The Autobiography of Satoshi Nakamoto by Matthäus Jandaček

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Dedication

For Matyáš Jandaček.

1 – Who?

Who is this Matthäus Jandaček claiming to be Satoshi Nakamoto? That's a fair question. The blunt answer is, "Yes, I am Satoshi Nakamoto, the real one, the inventor of Bitcoin. And no, I am not Satoshi Nakamoto. My name is Matthäus Jandaček."

Let's answer the essentials up front, as simply as is possible. Who?—I am I Matthäus Jandaček. Why?—I decided to write this, my autobiography, for reasons that will be enlightened as the story progresses. There is no short answer. For now, just know that I am who is known as Satoshi Nakamoto and that this is my story. Why now?—because it has been long enough. A seedling requires care as it sprouts and struggles to survive in drought and sun, but when it grows and strengthens and takes root, a gardener can leave it on its own and await a day to rest under its shade. Why now? At this point, it's okay.

Writing an autobiography is wholly daunting. It's something that a person does only once in life, yes? So, naturally, it's something I've never done. It is intimidating.

Where to begin? The only thing that likely matters to anyone who may read this biography is my work with Bitcoin. I understand that. Yet, jumping right in there would perhaps be rash. It would ignore the building blocks of my life that led me to that point—blocks that might have merit ingrained in them that even I do not see, but which others might. Illumination comes from what others perceive, not from the source itself. What's more, to simply offer a list of reasons for creating Bitcoin would be only the story in part and somehow inauthentic.

Thus, I should begin earlier than with Bitcoin. But still, when? "I was born on…" seems too obvious and banal. My childhood years seem to me to be immaterial. My formative years would not be considered uncommon or outstanding when compared to the same years of many others, but they may well matter here. Again, others may see more clearly

what coalesces a person's substance better than he sees himself. And yet, where do "formative years" begin? Adolescence? Early adulthood of the twenties? I don't know.

To understand me, and to understand what gave rise to the birth of Bitcoin, it's necessary to go back even beyond me and into my roots. It's necessary to begin in a small Bohemian hamlet in the Czech Republic today known as Loučná pod Klínovcem. This small town was home to my father and mother, Matyáš and Vicktorie Jandaček. As it is located on the Pöhlbach River that sets the Czech/German border, the histories and cultures of the two cannot be separated. This truth was painfully manifest during World War II. For purposes here, this marriage of the Czech and German was especially true for my parents who were children during the war years.

Both of my parents had been raised to despise the Nazis, understandably. My father remembered the rise of the Nazi party, watched the German motor trucks bring in columns of soldiers as they occupied the Sudetenland, then tried to eke out a living under the Nazi restrictions. By the time of the war, fewer Nazi troops were present in Loučná pod Klínovcem because they were all off fighting elsewhere. Only a skeleton of a garrison was left back in Germany in Oberwiesenthal. This area in the Czech was rugged and simply not deemed as a critical threat.

When I was a young man, and since my father was then old beyond his years as a result of a life of working too hard, I decided to record his life as best I could. Armed with an old cassette recorder and a shoebox full of cassettes, I began spending evenings simply talking to my father about his life. Those recordings provide the tales and details listed below.

As a boy during the war in Loučná pod Klínovcem, my father daily watched the German Nazi soldiers who patrolled the streets. What else is a poor Czech boy to do during a war as strange looking soldiers

occupy one's home town? The soldiers either sped by in motorcars, if they were officers, or more usually screamed by on motorcycles. There was no reason to stop in Loučná pod Klínovcem. But always, a guard would be stationed at the bridge that crossed the Pöhlbach to and from Germany. More precisely, there was a guard stationed on both sides of the bridge, but the Czech side was of course considered the lower rank. Consequently, the Nazi guard on the Czech side was either in a constant state of ill-humor at his disgrace, or he was a fool, or he was simply young and would be moved on and up in a month's time then replaced by another, younger soldier fresh from boot camp.

As my father told me, the guards rotated in shifts and then would suddenly be gone. But, there was a particular guard who became a steady fixture at the Czech station. His last name was Gerst; father never knew his first name.

Gerst was a private, a soldat, and he was big. Gerst was a soldat of the lowest rank and would always be one, no doubt due to him being "a nitwit wrapped inside of an imbecile," as my father said. Gerst also had a friendly disposition, in a nitwit's way, and was eager to talk if anyone would talk to him, though my father didn't know this at the time. My father simply saw a very large Nazi soldier, assumed to be grumbling from a demotion, and was therefore a person to avoid. Added together, the qualities Gerst possessed, those of being dull-witted and talkative are noxiously toxic, and especially were during the Third Reich.

My father explained to me how he came to know this big, stupid, loquacious, but friendly Nazi. My father said he was bored and was lurking around the underside of the bridge one day when he heard a sound that he described as like a cow birthing. I'm unsure of that sound, but it got my father's attention and he investigated its source. The sound was, of course, from Gerst, who was retching over the bridge's railing. His plain face was purplish, his stomach's contents were falling not far from where my father stood. The two made eye contact immediately.

This Nazi was new, not one of the regular guards, so he was no doubt peeved at his ill-fortune in his miserable assignment here.

My father said he thought he was a goner. A large, angry Nazi spotting a boy loitering underneath a bridge to Germany was not primed for a positive result. Surely this soldat would assume the boy to be up to mischief underneath the bridge, perhaps even plotting against the bridge and the Reich.

But, events panned out unexpectedly. When he gathered himself and wiped away the drool that was stringing down from his chin, Gerst gave my father a broad, earnest smile. The kind that only a true nitwit can give.

"I erbrechen," Gerst said proudly. I vomit. My father nodded. Then Gerst smiled even broader.

Gerst called my father up to his post, a small sentinel's box to gain shelter from the elements. It was not unlike an old phone booth, and inside, Gerst began jabbering away. The upshot was that Gerst considered his new post in the small Czech town as a special appointment, an upgrade assignment. No doubt a superior somewhere had sold it as that, likely to rid Gerst of his charge. Gerst had spent the night prior in Oberwiesenthal celebrating his appointment with other soldiers. They quickly allowed Gerst to buy them all drinks so that they too could celebrate. It seemed to Gerst a very polite thing for them to offer. Apparently, the celebration of Gerst's appointment went well, with Gerst funding the celebration, and the other soldiers being very friendly toward him—ordering him more drinks off his own tab to keep the celebration going. As a consequence, Gerst was erbrechen and he was completely broke. He explained that would not get paid until the end of the month, another two weeks. But, Gerst smiled recollecting his grand night.

This discussion of my father's boyhood and of a retching Nazi may seem displaced here. Why this tale in this autobiography. Since the only thing about me and my life that might be of any interest to any

person is that which pertains to Bitcoin. An oafish, retching Nazi certainly does not bear any interest there. But, it is here in my father's youth that a thread began to be strung which later links up to my work with Bitcoin. Patience. More particularly, on this day, Gerst asked my father if he knew of a way to get some money.

My father said that he immediately turned and ran away at that question. What kind of a fool Nazi soldier asks a 12 year-old boy how to get some money? The ogre of a Nazi was frightening. My father decided to give Gerst wide berth until he was gone and replaced.

But, this plan went awry for a number of reasons. First, Loučná pod Klínovcem is a small village—there are few places to go and consequently, avoiding a person who is always present is very difficult. Secondly, it became clear that Gerst was staying. The Reich had no use for a dimwit on the front line, or anywhere of any import. Guarding a remote, inconsequential bridge that led to an area that was not threatening was ideal for Gerst. He would stay. And thirdly, the fool began to grow in my father's young eyes. To an adult, Gerst was an oaf of a buffoon. To a boy, he was funny.

My father explained that he had a small hideout constructed of driftwood, loose boards and tarpaper that he'd built down in the bulrushes by the river's edge. From there, he could survey the town and Gerst in his post. Gerst's activities were intriguing and riotous.

For instance, one day Gerst tried to fish off the bridge, no doubt because he couldn't afford to buy food. Not only did he catch no fish, but he quickly snagged his hook in some downed branches. He tried to yank the hook loose, but could not. After several minutes, he gave up and concluded he must go down and dislodge the hook. Fishing from the bridge though, Gerst was in a predicament. With the fishing line strung between the river's edge and his hand, the phone booth box that constituted his post was in the way of him walking down to the river bank. My father watched Gerst try to finagle the line over and around the

post. He could not. My father said he began to chuckle. Gerst tried tossing his fishing pole over the post's rooftop—it fell back and hit him on squarely across the face. My father said he laughed audibly. Then Gerst decided to climb up on the handrail and then wiggle around the post, fishing pole in his right hand. Naturally, Gerst was clumsy, and operating with only his left hand holding on, he was doomed. He took a wide step to his right, was straddled spread-eagle, then released his left hand's grasp on the post's corner, he was then hands-free. And, as if by some slow, horizontal magnetic pull, Gerst began to peel away from the post. His feet stayed hinged to the guard rail and he fell like tailgate flopping open until his head was level with his feet. Then he gave a push with his feet to separate from the bridge, let out a scream of, "Ahhyow!" and fell like a dropped book to the ground below. My father swore he heard the air whoof out of Gerst's lungs. I believe him. My father said he ran over, found Gerst gasping for air, the fishing pole still in his hand. Gerst looking up at my father as though my father were an angel. Gerst floundered.

"Ich fiel," Gerst said finally—I fell. My father nodded and grinned.

Other events followed. Gerst saw his lunch stolen one day by a flock of crows, as he chased one off, another would sneak in behind him and snag a bite. This was repeated until Gerst's meal was gone and Gerst's brow beaded with sweat. Gerst one day had a case of what the soldiers called "the brown screamers." There was no bathroom to use, of course, and he could not leave his post, so, to his amusement, my father counted eight trips by Gerst down underneath the bridge that day. There was a time when two girls of around 17 years old walked up to speak with Gerst, no doubt as a practical joke. Terrified, Gerst ran into his sentinel's post when they walked up, closed the door, and would not open it or talk them at all, though they teased and flaunted before him and laughed until they finally grew bored and left. Another day Gerst snagged the seat of his pants on a rusted nail in the bridge's side. As he was

walking at the time and due to his mass, his pants ripped open and down to his knees. Since they were no longer wearable, he took them off and spent the rest of the day standing guard in his skivvies. Had an officer happened by and seen this fool Nazi guard standing sentinel pantless, Gerst likely would've been shot on the spot.

All of these stories my father told me. Whether they are true, or not, doesn't matter. The points here are that (a) my father felt they were either important enough or entertaining enough to convey them to me, and (b) true or not, they build an outline of Gerst.

More pertinent to this autobiography, on another day, there were two guards stationed across on the German side of the bridge. They were apparently bored and desired some fun. So, one of the guards walked across the bridge to the Czech side to speak with Gerst. The visitor picked up the telephone in Gerst's post, gestured calling, and pointed across the bridge to the other sentinel post. Clearly, the message was that Gerst was supposed to call the other post. Gerst, got on the phone, made a call. My father could barely see across the river—it was mixing rain and snow that day—but he made out the guard on the German side picking up and then talking on the phone, no doubt with Gerst. Then, the soldier visiting Gerst took the face plate off Gerst's phone, wrangled with the phone's insides a few moments, slapped the face shut again, then marched back across the bridge to the German side.

Apparently Gerst had been instructed to check in with the other side on a regular basis. So, after some time, Gerst picked up the phone, placed the receiver to his ear, and poked out his finger to dial. Instantly, Gerst leapt in the air, threw his hands upward violently and smacked the low ceiling. The sentinel's box lurched upward off its unattached foundation, then landed askew.

My father saw Gerst through the post's window standing dumbfounded, wondering what had just happened. And across the bridge, the other two soldiers were outside their post doubled over in laughter.

When Gerst had dialed the first number, an electrical jolt of a few milliamps had shorted through the receiver and arched between his ear and lower lip. The receiver swung freely—Gerst left it hanging and would not touch it again.

Soon, the soldiers across the bridge gathered themselves. The one who'd marched over prior started across again. He trudged, as though unhappy to be rousted out in the rain and snow. Gerst came out of his post sheepishly and the other soldier barked at him strongly. Apparently, Gerst was being scolded for not calling as he had been instructed to do. Gerst tried to explain, but was shouted down. The soldier slammed the receiver back down to hang it up, about-faced, then marched back across the bridge.

Gerst, went back in his post, hunched over, and stared at the phone. He obviously fretted over his next phone call. Watching Gerst stare at the phone, my father began to chuckle in his little fort at the river's edge anticipating the humor to come. Gerst stared at the phone, then would glance up across the bridge toward the other post, then back down again at the phone. This continued for an entire hour.

Finally, Gerst began to reach toward the phone. It was obviously time to call and check in with the others. His reach could not have been more timid. His hand edged forward, then lurched backward, like a person reaching to pick up a viper. He eventually brushed the receiver in a series of quick thrashes, apparently with no shock, because he picked up the receiver.

Without putting it to his ear, he pointed an index finger out to dial. Again, his finger twitched forward and bounded back in a series of heaves and yanks. He kept looking across the bridge for some salvation from the others, which never came, of course. Gerst finally dialed, and again, he snatched up and back and flung the receiver against the wall. The other soldiers roared again.

This nonsense went on an entire afternoon. The soldier would march across the bridge, berate Gerst so that he'd worry and pout, then he'd try to call, and then he'd be shocked again.

Gerst eventually figured to try to call without holding the receiver at all. Evidently this indeed did avoid the shock, because he seemed able to successfully dial the other post and the others did answer. But, speaking on a receiver that now hung upside-down from the phone is tricky business. This was especially true in Gerst's case with him being large of body and confined to a closet-sized building. He tried first to speak into the microphone end then quickly adjust down to the receiver. His head bobbed down and up like a woodpecker. The soldier on the other side was barking into the phone, mock scolding while the other laughed. It seemed that Gerst couldn't make out anything being said, but concluded he was obviously in trouble. Using his coat folded over, he grabbed the receiver and hung it up, leaned back as far away as he could, and resumed staring at it.

Once, Gerst walked across the bridge himself for a face-to-face meeting, but the other guard yelled at him so fiercely about leaving his post that he didn't dare do it again. The electrical shock stung less than the Nazi reproach. Of course, as he plodded back to his post, both guards bowed over in silent laughter. My father said he too laughed, it was impossible not to. But, as Gerst ambled back across the bridge, hunched over in despair in the rainy snowy afternoon, my father said that he also felt a growing empathy for the poor fool.

"Man, he was a dumb bastard," my father recollected, "and I decided to help him."

The timing was good to help Gerst because the next day, the post on the German side of the bridge was abandoned. Apparently, the two soldiers had pulled the prank as a final send-off to Gerst. Either the Nazi higher-ups had decided one man, even a lout, could man this inconsequential bridge, or the war was going especially poorly for

Germany and that all able-bodied soldiers must be pushed to the front, or both. Either way, Gerst was free of his tormentors.

When my father arrived the next morning, he didn't go down by the river to his makeshift fort, but walked up to Gerst's post on the bridge. Gerst was inside motionless, staring at the phone. He stared despite the fact that there was no one to call. Gerst looked up at my father and in the beautifully clear way that the stupid speak, said, "Es ist kaputt." It is broken. My father said he offered to take a look, Gerst was relieved to allow someone else to touch the phone. My father opened the face plate and looked inside. It was surprisingly simple and bare. He saw a red wire that had been curled around attached with a screw head to the housing, he disconnected the wire, and then reconnected it beneath the wingnut from where it had obviously been loosened.

He slapped it shut, said, "Try it now." Gerst would not, but told my father to try it. My father did with no shock. The other sentinel post rang and Gerst beamed. Ecstatic, Gerst told my father to run across to the other post to test the phones. My father did so. The phone rang when Gerst called, my father picked up the phone, and Gerst exclaimed, "Sie fixiert!" You fixed! Upon his return, the two were friends and my father was a hero in Gerst's eyes.

My father said that crossing that bridge had felt like his first trip to Germany. As a smaller boy, the Nazi's had been rising and pushing and conquering. People fled away from Germany, not toward it. Of course he'd forded the river many times as it is little more than a bold brook, but legally walking across the bridge this time was different. With that crossing, the gears in my father's head began churning. The question Gerst had first ask my father—if he knew how to get any money—immediately returned. My father thought he indeed might know a way to get money and the way was to cross that bridge. This is how my father's business began, and how, I suppose, I became motivated to find a better way.

2 – Business

After establishing himself as a hero with Gerst, and with Gerst being the only guard on the bridge, my father gained essentially free access to cross into Germany and back. They had to be careful, or at least my father did because Gerst was so stupid. My father told Gerst that he would be Gerst's official errand-boy, running official duties for the Reich. Gerst nodded and agreed that that would be a good idea.

My father's plan was simple and it wasn't exactly a plan but more of a general concept—he was only 12 years old remember—he would begin a rudimentary import/export business across the bridge into Germany. As far as commodities or buyers or sellers, he had no idea as yet. He only knew that everyone in Loučná pod Klínovcem had very little of anything and that the German soldiers that he saw daily seemed to have much. Even the very morning he began, my father had eaten the heel of a loaf of bread, and was happy to have had it, yet Gerst had in his post a half a loaf of bread, with butter and jam. Though the Bohemians worked continually, there simply was nothing. The Nazis would not allow merchants into Germany to buy supplies as foodstuffs and other essentials were officially deemed too important for the war and that was the end of it. Commodities were requisitioned for the motherland from the hinterland, not exported to it.

In his mind's eye, my father saw a simple business model. He envisioned buying commodities in Germany, bringing them back to Loučná pod Klínovcem and selling them to the townsfolk at a slightly marked up rate to make a profit, then returning to do the same again. He would both be providing a service to the community and making some money for himself. That would be both moral and wise.

He told Gerst the plan and offered to split the earnings 50/50. Gerst of course agreed earnestly, and my father regretted offering such an equitable deal. But, the deal was set and that was over.

The problem, of course, was a Catch-22. My father had no money with which to begin buying commodities to sell, or, he had no commodities to sell in order to get money with which to buy. Whether to buy or sell first was easily answered because between the two of them Gerst and my father had exactly zero money. Gerst's wages as a soldier were a mystery to him, likely someone else took them and told him that the food he ate at the barracks in Oberwiesenthal were purchased with his salary. Clearly, that was not an option. So to begin his trade, my father would have to find something to sell.

As a 12 year old boy in Loučná pod Klínovcem during World War II, he had nothing to sell. Nothing at all. So, he imagined what he could find or scrounge and came up with only rocks or sticks. People don't buy them, unless they were building a house of stone, or perhaps firewood. Either way, selling sticks and rocks requires heavy lifting and hauling. The plan was not appealing.

Finally, sheer hunger gave my father his idea. While standing with Gerst at the bridge looking out across the river valley, and while hungry, he saw a large jackrabbit grazing below. Like in a cartoon, he pictured the rabbit cleaned and skinned and slowly roasting rotisserie-style over a fire. And that was it—he would begin by selling rabbits.

By the end of the day my father had built two "rabbit boxes." A rabbit box is a trap, a long box with a trigger on the far end and a trap door at its entrance. It can be made from scraps of discarded wood and tree branches, as my father did that day. With two traps and a half of an apple that Gerst provided as bait, the two were in business.

That evening, my father set the traps in the bulrushes down below the bridge near where he'd seen the jackrabbit.

"Tomorrow morning," my father told Gerst with a nod. Gerst smiled.

The next morning, up from the street that runs through Loučná pod Klínovcem and parallel to the puny river, my father plainly saw that one of his traps was still set, unmolested. He was disappointed. But, the other had indeed been tripped. He raced down to it and, sure enough, had captured a large jackrabbit, no doubt the same one he'd seen the day before.

My father picked up the rabbit box and raced up to Gerst. He proudly showed Gerst his prize, they both beamed with excitement. Gerst signaled for my father to cross over the bridge into Germany to begin looking for a buyer. My father did not hesitate, but crossed the bridge into Deutschland on official business for the first time in his life. My father had never been to Oberwiensenthal, of course. His only trips to Germany prior had been wading the river to the Deutsch side, and then two days before, crossing to the other side of the bridge. But, excitement and youth were with him and he set off confidently.

As he walked, reality began to grow and his confidence waned. Would be people be friendly? It was Nazi Germany after all. Rumors had been rampant of things that occurred there, but who could believe them? And besides, where was he going? He passed farms along the road to Oberwiesenthal, and then as he grew closer, houses, and then shops. His simple plan was that he would he ask someone at some point if they'd like to buy a rabbit? But for how much? He had no idea, but pressed on.

A man drove by on a wagon pulled by a mule. He looked down gruffly at my father and grunted the question, "What's in the box?"

"A rabbit," my father said proudly, "want to buy it?"

"I have no need for a damned rabbit. I have too many eating my vegetables right now. Get out of the way boy." The man passed on.

My father continued until the road evolved into more of a street and there were more shops than there were houses. Finally, amongst the shops, he came to a bakery. Although it was a very cold day (the cold

front that had dropped the rain and snow had passed and been replaced by the clear and cold air behind it) the bakery's door was open to exhaust the heat from the oven. The smell of fresh bread was intoxicating. My father walked inside, still carrying the rabbit box. My father stared at all of the bread and pastries, stunned. He drank in the aroma. A large, stout woman, a frau, appeared from a back room.

"May I help you?" she asked kindly.

My father stammered, ashamed because he had no money, but said, "Ich habe ein Kaninchen—I have a rabbit. Would you like to buy it?" He held up the rabbit box proudly. The frau looked at him curiously. Then, as a bit of salesmanship, my father thought to add, "Es ist groß—it is a large rabbit, caught this morning. He won't have any boils this time of year and would make a good pot pie." My father smiled at his good selling points, all true.

The lady too smiled and said, "Let me have a look at him."

My father opened the box, reached down, grabbed the rabbit by the ears, and hoisted him out. He held the rabbit up for inspection.

"Oh, ja," the lady said, "that is a good rabbit. How much do you want for it?"

This caught my father off guard. He had not prepared for a price. But instinctively, his eyes trained down onto a large loaf of pumpernickel bread.

"We will trade?" the frau had perceived his intentions.

"Yes, that loaf of bread for the rabbit," my father said.

"Oh no," the lady said, "that is not enough. You must have two loaves for such a large rabbit."

Returning, my father could not believe his good fortune. He now had two loaves of bread, a loaf of pumpernickel and a loaf of rye. His

goal of making money had not been met, but that was all the better. Since the first World War, Germany had been printing paper money and coining metal money in various fashions at breakneck speed. It was an endless chain of minting money and rising inflation until the money became useless, then starting over with a newly named and newly minted form of money. The Reichsmark, the current version of German money during the war, was suffering from wartime inflation and thereby declining in value, as they all eventually did. Money was questionable, but two loaves of fresh bread kept their value! The lesson my father learned that day was that the value of two loaves of bread equaled one large jackrabbit.

Gerst was ecstatic. He and his business partner had earned their first profit in that bread. The two decided that the pumpernickel would be enjoyed as something of a celebration. They split it and ate it whole right there at the sentinel post. The loaf of rye would be sold. And sure enough, my father quickly found a buyer for the loaf in Loučná pod Klínovcem who paid him with one of the newly minted coins for occupied German territories—a zinc coin with a hole in the center of 5 Reichspfennig. This was my father's first monetary profit. He quickly spent the 5 Reichspfennig on a small piece of cheese at the small market run in Loučná pod Klínovcem run by a Mr. Doubek, which he and Gerst shared.

For the next week, my father trapped and traded more rabbits. When he returned to the frau's bakery with a small rabbit, he was only awarded one loaf in return and walked back to Gerst somewhat disappointed. And when he bartered with a large but rangy rabbit, the frau pointed out the rabbit's frailties and said he wasn't worth two loaves as was the first plump rabbit. But, negotiating, my father made note of the rabbit's large-boned features and noted that he likely would yield more meat than one might expect if stewed in a pot. The frau concurred and agreed to a loaf-and-a-half.

My father was learning his lessons in business quickly: selling points matter, honesty matters, quality matters, negotiation matters. He

also was learning about value: one large, filled-out rabbit was worth two loaves of bread, a small rabbit worth one, and a large but skinny rabbit worth one-and-a-half loaves of bread. After selling a bit more bread and earning a bit more money, he again tried to purchase another piece of cheese, of the same size, from Mr. Doubek at his market back in Loučná pod Klínovcem. But, the Mr. Doubek said that the 5 Reichspfennig piece was no longer enough. The war was on and Germany was printing money to fund it and inflation was rising and it would now require a 10 piece coin to buy the cheese. Yet, when my father returned the next day to barter a loaf for a piece of cheese, Mr. Doubek gladly exchanged. Another lesson was branded into my father's brain—real items keep their value, minted money does not.

