THE

COWBOY IN YOU

A SURVIVAL MANUAL



GREG KEOUGH

RECIPIENT OF THE
CIA INTELLIGENCE STAR
FOR EXTRAORDINARY HEROISM

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KEOUGH HOUSE

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KEOUGH HOUSE

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TO MY FAMILY

To my wife, my kids, and my loved ones.
You have marked my heart and soul
from the very first moment.
Live well. I will always be walking with you.
Every step of the way.

DAD

"I've received the Intelligence Star at Langley,
and I've been reduced to a number in a federal cell."

This is not a self-help book.
It's a survival manual, written in the margins
of a life lived at the extremes.

For my children. And for anyone
who refuses to be shaped by fear.

"You don't become unbreakable to impress the world.
You become unbreakable to survive it."

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The guy in the next cell defecated on his cellmate's bed.

His cellmate was a quiet Black man who kept to himself. The white guy lost it.

The cell erupted.

But let me tell you how I got here.

Early morning. I stood at the front door saying goodbye to my wife and kids.

We knew this could be an issue.

My wife knew. The kids had some inkling. Our lawyers told us low probability for a lot of reasons.

I remember thinking: if this goes sideways, it changes our lives forever.

My wife gave me a big hug. A kiss. And a cross on the forehead, as is traditional in our house.

Then I was off.

The flight was 7am, San Salvador to Miami. Uneventful.

When we landed in Miami, I knew there could be an issue.

First clue: we could see the gate, but the whole plane sat for over fifteen minutes. The pilot announced over the speaker we have to hold here for a few minutes, we've been requested by the gate.

I could see the gate. No plane there.

This is the moment I knew.

I texted my wife. I think I am going to be arrested. May not hear from me. Call the lawyers if I don't call again in thirty minutes.

We sat. Seemed like a real long time. Probably fifteen minutes.

Then we pulled to the gate.

I was sitting up front. One of the first people off.

As I stepped out, a man and a woman approached with a brisk walk.

Mr. Keough, we are from the FBI. You are being detained.

The man asked if I had any luggage. I said no. He asked for my phone.

Then he said: can I see your hands.

I said, do we really have to do this?

He said: due to your background, for your safety and ours, we need to.

So the ride began.

The first hearing came fast. There would be many more.

Full restraints. Feet chained. A chain around my waist with handcuffs attached. Prison clothes. Transported on a bus with the others.

When I walked into the courtroom, shuffling, clanking, surrounded by guards, I saw my brother- in-law's face.

He was traumatized.

He had never seen me like this. Never imagined he would.

He shed a tear.

I gave him a head nod. Everything will be okay.

He still talks about it to this day. Still devastated.

My whole life, I had defended this system. Now I was in its bowels.

PROLOGUE

"You're not crazy... you're awake."

GREG KEOUGH

I'm 58 years old, and I've lived a life of extremes.

Since the 5th grade, I've been working, and I've never stopped.

I've worked in intelligence, in business, on ranches, in boardrooms. I've built companies and watched them collapse. I've been a husband for 30 years, a father of five. Yes, all with the same woman.

I've also been a federal prisoner of the U.S. government.

I was awarded the Intelligence Star, the CIA's decoration for extraordinary heroism. A friend died in the rescue that led to it, and he has a star on the Memorial Wall at Langley. I'm one of the few living recipients.

I've been so broke I couldn't afford housing or food for my family. As my daughters still remind me, I even had to sell their dollhouse.

You learn more sleeping on concrete than in a classroom.

I never planned to write this.

But my kids said I should.

So this is for them, and for you.

Some of these stories I tell fully. Others I only sketch, not because they are unfinished, but because some things are meant to be told in person, face to face, voice to voice. If you want the rest, come find me.

This book is not for everyone. It's for the ones who sense something's wrong and don't know what to do about it.

This isn't a book written for comfort. It's written because the window is closing.

Systems don't fail all at once. They hollow out quietly. Families notice last. Men notice too late.

If you're reading this, you're early, not special. Early still means responsible.

Some of what follows will feel familiar. Some of it will make you uncomfortable.

That discomfort is the warning.

Let's begin.

HOW WE GOT HERE

"You've made a bad trade: freedom for the promise of safety and comfort."

GREG KEOUGH

I believe I was lucky to grow up during a "Golden Age" of the United States. From the 1980s through the early 2000s.

True freedom and liberty. Economic growth. Upward mobility. Strong families. A general sense of stability and optimism.

But something has changed.

Over the last 20 years, the shift has been dramatic.

And if you're under 25 today, I don't think you've been prepared for what's coming.

This book is my way of helping you prepare.

My grandfather worked as a lineman, my grandmother was a nurse. They were proud to own a home. Even after the Great Depression. My dad worked at a bank.

My mom, whose maiden name was Hennigan, was a teacher.

My father served in the Navy during the Korean War. My uncle was one of the first Navy SEALs and was wounded in combat in Vietnam.

I was the second of four brothers. Yes, we fought. A lot. My poor mother. We didn't have much.

But we had structure. Discipline. Purpose.

We had a shared reality. Each morning, the anthem was played on TV and the Vietnam dead were listed. At midnight, the stations shut down to static.

We were Catholic. Mass on Sunday. CCD on Wednesday. Bible study on the weekends.

I didn't realize it then, but that spiritual foundation was everything. It has paid dividends throughout my life.

And it will for you too. You'll see this thread again in later chapters.

There were no personal computers. No cell phones. No internet. If we weren't working, we were outside.

We grew our own food, chopped logs for firewood, and lived like country kids.

My mom would ring a bell to call us back. We carried BB guns, then .22s.

We hunted, fished, and got into trouble. But when we did, the authorities were grounded. They shared our values.

Everyone said the Pledge of Allegiance. Everyone loved this country.

Our neighbors fixed cars, poured concrete, ran the movie theater. Real work. Honest people. Some had junk cars on the lawn. But everyone contributed.

Republicans and Democrats mostly agreed on the big stuff: Work hard. Defend the country. Keep government small.

Don't waste taxpayer money. My how things have changed.

People were religious. They believed in duty. Honor. Patriotism. And most importantly, freedom.

If you're my age, you know something is wrong. If you're younger, you feel it.

You sense a void, a hollowness. Like something's been stolen. And it has.

You scroll TikTok and Instagram searching for meaning. But you never feel fulfilled. That's not an accident.

You have been the target of something I recognize, because I saw how these programs worked. Up close. As a CIA covert ops officer.

This is real. This is global. This is by design.

• • •

THE COWBOYS WHO RAISED ME

• • •

They say, "Show me who you spend time with, and I'll show you who you become."

Well, I was lucky. God placed Cowboys in my path from the beginning.

I didn't call them that at the time. Back then, I didn't have this framework, this idea, "the Cowboy in you."

But they were Cowboys all the same. Each one different. Each one vital. Each one left a mark.

And thank God for that.

When I was growing up, most Americans still leaned Cowboy. This was the 60s, 70s, 80s. Men were hard because life was hard.

