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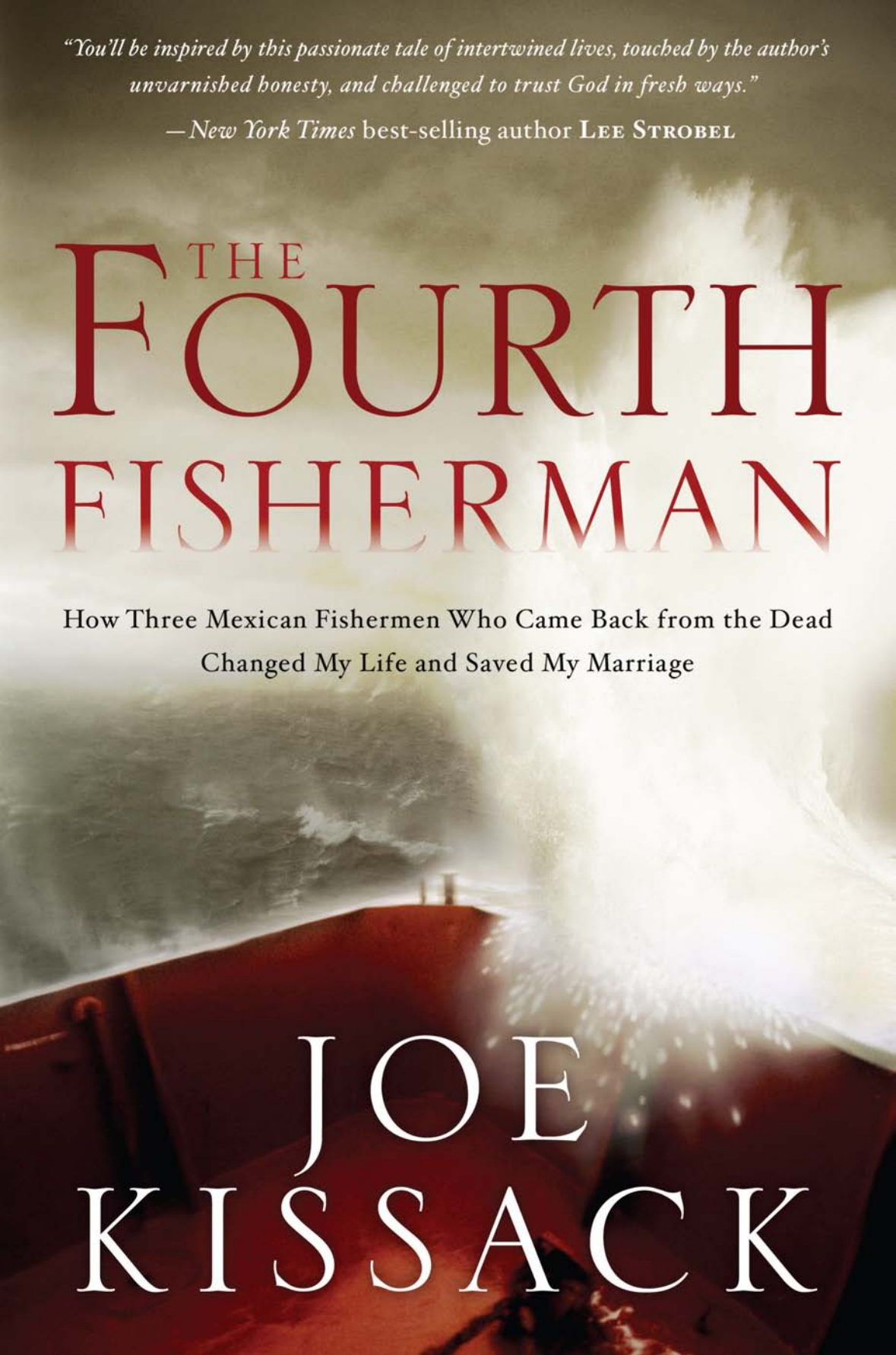
The Fourth Fisherman

How Three Mexican Fishermen Who Came Back from the Dead Changed My Life and Saved My Marriage



