

DO GOOD. SELL LOTS.

By: Brett Thomas

Foreword

If you're holding this book in your hands, there's a good chance you're looking for something.

Maybe it's direction.

Maybe it's hope.

Maybe it's proof that broken people can still build beautiful things.

Well, here it is.

This book isn't written by a guru.

Not by a millionaire motivational speaker.

Not by some polished success coach in a clean suit with a five-step plan and a trademarked slogan.

It's written by a man who's walked through hell with his eyes open—and lived to tell the story.

I've been rich.

I've been broke.

I've been a father, a husband, a failure, an addict, a fighter, a builder, a wolf, a ghost and yes, even a vampire.

I've burned it all down. I've climbed back out...twice.

And now, I stand here—successful, yes. But more importantly?

Alive. Present. Purposeful.

This book isn't about theory. It's about truth.

You'll read about heartbreak. About addiction. About persistent and torturous regret that won't let go. You'll meet people who saved me. Others who nearly destroyed me.

You'll watch me fall apart. And you'll watch me put myself back together—one brick at a time.

And through it all, a single phrase echoed in my head:

Do good. Sell lots.

It started as a sendoff.

A little line my young wife said to me every morning before I walked out the door.

I didn't know it then, but those four words would become the foundation of my life.

Because if you do good—real good, consistent good, good that makes people trust you—you'll sell. Not just products. But ideas. Belief. Change. Yourself.

And if you sell with heart, with grit, with truth—you'll never go hungry.

That's what this book is about.

Not just how to sell.

But how to survive.

How to rebuild.

How to turn rock bottom into the solid ground you stand on for the rest of your life.

My name is Brett Thomas.

I built Rhino Web Studios from the ashes of addiction, heartbreak, and bad decisions.

And this—this—is my story.

But more importantly, it's yours too.

Because if you've ever felt lost, stuck, guilty, hopeless, or done...

Let me show you what happens when you stand up anyway.

Let me show you why...The best is yet to come.

Chapter 1: My Angel

I met Angela because of a prank call.

Not one I made—my brother and his friends were the culprits. They were sitting around one night, bored out of their minds, doing what teenage boys did before cell phones and social media: flipping through the White Pages and calling random numbers to mess with people.

I was in the other room when one of them yelled out,

“Brett! Talk to this girl!”

I rolled my eyes, took the phone, and figured I’d play along.

What I didn’t expect was *her* voice on the other end of the line.

Angela.

Even through a cheap landline and a living room full of idiots, something about her voice cut through the noise. There was a calmness in it. A softness. She sounded amused, not annoyed. Like she had nothing better to do either—and maybe, just maybe, she was a little curious too.

We talked for a few minutes. Then a few more.

And by the time I hung up, I already knew I was calling her back.

Angela wasn’t just another girl. Not to me. Not ever.

She was the kind of beautiful that didn’t try to be. She didn’t need makeup or angles or filters—she *glowed* from the inside out. Her hair was red like fire. Her eyes were big and hazel, like they could see through the walls I didn’t even know I had. Her smile could disarm an army, and her laugh? Man... that laugh lived in my chest long after she walked out of the room.

But it wasn’t just how she looked. It was how she *carried* herself.

Angela was gentle, but she wasn’t soft.

She was kind, but she had an edge.

She didn’t let people walk all over her. She didn’t hand out her trust like candy. But for some reason, she gave it to me.

And I gave her mine.

We started talking every night.

Then we started seeing each other.

Before long, I was waking up next to her—and every morning felt like a miracle.
Waking up next to Angela was better than any high I've ever had. It wasn't just love—it was safety. Clarity. *Home*.

We had our routines. Our jokes. Our inside language.
And I'd be lying if I said I didn't picture forever.

I'd never felt that way before. And I haven't felt that way since.

There was no plan. No timeline.
Just two people finding something rare—and holding on as tight as they could.

She didn't fix me. She just *saw me*.
And in seeing me, she made me want to be better.

We didn't have much. We weren't rich. We weren't stable. We were just... *us*.
Two kids trying to figure life out.
But when I had Angela, I had everything.

And in hindsight, I didn't realize how dangerous it is to build your entire sense of peace around one person. Because when that person starts to slip away...

Your whole world goes with them.

The Christmas Hustle in Chattanooga

It was Christmas.
Me and Angela were in Chattanooga, visiting her dad—Paul.
The air was cold, the hills rolled quiet, and the city felt like something out of a snow globe.

We didn't have money.

Not the kind of broke where you skip Starbucks and eat ramen for a week—*real broke*.
The kind where you look at your girl, your gas tank, and your future and think,
“Something's gotta happen today.”

I had a trunk full of **solar-powered AM/FM radios**—five cases I'd picked up on the cheap thinking “These things are COOL! If I got them in bulk they were only \$4 each... I could sell them for \$10. I didn't even need to pay for them upfront. I got them on Consignment from a company called DS-Max...more on them later...but for now, I popped the trunk, grabbed a box, kissed Angela on the cheek, and said,

“I'll be back later. With Christmas, baby.”

She kissed me and as I walked to the car, a man on a mission. I WAS going to go get christmas...and I only had today to do it.

"Do Good! Sell Lots!" she yelled to me waving.

And I hit the streets.

I didn't know a soul in Chattanooga.

Didn't know the neighborhoods.

Didn't have a plan.

But I had that itch in my chest—the one that always whispered,

"Figure it out. **Go. Now.**"

So I did what I knew how to do:

Sell.

I went door-to-door, business to business.

Walked into shops, barbershops, pawn stores, diners.

"Hey, how y'all doing?

Listen—Nothing serious or crazy...I'm not here to waste your time.

It's Christmas, and I've got something practical, affordable, and honestly kinda cool."

Click.

Radio on.

Volume up.

Tuned to the local station, running off nothing but light.

Solar-powered.

No batteries.

Perfect for emergencies, fishing trips, camping, and makes the perfect stocking stuffer.

"ten bucks. Yours to keep.

I'm just a young guy trying to buy Christmas for his family....how many do you need?"

Some people laughed.

Some waved me off.

But some—*enough*—opened their wallets.

By the end of the day, I had **empty boxes** and a **wad of cash** in my pocket.

I drove back into Paul's house like I'd just come down from the mountain with fire in my hands.

Angela lit up.

And Paul - grizzled, no-nonsense, tough-as-nails Paul—looked at me, smiled, and said something I'll never forget:

“Stick with this guy, Angie. He’s gonna be a millionaire.”

That night, I bought gifts.

We sat by a Christmas tree.

Angela smiled the way she used to.

And I felt—if only for a moment—like a king in a city of strangers.

Because when you’ve got **drive**, when you’ve got **purpose**,

You find a way.

Even if it’s one solar-powered radio at a time.

Within a year, we were married.

And for a while—*my life was perfect*.

I had a beautiful wife. A partner. A teammate. She loved me, and I was madly in love with her. I was ambitious, driven. First, I went to culinary school and landed a job in the kitchen at Casino Magic. I got her a job there, too. We worked side by side. Laughed. Planned. Dreamed.

We bought a house. I started a little business selling two-for-one daiquiri cards door to door.

I Called it “Rhino Promotional Marketing”. Rhino because it was my spirit animal. I was going to put my head down and charge head first into life with thick skin and a “damn the torpedos” attitude.

I’d put together \$400 worth of buy-one-get-one-free drinks from local spots and sold the cards for ten bucks each. I’d hit parking lots, businesses, wherever I could, trying to sell at least 10 a day. Sometimes up to 20.

“How’s it going? Nothin crazy, I’m just out here for Daiquiri Beach looking for people who like daiquiris... do you qualify?”

Of course they liked daiquiris! Who the hell doesn’t right?

I would put the card in their hand, “For the next year, everytime you buy a daiquiri from Daiquiri Beach, were going to give you another one absolutely FREE! This is over \$400 worth of daiquiris.. 50 FREE daiquiris...and its only 10 bucks for this card... how many do you need?”

I was young and hungry and chasing a future.

But here’s the thing about being young and hungry: if you’re not careful, you can also be stupid.

After a few years, it *seemed* that Angela started pulling away.

It was subtle at first—less affection, less connection, more silence.

I didn't understand. And instead of asking the right questions or loving her through it... I panicked. As a seasoned and experienced man, I know NOW that this is the normal evolution of romantic love...for most people, but I am built differently. My passion didn't fade...so I thought I was losing her. I didn't understand what was happening and I panicked.

I made the worst decision of my life.

I started talking to someone else online—Malisa. A manipulator. A predator. She played my insecurities like a violin, convincing me that Angela didn't love me anymore. Convinced me to test her. Told me to push her away to see if she'd fight for me.

Spoiler alert: she didn't.

The day I kicked Angela out of our house is the day I broke my own heart—and it would take decades to even begin to forgive myself.

This story?

It's about *what came after*.

