

Chapter 10

I gorged myself with spaghetti and bread in the cafeteria. They let me go back for seconds and thirds. They then put a huge bowl of banana pudding under my nose which I couldn't say no too so I ate that too. I then left the cafeteria and walked along the sidewalk to the path that would take me through the woods back to The Lake. I started formulating a plan in my mind for survival. If I could just make a point to stay in the shadow or shout of an adult for the rest of the week and somehow manage to sneak out of the cabin every night after Quentin left us to go to his little counselor parties down by The Lake, I might make it out of the hell hole and get back home alive. And I would never return to this place again.

The path from the cafeteria across the campus to the Lake trail passed by the camp entrance. I stopped for a minute and looked down the road. It was a narrow farm to market two lane blacktop road as empty as Space as far as I could see to the horizon. I turned around again and looked down the trail towards the Lake. A hundred yards or so down the trail, I saw The Hooligans hanging out, very causally walking to the Lake. Their backs were away from me and they had not yet seen me.

A chill went down my neck, across my spine, through my legs and down to my toes. My body locked.

I breathed in and out a few times. I tried to continue my walk back to the Lake, to The Hooligans, to the Counselor. To that damned counselor who seemed to have better things to do than to see to the safety of those who were his charge. I tried to move in the direction I was supposed to, but a I couldn't.

Some force overtook my mind and body. I bolted through the entrance gate and down the road as fast as I could-like I had never run before and like I haven't ran since. I ran and ran. And when my

lungs were screaming and burning with pain and it seemed like I couldn't get any more oxygen down the old tubes, I ran even more.

I kept running and eventually looked behind me. I could no longer see the camp's entrance gates, but still I kept running.

I ran until my legs gave out and I fell over. I fell over and I started crawling on all fours. I pulled myself up and walked. I'd catch my breathe and then I'd run a little. I'd run out of energy and I'd walk. Walk, then run. Run, then walk. Finally, it was all I could do just to drag my feet along the asphalt shuffling along. The sun was down, and darkness had set in.

Finally, I came upon a lone gas station in the woods at a flashing red light crossroads. There were a couple of cars and trucks. I walked into the parking lot. There was a payphone by the door. I should have picked up the phone, dialed '0' and asked the operator to call my parents. I should have walked through the convenience store's front door and asked for help. But I didn't. Every scenario that I analyzed in my mind of asking for help from any adult seemed to end up with me back at Church Camp. I wasn't thinking clearly. Or maybe I was thinking clearly, or maybe I wasn't thinking at all. I was running on instinct and adrenaline. The only thing I could think about was putting more distance between myself and The Hooligans, the dumb-ass Counselor and The Pastor.

I spotted a large flatbed pickup truck in the parking lot. It had a sort of canvass tarpaulin covering it. There was a flap opening in the back. I peeked underneath. There was a lot lumber boards and fence posts. I climbed up on the bumper and crawled into the truck's bed, beneath the tarpaulin and huddled next to the stack of boards.

I lay there motionless with my eyes closed tightly and curled up in a fetal position. Only a few minutes had passed when I heard the engine of the truck start. I felt the slight inertia of the truck pulling out of the parking lot and onto the road away from the direction of Church Camp.

I didn't know where the truck was going. I really didn't know where I was at. I only knew that I was going sixty miles an hour in the opposite direction of Hell. I closed my eyes and fell asleep.