Joe Kissack

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JOE KISSACK

WATERBROOK
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To Carmen

She endures

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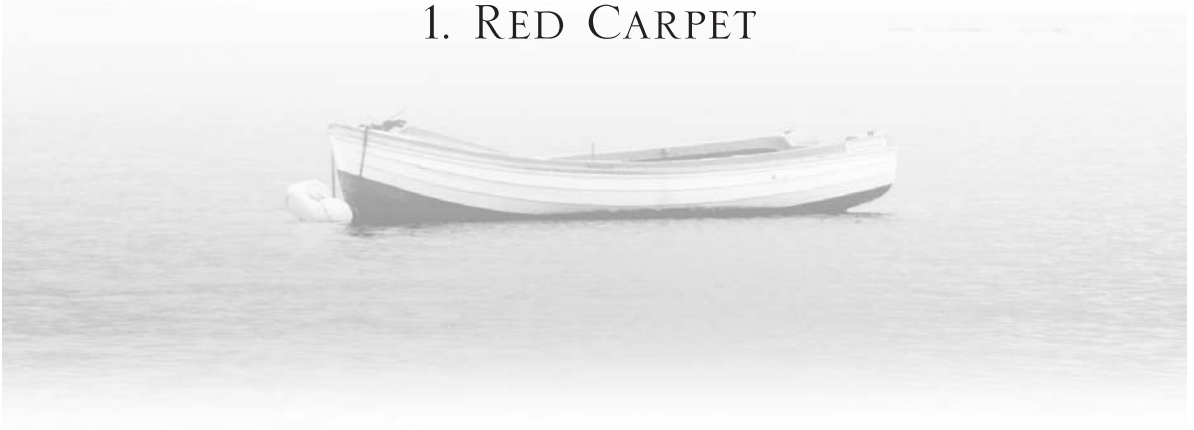


If something dark was looming, I wasn't aware of it. Not yet. Not now. I stood on the red carpet at the Emmy Awards, wearing obscenely expensive sunglasses. It was September of 1997, and my employment contract with Columbia TriStar Television was about to expire. I'd been invited to fly out to L.A. for some important meetings that would determine the next move in my soaring career. A seat at the Emmys was an extra perk, a glamour ticket in Hollywood.

I certainly looked the part: a thousand-dollar tuxedo, cuff links from Neiman Marcus, a Rolex Oyster Day-Date, Ferragamo shoes, and, of course, those sunglasses—three hundred bucks' worth of eye candy.

I had "arrived" according to Hollywood's standards, often calculated by one's ability to spend outrageous amounts of money on items of little substance. Even knowing that, I was a repeat offender. And I loved every glistening gold dollar of this good life. After all, I'd earned it. In my tenth year with a major television studio that had promoted me five times, I'd climbed all the way to executive vice president, pulling down a big salary with incredible

bonuses. My job allowed for marvelous vacations, dining in the best restaurants, and shopping at the coolest boutiques. I always traveled first class (concierge level, of course), and I received a car allowance that paid for my BMW 540i and later my Porsche 911 Carrera Cabriolet. I owned a six-thousand-square-foot house, complete with a home theater and sound system that would straighten the hair on your legs. And, oh yes, I rode a Harley-Davidson—just because I could.

If I saw something I liked, I bought it. If something could make me look better, I got it. If a hotel wasn't up to my standards, I found a better one. It was all about having the best. Not bad for a small-town kid from a blue-collar family in Illinois whose daughters make fun of him for having worn the same plaid shirt in his first- and second-grade class photos! Standing on the red carpet was an exclamation-point celebration of a once-lost kid who now looked so sharp.

Of course, there was something else. My life was furiously driven by something deep beneath the surface. Something I didn't know that I didn't know.

Trying to survive in the television industry is like being on the TV show *Survivor*. You're on a team, but the truth is, it's every man for himself. With an average of four shows to pitch each year, I was giving more than a thousand presentations annually. It wasn't brainiac stuff, but it was incredibly nerve-racking. I had to be "on" all the time; tens of millions of dollars were riding on it. Sure, some days it was glamorous, but the second I closed a deal, I would start stressing about the next one. I felt only as good as the last big thing I landed. This despite some of my successes—*Married…with Children; Mad About You; Walker, Texas Ranger; Ricki Lake*. Of course, there was also that big one—*Seinfeld*.

My job was to license the rights of television programs to broadcast stations across the country, otherwise known as syndication. Whoever figured out that television audiences would watch the same program a second, third, or even seventeenth time was a genius. Syndication is highly profitable—and cutthroat. With only so many clients in each city and twenty other shows competing for the same limited time slots, it's impossible to sell your show in every market. The expectation, however, is that you will. Every major studio had more than a dozen of us hired guns. We traveled to all 211 TV markets, four days a week, fifty weeks a year, from New York City all the way to Glendive, Montana, and every trip was destined, on some level, to fail.