The rise, the fall, the addiction, the near-death moments, the empire I built, the lives I touched, and the woman who would later save me.

Yes, I am a successful entrepreneur today. Highly respected in my field. But this is the story of how I had to lose it all...twice...to get here.

You want to talk about success? Let me tell you what it *really* costs.

Chapter 2: The First Fall

I didn't know it at the time, but the day I told Angela to leave was the day I had burned down something inside me that I have **NEVER** gotten back.

It didn't feel like destruction at first. That's the thing about heartbreak—it's not one explosion. It's a slow-motion collapse. Shrapnel doesn't always tear you apart right away. It settles in deeper every day until you wake up one morning, look around, and realize you're standing in the ashes of something you thought would last forever.

After she left, I still thought I could fix it.

I told myself I'd made some kind of bold move. A test.

I thought she'd realize what she lost and come running back.

She didn't.

She moved in with her mother. No fight. No tears. Just gone.

And in the silence she left behind... was the demon I had let in.

Malisa.

She showed up when I was still trying to save my relationship—back when I was asking strangers online how to fix what was slipping through my hands. That's when she found me.

At first it was innocent enough. It seemed like she was genuinely interested in helping me save my marriage. "People want what they can't have. Make her chase you. Go quiet. Stop sleeping in bed next to her...she'll feel you slipping away and SMOTHER you with affection."

When you get married, there should be some kind of instruction manual. A manual to tell you things to expect and how to handle them. Everyone on this earth is built differently. Brain chemicals are produced in different levels, and MY brain chemicals bathe my mind in PASSION. I was still in love, so why wasn't Angie still in love?

I realized too late, the truth. Angela DID love me, and my feeling of intense passion for her was just an overdose of a chemical produced in excess in my head. When she did not share that same chemical response with me, it felt like I was losing her. I wasn't, but that was the delusion.

Abandonment.

Maybe it was because I was adopted as a baby...perhaps something in my subconscious remembers being abandoned as an infant and when that feeling was triggered, I lost all sense of clarity... I freaked out. As a very young and overly emotional guy, I was helpless to this devil who was weaving herself into my life, one bad piece of advice after another.

Of course it didn't work on Angie. She was way stronger than I was, emotionally anyway.

As I was on AOL Chat with Malisa, explaining that the "test" wasn't working, she wrote the words, "I'm sorry Brett. It seems as though she's fallen out of love with you."

She told me, "This is very common when people get married too young. Love sucks". It felt like she was comforting me when she completely flipped the script.

Malisa said she had feelings for me. She said she wanted someone to share passion with...that she had that same kind of passion and she would take away my sadness. She was a MASTER manipulator. I guess she figured out that I had a "hero complex" too, because told me she was in trouble up in Michigan. Her Ex-husband was abusing her. She said I was the only one who could help her... Said all the things I needed to hear.

She promised she'd be what Angela wasn't.

Promised she'd never leave me.

Promised love, passion and loyalty, forever.

She said "You'll be my hero"

I believed her.

God help me—I believed every word.

I brought her into my home with her three kids. Gave her everything I had left.

And within two months, I saw who she really was.

She was nothing more than a slimy stripper con-artist with an aversion to the truth. She cheated. She stole. She brought drugs into my life like it was just another suitcase.

She didn't just lie—she dismantled me. And the worst part? I let her.

Because somewhere deep inside, I thought I deserved it.

I had broken the heart of a woman who only ever gave me love.

So I accepted the punishment.

But even through the wreckage, I still held onto one last plan.

It took me a couple of months, but I FINALLY kicked out that evil demon and sent her packing. With her COMPLETELY gone, I hatched what I thought would be the perfect plan.

It had to be perfect. Angie was hurt. I had to handle this delicately.

It was the Fourth of July, 1996.

I told Angela I needed to come over to her mom's house to get my key back—but that wasn't the real reason. The real reason was hope.

I was going to look her in the eye and tell her the truth:

That I was an idiot.

That I loved her.

That I made the worst mistake of my life.

Then I'd ask her to watch the 4th of July fireworks with me—just like we used to. Just one night. Just one chance. Maybe if I could sit beside her under that sky, the noise and light and memory would soften her heart. I'd reach for her hand, tell her I was ready to build the life we talked about. Tell her I'd spend the rest of my life making it right.

That was the plan. **Go. Now.**

When I pulled up, she was already at the door—key in hand. No emotion. No hesitation. Just an ending.

And then *he* came down the stairs.

A guy from high school. One of the many ass hats who always wanted to fight me. I was a boxer for the St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's Boxing Club in Slidell, Louisiana. I assume that he had seen an article in the newspaper of my Golden Gloves Championship win in High School and wanted to prove something. When that newspaper article came out, there were a lot of shitheads that came out of the woodwork who wanted to fight me. He told a friend of mine to have me go behind the Delchamps grocery store after school to fight him. I didn't show. He called me a coward...but I wasn't scared of him. I didn't want to get into trouble because I WAS A BOXER. I would have really hurt him, but if my coach would have found out, I would have been kicked off the boxing team... and I didn't want to get in trouble.

He looked at me like he won something.

"She's with me now."

Everything went red.

I don't remember throwing the first punch. Just the aftermath.

His face, bloodied. Shirt ripped. Him laying in the dirt looking up at me with fear in his eyes.

Angela's voice, sharper than I'd ever heard it.

"LEAVE AND NEVER SPEAK TO ME AGAIN."

Go. Now.

So I did.

I got in my car. Drove home.
Crawled into bed. And didn't move for a week.

No food. Just water. Just regret.

While I laid there, the fireworks I planned to watch with her cracked through the sky outside my window—loud, bright, and cruel.

They weren't a celebration.

They were a funeral.

I wanted to die.
But I didn't.

Not yet.

Chapter 3: The Demon Returns

I spent the better part of a week in bed.
Didn't eat. Didn't speak. Didn't move.

Angela was gone. And with her, the version of my future I had built in my mind.
It was quiet—the kind of quiet that hums like a siren in your ears. And I let it surround me.

And that's when Malisa showed up...*AGAIN*.

She knocked on the door like she'd forgotten something, like we were picking up a casual conversation. But that's not how it works.
Demons don't knock unless they know they'll be let in.

She saw me at my lowest and came offering comfort.
But it wasn't comfort—it was chaos with a friendly face.

And I took it.

Not because I believed her.
But because I didn't care.

Part of me thought maybe I deserved it.
After what I'd done to Angela, maybe this was just the fallout.

So I let Malisa back in. The lies. The drama. The manipulation. The drugs.
And just like before, she sank her hooks deep and didn't let go.

I couldn't stay in that house.
Every wall had Angela's fingerprints. Every corner echoed her laugh. Her presence was everywhere—just out of reach.

So I left.
Moved to Gatlinburg Tennessee with Malisa.

Not for peace—just for space.

But even the Tennessee mountains had ghosts.

Angela's father, Paul, used to live in Chattanooga. We'd driven there together more than once to visit him.

Angie and I had gone to Gatlinburg a couple of times and I loved the peace and beauty of the mountains. The Tennessee mountains speak to my soul.

I couldn't forget it, especially not that one Christmas.

"Stick with this guy, Angie. He's gonna be a millionaire."

Paul believed in me.

So did Angie at one time.

And now I was back in the same state—heartbroken, no money, worn thin.

Every winding mountain road reminded me of her.

Every cold morning felt like an agonizing memory I couldn't outrun.

It didn't last.

Malisa hadn't changed—if anything, she was worse. Meaner. Sneakier.

The lies got bolder. The chaos, louder. She cheated. Stole. Stirred destruction like it was her default setting.

And finally, I hit the wall...

I left.

For good this time.

I ended up in Sevierville, in a quiet little condo up on English Mountain. A resort-style place meant for tourists and honeymooners—but for me, it was a temporary bunker. A place to get quiet. To heal. A place to figure out what came next.

I wasn't looking for redemption.

Just stillness.

And for the first time in a long time... I had it.

Chapter 4: The Mountain

The mountain had other plans.

I didn't go there to disappear. I went to reset.

After finally cutting ties with Malisa, I needed somewhere quiet. Clean. A place where I could hear myself think again.

I found a condo at the top of English Mountain in Sevierville. It was peaceful—overlooking miles of trees and sky. Bald eagles soared below the balcony. There were no sirens, no chaos, no people pulling me in every direction.

Just stillness.

I thought that's what I needed. A breath. A little distance from the wreckage.

Then the snow came.

Being from South Louisiana, I thought I knew how to prepare for a storm.

I'd lived through hurricanes, floods, all of it. I figured a little snow couldn't compare.

But this wasn't "a little snow."

It was a full-on blizzard.

The kind that doesn't ask for permission. The kind that takes over.

The snow came fast and thick—dropping like concrete. It crushed tree limbs, knocked out power, pulled down the lines, and swallowed entire cars. The roads disappeared. People packed up and left the mountain.

