

## NEW FRONTIER

“The highway don’t care if you’re all alone.” Tim McGraw

The road had been a pretty lonely place for Michael Stevens, but at least he always had Rikki by his side. He didn’t really know what he would do without her. Be extremely lonely, he guessed. That brought a little sarcastic smile to his face; as it was balancing on his fist, with his elbow wedged into the cushion of the motorhome door. He stared down the North Idaho highway cruising along with his right hand on the wheel. Rikki was sitting up with her head hanging out the window, as per usual. She was a very happy dog with that mountain breeze slamming into her face. Some dogs really seemed to enjoy that.

The radio was wailing out some awful Kris Kristofferson compilation, forcing Michael to sit up and turn it off. Something about these radio stations in isolated valleys of the country, they never have the greatest music libraries. He switched back to the old reliable Zune, selecting some Shinedown; giving Rikki a welcomed scratch behind the ear and went back to his comfortable half-slouched position. The highway seemed to open up for a little while, into a gorgeous well-formed North Idaho valley, and Michael began to ponder some of his endeavors over the last few years on the road.

A couple of years ago, he had spent some time in an isolated little piece of nowhere in Eastern Montana during a fairly harsh winter. He had been a little proud of his journey there. Finally, he had managed to take down a rural GWEN tower. That put a dent in the weather control operations of ‘The Controllers’ for a little while. They always repair them right away, but he got a shot in. Michael had found a job working for a lumber mill as a Log Scaler. The job was very simple, especially with his analytical mind. He just had to measure the length, and size the diameters of the ends of each log. This gave the bean-counters enough data for their estimates. What was difficult; however, were the working conditions.

Coincidentally, he had been there for one of the most brutal winters the area had ever seen. Log Scaling was done outside, so Michael had to make sure he had enough dressing for the conditions. The daily average temperature was forty below zero, with winds amounting to the absolute value equivalent. He never could come up with the right words to describe it, other than ‘brutal’, and was only there a couple weeks. Michael would prepare each morning in a

similar fashion. First, he would don two pairs of long underwear, both tops and bottoms, and three pairs of socks. Then it was two sweatshirts, above; and a layer of sweats over a pair of jeans, below. He would then duct tape his sweats to his socks around the ankles. Now it was on to the outer wear. Michael had to slide his heated socks on first. He had them for years and they still worked like new. Over all that, went his over-sized Carhart bibs. Then, his well-insulated work boots to top it off. They were a size bigger than he normally wore, due to all the layers of sock. An insulated denim work jacket went on very last; along with military-grade foul weather gloves, with the cuffs duct-taped to the jacket. The biggest problem was in protecting the head and face area every day.

Michael wrapped a fleece scarf around his forehead and ears, covered over with an exceptionally warm knit hat. He would wrap two entire scarves around his neck and chin area; anymore and he wouldn't be able to turn his head. This left only a tiny open window circling from just below his bottom lip up around through each eyebrow back down to the starting point. The first day was definitely the worst, as they usually are.

Although his body remained toasty warm, Michael's face was blistering cold the first time he went outside to the log racks. His face remained rosy red, due the immense amount of heat being stored beneath all that clothing; but the surface of his face just felt like it was on the verge of frost bite at any time. He definitely made sure to keep it out of direct wind, especially since he couldn't use his hands to cover the open area and still work. It was interesting that, as the day went on, his face would feel decreasingly cold. Briefly, he thought that maybe it was frost bite, and the numbness was setting in. It wasn't until he went in for lunch the first day that he noticed the reason.

The hours outside in the cold blowing wind, being immersed in sweat, condensation from his breath, and snot drips out of his nose, had formed a semi-circular layer of a mucus-like substance around his mouth and cheeks that had frozen almost solid. His face was actually being insulated under the frozen greenish-orange substance. A small hole, about a half inch round, was located over his mouth for breathing; as snot was hanging in an assortment of hollow spires connecting from his nose to his upper lip. Many decorative multi-color lines of snot and sweat were frozen to parts of his face, the scarf, and other assorted clothing. There was even a nice lump of frozen snot on his glove from wiping his nose so much. It was truly a

winter work of art, slightly on the disgusting side. That was truly a job that Michael would never forget.