But—and this is a big *but*—the money was fabulous. And most of us hired guns lived beyond our means, believing that as long as the money was coming in, the physical and emotional toll was worth it. Believe me, it is very difficult to walk away.

Much as I reveled in my red-carpet moment, I knew it was just another part of the dance. The invitation—the whole weekend for that matter—was one more perk the studio had pushed in front of me, knowing I wouldn't, or couldn't, refuse their pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. It was all calculated. They had me right where they wanted me. I was a guy once obsessed with a worn-out plaid shirt, who hailed from a town whose chief industries were canning peas and spinning yarn, and now I was raking in lots of dough (and needing it to keep up my lifestyle), rubbing elbows with American entertainment royalty, and looking like a million bucks.

One of the keys to successful red-carpet walking is to do it slowly, especially the final twenty yards before you get inside. The proper walk is important, because you're supposed to project an aura of appreciation tinged with indifference, but never gratitude and certainly not awe. As an old coach once told

me, "Joe, if you're lucky enough to wind up in the end zone, act like you've been there before." I played the part pretty well. I had rehearsed for this moment endlessly. I knew how to cruise through a five-star hotel lobby and into a waiting limousine with just enough mystery that I looked like I could be somebody famous.

Illusion is important in Hollywood. It's carefully crafted on-screen; it's carefully cultivated offscreen. I'd gotten the hang of it.

There on the red carpet, my lovely wife, Carmen, stood by my side, just as she had during my entire climb up the professional ladder. She was a rock and looked like a rock star. Among many things, she was an incredible mother and kept the family running like a finely tuned machine. "Very special," her dad once told me, as tears welled up in his eyes. "That Carmen… she is a special one."

Even though Carmen's presence helped me project my grand illusion before the eyes of others, she was skeptical of the life I'd pursued. She had seen the wear and tear resulting from the demands of the job and tried to suggest that I needed more balance in my life. Carmen feared that I was being ground down to nothing and didn't understand why I kept renewing my contract. She would encourage me with her cheerleader smile, attempting to give me confidence. "Joe, you're a talented guy. You can do other things…" But I was like a suicide bomber who didn't have the wires connected quite right, and I was determined about my mission. Even if it killed me.

I suppose I knew that I was pushing too hard. Earlier that week I had met with the head of television for the studio, and he asked me the classic interview question: "Where do you see yourself five, ten, or fifteen years from now?" I told him bluntly I wanted his job someday. It was positively ludicrous to think I could handle this guy's responsibilities. He was ridiculously smart and operated as if ice water ran through his veins. It sounded good when I said it, though, and it was probably what he wanted to hear. Again, illusion.

I knew I was driven. But I had to be. The industry was intense: the farther you advanced up the ladder, the fewer the jobs—very few lateral moves. It was all about the next job, and there were only about six jobs at my level in the entire studio system. There was no workplace Zen back then. It was all tension, all the time. If you weren't stressed and strung out, you would be replaced. Some guys could handle it—thousands of canned speeches, smiles, fake laughter, and contracts. I felt I could too. I was holding it all together. Besides, everything I held dear was riding on my ability to continue to climb, to succeed: my house, my car, my family's future, my reputation. My sunglasses. The moment I stepped off that tightrope, it would all be gone, handed to the next guy in line. Every day on the job at the studio was, to my mind, another day I might be found out.

Some years before, to deal with the stress, I had tried seeing a shrink. There I'd learned a few things about myself, primarily that I had equated my success and lifestyle with my value as a husband, father, and head of household. I suppose I was looking for validation, approval, something to fill me up.

At one point the psychiatrist looked into my eyes and said, "Tell me about your father." No one had ever gone there before, and I didn't know what to say. So I never went back. I didn't want, nor could I even begin, to have a conversation about my father. Not with anyone.

Really, it wasn't such a big deal, or so I thought. Everyone was chasing something they wanted, the good life they desired, the status that would garner respect. I was no different. What if there were stresses? I just needed to manage them better.

And I felt I had. Look where I was! The sun was shining. Carmen was by my side. I was at the Emmys in Hollywood, about to re-up with my studio. I had made a name for myself.

We turned and began our slow, convincing stroll into the Pasadena Civic Auditorium for the commencement of the ceremonies. Yet, walking through

all that dazzle and glitter, I could not see on the horizon the storm that was about to engulf my life. Through my sunglasses, the world looked sunny and rosy. But behind those lenses, my eyes betrayed lines of anxiety, worry, and stress.

