

Introduction

The buzzer sounded. I had just fixed *three* college basketball games in a row, and I gently smiled as a cool *five* million dollars went right into my pocket. A few short years later, however, my joy and abundance would come to an end...almost to the point of suicide. As of this writing, I'm sitting on a wooden stool, typing my story on an antiquated twenty-plus-year-old typewriter, with no correction tape, while currently an inmate in a federal prison for the 2nd time in my life.

Who am I? Why should you care?

I'm a guy who has made poor choices for the sake of greed and success. A guy who applied God-given talents to build wealth and success, and then managed to misapply those talents and got a very different end result. A guy who charted a path that took him into grey areas and then had to pay the price for those ill-fated choices.

I am the guy with a story that can make a difference...a real difference in your life or the life of someone you know.

Bad results did not happen to me overnight, but rather through a series of poor choices and decisions that ultimately resulted in my downfall. I am a guy who is here to shine a bright light on the very painful, dark and public journey that I've endured so that I might positively impact others.

You may not be wandering into that grey area of your life right now. But, at some point in every person's life, temptation is placed before you. What you do with that choice is up to you.

I chose poorly.

This story is about the trading markets, a national sports scandal, building successful companies, losing everything (a few times), pursuing love, fighting suicidal depression, and finding redemption through faith.

My roller coaster ride stems from a single, early and fateful life choice I made in 1993. Remember the Arizona State men's basketball point shaving scandal? The one in which four college games were fixed?

That was me.

I organized and financed the entire scandal when I was a naive twenty-four-year-old, and to this day it remains one of the largest scandals in sports history.

I have never spoken about it, and I never wanted to. Over the years I have turned down many lucrative offers because I did not want to tell my story for the sake of entertainment or to turn a quick buck. I always knew that if I told the story, it had to serve a positive purpose for others.

I never had interest in a spotlight, or to put my family through that dark journey once again. But now, after having to accept a plea bargain on a second felony solely because I was an “easy” target,

I have both a story *and* lessons that need to be shared.

By telling my story, I'm willing to painfully expose my life's journeys with hopes of affecting others, to influence others, to warn others, and to share life lessons others may benefit from.

I am not here to make excuses, play the role of a victim, or shift the blame away from my due. If anything, I'm here to admit that I'm probably about the stupidest “smart” guy you will ever meet. Despite having just about every opportunity that life can offer, I chose to embrace the dark side of greed and relish material excess from impressionable moments imbedded in me at a young age, and even stronger impressions learned from the “legitimate” business world.

My story will take you from the elation of million dollar moments to the shame of telling your kids you are on your way to prison. This journey also goes into a dark depression only few survive. Depression so deep, that it had me searching for the “Top 10 ways to kill yourself” after I pled guilty and officially became a *two-time* felon.

Regrets? My biggest regret is not the loss of millions of dollars nor my possessions, nor even going to prison. What I regret most was the wasted time. Wasted, because of time I could have spent being a better father, a better person, a better friend, a better husband. Wasted, because I know I could have used my talents in many other ways to do amazing things, to make a difference in the world.

This is NOT a story of love,

But it is a loving one...

This is NOT a story of scandal,

But there were a few...

This is NOT a story of greed and corruption,

But it contains plenty...

This *IS* a story that finally gives the *true* details on one of the largest sport scandals in U.S history. The ASU point shaving episode is only a small part of my personal journey. My story describes life choices I made and how I sped down a dangerous path.

I hope you will find this story inspiring and motivating enough to give you a new perspective on how little, seemingly minor decisions, can lead you down a one-way street of financial, moral, and spiritual suicide.

No rational person begins life with dreams of cheating their way to the top. Or that this green stuff we call money is the end-all be-all of everything. And yet... sometimes it happens; one thing leads to another and before you know it, you're not who you thought you'd be... a person you would never have recognized in your early years.

You may have planned for success...

You may have planned to change the world...

But decades later you end up at ground-zero of one of the biggest sports scandals in the history of this country, and find yourself hit with *two* Federal prison terms.

Certainly not what my six-year-old self would have imagined.

I blame no one but myself for what happened; no one was holding a gun to my head saying, "Get rich at any cost or else." I made the choices, they were wrong, I got caught, and had to pay the price... with interest. That, I freely admit. But now it's time to make up for that wasted time and, with God's help, help others stay on the straight and narrow path.

With that in mind, I want this book to serve as more than an accurate telling of the inner details of the ASU scandal, my personal events, or the details on the self-serving nature of the criminal justice system.

My hopes are that this book will serve as a reminder to anyone using the same excuses as I did when it comes to right or wrong, - a loud alarm to anyone who thinks he can operate in the grey areas and not lose control.

