

## Chapter 169.6 (Bonus Chapter for Book Six)

### “Retard”

(July 5, year of the Collapse)

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“Retard!” someone yelled. That woke up Randy Jones, who was sleeping in an RV parked at the Port of Frederickson. Calling it a “port” was a stretch; it was really just a small, run down marina with almost no boats and a small, rusted out log-unloading yard that had been abandoned since the 1990s when the spotted owl regulations shut down logging.

The port was located on one of the two points where the main road went into Frederickson. Securing this point, and securing the second point on the other end of town, meant that Frederickson was protected from anything coming down the road, which was why they were there.

Randy Jones was a “Blue Ribbon Boy,” the volunteer posse established by the county sheriff and town police chief. They wore blue strips of cloth on their left arms so people knew they were official. Well, kind of official, but more official than just any ol’ boy with a deer rifle.

Being a Blue Ribbon Boy had its advantages. Randy had his meals provided and he got certain other “privileges.” He could, for example, pretty much take anything he wanted from anyone. They were told to be reasonable about the bribes and “requisitioning,” as they called it. Don’t abuse the privilege, the sheriff said, or the townspeople would start to get pissed. The sheriff and the Blue Ribbon Boys didn’t need that; the armed townspeople outnumbered the Blue Ribbon Boys and what remained of the police by several dozen to one. But still, to Randy’s amazement, the townspeople put up with this. Randy figured it was mostly because they were so scared and hungry. And because they had always been told to do what the government said. Government was there to help them.

Randy had recently turned twenty-one years old. He graduated from high school three years ago and, like almost everyone one of his classmates, couldn’t find a job. There were zero jobs to be had. The handful of small businesses left in Frederickson only hired family members and very close friends. Even if Randy knew someone, businesses had been closing up every day. Something about taxes and regulations, Randy had heard. Whatever those were.

He did what all his friends did: got on the EBT, which was basically a debit card that had all the money he got from the state. It worked just like a regular debit card. And Randy used it to get food and buy stuff on the internet, back when it was up and running and people could actually buy things.

After high school, he spent two years partying and selling a little weed. They had legalized marijuana in Washington State, but they still taxed it. So people grew it and sold it illegally without paying the taxes. This wasn’t that big of a deal. If someone got caught with it, the cops would just take it, and then they’d sell it.

After a couple years of partying, Randy got bored. He felt like he was still living the life of a boy. When he turned twenty, he decided that he needed to grow up and be a man. His uncle, John Bennington, who was a Sheriff's deputy, talked to him and told him to "man up." To do something with his life. Randy agreed.

So, before the Collapse, Randy's uncle helped him get one of the coveted county jobs. Even if businesses weren't hiring, the county always seemed to have money and jobs. Uncle John's connections were good – he apparently knew Commissioner Winters really well – and pretty soon Randy was working on a county public works crew.

At first, it was hard work. The "new guy" was expected to do all the hard stuff, but after a few months, there was a new "new guy," so Randy's job got much easier. Pretty soon, his crew was just driving around. They didn't do much actual work.

Randy could see that everything was a scam. They pretended to not have the paper work they needed to fill in potholes or whatever they were supposed to be doing, so they sat around, took long lunches, and left early.

Some of the guys were stealing county equipment and doing side jobs during work hours. Randy wasn't into that. He'd slack off if that was what all the other guys were doing, but he wouldn't steal. He just couldn't do stuff like that. He would lie a little to cover the guys when it came to things like whether they were at work, but he drew the line at stealing. The other guys left him alone. As long as he was a "team player" and occasionally lied for them, they didn't care if "Mr. Goody Goody," as they called him, didn't steal. Hell, that meant more stuff for them.

Randy remembered May Day, the day the Collapse started. He was at a bar that his supervisor liked to go to. They were "checking the water line" there, but really his boss was in the bar getting drunk. Randy was sitting in the truck making sure no one stole it, which had been a real problem in the months leading up to the Collapse. Randy carried a snub nose .38 to work, which was grounds for getting fired, but everyone carried something. You'd be crazy to be out driving around, especially in a truck full of valuable tools and copper wire, without a weapon.

Randy's boss came out of the bar, tipsy, and said the TVs in there were showing some riots or something in nearby Olympia. "It's about time," his boss said and then told them to go home, which Randy did.

He watched TV that night and knew that things were going to change. He didn't understand all the political stuff – he could care less about that – but he kept getting the sense that all of this was over. He had wondered how he could get paid to sit around all day when so many people were hungry and homeless. He knew this whole system had to end. It looked like that was happening right now.

The next day, Randy's uncle came by Randy's little apartment he shared with some of his high school friends. His uncle seemed pretty concerned.