We are so blind to our own stuff, blind to the storm bearing down on us. In fact, I was already adrift. I just didn't know it.

2. The Fishermen

Shortly before sunrise on October 28, 2005, five fishermen prepared to launch a twenty-seven-foot fiberglass boat along the shore of San Blas, a small sea town on the western coast of Mexico. This boat, resembling an oversized skiff, was called a *panga*.

The marina cove was filled with hundreds of these little boats, tied to tree limbs that had been pushed into the ocean floor as makeshift dock cleats. There were no real docks, just one insignificant boat after another attached by any means possible to tree limbs jutting out of the water. The shoreline consisted of three-foot-high grass littered with rusted-out containers, oil barrels, chairs, doors, and other trash. Farther down the shoreline, dozens of sunken boats, lame and listing, lay dead as if they had done their service in war and washed up onshore after a great battle.

The captain of the panga, Juan David Lorenzo, had assembled his crew just the day before. Consequently, most of these men didn't know each other, and they remained quiet and kept to themselves as they stocked the boat with what they would need for the trip. Lorenzo, known to the men as "Señor

Juan," was not a professional fisherman but owned a boat, an engine, and a fishing net, all of which made him captain.

With luck, they would fish the boat full in three days. Just to be safe, they packed enough sandwiches, canned tuna, and bottled water to last four days, along with some blankets and extra clothes. A day's worth of fishing might yield each man two hundred pesos, about twenty dollars. Three days would give each man enough to live meagerly for about a week.

A husky man in his forties, Señor Juan was adept at repairing computers and installing networks. He had held such a job in Mazatlán, but his real passion always led him to the water, down to San Blas. More than anything he was an adventurer. The ocean fascinated him. Fishing was fun, but just a pastime; he simply loved being on the water in his boat.

Fishing was for Señor Juan a hobby, but for Salvador Ordoñez it was his life. Ordoñez had been a fisherman for nearly thirty years, having learned to fish on the east coast of Mexico in the Gulf. He had started fishing for sharks in his teens and ended up in San Blas fifteen years ago.

Señor Juan knew he needed a crew who not only had fishing expertise but who also were as tough as nails in order to handle the hard work that fishing in this part of the world requires. To him, being tough was important on the water and also in life. Macho was what he wanted himself to be; it was also what he looked for in others. On the ocean they would not use fishing rods but rather a net that took much strength to toss out and especially to pull in. Three or four days on the ocean under the sun took its physical toll. You had to be tough, Señor Juan knew, and Salvador Ordoñez was certainly that.

Two other crew members, Lucio and Jesús, brought to the crew their own scrappy machismo and fishing experience.

Lucio Rendon was the tallest of the five and looked like a Mayan warrior. He'd grown up the hard way. He had lived in a small dirt-floor hut with his grandmother, whom he called Panchita, since he was ten years old. Lucio had quit school at thirteen and learned from his uncle Remigio how to fish.

Fishing became his life. Lucio typically walked or hitched rides to the nearest fishing village, Boca del Asadero, and would be gone for days or weeks at a time, looking to pick up jobs as a day laborer on the water.

Lucio often had a soft and sad look about him, even when he was smiling, as though he had just gotten some disappointing news. It was perhaps the effect of a hard life and its resulting weariness even though he was still a young man.

Like Lucio, Jesús Vidana moved from town to town in search of work on small fishing boats. He lived eight hours north of San Blas in a one-room shack that he built out of sticks and scraps of lumber. The shack had no electricity or running water, and the interior walls were covered with cardboard for insulation. Jesús was married and lived with his pregnant wife, Jocelyn, and their son, Juan, almost three. On extremely hot nights, Jesús cooled off his family with an electric fan that he ran off a hundred-foot extension cord stretching to his nearest neighbor's house.

Jesús was always full of energy, "passion" as he would call it, which kept him constantly smiling and laughing and brought a smile to the people who knew him well. But his passion would sometimes turn in another direction and puff him up like a Texas horned frog, warning an approaching predator to think twice about messing with him. Yet, unlike the lizard, Jesús wouldn't spit blood from his eyes. He was more bark than bite.

Señor Juan looked around anxiously in the predawn. Wanting them to get away before it was light, he urged the men to hurry. He was often headstrong, sometimes baring a temper, and he would make a crew perform quickly. Anyone who saw the hundreds of fishing boats in the cove would soon know, as he did, that fishing on the Pacific in pangas was a common way of life. Like everyone around him, he had done this many times. Yet he didn't take anything for granted. While routine, it was still dangerous work, and he needed the right crew members, ones he could count on to handle what was always a hard job.

