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*~ Brian Tracy, Bestselling Author of *Unlimited Sales Success**

# THE UNEXPECTED TOUR GUIDE



JEFF C. WEST

Foreword by Paul S. Amos II, President, Aflac

# **The Unexpected Tour Guide**

By  
Jeff C. West

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## What Great Sales Leaders Are Saying About *The Unexpected Tour Guide*

*“The Unexpected Tour Guide is full of wisdom and insights that will make you a better salesperson and a better person overall in every area of your life.”*

~ Brian Tracy, Bestselling Author of *Unlimited Sales Success*

*“Brief, powerful and impactful. The Unexpected Tour Guide combines an entertaining story with some of the best teaching you'll ever receive on how to become a hugely successful sales professional. If you're in the selling profession, buy this book. If you're a sales manager or leader, buy one for your entire team and watch your sales numbers rise and rise.”*

~Bob Burg, Bestselling author of *Endless Referrals* and *Adversaries into Allies*

*“Your life, your income, the results you're getting are nothing more than a mirror reflection of what you are putting forth. If you're unsatisfied with your current results, read The Unexpected Tour Guide. It will help you gain a new, improved perspective and find a more fulfilling direction.”*

~Tom Hopkins, Bestselling author of *How to Master the Art of Selling* and *When Buyers Say No* (with Ben Katt).

*“The Unexpected Tour Guide” may very well be one of those stories you remember for the rest of your life. And if you apply the lessons it contains, it may lead you to one of the best stories yet to be written – yours.”*

~Paul S. Amos, II, President – Aflac

*“The Unexpected Tour Guide; I couldn't put it down until I finished it. What a great little book. This short read tells a timeless story that will not only be impactful to those in sales or business, but to everyone in every walk of life. Jesus Christ taught through parables for a reason. Jeff West does the same with this gem of a story that will be life changing for all who read it. Thanks Jeff!”*

~Michael J. Tomlinson, Senior Vice President, Director of Sales, Aflac

*“I have read many books in my 35+ year sales career and this is one of the best. Jeff has written a book that can change your career but more importantly your life. He shares principles that are*

*timely for the struggling salesperson but also the seasoned professional. Most important he helps us discover why we do what we do.”*

~Lynn G. Barnson, Marketing Director, Aflac-Utah

*“Just finished The Unexpected Tour Guide. Thanks in advance from every salesman whose career will be successful because of it! Great story – laughed, cried, remembered.”*

~Eric Leger, Vice President – Aflac, Southwest Territory

*“At around 10:30 I began reading your book... I honestly couldn't put it down. The funny thing is that I never once considered putting it down and giving in to the temptation to sleep. Your messages are spot on and I truly enjoyed every chapter as the story unfolded. It's now 1:02 and I just had to send you a note of thanks.”*

~Blaze Fremin, Marketing Director – Aflac, Louisiana

*"Regardless of how motivated you may be, if you will read Jeff's book and do the exercises, you will become even more motivated and discover areas to develop to take you and your business to a higher level. The Unexpected Tour Guide will become a classic in the field of personal development."*

~Mike Butler, Marketing Director – Aflac, North Carolina

## **The Unexpected Tour Guide**

*A Salesman, A Homeless Man  
And an Incredible Adventure*

## Foreword

by

Paul S. Amos, II, President

Aflac

(American Family Life Assurance Company of Columbus, GA)

If you build your people, they will build their business.

I have witnessed firsthand the truth of that statement. My grandfather and his two brothers began a small insurance company in Columbus, GA in 1955. With high dreams and hard work they grew that business into what has become an international company on the Fortune 500® list with current assets exceeding \$118 billion dollars. Not only did they build a business, they built an industry – the voluntary employee benefits industry.

The three Amos brothers did not accomplish this feat alone. They successfully attracted people to their organization – good people. They worked with those people. They taught them how to build their businesses. Then they encouraged them to use Aflac as the vehicle to accomplish the dreams and goals they had for their families. Countless people have done exactly that over the last 58 years.

Jeff West is one of those people.

I have known Jeff for most of his Aflac career. When Jeff started with Aflac in 1993, he and his family were in the midst of major financial difficulties. As a matter of fact, I have heard Jeff jokingly say, “If anyone had robbed me in the days before I began my career with Aflac – all they would have gotten was practice!” I have watched him as his business and his income grew exponentially over the last 21 years. He did so by developing his craft in sales and transferring that knowledge and skill set to others. Then he encouraged them to chase their dreams.

He built his people and they built their businesses.

Stories sell – and *The Unexpected Tour Guide* is a great story. It is a story that will keep you engaged and will teach you great principles for life as well as sales. Read the story. Apply the lessons. Then reap a great return for the time and money you have invested.

*The Unexpected Tour Guide* may very well be one of those stories that you remember for the rest of your life. And if you apply the lessons it contains, it may lead you to one of the best stories yet to be written – yours.

## Dedication

I have been blessed.

