

*A Journey to the Center of the Mind, Book I*

Bonus Chapter “6A,” page 83...

In the early 1980s, when working as a uniformed police officer, I was patrolling the area of the Cornwells Train Station late one night in my marked unit. While there were few, if any, cars in the lot to be tampered with at this time of night, teenagers would nonetheless sometimes drive into the otherwise empty parking area and drink, party, and occasionally commit acts of vandalism. So, when I thought of it and had the available time between police calls, I'd drive through the train station's three separate lots just to make sure nothing was going on there that shouldn't be.

On this particular Sunday morning, probably around 2:00AM, I drove up the ramp to the main parking lot area of the station. Right away, I noticed the reflected rear lights of a car parked toward the back of the lot. The car's taillights themselves were off, but I could see vapor coming out of the exhaust so I knew the engine was running and I could see someone, at least one person, standing nearby. As I drove closer I got on the police radio and advised dispatch of my location and the make, model, and color of the car, plus the tag number. Once I saw a lone figure standing beside the car I also advised the dispatcher that I would be checking out the presumed driver, a middle-aged white male, standing near the front of his car.

Upon exiting my patrol car, with flashlight in my right hand, I pointed the beam of light in the direction of this man. As I walked toward him I quickly checked out the interior of his car and saw it to be unoccupied. The vehicle's lone occupant was now in front of his open driver's side door. I noticed from his sideways position from me that he was a well-dressed man, in a three-piece suit and tie. Upon eventually noticing my presence he suddenly started fumbling

around with something in the area of his belt buckle, although his hands were seemingly empty. It became clear as I approached him that he was standing next to a steaming puddle of what appeared to be newly deposited liquid on the ground directly in front of his feet. He was also wobbling a bit as he was tried to finish whatever it was he had been doing in or near the front of his pants.

Of course, by this time, having seen the fresh puddle on the ground, I surmised what the wobbling man had just done. It was the ostensible reason why he was in the otherwise empty train station lot in the first place.

As I walked closer to him, he mumbled in my direction, "Hello Officer. Beautiful night, (hiccup), isn't it?"

I replied, "It is indeed, but may I ask you, just what are you doing here?"

I knew the answer to that question before I asked it, but I wanted to hear his response. Plus, I wanted to buy some time with him as I checked out his hands and his belt area to make sure there were no weapons on him which could pose a threat to me. I determined him to be "clean" in that important regard. That's when, for the first time while now up close to him, I shined the flashlight upwards to his face. It was then that I did a double-take. I recognized this guy, as disheveled and out-of-sorts as he was standing there in front of me in the empty parking lot.

The clearly drunk man with the now presumably empty bladder was a well-respected, long-term English teacher at Cardinal Dougherty High School, who happened to be my fill-in English teacher for a month or so during my sophomore year when my regular teacher was out sick. I had heard and/or read over the years that he was still at the school, having won various

awards and gaining further recognition for his stellar work with the young men in his classes and in the English department there.

But now he was here, in the Cornwells Train Station parking lot, and not exactly in award-winning form at the moment. But, at least his pants were now zipped up. That's a start, I suppose.

After pondering my query as to his purpose at the train station, the teacher started to answer but then stopped. He started to move forward but then staggered back. Finally, after mustering up the appropriate foot and mouth orientation, in what could be best described as a quasi-coherent, misarticulated speech pattern, and while then staring straight upwards toward the sky, he whimsically related, "Oh, nothing really. I'm just (hiccup) here looking at the stars. They're lovely, wouldn't you say Officer (hiccup)?"

That's when without pondering HIS query to me, and in a very balanced and coherent speech pattern, while pointing my flashlight beam at the puddle of pee, I said back to him, "You know, lying to a police officer is not a good thing. Wouldn't YOU say, Mr. Randall?" (No, it's not his real name.)

Having confronted him in such a fashion with pretty clear proof of his obvious prevarication, my former part-time teacher went from staring at the stars above to slowly lowering his head to meet my eyes. The teacher in his best quasi-coherent manner, this time however preceded by a loud burp, and while staring down at his recently released liquid stated, "Yes, you're right. I'm so sorry. The truth is, I drove up here, Officer (hiccup), obviously to relieve myself, and I do apologize to you and to all who I may have offended."

My former English teacher, even if just for one month, who wasn't yet aware of our short-term association from all those years ago, ended that last sentence with a very interesting grammatical choice. And, no, I don't mean the hiccup.

Upon hearing this, I remembered back to my class days that this teacher was well known as being a stickler for "proper" grammatical usages in his classroom (as an English teacher should). And, that he had publicly corrected my grammar on at least one occasion during one of those classes (also as an English teacher should).

In view of this, I couldn't resist the opportunity. With my flashlight beam in the direction of his face, but out of politeness not directly in it, I suggested to him, "Don't you mean, 'to all *whom* I offended,' Mr. Randall?"