Señor Juan had handpicked the fifth man, whom he had known previously. His name was Farsero. To Señor Juan, Farsero was a dependable crew

member. To the others, he was a mystery. They didn't know much about him, and he never volunteered anything about himself. When someone would ask about his life, he would say, "You don't need to know." Señor Juan had introduced him to the other men as *El Farsero,* which means "the Joker." Thing was, he rarely smiled.

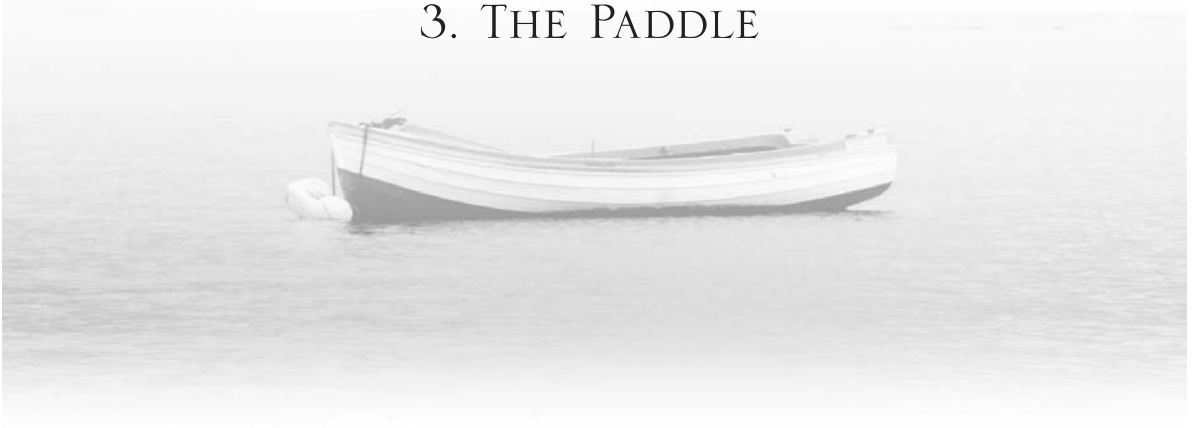
But then, each of the men had something, something unique, even mysterious. An untold story, a passion, a special ability. Lucio had actually known Salvador from a previous fishing job. Lucio didn't talk about it, but a year earlier the engine on their boat had failed, and they'd been stranded on an island for a period of time. Jesús had an incredible singing voice that could gloriously fill the air out of nowhere. And Salvador, tough and rugged, had a deep faith in God. One of the last things he carried into the panga was his prized possession. His Bible.

The panga had a V-shaped hull that was nine feet wide and five feet deep, with four three-foot-tall dividers that split the interior into five sections. There was a partially covered area in the bow for storage. In addition to a few tools, food, blankets, and extra clothes, they had on board an ice-filled cooler, shark knives, a whetstone, some rope, and an anchor. This particular panga had an added feature: a welded flotation chamber that provided extra buoyancy so the craft could carry a larger load of fish.

As day broke behind them, the five fishermen headed past the harbor master's shack and out of the channel. Señor Juan turned the panga west toward the Islas Marías, which lay sixty miles ahead. He gunned the engine, and the front end of the boat rose out of the calm Pacific waters. Being at the helm, in control, gave him a rush.

The other four men nestled against the inner walls of the boat, preparing for a long ride, not expecting what the day would actually bring.

3. The Paddle



"Go get me the paddle," my dad would say.

Only we weren't going canoeing. I never expected to hear that sentence. I don't know why, because after a while I should have been able to figure out when it was coming. But somehow it always surprised me.

I was about nine years old when the paddlings started, usually over some innocuous incident typical of a kid my age, like telling a fib, throwing a tantrum, or spelling my name on the driveway with butane and setting it on fire. And, okay, there was that time when I was five that I stabbed my brother in the leg with a pair of scissors. (I had no idea that leg skin was so soft.)

In our house, discipline was doled out with my dad's fraternity paddle, which lived on top of the refrigerator next to the dust bunnies and cigarettes and vodka until summoned into action, usually about ten or twelve times a year. When he said those five words, it was as though he were asking someone to pass the salt. The request didn't seem to carry any anger. It scared the daylights out of me, but I don't think it affected

him at all. His face was expressionless, and he didn't look at me when he said it.

