

Immersing yourself in the story while you read it is the greatest compliment you can pay any author. Have you ever wondered how an author came to us with such fantastic characters?

*I cannot speak for other authors, but I can speak as to my process. When I write a story like *Shattered Reality*. I met and sat down with my main character, Jason Roberts, over a couple of beers.*

You must be asking how I could sit down and listen to a fictional character tell me his story. I usually start with someone I met and a day or two later, sit down and start writing with that person in mind. Most of the time, I only take a physical feature of a small part of their store and build upon it.

*What you read below; I wrote, was meant to be at the beginning of *Shattered Reality*. My editors and beta readers suggested I cut it out and get to the action. I am giving you these few chapters to you as a prequel of *Shattered Reality* in exchange to be on my mailing list.*

You can opt out of my mailing list at any time. The mailing list will only be used by me once a month to update you on new stories and events to you, my readers.

Meeting Jason Roberts

By EF Cussins

At the Yard Sale

Over the years, my favorite Saturday morning habit in the summer consists of exploring yard sales. Why? You may ask. I conducted a search for that elusive item I didn't know I needed until I found it.

This one Saturday at my third yard sale, I found it. Well, I should say, I found who?

It happened when I stood in front of a display table of a collection of various types of knives. They ranged from hunting knives, a couple military-types, and the types you would expect to find in the kitchen. One military style knife caught my attention. I picked it up to inspect it.

It appeared to be an over-sized Kabar knife. Kabar knives became a standard issue to United States Marines during WWII. The design of the Kabar made it a useful tool and a weapon. The knife I examined was noticeably bigger than a regular Kabar.

"How much for the knife?" I asked the elderly gentleman on the other side of the table.

"\$100, I took it off a Viet Cong in Nam who was trying to use it on me. I'll let it go for \$80."

Out of the corner of my right eye, a tall figure approached. I tried not to notice his colorful tie-dyed t-shirt.

Before I realized what was happening, this guy hit the butt of the knife with two fingers,

sending it up in the air out of my hand. While mid-flight, his other hand reached out and grabbed the knife's handle.

Both the seller and I were stunned by how smoothly this gentleman relieved me of that knife.

"Careful with that knife. You can hurt someone," the seller cautioned.

"You should be ashamed of yourself for selling such junk," the stranger announced.

I took two steps back. The way he handled that knife and talked, I wanted to be at a safe distance.

"This is a knockoff made in Taiwan." The stranger continued with his critique. "The blade is not real steel. It is nothing more than cheap aluminum. The whole thing is a piece of junk. It is definitely not worth \$80."

He then tapped the sharp edge of the knife blade against the corner of the table. The blade now had a dent.

"You damage it, now you got to buy it," the seller snapped.

"I'll give you a dollar for this piece of crap. That's being generous."

The seller took a step back from the table. His face showed he couldn't decide between anger and fear. He chose the latter. Sheepishly, the seller offered, "I'll let you have it for the deal of five dollars. That is less than what I paid for it."

The stranger rejected the offer by slowly moving his head from side to side.

In a burst of courage and anger, the seller demanded, "Put the knife down! Get out of here. You are costing me money."

The stranger changed the position of the knife blade. Instead of the knife pointing out, it now pointed toward him. In two powerful quick motions, he raised the knife to eye level and plunged it downward into the table. The blade surrendered to the hardness of the table. The knife fell limp, bent.

"You can keep your junk." The stranger turned and walked away.

Curiosity overtook me. I followed the stranger toward a group of parked cars.

The stranger walked with purpose and confidence. When he opened the door of a black 1972 El Camino with a gold racing stripe. All this intrigued me so much to where I wanted to know more about this stranger.

"Hey, mister!" I yelled. "Do you have a minute?"

He stopped just before climbing into the El Camino and turned toward me. "I might. What do you want?"

"You impressed me the way you dealt with that guy. I'm even more impressed about the way you handled that knife. Where did you learn to do that?"

"I did a short time in the Army as a combat photographer. While there, I learned a few knife tricks."

I proceeded to tell him about my interest in people and writing their stories. He turned to a forty-five angle and narrowed his eyes. Then he said. "I have a story you may be interested in writing. Would you be interested in coming up to my cabin just below Idaho City?"

"It has been sometime since I have been up that way." I said. At that point in my life, I didn't like to leave the Treasure Valley. "Why don't we meet somewhere in Boise?"

"I know it is quite a drive up to my place." I detected a slight grin on his face. "What do

you feel about homebrewed beer?”

“Some of the best beer I ever had was homebrewed.”