Then there was that time in Bakersfield. Michael was trying to learn to fly. His connection to nature was so in tune, that flying came natural. It was the simplest concept of differences in pressure causing lift overcoming gravity and air friction. He was also able to feel the pressure changes, just like an eagle anyway. There was just one problem, he had a rare condition of undersized blood vessels leading from his circulatory system into his brain. Changes in pressure can cause him to pass out quicker than normal. He first found this out in the Navy, during an F-14 ride. The first few seconds of the ride was amazing, but he was passed out by the end of the first climb. Michael didn't figure he would have that same trouble with prop planes, but he did.

During his first live flight with an instructor, he was performing a few minor barrel rolls and then proceeded to complete a diving and turning maneuver. He came to, with the instructor in somewhat of a frantic. Apparently, as they were diving, Michael lost consciousness and never rotated into a turn; leaving the plane diving for the ground at about 180 mph and an elevation of a few thousand feet. The instructor had to be on the ball, and pulled them out of it; and refused to fly with him after that, so he decided to put that hobby on hold for a while.

The interesting thing in that situation, was that Michael was still aware of his consciousness. It was just that his 'lights' were out. He knew that the plane was diving, and saw the instructor pull up; but his physical body had no response. His astral body was just hanging there in the wind watching, so to speak. He didn't like that helpless feeling, and had avoided similar situations where there was a chance that it could occur.

Michael had been through a lot of interesting situations over the past few years. As with the ride of life, some were good and some were bad. Thoughts of his parents popped into his head for a moment. God, he hadn't thought of them in a while. They had died a little over a year ago in a Drunk Driving accident. They hadn't stayed sober for very long; in fact, Michael was never sure if they would make it. At least, they didn't hurt anyone else when they died. They had been coming home late from a social gathering around Christmas, lost control on the ice, and slid into a concrete barricade on the highway. They were killed instantly.

He never went home for the funeral. All the peace and forgiveness, that he needed to find within him, was achieved before Michael had embarked on this Journey. Financial issues were easy to take care of, since there wasn't any money left. His folks had drank their way into a reverse mortgage, so when the tally sheet came out the value of the estate was effectively zero. He really didn't care that there was nothing left for him, since he had always made his own way in life. The empath within him felt sorrow for the souls that wasted their time here, and would now have to come back; not a place that you want to have a return ticket to.

He did his best to never let his mind wander to the agony of the past; but, sometimes, the force was greater than the will. Thoughts of his parents were bringing back painful memories of his childhood. The one thing that bothered him the most about alcoholics, was their lack of compassion or willingness to understand others. Michael had been no different; but, with being an empath, the struggle was much more difficult. Regrets were a waste of time; since, everything in life is just a lesson and the only regret would come from not learning anything. True, he would have been much further along in life by now, had he not been raised in an alcoholic family; but he would have never had the experiences either.

The other kids actually spitting on his back in high school was always one of the worst memories he used to block out from his adolescence. He would be blamed at home, if he told them about it, that he had been doing something to make the kids spit on him. After a while, Michael had quit telling his parents about the abuses at school, for fear of additional punishment. It was like his parents were ashamed of him, mostly because of the alcohol. They had been brainwashed fools like the rest of society; so much so, that they hurt their own flesh and blood because of it. Humans are a very cruel species, but only because of the 'Fear' they have been programmed with. The 'Fear' to be the individual Souls that they are, as ingrained by the education systems, that only serve to create obedient workers who believe the same things. They are easier to control that way. Alcohol makes that condition worse, and it burns. It is literally like throwing gasoline into the fire; except, this fire is their burning souls.

Michael shook his head at the thought of slipping back into thoughts of the past. The sight of the narrow mountain highway came back into his conscious view. Rikki hadn't changed positions much; but he was starting to get a little cold, since it was still early spring, and he needed to roll the window up. "Sorry girl." He watched as she retracted her head, with the window slowly creeping up. "I need to roll it up because it's getting a bit chilly." She just

looked up at him in acceptance, did a couple quick spins in the seat to find a comfortable position, and plopped down to go to sleep. He squirmed in his seat a bit to get a revised position, and felt his wallet dig a little into his ass cheek. Ah, Michael smiled a bit, it was the only reliable 'Pocket Monkey' in his wallet. Occasionally, the sharp edge would poke through his wallet, and he could feel it.