My family were Irish immigrants. Most of the cousins stayed in the city, but my father, he chose something else.

He moved us out to a small town with land. He loved the country. Maybe needed it.

He was hard. Probably too hard. But it was all he knew.

One night, much later in life, I had dinner with my Uncle, my dad's best friend since they were kids.

He looked at me, a quiet moment, and said:

"Your father had a very hard upbringing."

He didn't explain. Didn't need to. It just hung there.

That was enough.

My dad never had a bed growing up. Slept on the floor of a small NYC apartment.

We're Irish, we don't talk about our problems. We just suck it up. No therapist, no soul-searching. That's what Guinness is for.

But pain still finds its way in. It leaves a trail. Sometimes in silence. Sometimes in steel.

Thankfully, my mentors didn't stop at my father.

There was Uncle John: Navy SEAL, combat vet.

I'll never forget when he went missing after being shot in the jungle. For months, we had no idea if he was alive.

My mother was frantic. I can still see the stress in her eyes.

Then one day, a photo arrived. Uncle John, alive, wounded, in a hospital bed, smiling.

An American Cowboy.

Then there was Uncle Tom. The most charismatic guy in the room. He lit it up... energy, ideas, hope, vision.

One of the youngest executives on Wall Street. Started his own firm. Made it big.

Then hit rough times. The bottle got the better of him.

But he was a Cowboy to the end.

Flawed, but unforgettable.

These men weren't perfect, but every one of them carried at least one Cowboy trait. Often more.

And not just mine.

Our fathers grew up in the shadow of the Greatest Generation, men who survived the Depression and fought in WWII. They didn't explain grit. They embodied it.

They built the country we take for granted today.

As I got older, God kept putting Cowboys in my path.

When I joined the CIA, one of the first was Mike.

Marine. Vietnam veteran. Hard as nails. Inspiring.

He wasn't the kind of leader who kept you on the sidelines. He threw you into the fire, not recklessly, but with belief.

He trusted young guys. Gave us responsibility early.

That kind of leadership is rare.

After training, he called me.

"El Salvador," he said.

He was heading there as Deputy Chief of Station.

Was I in?

Hell yes, I was.

Steve, the Chief of Station, was a legend, a Vietnam vet who'd commanded Montagnard tribes in the jungle, training them to fight the Viet Cong.

Another Cowboy. Through and through.

I learned that fast.

Early on, there was an incident. A rescue that went sideways. I couldn't save my buddy. It tore me up. Still does, if I'm honest.

I went to Steve, rattled. He looked at me and said:

"Don't think one more minute about that. If you did, you'd be dead."

He'd been there before. He knew. That was Cowboy mentorship: no coddling, just truth.

Another time, I nearly got myself fired.

I worked a cover job at the embassy. My boss there was a Bureaucrat, classic. We clashed constantly.

One day she was riding me hard. I'd had enough.

I told her to fuck off.

Big stink. Huge. I figured I was done.

Got called into Steve's office. Walked in expecting a dressing down.

He looked at me. Paused.

"Did you really tell her to fuck off?"

I said, "Yup."

He just laughed. Hard. I can still see his face... tears in his eyes, shaking his head.

"Get out of here," he said.

That was Steve.

Now, in retrospect, I shouldn't have said it. I was wrong. That boss and I actually became friends later. But she was a Bureaucrat, and I was a Cowboy. Oil and water. Classic Cowboy crap. And Steve knew it.

Reagan had drawn the line: we would not let communism take El Salvador.

No massive troop deployment. Just special forces. CIA. Advisors. People who got things done.

Everyone there had Vietnam experience, except me.

I was the kid. But I soaked up everything.

It was hard. Real. Dangerous. And it was glorious.

I got to stand shoulder to shoulder with real American Cowboys.

And it changed my life.

Mike eventually retired and did what Cowboys do: built a new life. Started a company. A vineyard. Lived full, lived free.

He died skiing out West. Fast. Sudden.

A legend no one will ever hear about.

But I knew. I remember. And I honor him now.

When I left government, I stayed in Latin America.

Was supposed to go to Mexico next, drug war was heating up. Could've gone. Might've ended up dead.

But life took a turn.

I launched a business. And again, another Cowboy showed up. Tom Pownall. CEO of Martin Marietta. Naval Academy grad. Fortune 500 heavyweight.

He knew my past. Saw potential.

I had no money. Just vision.

He backed me anyway.

Most Americans wouldn't set foot in El Salvador after the war. He flew down with me. Met the locals. Shook hands. Built trust. Took risks.

We started a company together.

He co-signed my first mortgage. Attended my wedding.

We got married on an island called Teopan, owned by my father-in-law. Still one of my favorite places on earth.

The business worked, but it wouldn't scale.

Tom lost money. I hated that.

But he never complained. Never asked for anything.

When I pivoted to tech, he was the first to cheer me on.

He was a mentor. A friend. A Cowboy.

God rest his soul.

There have been others.

But the last one I'll tell you about, he may have been the most important.

The one I call the Quiet Cowboy.

Most of my mentors were hard-charging, visible, classic Cowboys. But the Quiet Cowboy lived in the rarest zone. The sweet spot. Not loud. Not showy.

He shaped my soul more than any man I ever met.

You'll meet him later. And when you do, you'll understand.

I didn't always live up to what they gave me. But I never forgot it.

LESSON #1

YOU ARE GOING TO DIE

"You only get one ride. Make it count."

GREG KEOUGH

As silly as it sounds, the fact that you're going to die is something most people spend little to no time thinking about.

This is the first and most obvious life lesson. It's also the most ignored.

But how you approach this fact will change how you live.

You are going to die. Let me say that again:

You. Are. Going. To. Die.

Most people don't live like they believe that.

It's 100% certain. A definitive rule of the human experience.

And yet most people plan their vacation more carefully than they plan their life.

They spend more time worrying about their outfit than their soul.

Your life is a journey with a guaranteed destination: death.

Not preparing for that is like starting a cross-country trip without a map, gear, or idea where you're headed.

It makes no sense. But most people live this way.

We used to experience death more directly. It was common, personal. In most of the world, it still is.

But not in the U.S. Here, death has been sanitized.

People die behind hospital curtains. The bodies disappear. The grief is private. The lesson is lost.

And because we don't see death, we don't think about it.

I've had a different experience. I've been close to death maybe too many times.

When I was a kid, I almost fell 100 feet off a cliff while exploring a waterfall.

A tree root saved me.

I survived gunfire encounters. Including one where a bullet went through my notebook on the table and just missed my head.

During a rescue, a fellow officer and good friend died.

I'll never forget the look in his eyes as he was dying. Or the long helicopter ride back to base with his body on the floor. An experience that later led to my receiving the Intelligence Star.

I was there to recover the bodies of my father-in-law and two others after their car went off a ferry in El Salvador.

We had to recover the bodies in front of my children.

I've seen cancer, shootings, car wrecks. I've seen people die in peace. And in terror.