After that first week, my father's business began to grow and expand. He trapped rabbits until they were too thinned out and demand waned—one's appetite for rabbit stew has limits. So, he branched out. He still had a few coins that he'd earned so he could still buy and sell bread and did so. But there was a cheese shop near the bakery in Oberwiesenthal, with cheese of much better quality than was sold in Loučná pod Klínovcem. This was a natural opportunity and my father took it up. He bought the German cheese and then sold it back in Loučná pod Klínovcem at Doubek's Market from whom he'd bought his first piece of cheese. Both were happy with the deal and an ongoing business relationship was established.

Further down the street in Oberwiesenthal was a general market, much larger than the pitiful stand in Loučná pod Klínovcem. My father took visual inventory one day, purchased a few pieces of chocolate out of a splurge and whim, ate one, then returned to Loučná pod Klínovcem. He showed the chocolates to Mr. Doubek and allowed him to try one. It was delicious. Doubek would buy them. My father explained the variety of goods he could supply and asked the merchant if he would like any. Mr. Doubek was indeed interested and quickly made a list of items and quantities. As a budding business partner, and knowing he could easily

find and shake down this small boy, the store owner even supplied my father with a small cash advance.

From there, the import/export business boomed. Gerst too gained confidence and when other's inquired about crossing over into Germany in order to do what the enterprising Jandaček boy was doing, they were flatly denied. Gerst explained that crossing into Germany was flatly not permitted but that Matyáš Jandaček was on official government business supporting the war and was thereby given authorization. This was not negotiable.

Gerst was certainly doing his part to keep the monopoly intact. My father kept his end of the deal with Gerst, keeping things at 50/50, even though cheating Gerst would have been very easy for many reasons. Largely though, there was no reason to cheat him anyway—all revenue went straight back into the business to buy more product. The only profits gleaned from the business were loaves of bread or chunks of cheese, or by this point, links of knackwurst, leberwurst spread over hard bread, or slices of landjäger during the warmer months. All of these items were joyfully shared in Gerst's cozy sentinel post.

The business grew further. My father was born with the gift of business acumen. Adroitly, even as a boy, he saw that he was only a middle-man. And, though profitable, profits would be greater if he were also the retailer, rather than Doubek. Rather than cut out the middle-man, he would cut out the end-man and become both. So, he opened his own shop.

My father's shop was a hovel of a shack. He scavenged his little fort from down by the river, rummaged some more loose boards from a farm and fashioned them together into a three-sided hut. A grown person could hunch inside and fend off rain and snow, generally. This shack was erected along the *ulice*, the main street, of Loučná pod Klínovcem looking out across the river. It was only two buildings down from Doubek's Market with whom my father had been doing business. Doubek

was not pleased with the new competition, of course, and might have been able to have my father shut down by authorities on grounds of some health-related premise. But, the ramshackle store run by a small boy did seem innocuous enough. Plus, the Doubek's business was going through something of a mini-boom thanks to my father's new supplies. Inasmuch, he relied on my father's favor. He would put up with the new competition.

The cheese shop in Germany also sold a small vintage of wines. Having turned 13 at the end of the year, my father was prepared to begin dealing in spirits. Various reds and Rieslings began turning up for sale in my father's shack. Buyers were quickly found and my father quickly learned his customers' preferences. Turning over alcohol proved to be lucrative, relative to his other products. But at this point, my father had a built up a rather cosmopolitan inventory of wines and spirits, foods and foodstuffs, and knickknacks of all types—either those requested by his customers or things that capture a 13 year-old boy's eye. Either way, the shack was quickly being outgrown. Changes were coming.

3 – Rates

By the end of the war, my father had bought out Doubek's Market in Loučná pod Klínovcem, his only competitor. The old man was happy to sell out, even at a cut-rate deal for my father. He knew that he was being beaten and he could see that the town was dying anyway. My father paid with a sack of cash. The day after he sold, he and his wife left cash-in-hand and moved somewhere to the Czech interior. My father now had a real shop, still crude as it was by today's standards, but at least one with four walls and wood plank flooring rather than three and dirt.

Gerst was still manning the bridge. He was a fixture by then. More likely, as the Nazis retreated back toward Berlin, useless outposts such as his had been all but forgotten. He was still an equal partner with my father. A sign was even painted and erected above the store's entrance that announced in red letters, "G-J Market", short for Gerst-Jandaček Market. Gerst's name could not be printed on the sign, of course, but my father made it clear to Gerst that the G was for him. Gerst was immensely proud of the sign and the market. He could see it from his post, and spent most of his day looking at the store rather than eyeing the bridge. He promised after the war to join my father and work at the market.

The G-J Market did very well. My father hired his first employee—a widowed woman with four children. She manned the store in the mornings with the kids behind the counter while he went to Oberwiesenthal for purchasing. Still only in his middle teens, my father had learned much about running a business, yet a new lesson was brewing—that of exchange rates.

The Nazis, of course, ruled what was Czechoslovakia then. The Germans dictated official currency and they set official exchange rates. The rates were not fluid or natural, to be worked out in an open market between two people the way my father and the frau had negotiated rabbits-for-bread. Rather, Germany simply set the rates. The rates were

first set rather arbitrarily by some Nazi bureaucrat, but later, the rates were tweaked so that in every exchange the Nazis sliced off a gain in their favor. The Slovak koruna was initially set at a rate of .1 koruna to one Reichsmark. Later, it was pinched down to .086 koruna to one Reichsmark, though on the street the .1 rate was normally used, it being much simpler to calculate on the fly in the markets.

The pertinent point here is that these rates were entirely artificial. Who was to say a koruna was worth only a tenth of a Reichsmark? Or, why was a Reichsmark ten times more valuable than a koruna, especially when the Reichsmarks were being printed and minted at ever faster rates as the war drug on and the Reich was falling. The Nazis had entered into a printing race. As they ran out of money, they began trying to literally generate more by printing and coining more. Of course, the more money that was invented from air, the less it was worth and the more ridiculous the exchange rates became.

My father largely ignored the Nazis, except for two reasons. First, by 1944, he was nearly 16 years old. With the Nazis becoming increasingly desperate, they might conscript him at any time and pretend his was older. Looking back, there was less than a year in the war, but my father didn't know that at the time, of course. From his view, the war had been going on most of his life and it may be going on years more. Running a market, he couldn't hide. Secondly, the artificial exchange rates were cutting into profits.

The problem wasn't even in dealing with his sellers in Germany. My father had built good relationships with them. As business partners, the trade benefited both sides. And personally, the Germans seemed to like this energetic, industrious boy with a quick smile. Plus, in trade, negotiations would dominate exchange rates. And besides, simply agreeing to the deal meant agreeing to the terms. If either side didn't like the deal, it was simply rejected—the purest form of laissez-faire economics there is. Each person makes his own decision, each person does what's best for himself, and both people benefit.

Rather, the problem came when Nazi officials visited the store and requisitioned Czech money. They would demand that all Slovak koruna money be exchanged for Reichsmarks, at the official exchange rate. This, of course, was selling money at a bargain price. There was nothing to do but to go along with the shake-down, else the market would be raided and shut down. Even more infuriating, it became clear to my father that the soldiers were doing this clearly on their own. When they needed a bit of cash for a night of drinking and carousing, his market was an easy target.

This exchange rate business boiled my father. He was an honest man, even as a teenage boy. The easiest example is his fair dealings with Gerst. But to my father, what the Nazis were doing was nothing short of stealing. It could be called official business and official exchange rates, but it was stealing.

Years later, my father enjoyed telling and re-telling these stories of his early years. My father pointed out to me several times the oddity here regarding our names, Matyáš and Matthäus. Both are variations of Matthew, in Czech and German, the disciple whom Jesus rescued from a career of shaving taxes for personal profit. Indeed, the irony is blunt.

There were other problems. The town of Loučná pod Klínovcem was drying up. The population had dwindled from a couple of thousand down to several hundred. The war and its chaos had ruined the economy. What was a starving person to do other than take to foot and go somewhere else? Abutting Nazi Germany, there was no direction to go except southward, away from Loučná pod Klínovcem and away from Germany. This migration meant, of course, fewer and fewer customers at the G-J Market. Fewer customers meant fewer sales which meant my father wound up with fewer worthless Reichsmarks.

4 – Change

September of 1944 was the turning point for my father and it happened in a rather dramatic manner. One morning, September 11 no less, he was making his run to Oberwiesenthal to make his purchases. By this time, he pulled a rickety hand cart loaded with product that clacked over the stones on the dirt road. The trip had become old-hat by this time and he'd come to enjoy the scenery of the Ore Mountains while walking. There was something peacefully soothing about the mindless physical activity of walking and looking.

Then he heard planes droning on the horizon. Planes overhead were not uncommon, there was a war on, of course. But these were different, were in formation, were large bombers, and were numerous—dozens in all. As they drew nearer, a large pack of fighters intercepted them. Immediately the situation was clear—with their minimal range, the fighters had to be German and therefore the bombers were American. When they drew nearer, and even at their high altitude, my father recognized the B-17s with their definitive profile.

My father told me how he was surprised at how quickly things began to happen then. The German fighters swarmed the bombers who were largely helpless. A plane of that size and of that much weight usually breaks apart as it falls. My father said the B-17s began falling all around Oberwiesenthal. Fourteen B-17s would eventually go down. More than twice that many German fighters went down after the American fighters arrived and fought back. My father said it was like planes raining from the sky that day.

As he stood dumbstruck with his cart of goods, my father watched one of the earlier B-17s go down only a couple of miles away, just over a knoll. With both wings mostly broken off, he said it fell like a dropped loaf of bread. The townsfolk were rousted out of their houses and shops

at the droning sound overhead and stood watch as the air battle took place. No doubt that people, and Nazi soldiers, would arrive very soon.

The curiosity was palpable. My father said he left all of his goods in the cart alongside the dirt road and lit out as fast as he could run toward the crash site. At the top of the knoll, he paused to catch his breath and survey the scene. He said that there was little to see, just a crushed fuselage surrounded by debris. There was no fire, very little smoke. He said it that, but for the small amount of smoke or steam venting, it looked as though it could have been there for years already. He ran to the site to scavenge for souvenirs before the Nazis arrived and cordoned off the area.

Around the plane he said there was nothing but scrap metal, some type of insulation, and what looked like cardboard ripped and strewn around. There were some papers written in English which he could not read, but he grabbed some as souvenirs in case he found nothing better. Then he walked to the front of the plane, which had been ripped open, to peer inside. He reported that there was little to see. There was only twisted metal, wires, more insulation. He saw no signs of any people, alive or dead. Where had they gone? He wondered. Had they parachuted out? He hadn't seen any.

He knew he had very little time—minutes at most—before someone would arrive. And, once the Nazis arrived, they would demand he hand over anything that he rummaged. So, if he was to grab souvenirs it would have to be fast. He rummaged a bit at the entrance to the plane but found little. He did pick up a small piece of metal with the green paint on the outside. It would be neat to say, "This is a piece of an American B-17," to anyone who'd listen. Outside, he found a few more trinkets—another piece of metal, a pen, another piece of paper. Then he saw the body.

Outside the plane and perhaps thirty yards away lay a dead airman. My father looked around, no one was coming yet. The arrival of

others was imminent. The curiosity was thicker than even before, so my father slowly walked over. My father said he was sure the scene would be gruesome up close and wondered if he could stomach it. As he neared, the dead man appeared unhurt. There was no sign of trauma, no blood, no ripped clothing. My father wondered if the airman was "playing possum," as they say, and would lunge at him at any moment. He looked for signs of breathing and saw none. My father watched the man carefully for any signs of life. There were none.

The airman wore pins on his uniform which caught my father's eye. The meaning of the pins was unknown and my father didn't know how to determine the man's rank, but those pins would be fantastic souvenirs. Then, after circling the man, what really caught my father's eye was the handgun holstered on the dead man's hip. The pistol off a dead American airman would be a priceless souvenir.

But, was he dead? Or, would he draw the weapon and fire? My father knew that time was very short. The man lay on his back with his head cocked sideways. My father said he approached the man slowly toward his feet with the man's face looking the other direction so that he could not be seen. When he was close enough, my father sharply kicked the bottom of the man's boot. There was no reflex. He kicked again, and again, there was nothing. My father described kicking the man as being like kicking a sack of oats. Still, not completely sure, my father picked up stone the size of a man's fist and hurled it at the man's chest. The rock thudded and bounced away without any response.

Satisfied that indeed the man was dead, my father quickly unsnapped the holster, and withdrew the pistol. He looked at it a brief moment, intoxicated by it. Then he ran.

As he ran he considered ditching his wagon and bolting back across the bridge. But, he'd made a heavy load of the trip and throwing it all away seemed very ill-advised and poor business. Plus, no one was to be seen as he arrived back to the wagon. So, he began pulling it as

quickly as he could. He knew that he had to get out of sight before anyone else arrived. If the Nazis arrived, they'd halt him, question him, and search him for sure. Not only would the pistol be confiscated, all of his goods would be too. He might be arrested as well. If any townsfolk were to arrive and see him leaving they likely wouldn't stop him. But, the soldiers would eventually question them and they'd mention the boy with the cart leaving the scene. Everyone knew who he was and where his shop was located. The soldiers would then only arrive at the shop in Loučná pod Klínovcem to question, confiscate and seize there. The results would be even worse than simply losing a wagonload.

He decided to ditch the pistol. The roadside was strewn with rocks the size of a man's fist and some stones as big as a cow's head. Underneath one of the larger stones my father huddled out a small cove and placed the pistol there. He also placed the small mementos from the plane there, so that he'd have nothing from the plane in case the Nazis indeed stopped him. Then he replaced the rock.

The plan was to return that night and retrieve the gun under cover of darkness. He was sure he'd remember the correct spot and the correct rock, but he needed to be doubly sure. So, he edged another large rock out into road as a marker—not too far that someone would be inclined to move it out of the roadway, but far enough so that it was noticeable.

It was a good thing that my father hid the gun because the Nazi soldiers did track him down just before crossing the bridge. They questioned him about the crash. He said that he had indeed seen it come down, but lied and said that he didn't go over to it. He said he was afraid and wanted to hurry back to town. The soldiers bought the lie, gave my father and his wagon a cursory search, then let him go. They were eager to get to the crash site and inspect the plane themselves.

The plane had gone down in the morning. My father said that waiting for darkness was the longest few hours of his life. But, he knew that the duration was to his benefit. The Nazis would have considerable

research and paperwork to carry out with the plane. Plus, my father had to remind himself, there were many downed American bombers, not to mention thirty or so German fighters that had also come down. And to boot, there may be American airman at large, not likely, but possible. Returning too early, and at night, would be a dead giveaway that he was up to something. Sneaking around in the dark, he might even get himself shot by a jumpy soldier. So, he waited until after midnight.

After crossing the bridge back into Germany, my father moved off of the road into the fields. He traveled about 200 meters parallel to the road. Certainly, there would be guards at the crash site to stop looters. Likely, there would be soldiers at checkpoints along all roads. Indeed, there were pairs of soldiers stationed at intersections. There was enough of a moon to allow for some sight. But, being off road and in the dark, my father was unseen.

As the neared where the plane had gone down my father faced a dilemma—should he stay off road and risk missing the marker he'd placed in the road or should he track over to the road to find the marker and risk being caught. He wished he'd had the foresight to have hidden the pistol away from the road. But, he hadn't, so there was no use in beating himself up over that. He decided the road was too risky. He'd stay away from the road until he knew where he was.

Finding the spot was easy enough. The Nazi soldiers had erected floodlights around the crash site so that my father saw it glowing well up ahead over the knoll. When he came up out of a declivity and peaked a small hill, he saw the plane illuminated as in daylight. Several soldiers milled around.

My father slunk back into the declivity then cut straight over toward the road. He proceeded slowly so that his motion would not reveal him. At the road he ran quickly, looking for the stone marker. He soon found the stone marker, unmolested. He uncovered the large stone where hid hidden the pistol. He told me he was sure that it would be gone—

confiscated by the Nazis. But, there it was, just as he'd left it. He pocketed the gun quickly, along with the papers and pen as souvenirs.

My father said that he'd never run as fast as he did that night. To be found slinking around in the dark, carrying an American pistol and papers that a German likely couldn't read…my father said he didn't even want to think about what the Nazis would do if they caught him.

Fortunately, he made it back to the bridge. Usually, no one would be guarding the bridge. Gerst was the only guard these days and he only stood sentinel during the day. But, with the day's activities, someone different might have been appointed.

My father doubled back a mile or two then waded the small river. He held the pistol in his hand so that it would not get wet. He said it felt like he has invading an enemy territory—wading a river, gun-in-hand.

When he arrived at his home he snuck in so that his mother would not be awakened. Him carousing at night with a gun would not have gone over well. He got into bed, both terrified and thrilled.

I realize this is a somewhat long story about a pistol and might be a bit perplexing to anyone reading this. I can hear the question being asked, "What does this have to do with Satoshi Nakamoto's biography?" Well, there are three answers here. First, that pistol, which we later learned was a Colt .45 M1911-A1, is perhaps my most prized possession today. It's my link to my father. Secondly, there's more of a story yet to come regarding that pistol. Eventually, I think, it will come to say something about the formation of who I am. And thirdly, this is *my* autobiography and I'll include whatever I damn well want.

5 – Move

The war was very hard on Loučná pod Klínovcem and therefore was very hard on my father's business. On the one hand, one might say that he was thriving. His business indeed grew, maybe even prospered, at least to the degree that a business could under a communist government. He met a pretty girl named Vicktorie while doing business in Prague. She was the owner's daughter, and he took a liking to the ambitious boy from the mountains. He often invited my father to lunch with the family in the anteroom of his shop and made sure that his daughter was present.

A courting ensued, followed by an engagement, and then by a marriage. Children soon followed. A girl was born, my sister Kveta. She is brilliant and is now a medical doctor. Two years later my brother Evžen was born. He is also brilliant and now operates several businesses. Several years later, in 1960, I was born as a complete surprise. I am the dullard of the lot. My family lived in a stone house in Loučná pod Klínovcem uphill along the main street from my father's shop.

Despite these good things in life, it had become pointless to run a business like my father's. The communist party took more and more of whatever was made. What would later be called the "Laffer Curve" was tangibly at play with my father—the more he worked and made, the more the government took. Like a sapling bending over under the weight of a behemoth which has climbed its trunk, the sapling eventually gives way and bows to the ground. If left encumbered, it will eventually die. So, my father began to do the only reasonable thing—work less and earn less. And he began seeking a way out.

What's more, Loučná pod Klínovcem was drying up. The war had driven most of the population away. The population had dwindled from the thousands down into the hundreds. Everyone had either fled the Nazi influence to Prague or to Western Europe, or they crossed into Germany.

The iron mines in Oberwiesenthal were enjoying a flowering of sorts. There was work to be had so people moved there. Skiing had not yet become the tourist draw that it is today, but mining jobs were open for those strong of back. Nevertheless, the town of Loučná pod Klínovcem was all but gone—certainly a market could not be sustained without any townsfolk. So, with only a few hundred buyers in the potential market, my father decided to move. This was a business decision. Later, my father would slowly begin making major decisions less based on concrete business facts and more on nebulous ideals. It's funny, but as a boy, his business mind was flawless. As he matured and aged, that adroit ability to immediately and flawlessly make business decisions waned. Other matters became more influential in his decision-making—matters that were not especially good for business—but perhaps good in another sense. I hope what's written here will enlighten these points later.

The obvious question when my father announced that we were moving was, "Where?" and the obvious answer was, "Prague." My mother seemed to yearn to move to Prague—there were many people that we knew already there, and some family members. Namely, Kveta was there, living with a man she'd fallen in love with, but whom the family hardly knew. She was studying medicine, which was wonderful, but my mother worried that the whole situation was unhealthy. It was, of course, and Kveta eventually saw it for what it was and she threw the fellow out. Evžen had also long moved out. He moved through Europe the way locusts float on the wind. We never knew where he was at any particular time. We'd get postcards and letters sporadically from all points of Europe, usually the more exotic places, even Western Europe somehow. By all accounts, he was living well and enjoying life, though we were perplexed at how he got the money and permission to do the things he did. There was a small sense that snuck in from somewhere that told us not to ask, but only be happy for him and to pray.

My father balked at the idea of moving to Prague. There were already many shops in Prague, but that would be the case anywhere

except for another small town. Instead, my father desired a better life in an even bigger market. The Eastern European countries were not the place for a strong future. That meant looking to the West.

"We're moving to London," Father announced one evening. It was 1970, I was nearly 10 years old. With Kveta and Evžen gone, only my mother and I were at home with father when he announced that London would be our new home.

"London?" my mother was shocked. "How?" Her question was prudent. 1970 was Czechoslovakia, not the Czech Republic. A Soviet-run puppet government was in place in Prague. "Travel is not permitted now."

That was an understatement. After the "Prague Spring" two years earlier, the Soviets had clamped down on foreign travel. What's more, my father had met with Alexander Dubček as a "business leader in the region" on at least one occasion. Dubček had been the architect of the Prague Spring—a movement to liberalize Czechoslovakia from the yoke of the Soviets. His main call-to-arms was his cry for free speech. Therefore, he was an arch-enemy of the U.S.S.R. The meeting had been attended by many people far wealthier and more powerful than my father. My father was no one of consequence. But, his name in attendance put him, and our family, in jeopardy.

Dubček was a socialist. At the time, Father loved Dubček or at least his ideals, simply because they offered far more freedom than Soviet communism. Years later, the policies of Dubček would be despised by my father as socialist. But, in 1968, Dubček offered a breath of classical liberalism that was refreshing in a nation with little hope.

Until this point, politics was of no concern or interest to my father or my family. Business, and hard money, always trumped silly policy. Even in the days of Nazi Germany, there had always been ways around politics. Even a nitwit like Gerst saw this. Under Soviet occupation, there was no way to circumnavigate the reach of the government. Brezhnev

was a communist of the old order and was pressured by communists of even a harder line. A local deputy in the communist party visited my father one day and informed him there would be a new tax levied on his business. When Father pressed, the deputy said that it would be a monthly tithe, collected by the deputy personally, “For the good of the people in these desperate times,” the man had said. My father immediately saw the situation clearly. My father agreed and the deputy left.

The next day, my father announced to Mother and me over dinner, “We cannot stay. We are in peril here. We must get out of Bohemia,” Father stated flatly.

“People have died trying.”

“Let me handle that. I’ve spoken with people. I’ve made many connections in my work. There are ways.” Father said these things as though there was not to be discussion. Then he ate some more soup, then added, “We will leave soon. We must travel light. You can take only one bag.”

There was nothing else to say. Both Mother and I simply nodded and went back to eating our bread and lentils.

Father had been “squirreling” his money, as they say. Thanks to his hard work, his business acumen, and Mother’s prudence and thrift, they had amassed a fairly solid amount of money. Plus, he had been for some time now, allowing the stock in his market to dwindle. Or more precisely, he simply stopped replenishing the stock. Certain items had actual, real value, like flour or canned goods or cloth. Those he sold, but did not refresh. This was apparent to no one, not even Mother or myself, since it was such a gradual diminishing of stock in the store. For the knickknacks, like potholders or mugs, these items sold infrequently and their presence on the store shelves gave the impression of continuity. The truth was that Father had planned it so that at the right time, we would simply walk away. Anything left in the store could be had by whomever

wished to have it. And that is what we did. I've often wondered who owns Father's market today, and who lives in our stone home in Loučná pod Klínovcem.

Within the month, we were on the narrow gauge Fichtelberg train bound out of Oberwiesenthal. We each traveled with one suitcase, just as Father had said. It was the old mining train and we boarded and rode with hundreds of sooty workers out of the Wismut who smelled like a musty vegetable cellar. Out of fatigue and respect, no one spoke. Father had the family's life savings tucked into a billfold and stuffed into his chest pocket where he could feel it even if he dozed. He'd even had Mother sew the pocket shut to ward off pickpockets. This money was to seed a new market and a new life for us. Father also had the .45 automatic pistol from the American bomber packed in his case at his feet.

When we arrived at the terminus in Cranszahl, everyone debarked, of course. My father had said that we would then transfer to another train, a standard gauge to Leipzig, then travel on to Poland. But at Cranszahl, my father grew hesitant as he surveyed the situation. The train was obviously full of mine workers traveling home. It was loading with workers traveling to the mines in Oberwiesenthal. A husband, wife, and boy purchasing a ticket to Poland would certainly raise questions. Instead, Father walked to the station and purchased three tickets straight back to Oberwiesenthal. We rode the train back from where we just came.

"We're going into town," my father announced to my mother and I. "We'll spend a few days here."

We rented a room for four days in Oberwiesenthal. Though I'd been there many times with my father on his business trips, it was odd to be there in that capacity. We were, in essence, vacationers. And that is exactly what my father had wanted it to appear like. He told everyone we were on vacation celebrating his and Mother's 23rd anniversary, "Lucky 13th-plus-10," he said. It was complete twaddle and shite, of course, for a

couple or reasons. First, their 23rd anniversary had already come and gone in June. And more importantly, he was not a believer in luck. Father saw "luck" as a word used by people too lazy to work for whatever they wished to be lucky. Luck was an excuse and luck was a cop-out. If you wanted something, you were to work for it, not hope for luck to bring it. Even more importantly, as an evangelical in the Moravian church, the term "luck" was not welcome. It smacked of throwing one's fate toward sorcery, rather than holding fast in faith in the Triune God. "*Sola fide*, faith alone," Father would say. "There is no such thing as luck. Luck is for the lazy and the lost."