His mother had mailed him this wonderful gift about two years ago. Little did she know, it was the best thing he had seen since 'The Predator', a non-lethal self-defense product. It was used, extensively, by government mercenary contractor groups like Blackwater and Xi; except, this wasn't a self-defense tool like 'The Predator'. It was a pocket utility tool that fit into your wallet. Michael immediately saw its potential when he opened it. Being exactly the size of a credit card, it fit nicely in his wallet between his driver's license and old college ID. There was just about every little screwdriver, bottle opener, wrench, stencil, letter opener, and ruler on it; like a flat version of his Leatherman Tool. The tool was somewhat laid out in the shape of a monkey, but what really had caught his eye was the monkey's tail.

The tail section of the tool was where the ruler and letter opener were located. If you slipped the sharp tip of the tail into a letter, that was the letter opener function. It was also a very effective weapon, in a clutch. Holding the head of the monkey flat against his palm in a closed fist, the tail side could be used as an inch long sharp dagger. Also, it could be held in such a manner as to be able to fishhook the mouth of a potential assailant, to try to talk him out of it. Michael had never used a single tool on it, yet it still came in quite handy a couple of towns ago.

He had strolled into this little town with hopes of staying for a while, but that didn't pan out as intended. Stopping at a little café; a mom and pop as usual, Michael kept to himself at first. A few local punks, with huge egos, wandered in and sat at the bar area. They were loud and obnoxious, with typical ignorant redneck behavior. He was able to ignore certain things and not get involved, but some things he just couldn't sit through.

"Loud hillbillies!" Michael didn't even realize how loud he had said that. Although he was a confident man and didn't take a whole lot of crap, he tried not to be rude to people or instigate anything that was unnecessary. This backfired a little bit, here.

The tiniest of the dirty trio at the bar whipped around and looked across at Michael in the booth. "What was that? You say something, Mary?"

"Shit!" Michael hung his head a bit. Time to think quickly. He was very careful not to reveal too much of his real power, while in public. He wasn't afraid; just adaptive to people's fears in order to protect himself. He quickly remembered the 'Pocket Monkey' that was in his wallet. That name always made him laugh, since it sounded like a pocket sexual aid. He jerked it out of his wallet and palmed it in his right hand; as the 'Three Stooges' made their way, quite impressively, over to his booth.

'Stubby' spoke up first, so typical. "Ya got some sort of prollem mister? I can see you ain't firm 'round here."

Michael had to cool this off before it escalated. "Why don't you three sit down and we can talk about it, like gentlemen?"

Leaning down on the table in front of him, 'Stubby' furthered his dissertation. "Why don't you go Fu.....?" He never got to finish. Michael was fast as lightning. He slid over in the booth, pulled 'Stubby' down next to him, threw his right arm around his neck and 'fish-hooked' the side of his mouth with the 'Pocket Monkey'; one that he would have definitely thrown back.

Michael spoke to him in a calm voice. "Unless you want to look like the Joker, I suggest you encourage the two book ends to sit down here and join us." 'Stubby' did so without hesitation, and the two sat across from them. He continued on. "Now, I know it's embarrassing for a few local heroes like yourself to get a bad rap; so it just looks like the four of us are sitting here talking like good 'ole boys." None of the three made a sound. "When I take this metal out of your mouth, the three of you are going to casually get up and leave without a sound. I can promise you, if you change your mind on me, you will regret it VERY much. Please do not test me on this matter. I am very tired, and really not interested in seeing the sight of gushing blood. If this sounds agreeable, quietly respond."

'Stubby' made the best "Uh-huh" sound that he could, with the edge of a letter opener blade wedged into the corner of his mouth. Michael could feel that they were telling the truth, and in complete terror; so he gently released 'Stubby's' mouth, and pulled his arm from around his

shoulder. The three did just exactly as they were told, and were gone; making sure to put on a decent display of toughness on the way out. He decided to pay for his check and leave right after the punks did, since they were the type to go cry to daddy; thus, it was time to move on. This town was now dead for him.