I stayed.

And within 48 hours, I was completely cut off.

The power went out.

The heat vanished.

The food started to run low.

I had a fireplace, but barely enough wood. I wrapped myself in every blanket I could find and started rationing food. I thought about breaking into nearby condos for supplies. I didn't. Not because I couldn't—but because I was trying to be different.

Trying to build discipline where there had once been damage.

A week passed. My days were filled with finding firewood and getting water, at first by melting snow, but then later, boiling water from a running creek I found while foraging for wood.

And then, when I was almost to the point that desperation would force me to break into a stranger's condo, out of nowhere, I heard the familiar wop, wop, wop, wop ...a helicopter flew overhead and dropped crates of MREs. I think it was the National Guard. Didn't matter.

That cardboard-tasting food might as well have been steak.
It kept me going.

I was stuck up there for nearly three weeks. Alone. Cold. Quiet.

"Stick with this guy. He's gonna be a millionaire."

How could I ever be a millionaire. I was a loser. I couldn't even hold on to a woman who only WANTED to grow old with me.

And I remembered who I was back then—before the noise, before the demon, before I let it all slip.

The blizzard forced me to sit still. To look back.
To feel everything I'd buried.

Not as punishment.
Not even as redemption.
Just as truth.

When the snow finally melted and the roads reopened, I packed up and left.

I wasn't fixed.
I wasn't redeemed.

But I wasn't hiding anymore.

And that was a start.

Chapter 5: A Shadow In The French Quarter

When I got back from Tennessee, the first thing I did was buy a dozen red roses.

It wasn't a strategy. Just a feeling. Maybe enough time had passed. Maybe she missed me. Maybe if I showed up with the flowers, looked her in the eye, and owned it—I could reach her. Tell her I'd changed. That I was ready to be the man she always believed I could be.

So I called Angela.

She answered. I asked where she was. Told her I wanted to see her and bring her some flowers and talk.

She didn't miss a beat.

She said that "he" and her had "grown very close over the last year". "Give the flowers to your mom".

She wasn't mean about it, and I could hear sadness in her voice. Maybe she was just sad that I was sad. That's Angie.

Then she hung up.

I stood there, holding the roses, the silence doing more damage than the words.

That was it.

The final nail. No more hoping. No more maybe.

So I did exactly what she said. I gave the flowers to my mom.

Then I went inside, sat down, and listened to the stillness.

I was back in my parents' house.

No house of my own. No relationship. No real direction.

But I wasn't broken. Not fully. Not yet.

Because I still had the hustle.

That part of me never left.

Not long after, I met Danielle. She was a really nice girl, but she wasn't Angie, so she really didn't matter. She was a distraction from the depression, and she liked me more than I liked myself at the time.

One night she said, "Let's do something different—how about a vampire tour in the French Quarter?"

Why not?

Vampires. That's what I felt like inside. Undead. Like a new vampire that hasn't fully grasped the concept of feeding on blood yet. I knew I didn't want to die, but I didn't really want to live. My life had become a dark shadow of who I once was, and it hurt to face the light. I WAS a vampire.

We joined the tour group and wandered through the Quarter. The guide spun stories about old New Orleans—vampires, crimes, hauntings, seduction. It wasn't bad. The Quarter at night always had that pulse. A kind of theatrical tension. Dark, a little dangerous... familiar.

Then it happened.

We were in Pirates Alley, behind the cathedral. A group of gutter punks started heckling the guide—getting loud, getting too close. One of them crossed the line and laid hands on him.

I didn't think.

Go. Now.

I stepped in and dropped the guy. Clean. One punch.

The others ran. The crowd froze. The cops came.

Everyone backed me up.

After things calmed down, the owner of the tour company—Sidney Smith—pulled me aside.

"You want to walk the tours?" he asked. "Fifty bucks a night. Two hours. Cash. Just keep stuff like this from happening again."

Easy money.

So I took it.

For the next few months, I walked with the tours. Quiet. Watchful. A silent presence in the shadows. I listened to the stories, learned the route, picked up on the rhythm of the audience. Every night was the same: same streets, same tales, same emptiness echoing inside me.

I wasn't healed.

But I had a job to do.

And that was enough to keep me moving.

Sidney Smith was larger than life. He ran Haunted History Tours like a man who had cracked the code of New Orleans itself—part showman, part businessman, all heart. I started to look up to him as a kind of father figure. Not because I needed one—my dad, Joe Thomas, *the Coach*, already filled those shoes—but because Sidney represented something I hadn't seen up close before: success built on passion. He didn't just work—he created, inspired, *commanded*. Watching him taught me lessons I wouldn't fully understand until years later. He was a mentor in every sense of the word. More importantly, he helped me believe in myself at a time when I didn't even realize how much I needed to.

Then one day I heard about a company called Granton Marketing. It was the advertising division of DS-Max.

Ds-Max was a direct selling company...well, if I'm being honest, it was more like a cult than anything else.

DS-Max had the energy of a cult—in the best way. Everyone spoke the same language, followed the same daily rituals, and believed with almost religious intensity. There were chants, mantras, and “The Eight Steps” you lived by. It wasn't just a job—it was a lifestyle. A belief system. A movement. I worked with them briefly when I first met Angie. That's where I got the solar radios that I sold in Chattanooga.

They were doing what I'd done before at DS-Max - but door-to-door promotions. Just like the daiquiri cards I put together and sold years ago, but on a national scale. And the best office in the country?

Dallas. Run by a guy named Kevin Siebert.

I didn't have a plan. Just instinct.

I packed a bag, scraped together a couple grand, and left New Orleans.

Because maybe—just maybe—there was still a version of me out there worth chasing.

Chapter 6: The Eight Steps

When I showed up in Dallas, I had maybe a couple grand in my pocket and no clue where I was going to sleep.

But I knew one thing:

I was going to work for the best office in the country—and that meant **Kevin Siebert**.

Kevin wasn't just a manager. He was a psychopath with a quota.

Charismatic. Ruthless. Emotionless.

He offered to let me stay at his house... and when I got there, he pointed to the floor in the corner of the living room and said,

"That's your bed."

I should've known right then. But I didn't care. I wasn't here to be comfortable. I was here to *learn*.

And that's where I got introduced to the **Eight Steps to Success**—the daily mantra drilled into our skulls every morning in the pre-field meetings.

It wasn't just motivational—it was **militant**.

And somehow, it worked.

Because when you're out in 105-degree heat, knocking on 100 doors a day, wearing a suit and tie and getting told *no* ninety-nine times, these steps become survival gear.

Step 1: Have a Great Attitude

Not a good one. A *great* one. No matter what. No matter who slams a door in your face or curses you out.

You smile. You laugh. You move on.

Story:

It was 100 degrees, and I hadn't made a sale in three hours. My feet hurt, I was dehydrated, and my shirt was soaked from sweat. But I kept my energy up. I smiled like I'd just made a thousand bucks, because I knew one thing: attitude sells more than any script ever could.

At the last house, a woman answered the door with a scowl. I grinned and said, "I'm not here to waste your time—just here to make your day better. Do you like free pizza?" She cracked a smile, let me in, and asked my how many I needed to sell to hit my quota.

"Four more."

She said, "You just seemed like you should be miserable in this heat, but your smile says otherwise." She bought 5 of them, she said to give to her friends.

That's when it clicked—success shows up before the sale.

Step 2: Be on Time

You're not early? You're late.
Because the clock doesn't care.
And neither does opportunity.

Story:

Kevin had a rule—5 minutes late meant you didn't go in the field. I watched a kid get fired for showing up 10 minutes behind. Just enough to smell the meeting through the door. Gone. That lesson stuck.

Step 3: Be Prepared

Your pitch. Your products. Your territory. Your *mind*.
Preparation isn't just logistics—it's *mental armor*.

Story:

One morning in Dallas, I checked the weather and saw something the others didn't. A storm was coming—midday. Not a sprinkle. A *soaker*.

So before the team meeting, I hit a dollar store and bought every cheap umbrella they had. I think I spent twenty bucks total.

When that rain hit, it hit hard. Guys were out there getting drenched. Kevin didn't care. You worked rain or shine. But now suddenly, I was the only dry guy in the crew—with a trunk full of solutions.

I sold those umbrellas to the other salespeople *for ten bucks a piece*.

They thought I was doing them a favor. I was running a damn *side business* in the parking lot.

That's what preparation looks like.

See the storm coming—and *be the one selling umbrellas*.

Step 4: Work a Full Day

That means start early, finish late. No half days. No excuses.
You're tired? So is everyone else. Keep going.

Story:

One ridiculously hot summer day, it hit 107° in Dallas. My shoes were sticking to the sidewalk.

Everyone else tapped out early. I didn't.

I sold *four* between 5 and 7 p.m.—after most people had quit. That was my edge.

