

Chapter One

How It All Started

On January 7, 1996, after my wife Becky and our daughter Lindsay returned home from a weekend visit to Becky's parents in Taunton, Massachusetts, we had an argument over her use of a gym bag. Just like all our previous arguments, it started out simple, then grew to a full tug of war. When it came right down to it, we knew our marriage was on the rocks.

Even though nine-year-old Lindsay was in her room, I knew she heard her mother and father yelling that they couldn't stand each other. This altercation was also fueled by the fact that I was coming down from a serious high. I planned to reestablish that high, but my irrational need for this one bag put reestablishing it on hold. I'm sure Becky knew I was high. I could see it in her eyes.

When Becky finished unpacking, she threw the bag at me. I caught it and made a few more negative comments before going into the basement. There I would stuff it with the things I wanted to take to my girlfriend Sharon's house.

Here was my life with Becky coming apart at the seams. For a while I just stared into that open gym bag wondering: *How did this happen to us?* For years I was the happiest man on the planet. Now I could see the very reason for that happiness disappearing. My mind began producing a slide show of the first time I came to Boston to visit Becky on her home turf. It was a Friday night. Fifteen years ago. I had just officiated a Pro-Am basketball game. When I exited the plane at Boston Logan Airport, I saw Becky coolly standing there in brown ankle high boots, blue coveralls, a yellow turtleneck, and a light brown waist length jacket with a fur-lined hood. As I approached her, I began to feel like the luckiest man alive.

After packing I left the house to go to Sharon's place. While walking to my car, I saw two police officers at the door. *Why were the police at my door?* I placed the bag in my car and returned to the house to find out why the police had come. Once inside, I heard Becky telling the officers that she was concerned about her and Lindsay's safety with me living there. *Safety?* That statement almost cost me my high. I had never hit, threatened, or used profanity toward my family. As I stood listening, the officers glanced at me as Becky told them each of her concerns. I knew my approval rating was going down. Then it suddenly hit me—I was talking to two Boston police officers with seventeen grams of cocaine in

my pocket! The defense I was planning to give became a moot point. When the officer asked me to surrender my keys, I was more than happy to comply. I didn't want him to dig into my pocket. Then I remembered I had to go back into the basement. I asked the officer if I could retrieve some additional items of clothing. He said, "Yes." But that was not the truth. Because I might not be allowed back in the house, I decided to take three grams of coke that I had stashed there while I was packing my bag. (I had hid it in a space between the basement ceiling and the first floor.) Of the seventeen grams in my pocket, I had a buyer for sixteen grams. The rest was for Sharon and me to smoke.

When I returned upstairs, my only thought was leaving the house. However, the officers stopped to tell me that Becky was filing a restraining order. The black officer explained the nature, function, and purpose of a restraining order. At each interval of the explanation, I tried to bolt for the door. But he would stop me by saying, "Wait, Mr. Brown, I'm not finished." This happened three or four times before he concluded. "If you violate the restraining order, I'll have to arrest you, and you'll go to court. In court, a judge will put you in jail for the violation."

Throughout his speech, he asked me if I understood what he had said. And each time I said yes. (I remembered this officer from a nightclub. There we had had occasional casual conversations, mostly about women. I never let on I was married.) I could tell by the way he was squinting that he recognized me. I didn't hear much of what he said. My mind was hooked on the fact that I was talking to two Boston police officers with twenty grams of cocaine in my pocket. Then again, I was running late for a deal. Finally, the two officers allowed me to go.

Later that night I called Becky and inquired if she intended to file that restraining order. "Of course!" she said.

Now the full impact of what was really happening hit home. Here was the woman I once loved more than I loved myself and still loved, filing a restraining order against me. I felt like a jerk; then again, I was lying across my girlfriend's bed talking on the phone to my wife. My girlfriend was in the kitchen preparing a meal. The meal's aroma reminded me of two things: I wish I hadn't made such a mess out of my life, and Becky was a much better cook. So I did what I always did when I felt like this. I got high.

A snow blizzard erupted the next day, and the courts and schools were closed. That meant Becky couldn't get her restraining order. Shortly after 9:00 in the morning, I drove back to my home and rang the doorbell. She yelled from inside the house that I couldn't come in. Becky followed it up by repeating all the things the police officer had said the night before. She also warned me that she would call the police if I didn't go

away. I tried to explain to her that I was there to pick up more of my things and that I was cold and wet, and that she shouldn't embarrass me in front of our neighbors. She said I couldn't come in unless a police officer was with me.