Latin aside, a lucky 13th-plus-10 anniversary was a tremendous alibi. Since my father told everyone, everywhere of the anniversary, and told it with a broad smile, we were treated as royalty. We ate out each evening and proprietors offered complimentary glasses of champagne or desserts. We toured the spots that were becoming tourist sites, even the ski slopes which were of course closed at the time. We visited several of the wooden toy shops that are famous in the region. Father bought a small crèche, a hand carved nativity scene, for Mother and a small figure of an ice skater for me. On Sunday we attended church in the beautiful Martin Luther Church that dominates the Oberwiesenthal skyline. Father dropped his name many times with anyone who'd listen. He was sure to sign the registry everywhere that we went, especially at the church where records were kept meticulously.

The entire ordeal was only a front of course—we were to look the part of a happy family, on holiday, celebrating an important anniversary. The purpose was to set a trail of breadcrumbs for any officials who might become suspicious. The odd thing was that by acting the part of being on a carefree holiday, it indeed felt that way. The three of us, even Mother, genuinely seemed to thoroughly enjoy our façade holiday in Oberwiesenthal. Many times in the years to come we'd think back on and speak fondly of those days. I wish I still had that ice skater carving. Sadly, I don't even know what ever became of it.

After our made-up holiday in Oberwiesenthal, we waved goodbye to our motel hosts and hired a driver to return us to Loučná pod Klínovcem. At the checkpoint—the old bridge where Gerst had once stood sentinel—the communist guard now stood. He was completely inept in all ways and completely ambivalent to his job. That he had to stop and listen to us as we crossed was an infringement on his doing nothing. But, that was good for us. Our driver explained we were returning from holiday, "Our anniversary," Father added. The guard was annoyed at all the chatter and waved us across. It was strange being back in Loučná pod Klínovcem, since we'd just left for good a few days prior, but also because we did not return home. Father simply had us dropped off at the bus station. There, we waited.

The new plan was to visit my aunt in Gdansk. Of course, there was no aunt in Gdansk, but we were on our way to see her since it's been so long. And with the anniversary and all! Father suggested that we avoid East Germany. Split Germany was likely the highest profile of the Eastern European nations. We'd laid tracks there as vacationers and exiting soon after might raise eyebrows. Poland was less likely to draw attention. Father's plan was clever. He saw two options—to cross into Poland at either a major crossing where sheer numbers work to any one individual's advantage, or at an obscure post where the inept are stationed and no one really cares. Such as with Loučná pod Klínovcem. Eventually, he decided on a large post. He compared it to a herd of gazelles. He said there had been some study where they discretely marked a gazelle with paint then came back later to see if he'd been eaten by lions. The odds were very low that they it had been eaten. But, if they painted the gazelle brightly so that he stood out from the group, it was eaten every time. The lesson was clear—do nothing to stand out, stay amid the crowd, we'll be fine.

The reality was that we didn't exactly get a choice as to where to cross. We crossed where the bus crossed. But, by simply keeping our heads down and shuffling along quietly we hoped to pass. As we

approached the checkpoint, Father was calm, as always, but Mother was immensely nervous.

"They will know," she said. "They will know." My father tried to calm her and told her to shush. "And you have a gun," she said.

"Shush," Father said sternly. Then more gently, "It will be alright." Mother took a deep breath and quieted.

"Visiting my sister in Gdansk," Father said to the man checking Father's papers. I still don't know where he got those papers or what they said. But, like my father had said, he knew people. When the man grunted and nodded, Father added, "It's our anniversary too." The man grunted again, he could have cared less about some Czech's anniversary, and waved us along. And that was that. We crossed into town and Father smiled at us. Mother took another deep breath and gave an exhale of relief. This section had thankfully been uneventful. Besides, crossing into Poland was not the hairy part of the trip. Poland was, after all, a member of the Eastern bloc. The trick would be to get out of the East.

We were unaware then, but Gdansk was steaming to a boil. It was October of 1970 when we were there. The "Polish protests" would begin only two months later. The scene was chaotic when the protests unfurled across Poland. Scores were killed and hundreds were injured by police and soldiers.

It was there in Gdansk that Lech Wałęsa got his start as leader of the Solidarity Movement. In the movement, the Polish workers went on strike. Their strike was very different from strikers today. Strikes today are for more-pay-for-less-work. Every time. Labor unions say their complaints are for safety or working conditions or "fair pay" (of course, true fair pay is what the wage that a worker agrees to work for, else, he won't work). Honestly, try to find an example today where unions are not seeking more-pay-for-less-work. You'll be stumped.

Today's strikes are *against capitalism*. Strikers wish to throw out market principles and replace them with edicts, that is, "collective bargaining agreements" that bind regardless of a person's effort. In Bitcoin terms, proof-of-work is absent. Only proof-of-being-in-the-union qualifies a person for benefits. A worker in today's modern labor unions is expected to gain increased wages and benefits based simply on being a part of the union, not due to his or her work. Even more disgustingly, the money taken from the union members in the form or union dues largely goes to political support. Candidates today who pledge support to unions, and who pledge to continue the policies of redistribution, receive the unions' monetary and publicly-stated support.

Unlike today's strikes, the Solidarity strikes in Poland then were strikes were *against communism*—against taking from the productive and redistributing their fruits elsewhere. It was the Laffer Curve of Father's little market, swollen to a national scale. The Solidarity strikes were essentially strikes *for capitalism*. Along with freedoms desired, the workers simply wished to keep the fruits of their labors—which may be the greatest freedom. These events are immaterial to my biography, as they occurred two months after we had been in Gdansk. But, in some way, they feel as being a part of my story. Inasmuch as Solidarity helped bring down the failed economic system of communism, my passing through Gdansk at the very outset and my later creation of Bitcoin, somehow, seem connected.

To escape the Eastern bloc, Father said we'd have to be very, very careful. We would spend a few days in Gdansk on holiday again. But, he would be working out a way for us to pass. As it turned out, we were in Gdansk only two days. We took up at a small inn run by an elderly couple on the western side of town. Father left Mother and I and he went to meet with someone about our passage. Since it was a beautiful Fall day, I convinced Mother to leave the inn and go for a walk. We walked down to the main canal of Gdansk. The sounds of hustling people on the cobblestone paths, the blue sky and sunlight on the water, and the smell

of fresh bread from the shops was intoxicating. Mother and I forgot our apprehension for a short while. We sat on a bench and watched the boats traverse the canal. Having never seen the sea, I was enraptured. This was only a canal, but the size of the vessels made it clear they were seagoing. I looked forward to being aboard a ship at sea.

On the second night, or early that morning rather, Father woke Mother and I and said, “We are leaving now.”

We gathered our things and walked to the shipyards, perhaps two miles away. Father later said that was the most frightened he’d ever been. A family walking with suitcase-in-hand in the wee hours of the morning…that was a brightly painted gazelle. We entered a shabby metal building that had no door, Father went to find someone who he said would meet us. When they returned, we walked the gangway and boarded a small freighter nearby, then climbed down into the hold. We settled in among the freight. The man brought two rickety metal chairs. “That’s all we have,” he said.

“That’ll be fine,” my father replied.

“You are to stay here. I’ll bring food and water later,” the man said, then he pointed to a narrow door in the corner labeled ‘Lavatory.’ Father nodded. Then he left. True-to-his word, he brought food and water twice a day, for three days. I was upset that I wouldn’t be able to see the sea after all. I saw nothing, not even the shipping channel because it was pitch dark when we boarded and because we spent the next three days below in the hold. Three days in a ships hold is an eternity for a ten year old boy. There was nothing to do. Father spoke of plans for his new market. Mother read from her Bible. I wandered the hold, repeatedly, and slept as often as I could to avoid the boredom. There was a mouse that made occasional appearances and I busied myself with trying to catch it. Of course, I never did.

After three days at sea, when the man brought us our food and water, he said, “You can come up on the deck now. We are in free waters.” The three of us smiled.

Apparently, we’d steamed through the Baltic, past Copenhagen, through the Skagerrak, and into the North Sea. Finally, I saw the sea. I was immediately smitten. I stood on the bow of the small freighter, leaned out, and looked down to watch the hull divide the waters and hurl whitewater to starboard and port. England eventually came into view. First it was nothing but a faint grayness on the horizon and I wondered if it was actually land or just clouds playing tricks on my eyes. Eventually, the grayness became uneven and it was obvious that it was land. I fetched Mother and Father up to the deck to see, it was impossible to not grow excited with anticipation.

More and more ships began to be seen and passed in the opposite direction. Hours later, a gap emerged in the land—the entrance to the River Thames. We headed up the gut of the river and began steaming upstream. I stood on the bow and watched the ships and sailboats and buildings pass by as excited as I’d ever been. The weather had turned into a cold mist, but I was unfazed by the gloominess. It seemed to take forever for the freighter to dock, but finally it did. Though we didn’t know at the time, we had docked at Tilbury Town on the River Thames, some 25 miles downstream of central London. A custom agent met us as we debarked. Mother was very tense, father didn’t show it, but must have been. He gave us a nod to say, ‘It’ll be okay.’

The agent was kind and worked with us. “Seeking political asylum?” he asked and wrote it in his log book as he asked.

“Yes,” Father simply said. It was, in fact, very true. Of course that wasn’t the main reason we were leaving—we left seeking a better life, but it was true enough.

“What special skills do you have to offer the British Commonwealth?” the man asked.

“I am a businessman. I operate a market that serves the community by providing essential goods.” There was something about the brutal honesty in my father’s voice, the flat truth of what he said, that brought a slightly impressed look over the agent’s expression. “I have done it in Bohemia, I will do it here,” Father added. My father’s unswerving conviction was undeniable. The customs agent gave a frown of a nod and pushed a paper at my father, said, “Sign here.” My father did. The man ripped off a carbon copy, gave it to Father, and said, “Welcome to England,” then waved us along. And it was done.

It was October of 1970 when we arrived in London proper. I only remember this because we spent my tenth birthday in a room in a shanty of a “motel”, which was a rented room actuality, watching gray rain out of its window. My father was excited about the prospects of London at first. He wanted to scout the city, as best as he could, to find a location for a market. Or better, he wished to discover a poorly run market whose owner was willing to sell then swoop in on the opportunity.

A money problem quickly became apparent, namely currency conversion. Father carried his life fortune in Czech koruna money (because the elderly couple at the inn had been kind enough to accept the Czech money, he hadn’t bothered exchanging it to the Polish złoty). The Czech koruna was, of course, useless in Great Britain. Being Eastern European money, it was less than useless. After some asking and searching, he located a money exchanger. The prospects were not good as the exchange rate was difficult to ascertain. The koruna was infamous for inflation. And being behind the Iron Curtain, straight exchanges didn’t take place in a truly open market. They were masked behind shady, street-level money-exchangers. In all actuality, the exchange rate wasn’t even the problem. A fair rate could have been figured. Rather, it was the exchange fee that was the problem. The exchange fee was exorbitant. My father essentially said to hell with him, found another money exchanger, then found the same rates. The game was stacked against my father—he held worthless paper and they knew it. To change that paper into

something of value that he could use would exact a hefty price. Just as the money exchanger saw the worthlessness of the paper in his pocket, my father quickly did as well. So, he reluctantly made the conversion. The exchange was costly—in one deal, fully a quarter of my father's wealth was taken from him.

My father was a strong man. It had hurt to make that deal, but he shook it off. He was also a very practical man. He had faced struggles and setbacks in his life too many times to whimper and give in. He pressed on with confidence.

The following days, the same routine played out each day. Father would wake the three of us early in the morning with great energy. "Today may be the day!" he said. We ate bread and butter and drank coffee for breakfast. My father mulled over maps he'd purchased, analyzing roads, intersections, parks, schools, population centers. It was as though he entered all of these variables into a mental linear regression model to best predict a suitable location for a market—only a natural business man has a brain that works in that manner. Then Father would kiss my mother and light out to catch a cab to the locale he'd pinpointed.

My father was in his early 40s at the time—still young enough of a man to feel bulletproof enough to move to a foreign country with only what could be carried. This was his adventure and it was playing out each day. But, there was little for Mother and me to do while he was gone. Unlike Father, Mother was unenthused about the whole endeavor. Mother worried immensely. Moving as we did, with few belongings and knowing no one, is much harder on a woman than a man. Still, we were determined to make the best of it. I quickly grew restless and a deep curiosity of this great city began to swell inside me. Mother was uninterested in leaving the room, but I began to explore. I didn't go far because there was little to see in Tilbury Town. Mostly it was just apartments with small walled backyards. I spent much of the time down by the channel to the River Thames. From there, a vista of gray spread out and looking westward I could imagine the great city. It began to

become apparent that there was much to this city and to this country. Although Mother was still very hesitant about the moves and the uncertainty of it all, as I was young, I began to assimilate quickly. And the same excitement that burned in my father began to grow in me.

Evenings, Father would return to the motel room with great energy. He'd give Mother a small sack of food that he'd purchased, bread and cured meats mostly. His exuberance was contagious as everything was new and exciting in such a large city. Even ever-cautious Mother seemed to be infected by his enthusiasm. He rambled on about everything he'd experienced during the day and the places he'd seen. I begged him to allow me to go along with him, but he said he was scouting and learning and making contacts. The time was not right. He was of course, correct. Still, the newness and excitement, coupled with being cooped up in Tilbury all day, made me fit to burst.

On about the fourth evening, Father returned to our rented room. His countenance was obviously different—he gave us a smile, but was sullen. Unlike the other evenings when he'd returned in great spirits, he was now simply back and uninterested in speaking of the day. Mother pressed, but he simply said that it just a bad day and that he was sure tomorrow would be better. Father looked discouraged, which was extremely rare for him. I felt so bad, I invited him to come with me to the channel—I didn't know anything else to do but sitting in that dour room didn't seem productive. Father said he'd come along. We sat without talking and watched ships move along the Thames until dark.

The next day, Father returned to the room in the evening with a calm demeanor. He wasn't sullen as the evening before, but had a coolness about him. Again, Mother asked about the day and how things were coming along.

"Things are taking shape," he said. "We will know soon." He left it at that.

Two more days and evenings were the same, quiet and calm.

Finally, after a week, Father returned and was obviously in better spirits.

"What is it?" Mother asked with a smile.

"A decision has been made," Father said.

"Well?" Mother asked.

"Over dinner." Important things were always discussed while eating in my family.

Mother laid out a dinner on the small table in the room from the foodstuffs Father had brought back. It was bread, summer sausage, and canned vegetable soup. We all sat around the table, Father said grace, and we began to eat. Mother and I waited for Father to begin speaking. He didn't speak at first, so we just waited. It would come.

"London is different from what I'd expected," Father said at last.

"How?" I asked.

"That's hard to say," Father answered. "Just different. It doesn't feel right."

"We will get accustomed," Mother said.

"Yes," Father said as he ate. "But, I have made a decision." As a businessman, he could get directly down to the point. "London is not the right place for us," he announced. Mother and I looked at each other. We'd just fled Czechoslovakia for London. Now what?

"Then where?" Mother asked.

"A few days ago, I began to have misgivings about settling here. There's no doubt we could make it work. We'd have to. But, I began to think along other lines. I have spoken with men these past few days, business men who are knowledgeable, and they concur with my thoughts."

"And…" Mother said.

"We will move to Southampton. It is where the ships come in to England. A major port. Where the ships come and go, there is business to be had."

Mother and I looked at one another again as if to say, 'Okay, Southampton it is.' I'd really wanted to see London, but the sound of ships coming and going sounded wonderful. Since Gdansk and steaming to England and watching the ships along the River Thames, I was becoming infatuated with the sea.

"We will leave tomorrow," Father said, and gave us a reassuring smile. "We'll go through London as we leave." If we weren't going to live there, he knew both Mother and I were eager to at least see London. We smiled back.

The next day, early, we took a bus from Tilbury Town to downtown London. It was the first major, western city that Mother and I had ever been in. The gleaming buildings amazed us, as did the immense numbers of people. The hustle and hurry of the city was both intoxicating and frightening. Mother did not like it and seemed more and more eager to *not* live in London. By early afternoon we were on a train bound for Southampton and watching the English countryside roll past the train's windows. As the sun was setting, we arrived in Southampton.

Father hadn't mentioned it, but a man named Frank was there to meet us at the station. We got into Frank's car and he gave us a ride to a small inn in town. Again, we set up our temporary home in a new city. This time, the city would be our home for years.

6 – Southampton

We followed the same plan as in London—Father explored during the day while Mother and I stayed at the inn. Immediately, the feeling was much better than had been in Tilbury Town. Mother immediately began to feel at ease and at home and she made friends. Frank's wife, Betty, had Mother over to her home twice for tea. Since, unlike Tilbury where there was little for a boy to do, there was much to explore in Southampton and I adored it. In Tilbury there had only been ships to watch from afar. In Southampton, there were ships to watch as well, though now I could get up close to the docks to watch. And, there was the city itself and all of its trappings and goings on to entice a boy's curiosity. I told Mother I was just going around the block each morning, truth was, I explored the entire city.

More importantly, Father made progress quickly. He wanted to be near the activity of the ships and the docks so he focused his attention first on southern peninsula. Then, he explored the dockyards along the River Itchen on the east side of town. There, he found a closed furniture shop in an area called the Shamrock Quay. Father said the location was ideal—on the corner of Millbank and William. There was plenty of coming-and-going with the docks nearby at Shamrock Quay and there were many apartments across Millbank Street. With most of his savings and with a loan from a bank that Frank had recommended, he secured a lease. There was a loft above the shop. So, it was all set—Father would set up a new market in the shop on the Quay and our family would live in the loft above it.

Within the week we had moved in. Father moved very fast in stocking the store, in everything that he did actually. Since the building was larger than we needed, one of the first things he did was hire a local shipwright to build walls to partition the area into three separate rooms. Father would operate the front, corner room as his market. He sublet one of the back rooms to a sailmaking and upholstery company. The fellow

who rented it had had a few run-ins with the law, had defaulted on loans and thus was cut-off, and was in no position to negotiate. Father agreed on a rent rate that would pay for half of what Father was paying. The other room he soon let out to a freighter company that needed an office space, again paying half of Father's lease. So, within a month's time, Father had his business and home running rent-free.

Father's business sense was as down-to-earth as rocks. When he'd applied for the bank loan, the banker asked Father what assurance he could give that he would not fail in this endeavor. Father had said, simply, "Because I have done it before." As usual, the conviction in Father's voice was persuasive. And, that was exactly how Father did it—following the same pattern that he had used as a small boy working with Gerst back in Loučná pod Klínovcem. And just like then, he would start with bread.

Father had a simple business model—get them into your store and get them to purchase something, anything, and from there, sell them what will make you money. To get people into the store, Father focused on consumables, things that people must come back for often. And, Father wanted to get the women into the store. He believed that if the women frequented the store, they would talk of it and then other women would follow, and then the men would as well. Getting the women into the store to buy consumables meant bread. He considered buying an oven and having Mother bake every day. Mother would have, but thankfully Father decided that it was silly to waste time baking bread when there are already bakeries that do it. It would be better to simply buy and resell.

What it did mean is that I then had a job every morning. I was to retrieve the bread every morning before school from the bakery. I did that almost every day, for eight years. At first I paid daily. Then, once the bakers got to know Father, that he was a straight-shooter and that his word was good, I paid once a week. For the first year, Father sold the bread at a rate less than he paid for it. Mother didn't like the idea. I didn't

understand why I fetched bread every morning to lose money. “It will pay off,” Father reassured. “Get them into the store. Then they will buy.”

Of course, Father was right. He lost a little bit on each loaf of bread, but while they were there, they would also buy butter. Or paper goods, or a portion of bacon, or…you name it. Adding one thing to the loaf yielded a profit. And by getting them to stop in frequently…the business model works. It is the same today with convenience stores that sell eggs or bananas or potatoes cheaper than the grocery stores, then charging twenty times its value for a cup of coffee. What’s more, by shopping frequently, it became a social endeavor for the women. They would stop in and never know who they might bump into and have a chance to catch up on the latest gossip. Getting out of the house and chatting with other women can never be underestimated for a woman.

So, Father was well on his way to financial success and Mother, helping at the store and comfortable in the new surroundings, was happily settled as well.

This was, of course, good news for me as well. I adjusted quickly to my new home and would spend my formative years there. For my first year, at age ten, I attended the local primary school. School went fine, though I didn’t meet too many people. Still, that was fine because I knew I would only be there a year. During the school year we took the test known as Eleven Plus to determine which school we would attend the following year. Scoring high enough meant heading off to grammar school, else it was off to state school. I suppose I scored well enough, because at age eleven it was off to grammar school for me.

In reality, what that meant was a longer commute to and from school. And that meant rising even earlier to fetch the bread. I hated it then, of course, but am thankful today as it trained me to be an early riser and to get the bulk of the day’s work done early—Plough deep, while sluggards sleep, I believe is the Poor Richard’s Almanack aphorism. School was, well, school. There’s little else pertinent to say. I made a few

casual friends. I took up football, what Americans call soccer, and had a bit of fun with that because it was, and is, such a huge part of the U.K. Nevertheless, the most salient things that occurred during those years, at least with regard to my story as it pertains to being Satoshi Nakamoto and to Bitcoin, are fourfold: sailing, reading, nascent programming, and a board game called Isle of Blaq. What these things have to do with Bitcoin may not be readily apparent. But, bear with me, and hear me out…

I've mentioned how ever since Gdansk the sea-bug had bitten me. Living in Southampton I was only a block from the docks on the River Itchen. Sailors came and went constantly. The whole city of Southampton has a kinship with the sea and a maritime culture. The sea-bug had become epidemic. I begged Father for a boat. On my twelfth birthday, he surprised me with a skiff. We walked down to the river and there was a bright blue skiff tied to pilings by the seawall. It was very used, but fit and I loved it immediately.

The skiff was sixteen feet in length. It was equipped with oars, but was intended for sailing. It had a short, sturdy mast for a gaff rigged sail, and a retractable keel for the shallows. The gaff rig allowed the mast to be a bit shorter than most sloops, and coupled with the retractable keel and oars, I was able to go under more bridges and into surprisingly shallow water. The bow was covered with a small cuddy cabin just long enough to where I could even lie down in it and sleep if I wished. I was ecstatic. I knew that a proper boat was named after a girl, so I named it the *Vicktorie*, after Mother.

"You are always to stay close, you hear?" Father told me sternly. "And rule number one of sailing, always head upstream in the river…you can always come back down." I nodded. "Gareth here will give you lessons. And he'll watch over the boat while it's docked." Gareth was a drunk of a fellow who manned the dock—selling fuel and accepting tips for helping people dock or shove off. Gareth nodded.

Gareth gave me a sorry lesson that day. The only sailing lesson I ever got. But, it didn't matter. I learned to sail by sailing, not by listening to a sauced dockmaster. And the terminology I learned from books.

From that day, I spent nearly all of my free time aboard the *Vicktorie*. Father's rule of "stay close" was broken within the week. And his rule number one of sailing was wrong. Rule number one of sailing is that you cannot sail if there is no wind. And rule number two of sailing is that you cannot sail into the wind. So, it's more important to sail upwind first, to tack your way upwind rather, because it's effortless to sail back downwind. Father had been concerned about the current, but the current in the River Itchen was slow. What's more, the current is dependent on the tide, which goes both ways at various times, of course. That and the wind direction were by far more critical. Father knew business, but he didn't know sailing.

I quickly began to branch out my sailing range. Sailing in a river is not ideal, simply because it is a river. There are other crafts to maneuver about, there is the current and the tide, but mostly, your tack is always constricted by the river banks. Coming about causes you to lose speed and your vessel drifts leeward back over the water you've just gained. So, I began to sail downstream toward the shipyards, past the "floating bridge" that connected Southampton to Woolston (where the Itchen Bridge would later be built). There, the River Itchen joins the River Test and widens considerably to form the Southampton Water—sailing was much better there, south of town.

Still extending range, it was only a matter of time before I wished to venture into the Solent—the four mile wide channel between the mainland and the Isle of Wight. Though essentially a channel, the Solent is not far-removed from the open ocean and could turn dangerous quickly in weather. I'd ventured to the mouth of the Southampton Water several times during the first year I had the *Victorie*, and wanted to push farther, but there were always time constraints. When sailing, one never really knows how long it will take to return. My fear was that I'd get out there,

the wind would change directions or it would lay down, and I'd be stuck. Mother would fret terribly (she already did anyway) and Father would flog me upon my return. Worse, he might take the *Victorie* away and solve things for good. So, I set my sights on summer holiday when I'd have greater flexibility with time. Also, I began to prime Mother and Father. After much pleading, I convinced them to allow me to take an overnight "camping" trip down along river banks near Ashlett.

