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FRIENDLY FIRE

A FRACTURED MEMOIR

PAUL ROUSSEAU



HARPER HORIZON

A NOTE FROM PAUL

The following are two chapters cut from my book, *Friendly Fire: A Fractured Memoir*. Well, one and a half. The first, titled “News,” was not exactly cut, but adapted, presented as a more traditional essay in the actual book as the chapter “The Student and the Suspect.”

The original layout as presented here was borrowed from George Saunders’s novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*, which published two months before I was shot. I even mimicked Saunders in its creation—printing out all the articles written about the accident, cutting them up line by line with a pair of scissors, and then braiding them back together with blue painter’s tape and string on the back of my bedroom door, allowing meaning to radiate through subtext and the dissonance of a slew of voices. Each one proclaimed its own (often incorrect) version of the truth, but collectively they became something more.

This chapter was modified mainly for two reasons. First, we wanted my voice to be the singular, authorial force presiding over the book as much as possible, and the multiple sources took away from that. Second, though subtext is a fundamental rabbit in the

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writer's false-bottomed hat, we wanted to stick to saying the quiet parts out loud. Something that is especially important when dealing with facts in the age of disinformation.

The other chapter titled "Meeting," is a bit more straightforward. At one point, there were a lot more sections devoted to my office job in the book. The reason so many were cut was because they didn't really advance or add anything to what I was trying to say in regard to Mark, invisible disabilities, my personal injury case, etc. They felt like a filler episode where the viewer is (possibly) entertained, but nobody is really moved by the end. "Meeting" is one such example, where the writing gods had me land on what essentially resulted in a craft essay. Here, I hope it can entertain without getting in the way. A Blu-ray extra, so to speak.

Lastly, I wanted to extend my deepest gratitude for preordering my book. It's a practice that really does help support a writer and their work, and I'm honored you've done so here. I hope you enjoy this extra content as a token of my many, many thanks.

NEWS

About accidental firearm discharge on campus:
(University Facebook)

All involved last night were [University] students. This was not an act of violence. It is being investigated by [Local] police as an accidental discharge of a firearm. The weapon from this incident is in police custody. The individual who discharged the weapon is not on campus. There is no current threat.

(University Public Statement)

Police said earlier in a statement that the suspect was interviewed and cooperative throughout. Authorities continue to investigate the case for possible charges.

(Star Tribune)

The student who fired the gun has not been arrested or charged yet, and is cooperating with the police. [Campus Media] does not typically name suspects before they are charged.

(University On-Campus Media)

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The student, who is from [City], Minnesota, was not arrested and the investigation continues.

(Pioneer Press)

[Local] police confirm a [University] student had a valid permit to carry when his gun accidentally went off in his dorm room Friday night, injuring another student.

(Fox 9)

[Local] police are investigating the incident, according to the release. It added that everyone involved in the shooting was a [University] student, but that the person who discharged the weapon is not on campus.

(ABC 5)

Officials have not released the names, ages, or genders of the injured student or the student who fired the gun.

(Pioneer Press)

The two students involved in the accidental shooting at a [University] residence hall Friday were roommates.

(ABC 5)

University spokeswoman... said the student who fired the gun is no longer allowed on school property, a move that assures that others “are not going to bump into him on campus.”

(Star Tribune)

Both students are 22 years old.

(ABC 5)

The student who fired the handgun, a 22-year-old man from [City], Minnesota, has not been charged in connection with what [Local] police classified in its incident report as a reckless discharge of a firearm. Police released his name, but the Star Tribune generally does not identify suspects before they are charged.

(Star Tribune)

According to the school's website, the university prohibits "all weapons on university property except where possession of a weapon is a requirement of an individual's job."

(Pioneer Press)

Weapons are not allowed "on university property except where possession of a weapon is a requirement of an individual's job," according to the school's website. Violation of that rule could mean expulsion.

(Star Tribune)

The university has a zero-tolerance campus weapons ban. Yet on Friday night, a current student with a valid permit had his gun on campus in his dorm.

(Fox 9)

Firearms are not allowed in [University] residence halls.