I have a beautiful wife who is patient with me, and is absolute proof that I am excellent in sales. I have two daughters who inspire me to be better, and with whom I have been hopelessly and helplessly in love since I first held them in my arms on the day of their births. And I have had a colorful cast of family and friends who have set excellent examples for me. Even though this work is fictional, bits and pieces from many of them are reflected in the development of the characters.

I have also been blessed with several wonderful mentors. There are too many to name them all, but I wanted to mention just a few such as Bill Ross in Peachtree City, Georgia, who taught me how to have fun as I built a business; and Billy Florence in Athens, Georgia, who taught me to build a business as I had fun. Although their influence was during my early adulthood, it no doubt has made me a better man today.

To my favorite authors: Dr. John Maxwell, who taught me how to be a leader; and Bob Burg, who taught me how to be a true giver, not only in his written words but by his actions with me and those around me.

But I want to dedicate this book to two particular mentors who will always hold very special places in my heart:

*To the real Jack Amberson: You set the finest example of what a Godly man does in his work and family life. You gave me my first personal development book. You taught me how to work hard. And you taught me how a father loves his children. A young man, fresh out of college, could not have asked for better mentorship than I got from you. My life and the lives of my children are much richer because you have been a part of my story.*

*And to Frank Davies: You set the finest example of how a man can be passionate about his business. You taught me that you can't hide hard work. You taught me how to lead an organization with emotion, integrity, and enthusiasm. It is one of my greatest desires that I have passed along the things I learned from you to those in my charge.*



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## PROLOGUE

### In the office of Jim Fariss - current day

You and I have never met.

As we speak, I am sitting in my office, preparing for a meeting with a young man whom I believe has the potential to be one of the most impactful leaders in my company. He is intelligent, and has great people skills and a youthful enthusiasm that, if channeled in the right direction, could turn him into a star.

And yet he thinks he is coming to this meeting to be fired... for underperformance. Who can blame him? His sales results thus far would certainly make that a foregone conclusion.

However, I have other plans for him.

But before I get into all of that, I think I should introduce myself.

\* \* \* \* \*

My name is Jim Fariss, and I am the owner of a business that provides solutions to families in need of assistance when medical events create financial difficulties.

But, more importantly, I am the owner of an incredible story. It's the story of my life.

I'm not at all sure that you will believe my story. There were times when I had difficulty believing it myself. But I lived it. So I guess I really don't have the option of not believing it. You, on the other hand, can decide for yourself. Regardless of your decision, I will be fine with it. After all, when you think about it, I can't control what you believe about my story. I can only tell it.

There was once a young boy who rang the bells at a small country church every Sunday morning. He was so very excited about doing his job, announcing to the community that the services were about to begin.

A man once asked why he did it with such enthusiasm when so few people actually came to the church. The boy replied, "It ain't my job to fret over whether they come or not! It's my job to ring the bell and let 'em know we're here!"

So this is me, just ringing the bell.

## CHAPTER 1

### Growing Up Covered in Dirt

I'll begin my story about a mile and a half down an old country dirt road in north Georgia.

It was a typical childhood. Or at least it was typical for any young boy who was raised by good, hardworking, undereducated people in the South. We did not have an abundance of anything other than family love. As a matter of fact, as I learned later in life, we were actually quite poor—at least by today's standards. But I never knew.

Since there was very little money for all of the latest toys and gadgets, my friends and I had to come up with creative ways to entertain ourselves. We didn't have video games with battle scenes. We went outside and played army. Our version of "gaming" involved looking for the perfect stick to play with—just a little longer than our arms. When we pulled off the leaves, and broke off the small branches at just the right spots, the "V" at the end of the stick would align perfectly above our shoulders and below our armpits like the stock of a rifle; the small twig in the center made a perfect trigger.

It was a time when youngsters could play outside all day on a Saturday, letting their cares blow away in the wind as they rode their bicycles. We could be gone all day without our parents feeling the need every half-hour to pick up their cell phones and text us on ours. That fact was especially convenient; neither cell phones nor texting had been invented yet.

We rode bicycles and built tree houses.

When summer arrived, the swimming hole at the Swamp Creek railroad trestle was one of our favorite gathering spots. We had confiscated a rope from my friend Jeff's garage and securely tied a spare tire to the largest limb of an oak tree that stretched over the water. Then we pulled that "tire swing" as far as we could, away from the water. Someone else would yell, "go!" We took off running, like the start of a race, yelling as loudly as we could—holding onto that tire for dear life!

As we crossed the water's edge, we wrapped our legs around the tire and rode it until it reached its highest point over the water. Then at precisely the moment when the tire's forward momentum would stop, we let go and dropped into the creek. We did this every summer when we were young.

Some boys in attendance were extremely talented "show-offs." That made them very popular with the girls at the Swamp Creek swimming hole. The girls would giggle and point at the boys as they did their "Golden Egg Drop" into the creek. A "Golden Egg Drop" was a masterful feat accomplished by entering the water feet first, after completing a back flip from the tire swing. I have no doubt that a successful "Golden Egg Drop" from a tire swing into Swamp Creek would have made the highlight reel at the "Redneck" Olympics.