And I can tell you this: You do have control over how prepared you are.

But you can't prepare without thinking about it.

Embracing death isn't morbid. It's liberating.

Because once you accept you're going to die, you stop wasting time.

You start living.

Faith helps with this. And we'll talk more about God later.

But even if you're not religious, the power of remembering death still applies.

LESSON #2

MORE COWBOYS... LESS BUREAUCRATS

"When governments grow bloated and bureaucracies become oppressive, only the bold can keep freedom alive."

GREG KEOUGH

I've lived this lesson from the inside. When I joined the CIA, my mission was to be a Cowboy, a warrior for freedom. But to get the job done, we had to fight a war on two fronts. One against the enemy

overseas. And another against the Bureaucrat mindset in our own headquarters.

I've seen bureaucrats in silk ties do more damage than the enemies we fought overseas. I've seen the "system" reward those who avoid risk and punish those who take it.

We are in a global war of values: Cowboys versus Bureaucrats.

There can be no middle ground.

My mission is to raise my kids as Cowboys.

When I say Cowboy, I don't just mean literal cowboys. Though they're included.

I mean people who embrace a Cowboy-like view and attitude toward life.

Cowboys love freedom, take risks, stand by a handshake, fight to the last breath to save their family and home, and have no neutral ground on core issues.

When the law and bureaucrats are wrong, they stand up.

This is why Americans love Cowboys. The soul of our nation is in the Cowboy.

Cowboys possess: Vision, Conviction, Courage, Determination, Optimism, Endurance, Responsibility.

The Cowboy spirit once defined America. Storming Normandy. Going to the moon. Building the modern world.

But here's the difference. Back then, they had something we don't: a Cowboy army behind them.

Millions of men and women who believed in hard work, truth, sacrifice, faith, family, and freedom. Without needing to be convinced or coddled.

Those values were common. Today, they're controversial. That's the real crisis.

Let me be clear: when I say Cowboy, I don't mean male.

I mean courageous, mission-focused, truth-upholding. And that includes women.

I tell my two daughters this often: You're Cowboys. And I mean it.

Bravery and grit know no gender.

Bureaucrats hate Cowboys. They are failed Cowboys. Either lacking the guts or having given up.

They use rules and laws to control Cowboys because they can't win in a fair fight.

Bureaucrats have weaponized the law. Criminalizing everyday life and using it to go after anyone who steps out of line.

I have experienced this firsthand. The federal government boasts a 99% conviction rate, often targeting crypto and white-collar cases while ignoring cartel kingpins, violent offenders, and the corruption of the powerful.

Facts don't matter. Truth doesn't matter. Innocence doesn't matter. Once you're in, the only way out is through.

You have a choice: be a Cowboy or a Bureaucrat.

Cowboys live with purpose. They know who they are and what they stand for.

They trust themselves, not the system.

Cowboys create their own security. By betting on themselves.

Bureaucrats want you dependent. Cowboys want you free.

People like to talk about fighting back.

Most of them have never done it.

Real resistance does not trend. It does not get you invited to panels. It usually costs you friends, income, reputation, and sometimes your freedom.

The people who actually resist are not celebrated. They are punished. They are fired quietly. Debanked. Labeled problems. Pushed out of institutions they helped build.

Some spoke up publicly and paid for it. Most resisted privately, by refusing to comply, refusing to lie, refusing to surrender their conscience even when it would have been easier.

You will not see statues for them. History rarely rewards courage in real time.

Resistance is lonely.

And here is the uncomfortable truth: most people do not fail because they are evil. They fail because they are afraid. Afraid of being isolated. Afraid of being labeled. Afraid of losing what they have spent their lives building.

The system understands this perfectly.

That is why modern control does not require soldiers. It only requires incentives and fear.

And that is why the people who do resist, truly resist, matter. Not because they were loud.

But because they were willing to lose.

The most dangerous Bureaucrat isn't in Washington: it's the part of you that trades courage for comfort.

The Cowboy way demands sacrifice, grit, and a deep belief in something bigger than yourself.

Saddle up. Or get left behind.

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THE GRINDER

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When I was in my first hearing, I still believed the process worked as advertised. Innocent until proven guilty. A search for facts. Fairness.

I was wrong.

The government's argument for detaining me without bail was simple: they said I had fled the country.

That was a lie.

We were living in El Salvador. I had a residency permit. We'd built a life there.

My attorney sent a letter to the U.S. Attorney in charge of the case stating I would voluntarily return. It's in the record. He called the FBI office directly: "If you want to come in, come in. We're here."

They never responded.

What they accused me of had already been reviewed by a federal trustee, with an FBI agent present.

The trustee testified under oath: no evidence I had anything to do with it. None.

Loans I didn't fill out. For a company I no longer ran. For money I didn't receive. Loans that were paid back in full.

My bail was set at $3 million. My attorney said it was one of the highest he'd seen in that courthouse.

The guy who actually submitted the loans? Same case. $150,000.

I kept asking myself if I was missing something. Some mistake I'd made that I wasn't seeing.

That's when I understood what I was in.

The grinder.

A machine that does one thing. Softens you up. Spits you out.

Once you're in, the only way out is through the other side.

Even the U.S. Marshals knew I shouldn't be there.

They'd ask, "Mr. Keough, is today the day?"

I'd reply, "Only the Good Lord knows."

My lawyer told me they were pissed. No 20-man SWAT raid. No scene. Because we were living in El Salvador, I wasn't there to give them their moment.

So they used my background against me. Called me a flight risk.

If I didn't want to be found, they wouldn't have found me.

But I came back. Willingly.

There are four stages before general population.

First, the holding cell. Concrete and fluorescent light. No clock.

Then upstairs. A few days. Waiting.

Then quarantine. Fourteen days. Twenty-four-hour lockdown. No daylight. No exit except to shower.

Then general population.

It was upstairs I met the crapper.

He was having issues with his cellmate. A quiet man who kept to himself.

The crapper lost it. His solution: defecate on the man's bed.

The victim walked out into the hall and yelled:

"Who the hell took a shit on my bed?!"

The cell erupted.

Quarantine.

As they lined us up for the elevator, guess who was standing right in front of me.

The crapper.

Fourteen days. Locked in. With him.

I whispered, "Lord, if this is a test, it's a tough one."

The elevator stopped. First floor.

They pulled him out.

I stayed with my guys.

The Colombian taught us how prison really works. Knew every angle, every trick, every trap.

But every night, same thing. They'd bring the phone to the cell. He'd call his kids.

I'd watch him talking. Voice soft. Trying to sound normal. Telling them daddy was okay.

Then he'd hang up and go quiet.

That's when it hit me. What awaited me. What this would do to my family. My kids.

The grinder doesn't just grind you. It grinds everyone who loves you.

After quarantine, they move you into general population.

Noise. Movement. Eyes.

At intake, they take your name and replace it with a number.

They say do your time and you're done.

You're never done.

They put everything on the internet. Your name. Your mugshot. Their version of the story. Forever.