Step 5: Work Your Territory Correctly

Don't cherry-pick. Don't waste time. Hit the grid.

Every door. Every business. Every angle.

Story:

I had a partner once who skipped the “bad blocks.” Said no one there would buy. I looped back and worked them anyway. Sold three cards on that block. That was the day I learned: there's no such thing as a bad lead—just bad effort.

Step 6: Maintain a Great Attitude

Yes, they put it on the list *twice*.

That's how important it is.

Story:

Day from hell. No sales. Sunburned. Blisters on my feet.

At the last door, I made a joke about having the worst day in history. The lady laughed, said she admired my spirit, and bought *five*.

Never lose your smile. Never lose your fight.

Step 7: Know Why You're Here

Your “why” better be stronger than your fear.

Because this business? It breaks the weak.

Story:

My “why” was Angela at first. I wanted her to see the man I could become. Then it became my future. My kids. The family I didn't even have yet. That vision got me out of bed on days when I had nothing else.

Step 8: Take Control

Of the pitch. The interaction. The day. Your *life*.

Nobody's coming to save you. Control it, or be controlled.

Story:

There was this big-shot store manager who tried to punk me out mid-pitch. I took a breath, paused, then flipped the script.

“Look, you’re clearly in charge. So I’m gonna give you the VIP version. Sound good?”

He smiled. Listened. Bought.

That’s control.

These eight steps weren’t just sales rules. They became my *personal code*.

Because when everything else falls apart—when you’re heartbroken and when life knocks you down—you need *something* to hold onto.

These were mine.

I stayed in Dallas for about eight months. I learned more about business, grit, and *myself* than any school could’ve taught me.

And when it was time, I came back to New Orleans.

Changed.

Sharper.

And ready to build something *real*.

Chapter 7: The Viex-Carré Vampire

When I left Dallas, I wasn't the same guy who'd walked in with two grand and a suitcase full of desperation.

I had survived Kevin Siebert.

Sold in 105-degree heat.

I had literally heard a million NO's...and learned how to handle rejection without flinching, how to own a pitch, and how to rebuild from scratch—again and again.

Granton taught me the mechanics of hustle. It showed me what was possible—and also what I couldn't tolerate. I knew one thing for sure: I'd never work under someone like Kevin again. That man wasn't a mentor. He was volatility in a necktie.

So I came back to New Orleans with a simple mission:

Build it myself.

I moved back in with my parents. Not ideal—but temporary.

Because this time, I had a plan.

I was bringing Rhino Promotional Marketing back to life.

Same foundation as before: build a two-for-one coupon card, partner with local businesses, and sell it on the street for 20 bucks a pop. But now, I had Granton discipline in my veins. The hustle was cleaner. Faster. Sharper.

And by day, I hit the streets.

By night, I slipped back into the French Quarter.

Sidney was still running the vampire tours, and after my run doing security before Dallas, I didn't even need to explain myself. I was welcomed back without missing a beat.

Then the call came.

The guide was sick. The backup was gone. Sidney needed someone to lead the tour—*tonight*.

"Brett," he said, "can you do it?"

I didn't hesitate.

For months I'd studied the script. Watched the crowds. Learned every turn, every pause, every punchline.

But I wasn't going to just recite it.
I was going to **become** it.

That night, I transformed.

Velvet robe lined in red satin. Black riding boots. Ruffled white shirt. Long curls. Fangs.
I wasn't just playing a part. I was stepping into one.

The delivery wasn't robotic—it was magnetic. The crowd leaned in, laughed, gasped,
questioned what was real. I wasn't guiding a tour. I was commanding a stage.

It wasn't about tips. It wasn't about money.

It was about control.

Presence.

Identity.

Night after night, I owned it. The other guides hated me for it.
The crowds? They kept coming back.

Some followed me to the bar. Some gave me much more than that.

The vampire had become a local legend.

But here's the truth—clean, without theatrics:

Behind the robe and the fangs, I still carried the weight.

Angela.

The silence she left behind.

The things I hadn't yet earned back.

So I stayed busy. Distracted. Focused on the show.

And every night, before I hit the streets, I said the same thing:

Do good. Sell lots.

Even when it felt hollow.

Even when all I was selling... was an illusion.

Chapter 8: The Wrong Kind of Fire

When you're starving for validation, you'll eat anything.

By this point, I was living in two worlds.

By day, I was on the grind—selling coupon cards on the street, building Rhino back brick by brick.

By night, I became someone else—New Orleans' velvet-cloaked vampire, commanding crowds in the Quarter.

I had money in my pocket, women who chased me, a reputation that echoed in alleyways and bars.

But I knew better.

It looked solid from the outside, but underneath, it was all sand.

One rule kept me sane:

Don't date locals.

Tourists were easy. Safe. They left.

They couldn't stick around long enough for things to get real.

Then came Mara Cooper.

Petite, flowing long black hair, voice like an opera singer and eyes that saw straight through you.

She didn't try. Didn't chase. Didn't put on a show.

She had presence. Stillness. A kind of quiet power.

And she was local.

I met her through my buddy René, who gave ghost tours. He was smitten—convinced she was *the one*. When he asked me to give them a private romantic tour, I said yes. Loyalty, right?

We ended in Pirates Alley, all candlelight and old bricks. It was supposed to be his big moment.

Then we heard a scream.

A guy came running, purse in hand, barreling straight toward us with a woman chasing behind. Instinct kicked in—I stepped in and dropped him. He pulled a knife. We went to the ground. I held him there, yelling to René for help.

He froze. Just stood there.

"I'm calling the cops," he said, like that was all he could do.

I held that knife wielding guy on the ground, wrapped up in a choke hold for what seemed like an eternity until the police showed up.

When the cops handcuffed him, I immediately threw up. Not from fear—from the adrenaline comedown. The surge. The crash.

That night, Mara called me.

She didn't want René.
She wanted me.

Said I was brave. Said she couldn't stop thinking about me.
And just like that, I broke my own rule.

Mara wasn't a fling. She was full throttle.

Yoga at dawn. Running before lunch. Passion, intensity, and emotional landmines everywhere.
She pushed me. Challenged me. Got me back in shape—physically, at least.
But emotionally, it was a slow burn with a short fuse.

Then she got pregnant.

I wasn't sure what kind of future we had, but a part of me wanted to believe it could work.
Maybe this was the shot. The reset. A family. Something lasting.

I never got the chance.

She ended it without a word.
No talk. No warning. No "what do you want?"

Just gone.

I found out after the fact.

She terminated the pregnancy and went home to California.

And that was that.

Whatever hope I'd started to build around a second life, a legacy, a family—it disappeared just as quickly.

To her, I was nothing. Like I was just another stop in a story she didn't want to tell.

My life had become a series of abandonment stories, and for a guy with major abandonment issues, I was at the end of my proverbial rope.

Chapter 9: The Demon Returns...Again

Just when I thought that chapter was closed—she showed up.

Malisa.

Years had passed since Tennessee. She belonged to a version of me I had left behind. A scar that had mostly faded. But some people don't stay gone. They circle. They wait. And when they smell vulnerability, they move in.

It started quiet.

I caught a glimpse of her across the street, arms folded, just watching the tour from a distance. No words. No expression. Just there.

The second night, same thing.

The third? No doubt—it wasn't coincidence. She was following me.

And then, she stopped keeping her distance.

She was waiting at the end of my route in the alley—same place, same shadows.

"I missed you, Brett. I missed your cock."

That was her opening line. No apology. No "How have you been?" Just a weapon, unsheathed.

And yeah—for half a second, something stirred. Not because I wanted her. Not because I missed her. But because pain has a memory.

And mine still had gaps.

Angela. Mara. The version of myself I'd been trying to claw back to.

But this time... I didn't fold.

"Go! Now!" I heard Angela screaming at me in my mind. With that, I walked away.

No drama. No words.

It wasn't easy.

When someone's had their hooks in you before, part of you remembers how easy it was to let them in.

But not this time.

I walked away shaking—but standing.

Because I finally saw her for what she really was.
Not a person. Not even a temptation.
Just an echo of everything I'd outgrown.

She didn't want love. She wanted control.
To own something that had already outlived her.

And for once, I didn't give her the satisfaction.

Still, her presence stirred something up.
It cracked a few walls I'd worked hard to rebuild. Not enough to bring me down, but enough to remind me the work wasn't done.

She wasn't the storm.
But she was the match.

And I could already feel the heat building.

The real storm was still coming. Just not from her.

Chapter 10: The Vampire Slayer

I was deep into the vampire tour life when she showed up.

By then, I'd built a name in the French Quarter. The cape, the boots, the voice—I knew how to own a room. I didn't chase anymore. People came to me.

And I kept it simple. I WAS THE VAMPIRE. Everyday started at dusk. I haunted the french quarter feeding on the energy of whoever would let me. Every night was a party and I kept myself numbed just enough with booze, chicks and drugs to ward off the truth. I missed Angie and I was a worthless piece of shit for hurting her.