(Pioneer Press)

[Police] were unable to confirm at this time if that was the only weapon recovered. The [University] is conducting its own investigation into the incident and may charge the student with violation

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of the university's weapons policy, which explicitly bans firearms from campus with very narrow exceptions.

(University On-Campus Media)

No weapons are allowed inside the university's residence halls.

(WCCO)

Police say the student who fired the weapon had a permit to carry. However, it is against [University] policy to possess a firearm on campus.

(ABC 5)

Possessing a firearm on university property is a violation of the student code of conduct. The university takes this violation very seriously and is conducting an immediate and thorough investigation. The outcome will be handled through the student conduct process.

(University Facebook)

Weapons are not allowed in [University] residence halls, the school confirmed in a release early Saturday.

(Star Tribune)

The student did have a permit to carry the handgun, which is now in police custody.

(University On-Campus Media)

[University] policy bans guns from residence halls even if a student has a permit.

(Kare 11)

New details emerge in the [University] shooting.
(ABC 5)

The sanctity of our campus was shaken on Friday night when there was an accidental discharge of a firearm in [Dorm] Hall, one of our residence halls. [The University] is a weapons-free campus and the safety of our students, staff, and faculty is a top priority for all on campus. We are reaching out to all [University] community members to ensure you feel supported.
(University Facebook)

[University] student admitted to hospital after attempt at suicide, gunshot wound to head.
(Deleted Article)

When the weapon accidentally discharged, it fired though a wall and grazed another student who was not visible to those with the firearm, school officials say. The student with a surface injury was transported to the hospital.
(St. Paul Patch)

The bullet went through a wall into a common area, grazing the head of his roommate, a 22-year-old from [City]. Police called the wound “a graze” but [University] officials later said he was taken to a [Local Hospital] and underwent surgery.
(Kare 11)

He was shot Friday night in his [Dorm] Hall room when gunfire came from another room. The student that fired the gun is

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a 22-year-old man from [City]. He hasn't been charged yet, but detectives believe the shooting was accidental and they say the suspect was very cooperative.

(KXRA)

A bullet went through the 22-year-old student's bedroom wall at [Dorm] Hall, into another bedroom and then into a living room on the other side. It grazed the top of Paul Rousseau's head when he was in the living room of the dorm suite.

(Pioneer Press)

The bullet grazed the top of a male student's head.

(WCCO)

The bullet tore through two walls, skimming the head of his [Dorm] Hall suite mate, 22-year-old Paul Rousseau.

(Fox 9)

The student who was injured was in a separate room from the firearm and not visible to the student handling the weapon when it accidentally discharged. This was a terrible incident. The injured student was transported to the hospital. We have learned the injuries were more severe than originally identified.

(University Facebook)

A round fired from a firearm at [Dorm] Hall went through a wall and struck another student, according to the university, which called the incident a "terrible accident."

(Pioneer Press)

Police interviewed the student who fired the gun. He reported he took it out of his and went to put it in a lockbox, police spokesman said.

(Pioneer Press)

[Local] police information officer... said the 22-year-old male student was trying to store the gun at the time when it accidentally fired a bullet through two walls and grazed his roommate's head in another room of their fourth-floor apartment in [Dorm] Hall. The roommate was transported to a [City] hospital where he underwent surgery.

(University On-Campus Media)

The student said "he did not believe there was live ammunition in the chamber and he accidentally pressed the trigger while putting the gun away," according to [Police].

(Pioneer Press)

The [University] student who accidentally discharged a handgun, wounding his roommate in the head on Friday night said he did not know that the weapon was loaded, police said.

(University On-Campus Media)

A police spokesperson says a 22-year-old student from [City] who has a permit to carry was moving to secure his handgun inside a lock box when the weapon discharged. He told officers that he didn't think there was live ammo in the gun.

(Kare 11)

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Police spokesperson... said the student with the gun, who had a permit to carry a firearm, was in the process of storing the weapon and thought it was unloaded when he accidentally fired it.

(Star Tribune)

Police report that he took the firearm from his holster, removed the magazine, and while transferring the gun to a safe lockbox, he accidentally pulled the trigger.

