

A group of people are clinking beer bottles and glasses in a bar setting. The scene is dimly lit with warm, golden light from the background, creating a bokeh effect. The focus is on the hands holding the bottles and glasses, which are filled with beer. The text is overlaid on the image in a bold, white, distressed font.

THE DRUNKEN TRAVELER

**CHANGE YOUR GOALS. MOVE YOUR
FUTURE FORWARD.**

Devin Keith Nerison

The Drunken Traveler

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The 12 Commandments of Alcoholism

1. *Don't drink if you want to wake up to a bright new day.*
2. *Aging is a natural process. If you drink it will come quicker.*
3. *Life has a lot to offer if you are sober, if you're not it has a lot less to offer.*
4. *I am not 35 and will look even older if I am still drinking.*
5. *At 48, I have another thirty plus years to live if I stay sober.*
6. *If you want to make the correct choices in life you need to make them while sober.*
7. *A new beginning can only be made with a sober mind and by changing your lifestyle.*
8. *Forget your past and your past failures, they will only hold you back and cause you to drink.*
9. *Happiness is a frame of mind you can only sustain by staying sober.*
10. *Someone is out there waiting for you, but you know from the past that drinking will take them away from you.*
11. *Procrastination is an enemy and a trigger to drink.*
12. *Stay sober for a better life and future.*

CHAPTER ONE

THE SUMMER of 1969.

I was seven years old, and my brother Shawn was three years older. We lived down by the river in a cabin, and after school we would come home, throw on our shorts, and disappear until it started getting dark. We fished, swam, and rode the rapids, *rump riding*, without flotation devices. How we didn't break a leg or drown is beyond me. I always had Shawn to rope me in when I was doing something crazy and he probably saved my life on a few occasions. We had a summer cabin a few hundred feet away where one of the kids, Frankie, had a new mini-motorbike. We went out on the road, and on heading back I had an idea – I grabbed the handle behind the seat and ran. The bike accelerated and I kept running and holding on. I couldn't run any faster but I wasn't backing down so kept holding on. I fell and hit the pavement but still kept holding on as my head smacked the ground. I let go when my adrenaline drained and my head hurt. I staggered up and eventually made it home. I kept the incident from Mom because I wasn't supposed to be around the bike.

Years went by and I started having headaches. These were so bad that I'd be on the couch screaming for hours and pressing my head as hard as I could between the cushions and the armrest. When it finally went away I felt the calm after the storm. There was a settling, euphoric stillness. I would go to my room and lay down with a book and go to sleep. A few times I was awakened by an older lady with white hair and a dress that appeared to be flowing like a wind had it. I told my mom and she told me it was my great-grandmother.

I spent the next year on different medications and was tested for allergies. Twelve years old I was laid down on an operating table as they made a hundred cuts with a small scalpel putting different allergens on them - one battery of tests after another only to wait, wait, wait, and keep having those violent headaches.

I was taken to a neurologist who put me through a brain scan and an MRI. MRIs were new back then and more accurate than brain scans. When the results came back the neurologist explained to my mom that I had a brain tumor.

He gave me some more tests. I couldn't walk in a straight line, my hearing was not very good in my left ear, and my optic nerve was damaged beyond repair. He explained that a tumor in your left cerebellum affects your right side.

I would be all set for brain surgery the next Thursday.

CHAPTER TWO

RATATATA-tatatata

It kept on going.

Nothing ever prepares you for this. I was having a crash course.

I thought at first fireworks but soon dismissed the thought. When fear really grabs you the adrenaline pumps through the body to a level where all your senses are awakened. You hear more clearly than you ever heard before and survival instincts kick right in.

Why was I here?

Three hundred and sixty-five days in a year and I show up here on the roof of a cantina in Mexico with a tent minding my own business.

Free camping...

