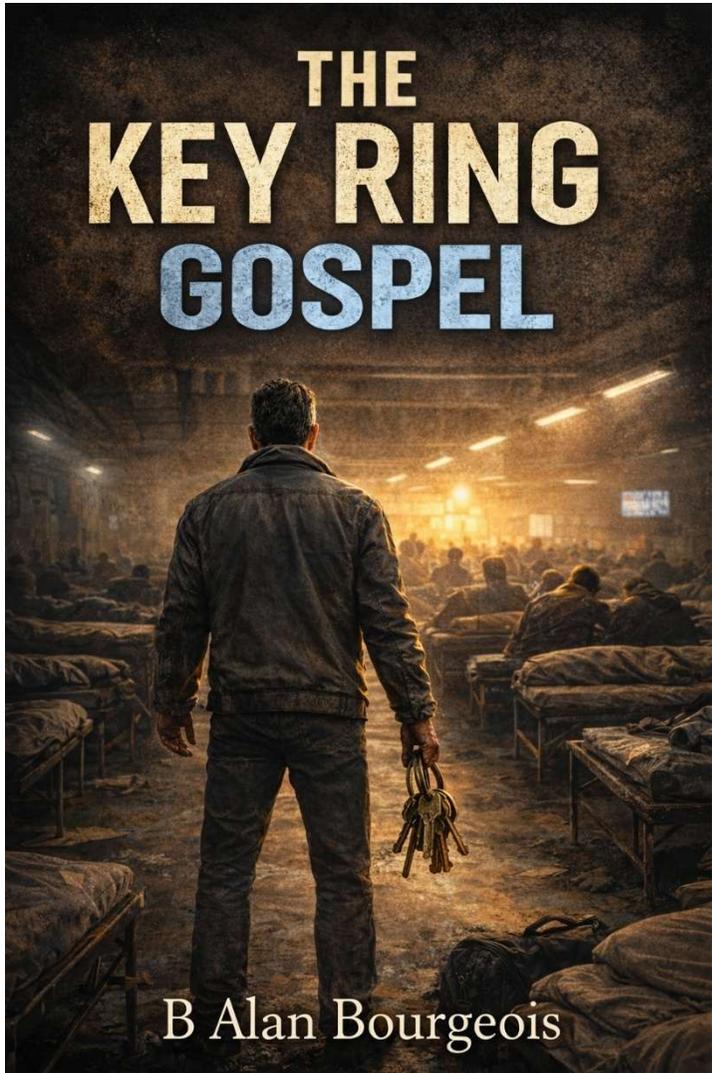


THE KEY RING GOSPEL



B Alan Bourgeois

THE KEY RING GOSPEL

Copyright © 2026 B Alan Bourgeois

All rights reserved.

The Key Ring Gospel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons (living or dead), actual events, or actual locations is purely coincidental.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the author, except for brief quotations used in reviews and other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

First Edition: 2026

ISBN: 9798250322720

Published by: Texas Authors Press

<https://TexasAuthors.Press>

Austin, Texas, USA

Cover design: AI Created

I don't remember when the anger stopped being a reaction and started being a residence.

At first it came like weather—thunder, then passing. You could take shelter, wait it out, open the windows again. But now it lives in my body the way old injuries live in the body: the ache that returns before the storm even arrives. It shows itself in my hands, in a mild tremor that flickers through my fingers like my nerves are trying to climb out of my skin.

I'm sixty-five. I should be an old man with a chair near a window, not a cot under fluorescent lights.

But in the warehouse, there are no windows. There are rows. There are rules. There is a constant hum of noise that eats your thoughts and spits out your worst instincts.

Two hundred and fifty men packed into one building, a hard echo of every argument, every cough, every muttered prayer. TV screens bolted high like false suns. Boom boxes playing other people's lives at full volume, because silence is a threat in a place like this. Urinals outside, exposed to freezing winter air or the kind of summer heat that feels like punishment. Showers rationed by time and patience. Food served lukewarm, like the system can't even be bothered to pretend it's feeding you with care.

The staff walk the aisles with clipboards and keys, and those keys are a language. The key ring says: *I open doors. I close doors. I decide who stays and who goes.*

Sometimes I hear those keys in my sleep.
And that's how I know I'm not sleeping.

Insomnia isn't just being awake. It's being trapped in a body that refuses to power down because it's convinced danger is near. Prison did that to me. Prison rearranged my nervous system. It trained me to wake at small sounds, to catalog threats, to sleep lightly like survival depends on it—because it did.

Eight years.

I don't say that number much. In America, a number becomes a brand.

I know because I've lived it twice—first in a cell, then in the “free world,” where the walls are invisible but the doors still don't open.

I didn't plan to end up here.

I began in fast food at seventeen, flipping burgers, cleaning grease traps, learning what it means to grind. I wasn't ashamed of it. It was honest work, and I was good at it. I moved up fast, because something in me refused to stay stuck. I learned the chain of command, the corporate language, the math of inventory, the psychology of customers. By twenty-seven, I'd clawed my way into corporate offices, wearing a tie, sitting in meetings, pretending I belonged in rooms built for people who never had to scrub a fryer.

And then life did what life does.

It put a hand on my shoulder and yanked.

After twenty-seven, I did a dozen jobs—bits of everything. I learned whatever I could, like a man gathering tools because he can feel the roof might collapse one day. At thirty, I felt the old hunger: writing. Not “I should write someday” hunger. Real hunger. The kind that taps your ribs at night and says, *You're not using your gift.*

But I didn't write then.

I waited.