I think I started to learn how to mask the pain after I got the paddle from the fridge for the very first time. I sent myself off in my own little world, adrift in the shame of his words and confused by it all.

Struggling to numb myself, I tried everything—rerunning episodes of *Hogan's Heroes* or *The Munsters* in my head and playing imaginary games of basketball where every shot went in—to convince myself that the pain was only temporary. Whatever it took, I did it.

"Assume the position," he would command. He was like an executioner who had no connection to his victims and was purposely and permanently detached from his actions.

I would start to reach my hands down toward my feet.

"Bend over and grab your ankles." Sadly, I learned what an ankle was by experiencing this humiliating routine countless times. By the time I was grabbing them, I couldn't feel a thing.

Neither of us spoke during these sessions. The only sound was my dad paddling me. His goal was to impress upon me not only certain letters of the Greek alphabet that the fraternity paddle bore but also our family's cardinal rule: *never mess up.*

Photos of my father when he was a kid show a serious little boy dressed in overalls. Even today, seeing these images of him with his mother and father, with stern looks on their faces, sends me guessing at the puzzle of his life. Perhaps it was a belt or a switch lashing his behind at the hands of a giant, angry father. Maybe that's where the silence came from. Addiction. Anger. Bitterness. No one seems to know the details, but something must have caused the man great pain. It has manifested itself in so many ways.

I think I had it easier than my older brothers and my sister. They endured a less-mellow version of my father and grew great, ugly tumors of loathing for

a man who even now remains mostly oblivious to the pain and damage he caused. I was the baby: strong, agreeable, and apparently full of promise to a dad hellbent on raising a quarterback. I was competitive too, adding my name to the roster of every sports league my little town had to offer, partly to please my father but mostly for the opportunity to hit back, to rage and rush and pound in ways legitimized by a referee and uniforms. Football was ideal for this. I wanted to be a linebacker like Dick Butkus.

Unfortunately, I was told I had to be a quarterback. *Quarterback? No, please not quarterback. They don't get to hit people.* Fran Tarkenton was a quarterback. And what's more, he was a *scrambling* quarterback; he actually ran *away* from people. I didn't want to be Fran Tarkenton. I wanted to be Dick Butkus. I wanted to pile into someone and drive him into the ground. It was my chance to prove my manhood, to be macho, to take my anger at my dad out on others.

Well, I was a lousy quarterback. Everyone knew it, especially my dad, who rarely missed a chance to remind me. But I was good at making people laugh, which was a great way to hide the mess inside. So I mostly hung out with people who got my jokes or didn't mind being the butt of them. When I was with them, I could feel good enough, even if it was only for a few minutes at the lunch table.

In that tiny town, you didn't hate your father. Or if you did, you never said so. You went out for football, kept your nose to the grindstone, and, if you were lucky, got a good job at the yarn factory. I continued to defend him to the rest of my family and the town at large for the longest time, as sons who long for their fathers' approval tend to do.

In some ways he was like many other dads. He was a small-town baseball, football, and basketball coach who wanted his kids to be winners. He worked hard; he was a carpenter in the summers. But I guess everything looked like a nail to him, and he was the hammer. I just never knew which side of him was going to show up on any given day.

He tried to connect with me through golf. One time in high school, I was winning a match in the club championship. I was up by three holes with four left to play when he came out on the course and started to tell me I wasn't doing something right. I asked him to leave, and he got angry and stormed off. I lost the match on the final hole. That night after a few too many, he stormed into the family room, swinging. I put my arms around my head, like a boxer who is just trying to survive the round. My mom had been cutting his hair and was right on his tail, holding a pair of scissors like a switchblade, trying to protect me. He popped me a few times, and my mom started yelling that she was calling the police. All I remember is that he stopped.

I know I'm not the only kid who was beaten by his father. And, like others who've experienced the same thing, the ultimate escape was, well, escape. Perhaps you know this all too well. Perhaps you left. You left home and went elsewhere—to college, on a trip, to a job across country. Distance faded the feelings, the memories. And eventually you built a new life in which you did something else, something you were successful at.

Even so, those experiences are still inside you. And what you do each week, each day, is somehow touched by them. Only you don't know it. You don't know why you do what you do.