(Fox 9)

The [University] student who shot and wounded a fellow dormitory resident in the head with errant gunfire was putting the weapon away when it discharged, police said Wednesday.

(Star Tribune)

The injuries were more severe than the school originally disclosed.

(ABC 5)

The student was injured seriously enough to require surgery after a gun was accidentally discharged in another room, sending a bullet through a wall in [Dorm] Hall, the university said Saturday.

(Star Tribune)

There was nothing in the police reports indicating alcohol or drugs were a factor in the incident, and the student told police he did not use any before the shooting, [Police] said.

(Pioneer Press)

In an ideal world, students paying several thousands of dollars to

go to college would be kept up to date by said college on everything happening on campus. While student emails get flooded with banquet reminders, first-year activity notices, movies on the football field—and let's not forget alumni donations—we are still kept in the dark when it comes to threatening on-campus incidents.

(University On-Campus Media)

[University spokeswoman] called the shooting an “unsettling situation” for the university.

(Star Tribune)

If you are experiencing fear or anxiety, please reach out to our student affairs, residence life, or campus ministry staff. We all stand ready to support you as you process the situation.

(University Facebook)

[University spokeswoman] adds anecdotally, this appears to be the first incident involving discharge of a weapon on campus in [University] history.

(Kare 11)

MEETING

The parking lot seemed so much bigger, the walk here so much longer, the day of my interview. Something has been demystified.

I have a meeting with my boss, Kate, and the boss of my boss, Toby, our firm's Chief of Sales, in Conference Room B. Conference Room B has the same general scheme as Conference Room A, where I interviewed, same erasable whiteboard paint on one wall, same oversized leather chairs, but it is smaller and without any windows. It's like Conference Room B is Conference Room A's malnourished twin brother that is never allowed out of the basement.

There are the four canvas pictures arranged in a square to make one larger picture, same as next door, too. The whole depicts a factory, in the sunshine, surrounded by cooling towers and industrial wastewater tanks, fences, and overgrown greenery. Toby says this represents our entire service line; each individual canvas is one of our areas of expertise.

Environmental, we can permit the shit out of that factory, survey the land, sample the nearby river for pollutants. Engineering, we can make what goes on inside more efficient and cost less.

Construction, we can manage the making of the facility itself. And Response, if something starts on fire, or there's a hazardous material spill, we can train their workers, set a plan in place, and clean everything up. Probably not in that order the first time around. Our people can touch every aspect of these pictures, offering comprehensive business solutions with our discreet expertise, Toby says.

"The cool part is, due to Nondisclosure Agreements, we aren't even allowed to talk about our clients directly."

He taps on the table in a 7/8 time signature. I ask if he plays. He says Youbetcha. Toby plays six string bass in an experimental jazz quartet on the weekends, the kind where they hire an artist to speed paint abstract pictures to the music during sets.

"The last gig almost broke even," he says with a huge clown smile.

I tell him I play too. He says that's good. We need more creative people here. People who studied journalism and who play music. I never took one journalism or communications or marketing class in college, but I don't correct him. Instead I just nod too much like a Yes-man dashboard ornament.

Toby looks like a typical silver-haired senior executive, but he is the fun member of the C-suite, I'm learning.

"Speaking of," says Kate. "Our people have zero respect for marketing. They openly mock us. We are treated like garbage. They come to us all day long with operations issues, IT issues, HR issues, and expect us to deal with it right away when we are in the eleventh hour on multiple proposals, mostly because their colleagues are stuck in the weeds making us go through like fifty revision rounds. Then they get mad at us for not being responsive,

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being too corporate with the Opportunity Roadmap, they say it's not like way back when. Well guess what. The firm had twenty people back then. We have three hundred now. Things change!"

Kate sips from a mason jar of what looks like purple mud that she pulls out from a personal cooler on wheels. She is someone you can't help but root for. She is on an all-liquid vegan diet. She hushes a burp behind her hand.

Toby says he knows. He says he wrote an email to one of our senior-level engineers with everything laid out step by step, and the engineer responded with, so what's the ask here?