He continued down the Idaho highway, not shifting positions in his seat too much. Michael was still having dilemmas about his journey. When he set out, all those years ago, his attitude had been much more positive. He had also been freshly powered up; so, of course, he was motivated. That feeling had faded, somewhat. Humans were just so terrible to one another. Being an Empath, that is the hardest thing to deal with. The energies from a species, so ignorant, as to intentionally cause harm to others was too much to bear some days. To Michael, if he was around too much judgement and indecency; it, literally, felt like some unknown force was driving ice picks into his brain. Most all of his joyful periods were when he was away from people, not with them. Why was he even doing this, again?

Chap had told him something about this dilemma when he got out of jail. Michael remembered it well. "Michael, there is no doubt in my mind that you will achieve greatness one day, but you must be careful. Never let this place bring you down too much. It can be very relentless. Questioning your intentions is a good idea, but NEVER do this with your purpose. Humanity is worth it, and you must know that in your heart if you are to succeed." He had received word of Chap's passing not more than a month after he had left society behind. Michael wasn't sad, because Chap would not have wanted that. When he heard the news, he found a place in the woods that day to say his goodbyes. He had placed two sticks in the shape of a cross on a half-buried flat rock and simply said, "Chap, you are finally back where you belong. Thank you for being my friend." A single tear rolled down Michael's cheek and he left, not looking back; just like Chap had told him so long ago.

Michael shook his head back into happy conscious thought. A speed zone was coming up, indicating his arrival in the next town. On the outskirts, almost like every other small town in America, was the local church. Oh yes, the 'Hypo-Christians'. Michael remembered back to when he was in high school, and still being forced to go to church. The only way to get through the agony of the banality was to have a few puffs on the pipe before the service. One Sunday, in particular, the pastor (who he always felt dark energies from) cornered him. "Are you high, Michael?"

He just couldn't lie very well. "Do you mean, have I partaken in the use of Cannabis?" He paused. "Why then, yes. It is the only way I can get through these mind control sessions. Also, why do you find it so bad that God created this wonderful plant; which our brain, that he also created, has receptors for us to make use of? I am just here to worship him for that." He smiled big at the presentation of rational intelligence to a brainwashed mind.

It was almost as if the pastor's face became like a tomato. He was furious at being forced to see his own ignorance. "Michael, you get out of here. I don't want to see you polluting this place."

"Wow!" Michael chuckled as he walked past the pastor to head for the exit. "Truly a man of God. You must be proud." He walked on out to join his parents, who were outside mingling with the rest of the clones. All the years later, he figured that the pastor never told his parents about it; since he never got a good beating over it. Michael just figured, the pastor didn't want to share with others how he was intellectually bested.

The other group that was testing his patience lately was, these so-called patriot movements; with their worthless marches, flying banners of ignorance. They all seem to be complaining about their Constitutional Rights, not understanding that their rights are THEIR responsibility and no one else's. Michael giggled as he thought about it. If he were to set the Constitution on a table, the odds of it getting up and doing anything to protect the people were the same as if a gun were on the table and it were to walk off and commit a crime. Both would require action by the people. What a concept! The problem was they had no courage. Fear agendas and controlled opposition employed by 'The Controllers' have definitely been VERY successful. As an Empath, Michael deplored violence. Other than his special abilities, he had one weapon, the 'Pocket Monkey'; just in case, of course. Traveling on the road without a weapon in this world would be just stupid. Violence should be a person's last choice; but, if mankind does not take sensible action soon, it will become inevitable.

Up ahead he saw the sign. 'Welcome to \_\_\_\_\_, Idaho!' Something strange was welling in his gut. Michael's intuition was fairly perfected, but clear visions of the future would still require more practice. There was definitely something special about this town; and, as usual, time would tell what it was. On the left, was the usual 'mom and pop' café that he adored so

much. It was a simple concept really. Whenever he came into a strange town and was looking for a decent place to eat, Michael simply observed which cafes the elderly people were eating at. It wasn't judgement, just common sense; albeit not too common anymore. If the elderly are eating there; then the service will be good, the food will be tasty, everything will be reasonably priced, and the atmosphere will be relaxed.