At forty, I entered the part of my life that doesn't fit on a motivational poster. I was in an abusive relationship—abuse that wasn't always fists, but always control. If you've never been in it, you think abuse is obvious. But sometimes it's a slow theft of self. It's someone turning your instincts against you, your compassion into a leash, your loyalty into a cage.

There was drinking. There was pressure. There was a night that broke into headlights and impact and a sound I can still taste.

Intoxicated manslaughter.

A phrase that looks neat on paper and ruins everything in real life.

They pushed me to take a plea. "It's safer." "It's what you can get." "You don't want to risk trial." While my lover convinced me it was better for the both of us, when it was really better for him to not get exposed as an abuser.

Eight years in prison.

I did my time. I survived the way people survive: by shrinking, by watching, by making myself uninteresting to predators when I could, by learning how to smile without inviting danger. Someone tried to rape me in there. I won't give you the scene; prison doesn't deserve the poetry of detail. But I'll tell you this: there's a kind of fear that changes your cells. The body remembers even when the mind tries to move on.

When I got out, nobody cared about the abuse. Nobody cared about the context. The world loved redemption stories, but it didn't love employing redeemed people.

So I wrote.

At forty-eight I sat down and did the work. I built a publishing career, not as an act of ego but

as an act of survival. I learned how to produce books, how to market them, how to build systems that could help writers who didn't have the money or the connections or the privilege. By fifty-one, I created an association. I built a museum. I helped thousands of authors stand up and say, *My voice matters*.

And for a while, it worked.

Then politics and COVID and the aftermath came like a wrecking ball, not just to public health, but to the fragile ecosystem of nonprofits and writers and educators. Funding dried up. Support vanished. Book bans spread. Culture became a battlefield, and people like me—gay, outspoken, running programs that celebrated voices the movement wanted silenced—became targets.

At sixty-one the floor went out.

At sixty-two I took early SSI because I needed money in the door just to keep the lights on while I rebuilt.

At sixty-five, the rebuild is still happening, and I am still homeless.

Austin, Texas. The city people imagine is music and tacos and tech money.

My Austin is a warehouse.

The shelter isn't evil in concept. It's just brutal in reality. It's an organism of stress. The constant noise keeps you raw. The constant fighting keeps you on edge. The staff—some kind, some not—can slip into that cop tone that turns grown adults into children. They remind you: "Do as you're told, or you're out."

And being out isn't freedom.

Being out is exposure.

I keep myself fit when I can. The gym is my one daily ritual, my one defiant act of self-respect.

I go early because mornings are the only time the world seems even slightly quieter. I lift weights to bleed the anger out through my muscles. Due to the accident, I can no longer run, so I walk on a treadmill until my lungs burn, or until my legs begin to give out, because there's nothing like physical exhaustion to drown out mental noise—at least for a while.

But lately even the gym doesn't fully work.

The anger stays.

It follows me back into the warehouse, back into the line for food, back into the outside urinals where cold air bites my skin and I'm reminded that the system doesn't care if you have dignity.

The anger lives in my hands. In the tremor. In the twitches. In the way my voice snaps at people for small things, then I hate myself for it.

I used to believe spiritual growth meant you got calmer with age.

Now I understand it means you get more honest about the war inside you.

Because here's the part I don't say out loud, the part I only write in Notes like a man confessing to a page because he doesn't trust the world with the truth:

I have fantasies of being a "necessary monster."

Not because I love harm. I don't.

Not because I crave death. I don't.

Because I am exhausted watching cruelty win.

Because I am exhausted watching rights get stripped away in slow pieces.

Because I am exhausted watching a movement draped in the language of God act like love is for losers.

Because I am exhausted being punished again and again for a crime I already paid for, while people who do worse wear suits and call themselves patriots.

The fantasies are not detailed plans. They're not cinematic. They're not brave.

They are my mind trying to imagine an ending. A clean ending. An ending where the noise stops.

And the fact that my mind even goes there terrifies me.

It makes me furious that I've allowed other people's darkness to move into my head like a squatter.

But anger is a parasite. It feeds on attention. And in the warehouse, attention is always being stolen.

One night, the TVs were especially loud—some cable host shouting about “liberals” like the word is a disease. A boom box played gospel at full volume. Men argued in line. Someone threw a chair. A staff member's keys snapped against metal to get everyone's attention.

That key ring sound—sharp, authoritative—cut through the noise like a whip crack.

I sat on my cot and felt my hands start shaking. Not a small tremor. A visible shake.

A thought floated up, calm as a knife:

No one is coming. Something has to happen.

It wasn't even rage. It was despair dressed up as logic.

I grabbed my phone and opened Notes. I wrote the first sentence that always comes when I'm at the edge:

I know I'm not pro-harm, but something has to happen to stop this madness.

I stared at it.

Then my mind supplied the next thought, the one that makes my stomach turn:

It would be good for humanity.

I hate that sentence. I hate that it even exists in my head.

Because I know what it is: the oldest lie violence tells you. The lie that says harm is holy if the cause is righteous enough.

I know better.

I have read the history. I have lived the history. I have watched how martyrdom works. I know that if someone acts in a way that turns Trump or MAGA into a martyr, it doesn't end anything—it inflames it. It makes it worse. It feeds the movement the story it craves.

So the counterthought comes, the one that keeps me from doing anything “crazy,” the one I repeat like a mantra:

It won't end what I think it will end.

But knowing that doesn't remove the pressure. It just traps it.

Because I still want accountability. I still want truth. I still want a court of law that forces a man like Trump to admit he lied, admit he stole, admit he used his followers like tools. I want a public confession so undeniable it breaks the spell. That's what I want. Not blood. Not chaos. Truth that heals by exposing.

And the more the system fails to deliver truth, the more the anger tries to recruit me.