I was never one of those “show-off” boys—I often wished very much that I were. I was never the most popular. I was never the boy who was the focus of all the girls and their young crushes. And I was never the one who could do a successful back flip from a tire swing into a creek. I wasn’t afraid, and always gave it a good effort. I could just never quite master the skills—neither tire swings nor girls.

When it came to girls, I would just get a huge lump in my throat, and smile as I blushed. And when it came to back flips into the water, I usually ended up hitting the water squarely on my stomach. Then I would stay under water long enough that my screams from the pain would just dissolve into bubbles and float to the surface.

I remember our first color television set being delivered, and the cartoons we watched on that Saturday morning. I remember watching first-run television shows that you and your family may routinely watch now on the syndicated networks: *The Andy Griffith Show*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, *Bewitched*, *Gilligan’s Island*, *Get Smart*, and *Bonanza*. I couldn’t decide if I had a bigger crush on Barbara Eden (Jeannie) or Elizabeth Montgomery (Samantha). However, when it came to the all-important question from *Gilligan’s Island*: “Who do you like better, Ginger or Maryann?” I was definitely a Maryann man.

There were no cell phones, video games, navigation systems in your car, or social networks. The only Facebook we had was our school yearbook, which we called an “Annual.” And instead of “commenting on your wall,” people “autographed your annual” – usually writing incredibly gifted poetry like,

*Roses are red,  
Violets are blue,  
Rotten cheese stinks,  
Your feet do too!  
Have a great summer!*

—Signed, Your Friend, Eric.

And yes, many of my friends wrote the word, “Signed” and gave themselves the title of “Your Friend” before their name on all of their annual autographs.

I played sports. I was on the basketball team (which is really hilarious when you think of how tall I wasn’t!) I ran track and threw the discus. I also played baseball, and was considered pretty talented.

Pretty talented that is until our teams got old enough that the opposing pitchers could throw really biting curve balls. Curve balls ended my youthful dreams of playing major league baseball.

I was a better than average student but not the most outstanding. I was a better than average athlete but not the one college scouts sought out. And I showed definite signs of leadership. As a matter of fact, my teachers would oft en refer to me as a leader (I believe the term they actually used was “ring-leader”).

My teachers really did like me, though. I was fun and full of mischief.

They would usually laugh, shake their heads, and say, “I know you’re up to something! I just don’t know what it is!” Being “up to something” was the term used for that stage in any prank where the plans were made, and the actions were being implemented. However, the final outcome and the certainty of the guilty party was still a mystery.

They were correct. I was almost always up to something. They always wanted to catch me. But I managed to stay at least one step ahead of them.

I even had a coach tell me once, “Son, you are showing signs of great leadership. If we could ever get you leading people in the right direction... you could accomplish anything.”

As I got older, I worked full-time jobs during my summers and part-time jobs during the school year. I graduated from high school, and entered college with the plan to become a teacher. Upon completing my master’s degree, I got married to my sweetheart and worked while she finished her Ph.D. in biochemistry at a major university in Texas.

My timing was a little off for getting a teaching position because I was entering the market in the middle of the school year. But I still needed to work. So for my first full-time, post-graduation job, I applied for a sales position with an insurance company. At the time, I would tell people that I landed in a sales career by default.

As I look back now, I prefer to call it divine providence.

I truly had no intention of being in sales—especially not in “insurance” sales. I thought all sales people were somewhat pushy, and that “insurance” sales people were probably the worst. One of my coworkers liked to say, “Thank goodness for those ‘snake-handling’ preachers in those backwoods churches in the mountains! Otherwise, we insurance sales people would be on the bottom rung of the social ladder!” I hated to admit it, but I somewhat agreed. (My apologies to all of you good, decent, and hardworking snake-handling preachers out there. I don’t mean to be disrespectful. I know you have a tough load to bear.)

My sales performance at that insurance agency was stellar!

*(In my best Don Adams/Maxwell Smart voice)*

*Well... would you believe my sales performance was good?*

*Well... would you believe adequate?*

*Okay... would you believe that sometimes my sales results were better than horrible?*

(Note: earlier reference to the Get Smart television show. My wife says I watch way too much television. I am watching her now as she reads this. She is raising an eyebrow, smiling slightly and thinking, *mmm-huh.*)

Back to being me again. My performance was not stellar. It was far from it. I didn't mind the work, but I just didn't seem to excel at it. I liked the people I worked with, and I knew that I could make an excellent living there. But for some reason, I was not succeeding.

My lack of success on the job was increasing my stress level. The money I was earning was inconsistent. And I was afraid that my wife would start to see me as a failure.

She was almost finished with her degree, and we both wanted to start a family. But I really didn't believe we were financially ready for that. The financial problems, and the job problems, were quickly being joined by marriage problems.

I have read that life is lived forward, but only understood backward.

I do believe this is correct.

And, even though I am no theologian, I do believe that God has a master plan for us that is good. I believe most things tend to work out the way they are supposed to, as long as we are not so stubborn that we refuse to get out of His way.