This was the first of three facilities.

At sentencing, the government tried to throw me back in jail. In front of my family and my priest. Said I was a flight risk. Despite full compliance.

The judge didn't allow it.

I self-reported to Alabama. They knew who I was.

When I arrived, they moved me to a state prison and put me in solitary. The place they send people who are problems inside the

system. Not people who just walked in the door.

Even the guards couldn't believe it.

That story is for another time.

They thought they were grinding me down.

They were sharpening me.

LESSON #3

BECOME UNBREAKABLE

"If you haven't faced death and chosen purpose, stop here. If you haven't rejected the bureaucrat and chosen the Cowboy, stop here. You can't become unbreakable without both. But if you have: welcome to the fire."

GREG KEOUGH

Becoming unbreakable is not a slogan. It's not a T-shirt or a podcast mantra.

It's a way of being that's forged over time. Through fire, failure, and faith. There are no shortcuts.

The bureaucratic class wants you soft. They tell you pain is a problem, hardship is trauma, and discomfort should be avoided at all costs.

But no good parent shields their child from every difficulty. And neither does God. Because avoiding pain isn't love. It's sabotage.

The truth is: cowboys aren't victims. They face the storm. They adapt. They pivot. They endure.

Being unbreakable doesn't mean being rigid or stubborn. It means knowing what matters and refusing to break when the world comes for it.

The bureaucrats hate unbreakable people. Why? Because you don't need them.

Their entire power structure is built on two lies: There is no absolute truth. And you are a victim.

Unbreakable is not about being perfect. It's about being forged. It's built in pain. Built in silence. Built in the dark, when no one's watching and you still choose to do what's right.

You don't become unbreakable to impress the world. You become unbreakable to survive it.

They can take your freedom. They can take your daylight. They can take your name and replace it with a number. But they can't take

what's inside you. That's yours.

But here's the truth they don't want you to hear: Without God, you'll break.

I don't believe it's possible to become truly unbreakable without God in my life.

For me, it was prison. I was angry, confused, humiliated. I could've let it define me. But instead, I saw the fork in the road.

Real resilience doesn't come from being protected. It comes from falling. And getting up fast.

You're going to get knocked down. You're going to be betrayed, lied about, misunderstood. You're going to suffer.

But suffering is not the end. It's the beginning.

It's the refining fire. It's where you meet your limits. And push past them.

Because here's the part they never told you: You have a mission.

You weren't made just to exist. You were made to do something no one else can.

I've been behind bars. And still, I was free. Because I knew who I was. And I knew whose I was.

God. Family. Friends. Mission. You're stronger than you think. Now start building the unbreakable version of you.

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THE DOLL HOUSE

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This wasn't my lowest point. That came later. But this was the fall that taught me how to get back up.

The doll house was the last thing to go.

I had built a telecom company, Voice Over IP, back when that was cutting-edge. We built infrastructure across Latin America, selling capacity to companies like Skype and major carriers.

At our peak, we were doing hundreds of millions in business. Growing fast. I thought we were bulletproof.

Then we made a critical error: we started extending large amounts of credit. Most clients paid. One didn't.

His company collapsed. He was a billion-dollar player in the industry. When someone that size falls, the ripple is brutal. He dragged us down, and dozens of others too.

Almost overnight, it was all gone.

I didn't have a backup plan. I always tell people: you need a cash cow and a moonshot. The truth is, you need TWO cash cows and a moonshot. I learned that the hard way.

I asked my parents for help. They refused. That lit a fuse that burned for two years.

So we faced the truth. We had to start over. Somewhere. Somehow.

But first, we had nothing. No money. No food. No shelter.

So we sold everything we had. A garage sale.

I remember standing in the driveway, watching strangers pick through our life. Furniture we'd saved for. Toys the kids had grown up with. Things that used to mean something, now marked with masking tape and a price.

What I didn't realize at the time, and it still breaks my heart, was what it meant to the kids. Especially the doll house.

I didn't know it mattered that much. They never said anything then. They just watched it go. But years later, they told me. It crushed them.

I would've done anything to spare them that. But they never complained. They just sacrificed, silently, bravely.

That's when I knew: my daughters were baby Cowboys. Quiet strength. No spotlight. Just grit. I told myself they were resilient. That was partly true, and partly me trying to survive my own guilt.

That's when I learned something: when you're in the mud, most people kick dirt in your face. But real people, real Cowboys, help.

A woman named Suzanne stepped in. A friend of my brother-in-law. She just offered us her small house on her farm.

She saved us. I'll always be grateful.

Oddly, we made some of our best memories there.

There was a big gator living out back in the pond. I knew feeding him was a bad idea. But we didn't have much else for entertainment, and Cowboys do crazy things.

So the kids named him. Started feeding him. Then he got aggressive. Started coming up toward the house. Hissing at the kids.

So we had to catch him and relocate him. Picture that: a broke family, at rock bottom, wrestling a gator off property we didn't even own.

Don't do that. Trust me.

But we were laughing the whole time.

Sunday drives down country roads, kids hanging out the windows, blasting Jason Aldean, singing loud. We didn't have money. We didn't have a plan. But we had each other.

We were broke. We were broken. But we hadn't lost our joy.

They took the house. The car. The doll house.

But not the joy. Never the joy.

LESSON #4

FOUNDATION IN GOD & THE TRUTH

"You may not believe in God now. But one day, when He's all you have, you'll realize He was all you ever needed."

GREG KEOUGH

Whether you believe in God or not, look around. Look at nature. Look at how life works. It's too perfect. Too complex. Too intelligent.

Something higher is organizing this. That something is God.

I was raised in an Irish Catholic family. And I consider that one of the greatest blessings of my life.

Every Sunday, we went to church. No matter what. We prayed at every meal. We prayed before bed. That rhythm of faith created a foundation.

When you're young, you may not understand it. But those seeds take root.

And when life hits, that foundation gives you strength. A sense that you're not alone.

I don't believe you can truly become unbreakable without a foundation in God.

God is real. Faith is the bedrock of every strong person and every free society. Hard stop.

You may never know God is all you need. Until He's all you have.

Make time for God each day. He is your greatest ally. Your sharpest weapon.

Now let's talk about truth. Because it's under attack.

Let's be clear: there is no such thing as "your truth." There is the truth.

You don't get to invent reality. You can't just feel something and make it true.

There are two sexes. Male and female. That's it. Period.

Love doesn't mean endorsing bad behavior. You can love an alcoholic and still tell them to stop drinking. That's not hate. That's care.

Jesus came to earth and confronted the bureaucratic elite. He was a Cowboy.

Truth is the battlefield of our time. And the truth, no matter how hard, is the only way out.

During a rescue operation with the CIA, one of my friends was killed. I was trapped, drained, and out of strength.

I remember praying the Our Father. And with nothing left, I said:

"God, if it's Your will I die, so be it. But I will push until the end."

I made it out. Barely.

But the worst part? When help came, no one wanted to go back into the situation to recover the body. Everyone knew it likely meant death.