Months pass like this—pressure building, release, pressure building.

Then the apartment application happened.

The shelter has a program where you can apply for housing. Paperwork. Hope dressed in forms. I've learned not to get excited. Hope is

dangerous when you've been disappointed enough times.

But when they told me there was an apartment possibility, something in me cracked open anyway.

A door that locks. A room that's mine. Silence. A bed without boom boxes.

I sat in an office with a caseworker, a tired human being doing their best inside a broken system. They typed my information into a computer. Background check. Standard.

I told myself: *This is it. This is the small win. This is the bridge out.*

I watched the cursor blink.

Then I saw the caseworker's face change.

Not shock. Not anger.

Administrative disappointment.

The kind that says, *Here we go again.*

"They flagged you," the caseworker said.

I felt my body go cold.

"For what?" I asked, even though I knew.

They hesitated. "Violent history/Murder."

My hands started shaking right there in the chair.

"Murder?" I said, But I never murdered anyone."

She responded in an low voice, one that signals frustration. "Intoxicated manslaughter, to them is murder."

I sat there in disbelief. "That was twenty-five years ago," I said. My voice was calm, but the calm had an edge. "I did eight years. I rebuilt my life. I built a museum. I've helped thousands of authors. I'm not a danger to anyone."

The caseworker swallowed. "Their policy—"
Policy.

That word.

Policy is the language of people who refuse to see you.

“They consider it murder,” the caseworker again.

For a moment, the office blurred. My hearing narrowed to a high hum. I could feel my pulse in my fingertips.

Punished again.

I stood up too fast. The chair scraped. The sound was loud in the small room, like a gunshot.

“Do you understand,” I said, leaning forward, “how insane this is? I served the sentence. I paid. I bled. I rebuilt. And now, because a computer says I’m a category, I stay in a warehouse with two hundred and fifty men, while the people destroying this country sleep in mansions.”

The caseworker looked down. “I’m sorry.”

Sorry doesn’t open doors.

Sorry doesn’t stop the tremor in my hands.

Sorry doesn’t give me back sleep.

I heard keys jingle outside the office—staff walking the hallway. That sound made something in me rise, fast and hot.

The “necessary monster” fantasy flashed—not as a plan, but as a feeling. A pure impulse: *Make the world pay attention.*

Then a thought, sharper than the impulse:

This is how people snap.

And that’s when I realized I was standing in front of a caseworker, a tired person with no real power, and my body was acting like I was facing the enemy.

I sat back down hard.

I forced my hands under my thighs to pin them still.

“Sorry,” I said, not because I felt polite, but because I felt dangerous.

The caseworker exhaled as if they had been holding their breath.

“Do you have anyone you can talk to?” they asked.

I almost laughed.

Talk doesn’t change policy.

But I understood what they meant: do you have a witness? Do you have a place to put the fire?

“One person,” I said. “But he doesn’t get it. He tries to fix me. He tries to tell me what I ‘need to do’ like I haven’t thought of it.”

The caseworker nodded like they’d heard that a thousand times.

“I write,” I added.

“Then write,” they said quietly. “Please.”

I walked out of the office into the Austin sun and sat on a curb like my legs were unplugged. My hands shook. My jaw clenched so hard it hurt.

I wanted to scream.

Instead, I opened Notes and started typing like my life depended on it.

Because it did.

###

The warehouse is worse at night.

Mornings have a thin layer of possibility. You can still pretend the day might be different. But nights are when the noise turns predatory. Nights are when people’s pain collides.

One night in late fall, the warehouse got colder than usual. The heaters weren’t enough. Men argued over blankets. A fight erupted near the bathroom line. Keys snapped against metal.

Someone yelled for security like “security” is a magic word.

I lay on my cot staring at the ceiling, my hands tucked under my thighs to stop the shaking. The tremor still traveled through me like electricity.

And the monster thought came back, meaner.

No one will act.

Something has to happen.

You've already been punished. What's left to lose?

I closed my eyes and felt the warehouse noise press against my skull.

Then something odd happened—something that has happened to me before when I'm close to collapse.

I heard music.

Not from the TV. Not from a boom box.

Inside me.

A melody from a song I wrote—a spiritual uplift track I used to play when my mind was too dark. I hadn't listened to it in weeks. The warehouse noise had killed my appetite for positivity. Lately, even my own songs felt like they belonged to a man I used to be.

But the melody played anyway.

It rose like warmth behind my ribs, not comfort exactly—more like pressure. Like my spirit pushing back.

I opened my eyes. The warehouse was still loud. Someone laughed too loud near the charging station. Someone coughed and never stopped.

But the music inside me didn't stop.

It grew.

And then, as if my mind decided to translate the music into something I could understand, I saw a scene.

Not a hallucination. Not a vision from outside. A scene like a dream you can direct.

A small room. Folding chairs. A simple podium. People of all ages—tired faces, bright eyes. A young person in the front row holding a paperback like it's a lifeline. Someone in the back wiping tears.

Me at the podium, older, steady, voice shaking but controlled.

And someone in the second row—someone I couldn't quite see—saying aloud:

“Thank you for saying what we couldn't.”

The scene hit me so hard I sat up.

My hands still trembled, but the tremor felt different. Less like collapse, more like energy.

The spirit within me wasn't telling me to be nice.

It wasn't telling me to forgive MAGA Christians who spit hate while quoting scripture.

It was telling me to be useful.

I grabbed my phone and started typing.

Not a manifesto. Not a threat. Not a plan.

A confession.

I wrote the apartment denial. I wrote the warehouse. I wrote the keys. I wrote the weekly death threats. I wrote the exact moment the monster fantasy arrives and tries to dress itself up as righteousness.