THERE ARE NO GREY AREAS.

Rather, consider this my entry for Career Day at your school; my way of saying, "Hey kids, here's what *not* to do and what to look out for." A road map, if you will, of the types of hazards to expect if you lose your way, with insight along the way into what happened behind the scenes.

Greed is a cancer, a trap. It will blind you, blur your vision, and twist your perspective of the priorities in life to the point that it will cause you to lose and risk far more than you bargained for. It begins with a small, single step. It may be the one choice you make in life that seems innocent enough at first. You may not even know that fateful

step when you take it. But that step, no matter how small you may think it is, will have a consequence in the future.

That first step being just one degree off today will result in being miles away from your true self down the road.

This is the story that starts with my first steps and the complicated dark path it led me on. My sincere hope for this story - my story - is to influence your thinking as you take your own steps.

May you make far better decisions than I did.

Chapter One:

Easy Money

“The Wolf of Wall Street” had it all wrong. Money is not the most seductive drug in the world...”

Easy money is.

It was on the trading floor of the Chicago Board of Trade, at the age of twenty-three, where for the first time in my life I knowingly compromised my integrity for the lure of easy money. Before I started at the CBOT, I was at a family party a few months earlier where I was introduced to a relatively successful bond futures trader by the name of Tony Stack. Tony was in his mid-fifties, an Italian guy who simply oozed money. He had a flair for the good life and loved to show off his successes in any way he could. Several drinks into our talk Tony asked me if I wanted to work for him as a clerk on the floor of the CBOT. At that time, I had no idea what a trading clerk was or what he did, but I did know clerks worked in the financial markets, and that was enough for me. I said “Yes” before my drink hit the table. I dropped out of college that same week, and went to work.

I loved everything about the financial markets from the very first day. The pace, the lifestyle, and the flash were all intoxicating. But most of all I was drawn to the nonstop action. I came to learn that a true trader has a mindset that defines the words “long term” as not

exceeding five minutes. It was an instant gratification lifestyle, one that only cemented my, “I want it now” way of thinking.

The trading floor, or the “pit”, of the CBOT is the pumping heart of the bond trading universe. In this Chicago landmark, I witnessed the ease and speed in which millions of dollars would change hands in the blink of an eye. The trading floor was choreographed chaos on steroids, run by hordes of sweaty traders wearing different styles and colors of jackets so they wouldn’t all look the same, each one spitting and yelling their buy/sell orders to others while using hand gestures that bordered on obscene.

While there is an appearance of rivalry from the outside looking in, I can tell you that is not the case at all. Sure, there were daily fights that broke out as jacked up alpha males fought for their space and power, but we all knew we were part of a small, rather exclusive club. So, the disagreements rarely got personal. We traded while jammed like sardines into what looked like a modern day UFC octagon. While the trading was going on in the pits, the clerks circled; trying to keep an accurate running account of their traders’ market positions.

The bond futures market Tony traded was one of the most expensive financial markets to trade. There was money, and tons of it, on that trading floor. The floor was broken up into two groups. First, you had the “Traders.” Traders were made up of two kinds of people: ones that traded their own accounts and money, versus the ones who filled orders for others like banks or retail business. “Clerks and Runners” comprised the second group. These guys worked for the traders in an admin type of role, keeping their traders organized and manning the phones for incoming orders.

It didn’t take me long to learn the ropes on the floor, or to figure out that the market was nothing more than a giant, legal casino. Sure, there’s the argument that there is an art to understanding the market and having a feel for its direction, but I boiled it down to the basics. And, just like any casino, there always has to be a winner and a loser every time.

As a clerk for Tony, I would keep his trading house organized, work the phones, take orders, and arbitrage those orders into the trading pits. I was learning this world at an accelerated pace, and it came easily to me. In fact, from the very first day, the CBOT fit me like a glove. There was only one thing missing.

I didn't have a vice.

Curiously, all successful traders did. It was pretty safe to say that the bulk of the people in that financial world, or on the trading floor, either had drug or gambling problems. Personally, I'd never tried a drug in my entire life, but while at the CBOT I can assure you that I certainly learned to gamble.

The grouping of phones I manned for Tony had me crammed shoulder-to-shoulder next to a retail brokerage group and some of their employees. One of those employees was a guy named Rocco Lo-Freddie. We called him Rock. With a name like that, there was no way you'd confuse him with anything other than a tough street kid from Italian immigrants. His short black hair was shiny enough to be a distraction, but in the early 90's it was almost the norm.

The way Rock walked into a room was a dead giveaway that he'd grown up on the streets. He looked right into your eyes when he spoke to you, but every minute or so he'd glance around to the side or behind him so quickly you'd hardly notice. I'm not sure if this was from being raised in a tough neighborhood, or just a nervous tick.

