

# Preface

## *The Hut*

## Thank You Kung Fu

By David V. Wenzel

THE SEIZURE HITS ME IN THE MIDDLE OF THE WOODS. I stumble, my right side having gone weak, and my knees hit the ground. I start to fall forward, but my right-hand catches hold of a tree trunk just off the path. Everything is quiet. Crickets stopped chirping their evening songs, and the squawks of the local birds seem to have paused. Everything feels wet: my breath in the air, the ground on my knees, the bark on my hands. I feel my crotch to make sure I didn't piss my pants this time.

I know I need water, so I struggle to my feet and begin limping the hundred yards back towards The Hut. I stumble through the unlocked door and make sure not to lock it behind me in case someone, unfortunately, needs to come looking for me. I sit down on the bed. The right side of my body feels like Jell-O as I sip from my bottle containing reverse osmosis water that was filtered twice before being alkalized to 9.5 pH to provide additional electrolytes. I can feel the drops leaking down the right side of my face, which has gone completely numb. I close my eyes, put one foot on the ground to stop the dizziness, then lean back onto my bed in my tiny cabin somewhere in the woods. My family is always concerned this will happen, concerned that when I go out on my own, I'll have a seizure alone in the dark and die by myself. But I had told them, "I can't live my life in fear that a sudden seizure will hold me back." And should a seizure be the cause of my early death in a tiny little hut, in the middle of a quiet forest, so be it. I really can't imagine a better way to go. Dust-to-dust and whatnot.

The day before, I had parked my car and began my walk for three days of complete solitude. I cry every single time I walk out to the cabin, named The Hut. I physically feel the worries shedding from my back every time, as an overwhelming peace pulls me deeper into the forest. It was dark when I arrived, but it didn't matter. I know my path through these woods. Take a hard right at the old barn. Slight left at the clearing. Slight right back into the trees and follow the winding trail to The Hut.

The Hut is small. There is no electricity or running water. It has a wood-burning stove and a single bed with flannel sheets. It has windows on all four walls, and there is a large painting of a grinning Amish farmer, who makes me wonder what he knows that I don't. There is a wooden porch out front with a two-person swing and a redwood shed to keep the wood dry. The first thing I realize whenever I get to The Hut is how loud I am. Every noise I make is like a record

scratch against the backdrop of silence. But eventually, my body realizes there is no hurry and I start slowing down my movements.

When I am at The Hut, I read, I write, I walk, and I nap. There are no other options. Through the purging of all distractions, I finally feel able to quiet the clutter in my head. I sit, accept the silence, and, when I'm ready, let the words pour out of me. This is the place where a single day feels like three, and the accomplished work would agree.

Feeling steadier after my seizure in the woods, I undress for the night. I step outside to the ledge of the front porch, and, standing in my underwear and untied boots, I pee into the valley before me. When I'm nearly finished, I hear a pack of wolves, maybe a mile away, howling away at the bright full moon. My eyes widen as I start grinning from ear to ear. It seems quite obvious that I am part of their pack tonight. So, I do as any red-blooded boy would do and begin howling with them in the middle of our woods.

My howl is a celebration of surviving my previous years with terminal brain cancer, after I was told I'd only have five to seven years left. With each howl, I burn through all of my frustrations, angers, and worries till I am gasping for breath. And as I listen to my echo, I hear the short, eager yelps of the small pups, followed by the alpha male, crooning into the night with its deep voice. That last holy howl seems to be the final note to this choir of carnivorous beasts, each knowing its purpose in life: to eat, to breed, and report the news to the moon. It only lasts a few minutes, but those minutes are glorious for me. I hope they heard my howls and understand that I, like them, am a survivor.

I return inside, invigorated by that moment, and write by candlelight for a few hours before sleepiness sets in. I have no idea what time it is because, intentionally, there are no alarm clocks, no watches, and no phones. There is only sun or no sun. I tend the fire for the evening, prepping it for eight hours of warmth, and climb into bed.

I don't know how long I've slept, but when I wake up in the dark I can only hear the quiet. No humming of the refrigerator. No heat clicking on and off. No buzzing of electrical outlets. No distant car horns from across town. The only thing I can hear is a faint ringing in my ears. Eventually, I fall back to sleep and wake up to the sun.

While lying there with early morning sunlight peeking through the windows, I begin thinking through my King David complex. I feel God has put me on this earth to accomplish something I have not yet done. David was unafraid to face Goliath because he knew God wouldn't let him die before fulfilling His promise to make him king, and I realize I'm starting to hold God to a similar agreement. Until I do what He's created me to do, I must press forward with as little fear of death as possible.