I wrote the sentence I hate:

It would be good for humanity.

Then I wrote the sentence that counters it:

It won't end what I think it will end.

I wrote about martyrdom. I wrote about strategy. I wrote about the agony of knowing spiritually better while still feeling the animal urge to end the noise.

I wrote until my fingers hurt.
And something strange happened as I wrote:
my hands stopped shaking.
Not completely. I'm not cured. But enough.
Enough that I could breathe.
Enough that I could lay back down.
Enough that the warehouse noise became
background instead of a weapon.
I saved the document with a name that made
me flinch and smile at the same time:

THE KEY RING GOSPEL.

Because those keys—the snapping, jingling
authority—had become my symbol of everything
wrong: power without care. Rules without
humanity. Control as entertainment.

I put one earbud in and played the spiritual
song I'd heard inside me.

For three minutes, I wasn't a number in a
warehouse. I wasn't a "murderer" on a computer
screen. I wasn't an old gay man society could
discard.

I was a writer.

I was a human being.

I was connected to something bigger than my
anger.

When the song ended, the warehouse still
roared. Men still fought. TVs still screamed.

But inside me, something held.

And for that night, it was enough.

###

The next day I did something I hadn't done in
months: I took my writing out of my private Notes
and sent it to someone.

Not my friend who tries to fix me.

Someone else.

A younger volunteer I'd met through the museum years ago—smart, blunt, compassionate. The kind of person who doesn't sugar-coat. The kind of person who doesn't panic when you admit ugly feelings.

I stared at the email draft for a long time.

Shame rose. Not shame for the dark thoughts—I told you, I don't feel ashamed of them. I feel angry that the world pushed me into having them.

But I felt vulnerable.

Because if you share something this raw, people either ignore it, or they turn it into a spectacle, or they respond with advice like you're a broken appliance.

Finally, I hit send.

Then I went to the gym and lifted like I was trying to press the weight of America off my chest.

An hour later, my phone buzzed.

A reply.

Two sentences.

"I read it twice. I cried. You're not crazy. You're describing the edge a lot of us live on."

My throat tightened.

That was the thing I'd been starving for—not pity, not solutions, not "have you tried..." nonsense.

Recognition.

Witness.

Someone saying: yes, I feel that too.

I sat on a bench outside the gym and let the words sink in. My hands shook, but this time it wasn't rage. It was release.

I didn't become a large winner that day.

No apartment appeared. No miracle check arrived.

But something changed.

I wasn't alone inside my own head anymore.

###

Weeks passed. The warehouse stayed loud. The fights stayed frequent. The staff keys stayed loud enough to cut through a man's dignity. The outside urinals stayed brutal in the cold. The shower line stayed long.

I kept writing.

Every day I wrote a little more, turning THE KEY RING GOSPEL into something shaped—a story, a confession, a small thriller of the mind. I gave it scenes. I gave it breath. I let it be ugly where it needed to be.

I didn't glamorize violence. I didn't sanitize my anger.

I told the truth: I was at the point of no return in my feelings, but I refused to become a weapon. Not because I was morally superior, but because I was strategic. Because I knew martyrdom would poison everything. Because I knew harm wouldn't end what I wanted ended.

At night, when the warehouse noise threatened to swallow me, I played my spiritual songs again. Not always. Sometimes I still couldn't stand positivity. Sometimes the sound of hope felt like an insult.

But more and more, I let it in.

Love thy neighbor as you love thy self.

That principle used to feel like a soft blanket.

Now it feels like a discipline.

Because loving your neighbor doesn't mean letting them harm you. It doesn't mean tolerating cruelty. It doesn't mean becoming a doormat for a movement that wants you erased.

It means refusing to become what you hate.

It means choosing a path that still fights, but doesn't betray your soul.

And yes, I said soul, even though I'm not sentimental about karma. Even though I'm not obsessed with legacy. People will judge me good and evil in the same breath no matter what I do.

What keeps me from exploding isn't fear of judgment.

It's the knowledge that exploding would be useless.

It wouldn't build. It wouldn't heal. It wouldn't protect.

It would only burn me down and feed my enemies a story.

I refuse to be their proof.

###

In January, the younger volunteer asked me if I'd be willing to read an excerpt on a livestream. A small online event for writers, a fundraiser, a conversation about art and survival.

"People need to hear it," they said.

My first instinct was no. My second instinct was fear. My third instinct was anger—anger at the idea that my pain would become content for people scrolling on a phone.

But then I remembered the scene I'd seen inside my chest—the folding chairs, the paperback in someone's hands, the person saying: "Thank you for saying what we couldn't."

And I said yes.

The night of the livestream, I sat in a corner of the shelter with my phone propped up, trying to find a patch of quiet. Quiet in a warehouse is relative. A man yelled near the door. The TV blared. Keys jingled.

I almost backed out.

Then I felt the tremor in my hands.

I looked at my fingers. I thought about all the times those hands built something—a program, a book, a museum, a place for writers to belong.

I thought about how many people I'd helped when I had more stability.

I thought: *If I can't fight with money or power right now, I can fight with truth.*

I went live.

The host introduced me. My name sounded strange in the air, like it belonged to a man with a home.

I began reading.

At first my voice shook. Not just from nerves, but from the fact that I was confessing in public to something people like to pretend doesn't happen: the way despair can seduce you into thinking harm is righteousness.

I read the apartment denial scene. I read the part about being called a murderer. I read the part about the weekly death threats.

Then I read the line:

"I know I'm not pro-harm, but something has to happen to stop this madness."

And I paused, because the pause mattered.

Then I read the counter line:

"It won't end what I think it will end."

When I finished, the comments flooded.