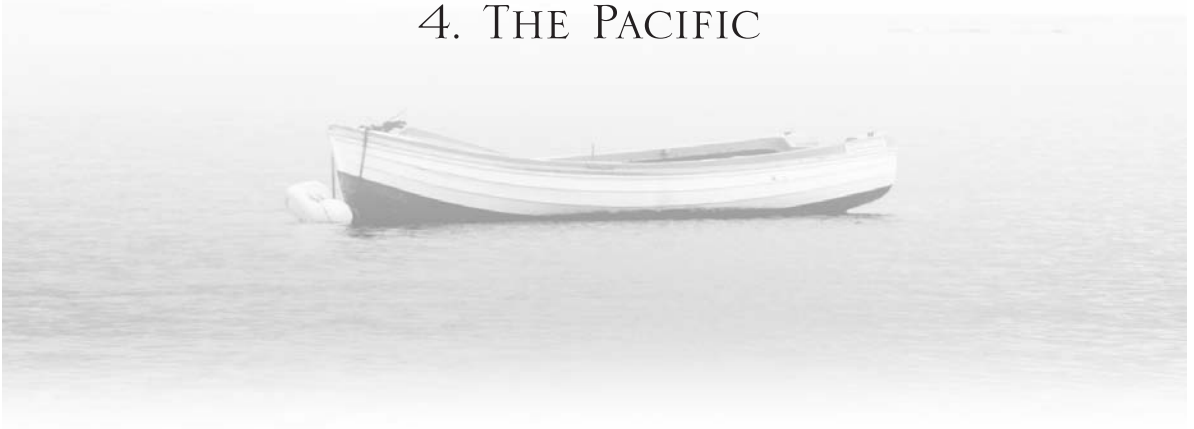
I remember when I was seventeen, just before I left home for good, my dad started taking me with him on his motorcycle trips—an attempt, I suppose, at father-son bonding. We would ride out on the new blacktop, stop at every white-trash bar along the way, and sit together in silence while I perfected a new way to cover up my pain: popping top after top of Old Milwaukee until I was numb. Then we would ride home. Ironically, he had shattered his paddle on my callused behind a year earlier, beating me for the very thing he was now encouraging. All of a sudden I was his drinking buddy.

During the beatings I had done my best to escape the pain by drifting into an imaginary world in my mind. Later, after I had experienced the effect

of alcohol hitting my stomach, my escape route was a great deal faster, was much more effective, and took considerably less effort. Oh, the things we don't know about the things we don't know.

I was very unclear about who I was supposed to be, where I was supposed to be headed. But I left, nonetheless, setting out on some ocean of life, chasing after something I was supposed to achieve.

4. The Pacific



When the panga neared the Islas Marías, Señor Juan cut the engine. The men immediately began to unfurl the fishing net, the *cimbra,* as they had done hundreds of times.

A cimbra is made by hand from fine but strong nylon fibers. It is strung between two poles, and the younger boys in the fishing villages walk back and forth, weaving it together like a giant, milelong tennis net. It floats horizontally about twenty feet below the surface of the water, suspended by beat-up buoys that have flagsticks attached to them to signal other boats to steer clear. Once the net is in place, the boat slowly zigzags across the water, snagging any sea life that happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

This particular cimbra extended for nearly two miles.

Señor Juan valued his cimbra as much as his boat. The huge net was worth three thousand dollars, more than a year's wages for a fisherman. It was so prized that one would risk his life to save it. Occasionally something will get caught in a cimbra that could damage it. A stingray, for example, can shred a cimbra in a short time. In such a case, a fisherman will take off all his clothes,

grab a shark knife, dive into the water, and slice off the "wings" of the animal with surgical precision even as the stingray is trying to kill him—all to prevent damage to the net.

Attached to the bottom edge of the cimbra and spaced about every thirty feet, ten-foot-long wires carry three-inch shark hooks sometimes baited with fish. On the surface above each shark line, a float—usually a plastic soft-drink bottle—serves as a marker. When a fisherman sees any sort of commotion in the net, he pulls the net toward the boat. If there is something of value, say a shark or a tuna, he'll yank it out of the net, throw it in the belly of the boat, and hit it on the head with a club.

This is backbreaking work.

The first day out, the unsuspecting five fishermen caught nothing of consequence. After the cimbra was in place, they sat on the boat, waiting for action in the net, dozing off occasionally when there was none.

Most fishermen in this part of the world have been doing this since second grade. Their fathers do this. Their brothers do this. Their sisters are married to men who do this. Uncles, grandfathers, great-grandfathers—all the men as far back as they can remember—have done this. Mostly, they sit and wait and watch the markers for any movement. Sometimes they make small talk; sometimes they doze off. When nature calls, they relieve themselves by hanging off the back of the boat and dragging their butts in the water. No paper required.