“Let me sweeten my offer. I have a hobby of brewing my own special beer. I’m sure you will enjoy a glass or two.”

“That is the kind of offer I can’t refuse.”

“Can you make it up to my place next Saturday?”

I thought for a minute. Since I didn’t have any plans, I said, “Next Saturday will work for me.”

We exchanged phone numbers. He said if I was still interested, call him on Thursday, and he would give me directions to his place.

As he climbed into his car. I said, “I go by EF. What’s your name?”

“Roberts, my name is Jason Roberts.” He closed the car door and drove off.

Who Is Jason Roberts?

The rest of Saturday and all of Sunday, the man who called himself Jason Roberts kept haunting my consciousness. When Monday morning came, the image of a fit older man wearing a tie-dyed t-shirt, faded jeans and sandals remained. He walked and talked like someone educated and not afraid to call out what he saw as wrong. He had to of have been more than an Army photographer.

I kept asking myself, “Why did he invite me, a stranger, up to his cabin for a beer? What am I to expect when I get there?”

On Monday, I walked into my home office. I sat at my desk and stared at the blank computer screen. I pondered the best method for me to get some background on this Jason Roberts.

My first cup of coffee helped push back the morning brain fog. I pressed the power button on my laptop. After it fully booted up, I went to Google and searched for Jason Roberts, Idaho. None of the results came back matching the man I had met.

I took a couple more sips of my coffee while I got one email notification after another, demanding my attention. I responded reluctantly.

In my mind’s eye, I pictured Jason Roberts as if he was standing in front of me. Six feet tall, with long, salt-pepper hair in a braided ponytail down to the middle of his back. A short well-trimmed beard matched the color of his ponytail hair. Golden brown tan on his face highlighted the wrinkles in his face. I judged his age to be in late sixties or early seventies.

His clothes were a contradiction. His worn jeans had a sharp ironed crease down the front of each leg. A colorful tie-dyed t-shirt faded but stiff, as if someone had applied too much starch and then ironed it. On his feet were Birkenstock sandals with no stocks.

He didn’t fit the stereotype type of people I usually would meet at a yard sale. I could see meeting Jason Roberts at a Credence Clearwater or a Willie Nelson concert.

The two things I knew about this guy. He liked to brew his own beer. And he drove a tricked out El Camino. As for his name being Jason Roberts? That I will have to verify. And then I had this haunting fear he was a serial killer luring me to his remote mountain cabin.

Considering Mister Roberts said he was in the Army, it got me thinking. If ex-military, that meant he would go to the local VA hospital for his medical treatment. I just happened to have a friend who worked in the administrative office at the local VA hospital.

Over the years, I had come across plenty of men and women who tried to feed me a line of bullshit just to impress me. My friend at the VA became a source to eliminate some of that bullshit.

I called my friend and asked him to do a search for Jason Roberts and get back to me with the results. He said he would and get back to me in a couple days. He said he would even make an inquiry to a friend of his at the Pentagon.

The next morning, during breakfast, my cell phone started playing the theme to the original Star Trek. I typically refrained from answering calls until after breakfast, but when I saw it was my friend calling, I made an exception.

I pressed the talk. My friend's voice came blaring out. I had trouble making out his words. "What the heck are you trying to do to me? I never in all my life got into so much hot water for asking about any one individual!"

More Mystery

"You are never to call me ever again for anything. I don't want to know or care what you have gotten yourself into."

"Slow down," I said. "Take a deep breath and tell me exactly what happened."

"This Ja...Ja...Jason Ro...berts you h...h...had me check out." I could told he had discovered something really big. I have seen my friend stay calm through life-threatening situations. I never had seen him anywhere near this rattled.

"Take another breath, and slowly tell me what happened."

"This morning, I was getting ready to get in my car and come to work. A big black SUV pulled up behind my car. Four scary dudes in black business suits jumped out and started walking toward me. I thought I was going to be beaten up or killed.

The lead guy walked up to me. He stood six inches from my face. His friends surrounded me. Each one of them started shooting all sorts of questions at me. I barely answered one question before another one shot me a question. All the questions were about you and that Jason Roberts."

"What did you tell them?"

"I told him I was doing some research on Vietnam vets who live in Idaho. His name came up, and I wanted to find out if he is still alive and exactly what benefits he was getting."

"What did they say?"

"They told me to forget about Mister Roberts. Any information about Mister Roberts is

off-limits to any of my inquiries. Only his personal physician can make limited inquiries and then only for matters of life and death. If anyone else is to ask me about him, I am to call this dude right away. He handed me his business card.

The scary part of that card is it only had his name and a phone number. The phone number had a DC area code.”