It was the last thing I wanted to do, and I was scared. But I went. And I trusted.

And once again, God protected me.

God is in control. And if you trust Him fully, He will show up.

LESSON #5

THINGS AREN'T COMPLICATED

"Common sense isn't dead. It's just been buried under a mountain of lies."

GREG KEOUGH

Life isn't that complicated. You've just been trained to think it is.

Bureaucrats and elites love complexity. Because complexity gives them power.

But strip away the noise, and life comes down to a few big decisions.

Most people will only face 5 to 10 pivotal forks in the road.

And how you choose in those moments determines almost everything. Marriage. Children. Faith. Your mission. Cowboy or bureaucrat.

These are the decisions that matter. Get them right. And the rest tends to fall into place.

As Ross Perot said: everything works like the corner store.

If it doesn't make sense, they're probably stealing from you.

Complication is the con.

Focus on the big things: Who you marry. What you believe. How you spend your time. What legacy you want to leave. Who you serve: God or man.

Here's the real truth: Most people spend 90% of their energy on the 10% of life that doesn't matter.

Flip that. Focus on the 10% that actually moves the needle.

Time is limited. If the wave is already moving, ride it.

Surround yourself with good people. Choose a spouse wisely. And yes, in-laws count.

You'll never be fulfilled until you find your mission. God chose you for something specific. Something eternal.

That mission is why you're here. Not money. Not fame. Not comfort. Mission.

Be a cowboy. Stand before God and hear, "Well done." That's the win.

LESSON #6

ENTREPRENEURSHIP, BUSINESS, MONEY & CAREER

"No one's coming. That's the bad news. The good news? You're all you need."

GREG KEOUGH

The world is splitting in two. A rich elite. And everyone else. The middle class? Vanishing.

Your generation may be the first that doesn't do better than its parents. And it's not paranoia. It's reality.

Bureaucrats built a rigged system. Preaching equality while funneling wealth to themselves.

You have two choices: Complain. Or create. I choose to create.

Be an entrepreneur. The people getting truly wealthy today? They're builders. Risk-takers. Problem-solvers.

They're Cowboys. And in today's world, that's your only path to freedom.

Real security comes from ownership. From building something of your own.

Own things. Land to work. A ranch to feed your future. Gold. Bitcoin. Own your home outright.

Don't chase money. Chase meaning. Build something that solves a real problem. And the money will follow.

Have a cash cow business and a moonshot. Keep one foot grounded. And one chasing greatness.

Ride the wave of history. Look for fundamental change: AI, blockchain, energy, biotech. Don't be too early. Be early enough.

Focus is your superpower. You'll have a hundred ideas. But pick one. Aim like a sniper with a rifle. Not a shotgun. Hunt big game. Build something that scales.

Find mentors. People who've done what you want to do. Learn from their scars.

And when everyone panics, stay calm. The best opportunities always show up when others are running scared.

Action is the difference. Everyone has ideas. Few execute. Entrepreneurs do. Cowboys do.

The world is changing fast. Own something. Build something. Free yourself.

No one's coming. But you have everything you need. Now build.

LESSON #7

MARRIAGE, FAMILY/KIDS & COMMUNITY

"You want to fix the world? Start with your family. Raise strong kids. Love your spouse. Build a real community. That's the revolution."

GREG KEOUGH

I believe that for many of us, family is God's mission for our lives.

And marriage (true marriage, between a man and a woman) is the foundation of that mission.

This isn't a "social construct." It's the most time-tested institution in human history.

A good marriage will challenge you, humble you, and ultimately make you more whole.

Marriage teaches you to serve. To think of someone other than yourself. To build something bigger than your own ego.

Men: be men. Women: be women. This isn't complicated. It never was.

Before you say "I do," spend real time with your partner's family. Look at their parents. That's likely who your spouse will become over time.

Broadly aligning in culture, and definitely in religion, gives you the best odds for success.

If you're not on the same page spiritually, you're building on sand.

For me, that foundation is Catholicism. It provides structure, discipline, and wisdom rooted in thousands of years of truth.

Invest time in your family. It's your most important asset. When your kid says "come throw the ball," go. These moments vanish quickly, and they don't come back.

Eat meals together. Pray before you eat. Laugh. Joke. Be present.

Let your kids be Cowboys. Not reckless. But bold. Brave. Adventurous.

Yes, assess the risk. Teach them how to check the depth before they jump off the cliff. But then let them jump.

Stop raising sissies. Let them try. Let them fail. Let them feel strong.

I grew up in a family of four Irish brothers. We fought. A lot. My mom didn't panic. She bought gloves and said, "Go at it."

We weren't bullies. We didn't pick fights. But we knew how to stand our ground.

Real strength is knowing how to fight. And choosing peace anyway.

But if the line gets crossed? Show them why that was a mistake.

Lead your kids by example. Be kind. Be polite. Help others. Surround your family with people you admire.

Go to daily Mass. Just 20 minutes. It will change your life.

You want a better world? Build a better family. That's the foundation of everything.

LESSON #8

YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN

"It's never too late to change. Unless you wait too long."

GREG KEOUGH

Life is not predictable. You're going to suffer. You're going to face hardship. That's not pessimism. That's reality.

But what most people miss is that these struggles are also sacred.

God uses them to polish your character, strengthen your spine, and deepen your faith.

And if there's one thing I've learned: God loves Cowboys.

There are no guarantees in this life. Not for success. Not for comfort. Not even for fairness.

But what is guaranteed is that God is always with us. And He has a better plan than the one we try to control.

Every failure, every setback, every moment of humiliation holds seeds of rebirth.

The world calls them "tragedies." I call them turning points. Because your life can flip directions in an instant.

That's the risk. And the beauty. Of living like a Cowboy.

I've had many unexpected, totally unpredictable events in my life. From federal courtrooms to foreign battle zones.

These extremes pushed me to the edge, but also closer to God.

Even now, sitting in prison, I know it: the best is yet to come.

No one saw this level of madness coming in America. Forced lockdowns. Churches closed. Speech censored. Riots ignored.

I never thought I'd see the day where Cowboys were hunted by the very government they helped build.

But that means there's an opening. Because big disruptions create big opportunities.

This country can still be taken back by the Cowboys.

The time is now. To return to God, Family, and Country. Start today.

It is never too late. You don't have to fix everything at once. Just begin.

Let me be clear: I'm not perfect. I still struggle with many of these lessons. Especially patience.

But learning to trust God's timing has changed everything. His time horizon is infinite.

In the military, they say "slow is smooth, and smooth is fast."

Rushing makes you weak. Patience makes you powerful.

But when it is time to act: ACT. And I believe we're there now.

If everyday Americans just started saying "No." No, I won't comply. No, I won't pretend lies are truth.

We could begin to take our country, our culture, and our freedom back.

We are at a binary moment. Choose your side.

Tyrants don't expect resistance. That's why it works. So resist.

Cowboys lead the wagon train. They don't wait at the back.