I was there talking with these guys in the bar. We were drinking and working between our two languages. Looking back, I saw nothing abnormal. Being in my low twenties, maybe I was naïve and not aware of the things to follow. I had no choice as it played out. It was about one in the morning when I heard the gunfire - that is nothing you want to wake up to, believe me. Crawling out of the tent and seeing the dead bodies on the beach doesn't make you want to go back to sleep. They laid there, just these people, with these red spots. I've seen movies but nothing prepares you for a real life incident like this. I went back into the tent, laying low, not knowing who would come and rifle the tent.

The whole episode was strange. Why this night?

A Mexican massacre.

I was beginning to feel like a shit magnet. Clarence was confused but worried all the same.

"Devin, what do you think that was all about?"

"Clarence, I don't have a clue! Gang members or drug dealers, hard to say, but I would lay low and leave when we think it is safe."

We crept out at 4am and split. You know? I didn't think about the dead bodies. I just wanted to get out of there; a fight-or-flight scenario. I was paranoid that somebody was following me. As they say, "Plug the witness." I got away and headed for a hotel with Clarence. He talked a few times but I wasn't really listening. I doubted if the gunmen thought a couple of guys were sleeping on the roof. I was just a foreigner in a foreign land with no place to go. The paranoia began to dissipate as time went by and we took up a guesthouse in Puerto Vallarta. Clarence gave up the fight and flew home. For somebody that grew up on a farm he understood chickens more than most people, and I didn't blame him a bit. My theory on life was quite different. What are the chances of this happening again? There's no way this could be repeated. The deck was stacked against me but I was determined to have a good outcome in the end in this search for life.

CHAPTER THREE

WHEN DOCTORS don't know what the problem is they normally prescribe something to make you think they know what they're doing. You know something is terribly wrong with your physical and mental health but nobody can pinpoint it. That's when I began to distrust doctors. You thought they were gods, especially at ten years old, but they weren't. They were only people trained to treat what they thought was wrong, and then pray that they were right. My life was in their hands, and I think if I were in their shoes I would have been a little shaky and lost a lot of sleep.

During the summer of '73 I saw a doctor for migraine headaches. But the headaches were getting progressively worse. I would go to sleep with them and wake up at 5 AM. It got to be such a routine that if I woke up at 5 AM out of habit, I would wonder what was wrong. Mom, Dad and my brother were always asleep at that early hour, and I could tell they were getting a little tired of me always waking them up. So I would go into my little laboratory and work.

The lab was a storage room. It held all the junk and gadgets. I could rebuild anything from a radio to a set of power tools. Here I passed the time. Deep in work that I felt was important. Not important enough to change the world perhaps, but to me, it seemed that way.

But my mother began to worry about my headaches and my obsession with work. My mind was a whirlwind, never stopping to do anything but think. She had to come into the room and interrupt me in my own little world to eat or go to school.

I was burning the candle at both ends: her way of helping was to take me to a doctor. He was only a general practitioner, but it was a start. He checked me over and gave me a clean bill of health. He said my headaches were due to nerves, and prescribed medicine for hyperactivity and gave me some advice – slow down.

Obviously this didn't work. The headaches got worse and my enterprising obsession got worse. The hyperactivity medicine had no effect, except for possibly slowing my body down so I had to work half- stoned. There had to be an answer, so we decided to look elsewhere for answers.

Dr. Bauer was our next choice. He examined me, and set me up for that battery of allergy tests.

CHAPTER FOUR

AT 46 years old I decided it was time to design my future instead of it designing me. I had taken a job overseas in Taiwan as a purchaser for a large computer distributor with a plan of saving for two years then moving to Thailand. As things worked out some financial obligations came up and I stayed for four. I wanted to be able to buy a condo free and clear and have enough money to allow me to live unemployed for several years.

January 6th, I flew to Bangkok and started my new life. I had so many ambitions and dreams. It was a Wednesday so I felt like I should be working so I was a little distracted but began doing things around the house. I'm saying all this because I feel all of us that retire, semi-retire, or plan on being bums go through a type of depression and feeling of uselessness. So I had to start thinking simple and not over thinking everything and relax. Waking up at 4AM and thinking about *what if* 's just doesn't achieve anything, just makes things worse. Until you get up and it's not so bad anymore. It's a daylight thing I think; night time is always worse but in the morning as you look out over Bangkok from your porch...