"Isn't that almost to Calshot?" Mother asked.

"Not as far," I answered truthfully.

"Calshot is all the way to the Solent. And that's ocean," Mother said.

"The Solent isn't exactly the ocean. But I won't be going to Calshot anyway. Ashlett is closer." Being closer was better, though it's not closer by much.

"Do you think your craft is worthy?" Father asked.

"It is. I have sailed near the waters many times. Ashlett is simply across from the River Hamble." The place names were familiar enough to Father and thus did not seem too frightening. He said that I could go.

This overnight camping trip was a *coup* on several levels. First, I got to take an overnight trip and also got out of fetching bread the next morning. Secondly, I was simultaneously admitting and gaining permission to sail in the Southampton Water. Thirdly, it would help me to explore the Solent during the summer. Perhaps I could show my responsibility and, for the next trip, extend my camping into two nights. Then, during the summer, I would simply not camp, but continue sailing for the days that I had. The problem of time constraints would be omitted. And that's the plan I followed. By the summer of 1974, when I was thirteen years old, I was ready to explore farther.

I wrote earlier that four things in my years in Southampton are pertinent to my development as far as it's related to Bitcoin. Sailing was the first, reading was the second. While sailing, or camping along the shore somewhere, I read. That's the beauty of sailing—it is still, and quiet but for the water rippling and the sail luffing, and it is calming. These are things that a motorboat will never replicate. Once a course has been set, it's very easy to hold the tiller in the crook of your arm or under the bend of your knee, to fasten the main sheet to a cam, and to read. And that's what I did.

At first, I read the sea adventure stories for youngsters such as *Captains Courageous, Treasure Island, Robinson Crusoe,* and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. These were simple stories, but then, I was only thirteen. I became more mature in my reading choices and read *Moby-Dick*. It took quite some time and I didn't understand everything and found the wording a bit tricky, but I absolutely loved it. The details of sailing and ife aboard a whaling ship were enthralling to me. It's still one of my favorite books. For a while, I rigged up a line and trolled behind my stern as I sailed, pretending to be fishing for a lunker of a Moby-Fish. Nothing ever came of it and eventually the line got tangled and it fouled my rudder until I cut if off and my fishing was done.

I frequented the local library for books. After reading the sea novels, I began reading some maritime non-fiction, mostly books on sailing ships of the old days and on sailing technique. I learned the words for the things that I had learned-by-doing. And I learned of things like the difference between a ketch and a yawl, or a lanyard and a halyard and a stay, or a broad versus a close reach, or windward and leeward, or falling off when the sail luffs or the danger of jibing or what to do when a vessel has fallen into irons.

One day, as I walked to the non-fiction section, a new display had been erected by the librarians. A book called *101 BASIC Computer Games* by a fellow named David Ahl was displayed at eye level. It was an ugly book that stood staring at me. That year I'd had some simple

algebra in math class. My teacher was something of a budding computer geek who rambled on about computers and how computers use variables, as in algebra, to alter input and do calculations and offer output just like we do in math but that they do it much faster. “They’re high-speed morons,” he called computers, “they only do what you tell them, they just do it very, very fast.” He said how we all should learn to use them and that they were the things of the future. His enthusiasm was evident, but no one exactly knew what he was talking about and there were no computers for 13 year-olds to use in 1974.

His enthusiasm and the name of the ugly book got me to pick it up. The word “computer” was the first enticement, then “games.” That was enough for a boy. The “BASIC” I understood to mean that these were easy computer games, so easy that “BASIC” was capitalized. I didn’t know it was a programming language—Beginner’s All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code. I didn’t know what a programming language was. Suffice to say, I checked out the book without knowing much about what it was at all. This was the third pertinent part of my life as if pertains to Bitcoin—the beginnings of an interest in programming. And, it strangely became connected to the fourth and last pertinent component—a game called the Isle of Blaq.

At the same time I checked out the BASIC computer games book, I took my first voyage to the Isle of Wight. It was June of 1974. I had planned a two night “camping” trip so I had plenty of time. Mother fitted me out with more than enough food and I shoved off. I sailed down the River Itchen, down the Southampton Water, I passed too-close to huge ships which loomed overhead and I bounced in their wake. I passed the lookout of Calshot Spit and entered into the Solent. In such a small craft, and alone, I really had no business being in the Solent. The waters were broad enough to easily capsize the *Vicktorie* if the wind and sea kicked up. I was cautious, though. If there was a question ever, I took the prudent decision. Still, looking back now, as much as I sailed those waters in that tiny skiff, I was very fortunate. One of several things, or a

combination of things, could have gone wrong—a broken mast, a broken tiller or rudder, a broken keel, a broken mast or mast stay, swamping of the vessel due to a breaker or rain or both, or capsizing. I was not big enough or strong enough to recover the vessel if capsized. Any of those problems would have meant the *Vicktorie* was, at the least, uncontrollable or, at the worst, dead-in-the-water. There is an old saying that the Lord looks out for animals, children and fools. I fit two of the three categories and the Lord looked out for me.

That first excursion into the Solent was a beautiful day with a brisk, but manageable wind—perfect for day sailing. I cross the four miles or so of the Solent from Calshot Spit to the mouth of the River Medina at Cowes, Isle of Wight. I did this, as I did all of my sailing—via landmarks and dead reckoning using a small toy compass I'd acquired. The route was rather foolproof. It is a straight southerly heading from the Calshot Spit to the nearest land of the Isle of Wight, which is Cowes. At Cowes, I figured that since I was there, I'd do a bit of exploring rather than take to shore just yet. The Isle of Wight is a diamond-shaped island that rises at the mouth of the Southampton Water. The River Medina slices straight down into the Isle from the north, like a knife cutting a loaf of bread in half. The river runs southward down midway into the heart of the island and to the main city of Newport. It just happened that I hit the incoming tide of the Medina at just the right time. So, I headed up the river, which actually flowed away from the sea due to the tide. I shortened and furled my sail, raised the keel, and manned the oars. Traveling up the river in this manner was easy. Soon, I was in Newport up to the point where bridges blocked even my short mast from venturing further.

I wanted to debark and explore the town and island on foot, as much as possible. I found a place to cleat off my skiff. I'd also acquired a small padlock for occasions like this. With the lock, I fastened a small chain around the tiller and pulled it completely to the larboard side and locked the tiller in place. With the rudder at this angle, the craft would be

useless—it would only travel in circles. A thief could untie and haul off the skiff, even row it away, but it would be a terrible nuisance to do so. With a quick prayer, I left the *Vicktorie* and set out afoot. Truth be told, my little, ugly skiff would be a sore sight for thieves. Much healthier fruit was everywhere to be plucked by the sinners.

Wandering around Newport aimlessly that day was enough to have me hooked. I decided that I would frequent the Isle of Wight. There was so much to see—landscapes, people and activity, festivals, restaurants and shops, villages, boats, pathways and alleys and roads and meadows and forests. But mostly, there was sailing. Cowes, at the mouth of the River Medina, was British headquarters for sailing. During the summer, sailing regattas were common. The around-the-Isle regatta immediately captured my attention. I starved for the chance to race in it. But, I knew my poor skiff was both too small and not designed as a racer. The gaff-rigged sail provided for a large surface area, and I did have a jib that I could fly as well so that I'd have plenty of sail area. But, flying the jib was tricky business for one person. You cannot man a tiller and main sheet, and raise a jib all at the same time. I only set the jib when the stiff breeze blew since it helped displace the tendency of a gaff-rigged craft to want to constantly edge a few points windward. Plus, gaff-rigged vessels could not tack into the wind as sharply as a Bermuda-rigged craft—an immense disadvantage in racing. For me to race would mean for me to only be a participant, like a walker in a marathon. I'd get a certificate of participation. I was confident that I could sail with anyone. I sailed by feel—wind and water and tiller and sheet altogether. The sleek lines of the racing boats were intoxicating. Though respectable in her own right, and speedy enough, the racers made the *Vicktorie* look like a bathtub. I dreamt of one day owning and racing a real racing sailboat and competing evenly. I lusted after a faster, more modern vessel. Sadly, I never had the chance to race in the regatta. Nor was I never ever able to sail around the Isle. But that is okay. I was able to sit in my skiff more than once as a spectator and I was absolutely thrilled at it. Maybe one

day, I'll go back to the Isle of Wight and sail around it. Maybe once day I'll race.

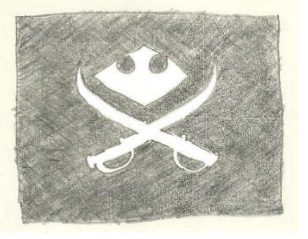
When I returned to my skiff in the River Medina, the tide had receded so drastically that the starboard hull sat flatly on mud. The rudder was also stuck down into the muck and in danger of breaking if the tide receded further. I knew I had to free the boat from its position. I uncleated the ropes so that the skiff was free, yet it still set atop the muck. The water level was so low I did not climb into the skiff for fear that my weight would break the rudder. Instead, I climbed down into the muck. I sank past my knees while holding to the rim of the hull of my skiff for fear of sinking like quicksand. I worked aft to the rudder and splashed into the channel. I lifted the craft and worked to free the rudder. Thankfully, it was unharmed, and I pulled the *Vicktorie* away from the seawall to deeper water. Floating free now, I washed away the mud that clung to me, then climbed aboard. The other side of the river was much deeper; I made a mental note so as to not make the same mistake again.

I rowed downstream a bit, northward that is, out of fear that the tide might drop further. But, it had bottomed out. The land on either side of the river gave way from buildings to football fields to farmland. The Harbour Island Marina was on the eastern shore and I wanted to enter its waters, but was too chicken. I'm sure they didn't want some boy rowing his sailboat in. Across the river, along the western banks, were two shipwrecks. I went there, found a niche of a cove in the river bank and set the *Vicktorie* to anchor in waist deep water. While waiting, I began to read through the BASIC book.

Although I'd never used a computer, I quickly saw what BASIC was all about, or rather, how it operated. It was a programming language built on simple commands like IF, THEN, and ELSE statements. It followed a logical, linear flow, possible to be shown in a flow chart. More particularly, one of the first games was titled "BOMBER" where the player imagines being a WWII bomber pilot. With Father's story of the downed B-17 in my mind, I traced through the code and to my

surprise, found it easy enough to follow. Immediately, I began thinking of my own game. Combined with my fascination with sailing, and my reading, and my exploration of the Isle of Wight, and being hove in between two shipwrecks, I would make a treasure hunt game.

I named my game the "Isle of Blaq." It was to be the classic island with a hidden treasure. Being a treasure island, it needed a flag, and being a pirate-style treasure hunt it needed a Jolly Roger. I drew a black flag with a skull and crossing swords, except I drew the skull as diamond-shaped like the Isle of Wight's natural shape. I added a couple of bays as eye sockets to give it a somewhat skull-like look. I fancied it as ever-so-clever. I thought the spelling and the allusion to black and white was oh-so-clever as well (I was only 13, remember). I didn't learn until later that "Wight" referred to some type of ghost creature, not the color white. Nevertheless, that was all the better. I'd mix the ghost into the game somehow.



The "Isle of Blaq" flag.

I wound up spending the night there in the River Medina. Thoughts raced through my head about my game. I had a notepad and pencil stashed aboard, and I scribbled notes and sketched frantically and drew flow-chart like diagrams. What I came up with was a perfect mess—totally unworkable from a coding standpoint—but it did form a general framework from which to build. Looking back, those notes scribbled aboard the *Vicktorie* on the western bank of the River Medina turned out to be the seed from which Bitcoin would later germinate.

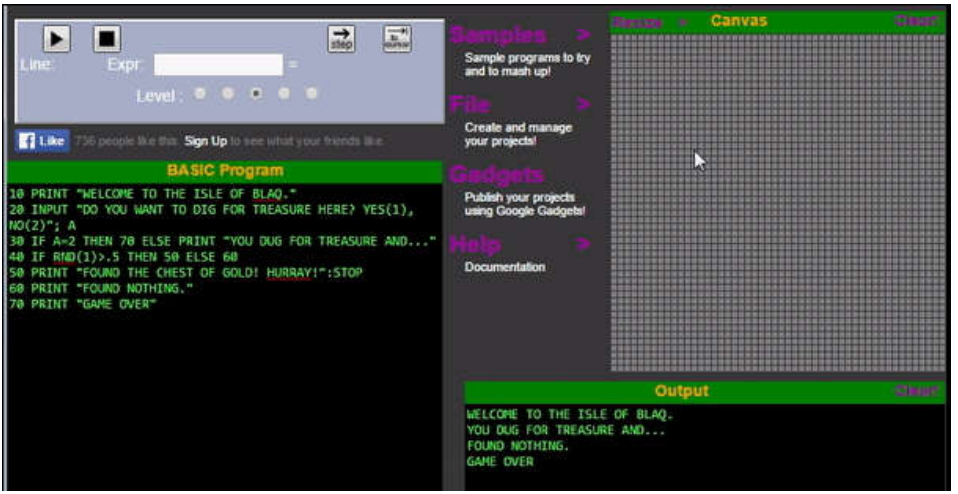
7 - The Isle of Blaq

After returning from my “camping” trip I immediately got down to work and the Isle of Blaq was born. There were no computers on which to code, so, I simply wrote my code on paper. I figured that since I was able to follow the BOMBER program, I would be able to code the Isle of Blaq. Quickly, I found that this “coding” was difficult to write. So, I decided to revert to the absolute most basic of basic treasure hunts that could be written. I figured I could start there, then build it into something more complex. The code below, in BASIC, formed my first program:

```
10 PRINT "WELCOME TO THE ISLE OF BLAQ."

20 INPUT "DO YOU WANT TO DIG FOR TREASURE HERE? YES(1), NO(2)"; A

30 IF A=2 THEN 70 ELSE PRINT "YOU DUG FOR TREASURE AND..."

40 IF RND(1)>.5 THEN 50 ELSE 60

50 PRINT "FOUND THE CHEST OF GOLD! HURRAY!":STOP

60 PRINT "FOUND NOTHING."

70 PRINT "GAME OVER"
```

There is no doubt that these seven lines make up the feeblest adventure game ever coded. Call it “Isle of Blaq 0.0.1.” It is nothing more than flipping a coin. But it works and it lays the first brick onto which to the Isle of Blaq game could be built.[1]

[1] You can run the highly sophisticated Isle of Blaq 0.0.1 program at http://www.quitebasic.com/. You’ll need to type in the code, or copy/paste it in, then click the triangular “run” button.



Isle of Blaq 0.0.1 being played at quitebasic.com

There was going to need to be more options to move the game beyond coin flipping. I tried. I changed the RND parameters in line 40 so that three options became possible: you find the treasure, you don't, or you die by the sword. Then, I got fancy and added the possibilities of death by hanging, or death by powder-shot up the nostrils, or by strangulation, or castration, or being drawn-and-quartered, or being hacked to death whilst sleeping by a wench-been-scorned, or by choking to death on an oversized morsel of liverwurst in the pub. A thirteen year old boy can come up with many ways for a pirate to die (version 0.0.2). Adding the possibility of death in various ways was a tremendous improvement to the Isle of Blaq! These changes were easily made, but the game was still lame.

I tried further, but things quickly became hopelessly convoluted with the many IF THEN ELSE options that a game has. Though I could follow the book's games on paper, without a computer to run and test and debug, writing code was futile. Unable to code the game, I devised an alternative. I used drew up flow-charts to flesh out my thoughts and used index cards and transformed it into a board game. It took an eternity to

work it out and set up the cards in such a fashion as to make it work. But I did. Following is how the Isle of Blaq game became manifest:

I began with a large poster board and drew out the Isle of Blaq map and the nearby mainland. It was, of course, a diamond shaped island with the Solent separating it from the mainland. The two bays that I'd added on the flag as eye sockets were included. This was actually a good thing as it gave the island more shape in its geography. Places were labeled. The center of the island, where Newport lays, was simply called "Town Centre." The four points were labelled directionally, such as North Point, East Point, etc. The bays were Westbay and Eastbay. The mainland was labeled Westerland and Easterland, depending on the side of the river on which it lay. There were many more locations marked on the map of the Isle of Blaq with alluring names, almost all stolen from the actual map of the Isle of Wight such a Whale Chine, Brighstone Forest, Horse Sand Fort and No Man's Land Fort.

With the layout set, the premise was that a pirate treasure was hidden somewhere, maybe. The players' job was to find it. Or at the least gather whatever booty they could in the process. The pirate who gets the most booty in the end wins.

Initially, I imagined the game as a single person game like the BASIC games. But as I worked it out, it became clear that having multiple people would make it much more interesting. The reasoning was simple…if I'd had a computer, I could have had the program generate a randomness to the game as far as placing the treasure. I could've therefore played myself without knowing how it would turn out. But being computerless, I knew where the treasure was. Although I built randomness into the game via playing cards, drawing cards would largely be pointless if I knew where the treasure was located—I'd just go to the spot where the treasure was, draw cards until the lucky one came up, and that would be it. However, with multiple players who know nothing about the treasure's location or how to obtain it, the possibilities for things to happen becomes very large.

At least four players were imagined as ideal. They each get a playing piece, as in the game of Monopoly. The players place their pieces on the map wherever they wish to begin—they are pirates after all! They can sail and go wherever they bloody well please! Then, they take turns in order. During each turn, they can only do one of two things—move (as in moving from Eastbay to Whale Chine) or take an action (such as dig a whole looking for treasure). All they know at the outset is that there *may* be a treasure somewhere.

To explain the game, I'll try to walk through a possible scenario. For now, I'd ask the reader to simply indulge me. Imagine that four geeky boys, two of age 11 and two of 12 years are sitting around a table. They'd been recruited in the Shamrock Quay area with the promise of sodas and snacks and were sitting around in the living room above a mini-market on the corner of Millbank and William playing a board game. And, another anonymous boy of 13 years, who happened to have created the game and who'd purposefully recruited the younger boys to reduce the chance of ridicule from this teenage peers, was serving as game-master. I'm not saying any of this actually happened, but just imagine.

Again, I'll ask the reader to indulge me. Following is an account of how the Isle of Blaq game might have played out with these five juveniles. I believe, somewhere amidst the absurdity of these five numbskulls in this room, it is my hope that a point pertinent to Bitcoin will ultimately be revealed. Patience and perseverance.

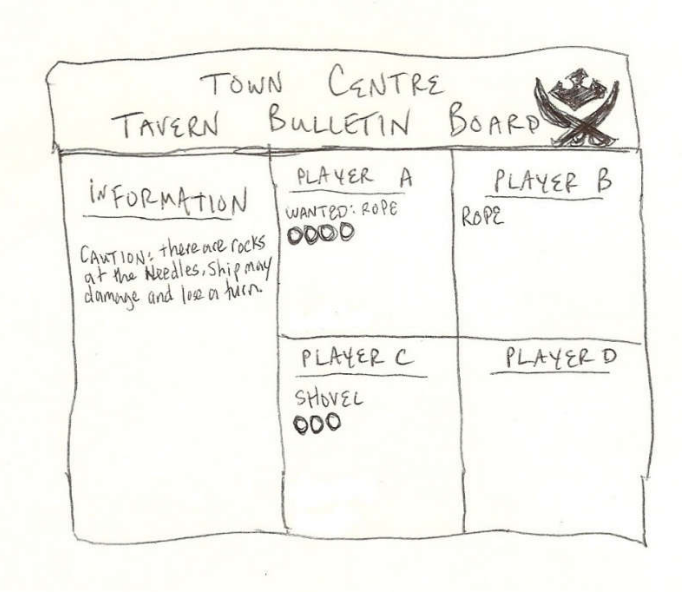
Numbskull A, rather, Player A might begin by saying, "I move from Westerland to North Point." He moves his piece on the board. There at North Point, a card would be drawn. If written in BASIC, a simple IF, THEN, ELSE subroutine accompanied by a string and a GOTO or GOSUB to jump elsewhere in the program would have been included. In the board game, the card might say something like, "There is a nearby well that local rumors says something valuable may be down at the bottom. If you wish to explore the well, you must have rope." Naturally, the player would want to explore this intriguing well, but he cannot

without having any rope. He did learn some (potentially) valuable information in that clue. The player would keep the information to himself since, number one, it was he who'd earned the information and wouldn't share his advantage, and secondly, had it been real life, he could not have told someone miles away anyhow. Player A would be done with his turn and Players B, C, and D would take their turns, moving or taking an action.

When player A is back up, he makes his next move. He wants a rope so he can go down into the well. But, how to get a rope? This is where the Town Centre comes into play. Player A would likely say he's going to the Town Centre and move his piece there. In the Town Centre, there is a tavern, known simply as Tavern. This Tavern is, naturally, where everything pirate-related takes place. At the Tavern, there is a public Bulletin Board for all to see. In the board game, I had a large sheet of flipchart paper mounted on an artist's easel. But, it was turned around backwards and thus hidden to the four players. My thinking was that, in real life, a pirate all the way across the Solent in East Point cannot see the Tavern's Bulletin Board, so he cannot see it in the game either. To view the Board, the player must move his player piece to the Tavern in the Town Centre. At that point, they were allowed to come around and look at the Bulletin Board. The Board had five categories: the first, on the left hand side, was simply labeled "Information." Like a real, cork bulletin board, anyone could put anything they wished there for anyone else to see. For instance, a player might write, "Caution: there are rocks at The Needles. Ship may be damaged and lose a turn," (a kind, gentlemanly warning). Or, "There's a well at Westerland, rope needed to explore", (a bit of info unwisely given to a competitor who will no doubt use it to gather any treasure there). Or, "Billy is a homo erectus", (which may not be helpful in the game but is always good to know). The other four areas were labeled "Player A", "B", "C" and "D." For each player, what they currently own is displayed. This area is, in effect, a running scoreboard.

So, back to Player A who wants rope to descend into a well up at North Point. Since a player can only either move or make an action during his turn, Player A has made his move (by relocating to the Town Centre) and is done for now. The other players take their turns. Upon his next turn, Player A might take the action of posting under his name on the Board "Wanted: Rope." He's done for now. The others go. Player A's turn comes up again. What player A is hoping for is that another player will come to the tavern with some rope, will check the Board and see that player A wants to buy rope, then player B might offer to sell the rope. As always, player A can either move or stay. There's no action for him to carry out in the Tavern, at least if he has no money, that is. He'll likely move somewhere, explore around, and see what he can find. Suppose he says he'll move across the Solent to Hurst Castle. He moves his piece, draws a card, then awaits his turn again.

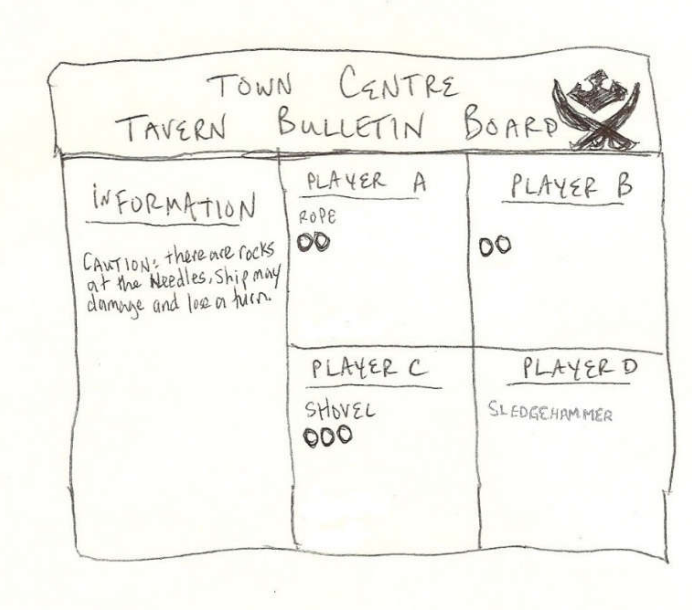
The card read, "You found 4 doubloons!"—a lucky card indeed. As I made the game, there were a few wildcards like this. Usually, the person had to do something to earn the money (I was fond at the time of "doubloons" per reading too much pirate literature). For purposes here, we'll just give player A the 4 doubloons out of sheer luck. Remember, player A has in his head that there is something in the bottom of that well in North Point. On his next turn, player A will likely return to the Tavern in the Town Centre in hopes that he can now buy rope. Suppose he does. No doubt he'll walk around and check the Bulletin Board. Suppose that player B (Billy, the Homo Erectus) has visited the Tavern and is now shown as indeed owning rope! Player A also can see that player C currently has 3 doubloons and a shovel, and that player D has nothing.



General layout of the Isle of Blaq Town Centre Tavern Bulletin Board.

