

"In my opinion, most people cannot answer that question very well because they don't really know what the expenses and benefits are, or what they are projected to be. And that lack of information, that ignorance, is itself due to the mandatory nature of the system. If dealing on a voluntary basis, you'd know a whole lot before you agreed to such a huge, long-term expense as Social Security. But because we don't have a choice, most people don't know the basics."

"And by 'basics', I mean, what would taxes be, and what would benefits be? The answer is that both taxes and benefits can be changed by law at any time. So workers do not know, except in the short term, what their taxes will be or what their benefits will be." He walked back to the whiteboards, and flipped over another one where he'd written some numbers, which he pointed to as he spoke.

"Social Security has attracted a swarm of analysts, among them some people working at the Urban Institute. These folks tell us that 2010 was a milestone year. Average people retiring in 2010 or later will actually receive less in benefits than they paid in taxes during their working lives; about 10% less. A negative return. And by the way, this is another broken promise. The government promised clearly that ALL participants would receive more in benefits than they paid in taxes."

"The return just gets worse for people retiring later, absent reform. People retiring in 1980 got back more than double what they paid in. But it's not as if even 1980 retirees were well-served by the system. Mutual funds or even Treasury Bills would probably have made more, even for people who will likely get back double."

"Virtually all workers know that Social Security taxes are levied on their wages, but most do not know what the ceiling is because only a fraction of workers earn enough to stop paying. Social Security taxes are levied on the first \$118,500 for 2016. The ceiling is generally raised annually. It was \$114,000 for 2013 and \$117,000 for 2014. Medicare taxes are levied on all wages. Workers pay 6.2% Social Security tax and 1.45% Medicare tax. And these taxes, by the way, are not deductible against federal income taxes the way state income and property taxes are. So Social Security and Medicare taxes paid by workers are paid with net income but are based on gross wages. This raises the effective rate of taxation considerably. Most workers are also aware that their employers must pay a payroll tax that is equivalent to the tax paid by the worker. So, when a worker is paid \$100, that worker's paycheck is reduced by \$7.65, which is sent to the government. Because the employer pays an equivalent amount, that \$100 of payroll creates \$15.30 in Social Security and Medicare taxes. There are a number of bad things here, not least of which is that most workers do not really focus on the employer end of the tax. But the fact is, the worker must earn the money, regardless of how the tax is paid. If the entire amount was deducted from the employee's check, people would have a much more accurate impression of what the true level of taxation really is. The present method is deceptive and dishonest."

"So when we look at it this way ... the employee earns \$107.65, is paid \$92.35, and then must pay income taxes on \$100. So the true level of the Social Security and Medicare taxation is about 14.2%, not 7.65%. But also, employees in the 15% federal income tax bracket have \$92.35 with which to pay \$15 in income tax. So the Social Security and Medicare taxes have the additional effect of raising the 15% income tax rate to about 16.2%, something that is usually overlooked. And the states follow right along in this regard. They levy state income taxes on \$100. So if you are paying a nominal 5% state income tax, paying \$5 on \$92.35 is actually more than 5.4%. Maybe the craziest part of this setup ... think about this! ... you have to pay income taxes -- federal and maybe state and local too -- on what they TAKE as Social Security tax, and then you have to pay income tax again if you eventually begin to collect Social Security."

Freeman stopped here, and the audience was rumbling some. I could see that he was right ... some of these people had apparently not seen the overall picture the way Freeman was presenting it. I was still wondering how all this would go over ... I kept thinking about how Jenna told me people would be bored by tax details. But right now, people here were paying close attention. Freeman was pretty enthusiastic, and although I knew he had notes on the lectern, he didn't seem to be using them. He did have now three big whiteboards that we all could see.

"So the recap for our young workers ... actually for all workers whose earnings do not exceed the Social Security wage ceiling, is a Social Security and Medicare tax rate of 14.2% -- not 7.65% -- plus a significant hike in the effective federal and in most cases state income tax rates."

"Something else not widely appreciated is that, because it operates by command of government, Social Security can impose its operating costs on others. Expanding on one of the earlier points ... Government simply commands that employers collect the tax and pay it in. And as mentioned, they can change anytime they want. There was a year in the 1980s when Congress decided to raise the Social Security wage base mid-year. So payroll processors had to rejigger their systems, and some people who thought they'd paid all their tax got a nasty surprise. Try doing THAT in the private sector. And government can impose severe penalties for non-compliance. Huge costs are imposed on the private sector, but these costs are generally ignored."

Clipper jumped up again. "When are you going to talk about the people for whom Social Security and Medicare make the difference between comfort and poverty, even life and death?"

"Yes, sir, hugely important. Americans are caught up in this system. People collecting Social Security now have virtually all been paying Social Security taxes their entire working lives. Same for just about all American workers, actually. And if you've paid in, you've got a right to expect a return. We need to keep our promises. And the closer you are to retirement age, the more likely you are to have factored Social Security payments into your plans. We can't let these people down."

Clipper was still standing. "But these are just platitudes you're giving us 'We must keep our promises.' What --"

"Promises that can't be kept; platitudes, are what we're getting from Washington, now. Except we're all forced to participate. Thanks again for underlining my point. Washington is making promises via a taxpayer-financed Ponzi scheme. We need to figure out what to do about that."

I could see Clipper look down at Bidwell, and then take his seat. I couldn't see DocDuh well, but I was sure I glimpsed a big grin on his face. Bidwell seemed unused to a public back-and-forth, whereas Freeman seemed fairly comfortable with it. At least to me it looked like he'd answered Bidwell without really being pulled off his immediate topic.

"So, we are paying huge money into Social Security. Where does the money go? What do our young workers get for their payments? Very little, for a long time. Part of the tax payments go toward disability insurance, which can be collected at any age. And there is a very minimal death benefit. But

the Social Security and Medicare programs are geared toward paying nearly all of the money they take in to people who are no longer in the work force. That is, the young people pay taxes for the benefit of our seniors, who have generally been subject to these payroll taxes their entire working lives. Our seniors are due the money that's been promised them. There is no other course of action. What we need to do, and what the situation on the ground will force us to do, is phase out what we've got and move to an individual-based, voluntary system."

"So ... what is the promise to a young worker today? Pay to Uncle Sam 14.2% of your first \$118,500 (this number is increased almost every year) and someday, if you survive to retirement age, you'll get paid back something. BUT ... there is no account with your name on it and money in it. It's not even legal for private pension plans to operate this way. If you die at age 60, without a spouse or children, your payments have not benefitted you directly. If you do have family, they would be eligible for benefits that you have earned. And because it is so extremely difficult to fulfill long-term promises, private companies have moved away from the so-called defined-benefit programs ... the programs that promise a certain level of payout."

"So where do the payments made by today's workers go? Everything paid in taxes presently is not sufficient to pay current levels of benefits. And the shortfall is growing every year. Not only that, but years ago, when tax receipts exceeded benefits, the extra money was earmarked for a Social Security Trust Fund, but the money was spent as part of the general budget, and the so-called Trust Fund holds only IOUs. So all of today's tax, plus some extra, is paid to today's recipients."

I could see that Freeman was concerned he'd be losing people's interest, and I think he decided he was.

He shook his head and raised his voice a bit and changed his tone. "Yeah, this is why FORCE was the first thing I talked about. Few people would bother wading thru all this detail if Social Security was voluntary ... they'd just walk away. And few people bother wading thru all this detail because the way it is, we have no choice in the matter. Not the way things should be in the Land of the Free!"

"OK ... probably everyone has noticed this. It is a fact of American financial life that there is a very strong correlation between age and money. You tend to have little money when you are young and just beginning to work. And generally, the older you are, the more money you make and the more money you have. So on average what we are doing is taxing people who have little in order to make payments to people who have a lot more money than the people paying the taxes. Pew Research claims that in 2009, senior households had almost 50 times the wealth of households under 35 years of age. But that's not even the end of it tho, because everyone with income still has the federal income tax to deal with, seniors on Social Security are no exception. And so, many seniors are paying significant income tax on their Social Security income, which is pretty perverse."

"Something else. Maybe the biggest problem in the system, outside of the use of force. As stated a couple of times already, predictions are difficult at best. Many people have remarked that Social Security was instituted to begin payments to individuals at age 65 at a time when people generally only lived to age 60 or so. Nobody can say what will happen to our lifespans. Personally, I'm thrilled to see the present dramatic extension of health and vigor for so many of us, and I believe this trend is

accelerating. It's great ... it would be hard to overstate how great it is. But it's creating huge problems with Social Security and Medicare because the ratio of workers to retirees has fallen drastically over the decades. And of course, another thing nobody can predict is birth rate. If you run a system like Social Security, you have to make accurate demographic and financial predictions. Birth rates, longevity, health, health care expenses, wages, employment levels, cost of living Nobody can predict those things. Increasing longevity and falling birth rates are a huge problem in parts of Europe and Asia. America does not have the problem on the same scale, at least not yet. But this is another reason why our Social Security System is unsustainable. It relies on projections that cannot be accurately made. Forty or fifty years ago, we had about 50 workers for every person collecting disability. Now we have about 13. It's far worse for Social Security itself. In 1940 there were about 160 workers for every beneficiary. By 1950 it had dropped to 16. That is, the ratio of recipients to workers jumped by a factor of 10 in only 10 years. Do you think Congress could have sold the 1950 numbers to the American taxpayer in 1940? Now we have less than 3 workers supporting each retiree. Every hundred workers today provides benefits to about 35 retirees and 8 people on disability. We just hit 11,000,000 people on disability. That is, 100 payers and 43 recipients, plus administrative overhead. And don't forget, the Baby Boomers are beginning their retirement years. Trouble is here, and it doesn't matter whether you love the concept of Social Security or not."

"Another problem with Social Security is the way it encourages dependency. Wouldn't everyone much prefer to be able to draw on their own personal savings? Yeah, if that 14.2% had been conservatively invested for all those years, how much would your account have in it at age 62? There are some countries, Chile is the best example, that have a tax like our Social Security, BUT each worker's tax payments can be invested in a personal account that really is the property of that worker. Chilean workers who invest in the stock market have roughly triple the benefits of American workers. And at death, they can leave their assets to others in their will. The Chilean system is very much NOT a Ponzi scheme."

I'd noticed Americans generally don't much like when anyone tells them another country does something better, and this bit about Chile seemed to me not so well received here. I guess Freeman was thinking along the same lines, because he stopped and repeated and clarified a little about the Chilean system. But he didn't back off at all, instead emphasizing that the Chileans used true individually-owned, personal accounts and that payouts were roughly triple. That really seemed to get people's attention, and as I looked around I thought I could see on some people's faces that they were going to research this bit on their own. Even a doubled payout, let alone TRIPLE, would be an absolutely huge difference.

"Another troublesome aspect is that the present system does have a tendency to pit old against young, a poison we don't need. There are other similar inequities. Everyone knows some families tend to be longer-lived than others. Some ethnicities too. Women on average live maybe three years longer than men. If you are someone in one of the generally shorter-lifespan groups, you can reasonably feel that the odds are stacked against you, and that Social Security tends to disadvantage you and your family even more than it does longer-lived groups. Few seem to focus on this issue, but if the extent of the

disparities were well-known, my guess is there would be some significant pushback based on this alone."

"Even the record-keeping can be a problem. A recent audit showed over 6.5 million active Social Security numbers belonging to people more than 112 years old, with several thousand of them even from before the Civil War." He shook his head with a rueful, frustrated smile.

Freeman walked around a little, and by gestures made it clear he'd finished with one part of the talk.

"So, the main points: I don't believe Social Security and Medicare would exist absent force. To me, America is about Freedom. We should strive mightily to avoid the use of force, particularly against our fellow Americans. So right there, that's enough for me to be against Social Security and Medicare."

"But beyond that, would anyone starting from scratch design the system as it is now? Absolutely not. We're in this situation because people made predictions they should not have made, and they made promises that other people must keep."

I looked at my watch ... Freeman had been going about 25 minutes. People still seemed interested. I didn't notice much fidgeting, and I didn't see anyone reading emails or texting. This was impressive to me, given how boring most people find this kind of stuff. On the other hand, tho, it looked like most everyone here was probably a taxpayer. Something that I still really wasn't. It's probably a lot more interesting when you are caught up in it.

"I said earlier that predictions of the type required to operate Social Security are difficult to make. And any financial analyst can tell you extrapolating trends is an easy trap to fall into. So there are good reasons to think the people predicting Social Security will fail are wrong. And I'm one of those people predicting it will fail, absent big changes. Retirement ages are already being raised. Next, Social Security will be means-tested. That is, the government will decide who really needs the money, and who doesn't. And some people will get reduced payouts, or no payout, because they have other resources. Some will say that is fair ... but it is also changing the game in a perverse way. We will penalize self-sufficiency and reward dependency. We will penalize thrift and prudence and industry and reward the opposite."

"So, my talk is almost finished, there is just one more topic I'd like to mention, please. What about SWEEP16? How would abolishing all federal taxation help with the problems Social Security faces? Very basically, our system of federal taxation imposes huge inefficiencies on the private sector. These burdens are significantly exacerbated in many cases by state and local taxation, although SWEEP16 does not directly address those issues. Absent all federal taxes, I believe we'd generally double our incomes, and prices would fall by half. We'd be enormously wealthier. We wouldn't need Social Security except to continue payments promised to people who have earned them and need them."

Freeman looked around the room, making eye contact here and there. "Everything covered tonight can be reviewed at SWEEP16.com, plus a lot more. I really appreciate your having invited me here tonight,

and your coming out to listen. I'm hoping some of you will stay and talk some more, please. Soft drinks and snacks and sandwiches will be on the tables in back momentarily. Thank You all again."

Freeman got a good bit of applause, certainly more than just courtesy, and if there were people booing, they were drowned out.

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Food and drink sounded good to me, and I knew Jelly Belly Bidwell would be interested. But also I wondered ... would Bidwell and Clipper feel honor-bound to refuse Freeman's hospitality? I felt kind of like a host here myself. I'd invited Clicks, Suzi, Jenna and the profs. I had no idea Freeman was going to provide a buffet, but I guess if I'd given it any thought I would have suspected as much. He'd obviously liked the informal setting at Pendleton better than the presentation in front of a crowd. Jenna and the profs would be fine on their own ... Suzi, maybe not so much, so when Clicks gestured toward the food, I told him to go ahead and made my way over to her.

Suzi greeted me like an old friend, and actually, I sort of felt that way about her, too. "Well, any thoughts?"

Suzi was still smiling when she answered me. "Mr Freeman is an impressive man. I've read your columns, and I read up about him elsewhere too. Arnold would love that I am here tonight! Thanks for inviting me, Danny."

"Ha! Thanks for picking me up! That WAS a great ride!"

"I decided to have a late dinner tonight, but I did not expect it to be here."

"Freeman seems to like to have an informal meeting after the scheduled event. C'mon, I'll take you over to meet him."

Freeman had several people around him, so we helped ourselves to a couple of drinks and kept a little distance from him. Looking around again, I saw Jenna headed our way. "What do you think, Mister Columnist?"

"Good to see you Jenna, really good." I introduced Jenna and Suzi, and told Jenna about my ride with Suzi

"I've never done any hitchhiking, but I do like to give rides, if the guy looks safe. There don't seem to be any girls hitchhiking."

"Danny is the only hitchhiker I've ever picked up. Funny how it worked out!"

"It is something that sort of matches the spirit of SWEEP16. When I told Freeman that Suzi is looking for some new things to get into, he was interested in speaking with her."

We spoke a little about Brattleboro and such, and when Jenna looked beyond me I turned to see Freeman walking up to us. Jenna greeted him with a hug, which surprised me some. He looked at Suzi for an instant, then at me, but before I could speak, Suzi introduced herself with the explanation that we'd met when I was hitchhiking.

"Yes, Danny told me about you. Thank You for your interest. It's so nice of you to come. May we find a quiet corner somewhere?"

Freeman and Suzi stepped away, and left me with Jenna. "Can I get something for you?"

"So what did you think of the Miller Show last night? Is Texas going to ... SAY NO!!!?" She ignored my offer, and her manner got my attention.

"Well, not tomorrow. But you know what ... I bet a lot of Texans are talking about it."

"You're right, not tomorrow. But next year? Maybe. It's already a big topic down there. I've been talking to friends in Texas, and a lot of Texans are saying YEAH, LET'S DO IT! It's all over the radio. SWEEP16 was not getting much attention yesterday, but Miller's show has an audience of millions. Freeman came off really well, and today I know there are a lot of people talking back and forth that SWEEP16 is just crazy enough to work. As of last night, it became a serious idea, I think. It had not occurred to me that there was a path other than the standard, obvious way. But Freeman has sort of thrown down a gauntlet, a dare, almost, and an awful lot of Texas is thinking seriously about taking him up on it. I'm headed for Dallas tomorrow."

"Wow, watching the show last night, we knew SWEEP16 suddenly had a lot more attention, but I didn't think to find out what was up in Texas."

"Actually, a couple of friends called me. You'll want to get on the web and check out the editorials in the Texas papers tomoro. I bet every major paper will be on it. Did Freddy say anything to you?"

"No. Except to tell me Miller wanted private time with him, and he was apologetic about that."

"How do you feel about Texas?" Jenna smiled at me for a few seconds, waiting for me to figure it out. But I didn't. "I expect you will be there pretty soon. I'll bet Freeman will be there within a week. I'll bet he's already been contacted for interviews and presentations like the one he gave tonight. You'll want to be ready to go."

I'd thought things were moving sort of quickly before, but now it was another gear. "WOW ... I've never even been in Texas. My first visit is going to be a business trip? WHOA." I was startled to find myself looking forward to telling Pearl. "Do you mind if I grab a sandwich?"

"Good idea. Freeman obviously wanted people to stay for a while. Seems he wanted to have something to appeal to anyone."

Jenna was apparently more interested in reviewing the guests and the offerings than in actually filling a plate, so I just walked with her from one table to the next. Not that I minded seeing what was available, but it also struck me it was being depleted, and I was hungry. I noticed Clicks had found a quiet spot by himself, and was honoring a large sandwich.

We'd worked our way across the hall, and Jenna had not yet approached within arm's reach of any of the tables. I guess that's a real difference between a guy my age and a petite woman ten years older. Reaching the other side, I locked eyes with Doc Bidwell as he took a big bite of a sandwich. He looked at me for a second, then at Jenna, and I could see that he recognized her. It amused me to see the old goat put down his sandwich and hurriedly chew and swallow. He wasn't doing that for me. Clipper and DocDuh were smiling at us. I greeted them and introduced Jenna. I thought of Bidwell's recent, scornful comment about Jenna being a low-cut journalist. But the times I'd seen her she was dressed modestly. On this occasion, at least, Bidwell seemed nothing but pleased to meet her.

All of them had stood when I made the introductions, and for a moment it seemed a little clumsy with the three of them standing over their food.

Jenna was quicker than me. "May I join your table?"

After she was seated, she turned to Bidwell. "You were Danny's advisor, weren't you?" It took me a second to remember I'd told her this a while ago, and it surprised me she remembered. Actually, it always surprises me when people remember what I say, just more so than usual with Jenna. Bidwell seemed more surprised, and he obviously liked it, too.

"Yes, I was, and it was a pleasure working with Danny. A student who finds his calling so early is a treat for an advisor. I hope Danny always bounces ideas off me. And I understand he's been bouncing quite a few ideas off you."

Before Jenna could answer, Clipper jumped in. "Are you a SWEEPER?" The look on his face was mischievous, rather than combative. And given the setting, it was a reasonable question.

Jenna stared at him for a moment, and inquired if he was asking whether she supported SWEEP16. "Yes, I think so. More a supporter of Freeman, actually."

"What does THAT mean?"

"It means I admire Freeman a great deal, and that leads me to support SWEEP16 even without considering it thoroughly, which would take weeks or months and would probably be impossible anyway."

"I considered it thoroughly within 3 seconds. It's ridiculous."

"My aged friend is an exceptionally quick thinker, and always confident in his conclusions." Durreg had hardly taken his eyes off Jenna, and I could swear he'd turned up his Russian accent somewhat when he

spoke to her. I almost laughed out loud thinking he might well have done it on purpose to pique her interest in him. "Congratulations on being the first to sign Freeman's list."

Jenna's face showed surprise and a little amusement. "Thank You Doctor. Do you share your colleague's disdain for SWEEP16?"

"People call me Niv."

"People call him DocDuh." Clipper obviously didn't think giving Durreg a hard time in front of Jenna was out of bounds.

"In acknowledgement of my good humor and humility, my friends, displaying their grammar school sophistication, have contracted 'Doctor Durreg'. And NO, Pete and I disagree on everything. I was happy to add my name to Freeman's list."

"Two econ professors disagreeing. Imagine that!"

Jenna gave me a polite smile, the profs didn't seem to have heard me speak. Durreg was still fixed on Jenna.

We talked for a few minutes about tonight's turnout, and I saw Suzi and Freeman heading toward us. When they were still several tables away, I stood to greet them. Freeman gave me a smile, said something to Suzi and peeled off as I stepped forward and then escorted Suzi back to our table. I really liked and admired this senior lady, and it seemed neither Freeman nor I felt she should be left without an escort. I introduced Suzi and grabbed a chair for her. As it turned out, she wound up sitting between Jenna and me, and it was impossible not to notice how similar they were, although it had not occurred to me until now. It was automatic to think that in 40 years or so, Jenna would probably become quite a bit like Suzi

"May I bring you ladies some refreshment?" This was DocDuh, and I surmised Suzi's arrival gave him a chance to offer something to Jenna without doing so directly. Suzi and Jenna looked at each other, and I'm sure a thought passed between them wordlessly. I even think I knew what it was. Then I caught myself thinking if Pearl was here I could ask her if I was right.

"Thank You, young man."

All three profs walked off ... Bidwell and Clipper probably focused on a feed. I was dying to know what had happened with Suzi and Freeman, but when she and Jenna began to talk about their shoes, I dashed off to grab a couple of sandwiches. Halfway to the food, I became suspicious the shoe-talk was designed to liberate me. Jenna probably pitied me some, given our buffet-cruise had left me high and dry.

Returning with the profs a few minutes later, Clicks was there with the ladies, and Jenna announced to the table that Suzi had something pretty interesting to relate to us.

Suzi explained how she and I had met, and how she'd come to be here tonight. "I just spent a few minutes speaking quietly with Mr Freeman -- he asked me to call him Freddy -- and I'm really looking

forward to helping with SWEEP16. I'm the first Project Manager. My job is to seek out worthy people, worthy projects. To come up with ideas and a plan to achieve something positive, productive, inspirational. He said it would be up to me, really, to figure out what it should be, how it should work. And I'll have \$100,000 budget."