Almost immediately upon entering the City limits, Michael noticed a café sign on the right. 'Margie's Place' was spelled out in neon, with some of the sections of tubing burned out. Typical of any small town café. He pulled in the lot and parked the motorhome far in the back to give him some space. Rikki was raring to get out, that was for sure. He always attended to his friend at each stop. She made her business by a small grove of arbor vidas growing along the back fence of the parking lot. Then he gave her some water and let her on up into the motorhome. Hungry, he headed on in for a good breakfast.

Small town cafés were definitely one of Michael's favorite environments to be in. They seemed to recharge his energy in some way. People were usually kind, with the exception of the occasionally punks. Feel-good music and the smell of outstanding food were what he would most often encounter inside. Here, comfortable sitting booths lined the large front windows with an opposing bar and waitress area, bordering the aisle leading from the door. Michael walked gently down the aisle to a booth on the far end from the door, and took a seat; facing the door, of course.

Booths were always his favorite place to sit in a café. They were usually located by the window, so he could look out at the natural world, and considerably more comfortable than sitting in one of the hard wooden chairs at the tables. Michael didn't like to sit with his back facing the door either. He found it best to be able to see who was coming in the door; as he had made quite a few enemies in his travels. There would always be the chance that someone was looking for him, most likely for the rest of his life. He thought of Caroline, and what it was like for her to always be on the run; and, now, he was living the same lifestyle.

"Hello, honey." Small town waitresses were always so polite and sweet. "Haven't seen you before, cutie. What you gonna have?" She was a middle aged, attractive, blonde woman with her hair in a bun. Actually, she did resemble Flo, somewhat; even with the pencil sticking in her hair. There was a beautiful green aura about her. She was a decent person.

Michael hadn't even looked at the menu. He didn't need to. Today he knew exactly what he wanted. "Chicken fried steak, browns, English muffin, and coffee; please, ma'am." He said as he genuinely smiled at the lovely woman. It kind of made him miss Caroline even more.

She jotted it all down on her pad and gave a big smile back. "Coming right up, love. Be back with your coffee."

He returned to his thoughts of Caroline. Every night for the past two weeks, Michael had been having the same nightmare, with her in it. At around three in the morning, each night, he would jerk awake and sit up, dripping with cold sweat. It wasn't fear he was feeling; but a power like he had never encountered before. There was something about Caroline that was VERY important for him to find.

The waitress set the steaming coffee down in front of him while maintaining a conversation with a local rancher at the bar, about the stench of a local dairy farm. The coffee smelled so good amongst all the talk about shit. Michael laughed at that thought, but the waitress took no notice. He grabbed the coffee, took a careful sip, and continued his thought.

In the dream, he is being pulled down into an ominous black abyss, by layers of spinning grinding metal teeth; like a black hole of mutilation. His legs had already been chewed off to the middle of the femur, with pieces of flesh and bone rotating about the human blender. Michael could feel no pain, though. He was reaching out holding onto Caroline's hand, as she was being pulled in the opposite direction by a raging inferno. The fire was not hot, but it was melting her body. Fear was heavy in the air. If he were to let go of her hand, then he would lose her forever; but the teeth and fire were consuming them, and soon they would be no more. Caroline was screaming, "Michael, don't let it take me." He was pulling with all his might, as his fingers slip off he screams, "Nooooooooo..." It was here that Michael woke up each night looking like he just got out of the shower.

Michael heard the 'ding' of the bell, indicating that his order was ready. The waitress wasted no time grabbing it off the counter, not letting it smolder under the heat lamp. She set it down in front of him. "There you go, sweetie. Anything else I can get you?"

“Yes.” He smelled the delicious food in front of him. “Is there a good RV Park in town?” He couldn’t wait for her response, and began cutting up the steak.

“Sure thing dear.” She was so nice and happy to assist. “We’ve lots of ‘em, but the best one is Jack’s. If you head down the main street here.” She pointed out the window as Michael palmed his fork and started in, trying to look up at her as she was explaining. “The second right, go out about 2 miles, and you will see the sign.”

