

THE GLOBAL COMPASS

NAVIGATING HISTORY, HUMAN CONNECTION
AND THE STORIES THAT SHAPE US



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THE GLOBAL COMPASS

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PREFACE

As I reflect on the journey that has brought me to this point, I am filled with a deep sense of gratitude.

The Global Compass is a testament to the road I've traveled—a path marked by service, unwavering faith, hard-won resilience, and a steady pursuit of purpose. But I did not walk it alone. Please see the “Acknowledgements” section for a list of those individuals whose presence and influence left an enduring mark on my life.

The decision to write this memoir did not come easily. It was born of inner conviction, the encouragement of others, and what I can only describe as the prompting of the Spirit. In the end, I came to understand that sharing my experiences had meaning—not just for me, but possibly for others walking their own difficult paths. This memoir is more than a series of events; it is a reflection on the lessons learned, the battles fought, and the faith that carried me through them all.

From the early days of my military career, through combat and command, to my post-service calling in the classroom, each chapter has been shaped by a belief in something greater than myself. My journey with PTSD—though painful—has also been transformational. It taught me the necessity of peace and how faith and resilience can light the way when the road grows dark.

Over the years, I've attended many high school graduations and noticed a common thread in students' favorite Scripture verses. While never unanimous, one verse always stood out far above the rest: *Philippians 4:13* – “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*” That verse has echoed through my life. In moments of hardship and triumph, it's reminded me to live grounded in faith, committed to service, and strengthened by grace.

As you read these pages, I hope that you'll find encouragement, a renewed sense of purpose, and maybe even a reflection of your own story in mine. Life is seldom easy, but it's through our struggles that we discover our strength.

Thank you for joining me on this journey. May these memoirs offer you a glimpse into a life lived with purpose, faith, and unwavering hope.

Through every challenge and every victory, I have aimed to honor Him in all I do, to be a pillar of strength for my family, and to leave a lasting impact on the lives of those I teach and serve. And in it all, I rest in the truth of Psalm 23:1— *“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”*

PROLOGUE

East Berlin — December 1987

As we sped through the desolate streets of East Berlin, a sense of foreboding settled over me like a heavy shroud. Darkness pressed in from all sides, suffocating and absolute. The silence was broken only by the low hum of the engine and the dull thrum of tires against the cold pavement.

Something in the air was off. The deeper we drove into this forgotten quadrant of the city, past crumbling buildings, through shadowed alleyways, the heavier it became. It was as if we were slipping not just through geography, but through time itself, into a place abandoned by light, untouched by history.

Our driver maneuvered with silent precision, weaving through the maze of streets as if guided by memory rather than maps. The fog thickened around us, blurring the weak glow of intermittent streetlamps. Every corner we turned seemed to draw us deeper into a realm of secrets, silence, and suspicion.

Inside the car, tension coiled. Then the headlights emerged behind us—fast. The sudden glare cut through the fog like a blade. Alex and the driver exchanged clipped phrases in Russian. Both stiffened. The calm was over.

“What’s going on?” I asked, my voice was low but sharp.

Alex gave a faint smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “Don’t worry. It’ll be over soon.”

His tone said otherwise.

Our Lada Samara took quick, calculated turns, weaving between buildings and slipping into alleys. The old East German Trabant behind us struggled to keep up. Within minutes, the headlights were gone. We had lost them. For now.

But the weight of the night remained. The silence returned.

Soon we pulled up to a nondescript building—gray, crumbling, indistinct. It blended with the fog, as if the city itself tried to forget

it was there. Alex gave the driver a subtle nod, and the engine fell quiet. The air around us grew colder.

“This is it,” Alex said, his voice barely more than a whisper. “Stay close. Follow my lead.”

We stepped out into the mist. The building loomed in silence, its entrance was nothing more than a dark void. Alex moved with purpose; I followed, every sense heightened. Inside, the air was damp, the corridors narrow and dimly lit. Our footsteps echoed through the hall like whispers of the past.

We moved deeper—twisting turns, concrete walls, the scent of old secrets lingering in the air.

Finally, Alex stopped. A door at the end of a long corridor waited. He listened, then slowly pushed it open. The room beyond was sparse—bare walls, dim light, a single chair.

He gestured for me to sit.

As I did, the darkness seemed to pull back slightly. The danger hadn't passed, but something inside me had shifted. I was here for a reason. The night had its secrets, but I had come to meet them face-to-face.

PART ONE

U.S. ARMY: ENLISTED

CHAPTER 1

SHADOWS AND SUNLIGHT IN BOGOTÁ

1976

A Senior Year in the Tropics

After attending thirteen different schools in my twelve years of education, I finally settled into my senior year on the mission base of Lomalinda, Colombia, South America. This lush, vibrant land had been our home for the past four years, where my parents were assigned to their mission work. Life in Lomalinda was a mixture of tropical beauty, threaded with the vibrant culture of the local community and the rhythm of mission life.