What kind of country do you want to live in? That choice is now in your hands.

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THE COLONEL

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I've always believed the good stories start when the plan goes wrong.

And Africa? Africa doesn't do plans.

The idea was simple: travel north from the Central African Republic into Chad. See some wildlife, maybe get a glimpse of the Sahara.

I had gotten used to traveling like this: bush buses packed to the brim, bargaining for a spot up front with the driver. Town by town, checkpoint by checkpoint, we made our way north. Until finally, the buses stopped entirely.

I found myself stuck in a remote town about 80 miles from the border. After a day, a cargo truck appeared, loaded with sacks of

beans and people already riding on top. I negotiated a spot, climbed up, and off we went.

But in Africa, the border isn't a line. It's a town. We arrived at the first checkpoint inside Chad, a dusty outpost with a small military base. Everyone else from the truck passed through. I did not.

They told me to wait for the Colonel.

When the Colonel finally showed up, he looked exactly like you'd expect: tall, commanding, clearly drunk. But polite.

"You're in the country illegally," he said.

I'd entered Chad one day before my visa officially started. I hadn't thought about it, travel in Africa isn't exactly predictable.

He named his price. Four hundred dollars.

That was an outrageous bribe, even by African border standards. I had the money, hidden away. But I told him I didn't.

He shrugged. "Then you're not going anywhere."

And just like that, the truck was gone. I was stuck.

For three days, I stayed in that little town. Each day, the soldiers came back. Same demand. Same answer.

"I'd give it to you if I had it," I'd say, smiling. "But I don't."

I stayed cheerful. Respectful. But firm. They didn't like that.

On the third night, he came for me himself.

He was drunk again, loud, pissed off. Said I was in violation of their laws. That for all they knew, I could be a spy.

Then he told me to get in the jeep.

The Colonel in front, his driver beside him, and me in the back with two soldiers. We drove out of town. No lights. Just the stars and the hum of the tires.

My mind was racing. Where would I run? Open desert. No cover. Could I take a swing at the Colonel before the soldiers reacted? I thought about the ditch on the side of the road. How to fall. How to roll. Whether I could make it to the dark before the bullets found me.

I wasn't calm. I was controlled, and those are not the same thing.

When we pulled over to the side of the road, in the middle of nowhere, my gut clenched.

"Out," he said.

I stepped down, heart pounding. Followed them around a bend. And then, there it was. Headlights. A truck.

The same truck I'd come in on, the one they'd made me wait three days for.

The Colonel turned to me, smiling.

"Get on the truck already."

That magnificent bastard. A Mexican standoff. He wouldn't break me. I wouldn't yield. No one won. But we respected each other for it.

I climbed aboard. Rode all night to N'Djamena.

A few days later, I was getting ready to head back south. We stopped to pick up one last passenger in the backstreets.

Out came a group of women... and then him.

The Colonel.

We both froze. Then, laughter. A big hug. We were long-lost brothers reunited.

He rode up front with me. At each checkpoint, he'd wave my passport and say, "He's with me." Then we'd hit the local bar and drink.

The driver eventually pulled me aside. "Can you get him to stop? We need to get these people home."

So at the next town, I gently told the Colonel maybe it was best he stay and enjoy himself. He gave me a hug. A proper farewell.

I've never forgotten that man.

You never know how things will turn. The man I thought might kill me became my drinking buddy by week's end.

Respect isn't about power. It's about posture.

Stand your ground. Smile. Stay human.

Even in a war zone.

Especially then.

LESSON #9

DON'T SAY IT, SHOW IT

"Talk is cheap. Action buys freedom."

GREG KEOUGH

What comes next may feel counterintuitive. Especially if you're young.

It sounds simple, but this is where the rubber meets the road.

So here it is: You have to do it.

Don't wait. The "right time" may never come. In my experience, the perfect time never comes. For anything.

Having kids. Getting married. Starting a business. There are better times, sure. But rarely perfect ones.

And if you trust in God, He can turn any time into the right time. If it's His will.

But first, you have to act.

This is where you can see the difference between Cowboys and Bureaucrats.

Politicians preach about helping the little guy, but the second they get into "public service," they start flying private and padding their portfolios.

They say all the right things, but never do the right things. It's all words.

How does someone go into government broke and come out a millionaire in a few years? We all know what it is: corruption.

Bureaucrats talk. Cowboys act.

Don't let fear of looking stupid stop you. Embarrass yourself. Try something awkward. Be bold.

Stop being an audience member in your own life. Watching it through selfies and TikToks.

Start being the main character. Start living.

Because here's the truth: if you keep saying "Someday I'm going to do XYZ," then unless you show it, someday is never.

No one builds something great by waiting for perfect conditions. Start with what you have.

Opportunities pass fast. They don't wait around. That chance you didn't take? It may never come again.

And when you act, do it with humility. People are drawn to humility. Pretentiousness repels. Authenticity attracts.

When you do something, go all in. If you're going to sweep the floor, sweep it like it matters.

No task is beneath you. Doing the small things with excellence is what makes you great.

One small thing might not change the world. But a thousand small things will.

Mother Teresa didn't start a community. She helped one person. Then another. And kept going. Eventually, she became a global force.

That's the power you hold.

Say sorry quickly. Own your mistakes. Then get back in the saddle.

And show the world who you are.

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THE EXIT

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The fear didn't surprise me.

What surprised me was that Americans complied.

I'd seen governments grab power before. I'd operated in countries where liberty disappeared overnight. I knew the playbook.

But I never thought I'd see it here.

Churches closed. Masks mandated. Inject an unproven vaccine or lose your job, your access, your life. We never vaccinated the three youngest. They all got sick eventually. They were fine.

The government wanting control? That I expected.

Americans surrendering without a fight? That broke something in me.

I don't blame them all. I know reasonable people saw it differently. I didn't think they were evil, I thought they were afraid. But I couldn't be one of them.

I remember the moment it became real.

We were at the feed store in Loxahatchee, near Wellington. My kids and I had been working the ranch all morning. Old boots. Dirty shirts. Holstered guns. This is how we lived.

We were standing in line to pay when a woman behind us, clipped voice, tight posture, already rehearsing the confrontation, started making a scene. We weren't wearing masks.

I told her politely, "Ma'am, we're happy to stand further away if you'd like."

That wasn't good enough.

I finally said, "Ma'am, please, go ahead of us."

She pushed past. And I realized: she probably just wanted to cut the line.

But it wasn't really about her.

It was about what she represented. These people, they move to places like Florida, like Montana, because they love it. They say it's "so

quaint." Then they try to change it. Implement the same broken systems they fled.

They love it. Then they change it. Then they wonder why it's gone.

I've watched it happen to a dozen towns.

But I kept thinking about the helicopter floor. My friend's body. His eyes as he died.

Is this the freedom we fought for?

Is this what he died for?

Then came the riots.

Cities burning. Businesses looted. I watched shop owners standing in front of shattered glass while politicians explained why it was necessary.