No dating locals.

Tourists leave. Locals stay. And staying meant risk. I would wind up hurting someone who didn't deserve to be hurt, so I avoided serious relationships like the plague.

Hookups were easy. Flings came and went. That kept things clean. Predictable. Anything to fill the empty void left in my soul where Angie once lived.

Then came the night that would change my life forever. April 1, 2001.

I was wrapping up a tour one night and invited a girl from the tour to meet me at The Dungeon—New Orleans' most bizarre little corner of nightlife. Think iron bars, red lighting, and a mood so strange it felt like a vampire club. There were people dancing in cages, walls with human skulls as the bricks and a vibe that was unique to New Orleans. Think Addams Family meets Moulin Rouge.

I walked in and as I got to the top of the stairs on the second floor, I saw her. On the edge of the dance floor, drink in hand, lit by a low blacklight glow. The song playing was "Killing in the Name" by Rage Against the Machine. She wasn't performing. Wasn't trying. Just bouncing to the beat—totally in her own world.

She glanced at me, then looked away like I was nothing special. I couldn't keep my eyes off of her. Why was she there alone? She was REALLY pretty! And then it happened. She looked over at me again, caught me noticing and quickly looked away. A cute little smirk appeared on the corner of her mouth. A few moments had passed, she cautiously looked at me again and smiled. "Gotcha!" I thought to myself.

That got my attention.

Eyes locked on to hers, I glided across the dance floor like Lestat to his prey...ruffled shirt, leather pants, black vest and a black velvet and satin cape...

"I saw you looking at me. What's your name?"

"Buffy," she said.

Oh my God! She was ADORABLE!

I smirked. "Oh yeah? Like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*?"

I have lost count how many times a woman had told me her name was "Buffy" it was very cliché - I was the "Vampire" and they were going to "Slay" me. Old joke. I heard it too many times.

"If your name's really Buffy, I'm gonna marry you."

She didn't miss a beat—pulled out her driver's license and held it up like it was the Holy Grail.

Buffy. For real.

"Well, damn," I said. "Can we go on a few dates first?"

We laughed. We danced. And we did go on those dates. A few turned into many. And somewhere in the middle of it all, she became part of my day-to-day.

Not a whirlwind. Not a distraction.

Something steady.

She felt safe—not because she was simple, but because she was solid. She wasn't impressed by costumes or stories. She liked me without the show. The "Brett Thomas Show"

That's rare in the French Quarter.

She reminded me of Angela—not in looks, not in words, but in presence. That gentle calm I'd been chasing ever since I lost it.

Buffy had two kids from a previous marriage. Her ex walked out and never looked back. To this day, I have no idea why. I guess someone could say the same thing about my kicking out Angela. I don't know what caused him to leave Buffy, but I am glad that he did.

She is the type of lady that comes along only once in a lifetime...well, in my case, twice.

Meanwhile, she held it all together—her home, her work, her family BY HERSELF.

And she still chose me. I didn't overthink it. I just leaned in.

On September 11, 2002, we flew to the Bahamas and got married on the beach. Flights were cheap—one year after the towers fell. No frills. No audience. Just a quiet ceremony and a woman who believed in second chances.

For a while, it was good. Really good.

Chapter 11: The Lister

I never expected to walk back through the doors of Granton.

Eight months in Dallas under Kevin Siebert had taught me more than enough: how to lead, how to sell, how to absorb rejection like a boxer rolling with punches. I left that world with calluses, not scars—and I brought the lessons home. Back in New Orleans, I rebuilt Rhino Promotional Marketing from the ground up. I was making money on my own terms. I wasn't looking back.

But opportunity doesn't knock.
It detonates.

It came in the form of a party coupon.

Celebration Station—a modest amusement park with go-karts, pizza, games, and just enough nostalgia to trigger parents and kids alike—was struggling. I walked in with a pitch: a birthday bundle worth \$500, stacked with two-for-ones and game tokens, all wrapped up in a crisp \$20 promo card.

They said yes.

I printed a thousand cards. Sold every last one.

Then came the call.

The VP of Celebration Station wanted answers. New Orleans had gone from worst-performing to top five in the country. He wanted to know what changed—and if we could do it **everywhere**.

I told him yes.

I had no idea how I was going to pull it off.
But I knew exactly who could help.

The name that came to mind was **Ian Ringle**.

I'd met him at Granton's corporate HQ in Toronto on a trip to corporate with Kevin Seibert.—a man who didn't need volume to make an impression. Calm, sharp, unshakable. The opposite of Kevin Siebert in every way.

When I picked up the phone, I could hear the edge in his voice.

“Didn't expect to hear from **you**.”

Fair. In his mind, I'd taken the blueprint and gone rogue—using their system to build my own thing. He wasn't wrong. But what I built worked. And now I was scaling.

“Ian, I’ve got something for you. Celebration Station wants a national campaign. I’ll bring the product—you bring the team.”

Pause.

“How many cards?”

“Ten thousand. Twenty bucks a pop.”

The tension dropped. I could hear the math clicking in his head. Because businessmen don’t need apologies—they need value. And I had it.

He said yes.

Just like that, I was back in the system. But this time, I wasn’t a soldier.

I was the one writing the map.

That’s when I officially became a **Lister**.

In Granton terms, the Lister created the product—the deals, the offers, the value stack. We didn’t knock on doors. We built what the foot soldiers would sell.

And I wasn’t guessing what worked. I knew.

I’d stood on hot blacktop parking lots slinging daiquiri cards and pizza deals in the middle of Louisiana summers. I knew what made people pause. What made them buy.

Now, I was the architect.

I went on a tear.

Restaurant after restaurant. Town after town. The pitch was honed down to a blade:

“Hi, I’m Brett with Granton Marketing. We run national advertising campaigns. I’m looking for one standout restaurant in this area to feature on our next round. I’ve chosen you.”

Simple. Strategic. It hit every psychological nerve: **Fear. Indifference. Greed. Sense of Urgency.**

FIGS. We lived by it.

The signups came fast: Copeland’s in Houma. Carmine’s in Metairie. Papa John’s. Pizza Hut. All names that moved cards—and money.

Within weeks, the New Orleans office had six months of product locked and loaded.

We weren't just selling.

We were winning.

Then the phone rang again.

George Graffy. George was one of those higher ups in Granton. He would later take Ian's role when he retired.

"What are you doing today?"

"Sippin' piña coladas on the beach in Biloxi."

He laughed. Then paused. "Really? It's Wednesday. Why aren't you out working?"

"I know. But we've got a six-month backlog. My job's done."

Another pause. "Hold on" he said... "I'm gonna call you right back"

About 10 minutes passed before he did. That was the moment everything shifted again.

He had just confirmed that I was telling the truth, and he saw that the New Orleans office was breaking records with the product that I had signed for them, and he confirmed that there was 6 months of inventory ready to go.

"Brett, apparently you have a gift, so we can't have you out there on vacation. We need you in other places".

Truth be told, I do not think it is a gift. Anyone could do what I do if they see enough people. EVERYTHING is a numbers game. That's what I learned in the field.

So...now I wasn't just the Lister anymore.

I was the guy they called when the fire was already burning.

They gave me a new title. "Troubleshooter"

But to the office managers I was sent to help, they called me "The Wolf".

Chapter 12: The Wolf

There's a rare kind of pride in being the one they call when everything's on fire.

At Granton, they called the role *Troubleshooter*.

But what it really meant was this:

Walk into chaos. Find the signal in the noise. Fix what's broken—and fast.

They flew me first class. Luxury car rentals. 4 star hotel suites.

Then dropped me into offices on the verge of collapse.

Low morale?

Weak leadership?

No momentum?

That's where I thrived.

Because I'd lived every rung of that ladder—repping on the street, building the product, running teams, closing deals. I didn't bring empty motivation. I brought proof of concept. I brought results.

I'd walk into a room and say nothing at first.

Just listen.

Because the vibe of an office tells you everything—the body language, the complaints, the excuses.

And I didn't sugarcoat it.

If the leadership was soft, I said it.

If the product was weak, I replaced it.

If the reps were discouraged, I gave them something real to sell—something they could win with *today*.

I signed deals on the ground. Created fresh cards. Stacked value until the phones started ringing again.

And every city I landed in?

Turnaround.

Kansas City. Omaha. Oklahoma City. Tulsa. St. Louis. Lincoln.

But it was Milwaukee that changed everything.

That's where I met **Chris Orkney**.

He was a storm in human form.

Charisma turned up to eleven. Brilliant in bursts, reckless in others.

But he had something few did—**loyalty**. His reps would go to war for him.

We clicked right away.

At first, it was strictly business—tweaking strategy, cleaning up the operation, keeping product moving.

But the conversations got deeper.

Over drinks.

Then over lines of coke.