As I look back on it now, I can see that everything happens for a reason. At least it did in my case.

But enough with the introductions. I need to move on and tell you about the amazing day that began to move my life, family, and success into a completely different direction.

It all began on a Monday morning, when my sales manager, Jack Amberson, had put a note on my desk saying, "Come see me in my office."

## CHAPTER 2

### Are You Looking For Me? I'm Not Him!

My stomach began to churn. That is the only way I know to describe the feeling that came over me when I read the yellow post-it note on my desk. "Come see me in my office." That was all that the note said. And it had Jack's initials at the bottom.

I consider myself an optimistic person. I generally see the silver lining and not the cloud. I don't think I've ever been unrealistic, but I have always looked for, and usually found, the good in life. However, that day was the exception.

On that day, I was sure that the reason Jack was calling me into his office was to fire me. I had been at the company long enough that I should have been making my sales targets. I was smart enough to learn the skills that I needed. And people liked me. But, for some reason, I was just not "cutting the mustard," as we used to say.

I asked Scotty, one of my coworkers, "Do you have any idea why Jack wants to see me?" Scotty didn't even look up. He just grunted the word, "No." In my mind, Scotty's reaction confirmed my suspicions. Scotty can't even look at me, I thought. *Jack has to be bringing me in to fire me!*

I would love to tell you that I gave it some thought, and came to the conclusion that I was a grown man who could take responsibility for his own successes and failures. I'd also love to tell you that I walked uprightly into Jack's office, and humbly accepted his decision, shook his hand, and thanked him for trying so hard to teach me.

Did I "man up" and act like a big boy? Nope. I hid. I immediately went into the men's restroom, and stayed there for almost half an hour. Of course the situation only got worse. I thought about the humiliation of my failure. My mind raced and I forecast the disaster that would occur when I got home and had to tell my wife that I had been fired. I also played a movie in my head about when we would be getting those wonderful calls from bill collectors.

Finally, I worked up my courage, left the men's room, and walked into Jack's office. As I tapped lightly on the side of his door frame with the note in my hand, I asked, "Is this a good time?" I was desperately hoping he was too busy.

Jack looked up from his desk and said, with a smile, "Sure it is. Come on in and have a seat."

Jack was what we all referred to in the South as, a "good ol' country boy." He was always friendly. He was always there with a great big smile and a firm handshake. He genuinely seemed glad to see you every time you were around him.

His priorities were God, family, and country, and the evidence of this was all around you as you walked into his tastefully decorated office. His Bible was on the corner of his desk, and it had a worn and tattered look rather than a brand new "store-bought" look. Hanging on the wall,

he had pictures of his wife, Sharon, and his young children, Ted and Becky. He had a couple of crayon drawings that his daughter, Becky, had made for him in frames on his bookshelf. On his credenza, he had a baseball trophy that his son, Ted, had won in the third grade. And, on a pedestal in the corner, he had a statue of an American Bald Eagle holding a flag.

Jack was also a “strapping” man. He had muscular arms that you could always see because he wore short-sleeved dress shirts and a nice tie. Jack never worked out at the gym. His muscular structure was because he was a hard worker at home as well as at the office. He did all of the “fixer-upper” chores at home. And he even helped his father with their family’s farm.

Once, I accidentally helped Jack and his father at their farm. I say “accidentally” because I had no idea what I was getting myself into. Jack asked me if I would like to help them haul hay one Saturday morning. I had never done that before, so I said, “Sure!”

I showed up at seven a.m. on that Saturday, still sleepy. Jack and his dad had been up for hours. They were actually cheerful! I hadn’t even had any coffee yet, and they were raring to go!

Jack got onto a flatbed trailer that was hitched behind a tractor, which his father drove. Jack said, “You walk behind the flatbed, and throw the bales of hay up here to me. Then I will stack them.”

“All right!” I said.

And that may have been the last word I said for the next three hours. Not because I didn’t want to talk, but because I was sweating like a racehorse on a hot day, and too out of breath to talk.

As I was struggling with my work behind the tractor, Jack was up on top of the flatbed—stacking the bales and making it all look really easy. He was joking around. And he handled those bales of hay like they were made of air! He was fifteen years older than me, but his stamina was putting me to shame.

Eventually, I tossed the last bale up to Jack. We then followed the tractor over to the barn. And I was truly relieved to see that the work was done. But, much to my surprise, Jack said, “Now comes the fun part!”

Jack continued. “I will get up into the hayloft. You stand on the flatbed and throw the bundles up to me.”

*Fun part?! I thought. He has to be kidding!* I thought there had to be a machine to move the bales to the hayloft. I thought wrong!

For the next hour, I threw hay bales up to the loft. Jack caught them and then stacked them. There were a few bales that never quite made it to the loft. I began to believe that if the pain were any indication, I would wake up the next morning with my arms lying beside me in the bed—no longer attached to me. And my hands would be making fists at me—crying, in sign language, of course.



The reward for the day's work came in the way of Jack's mother preparing a country feast for us. There were biscuits, fried chicken, potatoes, gravy, corn, okra, and other tasty treats. All of the items on that table had actually been grown or raised on their farm.

