

# MAYAN TREASURE

## CHAPTER ONE

Tuesday, July 20, 2010

Pain and discipline. That's how a girlfriend once described my life. I didn't necessarily believe in her assessment, but at the time, she knew me as well as anyone. Discipline was never something that was forced on me, it was simply expected. I grew up on a ranch and there were always things that needed doing and I did what needed to be done. Getting good grades in school, competing in sports, my eventual service in both the Marine Corps and the Navy and my 27-year career as a police officer all required discipline.

I was never sure what she meant by pain. Physical pain, in most instances, was temporary. Well, at least until you hit that point in your life when your body had a bad habit of reminding you of years of abuse. Emotional pain could last longer. I looked at the empty bottle of Tin Cup bourbon sitting on the night stand next to my bed and was reminded that it could last much longer. I wouldn't say I was an alcoholic but, I was. Denial was such a bitch.

I woke up early as I did most days. Despite my best attempts to the contrary, I always seemed to wake at the break of day. On a good morning, 6 am. More often than not, 4 am. I didn't sweat it too much anymore. I was 52-years old and after reaching a certain age, the most important thing was waking up period. I didn't consider myself to be at that age yet, but I was always silently thankful to see the break of a new dawn.

I rolled over towards the night stand and picked up my cell phone. 4:11 am. Hmmm, no sleeping in today. I tossed off the covers of my bed and leveraged myself to a seated position, my back cramping in protest. My body exercising its bad habit.

I stayed there for a moment and then looked over at where my dog, Steve, lay in the dog bed on the floor. My constant companion. Steve was an Australian Cattle Dog, high energy, loyal and protective. Steve was also a female and the name confused people. What can I say, I thought it would be amusing to have a dog named Steve. She was six-years old now and I had her since she was newly weened. I had been driving through a small farm town in the mountains of Colorado and stopped for some gas. A little boy sitting outside of a feed store across the street had a hand-written sign on a box that said, "Free to Good Home." I fell in love with her the moment I saw her.

"Well girl, rise and shine. Let's get the day started." Steve stretched in her bed, eyes never opening and then promptly rolled over so she faced away from me. Guess one of us had plans to sleep in.

I sighed and stood up. I was wearing shorts but no shirt. The morning was a little crisp, even inside the house so I picked up a sweat shirt from the top of the dresser where I had casually thrown it the day before and put that on. Slipping my feet into a pair of flip flops I made my way to the head. For those of you unfamiliar with naval terminology, that's what Marines and Sailors called the bathroom. I think the Army called it a latrine and the Airforce, a powder room. I never served in either the Air Force or the Army so I'm speculating.

My house sat on 5 acres in a ritzy part of the San Francisco Bay Area called Marin County. Populated mostly by hippy throw backs and limousine liberals, I was an oddity in Marin. A single, white, straight male. I thought of myself as being moderate politically but to the Marin elite, I was a rabid conservative because I voted mostly Republican, despite supporting such causes as gay marriage, transgenders in the military, and women's rights. I was also poor. Well, not exactly poor, but definitely not rich. I had retirement checks from both the police department and the military but fell short of the average income for the county by a few thousand dollars.

I had lived here for the past 4 years. My benefactor and the man who financed most of my extracurricular activities, Robert Hansen, had purchased the house years ago with the intent of turning it in to a vacation home and just never got around it. Rather than let it sit empty, he had allowed me to move into it. I was grateful. Prior to the house, I lived in an apartment in Oakland where the sounds of gunshots and sirens wailing in the background was the song that lulled me to sleep most nights. I fixed the place up and then one day, a lawyer appeared, had me sign some papers, and handed me the deed and trust. "Payment for service rendered," was how he put it. Robert Hanson was a multi-billionaire venture capitalist who had taken a liking to me when I stepped in between him and a very drunk and very angry college student when we both happened to be in a bar in San Juan Del Sur, Nicaragua. He also hated being called Bob so I made sure to use that nickname every chance I got.

After emptying my bladder, I paused in front of the sink to throw some cold water on my face and looked in the mirror. I had never been the handsomest of men but I wasn't particularly hard to look at either. Despite crossing over into my 50's, my hair was still as blond as when I was 10, with little grey showing and no balding to date. A crooked nose, a left over from my days as a fighter, broke up the symmetry of a face with few wrinkles. My body was lean. I didn't have a six pack but I also didn't have a beer gut. Broad shoulders, decent musculature, a wide chest, could have been worse. I wondered again why I was chronically single. Oh, that's right, I couldn't stay still long enough to form a relationship. It was always the details that got you.