Jenna had a big smile as Suzi spoke. "Wow! Just like that?"

"We spoke only a few minutes. Freddy is a very ... earnest and forthright man. When I came here tonight, I did not really have expectations, but I know Arnold, my late husband, wants me here. I've never thought of myself as a Project Manager, but Freddy said he has confidence in me. How could I have earned his confidence in only a few minutes? Danny, what did you tell him about me?"

I'd been watching Bidwell's face as Suzi spoke -- Bidwell was openly hostile to SWEEP16, but he kept it quiet now. I was glad to see he did not want to dampen Suzi's excitement. "I told him you'd given me a ride ... that I was your first hitchhiker. About how you'd raised a family and worked with Mr Ajemian."

Suzi's laugh made me stop. "Mr Ajemian? I haven't heard that for a while. Everyone called him Arnie except me." She was thoughtful for a moment, then continued. "You'll never guess the first question Freddy asked me."

Nobody said anything at first, so Jenna filled the space. "Employment interviews usually start with work history, education."

"Yes, I know, that's what I expected. But it was nothing like that. He wanted to know who I love, what I love, what I believe in. To me, that was quite remarkable. He's a very masculine, very rugged-looking man, but he speaks with such gentle tenderness. He asked what inspires my strongest emotions. Then he asked me what I thought about SWEEP16, and why I was interested in helping. Lastly, he asked if I'd agree to be the first SWEEP16 Project Manager. And so now I will be trying to figure out what to do with one hundred thousand dollars."

Clipper and Bidwell were listening intently to Suzi, and I did not see scorn or hostility on their faces. Discomfort, yes.

I hadn't thought this through at all, but I had not imagined Suzi would be involved with Freeman so quickly. "That was the whole thing?!"

"Well, no, but almost." Clipper and Bidwell exchanged glances, and I could almost hear them hoping for something to come down on. "He said there is no timeframe, but that I'd need to be prepared to manage or at least monitor my project. And that if it all possible, he'd like 100% of expenditures to be invested in the project. So I won't have a salary, and I want to cover my own expenses ... car, gasoline. I hope to do something near my home. And I have a new email address ... Suzi@SWEEP16.com ... that's about it. I'll talk to Freddy once a week or so."

"Where is the hundred K?" Clipper was still looking for some sleaze.

"I don't know. Freddy said he'd provide the money once I was ready to use it."

Durreg was still just the opposite of Clipper. "This sounds like great stuff Suzi! Congratulations and good luck!"

"Oh, and Freddy would like me to write about it, he called it 'blogging', on the SWEEP16 website. If I feel comfortable doing that. My daughters will be so surprised!" Clipper and Bidwell were doubtless skeptical as ever, or at least ALMOST skeptical as ever, but Suzi was too obviously excited and happy for them to go negative.

Clicks had stopped eating when Suzi began talking, but he didn't say anything until now. "Wow, that DOES sound great Suzi! And just like that, only a few minutes." He must have been thinking about his own upcoming job interview.

"Well, now that I've got work to do, I suppose I should get started. Will you all please excuse me? I'd like to speak with some of these people." Suzi surprised us all, I think, with that.

Looking around and counting roughly, I estimated about 120 people still here. The atmosphere had become festive, which was quite nice and unexpected, even after Pendleton. Freeman was seated at a table across the room, engaged with several men about his own age. From their faces, the conversation could not have been adversarial, maybe not even serious. Good chance they were talking sports. I decided to join Freeman's table, but I hoped eventually he'd make it over to the pros. I was really curious to see how that would go.

By the time I walked near, Freeman had moved to another table, and was greeting them as his guests when I came close enough to hear. He introduced me as THE journalist covering SWEEP16, and that was the first time anyone had introduced me as a journalist. At this table were two men and two women, all I judged to be in their late 20s.

"Thank You for coming. I hope you feel it was worth your time."

"Yes, certainly. We've all been interested in SWEEP16 since we first heard about it. You could say we are all Republican-leaning advocates of smaller government, which makes us a little lonely in Vermont. But none of us had considered anything so extreme -- sorry if that word is offensive to you -- as SWEEP16!"

"No apology necessary! SWEEP16 is certainly extreme, by today's standards. And of course that is part of what I see as a problem we face here in America today. People have become used to ... comfortable ... with the idea the feds can tax us however they choose. I believe, tho, that if we think about and discuss alternatives such as SWEEP16, it quickly becomes natural to think of the feds being held quite strictly in check."

"What are the alternatives to SWEEP16?"

"Eliminating the 16th Amendment would pretty well abolish the federal income tax. Some analysts believe the Constitution enables the feds to tax income even without the 16th, but let's say for argument that repeal of the 16th would eliminate the income tax, but that's all. There are other federal taxes that are presently levied. And here the situation is better than in many other countries. But the feds tax alcohol and tobacco, sporting goods, fuel. They levy import tariffs, which are ultimately paid by the American consumer. Communications are heavily taxed in the USA. Corporations pay extremely high tax rates, relative to other countries. The Estate and Inheritance Taxes -- well known to opponents as the Death Tax -- is a particularly ugly tax. Gas taxes, excise taxes, insurance programs imposed as taxes ... And there are others that are not levied in the USA, but could be. A lot of folks favor eliminating the income tax in favor of a VAT -- a Value Added Tax -- for example. VATs are imposed across Europe. I'd hate to see that happen here, but a VAT would in many ways be an improvement over an income tax. So if we eliminated only the income tax, we might just wind up playing whack-a-mole with the tax-lovers in DC. So the idea is to tame leviathan by abolition of the federal ability to tax us."

Freeman had gotten going a little, and people had knotted around him. He paused momentarily and surveyed the room as a big smile spread across his face. "It's great so many of you have decided to stick around for a while." He stood and looked over the tables of refreshment. "We're still good with the sandwiches and all?"

A woman who was standing near Freeman attracted his attention, and his wide-screen smile drew her out. "Some are going to say this is all about money. What do you say to them?"

"Money is a big thing, but if money is your only problem, you're in pretty good shape. You don't know what a problem is until you or a loved one has a health problem. But when you have a real problem, money can help. And if you have a real problem and you're broke, it's worse than it otherwise would be. SWEEP16 is about Freedom more than anything else. But it is also very definitely about money, and the things money can do. Thanks for bringing this out. The psychologists are telling us half of all marriages end in divorce, and the biggest problem in most marriages is financial. It may well be that our federal government is contributing to divorce. I do believe leviathan is exacerbating many social problems."

A guy about my age seemed like he wanted to speak, but when Freeman paused to let him in, he looked uncomfortable and just said something like THIS IS REALLY GOOD, THANKS FOR DINNER, which made everyone laugh, including Freeman.

"Glad you like it! Martello's was highly recommended, rightly so. ... A number of people have remarked that many government programs are perverse in their incentives and effects. We tax people who work, and pay people who don't. There are other less obvious but very important effects of taxation. How many people are working solely because of the tax man? It's well known, for example, that the more money a husband makes, the less likely his wife is to work. How many wives would quit jobs they don't like if the husband's earnings took a big jump? How many husbands might do something different if their wives' checks could cover? If wages went up a bunch, prices went down a

bunch ... it would change our lives. A lot. How much more flexibility would people have? Retire younger? Take a more fulfilling but lower-paying job?"

Freeman looked around a little, but nobody else was ready to speak, so he continued. "A lot of Americans have ... absorbed the idea that the government is supposed to be in charge, that it's right for the government to take our property -- our money -- and that money in the possession of government is a good thing. But force is not a good thing. And a central idea of SWEEP16 is that people will do voluntarily what they believe is good."

The guy who liked the dinner was ready to speak, and Freeman's smile invited him to do so. "Why are you doing this?"

Freeman nodded. "Maybe I should have started off the evening by explaining that. There are many reasons, but the big one is this. I've been fighting for America, believing I was protecting American Freedom, for 30 years. I've always believed it was important, the right fight. But lately I've come to believe the biggest threat to our Freedom is the federal leviathan. Some of you will know the line from Walt Kelly ... WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY AND HE IS US. That's how I see it now. So this is a new kind of fight, but this is my fight now."

When nobody said anything, Freeman stood up and thanked them for coming, and moved on. There were still plenty of people around, and a lot of them just seemed to be loafing with friends, enjoying some diversion and free food. Catching my eye, he came toward me. "Anything good for your column tonight?"

"Yes, good stuff tonight, but nothing compared to last night!"

This brought out Freeman's big-time smile, and I was a little unhappy with myself when I realized my smile was as wide as his. Again I felt like I was being pulled in. "I was as surprised as could be when you suggested Texas just go rogue. Jenna said a lot of Texans are taking the idea seriously."

"That's great! I'm going to have to speak with her."

"She'd like that. She's headed for Texas tomorrow, and she came up here tonight I think because she believes, as I do, that SWEEP16 moved to another level as a result of your appearance on Miller."

"He's a fine man, and he gave me an enormous opportunity. We really hit it off, and he believes in SWEEP16. He said it seems like a natural idea, once you think about it for a while."

He looked so happy with his thought I didn't want to say anything. So after several seconds he continued. "There was no missing Jenna in that bright green dress. Was that Clicks standing next to you in the doorway?"

Again I couldn't help but be impressed by his memory and awareness. "Yes, Clicks. Suzi said she is a Project Manager with a \$100,000 budget." I tried to say it with Jenna's statement-as-question inflection, and felt foolish.

"She is. I'm confident she'll come up with something excellent."

"She was bubbling when she told us about it, and then she went off to talk with people in the crowd here. Said she wanted to get some ideas. And she said she's the first more or less official SWEEP16 Project Manager."

Freeman nodded agreement, but didn't say anything. He cast his eyes around the room, and I sensed he was about to move to speak with some more of his 'guests', then asked "Those three men you were sitting with ... you seemed to know them."

"Yes, the fat one was my advisor at school, and a guy I really like, Doc Bidwell, journalism professor. Of the three, Bidwell is the only one I really know. The thin one is Nivram Durreg. He's a Marine Corps vet working in the economics department. And he's a real fan of SWEEP16. The not-as-fat one is Doc Bidwell's friend, an econ prof named Peter Clipper -- ". Freeman's look of recognition caused me to stop. "You know Clipper?"

"I've read some of his work, but did not recognize him. He's a big-government, central-planner type of guy. No wonder his questions had a bit of an edge. SWEEP16 is antithetical to his work. He's the kind of person I need to speak with."

And with that, he headed straight for Clipper's table. Jenna was nowhere in sight, only the professors sitting together talking and drinking and, in Bidwell's case, eating. DocDuh noticed Freeman approaching them, and stood when he was several steps away, which caused Bidwell and Clipper to look up. When Freeman reached them, Bidwell stood with a smile, but Clipper remained seated for a short time, and then stood after what seemed a pointed delay. I realized belatedly that I should have provided the intros, but Durreg was already going. DocDuh made it clear in words and expression that he was very happy to meet Freeman. Bidwell was well-fed and in jolly mode. I could see him swallow hurriedly so he could speak.

"Thank You for hosting an interesting evening! My compliments to your caterer. It's very unusual to find the bread in such excellent condition at a large event such as this."

Freeman seemed genuinely pleased and a little amused at Bidwell's considered praise of the grub. But he took Bidwell's comments seriously. "The caterer's offer of fresh-baked rolls gave me confidence in them. And I agree ... A sandwich is all about the bread. I'll be sure to tell them their efforts were appreciated."

Clipper was cordial but stiff, and seemed to make a point of standing and staring at Freeman for a couple of seconds after the rest of us sat down. I suppose he was more or less gearing himself up for a confrontation, but the idea of soft, pudgy Bidwell facing off against Freeman in anything other than a purely verbal match was absurd. Even Bidwell must have known it.

"I'm glad to be able to match a face to your name, Doctor Bidwell. I enjoyed your essay in the Journal a few weeks ago. The one on the ripple-effect of government spending."

"You enjoyed it? Thank You. I'm a bit surprised tho. My work is pretty devastating to the concept of SWEEP16." Clipper seemed fascinated. Durreg had a mischievous smirk on his face.

"Sure ... I realize that's how many would see it. For me, it's important to engage those who disagree with me, and I hope we can discuss our ideas soon." From what I could tell, Freeman was glad to be sitting with Bidwell, and not at all vexed or confrontational, as Bidwell appeared to be.

"Why not talk now, then?"

"There are quite a few people still here, and I want to visit with as many as possible, even for just a little bit. But it would be nice to speak with you for a few minutes now. Mainly I just wanted to stop by and thank you -- all of you -- for coming, and for your questions earlier. Doctor Bidwell, THANK YOU for advising Danny. He has a strong commitment to the truth. What could be greater than that? Doctor Durreg, Danny said you served in the Marine Corps."

"Yes sir, my brother and I both. My brother still serves. The military gave us the opportunity to become American citizens. The great honor of our lives."

Freeman and Durreg locked eyes for a second or two and I reflected this must be where the expression THEY SEE EYE TO EYE comes from.

Durreg continued, "I know you still serve, Mister Freeman. I believe in SWEEP16, and I plan to help."

"What we need more than anything else are people spreading the word and leading by example."

Clipper groaned, I guess for Freeman's attention, which he got. "Yes, I would welcome a chance to speak at length with you, Doctor Clipper."

"I'm sure we can arrange that. Would you be willing to debate on campus one night this summer?"

"I'd much prefer an informal discussion. The rules of formal debate are too restrictive."

"Good, yes, I agree. Looking forward to it! One thing I'd like to tell you right now ... Nobody forces me to pay my taxes. I pay them proudly, happily, almost joyfully. I feel good knowing my work, my earnings, are helping to advance the common cause."

"I'm glad you told me. Thank You. That's the kind of thinking that makes me believe SWEEP16 can and will be a success. I have no doubt America has more than enough people like you who will do their share or more without compulsion of any sort."

Clipper looked stunned for a moment, and DocDuh had to work to keep a straight face. I don't know how Clipper expected Freeman to respond to him, but clearly he was not expecting his statements to be taken as an endorsement of SWEEP16. I was getting to know Freeman well enough to realize he understood what Clipper had been up to, and was quick enough to take Clipper at his word, and at the same time sort of turn his intent inside out. It was funny to witness.

Of course, Clipper couldn't let it go at that. "You said you enjoyed my essay, even tho -- if I can be perfectly frank -- it pretty well demolishes your SWEEP16?"

"I enjoyed the article because it was well-written and demonstrated strong commitment to conclusions reached honestly. I love to see that, and I admire it. But -- I'm glad we're speaking frankly -- I disagree with the essay's quantitative and particularly qualitative conclusions. And I disagree even more with fundamental assumptions which the essay presents as fact in order to reach its conclusions. I certainly agree with you that quite a few people, probably including the newspaper editors who reviewed the essay prior to publication, feel your reasoning demolishes SWEEP16. The essay did not present any ideas I'd not previously considered and rejected. But, these are the types of arguments, assumptions and conclusions I need to address."

Freeman had spoken without any trace of scorn or sneer, and I found it difficult to believe he didn't feel any, given Clipper's bearing. My guess is that he just viewed Clipper as he said ... a mindset he needed to engage and change. If he had any personal reaction to Clipper, it was invisible to me. On the other hand, he'd pretty well thrown Clipper's FRANK talk back at him, even more dismissively than Clipper's own.

Clipper, tho, was sort of glaring at Freeman, so I decided to mention something Doc Bidwell had told me after our first lunch with Durreg. "I've been told Doctor Durreg tutors needy kids in the city of Syracuse."

This bit of info had clearly made DocDuh a little uncomfortable. Freeman smiled at him and softly said "Jarhead", then a couple of sentences in what I assumed was Russian. Freeman and DocDuh continued in Russian briefly, I think they were talking about where their families were from. Then Freeman spoke to the three profs, "Gentlemen, it's been a pleasure meeting you all, and thanks again for coming. Maybe we can continue our exchange of ideas later, after everyone else has gone. But either way, looking forward to seeing you in Syracuse."

We all watched as he walked off and joined another group nearby.

Durreg spoke first. "Well, now I've got something to really look forward to. How about you, Clipper?"

"Absolutely. I wish we'd had a chance to tell him about our bet, tho."

"It's something he should know about, I guess, if he is going to be debating -- discussing SWEEP16 with you publicly."

They looked at me. "I'll tell him. Do something for me tho please, write the bet down and send me a mail so I don't make a mistake."

We were quiet for a while, and I was just relaxing, idly watching Freeman. It wasn't long ago he was laid up and fighting off infection, looking gaunt as a scarecrow. And I thought about how he'd busted open some stitches while we were working out. And yet now he showed no sign of fatigue, or pain. The

simple explanation, really, is that he actually was just enjoying himself. It seemed kind of dopey, but I resolved to ask him directly as soon as I had the chance.

Suzi and Jenna showed up not far behind his seat, and it was basically impossible not to notice them, given their bright outfits. Clicks finished the last bite of another sandwich and walked over to them. I felt like I should join them and introduce Clicks to Freeman, but given the way he was immediately welcomed by Jenna and Suzi, I decided to just sit and take it in. The three of them waited until Freeman was excusing himself, then Jenna linked her arm into Freeman's and pulled him over to Suzi and Clicks. Although I couldn't hear what she was saying, it was obvious Jenna was introducing Clicks to Freeman, which for some reason really amused me. Clicks stood with a smile frozen on his face. This was NOT the usual Clicks, and it almost made me laugh aloud seeing the effect Freeman had on him. When Clicks nodded at Freeman, I was pretty sure I read a YES SIR on his lips, and I would have bet Freeman had just asked him if he'd ever served. I'd never thought much about Clicks' time in the military. Clicks had a level of maturity and focus that was beyond the rest of us, and although I figured part of that was simply him also being a couple years older, I couldn't help but reflect now that I'd often heard people say the military will make a man out of a boy. As Clicks and Freeman walked off together, I knew for sure his time in the service would not diminish Clicks in Freeman's eyes.

I was wondering how Freeman's talk with Clicks would go when I was jolted back to awareness by DocDuh. "I think my side of our bet is looking pretty good, Clipster!" Durreg was obviously pleased with himself, and Clipper's silence only added to his enjoyment. "Good road trip! Got room for another sandwich, Bidwell? Why not take one for later, too? Maybe there is no free lunch, but this looks an awful lot like a free dinner! Excuse me, boys."

Durreg made his way over to Jenna and Suzi while I sat with Clipper and Bidwell. "If we left town without him right now, how long do you think it'd be before he noticed?" Clipper laughed. "We'd probably be half way back to Syracuse, and I don't know that he'd care, either."

We all laughed a little, watching DocDuh talking with Jenna. "It has been a good road trip tho, Clipper."

I felt pretty weird, sitting back informally like this, as if it was normal for me to hang with two full professors.

"Yes it has. Beautiful ride, beautiful evening. Some good fun. I hope Niv gets her number. And you know what else, Clipster. Danny's right about one thing anyway. Freeman is sincere. And he's more formidable than I expected."

Did these guys really think Freeman would NOT be formidable? Compared to a couple of middle-aged professors?

Clipper had not taken his eyes off Durreg and Jenna, but he wore a smile. Maybe he too was hoping Durreg could connect with Jenna. Maybe he was smiling for some other reason.

Bidwell may have had his fill, but I decided this was a good time for me to tuck into some more vittles. I was just finishing the sandwich when Clicks and Freeman came back in from outside. Freeman was

looking around the room, but Clicks was looking for me, and I knew from his smile that he was getting involved. I walked over to meet him, figuring that was better than having his news aggravate Bidwell and Clipper.

"That guy is something. Well, I still don't know what to make of SWEEP16, but I'm getting a shot at becoming the IT guy. How come you never told him I was in the Corps?"

"I just never thought of it while I was with him."

"He asked me right away. I'm glad you didn't say anything."

"Yeah, I thought it was the first thing he said. And it looked like you answered YES SIR!"

"I did. I almost saluted."

"I'm not surprised. I've called him SIR a few times myself." With this I shrugged my shoulders, and in response Clicks nodded and smirked, "Yeah, I know what you mean now."

So, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know exactly, yet. I'm going to work on it for a few days then ... then, guess what!"

GUESS WHAT is something Clicks doesn't like put on him, so I gave him a look and he laughed.

"Then, I'm supposed to meet with Bill Serow to go over my ideas! Do you believe that?!"

"Well, yes, I do. Freeman knows some serious people. And he doesn't waste time."

Clicks was shaking his head, with a big grin on his face. "To think what I was putting up with in Chicago, and now I have a meeting with Bill Serow?"

"But you don't actually have the job yet, do you?"

"Freeman said he would pay me as a consultant just for putting my ideas together. It'll be up to Serow what happens after that. Freeman said he doesn't know anything about IT ... altho he obviously does."

It had been well over an hour since the food and the meet-and-greet session had started, but there were still dozens of people here. I could see Freeman was riding higher the longer people hung around. Someone opened up a bunch of doors to a rear courtyard, and people moved out there to sit and enjoy the beautiful night air. It wasn't long before more people were outside than inside, Clicks and I among them. A few people told us they were going down the block to buy some beer, and that sounded like a great idea. Pretty quick, just about everyone was outside. Some guys brought out tables with the remaining food, and it was nice to see several people walk around the courtyard offering cold beers. I saw Freeman with a brew, and walked over and told him it looked to me like some of the folks here were making this into a party. He didn't answer, except with a smile. When I asked if he was buying the beer, he shook his head, clinked bottles with me and smiled more. We were back in the shadows some, and from here it was natural to focus on the others. There were a few tables in easy earshot of

us, and for some reason I was surprised hearing them talking about the role of government and taxes and volunteerism. Right now, Freeman seemed more than willing to just stay in the background and let it flow. He was getting people thinking and talking, as he said he'd hoped to do.

----- 029 -----

As the socializing continued in front of us, I was happy to just sit quietly and relax here in this dark spot, although I admit it did seem strange to be doing it with Freeman. Of the two of us, he was no doubt more entitled to the quiet time. He'd been 'ON' a heck of a lot more than I had. And he'd been about half dead only a little while ago.

"You didn't tell me Clicks was a Marine."

"Really, it just slipped my mind. I didn't mean to keep it to myself. I didn't tell you his nickname was Clicks, either, did i?"

"Nope."

I was pretty sure I could see a big smile on his face, altho I decided not to look to make certain. "I thought that name bugged him like crazy."

"Looks like your old buddy put one by you there. They learn more than shooting in the Marines."