In the bright daylight everything is gone.

The Present Moment, the 'Now', is a crucial time for longevity. If you don't keep yourself busy and making goals the days will drag on, and as boredom raises its ugly head you will eventually abandon your dreams and head back for the land you know best. Back into the life that was molding you into what it wanted you to be and worst of all, back to a job of forty hours a week doing something you didn't want to do, clogged in that 5 o'clock rush hour on the way home.

But boredom isn't really so bad.

Ideas come and go but I had been thinking of one for a long time. Back in 2001 I rode the Thai railway for my first time. I had boarded at Hua Lumphong station in Bangkok to travel east towards Burma on this ancient train that was over one hundred years old. Something about being on that old rustic train was exciting to me. What could beat the bouncing, jostling, and the creaking of 100-year-old rolling stock? As it clacked through the countryside, up over hills, and along the river far below, I somehow found peacefulness.

The scenery along the way, the special spots with spectacular views, the best places to stay and to visit, and especially the dialogue of the people I meet along the way...

CHAPTER FIVE

DR. BAUER was our next choice. He examined me, and set me up for a battery of allergy tests. There were 72 tests in all. I didn't care for them much. They made little cuts on my back with a razor, placing a strip of the food or substance (food concentrates, additives, pollen etc. etc.) which would react by inflaming the skin around it. This was all well and good but when I reacted to 68 of them, I found that being allergic to almost everything had some drawbacks. I had to sell my horse because I was allergic to the hair. We had to keep our family dog at my grandparents. Most foods were off the menu. That didn't bother me all that much, at that time eating was just a waste of time. Time I could have better spent doing something constructive.

Once during this period of possible lethal reactions, my mother and I went to the Safari Club for lunch. The club is a restaurant filled with stuffed animals that the owner had shot by his own hand on countless safaris. You name it, lions, tigers, bears, and antelope. He even had elephant feet end tables. We had lunch there at the club: we were then to go visit the owner's house to see his private collection. I guess the owner's wife and my mom were friends from some oil painting class or something. Anyway, we arrived at a big house that was full of the stuffed animals. A ten-foot polar bear greeted us at the door with fangs the size of penny nails, but still, there was also something somehow fluffy and cuddly about it.

After about thirty minutes, the headache began.

It was bearable for a while, not only was I used to headaches, but right then the safari adventure was worth a little discomfort.

As I was looking at the king sized marlin mounted on the wall, my eyesight became fuzzy. I told my mother, and we were out of there and driving home before the screen door slammed.

The ride home was uncomfortable. My mother stopped the car once to try and comfort me. I was rolling around on the back seat screaming. I pressed my head between the door and the seat to alleviate some of the pain. It had always helped in the past, but this time I was having the granddaddy of headaches. My whole body was on fire, and nothing could put out the flames – I wanted to die.

The attack lasted for hours. When we got home I lay screaming and yelling on the couch with my head pressed into the corner. Eventually the pain got too much to bear.

I passed out.

I awoke hours later with the feeling of peace. The pain had gone. My whole body was tingling and well rested. I'll never forget that feeling.

I began staggering to my right. I was losing my balance and a roaring sound started in my ears. It was the kind of sound you might hear if you put a seashell to your ear. It wasn't deafening, but it was annoying all the same. I tried to ignore it, but it was no use. I decided to make the best of a bad situation.

Towards the end of the summer I went to an ear specialist. He diagnosed an inner ear blockage and a twenty percent hearing loss.

The ear roared on.