But Rocco also had an infectious smile, laughed effortlessly, and always gave you a slap on the back when you left. He was a street kid trying to work his way up, aspiring to one day trade his own account in the pits just like me. He was extremely well liked on the floor, so hanging out with him got me into the "in crowd" pretty quickly.

Together, we had more in common than two Italians simply having vowels at the end of our last names. Our personalities were very similar when it came to the life, pace, and fast action of the CBOT. The noise, energy, and millions of dollars that moved between our fingertips was intoxicating to both of us.

As clerks, we were not earning anywhere near what the traders did, but we knew we were paying our dues and learning the industry. We learned the trade by watching our traders. There was simply no other way to earn your stripes in that world.

Rock was the first person I had met on the floor, or in my life up to that point, who actually enjoyed cutting corners and looked at all possible angles for short cuts. I'd never met a guy who took so much joy in trying to create that extra edge. It was with Rock, at the ripe age of 23, that I did the first truly unethical thing in my life.

I remember that day like it was yesterday. The trading floor was still noisy, but the pace had settled down enough for us to have a quick conversation. Rock walked up to me to talk...

"Hey, Joey," he barked.

"What's up?"

"Let's do a square for the Super Bowl. We can sell each square for a thousand bucks apiece."

"Sounds OK, Rock. But, that's a hundred thousand dollars."

If you're unfamiliar with a square, it's a grid with ten rows vertical, and ten rows horizontal. Each row gets a number assigned to it from 0 to 9. If the numbers you get in your square match the last digits for both teams at the end of each quarter or the final score, you win a percentage of the pot collected.

I ended up thinking that this would be a good way to meet and bond with a few of the higher profile traders.

But Rock had other plans for this square.

"Don't worry, Joey," he said. "We'll fix the thing."

"Man, what do you mean?"

"We'll sell half of the squares," he explained, "collect fifty thousand dollars from these guys, and for the other half of the squares we'll will put our own names in."

“Put our own names in? I’m not putting fifty thousand dollars into the pot! Are you crazy?” I said.

“No man, we’ll make up a bunch of names, fill those names into fifty boxes, and assign the prime numbers where we need them to tilt the odds in our favor.”

I remember drifting off while he was talking. Trying to unwind this concept of the legit way this should be done versus the scam Rocco was laying out to me. I broke it down in my mind. If we took the “prime numbers” in football like 0, 3, 4, 6, and 7 and assigned them to the fifty boxes we filled in, we pretty much controlled the board, and the odds went in our favor. The gambler inside me knew that greatly increased odds were all I needed. Rock was the devil on my shoulder saying things I knew better on.

I would like to say that I mulled this decision over and paused a while before saying yes to this scheme...

I would like to say that Rocco talked me into it...

I would like to say a lot of things...

Most of all, I would like to be able to recheck my moral compass and turn back the clock and said, “No thanks.”

But I didn’t...

The fast money and rapid decision-making had been imprinted on me for good. I knew that the choice I was making at that time was wrong, but rationalized it by thinking that it was still a gamble, and by convincing myself that those traders snorted, drank, and whored thousand dollar bills in their sleep.

To me, having them betting on a fixed game wasn’t like robbing a bank or stealing from little old ladies. My moral compass was not absolute; I believed there was a grey area and this was it. My parents raised me to know better, but I continued to make excuses. Excuses that those guys would never miss a thousand dollars, and that it

wouldn't affect their lives one bit. As a clerk, however, at the age of twenty-three, the concept of a fast fifty thousand dollars for Rock and me was amazingly seductive. Too seductive...

"Sure, let's do it." I instantly said.

The day of the game I was nervous. The gambler's itch was rushing adrenaline through my body as Rock and I watched the game together. We raked in all three quarters and the final score, splitting the fifty-thousand profit between us.

Looking back now, I honestly wish I had lost it all, or at least a large portion of the money on that scheme.

I wish that a safety would have been scored in the game to mess up the numbers, or that there had been a few missed extra points. Losing money that day might have almost scared me straight at that crucial point in my life. But it didn't happen that way; I won, and it was a quick twenty-five thousand of easy money in my pocket that no one asked questions about.

That decision and the speed at which I made it now rolls through my brain in slow motion. At the time, it happened in less than a second. Now, twenty plus years later, writing these words from inside a federal prison, I remember how quickly I spoke those fateful words...

"Sure, let's do it."

I wish now that someone would have slapped me silly for even thinking about it. The saying, "I wish I would know now what I didn't know then" really hits home.

The ripples of my actions began to gain momentum...