I have to admit to being a little stunned here. "That is just great. How many times have we called him 'Clicks'?" I couldn't help but laugh out loud. "I guess he's smarter than we all thought! And I'd have to say it's too late now to come up with some new name that he'd hate."

I remember Aunt Arlene saying Freeman didn't laugh, but he did now, so I added, "Well, I'll enjoy figuring out some new way to aggravate him."

We stayed there a bit longer in silence, then I asked "What are the chances Texas might simply renege on federal taxes, like you said last night on Kenny Miller?"

"I think they're pretty good, amazing as that may sound." I could feel him turn to look at me, so I turned to meet his eye, but the first thing I noticed was a Cheshire-cat smile. "How would you like to meet the Governor of Texas?"

Somebody once said to me, IF A DOG ASKS YOU PLAIN AS DAY TO PASS THE SALT, you will naturally respond WHAT? That was how I felt, and that was what I said.

Freeman was still wearing that gigantic smile. "Friday."

I was still in dumbstruck mode, but although my mouth probably was open, I kept my silence, so Freeman continued.

"People are getting fed up, and it is the people who make things happen that are the most fed up. People are already talking about abolishing the IRS -- perhaps most prominently the young Senator from Texas. I haven't heard any of our national politicians talk about Texas refusing to pay federal taxes ... or more likely, Texas indemnifying any of its residents who refuse to pay federal taxes ... but I think the nation in general and Texas and a few other states in particular are ready to seriously consider it. And of course I strongly believe that once people consider the idea, turn it around and look it over from many different angles, I think we'll have enough of a core of people to make it happen. What do you think?"

"I admit to getting more used to the idea. But ... I'm not really a taxpayer, I never thought about these things before. A lot more interesting to me is what some older people think. People with more experience and information than me. I met a girl last night -- a graduate student -- she said her family raised her with Libertarian views, and they love SWEEP16. She said her parents signed up right away. I've met a few people lately who just said things like SURE, I'LL DO MY SHARE. Or, IT JUST SOUNDS LIKE BEING A GOOD CHRISTIAN."

"Thanks, Danny. That nails it pretty well, doesn't it? Great perspective."

----- 030 -----

Freeman took a deep breath and sat up straight, and I could tell he was about to rejoin the rest of the group. Sure enough, he stood, tapped me on the shoulder and walked away. I stayed where I was for a little bit, then followed him back out to the main courtyard and this somewhat spontaneous party-gathering that showed no sign of ending. Around three dozen people were still here, and were settled in, if anything. Jenna and Suzi were seated with a few people who looked to be about Suzi's age, and they greeted me warmly as I walked by.

Clicks was sitting by himself with a beer and yet another sandwich. I sat next to him, one table over from a pretty loud bunch that I soon realized had Clipper and Durreg and Bidwell at its center.

"I agree, The Founders surely gave us something great in our Constitutional Documents, but they had some glaring weaknesses too that we all know well. And the Founders themselves knew Constitutional Amendments would be necessary, and they left us a mechanism for that purpose." I knew the voice very well, and zeroed in on Bidwell holding forth. "What was a good idea, what was practical, in 1790 cannot automatically be assumed to be appropriate for us today. The world is very different now."

"Thanks, and I also agree completely with what you've just said. But Human nature has not changed. And THAT is what counts. If anything, our technological culture and the riches it has created for us

argue for even less regulation than we had in the days of the Founders. I'm not at all familiar with the idea that the Founders would have been big red-tape guys if only they'd had the means. Where did you ever get that idea?" The speaker had a Russian accent.

I looked over at Clicks. "The profs started going at it a while ago. They've been getting louder and having more fun, obviously, and people keep moving their chairs around them. Looks like they're the floor show now. And glad of it."

I reached over and grabbed a bag of chips from in front of Clicks. He frowned over-dramatically, which I appreciated even more when I found the bag unopened. I didn't really want another beer, but when I saw only one bottle left in Clicks' 6-pack, "Hey, you don't want this last beer, do you? It'll go good with the chips." He rolled his eyes and said something very impolite. "Thanks Clicks!" When I said CLICKS, I felt a little foolish thinking all along he'd never minded that name. But now, at least, he didn't know I knew he liked it. How could I use that knowledge against him? That'd take some creative thinking.

"These are guys who were OK with slavery, with the subordination of women. You think they really wanted Freedom for the masses? I think what they wanted was Freedom for the gentry, and they did what they had to do, included some of the unwashed masses, in order to get what they wanted for themselves." Clipper and Bidwell were tag-teaming Durreg. This was basically our lunder discussions all over, but with an audience.

"May I assume the good doctors favor Freedom for the slaves and women's suffrage?"

I could visualize Clipper and Bidwell grimacing at Durreg over that one.

"Good, then why do the doctors not also favor greater Freedom for all?"

"I do favor greater Freedom, so long as it does not negatively impact others. And a guy who consumes a fifth of bourbon and 3 packs of cigarettes a day has a negative impact on all of us because we are all forced to pick up the cost of his health care. The federal government has every right to force that guy to pay up, and I'm glad they're getting around to it, finally!"

"If I agreed with your basic assumption that government is supposed to be pulling all kinds of strings to begin with, then I'd agree with you on the bourbon and smokes. But I completely disagree with your basic assumption. Government, or, at least, the federal government, should NOT be picking up the cost of health care, and you bring up one of many good reasons why the feds should stay out of it."

"A rich country such as ours should never allow people to go without health care."

"Our rich country should allow people to go without whatever they choose to go without. And if our rich citizens decide to pay for each other's health care voluntarily, our federal government should again just keep its nose out of it."

"So a child who needs treatment should die just because her parents are poor? Even for you, Durreg, that's extreme."

"Even for you, Bidwell, that's an emotional rather than a logical argument, and I think you must know it."

"Don't dodge me!"

I had walked over and stood next to the professors' table so I could see better. Hearing them was no problem, I think, for any of the people still around.

"If the only reason the child gets her treatment is because the feds force the rest of us to cough up, well, I don't know whose vision of America, or of Vermont, that is. But it sure is not MINE! Is that what you think of Americans? Is that your own mindset?" These words came from a woman I'd not noticed before. She was seated on the other side of the professors, and looked to be about an age where she might have a little girl of her own.

Durreg had a devilish grin on his face, and gestured toward Bidwell and Clipper with his open palms.

Clipper answered. "No, it's not our vision at all. But it's what we'd get without government requiring payment from those who can pay."

"Of course I agree with Doctor Durreg, and with the lady who just spoke so forcefully." I hadn't noticed Freeman moving close. He was standing just outside the ring of chairs surrounding the profs. "But it's a great solace to me that all of us assume the obvious goal is getting care to the people who need it. This may seem strange to us here tonight, but there are many places in the world where people do not care much about each other, and do not make any pretense otherwise. Our automatic regard for the welfare of strangers is one of the reasons, in my view, that our country has reached the heights it has." He stopped for a second or two, then continued. "My disagreement with the mindset of most people in our federal government, and with Doctor Clipper, is whether our typical application of force is a positive or a negative. Obviously, I see it as a negative because I do not believe laws can force us to be better than we are, and because I believe the direct and indirect costs of those laws force us to be much less than we would be without them."

Clipper stood up. "Mister Freeman! I'd not seen you about for a while. Glad you've decided to join us. Please, will you have a beer with us?" Clipper extended a bottle, which a few people relayed to Freeman. "A very fine local micro-brewery."

Clipper seemed loosened up by a few brews, and less confrontational than he had been earlier.

"Thank You for a delightful evening, and actually, thanks for giving us a reason to enjoy a beautiful drive over from Syracuse." He was breathing loudly, and it seemed a weird way of holding the floor until he was ready to continue. "I do believe you, you and the people supporting your SWEEP16 can be well intended. But it's clear that we need national, federally enforced rules to promote virtuous behavior, and that these rules must be supported by federal taxes."

"You told me earlier you joyfully pay your taxes. Is it a source of joy for you that others are forced and threatened to do things they wish not to do?"

"I don't force others, and I don't want to. Seriously."

"People who defy the IRS are arrested and potentially jailed. And if they resist arrest, even worse."

"This is going far off-topic, isn't it?"

"If you'd like others to be joyful about their taxes, I'd say NO TAXES would create a lot of joy. And more to the point, how many people who pay joyfully now would feel less joyful if others had Freedom of choice?"

DocDuh jumped in. "I think a lot of them would, actually."

This was a bit of a rebuke of Freeman, and Durreg had everyone's attention.

"Has everyone heard the bit about Ivan and Igor? Well, it's short. Two poor, hard-working peasant farmers, Ivan and Igor, in very similar situations, except Ivan owns a cow and Igor does not. One day a magic genie offers to grant Igor any wish. And he says I WISH FOR IVAN'S COW TO DIE."

This brought quite a few laughs from what had become a group of 25 or so, focused now on this single open discussion.

"Yes, I've heard that tale, and it's a central question of SWEEP16 of course. But even more so, it's a basis of our present federal tax structure. One percent pays 37% of the federal take, and faces draconian rates. Fifty percent pay nothing. Many millions, because of the Earned Income Tax Credit, pay less than nothing."

"We're really going there?" This was Bidwell. "A guy works all year for the minimum wage, and the feds top him off a little and that's bad?"

I thought Freeman would answer, but a 50-ish woman spoke up. "We do a lot worse than the EITC, but it's not good. The EITC is just another distortion in the system, and I believe part of what Mr Freeman is saying is that all of these taxes have their costs. The EITC doesn't come from nowhere, and it seems almost like a law of nature that the taking of the money to pay the EITC causes harm that more than outweighs the benefit to the recipient. And we just keep adding on more and more of this forcibly imposed friction. I'm afraid that so long as they have the power, they -- DC -- will never stop. It's time to ... past time ... to put a stop to it."

I'd not noticed her until she got going, and it seemed like the strength of her conviction got everyone's attention. There were a few claps and YES MA'AM types of comments, and DocDuh laughed out loud. "Clipper, I think the lady means what she says!"

"No doubt she does." Clipper turned her way. "Thank You Ma'am. But may I point out it is very easy for us, taking our leisure here tonight, enjoying artisanal beers and a catered dinner, to criticize the EITC, but if, for example, you take away the EITC, the people counting on it may not be able to put food on the table."

But the lady was not impressed. "First off, the feds themselves tell us about 25% of EITC payments are obtained fraudulently. A pretty astounding level of fraud. And that's what the feds own up to. Who knows what it might really be? But much more importantly, if all these federal burdens and distortions were swept away, we'd have far fewer people in need of assistance, and far more people capable of offering it."

I looked over at Freeman, just to see if he'd be smiling as wide as I expected, and he was.

"Are Bidwell and I the only liberal/progressive types here?"

"Certainly not. We're in Vermont, aren't we? I've kept my silence until now because I couldn't quite believe thoughtful, rational, sincere people might actually believe we should end federal taxation. But I've heard enough." This guy was probably mid-thirties, looked like he did a lot of hiking or jogging. "I'll agree some federal programs waste money, some are redundant, there is fraud. But without the federal government taking an active role in a hundred, in a thousand different ways, there would be chaos. There would be huge abuse. Not only do we need a strong, active federal government, we need it to be stronger and MORE active."

"What if we get a strong, active, EVIL government? I mean, isn't that why the Founders wanted a weak federal government? Because power tends to be abused?" This came from the guy sitting next to the previous speaker.

"Then we just vote them out. Simple!"

"If they are strong, active and evil, we probably will not be ABLE to vote them out. Why do you think politicians are so keen on public financing of elections? Why do they so love redistricting? It's pretty tough to get rid of a Congressman or Senator."

This last bunch of people really seemed to enjoy discussing this stuff, but I found myself thinking again of Jenna's warning BORING, BORING, BORING ... and, at least from my point of view, she was right. I did like the back-and-forth, but I wished we were talking baseball, not taxes and government. Would I ever get this interested? Even with SWEEP16 being my job?

Looking over where Freeman had been a moment ago, I saw that he'd taken several steps back again, and was a little bit isolated. Clicks and I walked over to him. He greeted us with a smile, but I could tell his mind was focused on something else.

"You've got a real hardcore bunch here. And I think they are having fun bandying this stuff."

"I think so too. But what do you think is happening?"

I didn't know what Freeman was driving at, but Clicks did. "It seems like people are talking and enjoying, but not convincing each other. I haven't heard anybody say anything all night that makes me feel as if somebody's mind was changed one way or the other."

"Yes, exactly. I've been thinking this all along. About half the country will go along with SWEEP16 right off. But we need to get two-thirds, at least. And how to convince the people who don't agree. That's the real challenge. Getting the idea heard is turning out to be easier than I expected. But changing minds ... that's a difficult thing to do. And all the logic and facts in the world may not mean anything."

"You know what Jenna would say ... did say." As I mentioned her name, she appeared beside us, which made me stammer a little. "I was just about to tell Clicks the advice you first gave me on writing about SWEEP16. And I am convinced you were right."

"You mean that generally people will find tax-talk a real bore?"

"Yes. And that the compelling story for most people is the personal."

"Me included. I'm happy and proud to have my name first on the list -- and THANKS for telling me how that happened! -- but I didn't sign because of logic or economics or law or even love of Freedom. It was strictly a case of FOLLOW THE LEADER." She and Freeman were looking directly at each other as she spoke, and in profile, I could see Freeman's jaw set.

I had the feeling I was intruding on a private moment, and I know Clicks felt the same. It was a little funny, tho, because I was pretty sure Jenna was embarrassed, and I bet she was glad it was too dark for anyone to get a good look at her face.

We all just looked around for a while and listened to the rest of them still buzzing over this stuff. It was kind of like a dorm thing. Sandwiches, beer, friendly arguing. The professors were still going.

"The personal may be important, but people, older people at least, will need to see. We'll have to show them, more than anything else. For the younger people, it will be different. If you've never paid taxes, it's almost automatic to feel you never should."

I was beat, and would have been happy to call it a night, but I feel like at my age I should have more stamina than just about anyone. And I was still vexed with myself for sleeping on the way home from Pendleton, so there was no way I was going to dog out tonight.

I was dying to tell Jenna about the meeting with the Governor of Texas, but it didn't seem appropriate that should come from me. So instead I asked her when her flight was, and if she was flying out of New York.

"Tomorrow evening. I won't get into Dallas until midnight. Nothing like a summer night in Texas."

Freeman grinned at me, then asked "Did Danny tell you we've got a meeting in Texas?"

"No, he didn't. With who?"

Freeman just smiled and tilted his head toward me, then walked away. I was going to have to spill the beans myself. Freeman obviously wasn't going to be pushed into telling Jenna about the Governor. But

also I think he was uncomfortable still from Jenna's line about following the leader. Or more likely, he had something completely different on his mind.

I could only tell Jenna that Freeman, and probably me too, were meeting the governor on Friday. She was all smiles, and I was happy to tell her she was right about the Miller show changing things.

"Did Durreg ask you out?"

Clicks gave me a strange look at this, and I wondered if I was out of line asking. Maybe I was, because Jenna didn't really answer, except with a big smile and a question of her own. "Why are you interested in my social life? I haven't heard you mention anyone. Unless Nick is your date."

She'd knocked me off balance, for sure. We'd talked a bunch of times now, but she'd never taken a shot at me before, and I was really surprised. When Clicks spoke up, I knew it wouldn't get any better for me.

"Mister Cool here met a 'Pearl' last night, and he's been talking about her as if she were the last woman on Earth."

Jenna actually laughed out loud at my discomfort, then she touched my arm. "That's great, Danny, what's she like?"

I told her what little I knew, adding Pearl came from a Libertarian family and that she was naturally a big fan of SWEEP16. And that she had actually read my column. Although she didn't remember my name.

She smiled at me very sweetly and changed the subject. "You said Freeman went all night with the students at Pendleton? Well, this bunch here tonight still looks pretty comfortable, and it's almost 2."

"I think he'll hang as long as someone is still here. At Pendleton, the students were more interested in Freeman than in SWEEP16, especially after it got really late. You were right about that. And Freeman has known it all along."

"The profs are still going pretty strong too. I wonder what are the chances ..." Jenna's voice trailed off, and I picked up.

"The chances are pretty good. Those guys like nothing better than arguing. Throw in a gorgeous night, an audience, some sandwiches, chips and beer ... They may put up a tent."

----- 031 -----

My phone went off with a text coming in, and I got a real boost when I saw it was from Pearl: WAS REALLY WONDERING HOW IT WENT IN BRATTLEBORO AND I THOUGHT YOU'D STILL BE AWAKE. HOPE NOT TOO LATE!

I thought about texting back, and decided to call. She answered immediately, and I filled her in. She was pretty surprised when I told her things were still going, under the stars with beer.

"He's a happy man, isn't he?"

"I ... guess so. What makes you think that?"

"It's hard to picture him being anything else, based on what you've told me. You've got to love life, love people, being a joyful person to host a crowd of strangers and stay with it until they've all had their fill."

"Yes, now that you explain it, I think you're right. And tonight, some of the people in the crowd went off and bought refreshments of their own, beer and what-not. That may well have been what Freeman liked best of all ... knowing people wanted to stretch the evening and keep talking about SWEEP16."

"No doubt. I wish I was there!"

"Me too, and how!"

I'd spoken straight from the heart, but I felt embarrassed by my enthusiasm. And maybe I made Pearl uncomfortable, because she signed off right away.

----- 032 -----

It was 3AM when I looked at my watch. Then I looked over at Clicks and gave him a WHAT NOW? gesture. He shook his head and pointed down at the ground between his feet as I walked up to him. "No way I'm leaving before Freeman! A 50-something guy is not going to out-party me!"

It didn't surprise me to hear him say this, except I wouldn't have thought he'd call it a party. But he was right, it was late, people were tired, but they didn't want to leave, and pretty good quantities of beer had been consumed. The remaining folks were getting awful convivial, familiar, and although they were still arguing, it was friendly as could be and certainly nobody was letting anyone else's politics become a source of personal friction. Amusement, if anything. Suzi had excused herself quite a while ago. Jenna was still hanging in, but I'd be willing to bet her thinking was similar to Clicks. Bidwell had slumped to the side in his chair, and he was sort of propped up against a table and a tree, half asleep. But Clipper and DocDuh were energized, and each was sort of the leader of their respective camp. For a while now, a lot of the talk was personal stories, which made me remember again Jenna's advice.

Freeman was still there, sitting a bit to the side, but straight and attentive, as if this hadn't been going on for several hours already.

A woman of about 30 asked him how many people he thought would continue working their present job or business if they did not feel a need for the money.

"Some, but not many. I've wondered about this often. Less than 20% is my feeling. Certainly some doctors, medical people. My Mom for one. Quite a few teachers. Some lawyers, cops. Scientists. A lot of farmers are pretty much working for free as it is. What do you think?"

"I agree, and that's why I asked, I guess. I was thinking that if my husband's paycheck took a nice big bump, or if our dollars were going a lot farther than they are now, I'd quit working. And really, I have a pretty great job in financial services. A career path. But after 7 years at it, I know it's not all I want. My sister is staying home, raising her children full-time. And watching her family, I think that's what I want to do."

Another woman spoke up. "It's what I did. We were not in such great financial shape, but I stayed home anyway. And the kids never knew we were broke. But I did miss working, sort of. I think more, I missed getting out of the house, the people at work. Not so much the work itself."

This drew murmurs of assent from a number of people. "It's pretty true for a lot of people. Definitely for me. When I retired, I was glad to get out. I felt like I was getting my life back. I never liked my job. BUT ... I missed interacting with my co-workers. I started doing a little part-time work after only a few weeks. A day or two a week is just about right for me now."

"We'd probably both slow down, my wife and me, I mean. She's home with the kids tonight. We run the diner down the road. At this point it seems like one of us is always in the diner while one of us is always with the kids. Tonight is something special ... I put out a sign at the diner a couple of weeks ago telling customers we'd be closed so I could be here tonight!"

The man who said these words was seated within a few feet of Freeman, who stood and reached out with his right hand, sharing a handshake, nodding, with a very tight-lipped, sort of clenched smile. And not saying anything at all.

For several seconds, they held everyone's silent attention, then a 50-ish woman sort of mused how a nice financial boost would make a huge quality-of-life difference for the average family.

People began riffing on this idea, and for my part, slow on the uptake from the adult perspective, I could see now what Freeman had meant. It's not so much all about money directly, but more about Freedom and Choice. If prices were down and wages were up, a lot of people wouldn't go for a new car every year or a big house or whatever. A lot of people would prefer to do something different. Maybe a different job with lower pay? Maybe one job per family? Maybe earlier retirement? Start a business? Charitable work?

Clipper kept quiet, and I wondered if it was because he was rethinking, or he was tired, or maybe he just did not want to disagree with average folks who seemed to be enjoying their "what-ifs". Hard to believe it could be the first tho.

A guy in his 60s spoke out clearly. "Freddy ... we have something of a demographic problem here in America. Not enough kids being born. It's far worse in other countries. One of the biggest impacts of SWEEP16, even if we got only half-way there ... one of the biggest impacts, I'm convinced, is women

would have more children. I know that sounds crazy to some people, but I've been kicking this around in my mind a lot, and I believe it. More money, lower prices, more babies. That's a pretty gigantic thing to me. Maybe the biggest thing?"

I was still feeling kind of like I was back in the dorms, staying up late talking over some heavy-duty stuff, a kid getting in way over my head. But this guy was no kid. He was well-spoken, thoughtful and dead serious. There was a second or so of silence before DocDuh spoke up.

"YES!! Exactly. It IS the biggest thing. And governments CAN destroy family. SWEEP16 would create a baby boom, do not doubt it!"

Clipper let out a yowl as if he'd been slapped across the face. I guess he didn't want to disagree with the average folks, but was happy to pounce on Durreg. "Nonsense. There might be some marginal effect, probably not even measurable. There are so many reasons this is wrong I don't know where to begin. I mean, first off, any number of studies have shown the huge ripple effect of government spending. Curtail federal spending and all manner of activities wither...."

Clipper was cut off by DocDuh. "Here we go again. 'Any number of studies ...'. What do you think is the ripple effect of money being spent by the people who earned it?"

Watching and listening to this exchange was kind of funny, because the food, drink, and the hour were really taking their toll on people. You could sort of see a burst of energy here and there, but people were fading. It was nice, tho, in that they were fading together. Philosophical adversaries or not, this was a group of people getting to like each other.

Freeman spoke next. "We can argue these points either way. Of course, I agree completely with Doctor Durreg. Studies and polls are fine, and I agree with Doctor Clipper in that what he says is supported by lots of studies. But I don't care much about that. SWEEP16 is not an economic theory, or even hypothesis. It's an endorsement of FREEDOM."