“Can you give me that guy’s name and number? I want to call him.”

“No! Not on your life! Are you crazy! No way! I am afraid if I do, they will throw me in jail and lose the key! You must have tapped into some very high-level shit. I don’t even want to get near it.

Take my advice, forget about Jason Roberts. If you must write about someone, I know a half dozen other guys who would be safer to write about.”

I ended the call with my friend. I set back in my chair and pictured this Jason Roberts must be some real-life American version of James Bond. Should I play it safe and forget about Jason Roberts or go up to his cabin and risk getting thrown into prison?

I took a sip from my coffee mug. Yuk, cold coffee. I looked at the clock. Ten minutes to eleven. I had wasted the morning thinking about what I should do.

Another hour passed, and I reviewed for one last time what I should do. I could take a pleasant Saturday drive into the mountains. After what I had learned so far, I don’t think he is a serial killer. Still, my friend warned me to stay away. I liked the idea of tasting some home brewed beer. Why do men in black SUV and business suits want to protect an old hippie?

Well, if curiosity killed the cat. Then I am dead. Out of curiosity, I am going to spend next Saturday with Jason Roberts.

To The Cabin

Saturday arrived, and the heat of that July morning confirmed what the weatherman had said over the radio. Hundred degrees plus temperature accompanying low humidity. In other words, Saturday would be the perfect day for sipping cold beer under a shade tree.

Jason had called me the day before to confirm me going to his place. He gave me his address along with detailed directions. I needed them, because once off Highway 21, street signs and house numbers were nonexistent. Jason warned me to pay attention to the landmarks he gave me, or I would get lost.

A twenty-five-minute drive from the east side of Boise to a certain mile marker. There I turned left up a paved road that soon turned to all dirt. I followed the road for approximately a hundred yards to where I made another left turn up a steep hill. At the top of that hill, I turned right on another dirt road. After fifty feet, I entered a clearing. At the far end of the clearing stood an old rustic-looking cabin with a large front porch. On the front porch sat a wooden end table flanked by two wooden rocking chairs.

I knew I had reached the right place. Off to the right of the cabin sat the black El Camino.

While I looked for the best place to park my little Toyota, Jason stepped to the edge of his

porch. He motioned for me to park behind his El Camino with a Mason jar he held. I presumed it contained some of his homebrewed beer.

That day, Jason wore Army green cargo shorts and a Boise State tank top and a well-worn straw hat.

I stopped just before the bottom step of his porch. Looking around, I commented, "Nice place you have here."

Jason nodded and said, "Thank you. Come on up, have a seat, and I will go inside and get you a cold one."

A short time later, Jason came out with a second Mason jar and handed it to me. He sat in the unoccupied chair. He watched me take a drink. "What do you think?"

"I like it." That beer was incredibly smooth.

"Over the years, I have developed this beer with a high alcohol content."

"The place looks very well maintained. Do you do all the work?"

When I bought the property, the cabin was in bad shape. I have been fixing it up a little at a time. I finally got it looking just about the way I want it. Get up and let me show you around."

As Jason spent the next several minutes showing me around his property and the cabin. He pointed out what he had fixed and what he had upgraded. He explained he paid for it with the money he got from selling his parents' place in Boise.

Jason said that he spent most of his life running a photographic studio in the San Francisco Bay Area. When he retired, he sold the business and moved up here.

"I feel honored you would invite me up here to show it to me." I said. Still, what he told me and what I little I had learned about him didn't match.

"Glad to see you could make it. Come on, let's have a seat on the porch." Jason pointed to one of the chairs. "Can I refresh your jar?"

"I'm fine for now." I said.

Jason smiled. "I'll be right back. I have something I want to share with you." He walked into the cabin.

I sat in the spare wooden chair and took in the mountain air and the scenery.

Why Me, Why Now

Jason came back out carrying a ragged picture album. He took the seat next to me. He set his jar on the table between us. Placing both hands on the album, he sat there looking at it.

After a couple moments of awkward silence. "I grew up in Boise. My dad would commute six days a week from Boise to work in Horseshoe Bend. He worked at the sawmill most all of his life. When they closed the sawmill, my dad died a month later."

From the sound of his voice and the look on his face, I expected to see tears emerge from his eyes. None did.

"My mother died a couple months after dad. I had a brother. A drunk driver killed my

brother while riding his bike on the way to school.”

More silence. I began to feel like he called me up there to be his therapist.

Jason put his hand on the photo album. The events I am about to share with you, only a few people know the whole story.”

“Why are you telling me?” I asked.

“I can’t hold the truth in any longer.” Jason proceeded to open the photo album.