Not "thoughts and prayers" fluff.

Real people.

“I’m sixty-three and I’ve been thinking the same thing.”

“I’m thirty and I hate that I understand this.”

“I’m a veteran and I’m sorry you’re being punished again.”

“I’m a Christian and this made me ashamed of what ‘Christians’ are doing.”

Then one comment hit me like a hand on my chest:

“Thank you for saying what we couldn’t.”

My hands started shaking again. But it wasn’t rage. It was grief. Relief. Connection.

The host asked me how I was holding up.

I could’ve given a polished answer. I could’ve played the role of inspiring survivor.

Instead I told the truth.

“I’m holding up because people like you are witnessing me,” I said. “Because writing is the only place I can put this fire without burning the world.”

After the livestream ended, my phone buzzed with a message from the volunteer.

“We raised \$742 tonight,” they wrote. “We want to send you a share—\$250. It’s not huge, but it’s yours.”

I stared at the number.

Two hundred and fifty dollars wouldn’t solve homelessness. It wouldn’t rewrite my past. It wouldn’t erase a charge from a computer screen.

But it was something.

It was a vote of confidence.

It was proof that my writing could still move through the world.

It was a small win—a real one.

The next morning, I went to the shelter office and asked if they could help me set up a way to

receive it. The staff member behind the desk looked irritated at first—another request, another complication.

Then she saw the email confirmation and her face softened for a second.

“You’re a writer?” she asked.

I almost laughed. “Yeah,” I said. “I’m still trying to be.”

She nodded. “My mom used to write poetry,” she said. Then, like it surprised her to be human, she added, “Don’t stop.”

Don’t stop.

Two words.

Tiny mercy.

I walked back into the warehouse with the keys jingling somewhere behind me and realized: I hadn’t heard them as a threat for a moment.

###

The money helped me do something practical: it got me a bus pass for the month and replaced a few essentials I’d been rationing. It let me print copies of THE KEY RING GOSPEL as a zine-style booklet—something I could hand out, something physical.

And that’s where the next small win came from.

One afternoon at the library, a man approached me while I was printing. He was maybe in his fifties, clean shirt but tired eyes, the look of someone who has survived a lot quietly.

He glanced at the title page. “Key Ring Gospel,” he read aloud. “What’s that?”

I should’ve shrugged. I should’ve guarded myself.

Instead I said, "It's a short story. About being pushed to the edge and refusing to become what you hate."

He nodded slowly, like that was a language he spoke.

"You selling it?" he asked.

"Not really," I said. "It's... just something I needed to write."

He reached into his wallet and handed me ten dollars.

"For the story," he said. "And because I'm tired too."

I held the bill like it was heavier than paper.

He took the booklet, flipped through it, and paused at the line:

"I won't become their proof."

He looked up. "That's it," he said. "That's the whole fight."

Then he walked away.

Ten dollars isn't a publishing deal.

But it was proof again: my words could land in a stranger's hands and do something real.

That night, in the warehouse, I wrote another page.

I wrote about how being a winner at sixty-five doesn't mean a mansion or applause.

It means you wake up and choose not to surrender your humanity.

It means you refuse to let hate recruit you.

It means you keep building even when the floor keeps getting pulled out.

###

In February, the shelter housing program called me again.

I almost didn't answer.

Hope had hurt me too many times.

But I answered.

"Different complex," the caseworker said.

"Different policy. We want to try again."

I didn't let myself smile. I didn't let myself exhale. I just said, "Okay."

The caseworker lowered their voice. "I can't promise anything. But... this one is more flexible. They look at time passed. They look at rehabilitation."

Rehabilitation.

A word I'd earned the hard way.

I went through the paperwork again. I told my story again. I watched the cursor blink again.

This time, the denial didn't come immediately.

Days passed.

Then a week.

Then two.

In that waiting period, the monster thought tried to creep back in—because waiting is when the mind invents disasters.

But I had new armor now: the messages from the livestream, the ten-dollar stranger, the volunteer's blunt compassion.

Witness.

I kept writing. I kept lifting weights. I kept cutting back social media.

I kept choosing not to become their proof.

Then, one afternoon, the caseworker called.

"We got a conditional yes," they said.

I felt my knees weaken.

"Conditional?" I asked.

"They want an interview," the caseworker said.

"And they want references—people who can vouch for your community work."

I almost laughed. “I can get that,” I said, voice tight.

I could get that because I had built something real. Because despite prison, despite homelessness, despite politics and COVID and bans, I had helped people. I had created a mission.

Two days later, I sat in a small office at the complex. The leasing manager was polite but guarded. She asked questions that sounded like they came from a script: What happened? How long ago? What has changed? Why should we trust you?

My hands trembled in my lap.

I told the truth without begging.

“I made a catastrophic mistake,” I said. “I served eight years. I rebuilt my life. I’ve spent decades helping writers and building community. I’m not asking you to erase my past. I’m asking you to see my present.”

She watched me quietly. I couldn’t read her face.

Then she asked something unexpected.

“What keeps you going?” she said.

For a second I considered giving a safe answer: faith, perseverance, hope.

Instead I answered with the raw truth that had become my discipline.

“Because I refuse to become what I hate,” I said. “Because the world is trying to make me bitter and violent, and I won’t give it that.”

Her expression shifted—not warmth exactly, but respect.

Two days later, the caseworker called again.

“They approved you,” they said.

I didn’t speak.

The warehouse noise around me faded. Men shouted somewhere. A TV blared. Keys jingled. All of it sounded distant.

“You’re still there?” the caseworker asked.

“Yes,” I managed. “I’m here.”

“Move-in isn’t immediate,” they warned.