It was September and school was starting. I was in the sixth grade and eager for the seventh. The problem was I now had more than just a roaring ear to deal with, my eyesight was going. I had no idea where it was going, or why. I wanted it back because it hampered my progress, so I found ways to work around it. At first it was difficult, but soon I got the hang of it things improved. You see, my eyes had several blind spots. When I moved my head around at different angles I could see an object more clearly. This wasn't a perfect method, but I got a high percentage of hits.

Off again to the doctor we went. This visit was for a neurological exam. The doctor checked me out and sent me to have an electroencephalogram. I went in with the idea that these guys were going to put little sponges all over my head like in the movies.

Boy, did I have another thing coming.

My imagined TV doctor show version of this procedure to a remake of a Marquis De Sade flick. Needles attached to little wires. After a few minutes of phrases like, "very little discomfort", I began to calm down. I began to realize that the best I could do with this situation was to sink into the inevitability of the procedure. I was still scared though. I just tried not to show it – too much.

The pain really wasn't too bad. It was the sensation that killed me. The sound was the worst; grating as the technicians put in those needles. A small pain was followed by the sensation of the needle punching through the skin and grinding into the bone.

After they got about a dozen needles in I stayed there for what seemed like a long time while they did the tests. I felt and looked like Frankenstein's monster with all the wires sticking out of my head. Finally, they took the wires out, and I got up and started moving around the room. It held numerous electronic gadgets and technicians. It felt like a candy store and I asked more questions than I could list and absorbed as much as I could.

Two days later, I was back in Dr. Bauer's office waiting for skull x-rays, but not getting the EEG results. Within the week we were off for more x-rays and my first real brain scan.

Then there was silence, not a word from anybody. On the sixth day we received word from Dr. Bauer: they had found something on the scan, but they didn't quite know what – or did they? I figured they couldn't tell us if they weren't sure, so it seemed logical to keep hush-hush.

The following week I had an appointment with Dr. Dennis. My parents picked me up after school and drove me over to his office. John Patrick Dennis examined me, I was soon to call him Dr. John. He thought I better have another brain scan.

The thought of another brain scan was no big deal, just another appointment in a series of many. I went on with my daily routine.

That evening my brother and I were riding our bikes out on the road when we heard mom yelling for us to come in. I grumbled silently about the loss of some good riding time as we rode down the driveway to the deck.

Mom and dad were there waiting; I couldn't think of anything I had done wrong lately. I was always getting into trouble over something, it was my mischievous nature.

"We need to speak with you." "About what?"

"Dr. Dennis scheduled the brain scan for you next Monday. He thinks there's an abnormal tissue growth, he'd like to take a better look at it."

"Oh...Is that all. Can I go now?" I was much more interested in playing than worrying about abnormal tissue growths.

My mom looked at my father and said to me, "Would you like to take the horses to the beach this weekend?"

"Sure!"

I walked back to my bike.

CHAPTER SIX

I **HAD** been working in Taiwan for a year or so when I decided I needed to take two weeks off as a vacation. My boss didn't ask any questions because I told him it was a personal matter I needed to take care of. He said that we would not tell anybody in the company. I was going to just try to check my emails once in a while and try to keep things moving along and it wouldn't be counted as a vacation.

I flew to Koh Samui where I could cleanse and get off the bottle. I went through the whole routine of fasting for a week and colonic irrigations, taking all the supplements and the juices and the chicken broth for dinner. We had to drink lots of water and this stuff we mixed in that puffed up in the stomach to keep you from feeling hungry. Even though I wasn't eating the first week I actually felt better than I had in a long time and I had plenty of energy. I would walk several kilometers a day, and at times jog on the beach.

There were plenty of activities planned during the day so we were always busy, although there was time to stretch out on a hammock with a book. Mornings were meditation time, yoga, and a light weight training class. After that everyone was scheduled for massages in the afternoon. Later there would be some nutrition classes and quite often Thai cooking classes. After dinner, or broth if you were fasting, it was time for the steam room to sweat out all those toxins. Ten minutes in the steam then outside to a freezing shower, in for another ten, then shower again, then back into to finish baking until the meat was ready to fall off the bone.