The family atmosphere was fantastic, too. Sharon and the kids were able to join us for lunch. And I watched Jack as his young children ran in and jumped into his lap. He gave them both a hug and a kiss and told them how much he loved them, and then he said something I will never forget. He looked at his children and said, "I am so proud that God picked me to be your daddy."

As we sat down at the table, Jack's family joined hands to say grace. I was sitting between Jack and his father. They reached in from either side and grabbed my hands to include me in their circle. Jack's dad said a short and simple prayer of thanks, and then we all dug in.

Laughter and great stories filled the lunchtime. Jack's dad loved to tell the stories of how nervous Jack was when he was getting ready to ask Sharon to go out on their first date in high school, and how he got even more nervous when he went to ask Sharon's father for her hand in marriage. We all had a good laugh at Jack's expense.

Jack's mother looked over at Jack and said, "Don't feel bad, son. Your father was so nervous when he had that same talk with my father that he actually got physically sick."

Sharon smiled and said, "So did Jack!" Sharon looked at Jack and said, "Daddy saw how nervous you were. He liked you, but he intentionally stayed stone-faced through the entire thing."

Then with a big smile she said, teasingly, "He told me that he gave you his blessing, but he also said he wasn't sure you would amount to much."

Jack laughed and said, "The jury may still be out on that one!"

Everyone nodded their heads in agreement, trying to look very, serious... but then the whole group broke out into laughter.

Sharon got the sweetest smile, reached over and grabbed Jack's hand under the table, and looked around the room—stopping first at their children, and then turning her attention back to her husband. She then gave Jack a little wink and said, "Oh, I think you turned out all right." I had to admit, I agreed with her.

Jack and Sharon had a great family. That tradition was obviously how they had both been raised, and they were passing it along very well to their children.

Like I said, Jack was a "good ol' boy." And he was a fantastic family man. That's why I couldn't understand why he would be sitting there smiling at me as he was getting ready to fire me!

Jack saw that I was anxious. He asked, "How are you feeling?"

"Stressed!" I answered, almost shouting.

He asked, "What seems to be the problem?"

Jack didn't know, but the night before my wife Jean and I had gotten into an awful argument. There was no doubt that she loved me and I loved her. But the tension between us was growing with each passing day. After paying for her tuition and repaying my student loans, there was barely enough money to pay the rent and cover basic living expenses. The lack of money just seemed to compound the anxiety I was feeling about my lack of success on the job; it was really hitting home in our marriage.

That anxiety was creating a very real physiological uneasiness in my stomach—a feeling I was not used to and didn't like at all. And, to make matters worse, I brought that feeling home with me.

Sometimes, the feeling we associate with stress and anxiety can still be with us, even after the event that created the stress is over.

Then we often respond to other people—"innocent bystanders"—as if the event is still happening, and they were the ones who caused it. That was exactly what had happened that night.

Jean and I were at the dinner table. I was thinking about the calls I needed to make on the next day, and I was enjoying an unhealthy dose of stomach fun just thinking about it.

Jean said, "This weekend, I need to go to the store and buy some new shoes." Note that she didn't say, "I am going to go out and beat your car with a sledgehammer." Nor did she say, "I think your mother is a total nag!" She simply said, "This weekend, I need to go to the store and buy some new shoes."

But because the way I was feeling inside, I responded to her as if she were the total cause of all my problems and her need for shoes was equivalent to family treason. I made the one person who loved me the most, and who was a totally innocent party, feel the brunt of my frustrations.

I can't remember exactly what I said. (Actually, I am just too embarrassed to repeat it.) But Jean left the table in tears, saying that she was starting to wonder if our getting married had been a big mistake.

So when Jack asked, "What seems to be the problem?" I just unloaded like a windstorm. I told him that I was stressed because I knew I wasn't making things happen. I was stressed because I thought I was letting him down. I was stressed because I was letting my wife down. I was stressed because I wasn't making enough money.

Basically, I was talking too fast, and saying too much. But I needed to let it out.

Jack's smile disappeared, but his expression still surprised me. It was not one of disappointment or anger. He had a gentler look about him. It was the look of a father or brother, or close friend who wanted to help.

Jack said, "Jim, do you like working here?"

I said, "Yes." And I really did.

He said, "Do you think you can learn the job?"

Again, I replied, “Yes.”

He told me, “Well, you are not afraid of hard work. I have seen that firsthand.” Then he leaned forward in his chair and asked me,

“Why isn’t this working for you?”

*That is an interesting question*, I thought. After all, Jack was my sales manager. Shouldn’t he be telling me why it wasn’t working for me, instead of asking me?

I looked down and said, “I really don’t have an answer for you on that, Jack.”

Jack didn’t say anything for a couple of minutes, as he thought. Then he looked at me with a small grin and said, “I have an assignment for you.”

“Okay,” I said. “What do you want me to do?”

To my surprise, he said, “Take the rest of the day off!”

“Are you serious?” was all I could say.