Drying my face off, I headed down the stairs. I started most mornings with a simple breakfast. Eggs, toast, and some fruit. I added nothing to my eggs. No sprinkling of cheese or savory bits of ham. I ate them the way God had intended, with a dash of salt and a lot of pepper. A little butter on my toast, and I was good to go. Today though I threw a couple of strips of bacon into

the frying pan. If I was up, Steve should be up too and nothing held more allure than bacon. The smell had just barely begun to waft through the house when I heard the click, click of Steve's claws on the wood floor of the bedroom and stairs. She came into the kitchen a few minutes later, eyes open, mouth in a partial grin and tail wagging. She had my number and knew there was a piece of bacon in it for her.

"Outside first Steve." I opened the back door that led from the kitchen to a wraparound porch. It was brisk outside but not too cold. The Bay Area rarely got that cold even in winter. Here in the summer time, it was more than tolerable even wearing shorts. Steve ran down the short flight of stairs and into the yard, her black, blue, and tan markings blended into the darkness almost immediately as she passed outside the small pools of light shed through the kitchen window and open back door.

She returned a few minutes later, not even stopping for a quick scratch and went right to a spot where she could maintain a vigil on the bacon. I wasn't offended, I knew where I rated. I would walk by most people to get to a piece of bacon too. I had always maintained that money couldn't buy happiness, but it could buy bacon and that was close enough. I shut the back door and returned to the stove. Flipping over the bacon to make sure it was crisp on both sides, I pulled it from the pan and tossed it on to a plate to cool for a few. Steve appeared to be waiting patiently, eyes locked on the prize, but I knew her too well. The constant wagging of the tail and the fact that she wasn't sitting completely on her haunches was an indication that she was on the verge of going crazy waiting for her treat. She was practically vibrating with anticipation.

Touching the bacon to make sure it was cool enough for her, I broke off a quarter of a piece and tossed it to her. She was quick and caught it mid-air. It was gone in a snap and a swallow. Hence the reason for a quarter of a piece. If I tossed her the whole strip, it would be gone in the same amount of time. Giving her bits meant she, at least, felt like she was getting more than she was.

I fixed my own plate, occasionally tossing Steve a small bit of bacon, and sat down at the little table in the breakfast nook of the kitchen. I had a dining room and a table big enough to sit eight people comfortably but only used it when I had company. For Steve and me, the breakfast nook was just fine.

Truthfully, breakfast in my house was usually a boring affair. I ate in relative silence, read the day's news on my iPad, checked emails, and drank my coffee until I felt compelled to go take a shower. It was the most relaxing time of my day so I generally milked it. Nothing exciting in the news though. Lindsey Lohan was going to jail and both President Obama and the British Prime Minister were condemning the release of the Lockerbie bomber. No surprises on either of those stories.

Finishing breakfast, I washed dishes and grabbed a quick shower. Briefly I considered a workout, but my shoulders and legs were still sore from the rigors I put them through

yesterday, so I decided to skip anything too strenuous today. Plus, I had things to do, or so I told myself.

Things to do included walking out to the mailbox. What can I say, the retired life. Steve followed along happily, once giving a warning bark to a vicious squirrel that wandered too close to our little party. As it did most days, the squirrel administered a stern chiding to Steve and then raced further up the tree it was on and out of site. Feeling victorious, Steve gave a doggy grin and then raced up ahead to see if there were any other vicious woodland creatures that might require her attention. I opened the mailbox, pulled out the mail, and started rifling through it. I had a few bills, a lot of junk mail, and a thick manila envelope from a Harvard archeology professor I knew.

Thick manila envelopes from college professors weren't so rare that I felt compelled to immediately tear it open. Following my retirement from the military and police, a lot of people kept asking what my plans were. Truth be told, after 30 years serving both active duty in the Marine Corps and as a reserve in the Navy, and a 27-year career in law enforcement, I didn't want to do anything except travel and explore new places. When people would ask, I'd tell them I was going to become a semi-professional adventurer.

What started out just a joke turned into a passion. In the last few years leading up to my retirement, I began to travel more. My first big trip was to San Juan Del Sur in Nicaragua. The place hadn't become too touristy yet. Following years of war, Nicaragua wasn't high on many people's to-do lists and it wasn't until recently that the boldest of travelers began to discover Nicaragua's pristine beaches and great surf. It had the potential to become the next Costa Rica but wasn't there yet. I went for the surf and the sand and an admitted weakness for women with dark hair and sun-kissed skin.