Everyone was finished up about 7:30 in the evening and we would sit around and talk for a bit, or as I did, usually go back to my bungalow and read a book until about 10. Then go to sleep only to hear the bell ring at 6:30 in the morning to get up and start our walk at 7am and then start the rest of the day all over. Even though it was a tropical paradise with the private resort sitting right on the beach it became a routine after a while and by week two I was ready to go.

Then there is that moment you are out.

Walking by open bars people laughing and drinking beers, you sit down and the waitress comes up to take your order.

“I’ll have the Phad Thai Gai, please.”

“And what would you like to drink? We have Singha, Heineken...” “I’ll have a soda water, thanks.” She looks at you like you’re going to be one of those non-profit customers. As if you’re worthless.

I flew back to Taiwan after a few days in Bangkok and got back into my work and just put all my cravings and past behind me - which wasn’t easy since my friend owned a wine bar not far from my house and my friends often gathered there. They were pretty good about it. I told them I was taking a break for a while and sticking to coffee and water. Everything seemed to be going okay until I slipped and had a drink. Then later there was another one and then...

I was back on track to where I was before.

I decided it was something I could not do right now.

I enjoyed drinking too much and I didn’t see any easy way out of it unless I made some serious changes in my life. I didn’t like the feeling of something in me that could control me this way. Besides all the other stresses of my job and being so far away from family I decided to just forget about it until a later date.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MY OLDER brother tried to reassure me about the doctor situation, but I ended up reassuring him. Maybe I was just being naïve about the seriousness of the condition, or maybe I just didn't care. I think I understood what was happening to me, and was trying to do everything while I still could.

I wanted to live life to the utmost, to be the best I could be. I wasn't going to let anything stand in my way. I don't know what drove me but it was very strong. I don't understand it, but I had no fear. Fear of death seemed reasonable; maybe my will to live overshadowed it, or was too strong for that fear to come out.

My brother once had a friend in grade school who died from a brain tumor. Every time we drove by his house I would think of that. That was years before all these tests. When I started having those headaches I would always think that I had the same. As they got worse my belief in a brain tumor became stronger until I was almost sure. It was like I knew it was happening. So I found ways to accept it and live with it. Maybe that is why I was so fearless now: I had already accepted it.

October 21st was a Monday. But not just any Monday, the day for the brain scan had come. This would confirm or dispel Dr. John's suspicions of a brain tumor. I wasn't too scared even though I knew there were needles involved. I was more nervous. I guess I felt it would just confirm my suspicions and bring them to reality. This was the end of the road though, and it made me edgy.

They brought me into a room with WARNING-RADIATION on the door. I liked that. The room was filled with more electronic gadgets and video screens with graphs. Wow, this was neat. I imagined the days of joy I might have dismantling them to see how they worked.

In the middle of the room was the operating table. Over that was a thing that looked very much like a huge electromagnet - the kind they used to pick up cars at the junkyard.

The radiologist came over to me and said, "This is a radioactive isotope containing a dye that shows up in the scan and outlines abnormalities."

I made a joke about metamorphosing into Spiderman. I was trying to do anything that would stall the inevitable needle stick. I had had so many needles during this ordeal that I was becoming a little used to them.

I grunted as he pierced the skin.

There's something about shots. The anticipation of it hurts more than the physical pain. Everybody reacts to needles.

Time for the scan, and the big electromagnet was right there above me. I saw a car being lifted up to throw in the crusher.

They had me move my head to different angles, and at one point I was lying on my left side. As I lay there I saw a TV type screen with graphs and an outline of my skull. I saw the dye creeping upwards into my head like a small black snake barely inching along my vessels. It seemed the snake was looking for a home, a recess in my cancerous brain.

I watched that black ribbon for what seemed like hours. It finally slowed to a stop and pulled up its trailing end. It had chosen a spot in the middle of my brain to rest.

At that point it spread. It was now a dot expanding rapidly, darkening a space the size of a small orange.