Clipper didn't say anything. DocDuh had a huge smile. The guy who talked about 'more babies' said FREEDOM IS AMERICA'S GUIDING LIGHT.

There were rumbles of agreement, but everyone fell silent for a while, and I was a little startled to hear songbirds waking up and singing from the roost.

Freeman noticed too. "Is there anything nicer than birdsong at first light?"

I looked over at Jenna, and with a big smile she pointed her index finger at me, and traced in the air TX.

----- 033 -----

Mom and Dad had always liked Clicks, and it was over a year since they'd last seen him. So they were up, with a serious breakfast waiting for us on the table when we walked in. After being aggravated with myself for sleeping while Freeman drove home from Pendleton, I'd resolved to stay awake while Clicks drove from Brattleboro. Clicks still seemed to have a lot of juice in him, and after a minute of hugs and small talk, he was hard into Mom's best. I managed to eat a few bites, but threw in the towel pretty quick and went to bed.

----- 034 -----

It was evening when I awoke, and Dad greeted my appearance with a hearty HELLO, SLEEPING BEAUTY. Anytime I slept in Dad called me SLEEPING BEAUTY. Clicks had never heard this line before, and he made it clear he liked it. I scowled at them, noted only the three of us were around, and replied with language I'd never have used if Mom were present. I found out Clicks had spent a couple of hours with Mom and Dad after I conked out, then kept on with Aunt Arlene and Uncle Walt too, going more or less straight from a great breakfast to a great brunch. The guy must have been starved something awful at some point in his life, because in the four years I'd known him, he was always hungry. He'd been up only 15 minutes when I showed, but he already had another plate in front of him.

Aunt and Uncle had left a copy of the Sunday paper, and I'll admit to being pleased they'd all read my column. But I was taken by surprise when they both just wanted to talk about NEXT week's column.

"Kenny Miller ... that's your big story. What are you going to say about THAT?"

"I don't know yet. I don't even know if I want breakfast or dinner. Leave me alone."

Clicks looked at Dad, and to my surprise they did leave me alone. I wolfed a cold leftover pancake and nuked another one. "Breakfast it is. Actually, what I'm really thinking about is Texas. Freeman said he has a meeting in Texas on Friday." I stopped here and made them wait while I put butter and syrup on my pancake. Clicks was rolling his eyes, but that changed to raised brows when I continued. "He's meeting the governor, and he said I can go!"

"You couldn't tell Mom and me this morning before you went to bed?"

"I was so tired I forgot, actually."

Dad pulled out his phone immediately, and left the room. I was sure he was calling Mom.

----- 035 -----

It was nice to see how seriously Clicks was taking his website design work. One thing about Clicks, he'd always been good at committing to things. He had a sort of happy-go-lucky way about him, but at the same time, he had been a very serious student.

From my side, I had a few days before we were due in Texas, and needed only to complete another column before I left. Between Kenny Miller and Brattleboro, I had plenty of material. Remembering what Jenna had told me about newspaper editorials in Texas, I jumped on the web and pulled some up. She was right ... the Miller Show had gotten Freeman a lot of attention in Texas, and his suggestion that Texas just SAY NO was picked up by quite a few writers on the editorial pages. Reading these opinion pieces was like listening to Clipper and Durreg going at it. Most of the writers scoffed at the idea in numerous ways, but some of them took it quite seriously, examining the possibilities. Reading thru also reminded me of something Freeman had said -- that the people who did not agree with him pretty quickly would not be brought over to his side by talk or logic or statistics. They would have to be convinced by action and by example.

There was one writer, Aaron Harry, a blogger I'd never heard of before, that really caught my attention. He loved the whole SWEEP16 idea, and particularly the part about Texas forcing the issue. His picture showed him to be about my age, and his enthusiasm for some reason made me also think he must be pretty young. So I sent him a mail to see if he was interested in talking about SWEEP16.

My column was about half done by Tuesday when I remembered again Jenna telling me how people would be bored by tax talk. Looking it over myself, a rehash of some of the stuff from Miller's show and Brattleboro, I could see it WAS boring. So instead, I decided to interview someone with a personal story about Freeman, and hopefully scrap most of what I'd done so far. While I wondered who to talk to, I walked Clicks with my answer.

"Wanna drive down to Boston tomoro?"

I gave him the raised eyebrow look that he liked to use himself.

"I'm meeting with Bill Serow tomorrow afternoon! I sent him my ideas for the website and all about a half-hour ago. He just mailed me back to come to his office tomorrow. I guess that must mean he didn't think my ideas were awful. Or maybe it means he didn't even look at my stuff? He's just going to meet me as a courtesy to Freeman?"

"Maybe it means he thought your stuff was so awful he wants to see the fool in person."

I loved needling Clicks, but from the look on his face I could see he was all worked up over meeting Serow. I don't know what came over me, but I decided to cut him some slack. "He wouldn't waste his time meeting you if he didn't think your ideas were worthwhile."

"Really?"

"Yeah, really. You sound like a Little Leaguer about to meet Mickey Mantle."

"I guess. Do you know what Serow has done tho? The guy is awesome!"

Clicks was in enthusiasm-plus mode, and this was something I always liked about him. "I could tell you a lot about Serow. A LOT! But it will have to wait until tomorrow. I want to go over some more stuff before the meeting! We'll hit the road by 9AM. BE READY!"

"What do you mean, BE READY?! It's your interview."

"He wrote me -- well, his assistant wrote me -- to bring you along."

"Freeman must have told him I'd asked to talk to him. I guess he wants to finish both of us off at once."

"Thanks for the encouragement."

"Hey, it's like saying BREAK A LEG!"

In the morning I took a long run and got back around 8 to find Clicks all hopped up about his meeting, pestering me to have a quick breakfast and be ready to leave by 9. The fact we'd built in about 2 extra hours of travel time meant nothing to him.

Driving to Boston, Clicks filled me in some more about Serow. OK, he did have some impressive credentials, and he was about as famous as a cyber-security guy could be I guess. But technology just doesn't get me going. I use it like everyone else, but I don't pay much more attention to who makes it happen than I do to where my toothpaste comes from.

We were escorted into Serow's office by Maggie Ju, a woman of maybe 35 or 40 years, chubby and very plainly dressed. She looked like a classic computer geek to me, but she was very well-spoken and sort of bubbly and gracious. To me, her looks didn't match her manner at all. She was Serow's assistant, the one who'd been corresponding with Clicks, and it was soon apparent part of her job was to simply interface with the world, be a sort of mediator, on Serow's behalf.

Serow wasn't in his office when we got there, and Maggie asked us to sit and offered drinks and snacks. I knew Clicks was still keyed up when he turned down an assortment of the kind of junk food that the stereotypical technoid lives on. The office was an amazing mess, with papers and all sorts of electronic widgets piled up everywhere. Serow's desk barely showed beneath all the litter.

I looked over at Clicks, and he was all eyes, as if he couldn't believe where he was and he wanted to remember every piece of gear, paper and candy wrapper. It almost made me laugh out loud.

When Serow walked in, Clicks jumped up like someone had hollered 'ATTENTION!' I stood too, and we all shook hands.

If Maggie looked like a nerd, Serow was the guy whose picture was in the dictionary when you looked up NERD. He was short and rumped and pudgy and pale and soft, as if the most vigorous thing he'd ever done was type quickly. He had a weird body with thick legs and a thick middle, and he accentuated his

weird shape with clothes that were on the tight side. His shirt was stained as if he'd been wearing it for a week. His hair was pretty long and clumpy and probably beyond combing.

"Website", he said to Clicks, who clearly did not know what that meant.

"What do you think of the SWEEP16 website, Mister Fabio?"

Clicks looked at Maggie in bewilderment, then at Serow, who obviously thought it was normal for Maggie to elaborate on his one-word statement-question.

Clicks was silent for about a second, then said. "It's awful. Or, at least, it's awful compared to what it should be. Whoever did that website didn't know what he was doing. It's like something a high school freshman would turn out for a INTRO TO WEBSITES mid-term."

Clicks might have been awed by Serow, but he was obviously speaking his mind. "There are so many things that could be done to make it better ... but that would mostly be a waste of time. It should just be abandoned and a completely new website built. Forget what's there."

"My website" said Serow.

"Sorry, but ... maybe it's got great security somewhere, but I didn't even think about that. As it stands, the website doesn't really need security except to prevent someone from hijacking it entirely. As far as content, design, just about everything, really, it's ... not adequate."

Serow was smiling, and he looked at Maggie. "Mister Fabio has put forth some fine ideas." She waved a sheaf of papers which I took to be Clicks' website redesign.

"What do you read?"

The question was plain enough, although something of a non-sequitur. Clicks looked at Maggie, who nodded encouragement, saying "Mister Serow wants to know what sorts of things you like to read."

Clicks named a few TECHNO blah-blah pubs, while Serow nodded. When Serow said nothing, Clicks named a couple more, then a book. Serow walked over to a corner of his office and wormed his hand into the middle of a pile of horrors on a table, pulling out the book that Clicks had named. His face became somewhat stern, and he began asking Clicks some questions about the sort of thing the great majority of us have no interest in. They went back and forth for a while, Serow challenging Clicks on details of geekitude, with the two of them becoming somewhat heated and a little loud. It was ridiculous to watch, except after all this was Bill Serow, and even I knew he was just trying to draw Clicks out. Serow has the look of world-class nerd, but he had to be a whole lot more than that, considering what he has achieved. So this must just be his style of conducting a technical-employment interview.

Eventually, Serow changed his tone and said MAGGIE WILL HAND OVER THE WEBSITE TO YOU. YOU'LL CONTINUE WORKING AS A CONSULTANT. BILL ME FOR YOUR WORK. HIRE HELP IF YOU NEED. YOU'LL HAVE A DOTTED LINE TO FREEMAN. DO WHAT HE ASKS, UNLESS IT'S RIDICULOUS. Then he turned to

Maggie and instructed her to set up another meeting in two or three weeks. Turning back to us he said BURGERS?"

And that was it for Clicks' interview. It seems we were going out for burgers.

"You guys have wheels? Room for me? Good!"

Serow directed Clicks out of town, and although neither of us asked, I know we both were wondering where he was taking us.

"Oh ... I've assumed you guys would be good with coming to my place for some burgers, maybe some beer? Drink beer?"

Serow had a very strange way of speaking ... not only leaving out words that normal people would use, but he sort of clipped his syllables short, abbreviating everything, as if he didn't like to verbalize at all. Which, I bet, he didn't.

Being that this was still Clicks' afternoon, I'd sat in the back seat and Serow was riding shotgun. Clicks was about as much of a technoid as anyone I had known at school, but he was definitely not what I'd thought of as a pure computer nerd in that he was very socialized and athletic and outgoing. In those ways, he appeared the opposite of Serow. It was hard to picture that Clicks was enough of a technoid that Serow was actually interested in techy-talk with him, but that's what was going on. I couldn't clearly hear everything they said, but I could hear enough to understand I didn't know anything about what they were talking about. My perspective was kind of perfect, actually, because I really didn't want to have to pay attention to that stuff, and my place in the back seat removed me enough from them that they ignored me. Judging from Clicks various bursts of enthusiasm, I could see he was loving this.

Much to my surprise, at least, Serow took us to his home. Serow was unmarried, and even to my dense perceptions, this was sort of obvious when we walked in. He had what was really a pretty great spread, but he seemed to regard it as mostly a place to accumulate junk. It looked like his office, but on a grand scale. I guess he saw me looking around, because he said, "Yeah, like lots of stuff." An understatement if ever I'd heard one.

We followed him into a huge room that I could only describe as a geek's idea of heaven. There were screens and all kinds of gadgets everywhere, computer games, air hockey, foosball, pinball, stereo. A gigantic bar and grill in one corner. We sat down on a couple of bar stools and Serow went behind the bar, pulled a frosted mug out of a freezer, pulled a draft and extended it a little toward me. Rather than just ask me if I wanted a beer, he offered and questioned by a half-smile and raised eyebrows. This struck me as very funny and I laughed out YOU BET THANKS! With Clicks he didn't offer, just put the frosted in front of him. Once Serow had his own brew in hand, Clicks surprised me by raising his mug HERE'S TO FREEMAN! We clinked our glasses and Serow surprised me again by draining his at once. Clicks did the same, then both of them turned to me and stared, leaving me little choice but to chug mine as well.

"Wednesday!" said Serow enthusiastically, "Drinking day!"

A man in a clean white uniform entered the room and introduced himself to us. "Mister Serow has indicated burgers are the afternoon fare." We had a pretty heavy-duty choice of burgers and toppings and sides.

"Wednesday I normally leave office early. Best day for me to be out of there. Everybody else does their best on Wednesday and Thursday. I drink Wednesday, don't feel so good Thursday. Serious work the rest of the time." Serow was serious about his beer all right, he'd already finished his second.

"People coming in about an hour. The propeller-heads party here Wednesday." He turned to me. "You're writing about SWEEP16. We can talk for a while."

"I was hoping for this, THANK YOU!"

Serow smiled again, and gestured that I should drink up, which I didn't really want to, but did anyway. I surely enjoy a beer, but this was too early, too fast, too much for me. The ex-Marine was coming out in Clicks, and I could see this afternoon was going to turn into a drinking contest between him and Serow. With enough burgers and fries, especially the fries, I could probably make a showing tho.

Serow was sitting behind the bar, opposite Clicks and me, with a big plate of fries between the three of us. It was mostly me working the fries. Serow hadn't touched any food yet. I'd noticed Clicks had already started talking like Serow, dropping words and clipping syllables, so I decided to do the same. I was a little drunk already, enough so that it seemed to make sense to use some Serow dialect myself. "Freeman?"

"Indeed. Closest friend. Mentor. Advisor. Staked me. Owe him bigtime. BIGTIME." As he said this last, he waved his hands around the room, indicating, I guess, that he felt he owed all this to Freeman.

I hoped he'd continue, but he didn't. I finished my mug and pushed it toward him. He clearly considered this a friendly gesture. He filled another frosted mug for me while I hit the fries again. Wouldn't want to let them get cold. "These are great."

"Garlic!"

"Tremendous. Thanks." I paused for a few seconds, pulled on the beer, then asked another Serow-style question. "SWEEP16?"

"IN!"

"Freeman told me he didn't know where you stood on SWEEP16."

"IN!"

"He never asked, and you never told him?"

Serow seemed to ignore this question, and I assumed this was equivalent to an affirmation. "Nachos?" was what he said.

"IN!" This was Clicks voting YES on the nachos.

Serow wasn't much of a talker, but he obviously liked serving beer and food, and I thought maybe if I kept rolling with him, I could get him to tell me something interesting. So I offered up another one-word statement, BEER! -- and drained about half my new mug.

"BEER!" said Serow, with gusto.

"And there isn't much better than beer and good French Fries."

"Beer and blue-claw crabs?", asked Serow.

"Wow, yes, I think you're right."

We looked at Clicks, figuring maybe he'd make it unanimous. But he said, "I've never had crab. How about beer and serious -- I mean serious! -- salsa?"

"Yeah, that is another winner, so long as the tortilla chips are up to the level of the salsa. And I like the beer really cold. Chips fresh-made. Spiced chips especially." This was the most Serow had talked so far, and I was thinking he was something of a techno-version of Doc Bidwell, altho Bidwell loved talking. "In French seafood places they serve beer with fried-little fish. That's not available in the USA, it seems. Oh, and they also serve beer with these tiny snails or something. They spice them up when they cook 'em, and then you get a bunch of them and pull out the meat with a little pin. The spice winds up getting on your lips, just makes you want more beer, and then more of the little snails. THAT might actually be the best beer-drinking meal on the planet! Let me see about those nachos!"

Serow disappeared, and I turned to Clicks, who had this ridiculously satisfied, blissful look on his face. I rolled my eyes at him, and he said to me, with pure sincerity, "I'm drinking beer with Bill Serow. In his BLEEPING beer cave. Oh, man, I'd ask you to take a picture except I think it'd put him off. Do you believe this?"

I was just happy Serow was starting to talk a bit, using actual sentences, and when he returned I showed him my empty and a big smile.

"Cold lager in a frosted mug comin' atcha!"

He'd turned to grab a fresh mug, and looked down while he filled it. When he put it in front of me and looked in my face, I could see he'd become a different guy.

"OK, I know you're the reporter and you're looking for something to write in your column. Tell you what, I don't like scribblers because they always screw up what I say. They don't even get it right when I put it on paper for them. Don't understand their deal, I guess, so I've shut them off. But I know you promised Freeman to give your all to get it right. And I know you're trying to get Freeman's story out. So I'm going to tell you what's what with SWEEP16 and Billy Bits."

I gave him a big smile and chugged my beer. Then I told him I'd let him look over whatever I wrote, to make sure it was accurate. He set me up with another cold one, and looked us both over for a few seconds. "You guys are going to stay here tonight, OK?"

Clicks and I exchanged glances, and we just said THANKS ... Clicks somewhat louder than me.

"OK. There are some heavy-duty technical people coming here pretty soon, we do this every week. Not sure exactly who will come, but it will be a good bunch. Until they start arriving, we can talk about Danny's stuff."

"Thanks, that would be great."

"Freeman backed me -- I should say Mr and Mrs Freeman backed me -- when I was only 16. I was not happy in high school and I had all kinds of ideas I wanted to run with regarding security. I'd been working on this stuff for years, actually, but I had to stay in school until 16 because I was such a screw-up, they wouldn't let me off the standard track. But I'd been chasing around for a while, not getting anywhere in the business world because I was such a kid, and a geeky, arrogant, irritating one at that. But with the Freemans, when I met them, right away there was something different. Mrs Freeman is so ... WOW." Here he stopped for a few seconds, and just shook his head. "And Freddy, actually, is even more so. I mean, right away, I wanted this guy to like me. I don't know why, really. Never gave a rat's backside what people thought of me before. But this guy, I wanted to be on his good side. I tried to be nice. I laid out how I had all these ideas, how I truly felt I understood computer security at least as well as anyone else out there, but also how I did not know how to present myself, how to get people to listen to me, how to get funding to actually create a software company. The Freemans put up the money for me to get rolling. But even more than that, Freeman showed me how to work with people, how to manage, how to build a team. Really, he did those things for me for the first few years. I'm still sort of a zero when it comes to regular management. But now, I can hire ultra-geeks who don't care about ... or even like my goofy ways. With money coming into our accounts like crazy, a lot of problems get solved. I don't think this would have happened without Freeman. Or if it did, it would have taken 10 years longer, maybe. But I wouldn't have lasted those 10 years."

Serow stopped to fill another mug for himself, and by the time he'd finished, Clicks and I were ready too. We dived into the nachos as Serow resumed his talking.

There was a weird transformation going on with Serow, the more he drank, the more he talked, the more he drank, the more he seemed like a normal guy ... unbelievably technical, and, with that body, he was never going to really look NORMAL, but it seemed now like his weird one-word sentences was more pretense than real. I wondered why he would do it. I didn't have to wonder long ... he was about to tell me himself.

----- 036 -----

"You can talk the tech side pretty well, but you don't actually look like a tech to me. How did you get into it?"

I knew Clicks was eating this up -- personal talk with Serow -- but I was getting suspicious. He was being waaaay too nice to us. He had something else on his mind.

"When I was a little guy, my parents used to read to me a lot, and I knew my folks loved their books. They'd read to me from books, magazines, and the web. There were printed pubs all over our house, and I thought this was normal for books and magazines to pretty much cover every surface. Then one day when I was about 9, Dad asked me to help him load our old van, says he is donating most of his books to the town library. He still kept a lot of books, hundreds of them, but he donated boxes and boxes. I think we made three runs with the van. I couldn't believe Dad was doing this, giving away his and Mom's books! But what he told me ... that's what got me going ... he told me everything in the books he was giving away was more easily accessible, and more accurate, on the web. He explained to me the advantages of electronic media. I was a typical 9-year old -- I didn't understand what electronic media really was. But it knocked me out that everything in those vanloads was available on the screens we had at home, and where my folks worked, and all kinds of other places. That's how I got going. It still knocks me out when I think about it. The web is bigger than the printing press, if you ask me. Bigger BY FAR!!"

Serow looked thoughtful, and didn't say anything, which I took to be an expression of approval. I was kind of surprised when Clicks asked him how he got started in technology.

"Well, I always liked it. My Dad was a ham radio operator, and he started showing me things as far back as I can remember. But truly, it was my lack of alternatives, as much as anything else, that really got me going. You know, once you get to a certain point of expertise, you build momentum, and you just want to keep doing that thing in which you know you are good. Dad was a baseball lover, and he taught me to catch and throw and hit, or, at least he tried to. I just couldn't hack sports at all. WOW, I wanted to be a ball player. But I just have no talent at all for it. I was awful. Plus, I've never been able to run, I've never been strong. I wanted to be, I tried to be, but I just didn't have it in me. And I was sooooo self-conscious about this, and so embarrassed. I could never make Dad proud of me as a ballplayer, so I really dived into the tech. I loved it, sure. But I loved it partly at least, I understand now, because I needed it. I needed something to be good at, really good at. I think if I had serious athletic talent, I probably wouldn't be in tech at all!"

Serow had drained another, and he filled us all up again. He showed no signs of being drunk, except that he was sounding and acting like a normal, albeit talkative, guy.

"But I had zero athletic talent, and I was in a very sports-minded town. It weighed on me. I felt like I was nobody because I couldn't do sports. I'd fallen in love with women very early, especially for a nerd, and I was convinced the girls wouldn't date me and that none of the guys wanted to be my friend. It probably wasn't true, but that's how I felt. So the tech world was an escape for me, and I devoted myself to it completely. I wanted to be the Babe Ruth of geeks. I let pretty much everything else slip, and turned myself into Geekzilla. I didn't really understand what I was doing, but I sure was doing it.

By the time I was 11 I was making money doing tech stuff. By 14 I was making more than my father, just working nights or weekends or whatever. Software, hardware and security just came to me like breathing. And now here's the thing. I was making way more money than other kids my age, and now I had something to strut about. Other kids -- girls, I guess -- didn't care about tech, but I was understanding that women loved successful guys ... guys making money. And so now I wanted to create my own software security outfit so I could do my thing, make money and have women overlook by fat butt!"

We all laughed at this line, none of us more than the now-jovial Serow.