One evening I wandered into one of the beach bars and for a cold Tona, a pale lager local to the area. The place was rowdy. The music was loud and kids in their teens and early twenties danced, laughed and talked loud enough to be heard over the din of the crowd. Not my kind of establishment but I was there, and I still wanted a beer.

I found a place to stand at the bar in between a group of rowdy college-age students and an older gentleman with a full head of silver hair combed back, a good quality of sports coat that had to be too hot for the weather even given the breathability of the fabric, a button-down shirt open at the collar, nice pants with a fresh crease and what I guessed to be at least a \$600 pair of shoes. He looked more out of place than I did. He was maybe 5'6" with a thin athletic build. My guess, a business man here for work who decided to check out the local night life but didn't know how to fit in.

Ordering a beer from the bartender I made a few attempts at small talk with the man. He replied politely but seemed to be someone with a lot on his mind, so I left it be and decided to

check out the rest of the bar. Turning away, I surveyed the room. The college group next to me was getting pushy and louder as they attempted to out drink each other.

I had just finished my beer and was turning back around to order another when the older gentleman tapped me on the shoulder. "I need to use the restroom. Would you mind holding my seat?" It was hard to hear him over the roar of the bar, but I nodded affirmatively and yelled for the bartender to bring me another Tona. I turned back around just in time to see the older man run into one of the college students, spilling the kid's beer all over the front of his shirt. Oops.

"What's your fucking problem old man?" The kid yelled. Judging by the kid's accent, clearly from America, probably down for an early spring break. The gentleman was apologetic and offered to buy him a beer, the kid was having nothing of it and shoved the older guy not just once, but twice. I hate bullies. I intervened.

"Hey, hey, hey there my friend," I said stepping in between the two of them but clearly facing the kid, "no need to get angry. The man said he'd buy you a new beer."

"Fuck you dude! I'm going to kick his ass!" The kid started to push past me. Not today son. My elbow came up, fast and sure, and caught him right underneath the chin. His teeth clacked together with an audible click that could be heard even over the sound of the music and voices and his head whipped back. His friends, who up to this moment had not been paying much attention, all turned towards me as the kid staggered and half fell into my arms. I supported his weight and passed him off to his buddies. "I think your friend has had a bit too much to drink. May want to get him home and into bed before the 'policia' take an interest in him. I hear Nicaraguan jailhouses are rough places."

I turned him over to his friends. He was still rattled from the blow but to them, he appeared drunk. I grabbed the older man gently by his arm and told him we should get out of the bar before the kid recovered sufficiently to tell the rest of his friends what had happened. One, maybe two I could handle relatively easily. A group of ten could prove problematic. Plus, I really didn't want to end up in a Nicaraguan jail myself. I doubt my retired police ID would get me far with the locals if one of their bars was torn up in the process. That and I had an aversion to pain. Something that would certainly follow a bar fight where I was grossly outnumbered.

The man nodded his head and we made our way quickly towards the door. Once we were out of the bar and a way down the street, my new companion, his voice was deep for such a small man, turned to me, "Thank you. I'm not much for fighting. I'm Robert Hanson." He extended his hand.

"I hate people who are belligerent and bullies when they are drunk. I'm glad I was there." I took his hand and gave it firm shake. "Jerod Grey."

“Pleasure to meet you Jerod. My family and I are staying at a house near here and I have a bottle of good Scotch if you’d care to join me. I think my night of visiting the local establishments is over but I’d still like a drink.”

“What do you consider a good Scotch?”

Robert laughed, “It’s the Glenlivet 21-year old Archive single malt.”

“Ah, a man who speaks my language.” Also laughing. “If you had said Johnny Walker Black, our newly formed friendship would have ended rather abruptly. It would be my pleasure.”

We walked in silence for a few minutes. It was a gorgeous night out. The temperature in the low 80’s without any of the oppressive humidity that normally accompanies it. “So,” I said, “you prefer to be called Robert or do you go by Bob or Rob or something along those lines?”

He glanced my way and his voice took on a note of command that you usually got from salty old enlisted or senior commanders. “Robert. My wife is the only person who calls me Rob and only occasionally. No one calls me Bob.”

I smiled, Bob it was then.