It's time for a deal. Player A wants that rope. But, he must stay at the Tavern until player B returns to the tavern. So, player A "passes" on his turn until, eventually, player B returns to the Tavern. Then, player A gives player B a scrap of paper saying, "I'll give you 2 doubloons for the rope" (the paper replaces talking because anyone not currently at the Tavern should not be allowed to know or see who currently owns what). Player B could negotiate for more if he wished, but, suppose that since he has no present need for rope, he sells the rope for 2 doubloons.

At this point, the game-master (me), switches the rope from player B's section to player A section. And, two doubloon's are subtracted from player A's section and added to player B's. Player A now has 2 doubloons and rope, Player B now has 2 doubloons. Player C has 3 doubloons and a shovel. Just to be nice, let's say Player D showed up at the Tavern at some point reported having found a sledgehammer. All of these updates are recorded on the Bulletin Board and shown below.



The Town Centre Tavern Bulletin Board after player A bought rope from player B for 2 doubloons (and player D found a sledgehammer).

And there it is. That is both the game, Isle of Blaq, and that is Bitcoin, the system. As for the game, there were many more details built into it. As to Bitcoin, those who know it will recognize the seed of similarities here. This germ here is not literal, rather it is in the abstract. The three main cruxes of Bitcoin are revealed here conceptually. They are, (1) the ledger, (2) the mining, and (3) the value of the coins themselves as a currency. Let's discuss these in turn…

(1) The Tavern Bulletin Board was the public ledger. When it was printed that player A had 4 doubloons, no one doubted it. And when the Bulletin Board showed player B with 2 doubloons and a rope, no one doubted. What's more, player A sought to make, and did make, a deal to purchase that rope. When the deal was made and the doubloons went from columns A to B,

and the rope moved from B to A, all of the players understood and accepted this as fact when they saw the board.

Here, two problems are illustrated. First, players A and B could have gone into cahoots and agreed to monkey with the board without the other two players knowing. Or worse, player A (since he was the first to see the board) could have put anything onto the board if the game-master (a third party) was not overseeing things. Or, any player, at any time while solely viewing the Bulletin Board, might have changed all of the possessions to his advantage. Suppose player D (as in the Devil), while the only one in the Tavern and looking at the Bulletin Board, suppose he erases player A's possessions and writes them onto his own slot. Player A would be irate when he learns he's been burgled, but player D would deny it and players B and C would have no clue and would likely side with whomever helped them the most. We'd have a problem. The players must put their trust in this third party—in this instance, the game-master. Later, with Bitcoin, this third-party "game-master" was no longer needed since the ledger is always visible to all.

Which brings up the second point—the board was not visible by all at all times, as Bitcoin is now. Since the pirates would have been all over the place in real life and therefore unable to see it, I set it up that way in the game. With the Internet and P2P, having the Board or ledger omnipresent becomes possible. Someone here might be wondering, "Why not just have the Bulletin Board turned so the players can see it at all times?" That would've been possible, of course. But, it was just a practicality-of-the-game decision. Suppose there is a player way out in East Point who is looking for a ladder to climb a wall and suppose another player all the way over on West Point finds a ladder. If the East Point player saw on an

open Bulletin Board that a ladder had been found over in West Point, he'd immediately go to West Point and buy that ladder. In real life, that would not have been possible, so it just didn't seem fair from a game standpoint to have the Board visible at all times.

(2) The aimless and random exploration by the players reflects what's come to be called "mining" in Bitcoin. Often, the exploring around (mining) was futile as many of the cards laid out had nothing of value on them. And there was actually no reason to do the exploring, except of course that there existed the chance that the occasional gold doubloons would be unearthed (or shovels or ropes or grappling hooks—all of which had some value in the game). A pirate who lolls away his time in the Tavern will expend no energy, but neither will he gain any booty. A plucky pirate who pines away by digging many holes all for naught, will eventually unearth a chest full of plunder. Then, when he returns to post his findings on the Tavern Bulletin Board…proof of work!

(3) The gold doubloons had value. The doubloons gave the owner buying-power. Their worth was intrinsic to their ownership—if a player had them written on the Board, the player had their buying power. Their existence and proof on the Board and value were really one-and-the-same. I realize that today there exists a breed of people who purport that bitcoins have no intrinsic value (since they are simply numbers recorded on a ledger, not things tangible like gold or prettily printed paper or seashells or rocks).

Two things here: first, anyone who owns bitcoin can spend them and purchase anything he or she wishes with only a few clicks. That hardly sounds valueless. If still unconvinced, as a gentleman, I will gladly purchase, at half the current exchange

rate and in fiat money, any bitcoin anyone is willing to sell me and thus I will be willing to take the worthlessness of bitcoin off of their hands.

Secondly, to the doofuses playing the Isle of Blaq game, simply having written on the Bulletin Board that they "own 5 doubloons" immediately had an effect. The owner was overjoyed. His new wealth and buying power was immediately recognized and envied by the others. Still, 'it's not real,' you breed of naysayers say? Billy, the Homo Erectus, on that first day of playing the game was so thirsty that he made a deal with Player C somewhat outside of the game itself. Since the stash of sodas I'd requisitioned from Father's store was empty, Billy stepped out-of-game so to speak and made a deal with player C—two doubloons for his whole bottle of Pepsi Cola. That's a real bottle of Pepsi, as in, one you can hold in your hand, open with a bottle opener, and drink. Billy was happy and enjoyed the Pepsi (although bankrupt in the game). Player C was happy, now holding 5 doubloons on the board. Like the 10,000 BTC pizza sale[2], this virtual-doubloon-to-real-product shows real value.

Now, so as not to get ahead of myself, this was a far cry from bitcoin the currency or Bitcoin the system. I realize that. I'm not saying I invented Bitcoin in 1974. Nothing of the nature of Bitcoin ever came to mind when fooling with this silliness. Being a kid and although for a time it consumed me, I soon forgot about all of this Isle of Blaq nonsense. The point here is that something of a foundation had been laid in this imbecilic child's game. When I did work out Bitcoin and wrote the first coding of the Bitcoin system, I initially thought back to this inane child's

[2] The first "bitcoin purchase" was made for two pizzas for 10,000 BTC. This meant these became the most expensive pizzas ever, and that this was one of the best/worst deals in history. More importantly, it showed that a virtual currency could purchase a tangible item.

game and used it as a springboard to develop the first protocol. It was the same problems from the game that were solved. The Tavern Bulletin Board/ledger was solved by the Internet and P2P, the exploration/mining was solved by the random winnings of 50 bitcoins for correctly finding a hash, and the doubloon/bitcoin value was solved by the trust that the ledger provided and in the absolutely finite number of bitcoins at 21 million. There it is.

8 – Seventies

I had been completely absorbed into the Isle of Blaq game for a while, thinking it through, setting up the cards, and mulling over how it could be coded in BASIC. I didn't have access to a computer until years later. The silly game had been quickly forgotten and wouldn't be recalled for decades. The balance of the 1970s were spent quietly. I attended school where I somehow did fairly well. I worked in Father's market most afternoons. I read a lot of books. And I sailed. And that was my adolescence.

Maturing, I realized that I was not like my father, at least in personality, and that I never would be. As I grew, I grew more reserved. When I first realized this, it bothered me a bit. Father clearly wanted me to assume his business one day. He explained that a firm handshake and an outgoing personality would go further than any bit of schooling. I'm sure he was, and is, correct. I was coming to realize that the firm handshake was fine with me, I wasn't shy, but that my personality was hard-wired differently. If someone extended a hand to shake, I'd shake it firmly. Yet it was not my nature to walk across a room and seek out a handshake with a genuine smile, as it was Father's. I sensed a hint of disappointment in his realization of this fact. At the time, that stung a bit. It would be much later in my life that I realized I'd simply taken after Mother more so in those ways, and that it was okay.

Father's business was absolutely flourishing. The economy had picked up a bit and Father had slowly increased the rent that he was taking in from the two sublet spaces. Soon, he made an offer to the owner to buy the building outright and did so. Also, he had taken over a second mini-market that had been floundering on the other side of town. Father got it at a cut-rate price. It never did near the amount of business as Father's main market on Millibank Street, but along with the rent, it provided enough income to cover the mortgage payments for the Millibank Street building Father had purchased. So, thenceforth, our

family lived and worked rent-free. Father quickly paid off the mortgage far ahead of schedule, and it was ours free-and-clear. All income going forward was simply ours. This business was to be my inheritance and life's future.

Father considered all the time that I spent alone reading and sailing as curious. I wasn't making any business contacts or building my network as they say. I wasn't learning or honing business skills. I simply read and I sailed and that was it. Father would scratch his head at me and wonder when I was going to give up this silliness and start doing something productive for my future. He wasn't unkind about it, he just honestly didn't get the allure of it. Of course, if he ever brought any of this up, as a teenager, my inclination was to grab a book and light out to sea in the *Vicktorie*—problem solved.

So, as often occurs in life, change comes because funny things happen that you'd never expect. Just as Father and I were drifting away from one another, not in a mean or hateful way, but in a manner of misunderstanding, the very things that were separating us began to unite us. Specifically, my reading and his business activities intersected. More specifically, the novel *The Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand bridged us together.

Hearing of Ayn Rand undoubtedly makes the reader think, "Here we go—libertarian fanatical cuckoo." This is not the case with me. I'm not a Rand disciple at all. I'm not a libertarian, not an objectivist because I don't even understand it, and I'm certainly not an atheist. I simply liked her books, or rather, I really liked *The Fountainhead*.

The book had been assigned for our literature class when I was 17. It was such a refreshing style change after so much British fluff like Bronte and Thomas Hardy. I suppose that I began talking about it over the dinner table to Mother and Father. And I suppose that my interest was evident, first in that I was talking (which I did very infrequently),

secondly, in my tone of voice, and thirdly, in the content which Father increasingly seemed interested.

They asked what it was about and I said that it was about architecture, but more than just architecture. I explained how there were these two young men, architects, and how one is a talentless suck-up and the other a brilliant architect who breaks all the rules. I explained how the brilliant one, Roark, is obviously modeled after Frank Lloyd Wright, but that he shatters everyone else's conceptions of how a building is supposed to look and how he'd make a building look however he damn well imagined it to be but not how every clown on the street expected it. He did what he wanted to do and didn't give a rat's dung what others said he could or couldn't do. And, what he did was revolutionary. What I liked best about the book was that, what it was really about, was finding out what you're passionate about and then going for it despite what anyone else says—finding your thing and making your run in life. That's it. I suppose as a boy of 17, the book "spoke to me" as they say. This is an odd statement given that I had no clue what I wanted to do.

Father must have found something of substance in what I said or how I said it because when I finished the book, he said he wanted to read it. I was shocked—he never read anything other than the papers. But, he did. And when he finished, to my further surprise, he got a copy of *Atlas Shrugged* and began reading it. For him, *Atlas Shrugged* spoke to him, at least in the way that he understood most—business. Father asked if I'd read *Atlas Shrugged* and I told them that I hadn't. Then he began talking energetically to me and Mother as though we'd both read it. Father was even more passionate about what he'd read than I had been. And Father was angry. He spoke of the "looters" in the book and how no one worked, really, truly worked, but simply only held positions or titles and collected their paycheck at the end of the week. He mentioned how some people, when you ask them what they do, they reply by giving you a job title. And when you inquire what exactly that means because you honestly don't know, they tell you and in the end you still don't know what the

hell they actually do. And he mentioned how those who did work and produced things were being used to prop up the others who were "in need." Father said, 'in need' mockingly. Clearly, Father had a bit of resent working here and it became unclear as to whether he was talking about the novel or current goings-on. And I'd have to say, his point was rather valid. He had worked his entire life, literally from boyhood, and had done well for himself. And yet many resented his success as selfishness for not "giving back to the community."

There are times in life when things converge and build power, not unlike rivers coming together just before entering the sea. In the late 1970s, rivers were converging for Father. The Labour Party in England was making quite a bit of noise then. The Conservatives were on the rise and Labour was waning badly. The unions understandably felt under attack with Conservatives eager to balkanize them. Backed into a corner, the workers were ready to bite back. The local longshoreman's union in Southampton was stirring the pot that labor unions love to stir. The old union battle cry that unions always bellow was sung—too much work for too little pay! For Father at this particular time, reading Ayn Rand was like a double shot of adrenaline straight into the veins. He was already growing irked at workers in the neighborhood who obviously laid around doing very little work, and spent quite a good deal of time in the pubs, and yet at times were not hesitant to ask for credit in the store. Or worse, to send their women to Father's market and request foodstuffs on credit. As far as I know, Father never denied anyone credit, especially not a woman seeking credit for food. But, he grumbled privately. "He can spend plenty on pints of ale, but doesn't have any money when it's time for bread and butter. The pub doesn't give credit, but I'm expected to," Father said. "If he was really hungry, he'd find some work." It was a valid point.

And then, yet another tributary of a river merged into the already growing watershed. The local labor union leader, a chap named Ian, came to Father one day and asked to talk.

“We can talk, of course,” Father said. Ian had obviously wanted some place private to talk, but since the store was empty at the time except for Father and me, he proceeded.

Negotiations were currently going on with management. Talks were not going well. The greedy managers were only interested in profits. The bastards didn’t care about the workers. After all that the workers had done for them, and after all the money the workers had made for them, the greedy sons-of-bitches still weren’t satisfied. Things were always the same, always had been, damn the greedy bastards to hell, and we might need your help at this particular time.

“What can I do for you?” Father asked. There was a hint of Rand-inspired sarcasm in his tone. I’m not sure if Ian caught it, but I did.

“Well, and this is just between us, this isn’t official with the Transport Union—we’re not ready to go public with it just yet—but a strike might be coming. We’ll shut this piece-of-shite port down. Shut it down. Then they’ll listen. Those bastards. It’s the only way. They don’t give a rat’s bunghole about the worker.” Ian accented ‘bunghole’ with a finger-jab and his inflection rose as he spoke. Father didn’t respond. He hadn’t answered his question.

“What can I do?” Father repeated.

“What we need” Ian went on, “is your help.”

“How’s that?” Father asked.

“If we go on strike, we don’t know how long it might last. Hopefully, it won’t even get to that point. The greedy sons-of-bitches might cave if we just threaten a strike. They got no spine, you know? But, if we go to a strike, it might be a few days. Maybe a week. Some of the boys might need a little help getting through it. You know what I mean?” Ian asked.

Father didn't reply. He was pricing canned goods at the time and busied himself with the task.

"I'm not asking for a handout," Ian continued. "God no. I'd never ask for that. They'll pay you back. You got my word. You've got the union's word behind you. It's just that…" Ian seemed at a loss for words, then added. "These are tough times. Everybody has to do their part. You know what I mean." This time, Ian said it as a statement rather than a question.

"You're asking for credit," Father said because Ian apparently wouldn't.

"It's just that this is a tough time. The community has to come together, right? I mean, the workers have been very supportive of your business, they've been here for you all these years, right? We're just asking for a little help in return right now. And, again, it's just for a little while. I mean, you'll get repaid as soon as everyone gets back to work, right?"

"I see," Father said.

"That's the way it works, right? The workers support you in good times, and you support us in tough times. I scratch your back, you scratch mine, right?"

Father nodded as if to say, 'I see,' again.

"Listen," Ian went on. "I don't think it'll even get to that point. They got this lawyer from downtown named Kimble in charge of negotiations. A real set of mouse-balls. Like I said, we drop the threat of a strike, they'll cave."

"I see," Father said again.

"Alright then," Ian said and slapped the counter, "I'll be seeing you around."

After Ian left, it was clearly evident that Father was brassed to the gills. When Father was angry, he didn't lash out, he simply didn't speak. I tried to talk to him, just small talk, yet he remained silent. Then, as he was pricing the canned goods, he suddenly rammed a can of beets back into the crate from which he'd just removed it. He'd did it so hard the can had burst at the crease on the bottom and bled out.

"Go get some towels," he demanded me.

I fetched some paper towels and helped him clean up the mess in silence.

Less than two weeks later, the strike was on. Ian, the union leader, came back to the store the day the strike began to check in with Father.

"We didn't think it would get this bad," he said. "We didn't think it would turn into a crisis like this. But that's what it is, a crisis. Those bastards are so greedy. Worse than I thought. And that bastard lawyer Kimble wants to play hardball. Just trying to make a name for himself with the money-crowd. That suck-up of a bastard. Sellin' his soul to the devil, that's what Kimble is doin', you know. Bastard. He'll get hell for sure. Sucking the blood of the worker and sucking the John Thomas of management. That's what he's doing. But, he'll get his comeuppance. He'll get it. And doing all this in this time of crisis!" 'Crisis' was a big word with Ian. He used it repeatedly and it seemed there was always some type of crisis going on. No matter what was said, anything, if it was joined with, 'In this time of crisis,' it was absolute, unquestionable.

Father listened without speaking. "Well," Ian continued, "the strike's on. I'm glad we can count on you. You're a good man Jandaček. We'll remember this," he said, slapped the counter, and walked out.

"Crisis," Father said when Ian walked out. "Crisis? When the Nazis are killing everyone you know, and you're trading rabbits for bread, that's a crisis. To hell with his crisis, I'll wipe my hintern with his

crisis and shove it down his throat." I'd never heard Father speak that way before.

The longshoreman's union picketed along the docks. Photographs were shown in the newspaper for a few days of burly stevedores holding placards on the sidewalk. The entire endeavor was rather pathetic with overweight men holding signs saying they couldn't make enough money to feed their families. It was only a day or two into the strike that the first person came into the store asking for credit. With the strike going on and all and with the family and with money being short and times being tough and the crisis and all, there was no other way.

Father didn't turn a single person away. Being a Christian family from Bohemia, we'd studied Luther's Small Catechism and knew it well. Mother studied it continually alongside scripture every day. And Father believed in the Eighth Commandment—that we should not bear false witness against others and should take others' actions in the best possible way. That meant that if a person came and said he or she needed help and couldn't feed her family, then we were to believe that they truly were in trouble and that we should help them. Still, that doesn't mean that it's easy. Many a fool has used this to his advantage. It's not easy to follow this commandment at all knowing full well that many prey off of it. But to his credit, Father helped every person that came in and asked for help. This credit absolutely went against his business sense, just as logic goes against faith. Credit, Father explained, was like faith—it's being sure of what you cannot see and certain that it will be paid in the future. Credit would not be withheld to a person who claimed to be in want.

The problem was that, first, Father was helpful to the point of silliness. He probably would have given the store away if someone had asked for it. And secondly, word got around immediately that Matyas Market, as it was known, was giving credit freely to all comers. Shouldn't everyone cash in on the opportunity, what with the crisis and all going on? The credit-giving became a deluge.

After a week or so, Father wanted to speak with Ian about the problem. It had turned into a free-for-all. Now, Ian was not easy to be found now. When Father finally tracked him down, it was in the local Labor Temple—a smoke-hole of a brick building that doubled as a meeting house and pub.

I wanted to come along but Father wouldn't let me accompany him in there. But, he reported that the upshot of their meeting was that Ian reported the workers as being all good for their credit. The management would cave soon. Ian had acted surprised at Father's concern. Father had been warned, after all, that a strike might be imminent. And if a strike was on, the workers would be in need, right? What with a strike, and the crisis of men not working, and them having to provide for their families and all, Father wasn't going to suddenly get all greedy and try to reap profits off the backs of the workers, was he? I mean, his good fortune had been made off the backs of the workers and their patronage of his store after all? To not acknowledge that and to not give back in this time of need was selfish, a straight greed for profits, right? After all, Father wasn't the only businessman in Southampton being asked to pay his fair share in this crisis, so he shouldn't get his panties all in a wad like a sissy? In short, Father had been insulted.

With that, Father said he'd walked out without saying a word. I believe that's accurate because after that strike, Father started putting into motion the steps to leave.

Once again, over the dinner table, Father announced that we would be moving.

"Where to?" Mother asked, again.

"I'm not sure just yet," Father said. "I must think."

"When?" Mother asked. Mother had a heart of gold, wrapped in platinum, and her questions were brutally to-the-point.

“I don’t know,” Father said. Mother looked tense. “When we are ready. There is no urgency this time,” he added and Mother nodded and was reassured. It was Mother’s nature to worry about the family, but she didn’t press. Father might act impetuously, but his gut had always, always been right.

“Okay,” she said simply. “Let us know,” and went back to eating. She trusted Father.

And with that, the conversation was over and Father went back to eating as well.

The strike lasted about two weeks in all. An agreement was made, as they always are, and very modest gains were made by the labor union. Ian and the union extolled the victory publicly. The truth was that the gains were extremely minimal and represented wage increases that reflected little more than cost-of-living increases that had been in the plans anyway. And despite promises that he’d be reimbursed when work resumed, Father saw almost none of the credit he’d extended actually paid. The creditors continued to shop at the market, and paid for the items being purchased at the time. But it was as though the previous items they’d purchased on credit had been made during the strike and therefore should not be expected to really be paid off. That would be unfair.

Father hunted down Ian at the Labor Temple and spoke with him about this. Ian was puffed-up with his “gains” from the strike and explained how they’d broken the backs of management and a little flogging now and again is good for reminding one of his place. Ian explained that times are still tough and that those debts incurred back during the crisis of the strike must require patience. And when you really get down to it, you don’t want to be labeled as selfish and uppity, do you Matyas? I mean, we’re all in this together, right? The workers have been very loyal to the Matyas Market these years and all that they were asking for is a little loyalty back in thanks for their patronage. That wasn’t too much? Why was he being so greedy about this? Aren’t you with us

Matyas or are you too good for the working community and were you really in the bed with management?

Ian's words boiled Father's blood. At this particular time in his life, those words were rocket fuel tossed onto fire. Father calmly nodded and walked out. He would speak to Ian no more.

At home, Father sulked around, was moody, and was short with Mother and me. All of these things were very unlike him. Mother asked him what was wrong. He didn't want to talk about it. She pressed again, Father got angry. He fussed and grunted. Mother asked again. She knew what was wrong, so did I, but Mother simply wanted him to say it. Finally, when irked enough, Father began to explain what was bothering him. Except that he told it in the form of a tale, like a child's fairy tale or an allegory. Clearly, he'd given this some thought.

"What's wrong?" Father asked rhetorically, "I'll tell you what's wrong. The union—that's what's wrong. And all those scared little men in the union and the weaselly leaders of the union." Mother had asked for it, and she was about to get it. "Do you know what a union is?" Father asked Mother.

"Yes," Mother said.

"Do you know Matthäus?" he asked me.

"Yes, sir," I said.

"I'll tell you what it is," he went on. "It's a school of fish. That's what it is, it's a school of damned sardine, bloody fish. That's what it is."

Neither Mother nor I understood what Father was saying here, but that was okay. The rivulet had breached the dike and the deluge was coming. Then Father launched into a story that seemed to waver between simplicity, brilliance, and sheer insanity. For illustrative purposes here, I've taken Father's rambling, ranting monologue from that evening, cleaned it up, and reworked it for sensibility. It follows below:

School of Fish

School of Fish – by Matyáš Jandaček

There once was a tiny fish named Fred who lived in the ocean. Like all small fry, Fred stayed in the safety of the reef in a school along with the other tiny fish.

"Never leave the school," his teacher warned. "There are sharks who will eat you."

Everyone nodded and agreed, and no one dared stray from the school.

The adult fish also schooled together. But, being too big and too plentiful to take safe harbor in the reef, they schooled higher up in the open ocean. It was dangerous waters there. Sharks circled and sometimes sharks attacked.

"The school is the only thing that will rescue you in an attack," the teacher said. "The only thing. We are fish. Schooling is what we do. Never stray from the school. Repeat after me: We are fish and we must school."

"We are fish and we must school," the small fry repeated.

"We must never, never stand out from the crowd."

"We must never, never stand out from the crowd."

"To do so would bring danger to me, and worse, danger on the school."

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"In our unity of sameness, we survive."

"In our unity of sameness, we survive."

"Now, let us sing The School of Fish Song," the teacher said, and the school of fish began to sing together...

"We are a school of fish, and,

fish we school each day.

I am just like you, and,

you are just like they.

We'll always stay together,

we'll never stray away.

If you never stand out,

then you'll always stay the same.