Then over late nights and big ideas.

Chris was tired of Granton. Tired of the politics.

“We’re building their machine. Why not build our own?”

I laughed it off. I had my place. My reputation. I didn’t need more chaos.

But he kept talking.

Kept planting seeds.

And then came the offer:

“I’ll move my entire office to New Orleans. We’ll start fresh. You bring the product—I’ll bring the team...LET’S BUILD OUR EMPIRE!”

It was wild.

It was risky.

And it sounded like a hell of a ride.

Because here’s the truth:

I never walked away from a challenge.

And some of my best lessons?

I learned them the hard way.

“Only if we call it Rhino Promotional Marketing” I said.

Chapter 13: Rhino Promotional Marketing

Chris did exactly what he said he was going to do.

He packed up his entire Milwaukee crew, rolled south in a caravan of U-Hauls, and rolled into New Orleans like a band on tour. It was electric. These weren't just reps—they were believers. They followed Chris because he inspired loyalty. And now, by extension, they believed in us.

We set up shop in a three-bedroom apartment off Veterans Highway in Metairie. Tight quarters? Absolutely. But the energy was undeniable. It felt like a startup in its purest form—raw, real, and burning with potential.

We rented a modest office and hit the ground running.

The phones lit up. The pavement crews got moving.

I was out every day signing real product—solid, valuable deals.

Chris? At first, he was at his best—motivating, energizing, turning ambition into momentum.

And for a little while, it clicked.

The numbers were strong. The cards were clean. The team was growing. And for the first time, it felt like I was building something with real legs—not just a hustle, but a foundation.

But momentum has to be managed. And behind the scenes, the cracks were forming.

Chris started drifting.

Showed up later. Snapped faster.

And the drugs? They weren't hidden anymore—they were baked into the daily routine.

His BMW Shark convertible became a symbol. Sleek. Flashy. A head-turner.

We thought he paid for it himself.

We were wrong.

Turns out, that car—and a lot more—was paid for with company funds. Funds meant for payroll. For operations. For the future we were all building together.

Then one day, he vanished.

No warning. No goodbye.

Walked into the bank, cleaned out the company account and disappeared. Just like that.

I didn't even get a phone call.

He left behind unpaid reps, unfinished deals, and clients asking questions I didn't have answers for.

And me?

He left me holding the weight.

I was angry. Of course I was.

But I wasn't broken.

Because I'd been here before.

And every time life knocks me down, I don't stay there long.

When the dust cleared, I focused on what was next.

Just before the fallout, I'd met a guy. A web designer. His name was Maven and he showed me the basics—HTML, domains, hosting. It wasn't much, but it was enough.

Enough to spark a new idea.

I saw the shift coming—small businesses were about to need websites like they needed air. They just didn't know it yet.

“See the storm coming and be the guy selling the umbrellas”

And I was already in front of them.

It wasn't a master plan. Not yet.

It was a flicker. A signal. And I had the drive to chase it.

Chris took the money.

But he didn't take my name.

He didn't take my fire.

And he sure as hell didn't take my future.

That belonged to me.

Chapter 14: The Day I Met My Why

She arrived on October 20, 2003.

Morgan.

My daughter. My focus. My reset button.

The first time I held her, the world didn't just pause—it rearranged itself. One tiny hand wrapped around my finger and suddenly everything aligned. It wasn't about the past anymore. It was about what came next.

In that hospital room, I felt a quiet certainty:

This is why I'm here.

Not for ego.

Not for redemption.

But for her.

That moment shifted something permanent. The drive that had once been fueled by pain, revenge, and noise... now had clarity. I didn't want to prove people wrong—I wanted to prove her right. That she was safe. That she mattered. That her father would rise and meet the moment.

I didn't just want success.

I wanted **stability**.

I wanted her to grow up knowing that her dad *showed up*.

Buffy was incredible.

Composed, steady, strong through it all.

We had our hands full—two kids already under the roof and now a newborn in our arms. Money was tight, sleep was rare, and the days blurred. But I was waking up differently.

I had direction.

Rhino Web Studios was still in the crib alongside Morgan. I was selling websites out of the house, still figuring out code between diaper changes and invoices. It wasn't glamorous. It wasn't even sustainable yet.

But it had legs. And now, it had a purpose.

I started waking up earlier.

Staying up later.

Selling harder.

Learning faster.

I wasn't chasing clients—I was building a future.

Morgan gave me something long before she could talk:

Focus.

She didn't know it, but she brought a storm into stillness. I stopped looking back. Stopped seeing myself as the guy with a messy past and a long list of regrets.

Instead, I started seeing what she might see one day.

A father.

A builder.

A man who didn't run.

She didn't save me with words.

She didn't have to.

She saved me with presence. With timing. With that quiet, powerful reminder that real love gives you something to fight for beyond yourself.

I didn't need to be perfect.

I just needed to be **present**.

Every single day.

And if I could keep showing up...

If I could keep pushing forward...

If I could keep whispering those four words to myself every morning—

Do good. Sell lots.

—then maybe, just maybe, she'd never need to meet the man I used to be.

Only the man I became *because of her*.

Chapter 15: When Katrina Came

Buffy was eight months pregnant with Mina when the storm began to whisper its name.

Katrina.

We'd heard names like it before. Gulf storms were part of life in New Orleans. You stock up, you board up, you ride it out.

But this time felt different.

The sky was too still.

The air, too thick.

The city knew—before the radar did—that something big was coming.

And when it hit, it didn't knock.

It leveled.

Our home was spared the worst. A miracle, really. But New Orleans? It was underwater.

The French Quarter emptied. The streets filled with silence and sludge. Tourism vanished. The heartbeat of the city went flat. In an instant, everything I was doing to provide—vampire tours, coupon cards, street-level sales—was gone.

I had two stepkids, one daughter in diapers, and another on the way.

No income. No backup plan.

Just a computer... and a decision to make.

Then came **October 11, 2005.**

In the middle of a city still gutting houses and grieving its dead, our daughter **Mina** was born.

A quiet, steady flame in the darkness.

She didn't cry much.

She just looked around—like she was here to observe the rebuild.

And in that moment, something clicked. Again.

Before the storm, web design was a hobby. A few lessons from a friend, a little trial and error, and a curiosity I hadn't fully tapped into. But after the flood, it became something more:

A lifeline.

I looked around and saw the shift—roofers, contractors, insurance adjusters were flooding into the city. They had trucks, tools, and manpower—but no websites. No visibility. No credibility online.

And I knew how to sell.

More importantly, I knew how to **position**.

So I got to work.

Fast websites. Clean branding. Local SEO before most people even knew what that was. I wasn't trying to win awards—I was trying to get these businesses **found**. And paid.

That was the spark that became **Rhino Web Studios**.

I didn't name it *Rhino* by accident.

A rhinoceros doesn't tiptoe.

It doesn't ask for permission.

It charges. Full force. Thick-skinned. Unstoppable.

And that's who I had become.

I wasn't building websites.

I was building **come-back stories** for men and women trying to get back on their feet.

I was giving them digital storefronts when their real ones had been washed away.

And in doing so—I was building mine too.

And then another "Happy Accident". A lady I was selling a website to told me she liked that my company had a local touch.

I asked, "What do you mean?"

"Right Here In New Orleans... that's what Rhino stands for, right?"

I think back on that moment like that was the universe telling me I was on the right track.

"Of course it does", I quipped.

It started small. A client here. A referral there.

But I stayed focused.

While the city cleaned up, **I locked in.**

While others waited on FEMA, I knocked on doors.

I made calls. I made promises, then delivered them.

Because I had daughters who depended on me.

Because I had something to prove—not to critics or ghosts—but to the man in the mirror.

Katrina took a lot.

But it gave me something I'd never really had before:

Clarity.

This wasn't just about making it anymore.

This was about building something so strong, so solid, so damn resilient...

That no storm would ever take it away again.

Chapter 16: The Storm Inside the House

Katrina came and went. The waters receded.
New Orleans began to rise again.
And so did I.

Rhino Web Studios was taking shape. What started as a hustle had become a business. Clients were calling. The city needed websites, and I had found my lane.

From the outside, things looked good.
I had a wife.
beautiful children.
A roof. A routine. A reason to keep moving forward.

We had survived the hurricane.

But the most dangerous storms aren't the ones you see on the radar.
They're the ones that brew *quietly*, in the walls of your home.

Buffy had changed. Slowly. Almost invisibly.

She wasn't angry. She was vacant.
The laughter faded. The conversations stopped.
Eventually, so did the affection.

I assumed it was exhaustion, or the weight of motherhood. Mina had just been born. The city was still a mess. We were all running on fumes. She was still FURIOUS with me over Chris Orkney's bullshit, But this was something else.

She stopped sleeping in our bed.
Stopped looking at me.
The sparkle I'd once seen in her eyes—that glow that stopped me in my tracks the first night we met—was gone.

