



## V. MY MAKE IT HAPPEN OR GO BACK HOME YEAR

Age: 18

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To say that a person's plans can change with a flip of a switch would be an understatement. As I prepared to continue on to my destination (Miami), I was faced with a decision that would determine the direction my life would take forever. My brother-in-law presented me with a question; *"Why do you want to live and go to school where you don't know anyone? Why not stay here, live with us, and go to school here?"* It was a very inviting offer. It just required making one significant change.

I would have to enroll in college there (Florida State College at Jacksonville was available for late enrollment) and give up on attending the University of Miami, at least for now. In addition, it was too late to qualify for scholarship or student aid, so I would have to use all of my savings for tuition and immediately get a full-time job to cover living expenses. A small sacrifice to make for all of the benefits I believed came with it. One that offered the same feeling of being home, with the added value of going to college in an amazingly beautiful part of Florida with family and newfound friends nearby. Little did I know that this would only be the first of several back to back to back life choices that would contribute to completely changing the direction of my life forever.

I was now enrolled in FSC at Jacksonville and fully embraced college, work and life there when I would be faced with the next of a series of life altering decisions. Two months into my first semester of school with my sister's brother-in-law being discharged from the Navy, the brothers including her husband decided to return to New York. And, they were planning on leaving soon. This left me with a three bedroom home, no furniture and complete uncertainty of how I would be able to continue living in Jacksonville and under the circumstances stay in school.

I had made a bold decision not to go on to U of Miami and the reasons I chose to stay in Jacksonville were now being pulled out from under me. On the day of everyone's departure I stood standing alongside my sister and brother-in-law's car as they were about to leave. He would ask me what turned out to be the most influential, life defining question of my life. *"You can still go back home with us, if you want?"*

It was at that very moment that I knew what I had to do. It was simple; **Make it Happen or Go Home!** I responded accordingly. *“If I leave now, I will be quitting, and if I quit now I will be quitting the rest of my life. I’m staying!”*

To say that night was one of my loneliest ever would be putting it lightly. As I lay on my sleeping bag with my motorcycle next to me in an empty house, knowing I couldn’t keep it, get student aid or live in a dormitory, I had to have a plan.

I had just enough money to secure a studio apartment and buy new clothes for a second job. The job I had as a cook in an Italian restaurant would not be enough to cover my newly inherited expenses. The holidays were coming and I would have to get a second job. The obvious choice was retail. I scheduled an interview with a trendy men’s retail chain.

Wanting to look my best I decided to stop by a suit store on my way to pay my rent. Trying on various outfits to find the right fit, I went from the dressing room to the mirrors and back multiple times. Being at the entrance and trusting that no one could enter without my seeing them I chose to leave my pants and wallet behind. My thoughts were naive. I would only be a minute.

I was about to get the surprise of my life checking out. My wallet was empty. Everything I had, rent, food, and clothing money was stolen. I stood there shocked. Who could I accuse? Who’s a.. could I kick? I was momentarily dazed and confused. What was I going to do now? I had to have Faith or I was done.

First things first. I had to get that second job. It could have been any job, since its importance was my survival, at least in Jacksonville. But, there was something special about this opportunity. It was perfect for me. It would allow me to serve others, sell, and get out from behind the kitchen. I was hungry and excited, but I still needed to pay my rent. There was only one choice left to make. I would have to sell my motorcycle.

I had come full circle. The thing that inspired my motivation and challenged me in so many ways was now going to bail me out. What started my dream would now have to be sold to keep it alive.