When the session was over, I left not feeling much and hoping that what I had just witnessed was some kind of trick of the mind.

I kept what I had seen to myself and let the doctors analyze the images of my brain. I held onto the hope that what I had just seen was a mirage or some normal anatomical structure I didn't know about. Maybe it was a drug induced hallucination caused by their syringe-happy nurse. Possibly I was dreaming and my imagination had produced this image for some deep psychological reason.

The following Thursday afternoon I entered the hospital for a sort of orientation. Actually it was a surgical prepping session. They had scheduled the operation for 1pm the following day.

The day started with Jell-O, and I got soft food from then on in, cottage cheese, yogurt...

I had a color TV (without graphs) and my own bathroom. I didn't mind sharing, and I would have liked to have somebody to talk to, but I didn't want anyone else seeing the bedpan.

A few hours before surgery, more relatives than I knew I had came to see me, paying their last respects, perhaps. They all said the same thing – "Don't worry, it'll be alright."

I knew I was going to be alright, like I had some mystical cloud resting on me, letting me know the outcome and dissolving the fear.

Now it was about half an hour before they wheeled me into the operating room, and the nurse walks in with two hypodermic needles the size of caulking guns with springs inside. She proceeded to stab my legs and deliver the whole load. It hurt a bit, but it was over before I had a chance to think about it.

Within a minute or two I was on a cloud. I felt great - stoned and delirious. The only problem was that I had to pee. I tried to climb over the railings around my bed to get to the bathroom, but the nurse caught me before I made my drug crazed escape. I pleaded with the nurse to let me use the can, but to no avail. She was quite convincing in her promise that I could go afterwards. Basically, "Back to bed", was all I could get from her.

I lay back in my stainless steel bed and took in the euphoria. The inanimate objects seemed to be only partially there, like they were in some other dimension which I now saw. It was all so unreal, but there was no sense of struggle to find reality.

As I was floating around in the belladonna haze some people in white jackets (possibly angels) came into my room and lifted me onto a gurney. My Mom, Dad, Aunt, Grama, and Gramps were there walking with me down the corridor with strained smiles. They were worried but I was at peace. I wanted to tell them everything would be alright but no words would come. Instead I could only express giggles and jokes, like being at a party. For them it was more worrisome, they had no idea how things would pan out. The doctors had their own opinion of my confidence: they thought it was highly overrated.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WHEN I decided to move to Thailand, I wanted to be in the hub of things. I needed to get to the airport frequently, but mostly I wanted to be surrounded by the Thai people. I looked at condos that were far away from town and some close to town but in an almost foreign setting. Nice places with lots of Farangs (foreigners), upper class you could say. But I just didn't care for that type of thing at this point in my life. I wanted to be surrounded by people who were as curious about me as I was of them.

A new culture to be explored first hand.

My Thai friend I have known for years told me he had a condo. I was surprised he never mentioned it. It was in an older building in the middle of a Thai-only area. It seemed nice inside but the outside and neighborhood seemed a little rough. I thought about it for two years while I was working a job in Taiwan. One day I had the feeling to talk to him about it. I bought the place and flew back and forth from Taiwan to Bangkok every two months and used it as an office. On December 31st 2008, I left my job and permanently moved to Thailand.

At first it was all new but really quite frightful. I had a good job in Taiwan so I could semi-retire here but filling the days up can be difficult and you go through a sort of depression of feeling useless. I had to think of a lot of things to keep us (me?) busy, and we can all get caught in the trap of just sitting around talking to the guys drinking beer and whiskey all day and one day turning into another. That was getting old and driving down my ambition and energy to do anything.

One of the things I used to do frequently was pull out a table by the sidewalk and drink beer everyday starting at about 3pm until about 7pm, then I would go home and usually have a few more while I watched a movie. When I first started spending time down there I noticed how bold the rats were. It's not like you saw them all the time but once in a while I would see one scurry from one place to another. I began to get this idea with the guys that we needed to set up traps or practice target shooting. They do have some electric powered pistols now that shoot plastic balls that will actually take out a rat. Everyone is in favor of it but I think I am the one that has to pay for it.