And then one night, it hit like a gut punch.

“I hate you,” she said.
“I wish you'd murder me.”

That wasn't a fight. That was a cry from somewhere deep, and dark, and hurting.

I stood there, stunned.
No one had taught me how to navigate postpartum depression.
No one ever talked about it where I came from.

I tried to hold the line, but months in, I had to ask the question out loud.

“Do you still love me?”

“No.”

It was ice-cold. No hesitation. Just as sharp as Angela’s “Leave and never speak to me again”

So I asked the next question—half-defense, half-desperation.

“So if I go find someone else, that wouldn’t bother you?”

She rolled her eyes.

“Who the f*** would want you?”

That’s when something shifted.

Not rage. Not revenge. Just a deep, hollow silence inside me. A space that wanted to be filled.
So I went and filled it.

I did exactly what I said I would do.
And I told her.

She didn’t fight.

She didn’t cry.

She just left—moved in with her mother, took the kids, and the door closed behind her. Just like Angie had done.

And just like that, the life I’d built, the family I thought I’d repaired, fractured.

WHO THE HELL LOSES HIS FAMILY TWICE?????

The truth?

It wasn’t about wanting another woman.

It was about wanting *to be wanted*.

But this time... something was different.

Angela was a heartbreak.

Mara was a fracture.

But this—this was something I hadn’t felt before.

A kind of *emptiness* that didn't come with grief.
It came with **silence**.

And in that silence, I started slipping.

I told myself I was fine. I focused on work. I stayed productive.

But late at night, when the house, still littered with toys and a mess steadily building up around me, was quiet and the phone didn't ring... something darker started whispering.

It wasn't the storm outside that would bring me down.

It was the one already inside me.

And the next chapter?

That's where it all began to unravel.

Chapter 17: The Devil in a Glass Pipe

When Buffy left, something inside me didn't explode—it just shut off.

No screaming. No dramatic collapse. Just silence.
A stillness that pressed down like weight I couldn't push off.

The house was quiet.
Toys still on the floor.
Three chairs at the table that no one would sit in.
And the question echoing in my head:

What kind of man loses everything—twice?

That thought didn't break me.
It numbed me.

I started slipping, slowly at first.
Cocaine—something familiar.
Something I'd danced with before and thought I understood.

It gave me just enough energy to keep moving, just enough illusion to keep pretending I was fine.

Then one day, I went to pick up a bag. My dealer didn't have any.

"I got something better," he said.
"Ever tried Tina?"

Crystal meth.

He promised it would lift the weight. Erase the pain. Silence the noise.

I didn't ask questions.
I took it home.
Smoked it.

And for a moment, it did everything he said it would.

No pain.
No guilt.
No voices reminding me I'd failed.

It felt like peace.
But it wasn't.
It was a trapdoor to hell.

The fall was fast.

What started as “every now and then” became daily. Then hourly. Then *constant*.

I wasn’t chasing a high.

I was running from the crash.

And the crash always came—louder, darker, more violent every time.

I stopped recognizing myself in the mirror.

Eyes hollow. Skin dull.

Hands twitching even when I hadn’t used.

I scratched my arms raw, convinced something was under the skin.

To this day, the scars are still there to remind me.

Sleep came in short bursts.

Paranoia whispered through the blinds.

Pills to go down, glass pipes, shadows, silence and an uncomfortable buzzing in my brain.

I’d see shadow people from the corners of my eyes, and when I closed my eyes, it felt like there were no walls around me. Like I was floating uncontrollably in space

And still—I woke up.

Every time I did, I’d look in the mirror and think:

Why am I still here?

I didn’t want to die.

But I didn’t know how to live either.

The only thread I held onto—the last flicker of hope—was the thought that maybe Buffy would call.

Maybe she’d forgive me.

Maybe she would come home.

I could be with my girls. Try again.

But that call never came.

And so I kept drifting—further from my family, further from myself, further from anything that felt *real*.

I wasn't the vampire.

I wasn't the salesman.

I wasn't the Wolf.

I wasn't the father.

I was just a ghost with a pulse, floating from one high to the next.

Just a man moving through smoke. A soulless vampire in his own story.

Chapter 18: Spiraling

There wasn't some dramatic line I crossed.
No declaration. No breakdown.
No moment where I said,

"Today's the day I lose everything."

That's how addiction works.
It doesn't blow through the front door.
It seeps in—quiet, steady—through the cracks.

At first, I still looked the part.
Taking client calls. Attending meetings.
Half in, half out—going through the motions.

But under the surface?
There was nothing left.
Just a hollow shell powered by thick white smoke and survival.

Meth didn't make me feel good.
It made me feel *nothing*.
And that was exactly what I wanted.

No guilt.
No shame.
No grief.

I didn't want to think about Angela.
Or Buffy.
Or those words that still echoed:

"*Who the f** would want you?*"*

So I used.
Morning. Night. Before calls. After calls.
Every quiet moment became a threat—so I made sure there were none.

Three days awake. Two days crashed.
Then repeat.

The only people I kept around were users.
Not because they lifted me up, but because they didn't ask questions.
They were surviving just like I was—and in that world, *truth* is unspoken but understood.

There was one guy—**Mark**—who became a kind of companion in the chaos.
We didn't talk recovery. We didn't fake hope.
We just shared the silence and the high.

One day I stopped by, thinking I'd hit the usual rhythm: smoke, zone out, move on.

But Mark had something new.
He pulled out a needle.

"Ever tried shooting it?" he asked, like he was offering a cup of coffee.

I didn't hesitate.

"No. And I don't want to see it either. It's bad enough that we smoke this shit."

"You mind if I do?"

"I do. That's f***ing creepy, man."

So I left.

A few hours later, my phone rang.

Mark was dead.

Heart attack. Overdose.

Just like that—gone.

The same man I had shared a pipe with.
The same man who knew the rhythm of my ruin better than most.

Gone.

I wish I could say that moment woke me up.

It didn't.
That's not how it works when you're that deep in it.

But it did something.

That night, I sat at the edge of my bed and whispered into the dark:

"How long until that's me?"

I wasn't ready to stop.
But I was finally *scared*.

Not just of dying.
But of surviving like this.
Of slipping so far that my daughters would never know the man I once was—or the one I still wanted to become.

Because buried underneath the wreckage was still *something real*.

I'd worn many faces in my life—salesman, performer, builder.
But this version?
The one using just to feel nothing?

He couldn't survive.

I would have to kill him.

Chapter 19: The Courtroom Door

I didn't walk into that courtroom expecting a miracle.
I walked in to face the music.

After everything—my addiction, my absence, the wreckage I'd left behind—I was prepared to let Buffy go with dignity. I wasn't there to argue. I wasn't there to beg.
I was there to **own it**.

She had every reason to close the book on me.
The lawyers. The paperwork. The support of a family who had seen her cry too many times because of me.

To them, I was beyond repair.

And maybe, for a long time, I believed that too.

But as I sat there, the buzz of courthouse whispers around me, I looked across the room...

And I saw her.

Not the woman I had hurt.
Not the woman I'd lost.

But **Buffy**.

The woman who once danced under black lights with a red drink in her hand and gave me a second chance before I even deserved the first.

And in that moment, everything inside me said:

Go. Now.

No hesitation. No strategy. Just movement.

I stood up.
Crossed the courtroom.
Looked her in the eyes and asked a single question:

"What's wrong?"

Her voice cracked. Her eyes filled.

"I don't want to do this."

That was it. No speech. No theatrics.

So I did the only thing that felt right.
I held out my hand—like I had nothing left but hope—and said:

“Then let’s go home.”

And she took it.

The entire courtroom froze.
You could feel the oxygen shift.
Even her attorney sat speechless.
Shock. Disbelief. Silence.

But we walked—side by side—right out the front door.

No grand finale. No applause.

Just two people choosing *not* to quit.

There were no movie-scene apologies in the car.
No sweeping confessions.

Just a quiet, powerful understanding:
That the man she married still existed.
And that I was finally ready to fight like hell to become him again.

I didn’t get my wife back because I was lucky.
I didn’t get her back because I earned it with words.

I got her back because **I showed up**.
Because she saw in me something I had almost forgotten how to see in myself:

The will to rise.

And from that day forward, I knew—
Redemption isn’t granted. It’s built.

One step.
One choice.
One act of courage at a time.

Chapter 20: Quitting The Devil Cold

Getting Buffy back was nothing short of a miracle.

But I knew better than to mistake a second chance for a guarantee.

Love doesn't stay because you ask it to.

It stays when you fight for it—with everything you've got.

And I still had one last war to fight.

The devil wasn't wearing horns or dragging a pitchfork. My devil was Tina and she had a grip on my soul.

Even after everything, she still had a piece of me.

Not every day. Not visibly. But it lingered—just beneath the surface.

And if I was going to be the man Buffy brought back...