I've lived in Latin America. I've seen how fast things can turn.

I knew what was coming in America. This wasn't the end of something. It was the beginning.

My kids will remember the dinner.

We were sitting around the table after eating, like we did every night. I was listening to Aaron Lewis. "Am I the Only One."

Am I the only one willing to bleed, or take a bullet for being free?

And I started to cry.

My kids had never seen me cry. Not once. Not ever.

But I knew. It was time.

We'd talked about El Salvador before. Someday. Maybe when we retired. This wasn't that.

I told them we were leaving. Now. And we were selling everything.

The room exploded.

Two of them stormed out. Crying. Angry. "No. No way."

My wife cried. We had the perfect life. Palm Beach. Best private schools. Our ranch. Our house in Montana.

And I was asking her to leave it all.

But she knew me. She knew it wasn't a bluff.

I told the kids: "This is what life is about. Adventure."

So I did something I never thought I'd do.

I sold everything.

The ranch. The house in Palm Beach. The house in Montana. $10 million in real estate. Gone.

We kept nothing in the United States. We still don't.

We packed up and moved to El Salvador.

The Cowboy values that used to exist in America? They still exist there.

The two kids who were most against it?

They wouldn't go back now if you paid them.

But I didn't leave because America is lost.

America can get this back. But only if enough people stand up and fight, not with fists, but with refusal.

Sometimes you have to leave to see clearly.

We're outside.

When it's time, we'll be back.

LESSON #10

ENJOY THE RIDE... LIVE WITH JOY

"Existing is passive. Living takes courage."

GREG KEOUGH

To live is not the same as to exist. Most people don't understand the difference. Until it's too late.

But if you're reading this, you still have time. So hear me now: LIVE.

Not one day. Not when it's convenient. Not when it's safe. Live now.

This whole journey is a single lap around the track.

You don't get a warm-up. You don't get another shot. So why waste it coasting?

Your life is unique. You were made for something only you can do.

Your attitude toward life is under your full control. You are not a victim.

One secret? Live in the present. That's why kids are so happy. They experience life fully, moment by moment.

Joy comes from presence, not possessions.

Keep joy in your life. Some of the greatest joys are free and fleeting. And they're everywhere.

For me, it's the little things: Time on the farm with the kids. Watching them wrangle cattle. Building fences. Laughing after dinner.

You don't need a selfie or a vacation to have joy. You just need to decide to be joyful.

Gratitude is the gateway to happiness. It costs nothing. And there's always something to be grateful for.

Don't take yourself so seriously. If you don't laugh, you'll cry. So laugh often.

Limit your exposure to negativity. Especially online. Most of it is poison.

Be picky with your attention. Choose joy, truth, and beauty over endless noise.

Bad things will happen. But they don't define you.

You are stronger than your worst day. And you don't have to carry that weight forever.

Go to confession. Ask God for help. God can forgive anything if you ask.

Let it go. Forgive. Don't hold grudges. You're only hurting yourself.

Dance. Laugh. Sing. Be spontaneous. You don't need permission.

Never disengage. Keep learning. Stay amazed by the world.

Spend time in other cultures. Learn something from everyone.

Music is joy. It helps you survive the lows and celebrate the highs.

Finally: live in the real world, not the digital one. Technology is a tool, not your life.

Don't scroll through life. Live it.

Go out and find joy.

Whether you're on a mountaintop or at rock bottom, the next ride starts now.

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THE JUNGLE AND THE JOY

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The kids came sprinting out of the jungle, shouting and dancing:

"Moon Joo! Moon Joo!"

I turned to my guide. "What are they saying?"

He laughed. "They're saying... 'You're white.'"

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Somewhere in the jungle, there was a tribe that still lived like it was a thousand years ago. No phones. No wires. No plastic. Just firelight and stories passed through generations.

I had to see it. Before it disappeared.

So I started asking around. Took a bush bus from the Bangui market, packed full, people on top of people, chickens squawking. At a river crossing, I met a kid who spoke French. Said he was from a village deep in the forest and could take me there.

We walked for miles, no trail, just his memory and the shape of the sun. Finally, we reached a village by the river. Maybe eighty huts.

And that's when the kids came running.

I found the chief, followed the local protocols, and asked permission to stay. For a small donation, I lived in a hut with a local family. Ate with them, bathed in the river, drank palm wine.

Word was sent to the pygmy tribe, if they'd accept a visit, I'd bring offerings: salt, a pot, some basic goods. Fair trade.

After a few days, word came back. They'd see me. We packed up and hiked for days. Thick jungle. Mosquitos like helicopters.

Finally, we reached their settlement: four huts, maybe twenty people.

They really are small. But strong. Fast. Wary. Curious.

I sat with them, watched them hunt, learned how they moved through the jungle like it was stitched into their skin.

I'd thought I was going to observe something primitive. But instead, I witnessed mastery.

They didn't have much. But they had joy. Real joy.

They laughed with their whole bodies. They danced like the stars were watching. No phones. No plans. No anxiety about what came next.

Just here. Just now. Just alive.

They had less than anyone I knew, and more presence than most people I'd met in the modern world.

After a few days, I knew I wasn't meant to stay. I'd seen what I came to see, and it changed me.

They escorted me back to the village by the river, and on the last night, they threw a party.

We drank too much palm wine. We danced around the fire until our legs gave out. We laughed until sunrise.

And I'll tell you what I tell my kids:

You haven't danced until you've danced with the pygmies.

Go find your jungle.

THE FUTURE IS YOURS TO RIDE

"We must remember who we once were and who we MUST be again."

GREG KEOUGH

I waited to write this chapter until I had some distance. Physically and emotionally. From everything that happened.

I've lived my story. And it's your turn.

I'm speaking directly to the youth of America and the world. You got this. It's your time to grab the reins. And Cowboy up.

The good news? Something is changing. I see it. I feel it. And I believe in it.

People are waking up. Common sense is stirring. And a new wave of leadership is rising.

But I know this: history is turning.

Here's the challenge. You've been raised in a slow-motion decline.

When things rot over time, it's harder to see the loss.

What's been taken from you is massive. Freedom. Faith. Purpose. Joy. Family. Truth.

And they won't be given back. You'll have to fight for them.

But that's the thing about Cowboys. We don't wait for permission. We ride.

God always chooses unlikely heroes. That's the pattern.

And He's calling you too.

If you embrace the values in this book, you can lead the greatest comeback the world has ever seen.

The system must be held accountable. It won't fix itself. It never does.

Always have a backup plan. This system might collapse before it's fixed.

But with the 10 lessons in this book, you'll be ready for any storm.

Cowboys ride through anything.

The future isn't set. But it's yours to ride.

LAST WORDS

Be yourself. No one else can live your mission. Don't bend in the wind.

Hold your values. Especially when it's hard. One day, you'll be glad you did.

Live with intensity. Go all in. But be wise. Retreat when needed, and re-strategize.

Fight your battles when you're strongest. And always prepare. Even if you're never fully ready.