That night started a friendship that led to doing a few odd jobs for Bob. Bob was a collector of ancient artifacts and he helped acquaintances of his recover said artifacts for museums and college collections. He didn’t directly participate in their recovery but he was happy to help finance those operations when the finds were too small to be funded by the university or museum themselves. I was quick on my feet and my military and law enforcement time gave me a wide range of skills that made me adept at these types of endeavors and over time, I built up my own list of contacts who occasionally called on me to help them track down an artifact or old scroll. Thus, began my career as a semi-professional adventurer. This was also why manila envelopes from college professors weren’t that unusual. I was starting to garner a reputation in the world of archaeology.

I threw the bills on the counter, poured myself another cup of coffee, turned off the coffee maker, and sat down at the breakfast table with the manila envelope. Opening it, I rifled through the contents. Copies of old maps and manuscripts plus a letter from Professor Curtis Feldman. I had met Curtis a year or so ago. A genuinely caring person he was also a little timid. An archeologist who preferred the comfort of his classroom to the rigors of field work. We had worked together, him from behind a computer and me in the field, on a project last fall that resulted in the discovery of an ancient Oshara burial site in the Upper Gunnison river basin of Colorado. He specialized in Paleo-Indian culture and Mesoamerican civilizations and regularly asked me to follow up on tips he received.

Setting aside the maps and manuscripts, I unfolded the letter and read it through:

*Jerod,*

*I hope that this letter finds you in good health and spirits. As I'm sure you would inquire, if out of nothing more than politeness, I am doing well as are my wife and children. I have included with this letter several maps and copies of manuscripts that I recently discovered in a crate of documents sent to us by the National Museum of Natural Sciences in Madrid, Spain. An associate of mine there thought I may find some of the information pertinent to my research and arranged to have the documents sent to me.*

*In a manuscript written by conquistador Bernal Diaz del Castillo many years after his journeys in Peten (Guatemala). He mentions the fall of Nojpeten which he refers to as Tayal (a bastardization of the Itza language we believe). Nojpeten was located where Flores, Guatemala is today. In February 1697, conquistador Martin de Ursula Arismendi started an all-out assault on the island. The heavy bombardment of the city eventually caused the Mayans to flee and the last capital of great Mayan tribes fell.*

*Most of this is common knowledge and can be referenced on-line. What is not common knowledge, is that one of the conquistadors to accompany Arismendi was Juan Julio de Sonya Ramirez. Ramirez turned traitor and he and a small company of conquistadors made off with a portion of the gold looted from Nojpeten along with a significant religious artifact, the sacrificial dagger of the divine-king. The dagger was a powerful symbol of the divine-king's right to rule and his ability to interpret the will of the Mayan gods for the common people.*

*Unable to flee east (due to the Spanish occupation) towards the Caribbean and an easier sea voyage to Europe, Ramirez fled west to the Pacific Ocean. There is no further information in del Castillo's manuscript regarding Ramirez or his escape (I have included copies of the relevant pages of the manuscript with this letter.*

*Interestingly enough, late in 2008, a ship wreck was found along the California coast north of San Francisco. A colleague of mine from the University of Berkeley has been studying a ship's log found in that wreckage. The log was relatively intact and found in a sealed chest with that wreckage. It is from the pirate ship 'The Fancy Star' captained by an Englishman named Masey Sole. Sole mentions picking up passengers along the coast of Guatemala in January of 1698. This would roughly correspond with Ramirez fleeing west.*

*'The Fancy Star' sailed north in search of gold and treasure but was lost for some time in a dense fog. We believe that by the time the fog cleared, Sole and his ship were somewhere off the coast of Northern California. Sole, not familiar with his location, drew a map of the coast line. He also makes mention of his "passengers becoming restless and unruly" and he put them off the ship in what we believe is somewhere north of San Francisco. Another colleague of mine studied the map and believes that Ramirez and his men may have been put off at the mouth of the Klamath River.*

*Our trail would go cold there but, in 1978, a Ranger was searching for a lost couple near the headwaters of the Trinity River and found a small idol made of gold. A similar object, an idol made of jade, was found by a boy scout troop in 1985 in the same general area. Both items were turned over to the de Young Museum of Fine Art, logged, and forgotten until I accessed their database a few days ago. We suspect there is more of the treasure taken by Ramirez in that general area. I would need to study them in person but my initial assessment from the pictures they have in their database is that the two idols are potentially of Mayan make. If you're not familiar with the area, the Trinity River is one of the main tributaries of the Klamath River.*

*I know how you delight in searching for such things and this is too much of a stretch for the University to fund an expedition to locate. I thought perhaps you, with your resources, may be interested. If you do go searching for the treasure, all I ask is that you give me the first opportunity to look at the dagger, if found. Perhaps the University would be willing to make an offer if the artifact was in hand.*

*A rather long story for a rather long shot at locating this treasure. I wish you well.*

*Sincerely,*

*Curtis*

I read through the letter one more time and studied the maps. The manuscript, unfortunately, was in Spanish and my Spanish skills were decidedly lacking. I could take it to a translator that I knew over in San Francisco or, more than likely, try running it through a translator program online.