I climb out of bed and return to ledge of the front porch to, well, you know, and I see footprints of a buck that had visited in the middle of the night to sniff my pee and determine my threat level. Not sure what his final decision was, but I feel worthy of being considered a threat. Maybe he was concerned a howling wolf had moved in the night before.

I had come to The Hut to write a speech. And when I return to the city, I'll be giving this speech at my five-year cancer anniversary party. We've invited nearly a hundred people to join us for dinner and drinks at a restaurant near Lake Michigan to celebrate surviving another year. But this year's cancer anniversary is unique. After surviving for five years, the cancer community declares you a "cancer survivor." But all I got from the American Cancer Society was a stock letter congratulating me on not dying, so I decided to throw my own party to properly celebrate.

In order to write this speech, I sit and scroll through my journals I've brought along to think through the absurdity of everything that has happened to me over the past five years. Five years of struggling to make enough money to eat, to pay rent, to repay debt, to save relationships, and to simply stay alive (both physically and metaphorically). While reading through them, I see so many interactions that hurt me so badly, namely with Amy. But in the end, I can't deny the fact I've been a miserable person as well. I know I have hurt others. So, in an effort to show respect and honor to those involved, I will only use my journals to recount the events that happened and not assume the feelings of anyone else involved, let alone convict them for their actions.

Now I write, attempting to downsize all of these massive moments into this tiny little speech; another cliché to toss into a world filled with problems way worse than mine. But please, understand I need this moment for myself. In the words of Josh Ritter, my favorite musician: *"Don't say it's been done a hundred thousand times cause this one is mine."* I know people have

come before me, and I know people will come after me, but before anything else can happen, I have to get this story off my chest. It's been too hard to lug these word-filled chapters along with no one reading them.

When thinking through the words of my speech, I am motivated by a dream I had several years ago. The actual dream consisted of simple white text on a black background: "2 Corinthians 2:14." In fact, it wasn't as much a dream as it was a pointing finger. I suppose that's evidence I'm not very good at interpreting dreams. Apparently, God has to literally drop a reference—chapter and verse—on me. But being unfamiliar with this passage, I rolled over, grabbed my bible, and looked it up.

*But thanks be to God,  
who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession  
and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma  
of Christ to God  
among those who are being saved  
  
and among those who are perishing,  
to one a fragrance from death to death,  
to the other a fragrance from life to life.  
Who is sufficient for these things?  
For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned  
by God,  
in the sight of God  
we speak in Christ.*

I feel shameful saying the aroma of my life has anything to do with Jesus Christ. I am far too aware of how bent I am. But Christ, through all my weaknesses, has made me sufficient. I can't even begin to determine how you will react to both the life and the death of my crazy existence. All I know is that my life will be an aroma of death to some—to those who refuse to believe the Spirit of God is active and working on behalf of us all, to those who believe I'm selfish or manipulative for sharing my story, to those choosing to ignore the stirrings in their hearts as they

turn these pages. But I also know my life will be an aroma of life to others—to those who have placed their hope in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to those willing to follow him through the pain and suffering this world offers. Above all, I hope I can share the main thing I've learned through my years of struggle, which I desperately hold onto every single day: *What God originates, He orchestrates.*

While finishing the writing of my speech, I notice a small newspaper article that had been cut out and pinned to the wall. It states that, two years ago, a devastating F4 tornado had torn through my pissing valley and came extremely close to demolishing my hut. Since the tornado had destroyed nearly all the trees in front of me, I can see through my window the destruction only a hundred yards ahead. Massive trees that had been standing for who knows how long had been shredded and ripped down. As I look back at the article, I notice a tiny Mennonite church business card pinned on the wall with a handwritten message:

*The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars. The Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon leap like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the Lord twists the oaks, and strips the forest bare. And in His temple, all say, "Glory." (Psalm 29)*

Sitting at my desk, I am forced to review the evidence that God can bring down a track of hundred-year old sinless trees and make them stay silent for a hundred more. This seeming train wreck against the act of creation, brought on by what seems like an angry God, is now home to new creatures who are telling new stories. And now, sitting here and writing about my own slowly rebuilding valley, I realize maybe He's done the same with me. God is a good God who creates, but God is also a good God who knows when to hit the restart button.

After the past years of my destruction, I now sit here as His destroyed but rebuilding temple, and I say "*Glory.*"