Just past midnight a shift in the wind woke Salvador, also known by the familiar name "Chava." Moving rapidly toward them was a wall of black clouds five miles high. Salvador woke the other men, but Señor Juan and Farsero were unconcerned about the approaching storm. It was as if the two of them had never been in this kind of situation before and couldn't fathom its seriousness.

Jesús and Lucio were alert and standing by, like policemen backing up a fellow officer in trouble. They were ready to burst into action when called

upon. They knew the seriousness of the situation. Even though they were only in their midtwenties and might seem like a couple of wandering day laborers, each had been doing this kind of work for nearly twenty years. They were experienced and as tough as they come, and they knew the situation could get bad really quickly.

Within a few minutes the wind was howling and quickly escalated to forty miles per hour, producing fifteen-foot swells that tossed the boat and its contents around like Ping-Pong balls in a lottery drawing. Flashes of lightning lit up the night sea.

They squatted down low against the side of the boat to secure themselves. Cold seawater came blasting across the boat and rushed at them with crushing blows, stabbing their eyes like needles.

Salvador knew that each monstrous wave carried the threat of death. If the panga were to capsize or if the men were swept overboard, there was little chance they would survive. One swell lifted the boat thirty feet high and brought it down with a thunderous crash, stretching the cimbra beyond its breaking point and snapping the line like a ripe string bean.

"Why didn't you tie the line right?" Señor Juan screamed at Salvador.

"You're the captain!" he responded angrily. "You should have checked it yourself." Salvador stood in the center of the boat, up to his chest in icy seawater, his eyes burning.

Salvador always gave respect to those in authority…if they earned it. On the sea, anyone can be called "captain." Owning a boat might get you *called* a captain, but it doesn't *make* you one. Blaming or shaming the crew wasn't going to make Señor Juan captain.

The ugly black waves kept pushing them twenty and thirty feet into the air and into icy foam at the top. Then, like a roller coaster getting reacquainted with gravity, the boat would drop straight down into the darkness. There was nothing for them to do but hold on to the top edge of the side of the panga and hope she stayed upright.

They gathered as much strength as possible and jockeyed through the anger of the sea, watching most of their supplies fly out into the blackness. It was like going twelve rounds with Mike Tyson. An angry Mike Tyson.

The storm finally subsided.

And the fishermen took stock of what had happened. The cimbra was nowhere in sight. A tattered rope was all that remained.

"We will find the net," growled Señor Juan.

Salvador tried to reason with him, suggesting they try to reach land and come back later to look for the net, but Señor Juan refused.

Salvador was an experienced fisherman—nearly thirty years' worth—and he had seen this happen before. Equipment often gets lost, and sometimes the best thing to do is to go to shore, get some rest, and come back later with a fresh set of eyes and more cans of gasoline. He wasn't telling Señor Juan to go to shore for his own selfish reasons. He sincerely wanted to help Señor Juan find his net, and Salvador knew that taking a break was an intelligent solution.

But Señor Juan insisted on continuing the search. Salvador deferred to the authority of Señor Juan as the owner of the boat, and he stayed alert, diligently looking for the lost cimbra. They remained on the water for two more days as Señor Juan frantically circled and crisscrossed the area, nearly exhausting their fuel supply.

Salvador knew that getting back to land was now going to be impossible. They didn't have enough fuel. He knew the only thing they could do was look for another boat. They eventually spotted a vessel in the distance and headed for it.

All the men felt relieved. Even though they hadn't found the net, at least they had found someone who could help them get to land so they could refuel and come back the next day to continue the search.

But before they got halfway there, the engine sputtered and died. They had drained the gas cans. The men shouted and waved at the other boat, still

a half mile away. But perhaps not wanting to get their fishing lines tangled, the men in the other boat started their engine and pulled away. No other boats were in sight. Most had returned to port ahead of the storm. The panga was drifting now, caught in the westward-moving Pacific current. Tempers began to flare.

Salvador could still see one of the Marías Islands, but the strong current was pushing their small fishing boat out to sea.

The fishermen soon realized that the missing cimbra was the least of their problems. The storm had washed away some of the tools and all the canned food. A few bottles of water and a couple of sandwiches remained, along with their shark knives, some extra clothes, a few blankets, and Salvador's Bible.

After the two days of searching for the cimbra, the men were exhausted and finally couldn't help but fall asleep.

When Salvador opened his eyes the next morning, he stood up and looked around. He saw nothing but water in every direction.