"But it's not working! I mean, like I said, I had all these ideas. I was convinced I was smarter than everyone, pretty much -- sorry, but that's how I felt! -- but I didn't know who to talk to get anything implemented, and I didn't know how to talk to people either! Finally, I started getting to know, via my software clients, people who could at least point me in the right direction. But my looks, my personality, MOSTLY!, my age, my total lack of business experience ... I'd never even cooperated with another person on anything. What the heck? So essentially I am this helpless guy with a raging tech ego but otherwise this huge inferiority complex."

Serow quieted down for a minute, smiling, then added, "Not so different from now, maybe. But things got moving for me when I met the Freemans." Clicks and I had stopped eating, to show we were paying attention, and Serow motioned for us to get back to the fixings. "Freeman told me you'd asked a while back if you could talk to me -- it still seems weird people would want to interview me! -- so this is the interview. I've got a lot to say, a lot to tell you, but jump in with your questions if you have any. So anyway, things got rolling for me when Marti and Freddy took me under their wing. Mine was the first venture they funded, but Freeman really knew how to bring people together, how to lead, and how to push my buttons. I mean, he didn't mess with my ideas about tech, but he read me like a book. We never talked about this, ever, but I'm sure he understood me, why I acted the way I did. And I sure wouldn't say that about anyone else. He found ways to motivate me, bring people -- both techs and suits -- bring people together and turn us into a real company, a true team. You know, that's what he did with football, with his other companies and I bet with the military. He understands people, he picks up on all kinds of small cues, and he can turn your rotten afternoon into a great one and fill you with motivation."

"Whoa ... yes, he did that to me once! I didn't realize it until you just said so, but he did it to me. I was at his house, in a bad mood and kind of feeling mistrustful of him. He tells me he needs to hit the iron, and we work out together. By the end of that workout, I felt as good as I've ever felt in my life. He was literally still bleeding from a bullet wound. He didn't need that workout. It was a setup for me. Holy smoke, it worked."

Clicks had really no expression on his face, but Serow really liked my story. "Yep, that is Freeman alright, exactly!"

We all sat quiet for a while, having some more beer and food, and I figured I'd may as well just ask.

"So, about SWEEP16, you say you are IN. But what does that mean?"

"I'd like you to keep this to yourself, if you can. If you can't, OK. But I'd like to tell Freeman myself. Once he gets his Foundation set up, I'm going to pump in 95%, same as him."

I gave Serow a shocked look, but said nothing.

Serow shrugged. "I'll still have a lot of green, plenty to do my thing. Money's not that big a deal to me. I don't spend all that much, compared to what I could spend. Plus, our business is going to go nuts in the next few years. People are buying many millions of these so-called SMART devices, but they are just full of unbelievable security holes. How would you like that new TV in your bedroom spying on you? Yeah, all kinds of stuff like that will be going on. We'll have more business than we can handle. You understand, I want to tell him and Marti myself?"

"Sure, I can understand that. But, are you doing it just because you want to support Freeman, or because you really back the idea?"

"I definitely back the idea, and so I want to prove that. You know, geeks are pretty commonly libertarian. We like to do our thing and be left alone to do it. SWEEP16 is going to attract a lot of support from a lot of techs. Strange thing tho, the founders of successful tech companies, whether they are suits or geeks, tend to be big-government liberals."

"Why is that strange?"

"Well, maybe it isn't so strange. What I meant was, the guy sitting alone at 4AM writing code is far more likely to be libertarian -- like me -- than are the top people at the big software outfit he works for. And that makes no sense to me, but that is what I see. But I do think I understand what is going on. The geek just wants to be left alone to do his thing. The big-money entrepreneur also wants to be left alone to do his thing, but he's got lots of extra cash, and if he believes in big government, which most of us are socialized to believe in, then he feels pretty good about paying 8 figures a year in taxes. Freeman's going to need to convince big-money liberals that they can do more good with their own money than can the government with their tax dollars."

"Simple and clear, Mister Serow, Sir!" I was a little -- maybe even fairly -- drunk, and I guess that was why I suddenly decided to go with Mister and Sir. Serow gave me a sly grin, and I bet he was thinking Freeman was rubbing off on me.

Clicks and I were pretty well overindulged before all that much time had gone by. We were not used to food and strong beer flowing like this. Serow still didn't seem intoxicated, except for him having turned into a more or less normal guy.

By dinnertime, Serow's guests pretty well filled the place, and I was amused to find myself in the midst of an ultra-geek beerfest. A regularly scheduled one at that. I would not have thought there could be such a thing. Clicks was excited to have more techs to talk with, and he said a couple of the others were

also big names. I'd had enough, and took a walk outside to get some air and call Pearl. I was really looking forward to telling her Serow had described himself as Libertarian.

----- 037 -----

I'd never been to Texas, I'd never flown in a private aircraft and I'd sure never met a governor, so I was very wired when Freeman picked me up on Friday for the flight to Texas. He was driving another set of gorgeous vintage wheels and I will admit to looking forward to seeing what car he'd have, and to thinking I'd someday like to have a collection of old beauties to choose from.

"Nice suit. Good choice."

"Thanks." I'd not had much doubt that a business suit was appropriate, but was still a little surprised Freeman also was wearing a suit. "Have you met the governor before?"

NO was all he said.

I let him stay silent, I could see something was on his mind. I had plenty to think about also, and not talking was fine with me. Plus, as usual, he had windows wide open and the drive was noisy.

A few minutes before we arrived at a small, local airport, he said to me "With Harley, it's always something." He had a look that was half amusement and half aggravation.

"Sir?" I admit, I was getting pretty comfortable with the use of SIR, particularly with Freeman. This was new to me, a change in me, and not long ago I would have despised it. But now, it felt right.

"Harley ... is many things. He is one of the finest people on the planet. But he is also the King of the Ballbusters. Harley's done so much, seen and knows so much of the world ... I'm not sure if it is crazy, or if it makes complete sense. But one of the things he loves most is needling his friends. Putting us in uncomfortable spots, just so he can sit back and laugh. Small price to pay for being close to him, certainly. And I consider it an honor he thinks enough of me to pound my stones the way he does. ... Harley set up this meet. We're flying in Harley's Gulfstream. We're his guests, and we'll be treated extremely well, except I know he'll have something up his sleeve for me."

"Frankly, I'm looking forward to seeing what that is!" I guess I was feeling pretty comfortable with Freeman to say this, and he shot me a half-smirk, the exact response I'd expected.

The plane was gorgeous, and we were escorted in by a stewardess who offered drinks and snacks right away. There was no security, and no crowd and no IDs checked. Easy to see why seriously rich people had their own planes.

"Have you thought about your own plane, Freddy?"

"Yes, I have. But I like driving a lot, and I don't travel far all that often, except when Uncle Sam takes me somewhere. Doesn't make sense for me to have a plane. Plus, I really hate jumping out of them, and when I fly it gives me a feeling of anticipating the jump. So, I can happily do without a plane."

We'd been in the air maybe 30 minutes, and I was looking out the window when an elderly gentleman walked up behind Freeman. The guy didn't say anything, but he was standing close to me and because of his age and frankly, his authoritative air, I stood without thinking about it. Freeman didn't move, which seemed strange because the guy was normally so sensitive to his surroundings. He gave me that same half-smirk, then rolled his eyes a little.

"I'll take sparkling water with crushed ice and lime. Large glass. On the double!"

At first I thought he was confused, imagining the man behind him to be the stewardess. But he'd never order her around like that. The older man laughed. "Yes, sir MISTER Freeman, Sir!"

The stewardess had come up to us, but the old gent waved her off. When he'd turned his back, I looked at Freeman who had a bigger half-smirk, and I mouthed the name HARLEY? Freeman's response was a full-smile.

Mr Watson returned with Freeman's drink, saying, "Doesn't count. Too easy. Would you like something young man? A real drink? Some whiskey? Or are you sticking with the pansie stuff like my middle-aged friend here?"

"Sir, Mr Watson, my name is Danny Banks, and it's an honor to meet you. I don't need anything, thanks very much."

Watson turned to the stewardess and asked her to fix me something, then he sat down next to Freeman. "This is going to be a lot of fun for me, Freddy. You know, the governor's Dad and me go back a long ways. I've known Sonny Fields since he was a Little Leaguer, and I've never seen him angry, really mad, until I was talking with him about the Miller Show. I told him to watch it, and we talked right after. He knew half of Texas would go along with your idea about pulling out of the income tax, and he knew you were going to be causing him some massive headaches. Oh, he is going to kick your butt all the way back to New Hampshire."

"I know. And I don't care." Freeman spoke softly, without any of Watson's gaiety. "We may be getting close to a point from where we can't get back. I'm totally serious about SWEEP16, Harley. And Sonny Fields is someone I need to convince."

Mr Watson was not joking anymore. "Yes. I've come along to have some fun, Freddy. But, like I told you when you quit football, I'll back you up. I put my name on your list this morning. I'll do my share. I'll put money in your Foundation. And I'll help you convince Fields." Harley drained his glass and motioned for another. "I'm not as pessimistic as you tho, Freddy. I've seen too much to think anything is a lock. The financial markets are too complex to predict very much. And the USA, the world, too complicated. For a lot of years, I worried about lots of things. I'd analyze and plan and fret. But lots of times it turned out I was way wrong. And sometimes I was right, but for the wrong reasons. Often,

what I worried about tended not to be the real problem. Don't be too pessimistic about our future, no matter what you see, no matter what you think you understand." Harley was quiet, but we could both tell he wasn't finished speaking, so we also stayed quiet. "But it is important to try to think things out, to be prepared for what might come. Plus, it's just plain fun for me to form my own ideas and then see how it goes." Harley's second drink came, and he drained half of it before he continued. "Now, your SWEEP16, I'm with you, I have basically zero doubt it would create an economic boom far beyond anything the world has ever experienced. And I think it would do great things for the moral fiber, the human side of our country. It's going to be fun figuring out how to get this done. Plus I'm really going to enjoy putting a headlock on Sonny!"

Freeman didn't speak, but his lips tightened and his eyes locked with Harley's, and there was no mistaking his mind.

"Freddy ... you are going up against a new type of adversary now. I don't mean Sonny Fields. He'll be straight with you, no matter what he thinks, he'll tell you. But a lot of other people won't care what you say, will not talk to you rationally, or debate you honestly. People will lie about you, lie to you, lie about what you say to your own face. You will need to find a way to deal with people, to convince people, who are not only purely emotional, but totally unconstrained by facts. To an awful lot of Americans, big government is something they believe in, and anyone who challenges that belief, challenges their faith, must be demonized. It will get really ugly at times. You remember all the garbage when we were getting the operation going in Maine? That got bad pretty bad at times. Well, you are going to see things coming up here that will make the Maine bunch look like Boy Scouts. And it's not just people's beliefs. There are powerful people whose way of life, whose way of making a living that would be destroyed by SWEEP16."

Freeman just nodded a THANK YOU at Harley, and by now I knew this meant Harley hadn't said anything Freeman hadn't already considered.

It's not as if I was going to start a chat with both Freeman and Harley quiet, so I just looked out the window and thought some things over myself. I'd called Jenna the day before. She'd already been in Texas since Sunday, and she told me a lot of people were interested in and talking about SWEEP16. She said part of the reason was simply that many Texans don't like being bossed around by DC ... not that they like or believe in DC's tax laws, but that even more so, they resent limitations on their Freedom.

She had a lot to say, and she'd given me insights that would help me understand more about what I'd be seeing soon.

"You know that saying, DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS? Well, most of Texas really means it. There is a very strong independent, Libertarian mindset in big parts of Texas. Outside of some of the cities, you'll find a lot of Texans who are extremely Freedom-minded. They don't like paying huge tribute to Washington, but even more than that, they don't like the idea that DC can make them do whatever DC wants just because a bunch of congressmen pass some idea into law. Sonny Fields needs to figure out how he is going to handle this situation that Freeman has dumped on him, and I'll bet he's madder than a wet hen to be in such a spot. I'll also bet he hadn't really thought about SWEEP16 much at all until after the

Miller Show. But now he's got to think about it, and take a stand on it. But even though a lot of Texans jumped on the idea immediately--"

"Yeah, Clicks told me this morning that over 300,000 Texans have put their name on the SWEEP16 list."

"Wow, that's a lot. More than a lot. Make sure Freeman knows that before he meets the Governor. I hadn't been thinking about the list. But yes, you see what I mean. What Freeman is proposing for Texas is really, really extreme. But a lot of Texas loves it, and now Fields has to take some kind of a stand. And the last thing a governor of Texas wants is to be seen as kowtowing to DC. Do you know where the meeting will be?"

"Tilden, I think. I never heard of it."

"That's where the Fields family has a ranch. So Fields is keeping him away from the capital ... keeping more of a lid on the meeting and making it unofficial. Not giving the idea any respect or a formal airing. That was to be expected, I guess. What do you make of it?"

"Nothing, frankly. I'm just kind of amazed to be going, to be meeting the governor. I mean, I'm still a little shell-shocked by the whole thing. Freeman, Serow. Even you, Jenna. I was in school just a few weeks ago, sort of wondering what I'd be doing with myself after graduation. If anything I would have guessed I'd be reporting on high school sports, Board of Education meetings. What's happened is nuts."

"Yes, do you remember when you sat with a bunch of us the night of Freeman's announcement? We all had a pretty good idea what might be coming your way. And I don't think one of us at the table that night wasn't a bit envious of your situation. I hope you're having fun with it, and I'm really glad you think it's nuts! ... But anyway, here's how I see the Texas deal, if you're interested."

"Yeah, I'm definitely interested. I'm no good at all at figuring things in advance ... how people will react. Just not me."

"Politicians are ALWAYS thinking about how a situation will be perceived. How the press will spin it, IF the press will hype it, how it will affect their polling, what the best response will be. Politicians, the majority of them, don't have much of an opinion on anything except whatever opinion will get them re-elected. Fields is somewhat different tho in that he's not a career pol ... He's just starting his second term, he'd never held elective office before. Nobody knows if he wants to continue in politics or go back to the family business or even just retire. He can do whatever he chooses. I mean, he's been financially set since he was born, because of what his father achieved. So now, Fields needs to decide where he is going to come down on this wild idea totally out of left field, and he needs to decide quickly. And I don't think there is a way to waffle on this. He's going to have to come down firmly one way or the other."

"Danny ... have you thought about the implications for Fields of whatever decision he might make?"

"Ummm no ... I haven't thought about it at all. I've just kind of been rolling along like a dummy I guess."

"I don't know that it matters much for you anyway. But think about this. If Fields tells people he thinks SWEEP16 is just a ridiculous idea and he helps to bury it, then he might be able to do a pretty good job of that. SWEEP16 will still have lots of boosters here and there in Texas, but it will fade, at least for a while. However, that's just a very status-quo, uninteresting sort of stance for Fields. Regardless of how he might personally feel about SWEEP16, dumping on it will be safe and easy for him. And dull. And Sonny Fields is not a dull guy. But also, he has been a big promoter of economic Freedom, he campaigned on liberalizing the business climate, helping business to succeed by eliminating red tape, bureaucracy, etc. He's well known for his belief that the lack of a state income tax is one of the biggest reasons for the economic success of Texas."

"Are you following me?"

"Following, yes. But I'm not going any further ... I don't know where you are going."

"Freeman has basically forced Sonny Fields into a very big governmental and political decision. If Fields goes establishment and helps bury SWEEP16, no big waves. But burying SWEEP16, I think, goes against Fields's sense of theatre and politics and, I think, most of all, his love of Freedom. If Fields backs SWEEP16, but he is unable to get the rest of Texas behind it, his political career is over. He may or may not care about that. Can you tell me what the other possibility is?"

"Fields backs SWEEP16, and he gets Texas to implement Freeman's idea to stiff DC?"

"Right. And?"

"And ... I don't know."

"Well, you can bet both Freeman and Fields know. If Texas does SWEEP16, the next stop for Fields is the White House."

----- 038 -----

As the plane taxied to a stop, I leaned toward Freeman and told him about the 300,000 Texan names on his list. His face showed surprise for the first time since I'd met him, and he gave me that smile I knew had motivated a lot of people. Harley had heard what I said, and he gave out with what I could only describe as a thoughtful whistle, which sounds strange, I know.

We exited the plane onto an almost deserted airfield. A guy who looked to be pushing 80 was standing next to a big Chevy Suburban. He was staring at Harley without any expression on his face. "You stink like a stockyard, and I'm still upwind of ya."

"And you're even uglier than I remember. Which is saying a LOT."

They walked up to each other looking like a fight, but by now I knew they had to be tight to talk this way. Freeman didn't move, so I didn't either.

Harley shoved the other guy some, then they started laughing and backslapping.

Harley introduced us to his friend, who he called Sonny Senior.

"Used to be just 'Sonny', but since Sonny Junior became such a bigshot, now he's Sonny and my old partner is 'Sonny Senior'. I still get a kick when I think of that. Haven't seen these boys in 5 or 6 years."

"Sonny would have been here himself, but he got hung up with some foreign guys who were supposed to have flown out already. But c'mon, load up the truck and I'll run you back to the ranch. We'll see some pretty country on the way."

The airfield was really just a single airstrip ... long and paved but seemed almost private. However, driving past the small office building, I was startled to read a sign WELCOME TO THE FREE STATE OF McMULLEN COUNTY TEXAS. I glanced at Freeman, and his face again showed surprise, and an even bigger smile when he pointed out the sign to Harley.

Senior noted our interest, and commented, simply, "Ain't it grand?!"

As Senior said, it was pretty country, and I'd never seen anything like it. Senior explained it would be a few hours before Governor Fields could join us for dinner, so we stopped for something at a small place that he particularly favored. It smelled great even before we got inside, and I was liking Texas just fine. Due to the odd hour, I guess, there was only one car parked out front. Inside, the smell was even better, and I was really ready for lunder in Texas. The place was empty of customers except four guys that set me on edge. We sat about as far from them as we could, but they were loud. I assumed they were speaking French, with some English, mostly curse words, which seem to be the words young guys learn first when they pick up a language. That they were speaking so loudly, and cursing, was not right, and I wondered if they were trying to start trouble.

When they got REALLY loud, we stopped talking altogether, Freeman clearly staring at and listening to them. "Sounds to me like they're from Corsica. An unusual type of French. I'd guess they are kind of low-level mobsters. Senior guys are always discreet. These younger guys can't help strutting some. It's pretty common, too, for hoodlums in their early 20s to come to America and misbehave. Generally they get away with it, and of course that only makes them worse. But there are no women here now. I can live with it, if you guys can. The rest of us just shrugged and Sonny Senior and Harley continued their tales of 50 years ago. These older guys still had a lot of fire in their minds, and I had no doubt they'd done a great deal of living. Made me wonder what kind of stories I might have to tell someday. A few minutes later, while I was enjoying my first authentic Texas Barbecue, a woman of maybe 40 or 45 walked in with two younger women, around 20. I assumed them to be mother and daughters. The Corsicans quieted down and stared for a few seconds, then made some remarks and gestures that needed no translations. They laughed at their jokes and made kissing noises. And this set Freeman off.

He walked over to the Corsicans' table. I wondered what I should do. Not that I'm of any use in a fight, I've always shied away from them. But I didn't want to shrink with Freeman there. I admit he affected me. But also, I thought if I approached with him, that might seem like battle lines were being drawn. So I settled for pushing my chair away from the table, but staying in my seat.

Freeman had walked around the far side of the Corsicans table; I guess the one he'd tagged as the leader had his back toward me. Freeman was speaking French, so I don't know what he was saying, but I can say the look on his face was not one I'd want directed at me. He had a kind of a half-smile on his mouth, but otherwise he looked like a piece of stone.

They said a few things back and forth, the Corsicans getting pretty loud, the only words I knew being English curses. Freeman's voice did not rise, but his posture changed and I could feel him sort of decide this situation was likely to go beyond words.

One of the Corsicans jumped up and shouted something, close in on Freeman's face. Freeman pointed toward the door, speaking softly, with a spider-to-the-fly expression. The guy was large, and he made it clear to the others he was happy to go outside. When all the Corsicans followed, I figured I had to go too, but Freeman shook his head and put up his hand to stop me. And he gave me a big smile, which he made obvious to the Corsicans.

Harley said we should just let Freeman do his thing, he'd rejoin us soon. This reminded me of my first impression on meeting Freeman, how I thought he looked deadly, lethal.

I wanted to at least watch from the window, but Harley told me to sit. "Besides, the women are watching out the windows. We'll be able to tell from their reaction if we need to do anything. Believe me, if there is anything Freeman knows, it's how to size up young guys."

So I sat and watched the women, who were extremely agitated. One of the daughters looked at us incredulously, and I did feel like a jackass sitting here. Then the other daughter pulled out a cellphone and I was guessing she called 911.

We heard a shout of pain, the voice not Freeman's. Then more shouting and a loud thud against the side of the building. Then nothing.

The women continued to stare. I looked at Harley who just grinned at Sonny Senior and me.

The mother had good news. "Your friend is OK, but two of the bigmouths are down."

A daughter added "That guy ... WOW. Like there was nothing much to it."

And from Harley, "For him, I doubt there was."

"Wait, his hand is bleeding."

At this I jumped up, but again Harley told me to wait.

"Are the other two guys still down?"

"Yes, they haven't moved since they went down."

"OK, bring him a couple of our cloth napkins."

I felt unbelievably useless just going out with cloth. At least the cut on his wrist didn't look too bad. One of the Corsicans was sitting, sort of piled up against the building, but I couldn't see anything wrong with him. The other was lying down, holding his right arm and it was bent in a totally unnatural way. I think his elbow joint must have been turned inside out. The two Corsicans who were apparently unhurt were glaring at Freeman but otherwise keeping still.

Freeman looked at me and spoke in an amazingly breezy, carefree way, and reached for the napkin.

"Oh, Thanks Danny. It's not much of a cut, but I don't want to get blood on anything."

I couldn't believe this. "I'm pretty sure one of the women called 911."

"Good, that one pulled a knife. He went beyond bad manners, made it a police matter. These two were smart enough to keep out of it, but those two," he said, pointing with his chin to the ones on the ground, "need a doctor. An orthopedist. Would you go back inside and tell people it's all good? Enjoy your meals. I'll stay out here until this is cleared up."

The Corsicans, even the ones still standing, had obviously undergone an attitude adjustment, and I really wished I'd seen what had happened.

Back inside, Mr Watson seemed somewhat amused by the incident, but pretty nonchalant. Mr Fields seemed to share my perspective ... WHAT THE HECK HAPPENED?