“Absolutely,” Jack said. “But there is a catch.” Then he pulled out a twenty-dollar bill from his wallet and pushed it across his desk toward me. “I want you to take this twenty, and go through a drive thru somewhere and get you some lunch. Then I want you to take the lunch to Cypress Park and eat it as you sit outside in the sunshine. While you are there, I want you to think about your situation and find a solution.”

Then he bent over a little closer, dropped his voice, and said, “And I also want you to find a total stranger and do something nice for them today.”

I was silent. I thought about asking, “What?!” But I changed my mind. The instructions were simple enough, and it was obvious that Jack really thought I needed to do some soul-searching.

So I slowly reached for the twenty on the desk, and pulled it toward me.

“Yes, sir,” I said, quietly. And I got up from my chair and began to leave Jack’s office. At the door, I turned around holding up the twenty and said, “Thanks for lunch.”

“You’re welcome,” Jack said, as the smile returned to his face. But this time the smile seemed to have a little mischief in it.

I turned around and walked out of the office. I didn’t say a word to anyone as I left. I don’t even remember if anyone noticed me. I just walked outside, got into my car, and began to drive toward what would be the beginning of one of the most amazing adventures of my life.

## CHAPTER 3

### I See Invisible People!

It is just an afternoon off, right? At least that is what I was hoping as I drove out of our parking lot, turning right and heading down the feeder-road onto I-45 South.

I was still replaying the meeting in Jack's office. I thought his assignment was a little odd, but at least he didn't actually fire me. But that little smile on his face as I left had me puzzled. It reminded me of when my teachers thought I was up to something.

I just dismissed the thought, and continued toward lunch. It was a nice day, with blue skies and a temperature around seventy-five degrees. The humidity was low, and that was an unusual and nice bonus for Houston. I rolled my window down to enjoy the breeze. However, I didn't turn on the radio or play a CD. I just drove in silence, except for the sound of the cool breeze and all of the conversations that were taking place inside my head.

As I approached the Greens Road exit, I moved into the left lane in order to make a U-Turn and go back up I-45 North.

The underpass at Greens Road and I-45 is almost always a gathering place for a few homeless people when the weather is nice. Usually you will see anywhere from two to six of them holding their signs, and dressed in what would have certainly been really cheap clothing—even several years prior. Now the clothing was nothing much more than time-worn rags.

Actually, I said that you could usually see homeless people there. But the sad truth is that I had driven by that underpass many times during that year, and I almost never really saw anyone. As they were standing there, I would barely give them a glance. More often than not, I would actually avoid eye contact with them completely. Once I heard the morning news using the term invisible people to describe the homeless. I suppose that term accurately describes how I viewed them. I was uncomfortable. I was a little concerned for my safety. And I tried not to see them.

As I look back, I am reminded of the times when I was a child, and I was convinced that I could hide from my mother by closing my eyes. She would call for me, but I wouldn't move a muscle. I would just stand there, clinching my eyes shut—often while standing in the same room.

And when I would not come, she would ask, "Why are you just standing there? I can see you!" I would reply, "No, you can't see me! My eyes are closed!"

I think I was playing a similar game each day as I passed the homeless at the Greens Road underpass. I was mentally keeping my eyes closed, so that they couldn't see me. But this day was different.

I have a term that I like to use called "God Goose." Where I grew up, the word "goose" was interchangeable with the word "tickle." So if you tickled someone, you "goosed" them.

A “God Goose” is one of those moments when it almost feels like God is teasingly “poking” you in the side, like a tickle, just to let you know He is there.

Getting a very specific answer to a very specific prayer qualifies as a “God Goose.” Or when the traffic light changes to green, but for some unknown reason you don’t press the gas; then seconds later, a truck speeds through the crossing traffic and runs the light; that is most certainly a “God Goose.” And sometimes a “God Goose” is a gentle nudge that is there to move you into a certain direction.

I am not sure if it was because of Jack’s assignment or if it was a “God Goose,” but on this day, my eyes were open, and I saw someone. The traffic light had turned red, and the traffic was heavy enough that I had to wait before I could make my U-Turn. So I was sitting still, with my window rolled down.

As I looked out my window to the left, there he was, just staring at me as if he knew me. He was an older black man that I estimated being in his sixties. As I would learn later, he was actually a decade younger, but the years on the street had really aged him.

His hair was a windblown mix of black and grey. He was wearing an old navy blazer that was tattered beyond repair. His shirt was plaid—the kind of plaid that could have been seen at a sock-hop from the 1950s. And his pants were khaki. At least I think they were khaki. But they could have just been covered in dust. His eyes were very dark.

We made eye contact and just stared at each other; neither of us said a word. No one moved. No one flinched. It reminded me of the old western movies where the gunfighters were “staring each other down” just before the draw.

After what seemed like an eternity to me, the light turned green, and traffic began to move. And as I traversed the U-Turn, we maintained eye contact for as long as possible. I could even see him in my rearview mirror, watching me drive away.