He swallowed the masticated food in his mouth, so he could respond. “Thank you so much. You are a very nice lady. I really enjoy it when I met decent people in my travels.” He smiled up at her, not realizing the chunk of meat stuck in the upper grill of his teeth.

She laughed at the sight of the food in his teeth, but didn’t tell him. “Thank you, so much. You have a great day, sir.” She made a half-flirty spin, and went back to the waitress station. Michael could feel how much that made her day, and that made his as well.

Working away at his amazing meal, he continued thinking; definitely something that occupied the majority of his time, but he could turn it off when he needed to. He just couldn’t let these thoughts about Caroline go. They were so strong. He recalled that she had grown up somewhere in the North Idaho Panhandle, and that is where he was. Perhaps, he was picking up energies and was close to her presence. Not really sure, but he had to shake it off for now; until more information could be revealed. Otherwise, he was just mentally jerking himself off.

Michael observed people’s behaviors, constantly. His intuition was flawless; another skill that he could turn off, if necessary. They were just so beaten up. He wasn’t sure if they had just given up; or if ‘The Controllers’ agenda had worked so well, that they could not wake up. Conformity had become more of an enemy than the control itself. When you’re in the clouds of third dimensional reality, you can’t see the mist for the illusion it is; you must be grounded in awareness to notice. He never knew why people were so upset, when all they did was live meaningless lives anyways; and it was all self-inflicted. ‘The Controllers’ use fear to instill conformity. It is done in the statehouses, hospitals, churches, media, and schools; all institutions of enslavement. If people had any idea what the Human Will was truly capable of, ‘The Controllers’ would be running for their lives. Violence only erupts when good and evil are out of balance. If they remain in harmony, one will never attack the other. Good wouldn’t

intentionally attack anything; and Evil know that it has no creativity or imagination, thus it would be defeated if forces were equal.

He shook his head, and snapped back in the present moment. Michael needed to reconnect with nature for a while. Information was not negative, but his processing of it could lead him there. That was not a place that he could spend a great deal of time. He would never think of these things without a solution; but, he wasn't sure what the solution was yet. That was the true nature of his current torment. More than he knew what it was, he knew what it wasn't; just like with Love. The period with Caroline had been the last time he actually felt love for anything. It wasn't, at all, that Michael didn't believe in Love; it was just that he didn't see Love in action anymore in this world, anywhere. A dying world, doing so by choice. He just couldn't escape watching it. Humans made no sense to him, but he was one. They were completely insane. They all seem to want to monitor and control everybody else's lives, and never take care of their own. The only thing that he had been doing since he left society was trying to show people what their actions look like, in hopes that they would want to change. He has also had to make some waves with some very bad people; as much as he deplored violence, sometimes there is no choice, and he was good at it.

Staring out the window, finishing up what was left on his plate, he noticed a drove of quail making their way through the bushes in front of the restaurant. Cars were passing by making noise, driving the quail to scurry on for cover from the noise; all except one. A lone quail remained in the open, not frightened by the cars that were twenty feet away. This was the 'different' one; the one not ruled by fear. Michael chuckled a little bit. That is the one that will stand out later, just like in Humanity. The only people that have ever made a difference, in this idle world, were the one who were labeled 'different'.

"You all done, Love?" Michael turned his head from the window to the waitress, thinking it a little odd that he didn't feel her presence. That didn't happen very often, but perhaps that was because she had such a genuine spirit.

"Yes, thank you ma'am." He reached in his wallet, as she was clearing the table, and grabbed a twenty to hand to her. "This should cover the bill, too." She stuffed the bill in her smock and carried the dishes to the back.

She returned with the change. "Nah, you can keep the rest." Michael loving waved off the change she was carrying. He always tried to tip appropriately; but even better, when they were as nice as she was.

The lady just seemed to glow with excitement; perhaps from trying to make a living on, what he was pretty sure, not a well-tipping town. "Thank you very much, sir. God bless."

Michael began sliding out of the booth. "Well, you deserve it, hun. I may be in town a few days, and I will be back to eat. Thanks again." He stood up out of the booth, gave the waitress a loving smile, and made his way out of the café.