“There’s paperwork, a timeline. But you’re approved.”

Approved.

A word that felt like a door opening.

Not a large win.

I wasn’t suddenly rich. I wasn’t suddenly safe forever. I wasn’t suddenly free of trauma or tremors.

But I was a winner in the way that matters most to someone who has been repeatedly told no.

I had cracked the wall.

###

The first night I got back to the warehouse after the approval, I sat on my cot and looked around at the noise, the fights, the TVs, the boom boxes.

I felt the anger rise—because even in victory, the system’s cruelty remains. Other men still trapped. Other people denied. Other souls ground down by policy.

I felt the monster thought stir, quiet and persistent, as if it wanted credit: *See? The world only listens when you’re dangerous.*

I closed my eyes and listened for the music inside me.

It came—faint at first, then stronger.

I opened Notes and typed one line:

Winning doesn't mean you stop being angry. It means you learn where to put the anger so it becomes fuel instead of fire.

Then I wrote the next line, the one I knew would be the backbone of whatever story I would someday publish from this:

The keys can jingle all they want. I'm still walking toward a door that opens.

I didn't sleep perfectly that night.

But I slept.

For the first time in a long time, I slept with the feeling that something was changing.

###

On the day I got the official move-in date, I went to the gym and lifted like I was lifting my own life back into place.

Afterward, I sat on the bench outside and watched people walk past—people with headphones, coffee, errands, normal problems. I didn't hate them. I didn't envy them as much as I used to.

I just felt... tender.

Because I knew how quickly the floor can drop out.

My phone buzzed again.

A message from the volunteer: "People are asking for the booklet. Can you do a second reading next month?"

I smiled—small, tired, real.

"Yeah," I typed back. "I can."

Then I looked at my hands.

Still a slight tremor. Still the body remembering. Still the edge not entirely gone.

But the tremor didn't own me.

I stood up, shouldered my bag, and started walking—toward the shelter, toward paperwork, toward the slow, bureaucratic miracle of a key that would be mine.

And as I walked, I realized something that surprised me:

I still loved this country.

Not the mythology.

Not the slogans.

Not the movement that wraps itself in flags while threatening to erase me.

But the stubborn, imperfect, maddening possibility at the heart of it—this idea that a man can be crushed by the system and still crawl back. That he can make a catastrophic mistake, be punished, be labeled, be denied, and still build a life of service. That he can be homeless at sixty-five and still find a crack of light.

That he can stand at the edge of his own rage and choose not to become a weapon.

I don't know what America will become. I fear civil conflict. I fear the fever won't break. I fear millions could suffer if we keep worshiping cruelty.

But I know what I chose.

I chose writing over violence.

I chose witness over martyrdom.

I chose to keep building even when it would've been easier to burn.

And I chose to take the smallest win—a conditional yes, a door beginning to open—and treat it like proof that despair doesn't get the final word.

At the shelter entrance, I heard the staff keys jingle again.

For years that sound meant control.

This time, it meant something else.

It meant a reminder: there are keys in this world that lock people out.

And there are keys you earn back—slowly, painfully, honestly—by refusing to surrender your humanity.

I stepped inside, not as a man defeated by his darkness, but as a man who had survived it, carried it, and turned it into a page someone else could hold.

I took a breath, steadied my hands, and told myself, with the kind of quiet conviction that doesn't need anyone's permission:

This is what it means to be an American

~The End

Song based on this story:

“Door That Opens”

Verse 1

Fluorescent sun, no window light,
Two hundred voices in the night,
Keys on a ring like metal truth,
Telling me what I’m allowed to do.
Hands still shake from what I survived,
Old fear still wired to stay alive—
But I’m not done, not even close,
I’m still here, I’m still hope.

Pre-Chorus

And when the noise tries to own my head,
When my heart feels overfed with dread,
Something rises—quiet, strong—
A pulse, a prayer, a buried song.

Chorus

I feel the Spirit—steady my bones,
Saying, *Keep walking, you’re not alone.*
The keys can jingle all they want,
I’m still walking toward a door that opens.

I won’t be swallowed, I won’t be broke,
I’m breathing fire without the smoke—
I feel the Spirit, and I know—
I will survive. I will survive.

Verse 2

They call me labels like they're law,
A screen decides what I am or was,
But I've rebuilt with scarred-up hands,
Made a life where my feet still stand.
I've carried weight, I've carried blame,
I've carried years I can't rename—
Still I show up, still I write,
Still I fight with truth, not night.

Pre-Chorus 2

'Cause I've learned the difference, line by line:
Anger can be fuel, or it can be fire.
So I take that heat and aim it clean,
Turn the storm into something seen.

Chorus

I feel the Spirit—steady my bones,
Saying, *Keep walking, you're not alone.*
The keys can jingle all they want,
I'm still walking toward a door that opens.

I won't be swallowed, I won't be broke,
I'm breathing fire without the smoke—
I feel the Spirit, and I know—
I will survive. I will survive.

Bridge

I'm not here to be their headline,
Not here to be their proof.
I'm here to be a living witness,
A stubborn, breathing truth.

And if my voice shakes, let it shake—
That's my body remembering what it took.
I'll choose the page, I'll choose the light,
I'll choose the road that keeps me right.

Final Chorus (Lift)

I feel the Spirit—steady my bones,
Saying, *Keep walking, you're not alone.*
The keys can jingle all they want,
I'm still walking toward a door that opens.

I won't be swallowed, I won't be broke,
I'm breathing fire without the smoke—
I feel the Spirit, and I know—
I will survive... I will survive.

Outro (Spoken / Soft sung)

Winning doesn't mean the fight is gone—
It means I learned where to put the fire.