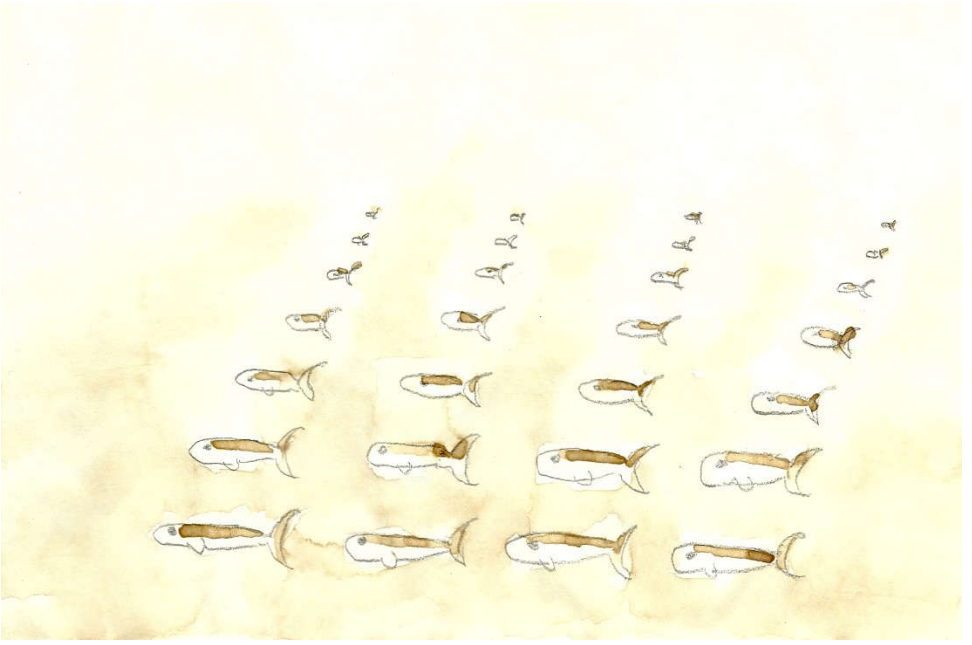
Oh…fish school, fish school,

we are all in a fish school.

We all are in a fish school. Hey!"

Fred and his small fry peers grew a little bit each day and they learned to stay in the school and they practiced swimming together. Swimming too fast drew attention to you. Shame, shame. Swimming too slow drew attention to you. Shame, shame. Swimming out of sync drew attention to you. Shame, shame. Swimming too far away or too near to the others drew attention to you. Shame, shame. All of those things meant danger! Danger for you and danger for the school! Shame, shame, shame.

So, they practiced swimming together, in order that everyone looked exactly the same.



The adults who swam high above in exact sameness were pleased with the progress of the small fry.

When they were big enough and unified enough, it was graduation day. Today, they'd join the adults in the main school of fish. On cue, Fred and his friends quickly swam up to the adults' school of fish and joined in.

Fred was so proud! He and his friends were swimming with the adults so keenly, that immediately no one could distinguish who the adults were and who were the newcomers. This is what they had been trained to do.

One day, after schooling for weeks with the adults, a shark appeared! It circled, circled, circled.

"Everyone stay together!" the school leader called out. "Don't anyone do anything to stand out! Remember youngsters, strength is in the school." Then they began singing the school of fish song together...

"We are a school of fish, and,

fish we school each day.

I am just like you, and,

you are just like they.

We'll always stay together,

we'll never stray away.

If you never stand out,

then you'll always be the same.

Oh…fish school, fish school,

we are all in a fish school.

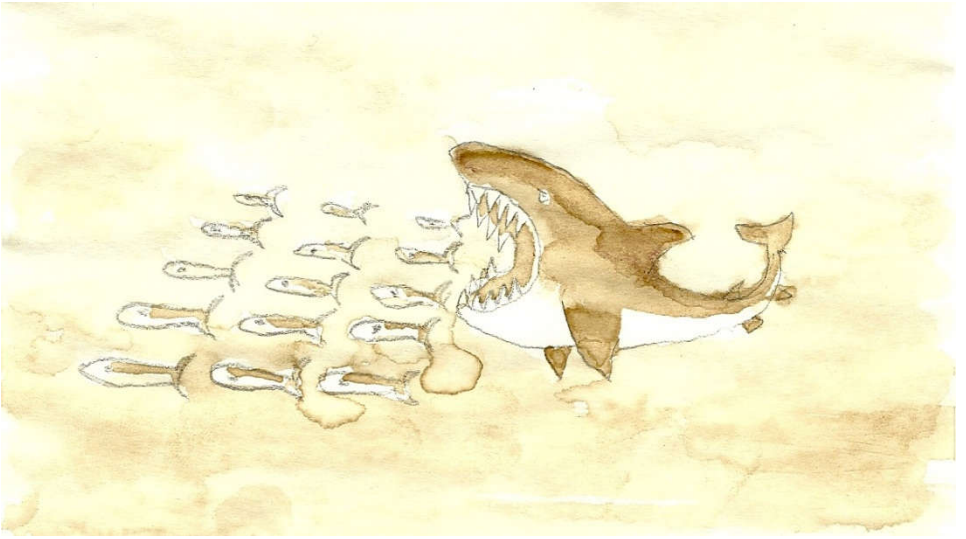
We all are in a fish school. Hey!"

The fish cycled the song around and repeated it again and again.

The shark drew nearer as they sang. Nearer, nearer, nearer.

"Steady," the school of fish leader said, "steady. Keep it together. Keep singing."

And then WHAM! One of the sharks suddenly attacked the school. Several of the fish in the school were gobbled whole. The shark swam away with a belly full of singing fish.



The main school refitted itself to erase the gap that the shark had created. "We survived," the leader said joyously and everyone agreed. "The school of fish got us through these tough times," and everyone nodded again.

Fred wondered though. "Why had we swum so slowly? We were helpless. Couldn't we do better?" He asked aloud.

The older fish looked at him with astonishment at his question, then gave him dirty looks for even asking.

The school leader scowled at this ill-trained fry, then answered Fred, "We swim as slow as the slowest swimmer can swim. If fast swimmers and slow swimmers separate, the unity of the school is broken and we are all in danger. To swim fast is to draw attention to yourself. That brings danger on you and worse, danger on the school. Weren't you taught this?" The leader looked down at Fred with scorn. Shame on Fred for asking such a silly question.

"Yes. I was taught that," Fred said, and he swam along with the school in hangdog fashion.

Days and weeks passed and Fred swam with the school in unity. Some days they were attacked by the sharks, and some fish in the school were swallowed up. Fred's body filled out and strengthened, as full and strong as any of the adults and his fins grew larger and longer. Fred felt the water stream around his body and ripple across his fins. He yearned for a chance to dart through the water and test his new abilities.

"Tighten up those fins young man," the school leader barked out at Fred. "Never, ever stick out your fins. You don't want to stand out do you?"

"No sir," Fred said, and he tucked in his fins.

One day, the sharks appeared again. Not one shark, but several. They stalked from several different angles.

"Stick together folks!" the leader called out. "They're putting the school of fish to the test! They're trying to break up our unity! Steady!"

In no time, the sharks attacked. They hit the center of the school and sliced it in half. Then they hit and busted the halves in half again and then halved those. Fred was quickly left with only a few other fish in the tiniest of schools. The sharks converged on his small school to finish them. The other few fish were terribly slow swimmers...they were quickly gobbled up.

In no time, Fred was on his own. A shark bore down on him...the teacher had been right. Being alone indeed does draw attention and does bring danger. With all his might, Fred sped up and swam as fast as he could, faster than he'd ever swum before. He was stunned at how fast he actually could swim. The shark stayed right behind him and was closing fast. It wouldn't be long now. The shark opened his great jaws and Fred could see his razor sharp teeth sparkling.

Just before the shark chomped down on Fred, Fred made a desperate attempt. He burst through the surface of the water and into the air. He made a high, smooth arc before heading back toward the water's surface. When he splashed back into the water, the shark was a bit further away than before and it seemed confused at how Fred had suddenly just vanished. Fred raced off again...leading the shark away from the others. But, the shark took up pursuit and shot toward him again. Fred swam as fast as he could once again, even faster. Yet again, the shark closed in behind him. At the last moment, the shark opened his great jaws again with his rows and rows of teeth and prepared to bite down on poor little Fred. But again, Fred burst up at the last instant and rocketed through the water's surface and into the air. Yet this time, out of some primal urge to survive, Fred opened his fins and spread them wide.

The sunlight shimmered off his fins and the wind raced beneath them. And that day, he learned that he could fly.

After Father got all that out and finished his tale, it was clear that he felt better. He gave Mother and myself a nod and a smile, and fixed himself a drink. Mother and I looked at one another as if to say, 'Okay then, a school of fish it is.' Father's rant freaked us out a bit. Especially the song. Clearly it was to mock the silly drinking songs the folks sang in the pubs, but to hear Father singing…hmm. We knew all the union business had been bothering him. We didn't know that he was switching over from reality to allegory. Was he losing his cool and cracking up after all, the way mortal men do? And the flying fish at the end meant…what exactly? Mother and I knew enough to not press further into this school

of fish puzzle. Father was just working things out in his unorthodox way. Yet, as the years wore on, the more I thought about that bizarre story that Father ranted out of himself, the more sense it made.

When the customers came back to shop after the strike, Father would kindly remind them of their debt. They said little or nothing, and left. Somewhat abruptly, their patronage tailed off. Clearly, they were talking. It came down to either Father not bringing up the debt, and thus de facto absolving it, or Father bringing it up and losing customers. Looking back, he should have simply absolved all the debts during that time—he would have gained a large covey of even more loyal followers. But, he had too much pride. And breaking a business deal, a promise was something that grated at him. Father would not give in and allow them to win. Shame on them for preying on his good will to give and then reneging on their pledge to pay. Some things are sacrilege and a man's word topped Father's list.

Eventually, Father wiped away any hopes of those debts ever being paid. "Got to wipe the dust off my feet and move on, just like it says in the Bible," he said. And that was it. He was done with that business. Having erased those debts from his mind, he was unfettered by them and once again energized. And, he made plans for the family to make a major move for a third time.

Sickened by the school of fish and drunk on Ayn Rand, Father set his sights this time on America. He began working silent channels hoping to find a buyer for the market, though he never let on to Mother or me. And he began laying the framework for how we would move. This time, it would be less fleeing somewhere, as from Bohemia, and more seeking somewhere.

After a few months, Father was ready to announce the plans. For the third time within the decade, Father announced over dinner to Mother and I that we would be moving.

“We are moving to America,” he stated simply as he always did. “They are capitalists there. The Socialism of Europe is shunned there. We can thrive.”

I liked Southampton, especially that I could sail whenever I wished, but moving to America had a primal level of exhilaration. America, was open land and opportunity. That Old West aura of America hadn’t entirely worn off to the European psyche. And what’s more, there was quite a bit of truth in what Father said. “Where will we move to in America?” I asked.

“Wisconsin,” father replied.

“Where is that?” Mother asked. I didn’t know either.

“It is in the heart of America. Almost the center. I’ve been doing research, and the people are said to be traditional, hard-working folks. It can get cold there, but is pretty country. The land is known for its dairy farms.”

“It sounds like Bohemia,” mother noted.

“A little. But it is still America. There are opportunities. It is where the Germans went when they moved to America. There are many Moravian and Lutheran churches.”

“Germans?” mother asked. “I thought we were trying to get away from them.”

“These are good people. They are Americans, only with German blood. And there are Moravians, or people with a Moravian tradition.”

“Are there Czechs?” mother asked.

“In the city there are some. That is where we will go, to the city. It is called Milwaukee.” Father ripped off a big chunk of bread.

“It’s also where they found that motor in *Atlas Shrugged*,” Father told me. “Do you remember that part?”

“Yes, I remember. But I didn’t know what the place was called,” I said. I’d read the book by then, liked it, but found it too preachy as compared to *The Fountainhead*. Mother frowned. She wasn’t sure what to make of this Ayn Rand kick that Father was on. Things were becoming clearer now—for the first time in his life, Father was making decisions not so much on practical issues of business opportunities or family safety, but decisions rooted on ideals. This was new ground for him.

“In the book,” I said, “everything was all run down there. Rusted out.”

“We’ll be in the city,” Father said. “Not those areas. Milwaukee is a modern city. It’s on a huge lake, same lake as Chicago. It’s as big as a sea. You can sail there too.” Father smiled. “We’ll rebuild a life there—a better life.”

With the sailing point, I was sold. Mother was hesitant, per her nature, but she trusted Father completely. He had always been right before. So, it was set. We would not leave until I had finished secondary school, and sold the market. Then we would light out for a new life once again.

Things proceeded quickly, as they seem to do when a decision has been made. Father sold the store at a fair price and made a very nice sum. We would be able to move and set up a new market in America, perhaps with no debt at all. Reluctantly, I sold the *Vicktorie* to Gareth the drunken dock master. I hard tried shopping it around, but no one wanted a day sailer, a slow gaff-rigged one anyway. Gareth offered a sheer pittance for it, but worse, I knew that he’d just leave it moored and let it fall into disrepair and let its hull crust over with barnacles. But, it was either accept the small payment and leave it there or accept nothing and just leave it there anyway. So, I sold it and walked away. Already I was thinking about and dreaming about the *Vicktorie II.*

9 – Milwaukee

On this move, Father allowed the family to take more than a suitcase. He'd made many shipping contacts over the years in Southampton. Father worked it out with one captain to transport a small-sized container full of our belongings at a shoestring rate. What's more, he would also transport our family.

In the summer of 1978, my family and I again boarded a merchant ship and set sail to a new country pursuing a new life. Only this time, we were not hidden in the cargo holds. We had our own cabin. The first mate had been evicted by the captain and relocated in steerage with the crewmen. He wasn't pleased about being kicked out, but then, he wasn't paying either. Mother, Father and I stood on the quarterdeck and watched Southampton draw away as he steamed down the Southampton Water toward the Solent—a trip I'd taken so many times I could have navigated the ship myself.

As we passed The Needles, the chimney-like towers of stone that jut up out of the water at the far westerly tip of the Isle of Wight, I saw more of the southern shore of the Isle of Wight than I'd ever seen. The famous cliffs that expose dinosaur bones when they erode laid about before us and shrunk away toward the horizon in perspective. Out of all the time I'd spent sailing north of the Isle, I'd never rounded The Needles to the southern shore. In such a small craft, rounding The Needles was absolutely not safe, and I knew it. All of the things that might happen to a small craft in the Solent were only more likely to happen there. I had made the right decision to never exit the Solent. Still, I regretted that I'd never taken the risk and circled the Isle.

Once out in open water, Mother and Father went below and rested in the cabin. It would be a long trip, they might as well settle in. I stayed up top and watched the sky and the water and felt the wind coming over the bow and into my face from the southwest. I kept watch on the land

behind us as it shrunk and grew hazy then fell below the horizon. I judged the swells and whitecaps, ‘a moderate breeze’ on the Beaufort scale I figured, and imagined how I would sail the water here.

The freighter set a beeline course for Charleston, South Carolina. Within a week, we were drawing near to the port at Charleston. While we were still in the blue water of the Gulf Stream, an ironic thing happened. I was standing on the bow, looking around at the sea and the water. When I looked straight down to where the bow creased the water, I occasionally saw fish shoot out of the breaking white water fleeing the ship bearing down on them. But, irony of ironies, they were flying fish. I was stunned at how far the critters actually could fly. I’d always imagine their “flying” as being little more than a graceful arc, but no, they actually flew, seemingly as far as they wished before tucking and diving back into the water. That’s just perfect, I thought, after Father’s crazy story. I raced back to our cabin, got Father to come out to the bow, and showed him the fish. He laughed, “School of fish,” he said. “Huh? School of fish!”

Eventually we passed Fort Sumter at the mouth of the harbor and followed the channel into Charleston Harbor and to the port. The city reminded me of Southampton as we approached. It was not the typical Europeans-coming-to-America story where they land at Ellis Island with the New York skyline across the river. Our arrival was very anti-dramatic—we just pulled in and docked.

Father had made amazing arrangements. The crate was off-loaded onto a truck that was already waiting. U.S. Customs met us. As usual, Mother was very ill-at-ease with customs. But Father said he had already been in contact with them and it was all set.

“You don’t have that pistol on your person, do you?” Mother asked.

“Of course not,” Father said. “It’s packed away with the other belongings.”

Indeed, the U.S. Customs seemed to have been expecting us. Much of the paperwork had been pre-filled. Apparently, being a successful businessman, and with a bit of "jingle in his pocket" as they say, Father carried a bit of cachet with him. The truck with our crate of belongings was already gone, heading to Milwaukee hopefully. We hired a taxi and rode to the airport. This was a surprise. Mother and I had expected to take a train to Milwaukee, maybe even a bus.

"No one rides trains anymore in America. They fly," Father said. "So, we will fly," Father smiled. I was thrilled, even Mother smiled. None of us had ever been on a plane before. America truly was about new opportunities.

We flew Eastern Airlines to Atlanta, Georgia, and then to Milwaukee. Father allowed me to sit by the window, Mother was unsure about flying and sat in the middle seat between Father and I. Watching the ground fall away to trees then splotches of farmland and then white clouds was a spectacle. I was glued to the window. Then, as we descended toward Milwaukee, we came in over the lake so there really was nothing to sea. I wasn't even sure what I was seeing, just vast blueness out the window and it was difficult to tell where the sky stopped and the waters began. I couldn't judge our altitude either, then though I saw tiny whitecaps. The waters of Lake Michigan reflected sparkles of sunlight. As we neared the airport, the whitecaps were clearly visible. Suddenly, white sailing sloops came into view far below. Tiny, brilliantly white triangles floating in a sea of blue. I pointed them out to Mother and Father. "I told you," Father said.

That night we were once again in a motel room with the same plan—Father would again scout out an area to again re-build his business. This whole thing was becoming routine. And again, a great sense of excitement overcame all three of us. We were, yet again, in a bustling new city, full of hope. This time though, Father had a fair amount of capital with which to start out. We were all certain things would go well.

Father wasted little time and soon had located a suitable location for his third market—a brick building on West Lisbon Avenue in Midtown. It seemed a solid, middle class neighborhood, just the type Father envisioned as being supportive of a neighborhood market. Within the week, he had secured a lease and even found a small house for us to live in—we would not be living where we worked. This time, we could leave work and walk home, the way it had been back in Loučná pod Klínovcem. Very soon, Mother had the house in living order and we focused our attention on stocking the store. Both Mother and Father seemed very pleased with the way that our new situation was panning out.

As for me, my interests were in looking around the city, figuring out what I wanted to do, and getting a sailboat. I spent most of my free time walking around, then taking the city bus somewhere, and then walking again. Naturally, I focused most of my efforts down by the lakeside and gawked at the beautiful sailboats docked or moored. The boats all seemed much larger than I could either afford or manage on my own. This made sense though, as there was no semi-protected bay or channel in which to sail, as the Solent had been. There was only Lake Michigan, and it was more of an ocean. And being one of the Great Lakes, was infamous for suddenly kicking up violent and frigid storms. Lake Superior was said to "never give up her dead"—the waters were so cold, year 'round, bodies didn't float, but sank to her depths. Lake Michigan was not as cold as Superior, but then, it was cold enough. In an odd way, this lake was much more treacherous than the Solent which opened to the open ocean. What this meant to me was that finding a smaller day sailer might be a bit more challenging.

We'd arrived in Milwaukee in late August of 1978. By early October, Father had the market reasonably well-stocked and he opened for business. "We'll grow as our customer-base grows." By now, the routine had become old-hat. And sure enough, the Milwaukee version of the Matyas Market started to become a part of the community. Since I

was no longer in school, I was able to work quite a bit. Father even paid me a wage (this was a first), figuring otherwise he'd have to pay an employee anyway and this way the money still stayed in the family. Father worked the mornings, I worked the afternoons and evenings. We all three chipped in on weekends, but Mother largely was not needed at the market. She joined several women's circles at a nearby Lutheran church that we'd begun attending. With the stability of the home and Father's market, and with the social support of friends at church, Mother was as happy as I'd ever seen her.

Although things were going tremendously for my parents, I suppose I was in a bit of a funk. I was a young man then. I had just turned 18. I was living with my parents and working with my parents. That was fine. But the problem that began to grind at me was that I didn't have any direction. My future, or whatever I could see as a future, was only working at the market. At that time, I looked ahead and foresaw at least 45 more years of working there. Again, although I didn't mind working there at 18 years old, I struggled to envision that as my life. What's more, it quickly became clear that everyone was readying for the winter. Sailboats were being plucked from the harbor and placed into dry dock storage. The sailing season clearly was over. I thought there might be a chance to purchase a boat on the cheap as people were putting them away, but I had no luck. I concluded that I'd have to wait until the Spring to sail. So, as a result of having no direction or goal, and being unable to pursue the one thing I had a passion for, I sulked around.

Mother and Father sensed this, of course. Mother encouraged me to continue going to school. Father wanted me to take more of an interest in the business. I wasn't sure what he meant. I already manned the store more than he did. Looking back, he wanted me to throw all of my energies into it—to come up with new ideas and new products and new ways to reach out to the community. These were things that he had always done, things he had been born for. But, like I have written earlier, I was wired a bit differently from Father.

Eventually, I wound up taking a few courses at a local technical school. The decision was made out of convenience—the school was close by and I could retain my hours at the market and save money for the *Vicktorie II*—and out of curiosity. My interest in computers had been piqued back in Southampton while fooling around with and trying to work out the Isle of Blaq game. So, beginning in the Spring semester of 1979, I took an introduction to computers course. That course would change the direction of my life from that of a shopkeeper and toward one of computers.

I'm sure I don't need to say this, but I will anyway—back then, computers were extremely different than today. Not just the computers themselves or their power, but even how people think of them. Today, computers are omnipresent. They are everywhere and everyone uses them. Then, computers were imagined as nebulous beasts somewhere, but few had seen them. Like Bigfoot. Few had seen them and even far fewer had actually used one. Our computer class had exactly one computer in it—a TRS-80. BASIC was still the default go-to program language. Though I'd read about it back with the Isle of Blaq game, now I was able to fiddle around with it for the first time actually on a computer. We signed up on a log book for time to use it. Using it meant that we already had all of our code written onto paper (by hand) and that we would simply type it in, run it, and then try to work out as many typos and bugs until the balance of our time ran out. The work-flow was insanely inane, but the simple, step-by-step nature of BASIC, and being forced to work things out thoughtfully on paper, proved later to be priceless building blocks.

This thought brings up the second major difference that I see between now and then. At that time, using a computer effectively meant coding a computer. Whereas today a person can use a computer in many different ways without the slightest inkling of what's going on or how it's doing what it's doing, then, the user knew what was going on because he'd just told the computer to do something via code. To use it, you

coded it. Or rather, there really was no distinction between a coder and a user. Although GUIs are fantastic for convenience, the power and knowledge of the command line is simply not present for most users today.

And a third difference back then, is that people had to be trained as to what a computer was, how it operated, what an OS is, and a programming language and on the hardware involved. All of these things gave a strong background from which to grow.

Immediately, I was intrigued with the hardware of computers and especially the coding. The pure logic of coding, and the sheer sense that it made, was captivating. There are so many things in life that make no sense at all, but coding did. Even when a coder hits a bug and racks his brain to see what's wrong, there is a logical, sensible reason somewhere. Often the coder sees it, sometimes not, but it's there. The computer does what it's programmed to do.

Looking back now, it's strange. I don't remember much about that year and most of the 1980s. There was a routine of work, classes at the technical school and then at UW-Milwaukee (after I'd taken all of the technical school's computer courses). I really didn't have a goal or a degree in mind, I simply took the courses out of interest. By this time, fairly good books were coming out on programming and I found that working through things on my own was more effective than taking courses. College courses always wasted time with some banal introduction that would last two weeks. Then they'd move on to a "First Project" which would always be geared at those of the lowest ability, just to get them off on the right foot. I wasn't the best coder by a long stretch, but I could do better working through things on my own. The process of wrestling through a problem was informative and somehow therapeutic as well.

With my earnings from working at the market, I'd used the money I was saving for a *Vicktorie II* and purchased a second-hand personal

computer from a computer lab assistant I'd gotten to know at UW-Milwaukee. They had been cycling through their old ones, upgrading, and storage was becoming an issue (these were the first days of realizing the short-lived nature of personal computers). New computers were to arrive the following week. He said that it was his job to get the new computers unboxed, hooked up, and ready for orientation at the end of the month so they could be shown off. He was to take all the old ones out and store them, but there really was no place to put the old ones and nobody had an answer as to what to do with them. The answer just seemed to be, 'Get the new ones hooked up and get the old ones out of there so it doesn't look trashy.' So, he sold me one for cash—I was doing him a favor. I didn't ask questions. This started me on a never-ending series of computer upgrades to keep up with software demands. And since I was now armed with a PC at home to accompany my programming books, this meant a lot of time on my own reading, coding, testing, thinking, and then repeating.

There were a few effects of this life that I was began living: first, a steady girlfriend wasn't going to happen. I'd dated a few girls during those years, pretty and sweet girls mostly through church. But, a fellow who spends all of his time either behind the counter at a convenience market or behind a black computer terminal…well, the probability of gaining a steady girlfriend declines at that point. There must be a mathematical equation to explain this. It would be something calculating the young man's weekly girlfriend-productive-hours (outgoing activities such as concerts, picnics, church functions, festivals, puppy-walking) and then factoring in his weekly girlfriend-*un*productive-hours (such as convenience store clerk hours and programming hours). A multiple regression would work here using the classic formula below:

$$Y_i = (b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + \cdots + b_nX_n) + \varepsilon_i$$

The formula could be altered to read as follows:

$$girlfriend\ chances_i = (b_0 + b_1 productive\ hours_1 + b_2 unproductive\ hours_2 + \cdots + b_n X_n) + \varepsilon_i$$

There would need to be a set of data to figure out the *b* (beta values). Perhaps the geeks in a computer classroom could be surveyed. Once the beta values were figured and factored in with the hours, the chances of getting a girlfriend could be calculated. But the upshot is clear. Clearly, the two betas of "productive" and "unproductive hours" work inversely in bettering a fellow's chances—my numbers were not good. The fact that I even imagined that there might exist a mathematical formula for this bodes poorly for landing a girlfriend. That would be a great third beta value: number of things in your life that you create multiple regressions for in attempting to explain them. I think you see my point—a steady girlfriend didn't happen.