"One thing about Freddy ... when stuff happens, it seems like Freddy is there an awful lot of the time. Marti, Freddy's wife, once told me he is a Bad-Magnet. I'm not going to try to explain it, but I can tell you, it is just the way it has always been with him. This thing here this afternoon ... it's ... it's just the way it is with him." Harley smiled at Mister Fields and me, then went after his meal.

----- 039 -----

Harley ate most of his plate in about half a minute, then stopped. He asked us if we knew how Freeman became the starting quarterback for the Minutemen. I didn't, so Harley began a story that he was clearly enjoying far more than he had the food, which was saying something. The barbecue was great, but I was hardly tasting it myself once Harley got going.

"I owned the Minutemen, and Freeman was on the team mostly because of me. But I always try not to interfere a whole lot with my managers, so when Freeman didn't get the starting job, I just let the coach make his own decisions. It was easy to see, at least for me, that Freeman was very unhappy on the bench. Not complaining, but always coming up with some new angle to get in games. H-Back, 5th

receiver, punt, kickoff teams. He came up with all kinds of stuff. But it's not normal for the 2nd string QB to do much of anything else. Eventually he became the holder for extra points and field goals, then he played blocking back on punt teams, which put us in good shape for fake punts. And he was a pretty good blocker. Real good blocker for his size."

"We were having a bad year Freddy's rookie season. We thought we had a good team, expected to make a run, but in game 12 we're 4-7 and about to be 4-8. Late in the game we're down about 30 points, so coach puts Freddy in at QB, plus some other guys who don't play much. Just to finish out the game. Now, these guys want a chance to show what they can do ... they don't care there is no chance to win. They're playing like it's the first quarter of the first game of the year. And this aggravated some guys on the other team. Play got a little nasty. One of our offensive linemen gets in a scuffle. Our guy has his helmet ripped off and is thrown to the ground by one of the other players. Before he can get up, the guy stomps his head. I was shocked to see this. Never seen a head-stomp in all the ball field scuffles. But then the guy lifts his foot and he's about to do it again. But before he brings his foot down, I see young Freddy come across with a kick of his own ... hits the guy in the head. Knocks him out. The whole stadium is stunned. Freddy gets ejected, of course, and within a few minutes the other guy is revived and ejected as well."

"Now, the thing is with Freddy ... he is a passionate guy. Hassling one of his friends is a good way to get yourself busted up. But also, he has a sense of leadership, team-building, drama. If you ask me ... he was so quick to get on that guy because he was just looking for a chance to do something. To get the rest of the guys behind him, to make himself the QB the players wanted."

"And boy, did he ever. After 'The Kick', of course the media is all over him, and again, his sense of drama comes to the fore. A TV reporter says to him, YOU COULD HAVE KILLED THAT MAN! Freddy, looking serious as could be, says 'OF COURSE. BUT I DECIDED TO JUST KNOCK HIM OUT INSTEAD.' Now this practically knocked out that lady reporter, and she just stands there with the mic in Freddy's face. So he keeps going, right into the camera ... 'YOU CHEAP-SHOT ANYBODY ON THE MINUTEMEN, AND I'M COMING AFTER YOU. THAT'S A PROMISE. THAT'S MY SOLEMN PROMISE.'"

"You can imagine ... Sonny I'm sure remembers ... The other players, the fans, the sports world, everybody just eats this up. But he league still had to do something, so Freddy is suspended for the next two games, forbidden from even meeting with the team, and we got beat again. So now we're 4-10 and it's not a good feeling in the locker room. But sometimes, mark my words on this Danny, sometimes things can change in an instant, a battleship can turn on a dime. And I remember an interview with July Peake, the offensive lineman who got stomped. Fine player and for quite a while now a fine sportscaster."

"The Quotable Ogre!"

Harley gave Senior a big smile, "Yes, the Round Mound of Mouth! Looking back, it seems July must have had the booth in his mind all along."

Harley took a quick sip of his sweet tea and continued kind of hurriedly, as if he was afraid one of us would change the subject, but there is no way that would have happened.

"So one of the TV sportscasters asks July if he thinks Freeman has what it takes to lead an NFL team. Big Ol' July ... I'd say his broadcast career got started right then ... He says something like 'SOME SAY FREEMAN'S TOO SMALL, TOO SLOW, TOO INEXPERIENCED, TOO BEAT-UP FROM THE MILITARY TO LEAD AN NFL TEAM. WE SAY FREDDY LED NAVY SEAL TEAMS IN ACTUAL ARMED COMBAT -- DO OR DIE -- AND HE CAN DAMN SURE LEAD THE MINUTEMEN. HELL, FREDDY PROBABLY THINKS THE NFL IS FOR PANSIES.'"

Harley took a quick drink and kept going. "We're home for the last two games of the year, the team is 4-10 and the fans and the media are agitating constantly for Freddy to get his shot. Coach starts Freddy and a whole bunch of younger guys who hadn't seen a lot of time, and ... well, you can guess what happened."

Sonny Senior and I just smiled at Harley expectantly, so he continued.

"Our offensive line is sky-high to block for Freddy. Remember, they are the ones supposed to protect the QB, but now they are blocking for a guy who showed everybody that he is protecting THEM. You can't believe what that meant to our O-Line. But it also inspired the entire organization. Players, coaches, office, owners. When you get beat week after week the way we'd been, you get into a defeatist frame of mind, and you aren't going to win feeling that way. But with Freddy and the backup players starting, we won our last two games, and there was never a question who would be starting next year."

"And that's how he became our starter. Football is the most emotional of our sports, and Freddy built everyone's emotions like an architect builds a building. THE KICK was the foundation, but he kept at it in a thousand smaller ways. And that, more than anything else, is why we won a title. The analysts said all along other teams had a lot more talent than we had. On paper. And I can understand where they were coming from. But you don't play football on paper. Freddy is a lot of things, a WHOLE LOT of things. But maybe more than anything else, he is a team-builder and a leader."

----- 040 -----

Flashing lights appeared outside, and Sonny Senior took that as his cue. Of course the governor's Dad would have a word with his hometown law. The Mom followed Sonny outside, and returned a few minutes later and spoke to Harley and me.

"So, one of your friends is the Governor's father. Who is the other one?"

Before I could come up with anything, Harley told her "The best friend and the worst enemy you could ever have." I knew I'd be relaying that line to a bunch of people.

When Freddy joined us at the table, I was suddenly embarrassed that we hadn't waited for him. Luckily, everybody still had about half the meal so we all had a few more bites. Freddy had waved off Harley's question about whatever happened outside, so we let that drop. Freddy began his meal, but the owner of the place, who was real familiar with Senior, stopped him and brought out a fresh plate. Whatever had happened didn't hurt his appetite. Sonny Senior rejoined us pretty quickly, but Freddy had already demonstrated a real taste for barbecue. We asked for a check but instead the owner came around with a large package of take-out, saying we were guests tonight.

As we were leaving, the woman stood and said SIR? She had her eyes fixed on Freeman, who walked back to her table. She didn't say anything to him at first, and I heard Freeman say something about their lunch. Then I could see her say THANK YOU. Freeman said something I didn't hear, and gave her a card.

When we got back into the car, I asked to see his card.

FREDDY FREEMAN

SWEEP16

Will you do your share?

Freeman surprised me then by asking to see MY card. DANNY D. BANKS, OPINION and NEWS. It said I was a syndicated columnist with a focus on SWEEP16. Plus of course my website, phone, twitter and email. Freeman gave me a big smile and put it in his pocket.

Mr Fields was driving, and Harley was seated next to him in the front seat. They were talking, but Freeman and I couldn't hear them well, and we remained quiet while the old friends caught up.

I was enjoying looking out the window at this new type of landscape, and actually pretty amazed I was headed for the ranch of the Governor of Texas!

I'd studied up a little bit on Sonny Fields ... he was, of course, an impressive guy. In some ways, the opposite of Freeman, in some ways pretty similar. I thought they might naturally hit it off. And of course I thought Freeman would be trying pretty hard to win Fields over to his way of thinking. I wondered how far he would go if he found that Fields was someone he just did not see eye-to-eye with.

Sonny Senior is a self-made multimillionaire, but Governor Fields was a rich kid. However, he seemed to be one of those rich kids that tried harder than just about anybody ... maybe he didn't want to live in his dad's shadow, or be seen as someone who'd never done things on his own. He'd been a pretty big baseball player in high school and college. And a great student too. He was still known as a real fitness enthusiast, and there were a lot of stories of Fields inviting people to jog or hike or cycle with him. He'd joined Sonny Senior's drilling business after a short time in minor league baseball, and had been responsible for tremendous growth in his arm of the operation. He'd been kind of a maverick candidate for governor, but people were drawn to him personally, and he attracted quite a few voters who'd crossed party lines to vote for him. PLAIN SPEAKING came up a few times. People perceive him as sincere and honest. He was endorsed by a big editorial page with the final comment being WE DON'T AGREE WITH A LOT OF WHAT HE SAYS, BUT WE TRUST HIM TO SAY WHAT HE BELIEVES. Kind of a refreshing thing for a politician.

I wondered what Freeman knew of him, and I was willing to bet he knew a whole lot. I was learning more and more that Freeman was the kind of guy who prepared himself for whatever was coming.

The Governor's Ranch ... Sonny Senior's ranch, really, was a slice of Texas the way it might be seen in a picture book. Very beautiful to me. The house was big enough that each of us had private quarters -- bedroom, bathroom, sitting room and balcony. A pretty great setup and I'm sure the Fields's had visitors a lot of the time. Sonny Senior suggested we settle into our rooms and asked us to join him in the main room after an hour or so. Addressing me directly, he said it was nice I'd worn a suit, but more or less told me to just dress for comfort for the evening. I went out on the balcony and called my folks while I looked out over a nice chunk of Texas. I knew they'd love having me call them from this setting, and I decided to tell Sonny Senior what a kick my parents and I had gotten from me being here.

When we reconvened, Sonny Senior gave us the news that the Governor would not be arriving at the ranch until late at night, official business keeping him quite a bit longer than expected. Harley and Sonny and Freddy were having drinks and talking over their own business ventures, so I excused myself to make a few last-minute changes to my column, which was devoted to Freeman's appearance on the Miller Show.

Things had really exploded over this last week, and I felt like somehow my column should reflect that, like it should really pop. But I didn't know how to make that happen, so I called McMoo. I felt a little funny calling him, but he didn't seem surprised at all. And he gave me a few good suggestions, as if he'd been expecting me to ask. Jenna said he was really good, and I'd never had a reason to doubt her.

It didn't take me long to write up McMoo's suggestions, and I confess to hurrying some, too. I really wanted to talk with Pearl, and we talked over an hour. I could hardly believe I'd met her only a week ago. So much had happened, and we'd discussed just about all of it, although somehow we didn't get around to talking about Texas. Pearl had no issues at all with Freeman's personal wealth, and it was obvious to me her thinking was influencing mine on a sort of emotional level ... like I really didn't want to disagree with her. But I also realized I didn't care she was influencing me, and I understood what

that meant as well. Mom and Dad would love hearing this, and it struck me that I really wanted Pearl to meet them. YIKES, this was a girl I'd only spent a couple of hours with, face-to-face!

When I rejoined the guys in the main room, their mood was a bit different. They'd been drinking a couple of hours, and they all seemed more relaxed and expansive, although none of them were drunk or even tipsy.

Harley was acting almost like another host, and insisted I have a real drink.

"So, what have you been up to, boy?"

"Did a little work, made a few phone calls."

I told them how my parents had gotten a big kick out of me being at the Governor's Ranch, and Sonny Senior said he was glad to hear that, and he was proud to host me.

Then all three of them looked at me expectantly, and when I stammered some Harley started laughing.

"Come on, boy! We're three old married coots. Who else did you call?"

When I told them about Pearl, I had the full attention of all three of them, and I had a weird feeling that I was talking with three uncles or something.

Sonny Senior spoke first. "It's great stuff there, son. Young guy, just out of school, whole world opening up for you, and now there's a lady in the picture and she's really turned your head. It just doesn't get better. You make sure you hang on to every bit of this."

"You going to send her a gift from Texas?" This was Freeman.

"That's a great idea. My wife would love to help you with that, son. She'd like nothing better. Take me up on this!"

That was certainly an offer I could not refuse, and I hope I offered proper thanks.

For another hour the three of them talked about family and children, and Sonny and Harley laughed about some of the exploits of young Governor Fields.

This was not the type of talk I expected. At one point, Freeman said something all of us will remember. "More than once, I'm sure I would not have survived except I had in my mind's eye a picture of my wife, Marti's face, and it was the desire to see her again, more than anything else, that pulled me through."

Then, "If Pearl's the one, Danny, everything else is second."

----- 041 -----

It was pushing midnight when Governor Fields finally arrived. He was friendly and energetic and looked completely fresh, not at all like a guy who'd already had a long day. I could see he was a runner or biker. I'd bet he jogged at least 40 miles a week.

"I apologize for keeping you all waiting. Had to finish up what we were doing tho. No choice. Sure hope Dad took good care of you." The Governor paused for a half-a-beat, looked quickly at our faces which I guess was to make sure we had no complaints, then continued. "I tell you straight out Freeman. I was watching Kenny Miller last week, and I don't think I've ever been as mad at anyone as I was at you, talking about Texas rebelling against the federal government."

Governor Fields still looked pretty mad when he was saying that, and Freeman started to speak. But Harley jumped in. "Yeah, you were mad ... until you realized Freddy might make you the next President of the United States!"

Harley's remark just hung in the air. Governor Fields was certainly not surprised, and neither was Sonny Senior. Nor Freddy. And I was really glad Jenna had tipped me off.

Governor Fields took a long breath and exhaled loudly, which somehow served to break the tension. "We've got a lot to talk about. You know, things are booming here now. I spent today, a lot longer than we had scheduled, with some industrialists from Germany. Looks like they are going to be building some serious manufacturing capability here. We've got the climate, the people and the ports, the tax and regulatory regime, and now we've got some very cheap natural gas. It was the energy, they said, that finally made Texas irresistible. Our business climate is great here. We're attracting people from all over America. Companies from all over the world."

"Imagine if they didn't have ANY taxes to pay!" This was Harley again, seeming very pleased with himself and actually elbowing Sonny Senior. Freeman seemed a little uncomfortable with this second SWEEP16 quip of Harley's. And Sonny seemed maybe a little annoyed this time.

By way of response, he just said, "Time for a drink."

Sonny poured himself some whiskey, checked the rest of us and topped Harley. Then he turned to Freeman. "Dad said you took out some trash this afternoon." Freeman didn't say anything, just shifted his position a little and met Sonny's gaze. The Governor stepped forward and offered his hand, which Freeman of course accepted. "Dad filled me in, and law enforcement gave me quite a bit of information about them. Corsican mob. Traces of heroin in their vehicle. Plus handguns and a lot of cash. You took them outside when they were rude to some women?"

Freeman smiled a little. "I wouldn't want to have to explain myself to my Dad if I had let it go. This kind of thing is becoming common. More and more we see hoodlums from other countries coming to America and misbehaving, deliberately insulting us, because they think they'll get away with it. And usually they are right. The predominant view among the young men of many countries is that America is filled with pansies."

"But there were four of them."

"Danny was ready to back me up if necessary." I hadn't expected him to say anything like this, and I think I blushed, but if anyone noticed, it was ignored. I'd like to think I was ready to back him up. Freeman continued, "The big one thought he was a fighter. But he really had no skills beyond probably some street fights. And he was slow, his movements imprecise. A broken collar bone changed his attitude. It's not difficult to break the clavicle, and it will disable almost anyone. The other guy ... a knife is different. But he didn't know what he was doing either. He stayed down once his elbow was dislocated. Those four were not truly formidable but I'm glad you've got them on ice."

"I'm glad you were the guy who walked into our favorite barbecue."

Sonny sipped some whiskey, and then he surprised me.

"I remember when you won the title with the Minutemen. Wow, it did my heart good. I tried my darnedest to play pro baseball, but a little time in the minors showed me I wasn't going anywhere. There were guys a whole lot better than me. You were way better than I was, but the way you had to work yourself off the bench, pick up a losing team ... Dad and I really loved it. I was inspired by it. You know all this, sure but I wanted to tell you anyway. In my book, inspiring other people is just about the greatest thing anyone can do. I owe you."

Freeman looked down a little, and his only response was a small, tight-lipped smile.

"Thank You for your service to our country. It's an honor to have you here. Please make yourself at home."

I was expecting the Governor to get talking about SWEEP16 and political sorts of things, but he seemed to have no interest in that.

Everyone followed his lead, and so we wound up talking sports and military. The Governor and Senior were very interested in the SEALs, combat situations, what it was like on the ground in some of the places Freeman had spent time. And in particular why Freeman was still at it. The Fields's were hunters and they started talking hunting and then guns and finally what to do about the problem of the ranch, and a lot of Texas, being overrun by wild hogs. The result of that conversation was a plan for a pre-dawn reveille in preparation for a hog hunt! I'd never been hunting, or even fired a gun in my life, so this was way out of my experience. But the plan called for about two and a half hours of sleep and so we all decided to turn in. Harley and Sonny Senior begged off the hog hunt ... it would be just me with Freddy and the Governor. The Governor had guests here often to hunt, and he was set up to issue hunting licenses. Having never taken any hunter safety course, I was not legal to buy a license. But Freeman had previously held a Texas hunting license, and I went to bed while the Governor worked up new paperwork for Freddy.

----- 042 -----

I was lucky to fall asleep quick, and could hardly believe it when my alarm woke me. Getting going in the dark on so little rest seemed crazy to me, but I was also realizing Fields was pushing Freeman ... just seeing what he could do. The idea of the hunt, probably, was a lot more about Fields wanting to see how Freeman handled things than it was about wild pork chops or varmint control.

When I got downstairs, Fields and Freeman were packing a few things in a pickup truck. Fields gave me some coveralls and coffee, and off we went.

As soon as we were under way, Fields asked "Danny ... why are you here?"

Although I was sure he knew, I told him, and I thought about that night in the Crossroads, telling Uncle Walt why I wanted to be a reporter.

I didn't expect it, but Freeman said "Danny's kept his word. He's always gotten it right."

"Mr Freeman's not barred me from anything yet, and he's not asked me to withhold any information about SWEEP16. But if you'd rather I not be here, I understand."

I was thinking Fields did not want me there, and probably I was right. Because after a few seconds he said "No problem. We're just going pig hunting."

The Governor explained to us that legally, the wild pigs on his ranch were varmints, and he or his agents were permitted to kill them, basically at will. However, if you wanted to use the pork, it's more complicated, and so Freeman would have a hunting license. Wild pigs are often donated to soup kitchens, but Freeman and the Gov had ideas about a pig roast here at the ranch.

The Governor explained to us ... to me, really, that pigs are keen animals, with tremendous senses of smell and hearing, and that they become extremely wary when they know they are hunted, as these pigs are. Freeman had hunted wild hogs previously, and offered me advice, too. Mainly, STAY AWAY from any pig unless I was sure it was dead. They can be dangerous. Some of them have sharp tusks, and can cause serious injury. The Gov also warned us about snakes, but he said with tonight's near-record cool temperature they probably would not be active.

After we parked, we followed a dry creekbed for a half-mile or so, then the Governor led us up a small rise and we tucked ourselves in among some rocks. It was still too dark to really see much of anything, and I was surprised at the chill in the air, given yesterday's warmth. The Governor explained the pigs usually fed at night, then took water several hundred yards off to our left, and would likely follow one of their main trails across in front of us, into a large, extremely thick area where they would spend the day. Freeman and Sonny arranged themselves comfortably so they'd be able to shoot, and I stayed sort of between, but a few feet behind them.

As we waited, the Governor and Freeman whispered back and forth about the gun he'd lent Freeman, and I heard Governor Fields say the GUEST SHOOTS FIRST, then he'd try to take a shot himself, if possible.

Nobody said a word for about 30 minutes, I checked my watch. It was a real pleasure to me to sit here quietly and watch night turn to first light and then dawn, and to listen to the sounds as Nature greeted a new day. I could imagine some guys might hunt just for that period before real daylight.

"I smell them. You guys catching that?"

Both the Governor and I shook our heads. "That's pigs." Freeman seemed sure of his ground.

I was very tense, straining to see or hear or even smell something. More tense I think than Fields or Freeman, but I wasn't picking up anything.

"Yeah, from the left, just where you said." Then, to me, "Might as well cover your ears when we shoot."

"You see them?"

"Not yet, but I hear them. They are relaxed."

Freeman and Fields hunkered down a little more, guns up, preparing to shoot. By now I could see fairly well, but judging by where Freeman was staring, the pigs were coming thru the shadows and I still couldn't see them. Freeman moved a little, and put his head down to use the scope on the rifle. He'd been doing that every few minutes since we sat down, but only briefly. This time he kept his head down, and I shifted my gaze from Freeman to where he seemed to be aiming. Now, finally, I could see the pigs coming ... Freeman whispered I'VE GOT THE BIG ONE WALKING HIGH. One of the hogs was walking on the side of a little rise, clearly a few feet higher than the others. Several more seconds passed, then Freeman's shot, followed immediately by the Governor's. Even tho I was ready for the noise, the shots still startled me. And for some reason, I hadn't covered my ears. Startled as I was, I didn't see whether any pigs had been hit, and I was surprised anew when Freeman stood and fired again.

I will admit I was still kind of jangled to be part of this scene, and didn't really know what had happened. Freeman turned to Fields and said NICE SHOT.

"Me? I did not expect you to even take that second shot, let alone hit another one. Let's go look them over. Did you let me take the medium one in front because it would be better eating?"

"I thought taking out the big one was better varmint control. But yes, I love wild pork. Any chance we can do a mesquite barbecue tonight?"

"I like the way you think!"

This last remark from Fields drew only a sly, glancing smile from Freeman, then all of us started laughing as we remembered the real reason we were here.

"The barbecue joint you visited yesterday is operated by Amos Hockley, a family friend. Amos I expect will be more than happy to help us get something going tonight."

The sight of the dead animals and their blood was unsettling to me. I eat meat ... I really like bacon on a lot of things, pork sausages, pork chops. It isn't as if I had any right to look down on this scene, or disapprove of it. But this was new and very much out of my comfort area, although I tried not to show it.

"These animals are lean ... nothing like the farm animals I have seen up close."

"You're right about that. Pigs go wild pretty easily, and these are true wild animals. Lean and tough and strong and healthy. But still a big problem here in Texas. Really, anywhere they get established. But this one", Fields was standing over the pig he'd shot, "is going to do right by us. And those others will go to some people who will be very happy to get the meat."

We walked over to Freeman's first hog, which was noticeably bigger than the Governor's.

