

Chapter One:

The Crisis Line

I'm basically a happy guy. I live alone with me, myself, and I, and for the most part I enjoy it that way. Oh, sure, I was married once. My nearly-ten-year-marriage ended in 1984. I was awarded custody of our two young sons and spent the next sixteen years devoted to single parenting. During that time, and since, I was engaged once and had several really nice girlfriends and, of course, a few bummers. I doubt I'll get married again at this stage of my semi-retired life, but one never knows what tomorrow will bring. I do know that it might've been difficult to remain happily married while writing a book placing at least half the blame for America's chaos on women.

Most evenings I go to bed peaceful, and wake up happy. I greet each new day by opening the window blinds throughout my home, meanwhile enjoying conversations and songs with myself, photos, paintings, mementos, whatever.

I kiss my living room crucifix, greet Jesus and have a prayer for Marlene, a flight attendant for the former Northwest airlines, who had given me my beautiful crucifix during my early single-parent years. She was so proud to have "blessed it myself."

I then step out onto the driveway to get my morning paper, take a few minutes to enjoy the almost-daily sunshine and stunning mountain scenery of St. George, Utah, ride my bicycle to the park, exercise on the basketball court, and come home to eat breakfast. During the rest of the day, between domestic and business chores, you're bound to find me hiking, bicycling, or

shooting hoops, or playing pickleball, or swimming, or relaxing on my patio reading, or enjoying a cold beer after five.

I'm sure you'll agree with me that we all have memories that stand out in our mind for one reason or another. I remember one particular fall afternoon as being seasonally warm and sunny while walking back to my townhome after picking up the day's mail from the mailboxes near the entryway of the homeowner's complex in which I lived.

While making my way past the in-line homes of my neighbors, most of whom I didn't get along with very well, and past the mature palm trees dotting the paved drive, I picked through my batch of mail. What I noticed most was the large white envelope from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

I got back home to unit thirteen, the last home on the left, and plopped the mail down on my dining room table. I opened up the veterans envelope first. It was the latest 2012 edition of the Veterans Health Benefits Handbook. I poured myself a tall tumbler of sun tea, which I had brewed outside on my south-facing patio earlier that day, dropped several ice cubes into the drink, and sat down to peruse the health benefits I was allotted as a Purple Heart recipient from my 1967-68 Vietnam infantry stint.

I paged through the manual fairly briskly, as I'm generally a big fan of the VA, often do volunteer gigs for them, and usually stay current with benefit programs. It was something on page seventeen which caught my eye: it was the phone number for the Veterans Crisis Line which claims to allow the veteran to speak to a live person in the event there are thoughts of suicide.

I had been hearing about the huge increase in the numbers of active-service as well as veteran suicides and had become interested into why there had been such an upward spike in

those numbers. So, I decided to call the number listed. You see, according to some, I've earned the title of "eccentric" for making phone calls like this, but as my friend, Logan, maintains, "An eccentric is someone who has lived long enough to learn the virtue of thinking for himself." I like that.

I thought for sure I was going to hear a long list of menu options and at least two or three other numbers to call but, lo and behold will miracles never cease? After only three rings a live woman answered, "This is the Veterans Crisis Line, how may I help you?"

I could quickly tell I was speaking to a black woman because after I greeted her and identified myself she asked, "How can I help you Missa Hoena?"

I told the woman I was curious as to what I would discover by calling the crisis line. I told her I had never seriously considered suicide as a means of ending any real or perceived personal agony of this mortal existence, but I could remember from the time I got home from Vietnam how much I felt society had changed and how so many hypocrisies and double standards had crept into the culture and how angering and frustrating they can be, possibly leading to the suicide of others. Then I told the crisis-line woman about the story of being back in Apple Valley, Minnesota where, during the 90s, I was doing full-time duty as a single parent of my two sons. One day I was walking out of the local post office when I saw a rather good-looking woman in her 30s sobbing uncontrollably while standing next to her mini-van. I asked if there was anything I could do to help. She told me between big, heavy sobs that she was a staunch pro-lifer in the abortion debate, and her immediate family, all living in neighboring Wisconsin, were all pro-choice and had alienated her from the family because of her position on abortion.

I then asked the crisis-line woman, who had been patiently listening to me speak, "Do you hear these types of stories which speak of lies and hypocrisy on this crisis line very often?"

After a short pause she answered very succinctly, "Mr. Hoena, more than you'll ever know."

Those stories of the sobbing woman in Apple Valley and of the crisis-line woman on the phone both made a strong impact on me, and the memories of those events will stay with me the rest of my life. It's because they are so telling in their simplicity; they both speak of lies and hypocrisy which can be so damn confusing and angering to any of us.

Just think of the untold chaos thrust upon humanity from the beginning of civilization by leaders of nations, families, businesses, religions, educators, lobbyists and others. Just think of the feelings of betrayal felt by the Apple Valley woman when she discovered she was alienated by her own family; and for what? For her deep-felt beliefs! It's not like she robbed and cheated her family; we can all understand being alienated for those reasons. But not the Apple Valley woman. All she did was to stick to her beliefs regarding the sanctity of life, and for that her family chose to alienate her from the group causing the woman great anguish and most likely, much confusion.

I have felt alienated from my family for standing up for my beliefs, and it does create feelings of hurt and confusion, not to mention anger.

Back when I was in Apple Valley doing my single parenting, I was at the center of a civil rights issue in which I felt women were being granted favors because they were women, and men were being penalized because they were men; all of which was totally contradictory to the law, so I blew the whistle and created a firestorm.

At one point, my father, who had long since retired as a famous Twin Cities radio and TV broadcast pioneer and was living nearby, stopped over to my home unannounced to visit with me about the issue. By this time, the story had been all over the local and national news (I'll cover