Push yourself. Save. Build something. Buy your freedom. And then use it to help others.

Time and possibility are life's true luxuries.

Chase joy. Savor moments. Ride hard. Love deeply. Leave your mark.

Saddle up.

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THE QUIET COWBOY

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I've been surrounded by Cowboys my whole life. God blessed me with that.

Cowboys come in all shapes and sizes: men and women, loud and subtle, reckless and refined.

But the apex, the version I'm still striving to reach, is the Quiet Cowboy.

You'd know one if you met one. No announcements. No posturing. Just presence.

I told you earlier: when you get married, look closely at your spouse's parents. Chances are, that's who they'll become.

I was blessed. My father-in-law was Antonio Cabrales.

The Quiet Cowboy.

Don Tony was Salvadoran, but raised in the U.S., his parents were diplomats. He studied agriculture in the States, then returned to El Salvador as a young man. An outsider, really. They told me his Spanish wasn't even that good at first.

But he had a way with people. Easy. Unforced. Instantly likeable.

He got married. Had five kids. Prospered. Bought a farm. Raised cattle. And then he set his sights on something impossible.

There was an island, Isla Teopán, in the middle of Lake Coatepeque. Untouched. Unspoiled. The Mayans had ruins there, they said.

He became obsessed with it.

It took him twenty years to buy it. Multiple owners. Endless negotiations. But he willed it into existence.

My wife and her siblings told me they would pray each night, for the family, the farm, and the island.

During the brutal Salvadoran civil war, most people fled. He stayed.

He looked after the farms of those who went into exile. Kept things running. Kept things alive.

One day, out checking on a friend's coffee farm, he came upon a roadblock. FMLN rebels. They stopped him, said they needed his truck, this was common, they'd take a vehicle, conduct an attack, then ditch it.

They didn't know he was the Minister of Agriculture. He'd left his bodyguards behind that day, which probably saved his life.

When they asked what he had in the truck, he said, "Some fruit from the farm. You want some?"

Didn't miss a beat. Didn't panic.

When they said they were taking the truck, he told them: "I need that back. I work out here."

He cut a deal. A few days later, they left it at an abandoned farm down the road.

And by God, the truck was there.

When I started my first business in El Salvador, he was there. These were hard times. Post-war economy. No money. No local connections. My own family didn't support me.

But Don Tony did. Every time.

He encouraged. He coached. He pushed me to go the extra mile, not with lectures, but with presence. With belief.

One night, before we were married, I came by to visit my wife. On the way in, I got into an altercation with a guy on the street. Stupid, so I

let it slide. Went inside.

But the guy wouldn't stop. Banging on the steel garage door. Screaming. Threatening.

So I went down to deal with it. Don Tony came with me.

We stood on the wall, looking down at this guy. Both of us were armed, but his six-shooter was already out.

I started exchanging words. Told the guy if he didn't leave, I'd come down there and beat the hell out of him.

Don Tony didn't say a word. He just raised the six-shooter and started firing. At the guy's feet.

Then, without raising his voice: "Andate, baboso."

The guy ran.

My wife heard the shots. She knew I'd gone down. In her mind, someone was dead, either him or me. She screamed my name.

By the time she reached us, it was already over.

When my trouble with the feds started, I turned to him.

I told him: these guys aren't going away. There's no way to win. I might as well go up there and knock this out, even though I knew what I was walking into.

He looked at me and said:

"Greg, they don't want to put you in prison. They want to put you under the prison."

He understood how these systems work. He knew you can't beat an unbeatable foe. But he also knew I don't run from things. That's not who I am.

He didn't try to stop me. He just made sure I saw it clearly.

It was the week of Easter. We were at the island, the same island he'd spent twenty years acquiring.

I was sitting on the deck with the kids, waiting for him to arrive for the weekend. I saw my sister-in-law take a call. I could tell something was wrong.

The ferry operator just said: You need to come here.

Wouldn't say why.

I knew something was wrong. I grabbed the phone and asked him directly.

That's when he told me. The car, with my father-in-law, mother-in-law, driver, and maid, had gone off the ferry. They were underwater.

I sprinted down the path, through the woods, to our boat. My youngest son ran with me. I told him to stay, I knew what I was heading into.

By the time I arrived, my mother-in-law had surfaced. Eighty-seven years old. A survivor.

But five minutes passed. Then ten.

I knew we weren't rescuing anymore. We were recovering.

In El Salvador, in the country, when there's trouble, no cavalry shows up. You solve it yourself. Fast.

We located the car. Tied it up. Started pulling out the bodies.

First the driver. Then the maid. Then Don Tony.

I pulled him onto the boat myself. Made the sign of the cross on his back.

I couldn't stop thinking: How does a Cowboy go out like that?

He'd crossed that ferry a thousand times.

You never know what will happen.

The funeral was packed. People I'd never met. All with stories about the Quiet Cowboy.

He built his own sanctuary, an island we still visit most weekends.

You can only get there by ferry.

And every time I cross that water, I think of him.

I'm still trying to become what he was.

I haven't made it yet.

But I haven't stopped trying.

Watch for them. Learn from them.

And maybe, if you're lucky, become one.

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BACK TO THE FRONTIER

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I didn't retire.

I didn't retreat into commentary. I didn't write this and disappear.

I went back to the frontier. I went back to El Salvador.

I chose distance. A place where you can still build, still take risk, still be accountable.

There are no guarantees here. That's the point.

I'm still building.

I can't stop. It's who I am. My wife knows. I won't stop.

But the weight has shifted.

I have five kids. I'm building for them now. Not to protect them from the world, but to prepare them to face it.

I'm the coach now. Not the quarterback.

Frontiers always shrink. There aren't many left.

I can't tell you where to go.

But I can tell you where I stand: exposed, accountable, unfinished.

The frontier is retreating quickly. But you must pick a place to hold the line.

Here I hold the line.

The strongest men I've known
never asked to be followed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GREG KEOUGH

Greg Keough has received the CIA's Intelligence Star for extraordinary heroism, and been reduced to a number in a federal cell.

He built companies worth hundreds of millions and lost it all. But every rebuild was bigger.

He wrote this manual from a prison cell in Alabama.

He lives in El Salvador with his wife of thirty years and their five children.

Today, Greg works quietly at the frontier, backing entrepreneurs, families, and operators who choose competence over credentials. He spends his time in places most people only talk about, helping other Cowboys build lives outside systems that no longer serve them.

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I have received the CIA's Intelligence Star for extraordinary heroism,
and been reduced to a number in a federal cell in Alabama.
I built companies worth hundreds of millions and lost it all.
But every rebuild was bigger.
I wrote this for my five children.

"Systems don't fail all at once. They hollow out quietly.
Families notice last. Men notice too late."

Ten lessons, and the stories they came from.

FREEDOM · MONEY · DEATH · MARRIAGE · FAITH

"They thought they were grinding me down.
They were sharpening me."

GREG KEOUGH

Greg Keough has been married thirty years,
is a father of five, and lives in El Salvador.

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