"Some of these people get it. Some don't. It's like I have to say, oh Shawn, you have a booger up there. Wait! Don't pick your nose! No! Don't do it! Get a tissue! Good. Now blow. No! No! Wait... don't eat it! Use the tissue! All right. Now throw it away... No! You don't eat that either!"

Toby uses his hands like puppets acting out the scene. He has one give the other a light disciplinary slap at the end.

"What's the first rule of marketing?" Toby asks.

"Buy time," Kate says, adjusting her glasses.

"The second rule?" Toby asks.

"Refer to rule number one," Kate says, without missing a beat. They've done this routine before.

"Exactly," Toby says, folding his hands over the table. "Your job isn't to say no. We will consider anything. Your job is to say, Yes But, to stuff that isn't mission critical. Right now, I need your team working on collateral, hub growth, and brand solidification. Big picture stuff. The stuff that will advance our business. You are the innovation group. If someone forgets how to pick their nose, put them in the parking lot. Clear?"

Toby will get fired in six months for this idea.

“Yes,” says Kate.

“Yes,” I say.

“Don’t be the Devil. I’m the Devil. Direct them to me,” Toby says. “Stay the course. Don’t catch any stray bullets.”

I rub my crater.

“Sorry you have to see all our dirty laundry so soon, Paul,” Kate says. “But this is partly why we hired you. You seem hardheaded and you are a storyteller. That’s what this place needs.”

Kate knocks back the last remaining bit of purple mud and pulls out another identical jar of it from her cooler.

“That looks pretty good,” I say, trying to think of other things.

“We need to rework the narrative of our brand,” Toby says. “New literature for our cut sheets and brochures, and new project profiles on our website that really tell our whole story. Not this siloed bullshit about how we increased a factory’s Total Maximum Daily Load of phosphorus by five milliliters.”

“I can do that,” I say.

“We need to get narrative loaded with SEO, our forty magic words. And less is more. Have the pictures do the heavy lifting,” Toby says. “The nice thing is, once you do a couple, we can reverse engineer them into boilerplate story templates to close out projects with. So it’s just, boom, boom, boom.” He moves his hand as if he were climbing down the rungs of an invisible ladder. “I know it sounds like a novel, but you’re a journalist and a storyteller. We need that creativity here.”

I feel a sudden rage in the back of my throat. Wires aren’t crossing quite right, which is normal with a traumatic brain injury, but this is different. It’s hard to hear the terms *narrative* and *literature*

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in this context, now bastardized—monetized—after years of study treating them as sacred. All to earn an English degree and wind up here: marketing for an environmental consulting firm. Truthfully, it gets me a little down.

By the sound of it, Toby wants to take all the guesswork, the spontaneity, the unresolved discovery out of writing. I'm guessing our brochures won't have dialogue, a genuine scene, or descriptive language other than holistic, cost-effective, and timely? How can I sit and write something expected to be story from a template? Making landfills seem sexy is fine and all but I'm not about to pretend we are actually saving the world. We are keeping companies within inches of getting fined for too much waste and pollution. Any heartfelt story would be an obvious sham, and people will see right through it, I think.

Real literature should be more than text, however persuasive. It should be layered, shimmering with emotional resonance, movement. Like an ordinary object with a secret ability. Like a stir stick enchanted with the power of nostalgia, for example. The more one spins their coffee, the more they think about smoking pot for the second time out of an ornate glass-blown pipe made to look like a catfish, on their way to homecoming dance in a friend's minivan named Mildew because of its smell and color. They think about leaving early before they got a chance to dance with their crush, since the friend is their ride back, and he feels the need to check on his sickly hamster, only to find it is indeed near death, immobile in its cage. They think about how their friend cried, playing with the hamster on his driveway as a way to give it one final taste of happiness, partial freedom. They think about how brisk it was outside, being nearly midnight, and if the hamster really

enjoyed the cold blacktop and breeze, or if that's what actually led to its death the following day. They think about how they cried, too. Before they know it, their coffee has lost all heat rendering it nearly undrinkable and they've added something new to their implicit literary manifesto.

Whereas text tells them the five reasons they need a pond cover.