He raised his head upon hearing his last name for the first time, looked at me squarely in the eyes, and stated somewhat remorsefully and just a bit more coherently now, "Oh, I see you know me. From Cardinal (hiccup) Dougherty, no doubt. How embarrassing. But, if it makes any difference to you, and clearly it does, you are absolutely correct. I should have said 'whom,' and not 'who,' as yes, it's the (hiccup) objective case and not the subjective case. (Burp!) You obviously learned something in my class... Wait, you WERE one of my students, right?"

He then leaned over a bit, studied my nameplate, and ended his statement with, "...Officer Fitzgerald...What year did you graduate Dougherty, by the way? You must have been in one of the (hiccup) advanced classes I taught."

Okay, this was now getting weird. Maybe I shouldn't have told him that I knew who he was. Maybe I shouldn't have playfully corrected his grammatical choice of "who" with "whom," even if I happened to remember after all these years that the word choice had something to do with the objective case vs. the subjective case. (I told you he was a good

teacher.) Either way, I decided that I did not want to have this discussion anymore with a now very intoxicated former English teacher of mine who most likely didn't remember me at all. It's time to get back to my other duties on this weekend midnight shift.

So, I switched gears, without ever responding his last questions to me. I firmly told him that he was very drunk, he was to give me his car keys, and he was going to sleep it off here in the parking lot until sunrise. At that time, I would come back with his keys and only then permit him to drive home.

He half-nodded and shrugged his shoulders and burped (or hiccupped, I forget which one) that he understood. He then pivoted himself toward his open car door, staggered sort of sideways toward it, plopped down onto his seat, shut off the engine, handed me his car keys, wrapped his nearby heavy coat around himself, leaned over onto the passenger side of the bench seat, and before I could lock and shut his door, he was already snoring.

After being at the train station with the drunken Mr. Randall for no more than ten minutes, I notified dispatch I was okay and back in service. And, that a man was "resting" for a few hours in his car there. I put this over the air in case one of my fellow officers should come upon him during their later patrols.

I came back to the station at around 6:00AM, just an hour or so before I was going off duty. I had brought Mr. Randall a black coffee from the local 7-11. With the hot beverage in one hand, I knocked on the car window with the other, woke him up from an apparent sound sleep, and gave the now seemingly sober but admittedly hungover teacher the coffee and his keys back. Mr. Randall was clearly more understandable now and apologized for his earlier poor judgment, acknowledging that he not only drove while intoxicated last night, but also recalled

relieving himself in public here at the train station. He said all of this utilizing standard grammatical construction I'm glad to say, even minus the burping and hiccupping now. Remembering him as I did in the classroom, I now knew for sure that he was sober enough to drive. I advised him, respectfully but again authoritatively, that he could have easily been arrested, or worse injured or killed, driving in the condition he was in just a few hours ago. He agreed wholeheartedly and thanked me for choosing the course of action I did.

I wasn't sure that morning as the sun was rising over the horizon if he remembered me from our relatively brief high school interaction or not. It didn't matter. It had been maybe 14 years since I had him as a teacher at CDHS, and he's probably taught hundreds of more boys since my time there. Quite frankly, I wasn't even sure if he remembered our verbal interaction from just about four hours before. In any event, nothing more about our high school nexus was discussed during his wake-up call.

I recall Mr. Randall treating me well those few weeks back in our short-lived English class, and others too from what I heard from my fellow students who had him as their fulltime teacher during my time at CDHS. And, yes, I'm glad he publicly corrected me in his class for whatever participle I dangled or verb phrase I may have mis-tensed. He imparted upon me a further respect for literature, language, and its spoken and written usage. I always remembered him for this and appreciated what he did for me in that regard.

In view of all this, and the fact that I never saw the teacher driving drunk on any actual roads or streets that night, I decided to give him a break. I have no regrets that I did. He drove off that morning and I never saw him again in any manner or form on the streets of Bensalem Township.

However, years later, as an FBI agent, I did have one more encounter with this esteemed teacher of English and literature at Cardinal Dougherty High School.

When I went back to my alma mater in the mid-1990s for their annual Career Day, I saw Mr. Randall again. I went out of my way between my several FBI employment-related talks to the students that night, visiting the new Vietnam War memorial (to the 27 CDHS grads killed in that war), etc., to re-introduce myself to him. I reminded him he was a fill-in English teacher of mine in the late '60s for a month or so and how I enjoyed his class, learned from him, and the like. And...I left it at that. For the minute or two that we conversed that night, I studied his face as we talked in an attempt to determine if he recognized me from that cold, starry night long ago but not all that far away. If he did recognize me at all, he hid it very well.

I didn't bring up that incident from twelve or so years ago. It wouldn't have been prudent or judicious to do so, there or any other time I may have happened to cross paths with him. It's very likely he wouldn't have remembered it, or me, anyway.

In life, I learned, some things are simply best left unspoken. My brief interaction with Mr. Randall during that CDHS Career Night event was one of those times.