A few days later I'm walking by my friend's restaurant that serves pork leg. Chit, the owner of the restaurant was lighting something and putting it over this grate where the rat always pops in and out of.

"Mickey," he said and grinned.

"You mean Mickey the rat, not the mouse?"

"Yessir." Chit said in his gentlemanly tone that always gave me a good chuckle. Some people can be funny saying anything as long as they say it in the right tone at the right time. He is Thai but speaks good English. To have a sense of humor in a second language takes some practice.

The fire that burned over Mickey's house had no effect. The next day I walked by a little shop selling odds and ends like knives and mini crossbows and binoculars. There it was right in front of me. It was black polished steel in the shape of a pistol. I glanced at it a few times and kept saying no to myself.

"Is that one of those electric guns that shoots plastic balls?" I asked. He looked at me with the look that he understood a little of what I was saying and knew I was eyeing the gun. "Gas, BB gun," he answered. I looked at it again from a few other directions without touching it.

Touching it meant I was serious about buying it. "Will this take out a rat?"

Another customer was now listening in, so they were both trying to understand what I wanted, and you could tell they wanted to answer correctly but did not quite know the meaning of the question.

"Can I blow away a rat with this?" I showed them about a length of a foot or so between my two hands and tried to describe a rat scurrying around. I felt like a jerk doing this but I was getting better at charades over the years. I think it paid off.

"Yes, can kill rat."

I told them thanks, and left with my wheels turning. I really wanted to plaster some of those bloody rats but how were the other people around me going to react? Save the rat movement? And a BB pellet is metal and could bounce off something and hit somebody and hurt them. Even a plastic ball could maybe have an adverse effect too. There are people at some of these shops around my condo that have cats, and they are afraid the cat will catch one of the rats and get sick or die. Besides, most of the cats are afraid of them since they are at least half their size. So my plans are on hold but the wheels are still turning until Mickey is lifeless in the bottom of the dumpster.

I was passing a little shop a few weeks later and saw these small cages about a foot long and six inches square. A light bulb went on in my head, Mickey's home! I bought the contraption and brought it back to my complex quite happy with myself. Chit and Pui his wife were starting up their business for the evening and I showed them Mickey's new home. I was not sure what to do with it when I caught him but I was intent on getting him. Chit took over and set the thing up and used a big piece of pig fat for bait. Pao and his wife had taken the day off so we put the trap in the back at the outside of his shop.

I stuck around and had a soda water then headed upstairs to do some work on the computer and see if I could find anything in English I could read. After a couple of hours, I went back downstairs and Chit told me Mickey was in the cage. I went over and checked and sure enough there was a large brown rat in there about the size of one of those dogs old ladies put in their purses in America. Mickey was a dirty white colored rat, so I believe we nailed a relative. I took the trap over to Chit and he picked it up and walked over to where all the dumpsters were. I was wondering what he was planning to do. My thought was to tie a rope on it and toss it in the klong (canal) for an hour or so then dump him in the dumpster.

Chit had other ideas. When we got by the dumpsters he started shaking the cage very violently then threw open the front door and threw the rat splatting him on the ground. He regained his composure in seconds and ran drunkenly under the dumpsters.

"I think he has a headache," I commented.

"I think he will be dead by morning," said Chit.

We went back to his place and baited the cage up again and set it in the same place. I went over to Chit's and scrubbed off layers of skin with soap and went up to bed. Just being close to the vermin made you feel dirty.

The next day I checked the trap about 10am, but the door was open and the food was untouched. Hopefully the rat did not limp back to his friends, have a little huddle, and discuss further strategies of getting food that was less deadly. I knew Mickey was a smart one but my plan was to banish him and his friends to a new neighborhood. I figured if enough of his relatives started disappearing, the rest may start looking for a new place to search for food. It would not be an easy task because these rats were street smart and also fearless. I always thought of rats coming out at night but I see these buggers during the day running in between people's legs like they were cats.