Obviously, I must have been yelling because all of our neighbors who had been shoveling snow stopped shoveling to look at me. Although I was giving them a show, it was only the opening act. I ran to my car and pulled an ax from my trunk. (The ax was in my car because two other guys and I were going to use it on the door of someone who owed us drug money.) After a few good swings, my front door burst open. From her voice I could tell Becky was on the staircase that led to the second floor. But when I entered, I found Lindsay standing on the stairs alone. Once inside I told her, "I will always love you, Lindsay." Then I headed directly to the basement. Before I began gathering my stuff, I decided to take a quick smoke break. After a few puffs, a man's voice told me to come upstairs. When I walked to the bottom of the stairs, I looked up and saw he was a police officer. Although my pipe was a few feet away from me, thank God, he couldn't see it. I figured there was no way he would hustle down those stairs with my German Shepherd, Ski, showing his fangs. So I asked him to give me one more second. I took the opportunity to smoke. After a couple of good puffs, I hid the pipe under the washing machine.

As soon as I got upstairs, the cop told me I was under arrest for breaking and entering in the daytime. He also said that I was in violation of a restraining order. I told him, "This is my house. So how can you arrest me for breaking and entering? And since there is no restraining order against me, how can I violate it?"

He demanded that I shut up and put my hands behind my back. As I was escorted out of the house, the officer asked me what I had used to open the door. I told him I had used an ax. He asked me where he could find it. I told him it was outside. On our way to the police car, he saw the handle of the ax sticking out of the snow. He picked it up and placed it in the trunk of his car.

The next morning I went to court. While I sat in the holding cell waiting to be called into the courtroom, a pleasant Hispanic lady called my name. She said that she was my court-appointed attorney, Ms. Soto. She also said that we would enter the courtroom soon and that the assistant district attorney would offer me a special deal which I should definitely take. In the courtroom the first person I saw was Becky. And once again I asked myself, "How did this happen to us?"

The charges against me were read. I was accused of an assault with an ax. What happened to the breaking and entering? What happened to

the restraining order violation? This was my first real experience with the system and the law. I should have never been arrested or in court. After all, can't one break into and enter one's own home? Didn't the snowstorm prevent Becky from getting a restraining order? Is this why they drummed up the charge of assault with an ax? Ms. Soto told me that since Becky was on the other side of the door, it did constitute assault. I shrugged my shoulders and accepted the deal from the State. By pleading guilty, I wouldn't go to jail. I thought this was the end of it, but it wasn't. I was given an eighteen-month suspended sentence. What I didn't know at the time was that the suspended sentence would come back to haunt me. When I left the courthouse, I went straight to Sharon's house to get high. I spent the next two weeks getting high and making love to a woman I didn't love.

One morning at Sharon's house when I was reading the newspaper, I happened to scan the obituary section. I noticed that a good friend of Becky's would be buried on the weekend in the city of New Bedford. This had to be the first time I had ever read this part of the paper. And little did I know this one look would change my life forever.

Knowing that Becky would be at the funeral, I thought I could break into the house to get my things. I knew that Becky had a restraining order then. But that didn't matter. So on January 21, I left Sharon's house at 8:30 a.m. and drove to my house. After making several unsuccessful attempts at opening the front door, the back door, and the basement door, I climbed onto the roof of the basement to try to pry open the kitchen window. However, once I saw the kitchen was filled with smoke, my attention shifted from retrieving my stuff to rescuing my German shepherd which was still in the house. I ran to the back door and tried to pry it open. Then I realized I had made so much noise that the people living two blocks away probably could have heard me. I began to worry about being detected because the judge had told me that if I ever return to the house I would go back to jail. Thanks to the cocaine I had smoked that morning, I became extremely paranoid and ran away.

After driving few blocks, I decided to go back to the house. This time it was to rescue my dog. On my street, people were getting into cars and working in their yards, and kids were playing in the street. I didn't stop. I drove back to Sharon's house. Once there I couldn't stop thinking about my house and how the smoke I saw through the window had to be the result of a fire. So what did I do when I came face to face with responsibility? Naturally, I got high. After a few puffs, my mind shifted from the fire to having sex, especially since Sharon loved sitting on the floor playing strip poker while loading up. She was always the loser, and by the time she was down to her bra and panties, her body made me as

horny as hell. We'd make love right there on the spot. Coke seemed to cause my erection to last longer. It also delayed my climax. I was convinced it made me a better lover and stimulated the entire romance.

After spending a few more coke-ridden and sex-saturated days, listening to smooth jazz, and watching dumb videos, I was struck by a bolt of common sense. I needed help with my drug use.