Missionaries, like my family, often traveled to the capital city of Bogotá for medical, dental, or much-needed getaway trips. Bogotá, with its bustling streets and Andean backdrop, was a city of contrasts—modern yet deeply rooted in history, safe yet shadowed by the growing anti-American sentiment of the 1970s. This unrest was fueled by the leftist terrorist group, the M-19, whose activities cast a lingering unease over the city.

Shortly after I graduated, I found myself needing work on my braces from my orthodontist, necessitating a trip to Bogotá. Despite the political tensions, I usually felt safe in the capital, partly due to the familiarity of these routine trips and partly due to the resilience and faith that our mission life instilled in me.

The journey to Bogotá was always an adventure. The road wound through breathtaking landscapes—from dense rainforests to rolling highlands—before finally spilling into the urban sprawl of the city. Each trip was a reminder of Colombia's narrow, winding roads through the mountains, flanked by steep drop-offs.

This trip, like many before it, blended the ordinary with the extraordinary—routine necessity set against a city grappling with its identity.

The harshness of Bogotá spread through every corner with its chaotic energy. Beggars, street kids, drug dealers, and vendors mingled with taxis and buses in traffic patterns that often defied logic. Colombian salsa blared from storefronts and buses, colliding with car horns and shouted conversations in a beautiful, frantic symphony.

There was a fine line between the honest and the unscrupulous. Weary fathers and struggling mothers rubbed shoulders with sharply dressed secretaries and suave young businessmen. Even thieves wore business suits, blurring the lines between the upright and the criminal.

When our taxi finally pulled up to Caracas 50, our mission apartment building, the sight of its concrete structure brought some comfort. The thick metal door marked "24-32" was more than just an address—it was a place of faith and fellowship in a city on edge.

When Dreams Turn into Nightmares

That night, I drifted into a vivid dream—one of the missionaries was pushing a heavy safe, which suddenly crashed through three floors of the building. I startled awake, muttering, “What a weird dream,” just as a thunderous sound echoed through the walls.

“Fire!” someone shouted.

Adrenaline kicked in. Still groggy, I threw on clothes and joined the growing commotion. Bob Wheeler, a fellow missionary, delivered the news: a bomb had exploded downstairs.

We descended the stairs into chaos. Debris filled the air, the familiar surroundings now resembling a war zone. Amid the confusion, I spotted unfamiliar Americans who had been caught in the blast. One young girl, maybe thirteen, stood out—her wide, piercing blue eyes radiated fear and confusion, framed by the haunting light of catastrophe.

Miraculously, no lives had been lost. Divine protection seemed undeniable. Yet in relief, a chilling question gripped us all:

Who had planted the bomb? And why?

The Colombian police arrived with sirens screaming. As chaos turned to investigation, my mind spiraled inward. Thoughts swirled—my parents' wisdom, my shortcomings, my uncertain future.

It felt like time itself had slowed. I was caught between guilt and the hope of redemption. Even if I didn't know whether I truly needed to repent, I chose to. I silently vowed to be better, to follow the call of the Spirit, to walk in a way worthy of the life that had just been spared.

By dawn, the city was still. Glass shimmered on the sidewalk like scattered jewels, a poetic contrast to the night's violence. As a Nissan cab arrived to take us back to the mission base, I breathed in the cool mountain air, ready to leave the horror behind.

Or so I thought.

One Month Later: The Unseen Battle

A month passed. Tension gave way to the comfort of routine. But that calm was shattered when I returned to Bogotá with friends. One night, walking through the dark city streets, we passed a food hangout, and the conversation turned to the bombing.

A sudden wave of dread washed over me.

Memories burst forward: broken glass, panicked screams, the gaping hole in the building. My body moved with the group, but my mind unraveled. One of the girls noticed her voice pulling me back, but I insisted I was fine and let them walk ahead.

Alone now, I wrestled with fear, regret, and confusion. The questions were relentless: *How close had I come to death? Why us? Who was responsible?* The invisible grip tightened around my chest. Panic.

And then—Psalm 23. "*Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...*"

With trembling lips, I recited it aloud. The weight lifted. Not all at once, but enough to breathe. Enough to walk again.

Peace Beyond Understanding

I caught up to my friends. We entered the restaurant and sat by the hearth. Yet inside, I was still processing what had just occurred

—a supernatural release, a whispered promise from heaven that I was not alone.

I didn't fully understand it then. I only knew something real had happened. That night planted a seed, one that would take years to grow. It would take four more years before I truly understood the completeness, the *wholeness*, of what had just begun.