I was actually feeling quite relieved to be moving on. But then Jack’s words came back to me. “I also want you to find a total stranger and do something nice for them today.” I thought to myself, *There has to be another total stranger out there that I can do something nice for today. Maybe help an elderly lady across the street. Or maybe carry some groceries for someone at the local H.E.B. Grocery Store.* But the more I tried to argue my way out of it, the more I could see the man’s face in my memory—and the more he could see mine, I imagined.

There was a local barbecue joint that I liked to frequent at the next exit. And even though Jack’s instructions said specifically to go through a drive-thru somewhere, I decided to forego the typical drive-thru restaurants and get a brisket plate instead. I also decided to order an extra plate for the homeless man at the Greens Road underpass.

The lady behind the counter had on a nametag that said, “Eunice.” (Of course it did! Every good barbecue joint has a lady around forty to fifty years old with sun-dried skin, whose name is Eunice. If you don’t believe me, go down to your local barbecue joint. She is there, too. Ask for her by name.)

Eunice asked, “Will there be anything else, Darlin?”

I said, “No ma’am.”

I gave her Jack’s twenty-dollar bill to cover a sixteen-dollar check and said, “Keep the change” as I walked out the door.

I caught myself wondering if that extra money on the tip for Eunice would count as me doing something nice for a complete stranger. I suppose that I was hoping to let myself off the hook. But then I thought better of it. After all, Eunice wasn’t a total stranger. I had seen her many times in the restaurant. And a four-dollar tip on a sixteen-dollar check probably wouldn’t rise to the level of doing something nice for someone.

Not that taking a single meal to a homeless man would rise much higher. I mean, I certainly didn’t expect the local news stations to come out and interview me after I took the homeless man a meal, and then broadcast my generosity on the evening news for all to see.

But I also knew that a four-dollar tip wouldn’t mean as much to Eunice as that brisket might mean to a hungry man. So I did another U-Turn and headed back to the Greens Road underpass.

As I slowed down for the U-Turn, my eyes scanned the intersection. But my homeless opponent from my imaginary gunfight was no longer there. There were others, but none were making eye contact with me; I couldn’t even give the lunch to one of them. It was as if I were the invisible man this time.

The car behind me tapped his horn to remind me that the light had changed. Disappointed, I drove away. I thought about coming back and making another pass through the intersection, but I didn’t. I thought about giving the meal to another stranger. But I didn’t do that either. I just drove ahead. In my mind’s eye, I could still see that man and the way he looked directly into my face as I drove by.

I decided to go on to Cypress Park and have my lunch. Cypress Park is a beautiful small park in the northern suburbs of Houston. It has a full-sized soccer field, a baseball field set up for little league games, picnic tables, park benches, and well-maintained pavilions. And at this time of the year, the grass was a beautiful shade of green.

On the weekends, you will find families there watching the various sporting events taking place. You will hear people cheering for their favorite teams. You will enjoy the wonderful smell of hamburgers and hotdogs as they cook on one of the many grills. It is truly a slice of “Americana” and is one of my favorite places to visit.

On this particular Thursday, there were very few people at the park, and I was grateful. I wanted to have some quiet time to think about my conversation with Jack. I picked a park bench near a small stream that snaked lazily through the park. I sat down, and pulled one of my two meals out of the white plastic sack that Eunice had given me.

As I opened the cover on my Styrofoam lunch plate, a group of pigeons, which must have been almost directly behind me, suddenly and noisily flew directly over my bench. By instinct, I ducked slightly and then looked behind me to see where they had been. To my surprise, there stood the homeless man whom I had seen at the Greens Road underpass.

I like to think of myself as a “man’s man,” but I have to be honest and tell you that the hair on the back of my neck stood on end and a shiver went through me. Before I could utter a sound, he said with a loud Southern accent, “Boy! That ain’t no drive-thru!” I didn’t know what to say. I just sat there in silence with a stunned look on my face.

He said, in a calmer voice this time, “Boy. What’s the matter? Cat gotch-yo tongue?” When he said “boy,” he actually reminded me of my grandfather. It sounded like a cross between the words “boy” and “boa.” It rhymed with the French word, *mois*.

I was beginning to relax a little. And I answered back, trying to sound much more macho than I felt, “You shouldn’t sneak up on a man like that! This is Texas! You could get shot!”

He turned his head slightly and gave me a quizzical look that said, “*Is that boy really carrying a gun?*” Then a smile came over his face, and he walked slowly around to the side of the bench with a laugh that reminded me of many old men I knew in my youth. It was a slow and low laugh. “Heh, heh, heh, heh, heh!”

His voice got quite soft, as he looked down at the extra meal on my park bench and said, “Boy, you gonna eat both those lunches?” The look on his face told me that it may have been quite a while since his last meal.

I can’t explain why, but my trepidation was gone. And I looked up at him and said something that I was sure would raise his curiosity.

I said, “No. I actually bought this for you. But when I got back to the underpass, you were gone.”

To my surprise, he had no questions or puzzled look on his face. He simply said with a smile, “Well, I’m here now! Let’s eat!”