Downing the dregs of my coffee in one, long swallow, I grabbed up the copies Curtis had made me, put the coffee cup in the sink, and headed down to my basement office, Steve following with a ball in her mouth. Not many places in California had basements. I always assumed it was due to the earthquakes but this house did and it was one of the reasons I liked it.

The basement was really, more of a cellar. A 20' by 20' cinder block affair, it provided enough space for a large, dented up, oak table that I used as a workstation, several book cases filled with books, and an old military style metal desk where my computer sat. I had replaced the old florescent light that had been down here for years with a newer LED light that provided ample illumination for my home office and workspace. I flipped on the computer and while it went through its startup process, I laid out the documents on the table.

Locating the treasure would prove to be difficult and I would need help. I began scratching names on a piece of paper. First on my list was Sani Nez. Nez and I had met in the Navy during my first deployment to Dubai. He was a solid as they came. Quiet, reserved, and a skilled outdoorsman and tracker.

Next on the list was Karl Williams. Karl and I had met during my time on SWAT. Karl was a competent field medic and an avid hiker and rock climber. Also added was Anna Smith, if I could convince her to come to California. She hated this state. Too progressive for her and every time I had been able to get her out here it had been like pulling teeth. Each time though she enjoyed herself even if she wouldn't admit it. My best friend, she was a zoologist and ecologist by trade and education, with a wide range of knowledge in other areas including biology, geology, and botany. One of the smartest people I knew and her skills always seemed to come in handy regardless of the endeavor we engaged in. Additionally, she had been a gunner's mate in the Navy before the GI Bill helped her get her degrees and, she could field strip an M2HB .50 caliber machinegun with her eyes closed. A lady you wanted on your side when the shit hit the proverbial fan. Just don't cuss in front of her. She was not afraid of a little physical violence to keep you line with her idea of being a gentleman.

Last two names I added were Jerome Riviera and Andy Luna. Jerome was a good all-around guy to have in the mix. No particular skill set but he had a sharp eye and was a skilled shooter and martial artist. A former student of mine he often acted as my security. I had run into problems on expeditions before. Jerome also had a talent for smooth-talking the locals, often getting information we needed, or heading off potential problems before they arose.

Andy was a regular on my expeditions. In his sixties now, he was still in remarkably good shape if a little off his rocker. He often acted as my base camp manager, cook, and logistics and supply guy. Despite his seeming lack of rational thinking, he had a mind for putting together an expedition that I found myself envious of.

My computer now up and running, I confirmed what information I could via some reputable online sources. Not to scale but I could see where Curtis's colleague came up with the idea that Ramirez had been escorted off the ship at the mouth of the Klamath River. I didn't have access to the same databases that Curtis did being an academic but the residing place of the two artifacts found in 78' and 85' were right here in the San Francisco Bay Area, I made a note to call Curtis later and see if I could arrange a meeting with the curator to look at them.

Before I got too deep into the planning stages of this trip though, I needed to make one call right from the start. I picked up the landline phone on the desk and dialed Bob's private number. I figured I would get his voicemail. He was usually tied up in meetings of various sorts during the day. His company was based out of New York City and, unless he was traveling, he was three hours ahead of me. A little after 9 am Pacific Standard Time put him at a little after noon on the East Coast.

Bob picked up after the first ring. "Hello?"

"How are you doing Bob? It's Jerod." I replied.

I could almost hear him sigh at the other end of the phone. "You know I hate that name."

“So you tell me, every time.” I said with a laugh.

Bob “hmmph’d” on the line. “I’m good. How are you?”

We exchanged pleasantries for a moment before getting down to business. I asked about the wife and kids and how business was going. For his part, he asked about my dating life. In truth, Bob didn’t really care about my dating life but Susan, his wife, did and she would grill him over it during dinner.

Small talk out of the way, Bob asked the real reason I called.