"We need you, Randy," Uncle John said. "We need good guys to be an auxiliary police force," he said.

Randy didn't know what that was, so his uncle explained. "Sure," Randy said after he realized he would basically be a police helper. He didn't have anything else to do. Besides, he felt like this might be the "grown up" thing he was supposed to do with his life, and if Uncle John said this was a good idea, it probably was.

For the next two months or so, Randy was a Blue Ribbon Boy. He started off enthused about his duties. He felt like he was helping people, because he was. They were guarding things like Martin's grocery store. They were keeping the Mexican gangs contained to the "Mexi-zone" as they called that part of town. There were rumors of other gangs – motorcycle gangs, in particular – going into towns and...it was horrible. The Blue Ribbon Boys were there to make sure that didn't happen to Frederickson.

But each week after he started his new job, conditions seemed to get a little worse. Things in town were going downhill, but what Randy really noticed was that the Blue Ribbon Boys were getting to be more and more like a gang themselves. They were accepting small "gifts" for things to go smoothly. Some of the guys started selling stolen property. In fact, the Blue Ribbon Boys' guard station at the port became like a garage sale for stolen merchandise. Randy was told that the money from the sales went toward buying food for the Blue Ribbon Boys. Randy was glad to be eating well, but he was troubled by what was happening.

What could he do, though? He was just one guy. Randy assumed that everything he saw – the stealing, the abuse of power, the misery – was just how it was.

But the past couple of days, things were getting even worse on his crew. Don Hamilton, the boss of the day shift that Randy was on, was getting out of control. He was high or drunk most of the time. He would talk about killing people just for fun. So far, he hadn't.

Last night was the Fourth of July. There was a big party. Most of the guys got drunk. They were shooting into the air. Randy felt like something weird and bad had taken over the crew. The more they saw others doing bad things – like taking a huge swig of liquor and then emptying a magazine into the air – the more they did it themselves. Then they started to try to outdo each other. If one guy fired into the air, the next guy would shoot over someone's head. Then the next guy would shoot closer to a guy, and so on. Randy slipped away to the RV trailer and hoped he didn't get hit by a stray round. He was terrified and pissed at the same time. He wanted this to stop.

"Hey, retard!" he heard Don Hamilton yell again that morning. It was dawn. Don was still drunk from last night.

There was something about the word "retard" that Randy always hated. He had a cousin in Seattle who had to go to a special school and hearing the word "retard" felt like a knife being stuck into him.

"Retard, what you gonna do to me?" Don yelled again. Randy got out of his bed and went outside. He couldn't explain it. Randy was going to stop this. Finally. All of this had to stop.

As he got out of the RV, he could see a teenage boy with Down Syndrome at the gate. His family was around him, pleading with the boy to come back into the car. The boy seemed to be angry.

"You don't say bad things to my mom," the boy yelled to Don. "You say sorry." Don started laughing. He couldn't stop laughing. It was disturbing. Randy had never heard that deep, almost demonic, laugh from Don before.

"Come here, retard," Don screamed. "Come here and tell me that."

“Don’t go!” the mother yelled. “Come back!”

The boy turned around and looked at his mom. He didn’t really understand what was happening; he just knew that these men were being mean to his mom. And he knew that “retard” meant that they thought he was stupid and bad.

“You shut up!” the boy yelled with a tear in his voice. He had been called a “retard” his whole life and he never could do anything about it. He wasn’t going to let this man call him that. He had had enough.

The boy started walking toward the man who called him the bad name.

“Come and get me, little retard!” Don yelled. Anthony, Don’s second-in-command laughed.

The boy picked up a stick and started running at Don.

Don let loose with all six rounds of buckshot from his Benelli M2 tactical shotgun from about ten yards away. The boy was torn to pieces in an explosion of red mist.

After the ringing in his ears stopped, Randy could hear Don laughing and the mother screaming.

That was it, Randy thought as adrenaline pumped through him. Randy grabbed his pistol and started walking toward Don, who had his back turned to him.

Then Randy stopped in his tracks. No, he thought. Doing this now would just get him killed.

“Nice shootin’, Tex,” Anthony said. By now, Don was on the ground laughing that uncontrollable laugh. “Fuckin’ retard threatened you,” Anthony said. He almost seemed to believe that.

The other guys seemed to be nodding, but Randy wasn’t really sure. Randy was still in shock. Time has slowed down. But what Randy did know was that no one was trying to stop Don or questioning what had happened. Most of them were just accepting it.

Randy ran up to the boy. He tried not to look at him. Unfortunately, Randy saw the boy’s face, or what was left of it. Strangely – very, very strangely – the boy had a slight smile on his face. Even though he was literally torn in pieces, he looked calm and peaceful.