This brings up the second effect of my life then. All of this time spent in the unproductive-girlfriend-activities meant no time for sailing. I simply kept putting off getting sailboat because I didn't have much time to sail it and didn't want it languishing at anchor and money was spent on a computer or the one that would be soon needed when it no longer had the CPU power to run the programs I was running. The one thing that might have upped the girlfriend probability considerably—a sailing date—never came to fruition. I never got a *Vicktorie II.*

If there exists any benefit to these pathetic circumstances, it was that I threw myself wholly into computers and coding. Namely, I dove into the C programming language. I spent countless hours working through the programming books, working examples and small projects, essentially just fooling around, but in a somewhat systematic manner (i.e., generally following the book). Nothing I wrote then was of any consequence—it was the same as a schoolboy working out his math homework for the sake of practice. It was exercise. Although I enjoyed learning to code and the challenges it provided, I found the coding to be very frustrating at times. When stuck, there was no one to go to for

assistance. I either figured it out eventually, figured out a workaround, or gave it. Giving up was allowing the problem to win—something I hated. So, I usually stuck with it and grumbled around and wrestled with it until finally working it out. In an odd way, this might have helped me to learn by forcing me to continue to think through problems and work things out in some manner. It forced perseverance and practicality.

One other benefit was that I gained some experience that could be placed on a resume, sort of. The lab assistant from whom I'd bought my first computer and I got to be friends, or at least, acquaintances. The computers there were much more powerful than mine and he let me use the computers at times even though I was no longer a student. Then, he called me one day and asked for a favor. He often manned the computer lab at nights. A certain day was coming up and he was scheduled, but it was also the one year anniversary of dating his girlfriend. The other lab assistants were either out of town or being jerks and his girlfriend was going to give him hell if he stood her up and would I come in and man the lab? All I had to do was be there, don't let anyone steal anything, and answer any questions if they asked. No one ever does, but if they do, they're always very simple questions and he was sure I could handle it. Mostly, it was just people typing papers and the question is, "How do I print?" I filled in for him, and he was right—it was both easy and boring. I wound up filling in for him about three or four times. His girlfriend seemed rather dramatic and emergencies were often. They broke up shortly afterward and my substituting ended, but my "experience" there proved fruitful later on.

An unfortunate side-effect of this period was my grumpiness toward Mother and Father. Father wanted me to show more initiative that might actually be productive, such as with the market. Fooling around on a computer for endless hours was pointless in his eyes. Many times he was right in that regard. Mother wondered why I spent so much time on the computer and so little time courting girls. She must have known of the multiple regression equation as well. Somehow, I'd taken to growling,

literally growling, as in the sound a bear makes. When heckled by Mother or Father about things, rather than offer an answer in words, I usually gave a guttural, “Grrr.” The growl made its point, albeit somewhat rudely and disrespectfully. There could be yet another beta value for the regression: number of times you growl per day. Anyway, my grumpiness was fully unbecoming and regretful as I look back on it.

Years passed. As I mentioned, I really don’t remember much about them since there was essentially nothing to distinguish one day from the next. Working at the market, or working at the computer screen, or mulling over a programming book. That was all there was to it.

Mother thrived in Milwaukee with the stability and church friends, Father, for the first time in his life, only treaded water. Like each of Father’s other markets, this one had become something of a fixture in the community. Father’s exuberant personality made this inevitable. The area was home to mostly working class folks, many who worked in breweries or in manufacturing such as the nearby Harley-Davidson factory or simply in small businesses. Matyas Market was doing okay, but only okay.

By the late 80s, things were again to come to a head. Back in Southampton I mentioned that sometimes in life the rivers converge, once again the floodwaters were coming to a confluence from three directions.

The first river was simply a change in the times. Small, neighborhood markets were falling out of fashion to the large and shiny supermarkets. The 80s were very image-conscious days and it was more fashionable to be seen in a glitzy new shopping center than in an old brick market (where you likely wouldn’t be seen at all anyway). The absolute irony is that in only a few years, the pendulum had swung back the other way and it became more fashionable to be seen grocery shopping in the small, brick neighborhood market and shunning the clinical, cardboard façade of a supermarket. This supermarket problem of the 80s slowed Father’s store, but would not shut it down. The sheer

convenience of having milk and canned goods so close by and with Father's welcoming friendliness ensured business would always be around.

The other two rivers were much stronger. A second river came again in the form of Father's old nemesis, labor unions. Those schools of fish. It was déjà vu. And once again, I happened to be in the store when it occurred. Two of the labor union representatives came to Father's market one day on a "friendly visit." One even wore a Local 433 trucker hat and a red satin jacket, as if he tried to be as cliché as possible. Times were hard and people were struggling. No one wants a strike because that's not good for anyone and we were wondering if we can count on you if things go South and people need some help? It was almost exactly the same sales pitch that Ian had given back in Shamrock Quay. Verbatim. I worried that Father was going to lose it. After the "School of Fish" rant, a full berating dress-down was possible. But, he was as cool as a cucumber. As calm as I'd ever seen him.

"I'd be happy to help out in any way I can. I've always been here for the community," Father said flatly. The man seemed relieved. "What exactly is it that you want me to do?"

"We just need to know that you'll be here if we need you," the trucker hat man said.

"Of course I'll be here. I've been here for almost ten years now." Father said.

"Yes, but if things go bad. If a strike starts up and the workers need help," trucker hat said.

"Yes, a strike is hard," Father said.

"Then we can count on you?" the other man said.

“I will be here,” Father said. “But what exactly would I do to help?” Father was not going to let them off easy. He was going to make them say it.

The men hemmed and hawed a bit, irritated that Father was not acquiescing. “The workers may need credit,” trucker hat said. “If there’s a strike, and it probably won’t get to that, but if it does.”

“I cannot give credit,” Father said firmly. “I have done it in the past and it was a mistake. There will be no credit.” The men looked incredulous. “But, I will be here for them, ready to serve the community if things were to come to a strike,” Father added.

“Sir,” trucker hat said, “the community has supported you for several years. We’re not asking for much, just that you give back a little to the community.”

“I have served the community for all of those years, just as they have supported me. And I appreciate the community’s support. But it is a two-way street.”

“That’s what we’re saying,” the other man said, “it’s like you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours. We just might need a little help is all. Can’t you get that through your head?” This man was growing angry and becoming rude.

“I understand what you’re saying,” Father said.

“These people have paid your bills for ten years and you’re going to get all greedy, you dumbass kraut,” he said.

“No one has ever paid a bill for me, sir. And there will be no credit. Is there anything else I can help you with?”

“I’ll come back there and change your mind…” the man without the hat said and lunged at my father who stood behind the shop’s counter. Being corpulent, the man struggled awkwardly to get over the counter top. When he finally planted his feet and stood to face my father, Father

had his .45 automatic pistol trained on the man's forehead. The man froze.

"Get out of my store. Right now," Father said slowly.

I was frozen. The two union men were as well.

"Get out," Father repeated calmly, "you're done here." The man backed away slowly and then rounded the counter. He and the trucker hat man walked out together keeping their eyes on Father. Father kept the pistol aimed at the man's head and said, "Don't ever come back here. And if you do, you'd better bring a gun bigger than this one."

The men left. Father hid the pistol back underneath the counter. Until then, I didn't even know it was there. My heart was beating in my chest so hard it felt like it would burst. I didn't know what to say, but that was okay because I could tell Father didn't' want to talk. He just shook his head, angry. He looked at me and said, "Don't tell your mother."

"Okay," is all I could say.

And a third river came in the form of what turned out to be Father's first big business or financial mistake. The credit he'd given back in Southampton was only a minor setback. This one proved fatal. Upon arrival in Milwaukee, Father had taken out a loan to purchase our house. The problem was that the loan was from a local savings and loan, an S&L. With that information, anyone old enough to remember the 1980s in America can probably imagine what happened. For anyone who is unfamiliar with the S&L crisis of the 80s, I'll briefly try to outline of gist of what happened.

The late 70s saw inflation shoot up to astronomical heights—and it was killing the middle class. Buying food and putting gas in the car became real problems. The Federal Reserve Board decided it would try to fight back. "The Fed" has two main types of bullets in its chambers when it comes to manipulating the economy (or trying to manipulate it or corrupting it or bastardizing it). Those bullets are (1) playing around with

the amount of money in circulation, and (2) playing around with interest rates. In this case, raising interest rates was the Fed's weapon-of-choice in the Fed's attempt to curtail inflation. The logic was simple enough. High interest rates have two major effects on people and the economy: (a) they discourage the issuance of loans, which should energize business activity, and (b) high interest rates encourage the saving money in the bank. Both of these mean less spending, and a slower economy, and slower inflation. So, the Fed raised interest rates considerably at the end of the 1970s and entering into the 80s.

Savings are loans are essentially banks, but banks for regular folks, working folks. My father, being a business owner isn't really the type of person they normally award loans to. Normally it's the factory worker or the school teacher trying to buy a modest home. But, since he was a recent immigrant and since he sold himself as a "shopkeeper", and coupled with the fact that S&L loan officers worked essentially on a commission basis per loan and were therefore eager to issue as many as possible (often risky loans), the S&L gave Father the loan anyway. Father was lucky to get the interest rate locked in at a fixed rate just before the Fed began raising them. After interest rates went up, any money Father now made and put in the bank would earn more interest than what he was paying on the home loan. This seemed like yet another brilliant business strike for my father.

The other pertinent fact here is that S&Ls are what they call a "thrift", meaning they borrow their money from the Fed at a slightly lower rate than normal banks (ones that also deal with businesses and corporations). S&Ls get a thrifty rate. This is all fine, except that the rate was just raised considerably. S&Ls found themselves suddenly in a business model that was top-heavy. They had given out many long-term loans at fixed, low rates, like my Father's home loan. Yet now, they were borrowing money from the Fed at a much higher rate. The simple result was that the S&Ls' rate of income from the old loans was now lower than

their costs to lend money going forward. Their business model was now unsustainable. And the time bomb began ticking.

By the mid-to-latter half of the 80s, S&Ls, regulators, and politicians were aware of the malignant nature of this situation. But, no one knew exactly what to do about it. The solution, if it could be called a solution at all, was called "forebearance" and bore a striking similarity to doing nothing. (Understand, doing nothing is always an option, an often is a good option. However, when your boat is taking on water, doing nothing is likely not the wisest option.) Forebearance was simply the hope that S&Ls would ride out the tough times and ultimately turn things around. The hope was that the S&Ls would tighten their belts for the lean years, but then the economy would rebound and interest rates could then be lowered again and a state of homeostasis would return. For many S&Ls, the turnaround never happened and they eventually folded. Worse, some S&Ls got desperate and began investing in wildly speculative ventures in hopes of keeping the boat afloat. Not surprisingly, these usually failed. Even worse still, these speculative ventures were at times hustled up by hucksters eager to create quick millions via investment in junk bonds. And then, to top off the entire fiasco, politicians in Washington decided to spend some $160 billion in U.S. taxpayer money in to attempt to restore order to the S&L downward spiral in what's sometimes called the "S&L bailout."

As to what this all meant to my Father and to our family…well, it was not good. In the same week that Father had pulled a gun on the labor leader, Father received a letter from the S&L. It was brief, slightly terse, and to the point. The letter read that the S&L was in trouble and in order to keep the loan intact, a monthly "sustenance fee" was going to need to be added to the mortgage. This sustenance fee would be prorated with the original, low interest rate so as to bring the mortgage rate up to and aligning with, current interest rates. The sustenance fee is subject to change monthly, per any further changes in interest rates. Failure to pay could yield very undesirable results. The S&L was very sorry for any

inconvenience, but this was all beyond their control, and with cooperation we can all pull through these tough times.

Father was irate. Very, very mad, to the point of throwing things in the store. I was there, but knew better than to talk to him just then. I went home and gave Mother a heads-up warning. None of it made any sense, but Mother had enough sense to fix Father's favorite meal—pork roast with potatoes and brown gravy.

That evening I was to man the store, as usual. Mother went with me to the store so that we'd all be there. He should have calmed down and maybe we could talk things over as a family then. When we walked in, no one else was in the store—that was a good thing. Father was simply sitting calmly on the stool behind the counter. He didn't bother to look up when we entered.

"Matthäus told me about the letter," Mother said. Father handed it to her without speaking. Mother read it over, slowly. "What does it mean?"

"It means they are breaking their promise," Father said.

"Can they do that?" Mother asked and glanced at the paper.

"I don't think so. I have the papers. We have a contract."

"Yes. What does it mean by 'undesirable results'," Mother asked.

"It means lose the house," Father said flatly. "You can't just change the rules of a loan when you feel like it. I feel like writing them a letter and telling them I'm going to start paying the mortgage at half its rate." Father shook his head, but he was no longer angry. Now he was frustrated and, understandably, a bit confused as to how the S&L could have just changed the stipulations of the loan at whim.

"I spoke with a lawyer on the phone, or a lawyer's office," Father continued. "I made an appointment to speak with a lawyer in town tomorrow."

“That’s good,” Mother said.

“I’d like Matthäus to come along with me, it’s at 10:00am,” Father said and looked at me. I nodded. “Can you man the store in the morning?” he asked Mother.

“Of course,” Mother said in her calm manner. “You are taking the right steps. Things will work out.” It had always been Mother who was nervous about things and Father was the one who reassured her. In this case, the roles had become reversed. Father nodded, and that was it for the evening.

The next day we met with the attorney. Father explained the situation, showed the attorney the letter and the loan agreement papers. The lawyer put on his spectacles and mulled them over. Then he snatched off his glasses, and leaned back in his chair.

“Well,” he said, “here’s the deal. It’s not legal what they’re doing to you. They can’t change the agreement midstream. They’re pretending like they can, but they can’t. You can beat them in court.”

“I knew it,” Father said and jumped to attention in his seat. He looked over at me and smiled.

“But here’s the thing,” the lawyer went on, “the question is, ‘Is it worth it?’”

“You bet it is,” Father said, “I’m not paying some fee they added on. Those bastards didn’t even have the gumption to come talk to me in person. They had to send a letter. I’m not giving them an extra nickel.”

“I understand, but let’s look at the options,” the lawyer said. “One option we have is to pay the mortgage with this ‘sustenance fee’ they added on. If you do, they get off your back and the problem goes away. I know you don’t like that option, I wouldn’t either, but it’s an option. There’s a cost in everything. Sometimes the cost of dealing with a problem to just make it go away is worth the money. An option two is to

just ignore the sustenance fee altogether, ignore this letter, and just pay your mortgage like regular. See what they do. This could be a bluff letter. They might send it out to everyone and see who will and who won't pay it. They'll get money from the payers, but might not have any intention of pursuing those who don't any further because it might not be worth their trouble. Of course, this is a bit of a gamble, because they might decide to play hardball and come after you then. And then, as an option three, we take them to court. We could file a suit against them for breach of contract and we could throw in emotional damages if this has been unsettling at all."

"It's pissed me to the gills," Father said.

"Well, there you go," the lawyer noted. He gave us a few moments to consider those options.

Father thought them through, then said, "Tell me the options again."

The lawyer ticked them off with his fingers, "One, pay the sustenance fee, two, just ignore the letter, and three, go to court."

Father thought again, then looked at me. "What do you think we should do Matthäus?" Father had never asked me for a business-related opinion before. He'd always instinctively known what to do.

I thought for a second, then said, "I like the second option. Ignore it and pay the mortgage as usual."

Father listened, looked at the lawyer, and the lawyer nodded.

"It is a good middle-ground," the lawyer said. "It puts the ball back in their court. And it leaves our options open going forward. If they do nothing, then there is nothing to it. If they do press further, then we can go to court, essentially we simply go to option three."

I liked the way this man's thought process worked. It seemed like an if/then/else/either/or program, in a lawyer's style.

Father considered what had just been said. Knowing Father, he'd wanted blood. Simply ignoring the letter, even if it worked out and they didn't do anything further, meant they'd tried to bully us and got no push-back. Then Father asked the lawyer, "Is that what you think we should do?"

"It is. That is what I would recommend doing. Ignore it, go from there."

Father thought a moment, turned to look at me, then gave one nod, and the plan was settled. We shook hands with the lawyer and left.

In the coming months, the lawyer had been right. Father paid the mortgage as if he'd never even gotten the letter. They did send one other letter, essentially saying the exact same thing, but Father ignored that one as well. As it turned out though, it didn't matter one way or the other what we did. Those letters had been last-ditch efforts on the part of the S&L management to attempt to drum up phantom income so they could show regulators an uptick and hopefully keep the S&L afloat a bit longer. The uptick was negligible and inconsequential. In the summer of 1987, the S&L folded and quietly closed.

The government regulators soon came in to liquidate any and all of the S&L's holdings—that mostly meant reclaiming homes from people. For our family, that meant that we were forced to sell our home. Since we were forced to sell, the price we finally received was less than market value. At least our family got the slice of the home's worth in proportion to the quantity of the mortgage that had been paid off. We considered another home, or an apartment, but Father was insistent that we just live in the back room of the store, like we'd done in Southampton. The only problem was that in Southampton we'd had a loft above the store. In Milwaukee, we only had a backroom, essentially a storage room, partitioned off from the store itself. It was hardly a fitting place for a family. For me, being 26 years old at the time, this was especially not ideal.

Father assured Mother and me that this would only be temporary. He was right, although the way things worked out were not as we would have guessed.

The rivers of life once again converged. The labor union returned. Talks with management, again as always, were going poorly. Union workers were disgruntled and edgy. Shoppers in the store began dropping little phrases, like, “support from the community,” and “we’re all in this together.” Father said nothing, but he knew the code.

One night, we were all three awakened by a loud crashing sound in the store. Father grabbed his pistol and burst out of the back room. No one was there, but a rock had been thrown through the front window. There was no note attached as we’d expected, just a rock through the window. Father and I rushed outside to see if anyone was around, but saw no one. A car was screaming somewhere far down the street out of sight.

“Hide,” Father said, “they’ll come back around to look at what they’ve done.”

Father and I hid outside the store for several minutes, Father clutching that pistol and gritting his teeth. I figured he’d get off a couple of rounds if that car did a breeze-by. Thankfully, no one came.

Mother had already cleaned up the glass. Father didn’t say much, he just looked at the window and shook his head.

“I think we should move,” Father said simply. “I don’t like it here.”

It was hard to disagree. Things were not working out exactly as had been envisioned.

“What do you think?” Father asked us. He had never asked our opinion before when we’d moved. I wasn’t sure that I should have a vote. This would be more of a move for Father and Mother.

“I like it here,” Mother said, “but not like this.”

Father thought some more. “I know you like it here. I know.” Father didn’t know what to do—I’d never seen him indecisive before.

“We’ll figure something out,” Mother said and Father nodded.

The next day, I repaired the front window. Mother had prepared a nice lunch and the three of us sat down to eat and talk. Good decisions were always made over food. The mood was much more cheerful with the food and the sunlight outside, and Father spoke more freely.

“I’d like to move to the country,” Father said. “Away from the city and to a small town.”

“Where to?” Mother asked.

“Rome, Wisconsin,” Father said.

“Rome?” Mother asked.

“Rome, Wisconsin. It’s a small town in the middle of the state.”

“Why there?” Mother asked.

“Because that’s where Dagny and Reardon found the motor, in the book." Mother was confused. I’d read *Atlas Shrugged* and I understood what he was saying. But, it was becoming very unnerving that Father was now making decisions based on that novel and using the characters’ names as though they were friends.

“It’s from the novel *Atlas Shrugged*,” I explained to Mother. She hadn’t read it, was uninterested in it, but she didn’t pursue an explanation further.

“It doesn’t have to be in Rome. But, maybe somewhere near there. I’d like to see it anyway.”

“That sounds fine,” Mother said.

“It’s supposed to be nice country there, a lot like Bohemia. We could find a nice church and you’d make new friends.”

“Mother nodded. It will all work out,” she said. She was so stable.

We finished our lunch without discussing it further. Mother was always so patient with things, or when Father said something like, ‘We leave in the morning,’ she would be ready to simply walk away. She really was an amazing person in her quiet, calm manner. The odd thing was that Mother and Father had now reversed roles—Mother was calmly sure that everything would work out fine for us, and Father was edgy and a bit indecisive. This time, Mother’s confidence gave strength and buttressed Father.

Father soon garnered his energies again. With a new purpose at hand—moving to the countryside—Father lit into his activities with enthusiasm. Things once again moved quickly. Father spoke with the owner of the building and it was agreed that whenever he wished to move out was fine. We’d be released from the lease at the end of whatever month we chose. That gave us great flexibility and Father instantly became very eager to move.

The three of us took a day trip to scout out the area. To Father’s surprise, Rome, Wisconsin really isn’t a town at all. It’s more of just an area. I believe Father was expecting a small, hometown America kind of town with a run-down factory on the edge of town, like in the novel. There was nothing but an intersection of two country roads. But nearby, there were several towns that were appealing to both Father and Mother.

They asked my opinion, but I told them I would be happy anywhere (I was convinced that this should be their decision, not mine). The truth was, since I’d never gotten around to getting a second sailboat, there really was no real reason for me to stay in Milwaukee anyway. What little I was doing and in the way I was doing it—learning to program—I could do almost anywhere.

One particular town especially caught our interest. It was nestled beside a miniature-sized mountain and with a little imagination, was indeed a bit reminiscent of Bohemia. We stopped in to the local Lutheran

church—this was a big thing for Mother—and met the pastor. He was a young man with an earnest smile. He stopped his sermon-writing and showed us the church—a small sanctuary with two adjacent rooms that doubled as classrooms for a tiny Christian day school during the week and Bible classes on Sunday, and an office. The pastor's wife was teaching in one of the classrooms with about six pupils. When she saw us outside of the classroom door, she stepped out and introduced herself. Again, her smile and words were real. She was genuinely that happy we had stopped in and invited us to church on Sunday and invited Mother to a ladies' luncheon afterwards. On the way out, we met the church secretary, an older lady named Zetta Krieg who volunteered in the office until school got out. Mother immediately hit it off with Mrs. Krieg. Mother already had made two new friends, so when we got into the car again, the decision had already been made for us—we would move here.

Before the end of the month, we had everything we wanted to take with us packed into a rented truck. Father had decided we would not announce that we were moving. There would be no "close-out" fire sale to clear out our product. "One morning," Father said, "we'll just be gone." He explained that we would leave just like Ellis Wyatt had done, but without burning anything down. "Then they'll see." Father's infatuation with all things Ayn Rand was troubling. I got the allegory, but it was worrisome still.

The other thing that was distressful was that Father said he would not be opening a new store in central Wisconsin. "The days of neighborhood markets are over," he declared. "Today it's all about supermarkets and 7-11s."

"What will you do?" Mother asked.

"I'll find something. I might do something different. I might just get a job—let somebody else worry about the details and just take an hourly wage. It'll be like I'm half-retired."

Mother grimaced. That did not sound like her husband speaking. She didn't say anything, she didn't have to. Mother and I both knew that Father was not the type of man to work for someone else. He'd either just start his own business. If he did get a job working for someone else he'd eventually just do his own thing and get himself fired anyway.

The plan was that we would take all of the dry goods—canned vegetables, paper products, etc.—with us for us to use personally. Most of the other stuff, we'd just leave for whomever wanted it. We loaded up what we felt would be of use to us, took one last look at the store, and then we left Milwaukee. Driving north and west toward open country, it felt like the old pioneer days—a fresh start of beginning something new with great possibilities ahead.

10 – Wisconsin

Our life in central Wisconsin was probably the happiest since Father's first store as a young man back in Loučná pod Klínovcem. Mother took to the town and community and church "like a duck to water" as the saying goes. Although in her early 60s at this point, she finally blossomed. Mostly with folks from church, she had an active social network with the other women in the area. She was outgoing, giving, cheerful, popular and largely care-free.