"This one is more for sausage and burger than barbecue. Let's go see that other one you shot."

The first two pigs had dropped more or less on the spot, but the 3rd one had run 100 yards or so. I asked about this, and learned that an animal shot through the front shoulders will be anchored right where it is hit, but an animal shot through the lungs will run some. Not the kind of thing I imagined I'd learn when I started covering Freeman.

The Governor surprised both of us when he announced we'd leave the hogs right where they were, and that a couple of guys from the ranch would be along shortly to process them. "It's still nice and early, and I'd love to get a few miles in before we sit down to breakfast. If anyone is interested, that would be great!"

I kept my mouth shut because I assumed the invite didn't really extend to me. But Freeman brought me in. "Sounds good. I always have some running shoes with me. How about you, Danny? Did you bring something to run in?"

"Yes, sir, I always do. But I did not expect to be hunting AND running this morning. Nothing like a few miles to make you appreciate your breakfast!"

"Well said, Danny!"

"Thank you, Mister Governor." The Governor of Texas had paid me a compliment, and I decided to go formal, respectful as possible.

----- 043 -----

I will admit the idea of running this morning, after the pig hunt, surprised me. It didn't really make sense, unless the whole point of the last 10 hours or so was that the Governor simply wanted to see what Freeman was made of ... could he stay up late drinking, get up early, shoot, and now run? I don't

know what if anything Freeman expected, but by this point I expected to see him go along with all of it as if it was the natural thing to do. And he did.

The Governor looked like he'd done plenty of running, and I'm sure Freeman had a better read on this than me. Freeman, on the other hand, might not have looked so much like a runner to the Gov. He had some size to his thighs, and his upper body, in particular, did not look like it belonged to a guy who put on a lot of miles. For my part, although I'm not much of a runner compared to REAL runners, I was going to be hitting the road with two guys as old as my Dad, so I did not figure I'd have an issue keeping up. In any case, I expected this to be interesting.

"I like to warm up with some calisthenics and stretching, if you guys don't mind. Danny, you might not have much use for warmups, but they seem like a better and better idea as the years go by."

Freeman and the Gov exchanged smiles that were obviously a little on the rueful side, and I thought about what it must be like to have your physical prime so many years behind you.

"Sir, I would have loved the chance to work out with you and Freddy when you were my age. We hit the iron some at Mr Freeman's house once, and it was the best session I've ever had with weights."

"Really?" ... the Governor's word was posed a statement, but he stretched it out and the tone of his voice turned it into a question, Jenna Jersey-style. "Would you be interested in a little lifting before the running?"

Freeman just grinned back at the Governor, mostly, and then at me. I wondered if he was thinking what I was thinking ... no way the Gov would have near his strength.

The Governor's personal setup was nothing special compared to Freeman's, but I almost choked when I realized how quickly I'd adjusted to at least this aspect -- a personal gym -- of being rich. Governor Fields' facilities would have knocked me out only a short time ago.

We did some stretching first, and I was surprised at how limber these guys were. I don't do any stretching, and both these old guys generally had more flexibility than me.

The Governor spotted the bandage on Freddy's wrist.

"How about we get a doctor to take a look at that?"

"It's not much. I carry a small medical kit, and it's taken care of."

The Gov stared at Freddy for a couple of seconds, then started doing pushups. He could obviously do quite a few pushups, but he seemed a little surprised when Freeman started almost like a jumping pushup. He pushed so hard off the ground it was like he was jumping off his hands.

"High enough for double-claps!" the Gov called out. Freeman obliged with some double-clap pushups. I'd not seen this before, and managed to do some single clap pushups but could quickly tell this would be a good way to smash my face on the floor, and said so, to the amusement of my elder workout

buddies. The Gov didn't do any double-claps either, but on the other hand, this was just supposed to be the warmup for weights.

Then we did situps, jumping jacks, windmills ... pretty standard calisthenics ... for several minutes. Plenty of movement for a warmup for the iron, and then Freeman said "You guys know kip-ups?"

After seeing blank looks from both of us, he continued. "Something we came up with in the Navy. These will get to you in short order." And then he showed us a couple.

A KIP-UP is a squat thrust with a jumping jack and a pushup thrown in ... drop down into a squat, throw your feet out behind you so you're in position for the pushup, do a pushup, pull your knees back up to your elbows, stand, do a jumping jack. Before I did the first one, I knew these would be killer. Squat thrusts are a movement I have always disliked, although I will admit they are great exercise. Freeman's kip-ups included his clapping pushups, just to make them even more insane.

"If this is a warmup for the iron, then 20 or 25 kip-ups will be plenty. These are not soft."

And they surely weren't. As soon as Freeman said '20 or 25', I vowed to myself it would be 25 for me. But we had already done some pushups and I will admit it was pretty difficult for me to do the 25 kip-ups without getting sloppy or slowing down. I was determined these older men would not outdo me, and I am more impressed they were pushing me than I am embarrassed to admit it. We finished our kip-ups about the same time, and I'd been so focused on my own movements it was news to me when Freeman smiled at me, "You did 25, didn't you? We only did 20."

Now I was embarrassed to have been oblivious. I only knew Freeman had been clapping out his pushups, and I said so.

"Those kip-ups are great, Freddy. You can get a heck of a workout in short order without any equipment at all. I'll do them again. Any other warmup movements you like?"

"I'm very partial to power cleans and power snatches from the hang. Do you know them?"

Freeman did the power cleans first. Basically, you stand holding the barbell at your thighs, then use your arms, legs, shoulders and back to heave it up -- clean it -- to your shoulders. Then bring it down to the thighs and do it again. He did a set of 5 with 200 pounds which I figured was about his bodyweight. I could see this was an easy weight for him. After Freeman, the Gov did a set with 100, and so did I. Neither of us had done this movement before, and obviously it was another way of getting a lot of muscles involved and was very aerobic.

"I like those too! Another great movement. Another one I'll do again."

Although the 200 was clearly not a strain for Freeman, I was still surprised when he put 250 on the bar and did five more. The Gov and I repeated at 100, then Freeman shocked me with 300. I'd known from that first workout he was the most serious weightlifter I'd ever worked out with, but I didn't know this

movement and seeing him sort of toss 300 pounds from thighs to shoulder repeatedly impressed me. "Sir, what do you weigh?"

"Now, about 195 but 205-210 is where I should be."

The Gov and I upped our weight to 120 but neither of us could do the full 5 reps.

"There is a lot of technique involved in power cleans. Coordination. You'll get better quick if you keep at them. Even more so with the power snatch from the hang."

Freeman started with 175 pounds on this one. He lifted the bar an inch off the floor, held it for a second, then flung it up high overhead, high enough that with a little bit of a squat his arms were locked out overhead. For the 2nd rep, he lowered the bar within an inch or two of the floor, but didn't let it touch. He did another 5 of these, and although I had felt the power cleans were clearly full-body and very aerobic, the snatches obviously had them beat.

The Gov and I each did a set with 70 pounds, and I liked this exercise a lot. Although it seemed somewhat insane to me that we were still warming up for the iron ... and a run.

Freeman did his next sets with 200 and then 225. The Gov and I stuck with 70 and it was some serious exercise for us. When we finished, all of us just walked around the Gov's gym for a minute or so, catching our breath. Then Governor Fields asked Freeman to tell him about 'the workout that Danny liked so much'. It seemed very weird somehow that the Governor would pay attention to me, and remember anything I said. I still could hardly believe this was happening.

Based on the way I had trained with Freeman at his place, I knew Freeman's rapid-fire style was really a one-man approach, ideally, and adapting that workout to three people would be awkward. But when I suggested maybe I should stand back they both gave me grief for it, and I felt truly honored these men were busting my chops. It reminded me of just a short time ago, when it made me feel sort of grown-up when Bidwell had given me the same type of treatment. But that was kind of amusing ... a different feeling than now. And it underlined in my mind that I now had far more respect for Freeman than Bidwell.

Freeman changed up the style of the workout, and stripped it down a little. Each of us did three sets of three different exercises, non-stop, while the other two guys watched. Then we moved on and did the same with three other movements. It took about 45 minutes altogether, each of us on the weights for about 15 minutes, but even so, I got that same feeling I had when I worked out with Freeman the first time, and it was easy to see the Governor felt the same. And he said so.

"There's blood showing on that bandage now. It's not a problem to have a doctor check it."

"Thanks, but it's just a scratch. It was a little awkward stitching it up with only my right hand, but it will be fine."

By now, this did not really surprise me, but the Governor had the same thoughts most people would have at that point. "You stitched it yourself? You keep that kind of equipment with you?"

Freeman smiled some, but that was all.

We were all wet with sweat and I was tired, so I figured these older guys HAD to be more tired than me, and I was thinking the Gov might back off the plan for running, but on the contrary, he said running would really top off a perfect morning and that we'd meet again outside in 5 minutes. He caught himself up for a second, then said to Freeman, with a quick glance at me, too, "Is that OK?" Obviously, the Gov was used to being the boss, and he'd realized to his embarrassment that it seemed a bit like he was ordering Freeman, who just smiled and said YESSIR!

I went out and checked things on my phone, and in less than 5 Freeman then the Gov were ready to run. I reflected it was still only 7:45.

The Governor set a slow pace, with Freeman and I on either side of him. I stayed about a half-step back ... it just seemed more respectful.

Governor Fields started talking as soon as we got away from the house. "You've had barbecued wild hog before?"

"Sure! I've eaten wild hogs a few different ways. Barbecue is great. And I love the way they do it in Hawaii, burying the hog in the sand, slow cooking for hours on the beach."

"Well, I think you'll like it the way Amos does it. He was not there yesterday when you four showed up at the barbecue joint. But after what happened, I'd bet my last dollar he'll be happy as all get out to come over to the ranch today and fix up a hog for us. That always means a little bit of partying, and Amos is not one to miss a party. That second pig you took ... that was not an easy shot."

Freeman didn't say anything, so the Gov kept going.

"Was it a case of not caring whether you wounded a varmint, or were you confident?"

"SEALs training includes an awful lot of shooting. And I've done an awful lot of practicing and shooting since then. The more you practice the easier things get. And that gun of yours ... couldn't have asked for a better tool for the job. .300 Short is my favorite."

"Dad will love hearing you said that. He gave me that rifle when I became governor, and it's the rifle I would normally have used myself."

"It's a beautiful rifle. Thanks for letting me use something so special to your family! Your Dad knows his guns. Did he get you involved with shooting and hunting?"

"Yes, he did. Although growing up out here, those things are just a natural part of ranch life."

"How about you? Your Dad get you started?"

I knew it was Freeman's Mom who took him hunting as a kid, and got him comfortable with firearms. But it wasn't until I heard the Gov's response that I realized how unusual it was for a boy to learn these things from his Mom.

The Gov was very interested in Freeman's stories of his Mom's life in Siberia. I was too, but I was more impressed that these 'old' guys could chat as easily as they were while we jogged along. We'd covered about two miles, and I was wondering how far we'd go, and if we were going to loop somewhere, or just do a U-turn. We jogged along in silence for a while, then the Gov said casually WATCH FOR RATTLERS. I was so surprised I just blurted out REALLY? and both Freeman and Fields started laughing. "Really", said the Gov. "It's warming up now, and they'll start to move. Not that there are so many of them, but you really don't want to get bit. The night was chilly enough I didn't expect them to be active while we were hunting. But they'll be moving as the day warms up. You've got to be mindful of snakes in this part of the country. We've got snakebite treatments at the house."

"Yikes. Have you ever been bitten?"

"No, but I've talked to people who have been, and it can be pretty bad."

"It can be worse than bad." This was Freeman, and the Gov asked him if he'd been bit.

"Only once by a rattler, and that was a big Eastern Diamondback. He only got me with one fang, and I was already pulling away when he hit me, so he didn't get a chance to pump his venom in. But even so, and even with treatment, my hand swelled up something awful, and it hurt like all get out. But I've been bitten a few times by poisonous snakes in Asia and Africa, and by some nasty scorpions and spiders too. You go around long enough where those critters live, crawling in the weeds, hiding in caves, moving at night and all, and you're going to get envenomated. You need to be well prepared."

"Spoken like a pro. Are you prepared now?"

"I wouldn't come to Texas, even in winter, without a snakebite kit. I'm carrying one now."

We both looked him over.

"I've got a medical kit riding at the small of my back, on a belt under my shirt."

"Anything else on that belt?"

"I always carry at least one sidearm. I'm a Federal Marshal, so I'm legal in all 50 States. What are you carrying?"

This bit about being a Federal Marshal surprised me, and I would guess it surprised the gov also, because he stared at Freeman for a second or two. I hadn't noticed, but the governor was also carrying a pistol at his waist. This explained why I was the only one wearing a shirt tucked into my shorts.

I was feeling a little emboldened, so I ventured that I'd heard rattlers were good to eat.

Governor Fields said he'd never eaten one. Freeman was smiling a little, which led the Gov to ask
WHAT ABOUT YOU, FREDDY?

"Sure ... I've eaten rattlers and lots of other snakes too. I've eaten snakes raw. They're good, if you can cook them right, and big enough for a decent meal. I've eaten plenty of other critters too, some of them pretty nasty. You get hungry enough, you eat what you can, what you have to."

"You run out of food on a mission?"

"Maybe you run out because a 1-week thing turns into a 3-week thing. Or maybe it's a 6-month thing to begin with, and there is just no way you can bring that much supply. Maybe you get food drops, maybe not. So you need to eat and drink whatever you can. It's part of the plan."

We ran for a good bit, talking some, Freeman admiring the beauty of the ranch and commenting on animal tracks in the road. He obviously knew a great deal about critters and their signs. He pointed to deer, javelina and hogs before Governor Fields or I saw them.

"I love Texas, and every time I visit I wonder how so much life can fill a place that looks so dry."

By now, we were about 4 miles out, I figured, and I wondered what the Gov's plan was. A little bit later, he took us up over a hill, following an ATV trail, for about a half mile. Obviously a great place to turn an ankle, and now I thought also, a great place to get bitten by a snake. But when we got down the other side, we were back out on another good dirt road, and the Gov took a left turn, which I was sure would lead us back to the house.

We were running harder now, and nobody was saying anything. I felt strong, and was glad of it. I wasn't going to be first to reach the house, and I was sure Freeman wouldn't run ahead of the Gov either, if he could. But regardless, I wanted to stay with the pace.

We came around a bend and I could see the ranch house far in the distance. Answering my thought, the Gov said "The House is about 3/4 mile from here. I like to open it up a little, then walk the last few hundred yards to cool down."

And with that, he took off at a speed I would not have thought he had. I dug down some and was able to hang just off his shoulder, as I had the whole run. I shouldn't have been surprised, I guess, but Freeman stayed with us too. I don't know how far we went at that speed, but I was burning when the Gov slowed to a walk, and I was impressed with both of these 50-something guys. Plus it made me happy to think if I was lucky and smart, maybe in 30 years, I would be able to do the same.

None of us spoke for a few minutes until our host broke our silence as we walked up to the house. "We'll have a poolside breakfast soon, but first, I am looking forward to that water." The Gov kicked off his running shoes, reached under his shirt and took off a holster belt that he placed on a table, then just sort of stepped into the water at the deep end of the pool. Freeman and I looked at each other and laughed a little, then did the same.

"One of the best feelings in the world is what we just had ... you're hot, sweaty, gritty. Your clothes feel nasty, and they'll feel even worse while you are taking them off. But the water cures all of that in an instant."

The Governor and I agreed, and I watched as the Governor peeled off his socks and shirt and tossed them onto a chair. OK, that seemed like a good idea to Freeman and me, too, and it reminded me of when I'd been swimming at Freeman's house. Freeman stood up in the low end and pulled off his shirt. The wound that had been bleeding when I lifted weights with him was still pretty obvious.

"Is that the bullet wound Miller mentioned?" Freeman was silent, and I was thinking he wouldn't answer at all, when he nodded.

"Sorry, dumb question. If you don't mind my asking ... What's it like to get shot?"

"It's bad."

"Yeah. Another dumb question."

"Even if the bullet itself doesn't do a lot of damage, and this one wasn't real serious, bad things can result from a minor wound."

The Gov tightened his lips, looked down and said nothing, and I knew he was wordlessly telling Freeman YOU HAVE DONE SOME THINGS WAY BEYOND MY EXPERIENCE. That's a strange thing to believe, I know, but I was convinced of it. I guess because I was thinking the same.

Harley and Sonny Senior came outside, and Senior asked if we were all OK with bacon, eggs, pancakes and fresh fruit for breakfast. Um ... YEAH!

The water felt great. I love swimming, even more so after a good workout. And after all we'd just done, plus being short of sleep I was ready to just relax and enjoy the pool.

But Governor Fields was not. He swam a couple of laps in a very smooth crawl, then he ducked down and swam some underwater. He was grinning when he surfaced near Freeman. "So I hear SEALs do a lot of swimming."

Freeman didn't say anything, just stood with a half-smile and I was thinking THERE IS NO WAY THE GOV IS GOING TO PUSH FOR MORE EXERCISE HERE IN THE WATER?!?!? But I was wrong. Sonny took three deep, slow breaths, ducked under the water and kicked off the end of the pool. I like swimming underwater myself, and I could see the Gov was pretty comfortable at it. For me, the old science writer Carl Sagan really nailed it when he wrote that for a human, swimming underwater is like flying in the water. He loved the three dimensions of it. Me too.

I was on the opposite side of the pool from the house, and I noticed movement on a balcony overlooking the pool.

Two women were leaning on the balcony rail, watching the Governor. I figured one of them must be Mrs Fields.

The Gov's pool was pretty big and it was not a trivial thing to do a full lap underwater. I knew I could do it, and given what I'd just seen the Gov do, I expected it wasn't a big deal for him either. But I WAS surprised to see him turn around, stay underwater, and kick off toward the far side again. Looking around at the group, everyone was completely focused on the Gov, nobody talking at all. It seemed to take the Gov longer to complete the 2nd lap than the first one, and when he came up at the end of the pool he was seriously out of breath. He just clung to the side of the pool for at least a half minute, gulping air with his back to the rest of us.

I looked up at the balcony in time to see one of the women say something to the other, and I recognized the half-smile, head-shake and eye roll that my Mom would make when Dad did pushups or something with me and my friends.

"One hundred feet ... 2 laps ... is about all I can handle. Did I read somewhere that a SEAL has to be able to do 200 feet underwater?"

Freeman had a weird look on his face, and I remembered once when I'd tried to bait him, he didn't like it. But this time he said YEP! and swam over to where the Gov was. Same as the Gov, Freeman took a few deep, slow breaths, dropped under the water and kicked off for the other side. The women had left the balcony, but everyone else was zeroed in on Freeman. I could see right off I was not going to keep up with him underwater, but I also had my doubts about 200 feet. His pace was even and his strokes smooth and efficient and when he made his 3rd turn and kicked off on the fourth lap, I knew he'd make it. When he popped up at the end, his breathing was still pretty controlled.

To me, this was more impressive than the other stuff I'd already seen, and the Gov echoed my thoughts when he shook his head with an expression of wonderment and said "Son, that was a serious piece of swimming, and you don't look like it was even that tough!"

"Underwater endurance can be developed, and it's probably the one area where I'm better now than 30 years ago."

I caught the Gov's eye and tried to say WOW with my eyes and expression. But when he held my gaze and his face changed to expectation, I realized it was my turn!

Well, I wasn't sure what I could do. I'd never tried to swim underwater as far as I could. I did know one lap would be no problem, but I had my doubts about two. At the same time, I had to hold up the YOUNG GUY role and not get beaten by two guys who were over 30 when I was born. The first lap was not a problem, as expected, but I was already uncomfortable when I turned to start lap two. I was pushing hard to finish the second lap, and half-ready to bust, actually, when I got to the wall. But I decided if I could just turn and kick off the wall, I'd make a good dent in a 3rd lap. So that's what I did, and then I gave it one more stroke and surfaced about half-way through the 3rd lap. If anything, I was gasping more than the Gov, but at least I didn't embarrass myself completely.

We all just paddled around easy in the water, quiet for a while. At least a couple of minutes I am sure, because I know it took me that long to completely recover my breath and get my body feeling back to normal. That was the most oxygen-deprived I'd ever been, and it was not a feeling I liked at all. Nothing like the feeling from running hard.

Harley and Senior sat nearby, in the shade under a big awning. The sun felt good on me, but I need to be careful of burning. Freeman and Fields looked pretty tan already. About as dark as I've ever gotten in a full summer of being careful not to burn.

"I don't like reporters much, Danny. Most of them just aren't very careful, or worse, a lot of them seem to actually try to misrepresent things. Why do you want to be a reporter?"

I gave Freeman a grin, then told Fields pretty much what I'd told Uncle Walt and Freeman. And it made me feel good when Freeman added "Danny's done a fine job. His columns have been totally accurate and he made it clear whether he was giving readers a personal impression or a fact. He's let his feelings be known, but he's been very even-handed. He's still against SWEEP16, I think, but he knows I mean what I've been saying."

"Is that true, Danny, you're against SWEEP16?"

"I was very much against it originally. I thought it was an awful idea, and I thought I wouldn't like Mr Freeman. But now I know for sure Mr Freeman is sincere. And I know for sure he's seen far more of the world, and of people's hearts, than I have. At this point, it's true, I still don't believe in SWEEP16, but I do believe in Freddy Freeman. If he thinks this is the way to go, I'm no longer willing to say it isn't. I was raised to DO MY SHARE. Heck, my Mom and Dad have signed the SWEEP16 list. Sorry, Governor Fields, I didn't mean to make a speech."

"That was a nice little speech, Danny. I believed every word of it, and I think you've hit on something big, too." The governor was looking at me when he spoke, but then he fixed his eyes on Freeman, and he raised his voice somewhat. "A lot of people will think SWEEP16 is preposterous. But nobody will think Freddy is preposterous, and nobody will think he is insincere or self-serving. And he'll win a lot of people over more by what he is and what he's done than by what anybody says."

The Governor ducked under the water and kicked off the wall over to the other side of the pool. He was a lot closer to me now.

"Texas has been buzzing over SWEEP16 since the Miller Show. And probably half the state is with Freeman. There is an awful lot of dissatisfaction with DC here. An awful lot."

The Gov looked at his Dad, then at Harley, then back at Freeman. "The Miller Show wasn't even over and my office started getting messages: TEXAS SAYS NO; BILLY SMITH SAYS NO; MY FAMILY SAYS NO; DALLAS SAYS NO; PECOS COUNTY SAYS NO; WORLD WAR II VET SAYS NO. We've gotten thousands of them. We've also gotten UTAH SAYS NO; ALABAMA SAYS NO and on and on like that. Phone calls, emails, faxes, tweets, website comments, snail mails."