As he arrived outside, he could see Rikki in the distance; beginning her 'here comes my man' dance on the driver's seat, leaving little lines of doggy snot on the window. This didn't bother Michael any, coming from a creature who thought of nothing else except loving all day; unlike Humans. This triggered another memory in his head. He remember when he was young, the family had a little Shih Tzu. One day, when it obviously had worms, the dog began dragging her butthole on the nice white carpet; leaving an inch-wide brown streak of dog shit. Michael's mother had literally come unglued, being that she worshipped material things like they were Gods. Oh, how he felt terrible for that poor dog. For some time, he could still hear the screams from the punishment that loving creature had to endure. His mother had always been that way. Michael had received so many harsh punishments from things that were TRULY accidents, and could have happened to anyone. He would receive a beating, as if his accident were intentional; which were always multiplied, if the accident occurred at night, when his mother was inebriated. That brought a little tear to his eyes. Had that bastard of a father never got her to drinking, maybe she would have lived longer; but that could not be changed.

The last time he had left home, Michael's mother seemed to have a renewed strength about her; but he had been on the fence about it. Now that she was gone, he did really miss her. She had a genuinely benevolent soul inside her; and, initially, a strong spirit. Her spirit had just given up. Every person has their breaking point. The point when you must decide if your path must change. Paths can change in a lot of ways. One can snap and do something stupid, which usually ends up as the subject of a Lifetime movie. Then, one can just give up and stay in a shitty situation, no matter what; which had been the fate of his mother. Finally, there was

Michael. Those who leave it all behind to try to fix it. He had no resentment or shame for his mother. She would get it right, someday.

Looking over at the window by the café door, Michael saw all the local ads and announcements that people post in the windows of local businesses. He noticed something odd. There were three 'Missing Children' flyers, which seemed like a high number for such a rural area. He had this feeling that there was this dark cloud of energy here. Something wasn't right, but he would let it reveal itself in time, as usual.

He wasted no time in getting to the motorhome, so as not to torture Rikki too much. She greeted him in the usual way, with a combination of hugs with her front paws and gentle licks on his neck. Michael adored how amazing she really was; making sure never to get too out of control with excitement, just tender love. If Humans were half as genuine as dogs were, this world would literally be 'Heaven'.

Michael set out for the RV Park, remembering the nice waitress's directions. He was his own GPS system, as a general rule; but it was nice to have actual directions to work with, from time to time. When he pulled in the park, Michael got a good feeling in his gut. This would be a place he could stay for a little while, without too much hassle. He stopped in front of the main office, and went inside to pay for a space for a few days.

'Ding. Ding.' The usual sound of a door hitting a hanging bell as it opens was common in these small town parks. Even with today's technological advancement, it was rare that he ever encountered an electronic buzzer. The sound brought out an older gentleman from a doorway behind the counter. It was quite obvious that this was also his home as well; a lifestyle that Michael could actually envy.

The man had just as 'kind' of an aura about him as the waitress did. There were some nice people in this town, for the dark cloud that seemed to be hanging over it. A thick unkempt salt and pepper beard with a graying widow's peak and a few missing teeth were some of his highlights. He had a slight beer belly with a confident way about him and a genuine smile, not caring about his missing teeth. "Help you, mister?"

Michael approached the counter. "Yes, sir. I would like a space for a few days, preferably one that is somewhat isolated. I have sensitive ears, and enjoy the quiet." He smiled big back at the nice man.

"Sure thing, mister." He went to looking through the maps and papers on his counter. "I can give you space 11, and I will try not to put anyone near you. We aren't that busy this time of year. How long you planning on staying?"

He smiled at the coincidence of his favorite number. "I will be here a few days for sure, but not certain after that."

"I'll just charge you the thirty dollars for the three days for now, and leave you open. If you end up staying six days, then the seventh is free." The man handed him a receipt, after Michael paid him. "Name's Harry. Anything you need, my friend, come see me."

Michael liked this man almost instantly. "Thanks, Harry. Actually, I was wondering if there was a little grocery store nearby. I already ate at Margie's, and that was excellent."