“I have a venture.” I ran down for him the story Curtis had told in his letter. “It’s a long shot but it’s still a shot.”

Bob was quiet for a few. “Alright, let’s make this happen. Who are you taking with you?”

“Nez, Williams, Smith, Riviera, and Luna.” He was familiar with my normal partners and I could picture him nodding as I listed each name.

“Sounds good. Standard contract. \$250 a day plus expenses with a bonus if recovery exceeds expenditures. Once you’ve confirmed they’ll participate I can have Julie email the contracts to you.”

My turn to pause. “I’d like to pay Andy a bit more. Say \$350. He maintains the camp which includes cooking for us and cleaning the head. That alone has to be worth an extra \$100 a day.”

Bob liked to negotiate. We both knew what number I was shooting for but we also both knew Bob liked to play the game. “\$275. He already cleans the latrines for \$250 a day so an extra \$25 would just make it more worth his while.”

“\$325. He not only takes care of the camp but he handles the logistics of the trip. He works harder than any of us and doesn’t get to experience the adventure of the find itself.” I countered.

“\$300.” The number I was looking for.

“Done.”

“Good. I’ll have Julie make the changes. Let me know once they’ve confirmed.”

“Will do. Hey Robert, thanks. I’ll keep you up to date on the trip.”

Bob laughed. “You’re welcome. Someday I swear I’ll join you on one of these little adventures.”

My turn to laugh. “Unless we put basecamp in a five-star hotel, I doubt it. Take care my friend.”

“You too Jerod.” Bob hung up still chuckling to himself.

I spent the rest of the morning making phone calls. Anna, who usually took a bit more convincing, I called first. She didn't answer so I left a voicemail, light on the details. I needed her interested enough to call back but not so much information that she arbitrarily said no because it was in California. She only didn't answer when she was busy and was generally pretty good about calling back. Nez, Karl, and Andy all picked up and confirmed they would attend. Nez and Karl would be flying in on Friday. Andy decided he'd be here on Thursday morning. It would give him time to double check the list of supplies and equipment we would need. Providing Anna could come, and could fly in no later than Saturday, we could leave on Sunday.

I called Jerome last. He lived right down the freeway in Vallejo with his wife, Madeline, and son, Lucas. Lucas was about six months old now. It took a bit of doing, but Jerome confirmed. Most of the pleading was done with Madeline. She didn't oppose him going but she wanted something in trade. Specifically, I had to agree to dinner. Jerome was one of my closest friends and I adored Madeline but any time we made plans, something would come up. I had to give my word that once a date for dinner had been set, nothing would interfere with it.

Four of the five people on my list confirmed, I shot Bob a quick email and updated him on who had said they were coming. Unofficially, I called the people I took on these expeditions the Adventure's Club. Once you were a confirmed member of the Club, Bob's company issued them a corporate credit card to be used for expenses including transportation, food, and lodging. The card could be turned on and off so it was only available when people were on mission so to speak. Maybe it wasn't quite as unofficial as I made it out to be. Julie would have already been working on the contracts so I expected to see them hit my email inbox within the next few hours.

I called Curtis as well, told him we would be taking on the search for his lost treasure and missing conquistadors, and set up a meeting with the de Young Museum to look at the two artifacts. He was thrilled we'd be taking on the expedition. At his request, I would be taking a high definition camera to photograph the two idols. I could tell Curtis was excited at the prospect of being able to examine the artifacts more closely. He talked for almost an hour.

I ate lunch. Nothing fancy, a peanut butter sandwich washed down with a bottle of water. I spent the rest of my afternoon fielding questions from my team members and arranging transportation for them from the airport to my house. Steve enjoyed the phone calls, mostly because I sat on the porch and threw the ball for her while I talked.

Around about 6 pm, I went in to fix dinner. I was the master of the 15-minute meal. One of the side effects of being chronically single is that I had to learn how to cook or face the high cost of eating out all the time. Tonight, Cajun sausage pasta. Hot links diced for easy cooking, heavy cream, parmesan cheese and some Cajun seasoning, add in the pasta and I had myself a hearty meal.

After dinner and dishes were done, I poured myself a double bourbon and sat down in the lazy boy recliner in the living room and flipped on the TV. The bourbon would be one of several this evening. I would drink until I was tired enough to sleep and too sedated to fight it. A life of pain and discipline. Discipline was simply bred into me. Part and parcel for who I was. The pain? That was something I was still working on.