I got the other lunch out of the bag, as he settled himself on the other end of the bench. I handed it to him. He said, “Thank you,” as he opened the cover and his hungry eyes saw the brisket. “This ain’t drive-thru, but I’ll take it.”

I thought that comment was rather odd, but my thoughts were more concentrated on how he could have possibly traveled from the Greens Road underpass to Cypress Park so quickly.

He looked up from his meal and saw me staring at him. “What?” he asked.

“I was just wondering how you got from Greens Road to here so fast?”

He just watched me for a few seconds, and then he looked down and said, “I really don’t have an answer for you on that, Jack.”

Now, I’ve never been a fan of street slang. I don’t call people Jack just because I don’t know their real name. But I have to admit that I was less concerned with what he said, and more concerned with how he said it. It was as if his thick, elderly, Southern accent was gone. And his cadence and voice inflection almost sounded like he was imitating someone.

That someone he was imitating was me. It was exactly what I said to Jack, earlier in his office. Before I said anything, he smiled and laughed again.

“Heh, heh, heh, heh, heh!” Then he shook his head back and forth several times as he went back to consuming his meal.

My mind was racing. I thought, *There has to be a simple explanation for this. Maybe he took the Metro bus over here. Maybe he hitched a ride with someone. But was he really imitating me? Or was I just imagining things?*

We finished our meals in silence—except for the occasional sounds he would make as he ate. One sound he made as he ate his meal was like a repeated low grunt. It reminded me of a frog in the pond back home.

He made another sound without opening his mouth. He would almost hum the affirmative words, “Mmm-huh.” That was followed by, “That’s good.” And then another hummed, “Mmm-huh.” As he closed the top of his Styrofoam lunch plate, he looked at me and asked, “Boy, why are you here?”

I thought about his question. Then I gave him a simple answer: “I’m having lunch with you.”

“No!” he almost shouted at me as he shook his head back and forth several times. He was obviously becoming agitated with me.

“Boy! You don’t follow instructions, and you waste too much time! Why... are... you... here?!” he said slowly, emphasizing each word.

I just sat there almost frozen for a few seconds. I just looked at this man—this homeless man I had only known for a very few minutes. I couldn’t decide: was he was a delusional threat to me or was this just an eccentric old man? But since I really sensed no danger, I decided on the latter.

“Well, I guess I am here to figure some things out. My boss sent me out here to have lunch and to find out why things are just not working out for me right now.”

I don’t know why I was opening up to this stranger. But it did feel good to talk to someone who didn’t know me. I would probably never see him again, so I didn’t have to worry about being embarrassed later.

“I’m not getting the job done at work. I’m not getting the job done at home. I think I am in danger of getting fired. And my boss sent me out here to see if I can figure out why.”

“That’s right!” he said excitedly. Then the old man looked at me, and I watched his face soften. He said, “Boy, what’s your name?”

“Jim. Jim Fariss,” I replied.

“Well, Jim-Jim Farris. My name is Ray,” he said as he extended his hand to shake mine. As I grabbed his hand, he said, “The first thing you gotta do is figure out why you are here.” As he gripped my hand, it started to tingle. The sensation reminded me of the feeling that occurs when blood flows back into your hand or foot after you have been sitting or lying in a position that caused the appendage to become numb. As a kid, we referred to that numbness as your hand “going to sleep.” And we referred to that tingling sensation as your hand “waking up.”



As Ray touched my hand, it was as if my hand began to “wake up.” That feeling began to travel up my arm and, within seconds, the sensation had engulfed my entire body. I watched one of the pigeons as it was returning to the area. However, rather than the normal winged movement of a bird, it was moving in slow motion. And it was as if I could see every flutter of its wings.

“What’s happening, Ray?” I asked.

Ray laughed and said, “Don’t worry Jim-Jim. You’ve been asleep. I’m just waking you up!”

At the time I had no idea how accurate the term “waking up” was going to be.

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## About Jeff C. West

Jeff C. West is an entrepreneur with over 31 years' experience in sales, sales management, and business ownership. He has coached and led sales teams in multiple industries and has been among the top sales performers and award winning sales managers in the USA with the nationally recognized *Fortune 500*® insurance company, Aflac.

Jeff has been a guest on the Go-Giver Influencers - Making a Significant Impact show with bestselling author, Bob Burg, a guest on The Buyer's Mind with Jeff Shore. He has also been a quoted source for publications such as Sales and Marketing Management Magazine, Peak Sales Recruiting and the National Federation of Independent Business, as well as a guest blogger for Best Selling Authors Bob Burg and Susan Solovic-THE Small Business Expert (Frequently seen on Fox BusinessNews.)

After a successful career in sales and sales leadership, Jeff now travels the USA as a keynote speaker, sales and leadership coach, and entrepreneur.

Jeff and his wife, Laurie, now live on a small ranch in “the middle of nowhere”, about half way between Houston and Austin... well, you actually have to go to “the middle of nowhere” and then drive an extra 20 minutes to find him!

Jeff has earned a B.S. Ed. from Jacksonville State University; a M.M. from Texas A&M University, Commerce; and a CLF® from the American College.

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