Harry piped up with exuberance. "Margie's is the best food in town. You definitely picked the right one there. The market is right up this same street here about a mile and a half." He pointed off in the direction that Michael had come from back towards town.

"Thanks again. I like the people that I have met in this town so far. Have a good day." He turned and made his way out, always trying to act as 'normal' as possible. When trying to fly under the radar, it really helped to be able to blend in as best as possible.

He was situated in his designated spot in no time. Michael was very organized and neat, but not anal retentive by any means. Judgmental people seem to associate cleanliness with obsession, which was not the case. Maybe they were just too filthy. He had a place for everything, but would modify it based on the layout of where he was parked. Rikki was exploring around the area in sheer ecstasy. She would make sure that all location were checked, with smell. Dogs could tell everything from smell alone. Even with Michael's abilities, there had been times when Rikki caught the scent before he did.

A while back, Michael had made a return trip to the Continental Divide. The two were hiking through the wilderness, when Rikki stopped and ruffled her fur, immediately. Michael stopped as well. She was staring at a little patch of Montana ferns about sixty feet away; that appeared to be moving, but there was no wind. Rikki was making no noise, so as not to draw attention from whatever it was. There was just no mistaking it when it happened, Michael heard a deep heavy snort from back in the ferns. He had heard this sound before. It was a grizzly, just letting them know where he was. This was his sign to go another way; and he did just that. "Good girl." He looked down at her. She looked up with pride at knowing she did a good thing for her man.

Only about five percent of bear attacks were truly accidents; where an unsuspecting hiker stumble on a cup, and momma wasn't having any. The rest are idiots not possessing that 'rare' sense, that people seem to think is so 'common'. Michael didn't fear anything; but, especially, not nature. That was the only source of 'unconditional' love he was aware of, which included pets and mothers.

Michael traveled with a motorcycle as well. He had a Kawasaki 300 that fit perfectly on a bike ramp in the hitch of the motorhome. After unloading it and putting Rikki back in the motorhome for a bit, he set out for the grocery store to get some supplies. The bike gave him a great way to get around and really see the towns he would visit. First, he located the grocery store; and then cruised around a bit to get the lay of the land.

It was a very nice town, for being so small. Typically, Michael would encounter quite a few low income places, with junk in the yard; but not here. There really were no places that weren't kept up and nice. They may not have all been mansions, but they were clean. The business district was tip top as well. It reminded him of a 1950s town out of the past in some fashion. It was kind of like that odd 'Stepford' feeling. Something wasn't right here, as he also noticed from all the missing children in the window at the café. Not enough time left in the day to begin looking into anything; so he headed for the grocery store, and returned to the park when he was done.

After enjoying a pleasant afternoon in the sun with Rikki; Michael consumed a hearty burger for dinner, then climbed in the motorhome for the night. It was rather comfortable living, for just one man and his dog. The dining area doubled as an office; and the kitchen doubled as a

dressing area. He liked to sleep on the bed above the cab and reserve the back bed as kind of a living room area. Rikki could easily traverse up and down the ladder to the bed, and he had installed a dog entrance into the motorhome door, some time ago. That made it very nice for her to come and go as she pleased. Michael buttoned things up for the night, and retired to the bed with Rikki. He continued on in his mind about the things he was feeling that day.

Michael was here for a reason, he knew that. Everything in his life was following the signs and intuition that guide him. He wasn't sure what Caroline had to do with all this yet; but, very soon, he would. It was quite possible that this was where she grew up; where all those horrible things happened to her. When he thought about that, his gut would tell him that he was on the right track. His thoughts drifted to randomness just before sleep.

There is nothing in this world that Michael 'had' to do, except die; everything else was by choice. If he stood his ground long enough, he would break them; but he had to be willing to take a great deal of pain, and he was. He heard lots of people, during his travels, talking about their rights to choose being taken away. That is impossible. Rights can never be 'taken' away; they can only be 'given' away, by choice! His eyes started to become heavy as the sandman was finding his way in. It was time to close down for the day. Night is when Michael received his biggest recharge of energy. He expended a great deal of energy every day, just to function. He drifted off to sleep, with his hand buried in Rikki's mane, as usual; knowing he would be awake to towel himself off in a few hours, anyway.