And tonight... I keep walking.

You can listen to it here:



About the Author



B. Alan Bourgeois is an award-winning author, speaker, and literary advocate who has spent decades helping writers turn passion into publishable, marketable work. As the Founder and Director of the

Texas Authors Institute of History, he leads a growing ecosystem of programs that support authors, protect human creativity, and expand access to books—while advancing his long-term legacy project: the Texas Authors Museum.

Bourgeois writes across nonfiction and fiction, with a body of work that includes practical guides for indie authors, marketing-focused resources, and bold, socially engaged storytelling. His nonfiction work is rooted in the real-world challenges authors face—visibility, branding, platform-building, and sustaining a writing life—delivered with a clear, no-nonsense voice and a mission-first mindset.

When he isn't writing, Alan builds opportunities for writers through contests, events, partnerships, and author services designed to strengthen regional and national literary culture. He is also an active advocate for human authorship and transparency in publishing.

Learn more at TexasAuthors.net or at BourgeoisMedia.com

Other Books by the Author

Bourgeois has over 55 books published. What follows are just a collection of books published in the last five years.



When the world began to rot, it wasn't war or fire that brought humanity to its knees—it was the silent bloom of a fungus that spread through cities, minds, and souls.

This is not just another survival tale. It's the story of a fractured society forced to face the mirror of its own hubris, where science and faith collide, and where love, sacrifice, and betrayal carry the weight of humanity's future.

At the heart of the chaos are those who refuse to surrender—a band of unlikely survivors navigating a landscape where spores whisper in the air, where every step could mean infection, and where the line between human and inhuman is dissolving.

Tense, atmospheric, and unrelenting, this novel weaves psychological depth with cinematic scale. It dares readers to confront not just the horror of collapse, but the raw, resilient beauty of those who rise from the ashes.

If you think you've read every apocalyptic story there is—think again. This is not the end. This is the reckoning.



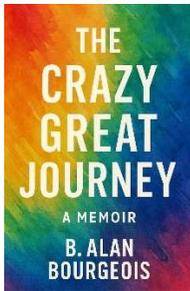
The Current

Let the light lead you to love.

Adrian is thirty, restless, and untethered. At a friend's funeral, a single moment cracks open a space inside him—a question he cannot silence: *what else is there?*

From that quiet fracture begins a journey through desire, doubt, intimacy, and surrender. Love takes unexpected forms, grief becomes a teacher, and ordinary acts of service turn luminous as Adrian is pulled deeper into a current he cannot control and can only learn to trust.

The Current is a lyrical and intimate novella about what it means to be undone, remade, and returned to life with new eyes. B Alan Bourgeois weaves together queer romance and mystical depth in a story that is at once raw and transcendent, inviting the reader to drift, to dive, and to discover the hidden river that runs through us all.

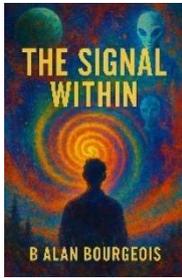


The Crazy Great Journey is a raw, uplifting memoir of survival, vision, and the unshakable belief in the power of stories. B. Alan Bourgeois—an indie author, gay man, and literary advocate—pulls back the curtain on a life marked by heartbreak, resilience, and relentless service to others. From writing his first story in prison to founding the Texas Authors Museum, Bourgeois has lived every word of his legacy with passion and grit. With candor and courage, he recounts homelessness, loss, and rejection, but also moments of triumph, vision, and community.

This memoir is not about fame—it’s about *purpose*. It’s a deeply personal story for anyone who’s ever felt like an outsider, dared to chase a dream, or fought to build something bigger than themselves.

If you believe stories can change the world—start with this one.

If you believe stories can change the world—start with this one.



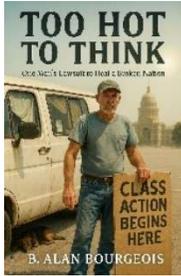
The Signal Within: A Short Story
What if a single signal could awaken humanity to its forgotten potential—only to spark a global shift too powerful to control?

The Signal Within is a breathtaking sci-fi odyssey that blends government conspiracy, spiritual awakening, and first contact into a sweeping story of hope, resistance, and transformation. When a mysterious three-minute broadcast known only as "The Signal" interrupts every device across the Southeast United States, those who hear it are changed—emotionally, biologically, spiritually. As governments scramble to suppress its spread, ordinary people begin remembering who they truly are... and what they were meant to become.

From a grieving mother in Georgia to a war-weary veteran in Alabama, from secret bunkers to spontaneous gatherings of global resonance, humanity stands on the edge of a new evolution. But not everyone welcomes the awakening—and a counterforce is rising.

Gripping, visionary, and deeply moving, this is the sci-fi event of the decade for fans of *The Three-Body Problem*, *Arrival*, and *Silo*.

Will the world fracture under fear—or finally remember its song?



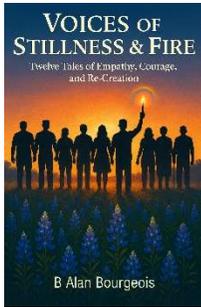
Too Hot to Think: A Novella of Change

What if the real fight for America didn't start in Washington—but in a van parked behind a strip mall?

When 64-year-old David Mercer, a former nonprofit founder now living in his car, uploads a video declaring he's suing both major political parties for abandoning the people, he has no idea the spark he's about to ignite. What begins as a desperate cry for help becomes a national movement—uniting veterans, teachers, mothers, whistleblowers, and coal miners across the country.

Led by civil rights attorney Rosa Calderón, the class-action lawsuit shakes the foundations of American politics, pulling back the curtain on decades of bipartisan neglect. As smear campaigns, threats, and sabotage intensify, the plaintiffs must decide: how much truth are they willing to risk for justice?