Remember the movie Ben? Michael Jackson singing the theme song? Well that showed rats in a whole new light. Not only were they smart but also trainable. This kid with all these filthy vermin all over him and the idea of the plague and rabies and countless other diseases never entered his mind. Oh to be young again.

Chit was on vacation for a few days so I waited until he got back before we thought through a new strategy. We had caught one but we both knew it was not Mickey. We baited the trap that night with the same pork skin that the rats and most of Asia enjoy and set the trap in a new place. It was the vendor's stall next to Chit's and no one was there, it was all closed up for the night. Disappointment came the next morning when the bait was hanging on the dangling hook. The bait was still there but seemed a little smaller. Possibly it dried out? Did the rat go in for a little nibble knowing if he got greedy and took it all the doors would slam closed? I was beginning to think there was a rat learning curve we had set in motion.

Just as I was walking across the small soi (alley) in front of Chit's to Pao's place, I saw a rat scurry under tables and then run across the soi and run under some other places half-hidden. So now it was a game! He had probably spoken to the rat that had suffered some mental damage from us before, and ate just enough pig fat to not spring the trap. Then to really annoy us he made two runs in broad daylight in front of both Chit and I to show who was the wiser of the species. I will not be out done by a rat even if I have to plant claymore mines topped with smelly pig epidermis!

Days later and still the trap has not been sprung. Mickey has presented himself as a worthy adversary from the rat kingdom. We have tried different types of bait and nothing has worked. There is some sort of Stalag 13 for rats, I am beginning to think. Yesterday Chit took the cage and thoroughly washed it so there was no rat smell from the previous occupant. I found a place that was deep frying sausage that if he did eat he would most likely die of cholesterol related illnesses. Not only that, but it did smell rather fragrant for that type of dish so I skewered it on the hook that holds back the spring that slams the door shut.

Still no luck the next morning, and not a nibble on the tasty tidbit.

That next morning, I headed downstairs again and Chit and his wife Pui were there.

"Mickey is dead," Chit said with a grin.

“What do you mean? You got rid of Mickey without me even seeing the bugger in his last remaining seconds?”

“Yessir,” he said with his calm humor.

“Well, that’s just great! Now I hope there will be more when I get back? Maybe you weren’t out smarted by a rat but I was. It must have been that greasy sausage I used - he knew it was harmful to his health. You got him on a fish head right?”

“Yessir.” He smirked

“Okay! Wait until I get back and we’ll rework this scenario with fish heads. You made sure Mickey was dead right?”

“Yes, a few flaps on the floor and it was over.”

“Okay, so he’s not going to tell any of the other rats not to eat fish heads I hope. They got a little network going that I think we’re homing in on, and as long as there are no survivors to tell the secret I think we’re okay.”

“So you’ll be back November 2nd?” asked Pui.

“Late that night so will probably see you on the third. Depends If I just feel like hitting the sack when I get home. Who knows, I may come down for a soda water. I guess it’s about time. I better be going.”

“When does your flight leave?”

“No idea, I just know it’s usually around this time when I leave so I forget all the rest. If you had flown this same airline to Taiwan at the same time every day, you just don’t think about anything except when you usually leave for the airport. See you in a week.”

When I got back a week later, the Mickey incident had taken a break. Soon after that, we got back on the frenzy and nailed two more that I can say are snugly in the bottom of a dumpster. I believe when we broke the communications network of the rats, mainly by taking out Mickey and his cohorts, that all mayhem broke loose and none of the rats were aware of what was going on because a serious link in their chain of command was broken. Now the stupid rats were running around with bad intelligence. I knew we could do this, and I hope this technique will be used all over the world to bring this rodent population back to normal.

Sad to say, three years later I still see a rat that has the same appearance as Mickey. He is running around laughing at us and has set his network back up. I think he is also getting bigger...

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