



CHAPTER 1

Anger Builds in the Year 2019

It was getting so that a good ole boy couldn't get by anymore! First they took my Harley—and then they took my truck. I was madder than hell I'd lost my freedom and was now a slave. Something had to change—and soon...

The old San Francisco was no more since the Guardians took power during the Regional Wars. It was dark and smelled like death. A smell I once knew in Vietnam. There were dead bodies hung on crosses all over the City. Burnt out buildings and demolished cars were everywhere. It all happened so quickly!

The world plunged into madness during the Regional Wars when civil wars broke out everywhere. The power grids went down and technology shut off. Everything became basic survival very fast. It was a broken world.

Before the Regional Wars the underground media tried telling people that a powerful secret organization called the Concern had been controlling countries since the big war. They claimed they had created an invisible government that was behind all of the industrial governments and controlled most of the world's wealth.

In 2018 accusations on the internet about how the Concern had targeted their own people in the 9/11 attacks became accepted ideas. Identities of the Concern leaders were being leaked by somebody. Armed groups sought out the exposed Concern leaders and assassinated them. But in the anger to eliminate the members of the Concern—and their political agents—no one was thinking about the incredible impact it would have on humanity. This violent action undermined world governments and started the Regional Wars across the globe.

Just before the television and radio went out we heard that millions were dying in the fighting—then it all went silent. Were the stories about the Concern really true? I'd probably never know. For now all that mattered was my survival—and freedom. I had taken my freedom for granted most of my life. Now

it had become the most important thing in my changed world.

In the Bay Area the drug lords of the city moved first to seize power when the Regional Wars started. They called themselves the Guardians. They built their army by taking over the prisons in the Bay Area. Inmates were offered the choice to join or die. Very few refused. In a short time they assembled a ruthless army of murderers and rapists. Their penalty for disloyalty was death — on the spot.

There were several military bases in the Bay Area and the Guardians captured plenty of firepower. Some of the street gangs challenged them but were quickly eliminated. It wasn't long before the Guardians had control of the City and the surrounding areas. They had enough food and supplies to hold out for a long time. Anyone who did not serve their purpose was eliminated.

To the north of the City a different group took control. They called themselves the New Society and set up their government in what was once Mendocino county. At night I'd pick up radio broadcasts from them trying to recruit followers to their new order. They talked about the old ideals of family and values. Sanctuary was offered to any who valued freedom and would fight for that cause. In their radio messages they said they were made up of a lot of the military who fled the Bay area. They claimed they were well fortified from the Guardians and planned to defend their new society. It was difficult to believe in anything now — but whatever the truth — they sounded like a better option than the ruthless masters I now served.

The Guardians feared the New Society and worried that once strong enough they would invade the City. So they were taking no chances by maintaining tight security on the routes to the North. The Guardians only kept those alive who provided important work for them. Since I could fix things I was still around. But I was just one of their workers to help keep the machinery running. So I was working on a plan to escape — even though it seemed impossible!

There wasn't much information on the New Society other than the nightly broadcasts. Anyone who tried to get out of the City was never heard from again. Was it just another scam? Like the Concern? There was no way to be certain. I'd have to risk my life to reach the New Society but decided I was willing to take the

chance. It wouldn't be easy. The Guardians had well armed security on the roads out of San Francisco. No one was allowed to travel without their permission. If you were still breathing they wanted you to stay and be part of their new empire.

I first came to the City after separating from the Marines in '71. The City was pretty exciting for someone who had grown up in the back hills of West Virginia. I became part of the biker crowd and lived in the biker world. Good times, cheap beer, awesome weed, great rides, fun ladies – what more could one ask for?

Like many in the biker cult I didn't ask much from life and took only what I needed in return. It was easy to make a living in the City as a handyman fixing the common stuff no one could repair anymore. People became obsessed with technology. They forgot how to fix a toilet or rewire an electrical switch. I didn't have much use for technology. It made people lazy and dependent. In my experience it also wasn't very reliable. I liked things that were mechanical or pneumatic. I really enjoyed working on motorcycle – especially if it was a Harley.

Couldn't get a pass out of the City. I wasn't that important. The Guardians took my truck and gave me this old beater station wagon to carry my tools. If I was going to escape I would need different wheels. When they confiscated my '09 Super Glide they weren't too interested in a fairly worn out '75 Super Glide I had sitting in the garage under a tarp. That girl had been my ride for many good years with over a hundred thousand miles on her. I'd done two rebuilds on the motor over the years but the Glide hadn't been out in a long while. She would have to be my wheels again. But could I get her running?

Studying a map of Northern California I decided that Route 1 – the coast road – would be the best chance for my escape route. My military hunch was that it would be the most lightly guarded. Mostly because they wouldn't expect very many to be crazy enough to try it. Probably for good reason. The coast road winds around and runs along the cliffs in many places. It was a slow ride even on a sunny day. I'd ridden that awesome road too many times to remember. But now it would be for the highest stake of all – my life and my freedom!

I had no idea yet how I'd get across the Golden Gate Bridge.

There was no other way to the coast route unless you had a boat. Avoiding the Guardian patrols would be very difficult once I reached the coast—but how to find a way to get there had me stumped. I would start my preparations while I worked on that big problem.

I looked at my map of Route 1 carefully and tried to figure out the most likely places for checkpoints or command posts. I was uncertain how far north I'd have to go to meet up with the New Society. Mendocino County would be a dangerous 120 miles up the coast road. There was little available in the way of military intelligence. My plan was to run at night around their patrols and hide out during the days while I did recon. I'd have to remember the best of my Marine training to survive this run. My age was against me—but my anger would be my strength!

When I returned from the nightmare of Vietnam I swore I'd never take a life again. I'd gone into the Marines a militant—and come out a pacifist. There were too many innocents killed in Nam and I lost a lot of good friends. It all seemed like it had been for nothing now. Many said it was a war the Concern wanted fought to stop their economic enemy—communism. All I know is that I saw too many good men die or disappear. I killed people I didn't really know—or hate—just because we were killing each other. My government told us we were defending the free world. Looking back—I think maybe the Viet Cong were just fighting for their freedom. How ironic now.

Since I lived in the biker world I was offered many chances to become an outlaw. They liked former military who knew their way around a weapon and explosives. But I didn't want to kill or maim again so I never joined. I got into an occasional bar fight over a poker game—or a babe—but I kept that promise to myself. Now I had to think about whether I could take a life again if I had to. I'd hoped I could make it to the north without answering that question but understood I might not get the option.

There was no doubt left I wanted out of this hell with the Guardians. So I was willing to take whatever risks were necessary. We used to have a saying in the Corps—"Once a Marine—always a Marine". I guess I was going to find out if that was true. Even for an old fart biker like me...