Harley made a movement as if he was catching a football, I think, then he pumped his arm about 7 times and gave Governor Fields a crazy grin.

The Gov continued. "Some people have sent money. Anonymously. This has never happened before. Five bucks, 50 bucks in envelopes reading TEXAS SAYS NO! HELL YES!!! or SWEEP16, BUY A FEW BROOMS. We've gotten a bunch of those too. Nobody has ever sent cash to the Governor's Office like this, as far as we know."

The Governor paused again, and none of us said a word, or for that matter, even moved, although Harley looked on the verge of pouncing on something. The Gov smiled and continued. "Have you ever had a scoop, Danny?"

"No. Are you saying--?"

"No, I'm not saying THAT. But I am saying I want Texans to think about SWEEP16 seriously. I want them to know I'm thinking about it seriously. My staff and I and several legislators have had some talks about it. And none of us are of a mind to dismiss it. So we're going to ponder it, jawbone it, brainstorm it. We're going to kick around the idea a lot. How it might work. What the feds might do, what we might do instead. Without really even trying, we just naturally wound up writing a framework of something we've come to call the Texas Declaration. Just like in 1776, there is quite a list of things we are fed up with. I'd never seen it this way before, but there are great similarities between the way DC treats the States and the way the King of England treated the Colonies. So we're going to think this thing through. And I don't know where I'm going to come down, although I am pretty sure. And I don't know where Texas is going to come down either, although I am more than pretty sure of that. But you can put in your column ... can you still get it into your column tomoro? ... You can put in your column that the Governor of Texas and quite a few others are seriously debating and considering SWEEP16, and every Texan should do the same."

I was about to speak, to tell the Governor YES I CAN, when Freeman let out a very low-pitched rumbling half-roar FREEEDOMMMMMM!

Harley and Sonny were on their feet, standing poolside right behind Freddy. The Governor swam over toward Freddy, and tread water a few feet in front of him.

"Yes, it's true when I watched the Miller Show, I was mad at you as much as I've ever been mad at anyone. But not now. SWEEP16 looks to me like a snowball rolling downhill. This may be the beginning of one of the most important things that has ever happened in Texas. Or in America. I'm truly honored to have you as a guest in my home."

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Nobody seemed to want to say anything for a while, and even then it was Harley asking about our pig hunt, and not what I am sure we all were really thinking about. Somewhat to my surprise, they were interested in what I thought about the hunt. Sonny and Senior and Freeman had all grown up hunting, and Harley had done a fair amount of it. As Harley put it, if you do business with Texas oilmen, you go hunting like other businessmen go golfing. We were at the breakfast table, but pretty well finished with the meal, when Freeman smiled broadly and said simply "Governor?".

"Miller's show wasn't even over when people started calling me ... ARE YOU WATCHING? DID YOU HEAR WHAT HE SAID? I'm glad this is coming from you, started by you, at any rate. Your military record ... We got your details from a couple of Admirals we know. Haymaker and Maria!! ... Nobody can say you haven't served this country! The military would be more than enough. But then football, business, philanthropy. Cuban/Russian. You're practically a poster-boy for America. I am ... my entire family is truly honored to have you as a guest."

This was the third time the Gov had told Freeman hosting him was an honor.

"Thank You, Sir."

"I'd like to ask your thoughts on a lot of questions. Do you mind if an aide to the Governor's office joins us? He'll record and organize everything we'll talk about."

"No Sir, I don't mind. I appreciate you not questioning Danny's presence."

Sonny left the room for a couple of minutes, and returned with a man I guessed to be in his late 20s. He introduced him to us as Mark Stutzman, and said he'd brainstorm with us and then write up and organize everything we said. The Gov made it clear he was very impressed with this guy's skills.

The Gov smiled at Freeman and me, and got started. "Just for my own curiosity ... when did you first come up with TEXAS SAYS NO?"

This brought what I would have to call a sheepish grin from Freeman. "I've had it in my mind all along. We need to change the Constitution to restrain the feds, but making the change in the formal, traditional way would likely take decades, if it got done at all, and meanwhile America might be lost. It was my expectation that we'd need to build interest in SWEEP16 far longer than this. But when we got the invitation from Kenny Miller, it was too much of an opportunity to pass up."

"Miller didn't know, did he?"

"No. I spent many hours talking privately with Miller before we taped the show. We talked a lot about SWEEP16, but not about Texas."

"He was surprised all right. The look on Miller's face was priceless."

The Governor had a big grin on his own face, which was also pretty priceless, and I could see him replaying that moment of the Miller Show in his mind.

"How much have you thought through on SWEEP16 ... the Texas part, I mean?"

"Quite a bit. I'm sure the feds would unleash a slimestorm of lawsuits, and they'd threaten to withhold every kind of payment that Texas and maybe even Texans had coming. They'd threaten other things, like restricting the flow of goods from other states into Texas. They'd threaten to shut down pipelines coming in and out of Texas. Perhaps make it difficult for people to move into or out of Texas. I think they'd likely TRY to treat Texas as almost a hostile country. And it's almost a given there would be negative stories, whether true or not, spread around to discredit SWEEP16 supporters. But I don't think they could, ultimately, do much. And I do believe other states would fairly quickly follow Texas' example. Utah probably first. Also Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arizona, Wyoming, Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, the Dakotas, the Carolinas, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama. Maybe my own New Hampshire. I believe if Texas debated it publicly, these states and others would be ready to follow suit. Perhaps even lead. But Texas is the state that could best pull it off, even if Texas had to go it alone for several years. But what I believe would actually happen is nothing much, from the federal side. At least, nothing much compared to protecting from retribution the residents of Texas that stop paying federal taxes."

This certainly wasn't a time for me to speak. Or Stutzman. Freeman gave the rest of us a couple of seconds, then continued.

"What I think will happen, is while Texas is deciding what to do, the feds will be too. And I am pretty sure they will decide to do nothing. Ultimately, I don't think they CAN do anything. You can bet they started thinking on this already. If there was ever anything that could bring all of DC together, Republicans, Democrats, House, Senate, White House ... this is it. These guys are about manipulating and controlling American thinking by every means at their disposal, and they've been at it for a long time. They're good at it. BUT."

Freeman stopped and looked each of us in the eye before continuing. "BUT the will of the people is still supreme. There are things the Feds are forcing that most Americans are against. People have actually gotten pretty used to the taxes ... I don't think that would have been enough on its own. The addition of some other highly unpopular measures, tho. Men have to buy maternity coverage? Tax credits for illegal aliens? Entire industries hamstrung ... basically put out of business by red tape and unelected federal bureaucrats. One of the first calls I got was from Andy Atcheson, head of the Montana Miners, telling me how federal bureaucrats had basically invented rules that put his members out of work. Things like this, seen as federal tyranny, will help create the groundswell of public opinion we need."

The Governor didn't respond exactly to Freeman. "People will say we are seceding."

"No doubt. We -- I hope you don't mind my saying WE?"

Governor Sonny smiled and shook his head. "Maybe you should move to Texas?"

"Thank You, Sir. There is Freedom in the air here, Governor. We need to be very clear SWEEP16 is not about secession, it's about solidarity with America and Americans and the original intent of the

Founders, and putting Washington DC back in its place. We can remind everyone Thomas Jefferson tells us a little rebellion is good and necessary. We've got to explain how Washington's career politicians, the political, ruling class, have set themselves over the country. We've got to get across the message that we are about restoring America's Freedoms, and that DC has destroyed so much of our Freedom, become the enemy of our Freedom. We have to push back hard whenever that SECESSION word comes up. Turn it back on our opponents. America is not bound together by allegiance to DC with its millions of pages of law and regulation. America is America because of our allegiance to each other, our love of the Fundamental American Principles, our love for the Dream of Freedom ... for a nation that was conceived as an organization of Free Citizens peaceably pursuing our own interests ... creating astounding collective benefit."

Freeman had gotten on a bit of a roll, and he caught himself and stared at the Governor for a few seconds. Maybe it was just my imagination, but as far as I was concerned, the look on Fields' face was one of extreme gratitude, or maybe devotion, or both.

Freeman continued, "This is the most important thing for us. We need to control the image, the perception of SWEEP16. American media is generally highly statist, and they can be counted on to mischaracterize SWEEP16. Half of them will be openly hostile. And most of the rest will be covertly hostile. Media attracts people who believe in big government. I've been unable to figure out why. It seems media ought to attract people who are hostile to centralized power."

"Check. We agree with all of that. But what you just said ... we need to put together a very short and cogent statement of allegiance to what we believe America is. That is going to be extremely important, and it has to be short and sweet. There are hundreds of questions we need to address. What about individual Texans who don't want to go along with SWEEP16?"

"A great many Americans believe in the type of government we have now, and are happy paying their federal taxes as they do now. Let them do what they want. Some people might pay more, some less, some nothing to the feds. But I'd love to see individual Americans free to make that choice."

"What about people who are due federal checks like Social Security, federal pensions, disability?"

"That would depend on each person. Quite a few seniors pay as much in federal income tax as they receive in Social Security checks. And of course, Social Security checks themselves are subject to income tax at varying rates. Likewise with pensions and disability. The feds will have to address these situations too. Will they refuse to send checks to everyone who lives in Texas? They might, but I don't think so. And if they did, perhaps that would alter the behavior of the Texans who otherwise intended to conform with the federal tax regime. But it is not truly possible to be sure of how this would play out. Part of the reason government keeps getting bigger is because it keeps creating more and more dependents. By design. I should add tho ... a very big part of SWEEP16 is my belief that people will gladly help people who deserve help."

"I know. I'll do my share. I put my name on your list before bed this morning. I'll do my share. And so will just about everyone I know. We had not thought about a federal blockade of Texas."

"I don't think they would actually try to do it because there would not be support. They'd need military and National Guard to impose any kind of blockade. The top military guys would make it clear that there would be absolutely ZERO support within the military to take any kind of action against a state. Even a relatively low-key sort of thing like a naval blockade ... the military would not do it. The orders would not come down. I think the reaction in DC would be emotional in the extreme, and what actions that would lead to might also be extreme. But right at that point, DC ... the White House, would finally be forced to acknowledge that Americans will not be pushed without limit. Remember, during the government shutdown, the feds tried to blockade the World War II Memorial. Like the guys who won World War II were going to be stopped. But the interesting thing there was when the Veterans pushed thru those ridiculous barricades, the DC police refused orders to arrest our Veterans. The cops simply stood down. I can promise you, our military believes in our Freedom. Our military will never be the enemy of Free Americans."

Freeman was rolling again, and nobody seemed inclined to interrupt him.

"I can imagine the gang in DC talking about what action they could take, what Texas could do. They'd review their options, then they'd reflect how Texas has international seaports, and a large border with Mexico. They'd know it would not be something they could do right away, then they'd realize they would have no support from almost anywhere. Whatever they might try could easily backfire, too. Neighboring states would be forced to take sides, and Oklahoma and Louisiana would decide within about 10 minutes to side with Texas. And of course, Texas has a large Congressional delegation. A lot of other influential people in DC. We'd have the oil and gas interests with us pretty quick."

Senior and Harley snickered a bit, and got the attention of the rest of us. Senior spoke. "Well, I haven't mentioned this to Sonny, but we've got a lot of those boys talking SWEEP16 already. You know Harley and I go way back with the drilling and all, and we've already put together quite a few big names in the industry. Big names in the State of Texas. We asked them to keep quiet about it for a bit, but they are ready to weigh in. We can have a bunch of these guys here quick, if you want."

Nobody said anything in response, but Freeman clenched his fist and pumped his arm a little, kind of like Harley had before, and Freeman and Harley locked eyes. I'd be willing to bet this arm-pump thing was something that started during Freeman and Harley's football days together.

"Governor, what Harley said about having people here quick ..."

The Gov held up his hand, stopping Freeman, "I can guess pretty well, but go ahead."

"Right after the Miller show, we got calls from a few Governors. Two of them I knew already, but three of them I did not. They all expected me to be heading here right away. That was a surprise to me. They'd be down here quick if they were invited."

Governor Fields' expression invited Freeman to continue.

"Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, Arizona, Maryland."

"Maryland?"

"Sir, Maryland surprised me. But maybe it shouldn't have. You could probably convene a meeting of the National Governor's Association in the next couple of days if you wanted."

"I already knew about Utah, Wyoming, Idaho and Arizona. Florida, South Carolina, Montana and Delaware too."

The list of States just hung in the air and I figured the Gov must have had this in mind earlier when he talked about a snowball rolling down hill.

The Governor took a deep breath, shook his head and smiled some. Then he returned to the line of thought that had been interrupted. "Many of us have accounts with national banks, federally regulated institutions. Do you think the feds might try to confiscate those assets?"

"I think that's possible in the case of Texans who decide not to pay federal taxes. They'd be best advised to move their assets out of the reach of the feds before going along with SWEEP16. I do not think they'd confiscate assets of all Texans ... assuming some Texans did continue to meet federal demands. But again ... what seems most likely to me is a period of talk, followed by inaction from DC. They could hardly confiscate anyone's assets pre-emptively, although a bunch of them would surely love to. They'd have to wait, and assets could be placed out of their reach in advance. But again, ultimately, I don't think there is much of anything DC could do, except of course jawbone calamity."

Freeman began speaking again after a few seconds. "We need to think about this as almost like a non-shooting war. I do not believe DC would try to make it a military situation. And frankly, I can tell you the military has infinite loyalty to the United States. And not so much to the gang in DC. Same as the great majority of Americans. That's one reason why we need to make totally clear that we are rejecting the overreach and tyranny of DC, and doing so as loyal and Free American citizens who are determined to SOLIDIFY the Union of the States."

"That's a huge reason why I am glad this is coming from you. And why I hope you will stay here for a while." The Governor paused for a second, and resumed in a different voice. "Mister Freeman, people will believe you and believe IN you."

Freeman and the Governor were seated next to each other, and they'd paid no attention to anyone else during this exchange. They both looked up and glanced at the rest of us a little sheepishly, but the rest of us were as engrossed as they were. I found myself wishing Pearl -- and Jenna -- could hear this. And I will admit I'd not thought of SWEEP16 in this sort of revolutionary way, but it seemed almost sure Freeman was right. Without the flow of tax money, DC would be forced to shrivel to a small fraction of what it is now, and they'd not do that without a very big struggle.

----- 045 -----

I excused myself to do an emergency rewrite of my column. Before I left the room, the Gov stopped me.

"Danny, this has nothing to do with politics, or with anyone's political career. And actually, if this happens ... in some ways being the governor of a state will be a bigger job than president."

I shrugged my shoulders to indicate my head was spinning, and walked away. Before I started work on my column, I made that call to Pearl that I wrote about in the INTRO to this story.

It was actually too late to do a rewrite of my column for some of the bigger papers, but I called McMoo and explained to him the situation. He just said to GET BUSY, so I got something done in about 15 minutes. Funny, I kind of liked it this way. Instead of working over every word and comma, I just cranked the thing out and was done with it. It might well have been better written too. At least, I figured, this column was going to have the feel of a breathlessly told story.

I was still thinking how I'd gotten off easy, sort of, when McMoo was on my phone.

"Holy Smoke Boy, do you know what you've got here? This isn't just a column, this is news!"

"Yes, I know, thank you. I can hardly believe it. The Governor doesn't want it to be news tho. He told me he wants to honor Freeman's choice, and just let me cover it in my column. He seems to think the world of Freeman."

"No surprise on that. I AM really surprised he is not doing a news conference or something to announce this tho. Sure, he will before long. But he's making YOU into a big part of the story, at least for a day or so. You better talk to Freeman and Fields and ask them how they want you to handle inquiries from the media."

GULP. I called Jenna, who answered immediately with some hearty laughing. "McMoo called me 15 minutes ago and told me to keep an eye out for your rewrite. He said it seemed like you had something of interest. You're about to become a media darling, my friend. Better get ready!"

"I'm going to handle it however Freeman and Fields want me to handle it. But to the extent anybody might want to talk to me, you're first in line. I mean, if you are interested!"

"This is funny, Danny. THANK YOU."

"Thanks for all your help, Jenna. I'm awfully glad Freeman asked you to help me on that Sunday night in New Hampshire."

"Yes, me too. I've enjoyed speaking with you, getting to know you."

"Sort of a joke, YOU saying that to ME, Jenna. Seriously, thanks!" Then I thought of something I felt Freeman and the Governor would approve of. So I continued. "Jenna, I'm not going to talk to anyone."

My column will be all, for now. Freeman and Fields have already done an awful lot for me. I'll talk to you, but after they've spoken to media themselves. If you're still interested."

Jenna was a little slow to respond. "That was pretty quick, Danny. But you are definitely right, and Freeman and Fields will appreciate it. Good for you."

"Freeman's won me over in a way. Not so much toward SWEEP16, although I do not disagree with it, but to himself. He's won me over. I believe him. I believe IN him."

"I know. Pretty much everyone does, who gets a good look at him. But some people will think you've been taken in if you refuse to talk."

"That's OK ... it's only for a week or so, probably. I'm not going to be news. Time to go hear what Freeman and Fields are up to now. This is going to be a very interesting day!"

As I walked down the hall, I texted Pearl: WILL FILL YOU IN SOME MORE LATER!

----- 046 -----

The mood was different when I rejoined the group. Now it was like a brainstorming session ... all kinds of 'how about' and 'what ifs' with an undercurrent of looks and tones, mostly from Fields, that said THIS IS STRONG STUFF WE ARE TALKING ABOUT. I was bushed -- I wasn't used to going on so little sleep, plus we had done some pretty serious exercise -- but I felt I couldn't admit it, given Freeman and Fields had so many more years than me. The way I felt, and the way ideas were being thrown around ... it reminded me more than anything else of some of the late-night talks we had at school. But this was serious and real! This guy was the Governor of Texas talking all this crazy talk.

As I was wondering if I was dreaming, the Governor's wife entered ... one of the women I had seen on the balcony. She greeted Harley like an old friend, then introduced herself to Freeman and me as Janis Fields. She looked us both over for a second, and it was clear to me this was what anyone would think of as a take-charge woman. Turning back to the Gov, she announced that Hockley, the barbecue guy, would indeed be happy to roast a pig for us, TOMORROW, although maybe not the pig the governor had shot this morning. Then she firmly suggested we all take a break. I was wondering if she was actually concerned Fields might say something he'd regret, given how little sleep he'd had, and what we were talking about. And I wondered, given the general subject, what could possibly have been on her mind, if I was right?

Much to my surprise, Mrs Fields pulled me aside. "Harley's pilot has headed back East. He is going to pick up Mrs Freeman and Mrs Watson. Harley told me you're seeing someone. She's welcome to join us. She'd need to be ready in a few hours. We've got plenty of space, another guestroom just for her. Just let Harley know please what you'd like to do."

I stood like a dolt looking at Mrs Fields, and she looked back at me for a second before laughing at my discomfiture. "I know, Harley told me you've just met, really, but we're all about family here, and if you want to invite her, she is more than welcome."

"Thank You, Mrs Fields, ma'am. Very much." This was lame, even for me.

"I hope you feel comfortable in your room. You look like you need some sleep. Is there anything we can get for you?"

"No, no, it's great. Thank You."

My head was spinning. But it took me only about a second to decide I WOULD invite Pearl. I could hardly believe I'd seen her only once and now I was inviting her to jump on a private jet to visit the Governor of Texas. What?

Pearl was probably more surprised than I was, she had to be, although it didn't sound like it. I explained the whole thing exactly as it was ... how Harley and Freeman and Senior had grilled me, how Mrs Freeman had sort of taken things over, how Freeman and the Governor had me sleep-deprived and physically whipped, and how it seemed crazy to me but there was a room waiting for her if she wanted to come.

"When would I come back to Syracuse?"

"I don't know. Didn't think to ask. My guess is Mr Watson will have his plane take you back whenever you want. I mean, I'm sure he wouldn't turn you down and ... Mr Watson seems an awfully nice guy and I don't know if sending his jet around is any different for him than taking a taxi for most people. I'd really like you to come, I think the barbecue tomorrow will be pretty cool, and ... for me, anyway, I feel like I'm ... like nothing like this might ever happen again ... if you ... WHEW!!! ... why don't you think about it a little and call me back?"

"The plane is already on the way?"

"Yes ... I don't know where Mrs Watson is, but I guess Mrs Freeman is in New Hampshire."

"OK, I'll call back soon."

Some shuteye was a really high priority but as soon as I sat on the bed, McMoo was on the phone. "I know this is bad timing for you, but with the way things are moving, you need to start blogging and getting out on all the social media."

"Yes, I know, Clicks has been telling me that. He says Freeman needs to do it too."

"Clicks?"

"Oh ... he is a friend of mine from school who just became Freeman's website guy. On the tech side. I've been thinking about those things, but actually I have never done any of it."

"We have people who can help you ... you just need to think of what should get out there."

"One thing I can tell you right now ... Freeman and Governor Fields are in darn good physical shape. They have pretty well beat me into the ground. If you called a minute later, I probably would've been too deep asleep to hear the phone."

"You've been working out with those guys?"

When I told McMoo about all the exercise, he said people would love to read that stuff. Bushed as I was, I did not respond. McMoo took that as a cue, and said, "OK ... I'll let you go then."

But now I was concerned if I fell asleep I might not hear Pearl's call, so I put the phone right next to my head, and I'd barely hit the pillow and I was OUT.

The ring did wake me up, and Pearl said she'd decided to come! Harley gave me a huge grin when I told him, and he gave me a card, saying I should contact his personal assistant and he'd handle the details of getting Pearl down here.

It had been a while before I needed sleep as much as I did right then, and it was late afternoon before I got going again. When I got back to the great room, Sonny Senior and Harley and Freeman were watching a ball game and still talking, but for now they were talking sports. Senior and Harley were sipping whiskey, and orange juice for Freeman. I wasn't ready for booze, and even if I was it wouldn't have felt right in this setting, so I was happy to drink some water and then balance out the group by pouring myself some OJ.

Looking around, I did about my 8th double-take. BIG-time business guys, governor's home, governor's family, thinking about the State of Texas defying the United States federal government. WOW. And I thought to myself ... The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing But the Truth.

NOTE TO READER, PLEASE: The story is not finished, more is being written. But it seemed worth putting the story out now ... and it would be great to get ideas -- all kinds of feedback welcome --- to help things along! THANKS --- Ralph