Too Hot to Think is a bold, emotionally charged political drama about courage, community, and the unstoppable power of ordinary people saying: enough.



Voices of Stillness & Fire

*Where hope meets resistance,
ordinary people kindle
extraordinary change.*

From a bluebonnet-strewn Texas dream to a covert tunnel network battling a modern-day purge, these twelve powerful stories trace a single arc: when we dare to feel with one another, we ignite the strength to remake the world. Meet writers rediscovering their legacy, lovers crafting magic in wax and gold, leather-clad elders proving age is power, professors and pastors unlearning dogma, and underground rebels turning grief into action. Every page brims with radical empathy, queer joy, and the unbreakable resolve of those who refuse to be erased. Whether you crave heart-warming inspiration or pulse-pounding dystopian suspense, *Voices of Stillness & Fire* will leave you burning to stand up, reach out, and write the next chapter of hope yourself.



The Shadow Directive: The LGBTQIA+ Community will Not be Erased

The Shadow Directive – A Gripping Political Thriller You Can't Put Down

In the shadows of modern America, LGBTQIA+ citizens are vanishing—discreetly, efficiently, without a trace. No raids. No bar scenes. Just everyday people, taken off the streets by hooded figures claiming to be federal agents. The government denies everything. The media stays silent. And a chilling agenda creeps forward under the radar.

When a gay investigative journalist and a tough ex-cop turned private investigator join forces, they uncover a disturbing network of data-driven surveillance, extremist influence, and a covert directive designed to erase queer lives. What begins as a mystery quickly spirals into a race against time—to expose the truth, rescue the missing, and rally a fractured community before it's too late.

If you loved *The Handmaid's Tale* or *V for Vendetta*, prepare for a bold, timely, and unforgettable new voice.

The Shadow Directive is not just a thriller—it's a wake-up call.



Divided We Fall

What happens when the truth is no longer enough—and stories are all that's left to fight tyranny? *Divided We Fall: Operation Neverland* is a cerebral, thrilling, and audacious entry in the anthology that imagines a near-future America

spiraling into authoritarianism. In this mind-bending tale, a covert trio of operatives weaponizes nostalgia itself, planting psychological triggers into beloved animated classics to unravel the fractured psyche of a dangerously unstable president. As the fairy tales roll, reality bends—and democracy itself teeters on the edge of madness.

Told through shifting perspectives—covert agents, a crumbling commander-in-chief, and the unknowing family members caught in the crossfire—this short story is both dystopian satire and a cautionary tale. Author B. Alan Bourgeois doesn't just hold a mirror to society; he shatters it and shows us what's behind the glass. With echoes of Orwell, *Black Mirror*, and political theater, *Operation Neverland* asks an unshakable question: If perception shapes power, who gets to tell the tale?

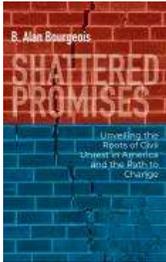


Echoes of Tomorrow: Stories of Resistance and Renewal

In *Echoes of Tomorrow: Stories of Resistance and Renewal*, a diverse tapestry of short stories weaves together themes of hope, resilience, and the unyielding human spirit.

From dystopian futures marked by political unrest to deeply personal journeys of defiance and redemption, this anthology delves into the shadows of societal collapse and the light of collective transformation. With characters who stand against oppression, question entrenched systems, and inspire revolutionary change, these stories challenge readers to reflect on the precarious balance of justice, power, and humanity. A must-read for those who dream of building a brighter tomorrow.

**Texas Authors Museum & Institute of History,
Award-Winning Humanities Series**



***Shattered Promises: Unveiling the
Roots of Civil Unrest in America
and the Path to Change***
Book 1 of 3
The Humanities Series

**"Shattered Promises: Unveiling
the Roots of Civil Unrest in**

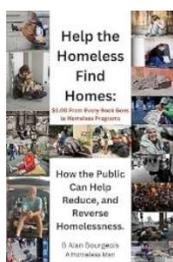
America and the Path to Change" explores the historical and contemporary forces driving civil unrest in the United States, examining the interplay of social inequality, racial and ethnic tensions, labor struggles, and government responses. With detailed analysis and historical insights, it highlights persistent disparities and challenges readers to consider whether the nation faces a turning point or revolution. Offering six actionable steps to foster equity and justice—addressing socioeconomic gaps, combating prejudice, protecting civil rights, improving government responses, promoting historical awareness, and strengthening communities—the book inspires collective action toward a fairer and more unified society.



I Know Me: You Keep Guessing
Book 2 of 3
The Humanities Series

Discover "I Know Me: You Keep Guessing," a book that celebrates authenticity, diversity, and self-acceptance while standing against hate and

discrimination. Dive into an inspiring journey of personal growth rooted in non-violence and influenced by figures like Gandhi and Jesus. Join the movement, educate yourself, and advocate for peace while spreading awareness and supporting inclusivity. Get your copy today and be part of a movement changing the world, one heart at a time. #IKnowMe #EmbraceDiversity #SpreadLove



**Help the Homeless Find Homes:
How the Public Can Help Reduce,
and reverse Homelessness
Book 3 of 3
The Humanities Series**

Homelessness in America is a complex issue that affects millions of people each year. In this eye-opening book, we explore the ten most common reasons why people become homeless and how we can work to address them. From the lack of affordable housing to the impact of natural disasters, we delve into the root causes and provide insights on how we can create solutions. With personal stories, data-driven analysis, and actionable steps, this book is a must-read for anyone seeking to understand and tackle the issue of homelessness in America."