For some reason that Randy couldn’t explain, he picked up the boy’s stick. The stick that was the “threat” to the man with the semi-automatic shotgun.

Randy instantly knew what he’d do.

“Back to work,” he said to Don, who wasn’t listening.

Randy did just that. He went back to work. Like nothing had happened. He didn’t even look at the family that came by to pick up what was left of their son. He couldn’t even hear them. Not because his ears weren’t working, but because he was focused on something else.

He laid low all day, avoiding his fellow Blue Ribbon Boys. Randy was off in his own world. He lost track of time. People assumed he was in shock. He was. Kind of. But, more precisely, he was focused.

Randy’s shift ended at 6:00 p.m. He couldn’t eat dinner, and remembered he hadn’t eaten all day. He had no appetite. He had bigger things on his mind.

Randy couldn’t wait for dark, which didn’t come until about 9:00 p.m. this time of year. He went into his RV and started to write a letter. Everyone else in the

RV – there were four of them crammed in there – left him alone. They assumed “Mr. Goody Goody” had been traumatized by the shooting. They were right. Kind of.

After several hours just staring at the wall and thinking, Randy finally said to the guys in the RV, “I’m gonna go take a piss.” It was almost midnight.

No one said a word when Randy left. Taking a piss was not an unusual thing. Randy went to Don’s RV.

“Gotta give something to the boss,” Randy said to one of the guys outside Don’s RV. Randy held up a piece of paper, which was the letter he’d been writing. He had something else in his hand, but it was dark and the guy outside Don’s RV was hung over and tired.

“He’s asleep,” the Blue Ribbon Boy said. Everyone knew that Don had passed out from yesterday’s all-night drinking fest.

“No prob,” Randy said. “Just dropping this off,” he said as held up the letter. The other guy nodded.

Randy quietly went into Don’s RV. Sure enough, there was Don passed out on the little couch. No one else was in the trailer. Randy locked the door so no one could come in.

Randy set the letter next to Don. He double checked to make sure Don was out cold; he was.

Randy couldn’t believe how calm he was. He remembered the look of peace on the boy’s face from that morning. Randy knew the boy was in a better place, where people like Don didn’t exist. Even more calmness came over Randy. He wasn’t afraid at all.

Randy pulled a box cutter out of his pocket. He looked at it and marveled that his hands weren’t even shaking. He took a moment and actually chuckled to himself about how his hands were steady for the work he had ahead of him.

Randy extended the razor blade in the box cutter. It made the faintest “click” sound. He put his left hand over Don’s mouth. Don started to wake up, but only a little. Randy effortlessly slit Don’s throat. It was like opening a box, but the razor went in all the way, almost an inch. Randy had to put some strength into it; he was cutting lots of skin, some muscle, and a bunch of fat. It was actually hard work.

Don lurched up as this throat was being cut. Randy held Don down with his left hand as Don convulsed. Pretty soon, Don quit fighting back, but he was still twitching. Randy enjoyed the fact that Don was trying to scream, but his windpipe had been cut. Don’s lips were moving under Randy’s left hand, but no sound was coming out. Randy thought about the helpless boy and now how helpless Don was. And smiled.

Blood was everywhere. It was amazing how far blood squirted out of that neck vein. It was getting all over Randy. He hadn’t thought about that. Now people would see the blood on him when he left. Randy looked around and saw a pair of Don’s overalls hanging over a seat in the RV. Don was fat, so his overalls would fit nicely over Randy. “Problem solved,” Randy whispered to Don. That was the creepiest part of slitting a man’s throat, Randy thought: whispering to him.

After a minute or two, which seemed to take forever, Don stopped moving entirely. As glad as Randy was that he’d done it, he had to admit that seeing all that blood was making him sick. He was fighting back his urge to vomit. He was

determined not to throw up. That would make him look like a wuss. And that's not what he wanted his legacy with the Blue Ribbon Boys to be.

Randy realized he needed to hurry up with this. The door was locked, but someone might be knocking soon. Randy wasn't sure Don was dead yet, but realized that no one could help him now. Don would be dead soon, if he wasn't already.

Randy grabbed the letter with his bloody hands and put it by Don's head. Then he took the boy's stick and jammed it in Don's wide-open neck. He heard neck bones crunch when he did it. He felt a warmth come over him and he flashed back to image of the boy's smile. He could feel the boy's smile.

Randy wiped his hands on Don's shirt, but there was still blood all over them. He quickly put on Don's overalls. They fit with ample room and covered up all the blood on Randy's shirt and pants.

Randy walked out of the RV calmly. No one was around.

He walked to the gate. No one was paying attention. It was midnight and it was quiet.

Randy opened the gate and started walking up the road toward Pierce Point.