

FUBAR CROSSROAD



An unlikely journey from hopelessness, being hit head-on by a drunk driver, and being granted a do-over by God.

By Michael Gonzalez, Ed.D.

The acronym, FUBAR, in the title of this memoir, was coined by Army Medics in the South Pacific during World War II. In the heat of some of the fiercest battles, medics were forced to make instantaneous decisions: Those they could save and those who were FUBAR, F***ed Up Beyond All Repair. Today, the acronym has been changed to a more genteel Fouled Up Beyond All Repair and is part of the lexicon used by first responders, law enforcement and ER staff when referring to victims of a heart attack, severe stroke, auto accident, victims of terrorists or domestic violence and other life-threatening human tragedies.

Saturday, June 1, 1996, started out as a clone of every yesterday I could remember. I had been awake for an hour before my cheap Timex alarm clock started chirping, taunting me with an irritating high-pitched jingle that ran through my head: Rise and shine, rise and shine, rise and shine to another miserable day, another miserable day. I slapped the ringer off, worked my way to a sitting position, elbows on my knees, chin cupped in my hands, staring at the tattered carpet, summing up the energy to shower and look at the pathetic guy in the cracked bathroom mirror.

As I shaved, I focused on the tip of the razor as it glided across my chin, cheeks, neck and around my mouth, anything to avoid making eye contact with the loser in the mirror. In those rare instances when our eyes met, I could hear him chanting: Loser, loser, loser. The words floated from his mouth onto the mirror in an endless loop shouting louder and louder: Loser, loser, loser!

Before I could look away, the guy in the mirror would goad me into a telepathic argument that would start with: Okay. Okay. What? What!?

Hey, he'd chimed in, you say you deserve better than this? You want a life where you get up every morning singing cheerfully in the shower? Whadda ya gonna do 'bout it? Huh?

Do what? You think this is my fault?

Ahh, got it. Okay, who you gonna blame today? Your mom? The man? The cops? God? The voice got louder and screamed: Now! I want an answer, now! I'm tired of your complaining. Take responsibility to change your life or shut up. Fight for the life you think you deserve or wimp out. The choice is yours...Fighter or loser, which is it?

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At that point I hit my mental mute button.

I towed the smattering of shaving cream from my face, flipped off the light switch and headed for the kitchen. Little did the guy in the mirror know I was seriously thinking of diving back into selling cocaine, although the consequences of getting caught, again, was something I didn't want to think about.

I was bitter that I didn't have a dad, like other kids. I fantasized what it would be like to have a dad. You know, a buddy to hang out with, go fishing, watch football and other father-son things. Then it happened when I was in the seventh grade. Mom met Tom, they fell in love, dated for a couple of years and eventually tied the knot. I remember the day Mom introduced him to me. He was big, broad shouldered, had a quick smile, friendly. He was the kind of guy I'd dreamed would step into my life and become my dad.

As singer-songwriter Peter Allen wrote: Don't wish too hard for what you want, or then you might get it, and then when you get it, then you might wish you never got it all...

'Things got totally insane when Mom told him she was pregnant. He started calling her at all hours of the day and night, screaming at her to get an abortion or he would shoot her in the stomach and shoot me.'

I decided my first day of school at New Hampton High School was a good time to start my new image, show everyone how cool I was, a certified wigger with an attitude. I wore black clothing adorned with heavy fake gold chains around my neck and a black cap turned at an acceptable rapper's angle. I acted as though I had come from the hood, rap slang and all. If I only realized what a fool I making of myself. I was no longer Jimmy's comic relief; I was New Hampton High School's comic relief.

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I got my chance to strut my stuff, when I volunteered to DJ the first dance of the year. I had a mind-bending stereo system and speakers that I had bought soon after I moved in with my grandparents. I set up my equipment, then swaggered across the gym stage, and in my best rapper slang asked the crowd if they were ready to get it on. I turned up the volume to 6 'n the Mornin' by Ice-T. I got an ovation as I started strutting my stuff and lip-syncing the words... Six in the morning, police at my door. Fresh Adidas squeak across the bathroom floor. Out my back window I make a escape.

Don't even get a chance to grab my old school tape... As the lyrics continued, the students were stunned... Threw action at some freaks until one bitch got ill. She acted silly simply would not quit. Called us all punk pussies, said we all weren't shit. As we walked over to her, ho continued to speak. So we beat the bitch down in the goddamn street... A teacher frantically hurried to the stage, yanked the plug and asked me to pack my equipment and leave.

My best friend Chris Lynch helped me load my stuff into my car. He was in tears from laughing so hard, as I complained that a brother, a wigger, never gets a break. The man always keeps a brother down.

"Brother? You're a brother from the hood?" Chris asked

Wendy's car suddenly swerved directly into my lane. Instinct kicked in, and I yanked the wheel to the left. She overcorrected, back into her lane, directly in front of me. Blinding headlights... Everything went black.

Not long into our conversation, Phil understood that I was living paycheck to paycheck. He casually asked if I would like to make some serious money working for him. I immediately replied, “You kidding me?!” I was all ears. I know, today, that I should have walked away. The warning signs were as huge as those electronic Las Vegas billboards, screaming, Danger Zone!! Danger Zone!!! Within a few days, I discovered that Phil, who was in his late thirties, had suffered two heart attacks. He and his girlfriend were users.

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He carried a Heckler & Koch .9mm pistol, trusted no one, and had two brothers doing life in prison. Frankly, I did not care about the risks; I was tired of being broke. He had what I wanted. He was in a business where he set his own hours, was making a ton of money and could buy whatever he wanted. My only thought was, adios to my miserable mobile home and hello to a hot muscle car and an apartment where I could take sexy women. I was about to take stupidity to a whole new level. A quick study, I bought a couple ounces of cocaine, cut, weighed and packaged it, and was ready to hit the streets. Phil contacted a few of his customers and turned them over to me. Money started trickling in right away, but it wasn't the kind of money I had expected, so I started buying larger quantities, expecting to make gangster money, but it never happened. It wasn't long before I realized I had stepped into a sleazy world where everyone lied, no one could be trusted,