True to his word, Father did not open a new store. He didn't get a job working for someone else either though. Instead, he opened a road-side vegetable stand. He obtained permission from a landowner to set up a small stand and he was simply in business once again, just like that. It was a perfect situation for him. There was no rent to pay, so essentially there were no expenses. On Saturdays, he spent the mornings at a local flea market. Father looked forward to Saturdays and this flea market like a child looking forward to Christmas. A flea market, or a garage sale, provides the purest form of a free market. There is no overseer, no taxation, and the buyer and seller can haggle out an agreeable price or haggle and not reach an agreeable price. Father absolutely adored the bargaining and would exude pure glee over getting an extra dime for a tomato above the price he was willing to take. The game was his joy. These days of his were not far removed from his boyhood days of selling rabbits and bread out of a wooden wagon back in Bohemia.

Our home was an old farmhouse on what would be called a "hobby farm" today. The reality was that it was a century-old farm breathing its last breaths of life. The farmhouse was in much disrepair and the wood was largely rotten through in many places. But, it was our home. We filled the basement with all of the dry goods from the store—we could have lived for years and never left if we wished. And the old house was warm in the cold winters and cool in the summers and we loved it. Between what Father had still in his savings and with the little

bit that he made from the vegetable stand, and with Mother's thrift, we survived just fine.

Finally, I found a bit of direction in my life. Since Father didn't have a market, I didn't have a job. I was living in a cozy room in the farmhouse and continued to learn to code and practice my skills, but I was eager to move out on my own. That meant that I needed to find a way to earn money. Two jobs came my way totally unexpectedly.

First, I was in a local hardware store one morning. Mother had wanted some chickens on the farm for eggs. So, we got a dozen. When the eggs started coming in steadily and we began to have more than we could eat, Father naturally sold them at his stand. When he saw that this was instantly near-complete profit, Father immediately wanted three dozen more chickens. What's more, this was the kind of product he loved—consumables that bring in women to shop on a regular basis. As a result, I was in the hardware store buying chicken wire, steeple nails, fence posts, tin roofing and 2 x 4s to build a larger chicken coop. While the fellows in the back of the hardware store were gathering up my materials, a man about Father's age was also there talking to the clerk. He wore a baseball cap that read "Badger Gravel and Rock." The rock man was frustrated because his driver had just shown up still-drunk from last night and since he was in no condition to drive and since he had a large order to deliver gravel at noon today he had had to fire him and he didn't know where he was going to find a driver in such short notice and did the clerk have any ideas or know anybody?

The clerk shrugged and say he didn't know and the rock man shook his head, vexed. Then he looked over at me and said jokingly, "You wouldn't want a job driving a dump truck would you?"

To his surprise, I said, "Sure, I'd love to do it."

The rock man was astonished at first, "You serious? I need somebody at noon today. Got to be at the job site at noon."

"That's okay," I said.

"You ever drove a dump truck?"

"No sir. Is it much different than a regular truck? A pickup?" I asked.

"Not really. Just sits up higher and if you pull the PTO while you're driving down the highway you'll turn a paved road into a gravel road." I nodded. "What's your name son?"

"Matt." I had begun using the shorten version of Matthäus in America.

"Matt, our place, Badger Gravel and Rock, is out off of County Road Z. Can you be there by 10:30?"

"Yes sir. I just need to drop these things at home and I'll be there."

The rock man put out his hand, I shook it, he said, "All right then, Matt, I'll see you then." Then he looked at the clerk and said, "How about that."

I showed up at Badger Gravel and Rock, was assigned to one of three dump trucks that were already loaded, was given a five minute lesson on what to do and what to not do, then fell in behind the others and drove off to a construction site to dump my load of gravel. And that odd set of circumstances began my truck driving career. I would be at Badger Gravel and Rock, "B G & R", off-and-on, for the next several years.

The second job that came my way accidentally was via my computer's failings. It was 1991 and computers had made considerable advances since I'd begun coding. But, my second-hand computers had always been behind the technological curve. As a programmer, I felt that the things I was working on were at the leading edge of the curve, yet I was holding an old tool.

Of all the things to go wrong on a computer system, my monitor went out. One day it simply flickered crazily, then went black, and was dead. Its number just came up. Massive monitor coronary, and drop to the floor. There was no Internet then to order a replacement, and with no big-box store or computer stores anywhere nearby, I was stuck. I reverted back to what had worked back in Milwaukee—I'd go to the local college and ask around to see if I could buy an old monitor.

I went to the local community college and asked the secretary to point me in the direction of the computer science department.

"We don't have computer science here, but we do have a computer lab in the math department in Building C," and she pointed that-a-way. I thanked her and walked over.

It was only a week before the semester was to begin. I found the computer lab and found a man fumbling with the set-up of one of the machines. The lab was in utter disarray with everything unplugged and laying in pell mell fashion. I introduced myself, told what I was there for, and asked about any monitors. The man said his name was Jim but that he didn't know about any monitors for sale. He wasn't the "computer guy", the computer guy had just moved on to a college in North Dakota. He'd just up and walked out and left the place looking like a tornado had come through. Jim said he was one of the math instructors and somehow this computer lab fell as his responsibility to get things in order before the semester.

Jim was fumbling around with the wires behind the computer, but obviously didn't know what he was doing. I've never understood how people can't hook up a computer—each wire only plugs into one place only—you simply plug them in to the place that they will plug into. It's like that child's game with the shapes, the X and the circle and the square and the triangle, and you simply plug the shape into the corresponding receptacle-shape. And yet, Jim the college math teacher, couldn't do it.

I said let me try, he stepped back, and I hooked it up and turned it on. Jim watched in amazement as though I'd grabbed his Rubik's cube and, in a few seconds, had it solved. The computer booted up and went to the command line, flashing and asking for input. I tapped in a quick command to double-check that it was responding; it was fine.

"You know about these things?"

"Yes," I said simply.

"We're looking to hire a new lab technician, if you've got any experience."

I thought about it and said, "I helped out a few times in the lab at UW-Milwaukee." That was true enough.

"UW-Milwaukee?" Jim nodded and seemed impressed.

"I don't have a degree, and it was only volunteer there," I explained.

"Doesn't matter," Jim said. "You don't need a degree. We just need somebody who knows how to this stuff works. Nobody in the department knows anything about computers and I hate 'em. Kids can't do the work themselves anymore, the computer does it all. We used to have to figure everything by hand, pencil and paper and a slide rule. Kids don't even know what a slide rule is now."

I nodded. "Well," I said, "I do know about computers. And I am interested in the job."

"What's your name?"

"Matt. Matt Jandaček."

"Listen Matt, go to the math secretary and tell her Jim Schmidt said you're a candidate for the computer lab job. She'll set up an interview."

I said that I'd do it, then took some time to show Jim how to set up the computers and test that they were working properly. He got the hang of it, said he really appreciated it and wished me luck. I didn't get a monitor that day, but two days later when I interviewed with the math department head, I got the job and my academic career had started.

Things then began to move quite quickly for me. As computer lab technician, I ran the entire operation. Just as Jim had said, no one in the math department knew anything about computers, absolutely nothing, and no one was interested in learning about them. Being lab technician meant nothing more than manning the lab so that students could use the computers—the same as back at UW-Milwaukee. But, it became evident that some of the students were generally interested in computers and how they worked and the basics of programming. Hearing them talk, I naturally joined into the conversation and helped them along. They began bringing in simple programs they were working on and asked me to look them over. I did and gave them feedback. Apparently, this made quite an impression and they students asked me to teach a computer course. I wasn't even sure how to respond to that, but said that maybe I could talk to the math department chair about it. I did, and to my surprise, he said that several students had already approached him with the idea and that it was probably something the community college should move toward if they want to stay competitive.

The upshot was that when the Fall semester began, I was teaching a course simply titled "Introduction to Computers." Mother was completely thrilled. When I was just the lab assistant she bragged about me teaching at the community college. Now, in her eyes, I was a full-fledged college professor. The truth was that I was scared to death about the ordeal.

Teaching a college course, or even a community college course, required a syllabus and a required reading list. I had none of these and was hardly familiar with these things. I thought back to the intro course I'd taken at the technical college in Milwaukee, berated myself for not

having kept the material from there, and splotched together a syllabus. My “syllabus” was little more than a general outline of what I thought we’d do in the course with some rather random dates along the left side column. Since no one knew anything about computers, and since the dates aligned with the dates for the Fall semester calendar, the syllabus seemed fine to all. For required reading, I put down the C programming book that I had done the most work out of and seemed easiest to follow. And I was now an adjunct instructor for a community college.

I really had no idea how to go about teaching computers and programming. I stumbled along at first with what might be called “history and theory of computers.” I don’t know if my students learned one iota, but I learned a ton because it forced me to go over topics I’d never really delved into. After a week or so of lectures on that topic, and with the students watching and listening and frantically taking notes, I realized that at some point I would need to have them actually do something so that I could record a grade. I figured it was time to get down to some work on the computer so I assigned one of the first projects that was listed in the book—create a program that is essentially a digital adding machine. The user enters a number, enters either a plus or minus operator, then another number, and the program prints the result. I gave the assignment on a Wednesday and said it was due on Monday. Initially, I was thinking they should bring it in on Friday, but this way they had the weekend if they needed the extra time. This was to be a warm-up assignment and would give me something to record as a grade.

On Friday, reality started to set in. Some students asked questions about the assignment and the program. That was fine, but the nature of the questions were so elementary or off-base, I grew worried. I tried to reassure them that this is an easy assignment and wouldn’t amount to a major grade and to not worry much about it. On Monday, the full dose of reality hit. Only two students turned in what might be called programs, though neither worked as desired. The others were general lines of code that they’d copied out of the book, but really had no resemblance to a

program. More than one student turned in an actual paper, an essay, describing what the program would do. It was an essay describing an adding machine adding or subtracting. About a third of the class turned in nothing at all.

It was evident that I'd over-estimated their abilities. By today's standards, there are many programming languages that are very useful for teaching coding. HTML, CSS and Javascript form a triumvirate that offer a terrific mix of simplicity and the ability to instantly gain satisfaction and to check one's work. But, in the early 90s, those were not around. Reluctantly, I reverted back to what I'd first learned on, BASIC. I felt uneasy teaching a language that was clearly dying, but consoled myself that it was only exercise—athletes don't use push-ups in competition, but they do them as exercise for competition.

From that day on, things went better. They actually went well. The student's C programming book was now useless. I regretted having them all waste their money on it. So, I dug up a copy of the old David Ahl computer games book, as well as some others that had come out by this time. With my one copy of these books, and going project-by-project, and step-by-step, the students made tremendous leaps forward. The lectures were essentially scrapped and I would just sit down with students at their terminals and help them work through their code. Then I'd move to the next person and help them. On and on, then circle around. As a semester exam, I simply assigned an end-of-semester project. Students were to write an original, working program. Most of them were very simple IF/THEN flow chart type programs, essentially stories that branched like a tree. But, the brighter students surprised me. One even wrote a program that took my first, failed assignment and ran with it to make what was a working basic calculator complete with all of the normal functions.

I suppose I did a decent enough job at the community college because I'd earned a bit of a reputation as being a good teacher and was well-liked by students. I didn't especially realize this, but as the students

matriculated on from the community college, they began speaking of me to their university professors. I only know this because one day I got a call from the department chair at UW-Stephens Point up the highway some miles. Stunned yet again, I listened. Students had been talking and several had had my classes and had learned a lot and I was highly recommended and there's an opening in the computer sciences department and would I be interested in coming up for an interview and by the way do I know anything about statistics?

The respective answers to the chair's questions were, 'Yes,' and 'No, not really.'

For the Fall semester of 1998, I found myself teaching two courses at UW-SP—Beginning Computer Programming and Introduction to Statistics. The programming class was easy enough for me to teach. New programming languages were in place by then, of course, but the concepts and premises and work-flows are always the same. Statistics had been gradually making a crossover from being a mathematics class to being more of a computer class. No longer were students required to apply the formulae to tabulate calculations, computers now did it for them. But, navigating the programs was not always easy, especially for older university faculty members who had and ingrained computer-phobia. "I'll break it," was always what they said. Once again, my being computer-adept had opened a wide door for me.

As for the statistics class, I stayed one chapter ahead, taught myself, then taught the students. The computer part of the subject matter was extremely simple. The tricky part was knowing how to create hypotheses and what variables to enter, and what plots and descriptives to run, and which tests are need to check assumptions, and what cut-off points in those tests are agreeable, and how to determine significance, and how to interpret the output with relation to the hypotheses. We dealt with these things step-by-step. We worked out the textbook's problems together, not much unlike the way we'd worked out the programming problems in my first course back at the community college. My teaching

was rambling and informal, but eventually I think it was effective and that the students learned. And I got better. Each semester, I was able to introduce and explain the material more clearly and more concisely and orderly.

I was not a professor, only an adjunct instructor, but there were definite benefits. First, I was able to take courses tuition-free. Beyond secondary school, I didn't have a degree at all, but now was somehow teaching two courses at the university level. It was odd, because at times I was in an undergraduate class with some of my students as classmates. Even they held associate's degrees from the community college. The administration gave me a bit of a fast-track exemption (they wanted to correct this slight embarrassment as much as I) and two years later I was awarded a bachelor's degree in Computer Science and was, somewhat, legit. A year and a half after that, I had earned a master's. Though still lacking a doctoral degree to truly be respectable, I could at least not be ashamed while teaching at UW-SP.

The second benefit of being around the university came in that I finally was able and motivated to move out of the farmhouse and was on my own for the first time. The drive to UW-SP every day was long, dangerous at times in the winter. One of the university professors had taken a liking to me, had a small apartment in his basement that he rented. He preferred graduate students and had recently lost his tenant. Being an instructor, I would be ideal and would I be interested in renting? I moved in immediately. My routine changed from driving to UW-SP to teach, to driving back to the farm to drive the dump truck for Badger Gravel and Rock. The money, when you figured time invested, was much greater hauling rock than teaching.

And the third good thing that came out of being at the university was that I finally met a girl. And she stayed with me. Anna had been one of my students back at the community college and was soon finishing up a nursing degree. One day she came up to me outside of the math hall at UW-SP. I recognized her face and her smile, but stupidly could not

remember her name. I fumbled around. She picked up on it and clued me in to her name and then I remembered more fully. We wound up having lunch together and she was the easiest person I'd ever met to talk to. Actually, she did most of the talking and I did most of the listening. And it seemed to work. Things moved quickly then, and in a year's time we were married.

We rented a small house in the area near the university and settled in. Mother was ecstatic, of course, and adored Anna. Father was proud that his son had finally landed gal; took him long enough. Anna and I found that visiting Mother and Father on that old farm was a therapeutic getaway from studies and teaching and work. On the hobby farm, there were only chickens to tend, and firewood to chop, and Father's vegetables to sort and load into his pickup, and the smell of something simmering from the farmhouse.

With all of the good things that life was bringing my way, something was bound to change. As if some evil cosmic see-saw sought to re-establish balance, bad things began to happen. Only a few months after the wedding, Father called one day and frantically left a message. Something was wrong with Mother. He was at the hospital and come fast! Anna and I raced to the hospital.

Mother had had a stroke. Father had returned from his vegetable stand and had found her unconscious. He'd rushed her to the emergency room and the doctor explained that timing in this sort of thing was critical and that another few hours might have been the end. Mother recovered quickly—she had only a bit of a limp and a very slight slur in some of her words. She said it was nothing and largely returned to her activities at home and at the church.

Father was very shaken though. He was rattled through to the point where he refused to leave her more than just a few minutes. Obviously, that meant he couldn't operate his vegetable stand or go to the flea market. Instead, he lurked around the farm house and drove Mother

nearly batty. She said that he wasn't doing anyone any good following around constantly in her shadow and that she was fine and that he should just go away.

The truth was, Mother was not fine. The stroke left few visible marks, but evidently there were concealed wounds deep down somewhere. One evening, she told Father that she was sleepy and that she was turning in for the night. She went to sleep and never woke up. It was November of 2003.

Burying Mother was about all that Father could take. Since Southampton, things had not worked out the way they had been expected. The small fortune that he'd amassed in England had almost entirely been lost since then, in a span of about fifteen years. It had been lost at little fault of Father's. All that he now had left was a run-down old farm house, an old pickup, and chickens.

At the beginning of this endeavor, I said that I hoped my story would make my reasons for starting Bitcoin evident. In case they're still not evident, they could be laid out thus:

1. A love of the free market.
2. A disdain for unfair exchange rates and fees.
3. Labor unions that inhibit individual initiative and hard work.
4. The Fed's monkeying around with the economy.
5. Bailouts for the powerful.
6. A disdain for collectivization where those who produce are expected to bear up the inactive.
7. Too much Ayn Rand.

Father was in not in a healthy situation if he was to live alone in that farm house. He'd never cooked for himself or taken care of things

around a home. But worse, his state-of-mind was not healthy. Anna and I grew concerned about his thought processes—they seemed scattered, or at least, far away at times. And he'd taken to ranting. Father always had had gripes with politicians or other businessmen or customers, but he had always been a doer. He would largely just ignore the person who was contrary and just do his own thing anyway. He'd leave that person standing flatly and move on. Now, he did very little. He no longer had interest in the vegetable stand at all. He ranted and mumbled about the unions and the bailouts and how small businesses never get bailed out but go under so the big boys can be bailed and how the government just does whatever they want and there's no reason to work because they'll just take it anyway if you do and how he's worked all his life and he's sick of it how and the government can take someone else's money and give some to him for a change but he was done with it. And on and on.

It hurt to see Father in such a state. Such a strong and active man beaten down badly. Anna agreed to have Father move in with us. Surprisingly, he agreed without much discussion. At that point, he didn't much care. We sold the farm house, or the property anyway, at a give-away rate. Soon afterward it collapsed in a windstorm and then was looted and someone burnt it to the stone foundation for fun. In just one decade, the homestead became overgrown with weeds and brush and looks a century old now. It is as though nature gives and then nature takes back what it gives.

The old homestead as it appears in recent years.

Father didn't live long after Mother died; less than two years. As to his cause of death, it's hard to say. He simply slid downhill and reached the bottom. I suppose all of those things listed above chipped away at him, like a woodpecker hacking at a timber—it eventually must fall. Then, without Mother, his ability to fight had been yanked out from underneath him. In 2005, we buried him alongside Mother.

By then, Anna and I had a cozy home in our little house. She was done with school and was working at a nursing home now, and I was teaching at the university. And despite the recent events with my family, we were happy. We had several friends, mostly from her work or a few buddies I'd made at the university, and we frequently got together with one another. In that sense, things were going well.

I suppose that amidst the good times, something within me was brewing. Namely, Father had been cheated, and therefore Mother had been cheated. All of the work he'd put in, and for all the people he'd served and helped, he died with almost nothing. This thought, and the causes listed above, steeped and brewed inside me.

11 – Bitcoin

My Father's experiences began to fertilize the germ of Bitcoin in my mind and then it became manifest when I wrote the initial bitcoin code. Beyond that, there really isn't much to say. I'll largely let Bitcoin speak for itself.

That stupid old Isle of Blaq game once again returned to my mind. One of the problems the player-pirates had faced in that game was that the "pirates" on the map could not see the Tavern Bulletin Board unless they were actually at the Tavern. Again, I imagined real life. There was no technology then for way to keep the Bulletin Board current to all people in all areas. This "ledger" had to be centrally located. The Internet eliminated this obstacle to allowing a ledger to be known and seen to all.

In the 2000s I became intrigued with Napster and then with bittorrent. It wasn't the swapping of music or movies or files that interested me, it was the software that enabled the files to be transferred. The P2P nature of these systems (though not 100% P2P for Napster) was what I saw as revolutionary. No one, or no one server held the file. The glory was that the program enabled computers to communicate in a manner so as to circumvent a third party.

As a developer, a work-flow must be developed to be effective. At its absolute most elementary level, it is challenge—solution. A series of challenges, or problems or goals, are presented or become evident. It is then up to the developer to work solutions to those challenges. Usually, there are myriads of ways to resolve any one challenge. The overarching challenge is to find (a) a solution that works, (b) the most efficient solution, and, (c) a solution that will not interfere with other aspects of the program.

The first challenge, then, when coding the first version of bitcoin, was to create a way for the client to communicate. P2P was the route I'd go, without a central authority. Once established, computers (now called

nodes) could communicate with others so that the ledger, or blockchain as it's called now, stays current and visible to all. Without this public blockchain, there really would be no point to Bitcoin. The blockchain is Bitcoin is the blockchain. This publicly viewed ledger effectively doubled to erase the double-spending problem. This is often called the "Byzantine Generals' Problem" where two attacking generals send messages to one another but never truly know if the other general received the last message. To use the Isle of Blaq game analogy, it became as though the Tavern Bulletin Board, which had been turned backwards, was spun around for all players to see plainly at all times, with transactions being continually updated. There no longer was any question about who knew what—everyone knew all because it was plain to see. And as far as double-spending, there would be none. Anyone who tried to spend his doubloons more than once would be called out by the others.

The question arose as to the value of a "bitcoin" and whether it has any value. This concept is still contested by "experts." The value lies in two things: (1) the scarcity I encoded with a maximum of 21,000,000 bitcoins, and (2) in the blockchain itself. A person "owns" a bitcoin because the blockchain ledger says it is at that address. And, since the person has the private key to spend that bitcoin (and no one else does, hopefully), that person "owns" something scarce and can be trusted as legit by all others.

The argument is still made that there is no inherent value. I would argue that the value lies in what others give it. If someone is willing to pay a certain amount of fiat money for one bitcoin, there is the value. If someone is willing to change the brake pads on another's car for one bitcoin, there is the value. If someone is willing to swap a certain number of goats for one bitcoin, there is the value.

By 2008, I was spending almost all of my spare time working on the project. Anna didn't understand what I was doing, I wasn't entirely sure myself. But, there was something about my Father's experience that

bothered me and drove me to do it and get it working. Coupled with the direction and tone of the 2008 presidential election in the U.S., and the financial crisis and bank bailout, I became driven. Again, the rivers had converged.

There's no need to talk lines of code and I won't do it. You can download and read the code yourself (visit Bitcoin GitHub repository). That's not my goal here. The purposes here were to introduce my background and to offer something of what made me who I am and to attempt an explanation at the why behind Bitcoin.

Once Bitcoin grew legs of its own, I stepped back as many know. Others (Gavin) were much better at coding than I—cleaner and more purposeful. I coded in a bit of a haphazard manner that reflected the way I worked. When I butted a problem, I worked a solution, then continued. The result was a bit of a patchwork quilt of a program. I was happy with Gavin's calm, focused, and methodical way of going about things. That was exactly what I thought was needed—someone to stand back and look at the patchwork quilt, then stich-by-stich and square-by-square, improve the fabric of the coding.

After making it work and being so emotionally motivated to make Bitcoin happen, I was thrilled to see it finally in action. But then, I quickly began to lose interest. With the Bitcoin community having taken root, and with my interest waned, I walked away. Today, I still teach a bit and drive trucks in the summers (though no longer with Badger Gravel and Rock). After Bitcoin, I largely lost interest in programming and in teaching and spend much more now time out on the road. I still teach a course on occasion, but sadly, the pay is much better driving than teaching. Now, I drive a big-rig all over the country. For anyone out there on a CB, my handle is "Ham Bitskit"—holler at me and I'll come back! I fully realize that truck driving and talking on a CB may seem a very unlikely thing for "Satoshi Nakamoto" (or for what people have come to believe Satoshi to be). But, like everyone else, I have bills to pay, and somehow, driving the open road has substituted for sailing.

One other reason I walked away…I was by then a father! Anna had given birth to a beautiful little girl. By then she was a toddler and completely had her father under her spell. There were (are) too many things I wanted to teach her. When I turned over Bitcoin, I wrote that I wanted to focus on other projects, it was a project with little blonde braids. Maybe I'll teach her how to sail.

Epilogue

In case anyone is wondering, two things...

First, I took the name "Satoshi Nakamoto" in a very simple manner. I simply wanted a name far away from anywhere or anything I'd done. A Japanese name seemed far away. An Internet search of common Japanese names yielded Satoshi and Nakamoto and, together, they had a nice sound. And that's really all there is to that. Despite all of the deep-rooted meaning and religious overtones that people have read into or placed into "Satoshi Nakamoto", and Bitcoin for that matter, there's really nothing to any of this. There is no deep meaning—it's just a fake name.

Secondly, I still have the bitcoins from the early days of mining. More precisely, I still have the private keys in a safe place (not on me or in my home). I realize they now equate to a fortune, but I intend to never use them. Releasing that many would be detrimental to Bitcoin as a whole, similar to flooding an economy with paper money. The only way I might release them would be extremely gradually (which I am fundamentally against doing at this point), or if they could somehow be "post-mined." By that, I mean if a system could be worked out in the future when most coins have already been mined, where a miner's efforts toward the Bitcoin system would earn him or her a chance at winning those already-mined coins. I'm not sure how that would work and integrate into the current system and am not interested in pursuing it. Again, my intent is that those coins never see the light of day.

And so, despite having a treasure chest of digital gold hidden somewhere, I’m still on the open road driving, working for a living.

This ebook is free. I hope you got a nickel's worth of entertainment from it.

By the way, I like coffee.

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Matthäus Jandaček