That piece had to go.

So I did the unthinkable.

I quit.

Cold.

No rehab.

No meetings.

Just a decision.

And a door I promised not to walk back out of.

I came home, looked Buffy in the eye, and handed her everything—

Wallet. Keys. Credit cards. Phone.

Anything that could give temptation a crack to crawl through.

"Don't let me leave," I said.

She nodded. And she didn't.

Then I went to bed.

And I stayed there.

There's no poetic way to describe meth withdrawal.

It's not dramatic—it's *visceral*.

Quitting meth cold turkey feels like dying—slowly, loudly, and without ceremony.

Your body turns on you first. Every cell screams in silence. Your skin feels like it's buzzing, crawling, twitching from the inside out. Your bones ache like they're mourning something. You can't sit still, but moving hurts. It's a paradox: restless fatigue. You want to sleep for a year, but the second you close your eyes, your brain flips on like a broken neon sign—flashing memories, regrets, hallucinations, demons. There's no peace, only static.

Then come the cravings. They're not just mental; they're physical. Your jaw clenches. Your teeth ache. Your fingertips tingle. You can almost taste it in the back of your throat. It's a ghost in your bloodstream, and it wants its body back.

Emotionally, you're stripped bare. Everything hurts. Guilt, shame, loneliness—they all crowd around you like vultures. You cry without knowing why. You rage at nothing. You plead with God, or the ceiling, or anyone who will listen, "Just make it stop." You hate yourself and love the drug, even though it's killing you. You feel pathetic for missing something that ruined your life.

Time distorts. Minutes stretch into eternities. Days melt into each other. You forget when you last ate, or showered, or smiled. Sleep finally comes in broken waves, thick with nightmares and sweat. You wake up soaked, shaking, and ashamed.

But then—after days, maybe weeks—you get a sliver of clarity. A moment where your head quiets, your body steadies. It's brief, but it's real. You realize you're still alive. Still here.

At one point, I stood up and looked down.

There was a perfect outline of my body soaked into the sheets—like I'd evaporated and left a ghost behind.

The room smelled like chemicals.

Like what a beauty salon smells like... not pretty

Like something was trying to crawl out of me and couldn't.

And maybe it was.

Because addiction isn't just physical.

It's spiritual.

And this wasn't just detox.

This was **an exorcism.**

I spent two weeks in that house killing that part of me that needed Tina.

I held the line.

And slowly... the monster started to lose its grip.

They don't tell you this part about recovery:

That your brain doesn't work right for a long time.

That you forget how to feel joy.

That laughter sounds foreign.

That sunlight feels like a stranger.

But I kept going.

I watched my daughters eat cereal at the kitchen table and reminded myself what I was doing this for.

Staring at them and imagining the man I wanted to become.

Buffy never let go of my hand, even when she had every reason to.

She gave me the **space to heal**—but not to hide.

That was love.

It took nearly a year before I could say I felt *normal* again.

Before the urges became whispers instead of screams.

Before the mirror showed me someone human.

But I made it.

No rehab.

No twelve-step meetings.

Just a man, a bed, a wife who believed, and a whole lot of God's mercy.

I didn't just quit meth.

I murdered the man inside of me that I hated.

And in doing so, I gave my daughters their father back.

I gave my wife a husband.

And I gave myself a future.

Through all of this, every single day I thought of Angie. My life would be very different if I was still with her.

Chapter 21: Brick by Brick

Getting clean didn't just clear my mind.
It *lit a fire*.

I wasn't looking back anymore.
I wasn't asking, "*What if?*"
The only direction was forward.

I had lost time—years I couldn't get back.
But I still had the one thing that mattered most:
The power to build.

There was no blueprint.
No investors.
No promises.

Just a beat-up laptop, a handful of starter websites, and a voice in my head that said:

"You're not going back. So build forward."

I dove headfirst into the world of web development.

No college. No classroom.
Just **Google, YouTube, and grit.**

What I lacked in formal education, I made up for with **discipline**.
Not the kind you read in a book—the kind forged in the fire.
From knocking on a hundred doors a day for a single yes.
From hearing "no" so many times that it lost its sting.

I wasn't just learning design.
I was learning how to deliver value.
How to turn ideas into tools.
How to solve real problems for real businesses.

In the early days, we worked from home.

Buffy's son Julian joined me. Together, we scraped together around \$75K that first year.
Not life-changing money, but it felt like we'd struck gold—because we had *freedom*.

I was home for dinner.
I was present with my girls.
I was sober.

And for a while, that was enough.

But eventually... I felt the ceiling closing in.

Not because I was ungrateful.
Because I had more to give.
Because I wasn't just building a business. I was building a legacy.

And here's what I realized:

People don't want websites.
They want what websites *create*:
Visibility. Credibility. Opportunity. Growth.

So I stopped selling "websites"... and started selling *futures*.

I'd sit across from a business owner and ask:

"What does your life look like when you're at the top of Google?"

That question opened doors.

I got a small office.
Hired an assistant.
Then a designer.
Then another.

We outgrew the house.
We became a *real company*.

The work leveled up.
The prices followed.
And the word started to spread:

"If you want it done right, call Brett at Rhino."

We weren't surviving anymore.
We were scaling.

I didn't build Rhino Web Studios overnight.
I built it *brick by brick*.

With discipline.
With consistency.
With a refusal to settle for who I was yesterday.

I wasn't just climbing out of the hole.
I was building a tower.

And I was doing it for something greater than success...

I was doing it for them.

For Buffy.
For Morgan.
For Mina.
For Julian.

They were no longer just my reason to recover—
They were my reason to rise.

Angela's ghost still visited me in the quiet moments.
But now, her voice didn't haunt me.
It fueled me.

And every time I heard her whisper...

"Do good. Sell lots."

I smiled.
Because I finally understood what that meant.

Chapter 22: The Rise of Rhino

Rhino Web Studios wasn't born in a boardroom.

It was built in the ashes—after the storm, after the struggle, after the second and third chances.

It started humbly.

A laptop.

A handful of clients.

A head full of knowledge earned the hard way.

But I didn't just want to survive anymore.

I wanted to build something real.

Something that *mattered*.

Once we moved the business out of the house and into a real office, everything shifted.

Clients took us seriously. More importantly—I took *myself* seriously.

I stopped thinking like a freelancer...

And started acting like a founder.

I wasn't here to build "pretty websites."

I was here to build **engines**.

Tools that didn't just sit there looking good—they *worked*.

They drove traffic.

They created income.

They built credibility.

I realized something most designers miss:

Pixels don't pay the bills. Results do.

And more often than not, what my clients really wanted?

 Their phone to ring.

So I stopped selling websites...

And started selling **growth**.

Eventually, we outgrew our small office and bought a 3000 square foot corporate headquarters in Slidell, Louisiana, just north of New Orleans.

The business model evolved.

I raised prices—not from ego, but from *value*.

Every night I studied: SEO, funnels, UX, content strategy.

I wasn't chasing sales. I was building a sharper sword.

And it paid off.

Clients began finding *me*.

Then came a commercial on **The Walton & Johnson Show**—one of New Orleans' biggest radio powerhouses.

That ad hit like a lightning bolt.

The phones lit up.

Momentum surged.

We started building systems.

Packages.

A recurring plan: \$99/month for hosting, maintenance, and support.

It was simple. Scalable. Sticky.

Pretty soon we had **500 clients** that were on the plan.

That's **\$50,000 a month** in recurring income—

Before we even sold a single new website.

What began as a hustle had become a machine.

But machines need vision.

A website without marketing is a billboard in the desert.

So I built the next piece:

Jambalaya Marketing.

Radio. TV. Billboards. Google Ads.

A full-service creative agency.

Everything in one pot—just like the name.

Because when done right?

It's not just strategy—it's a *feast* for your business.

Now, we were taking companies from invisible to unstoppable.
Design + visibility.
Brand + reach.
All in-house. All accountable.

We became the one-stop shop.

A digital powerhouse built on *grit*, *discipline*, and *redemption*.

Rhino Web Studios now sells more websites in a **week** than we used to sell in a **month**.
We're franchising.
We're scaling with strategy.

And we're just getting started.

I didn't get here by being the smartest guy in the room.
I got here by showing up—**every single day. Moving Forward every single day.**
By staying consistent when it was hard.
By refusing to surrender, even when surrender seemed like the only option.

Now, I'm not just making a living.

I'm building a legacy.

A legacy that started with four simple words—whispered by a tall, pretty redheaded angel on a front porch long ago:

“Do good. Sell lots.”

And we are.

Every damn day.

Chapter 23: Systems, Scaling, and Selling the Dream

Rhino Web Studios had outgrown its roots.

It wasn't just a business anymore.

It was a *movement*.

We weren't grinding in parking lots hoping someone would say yes.

We were running a machine.

A *real* company, with purpose behind every click and a strategy behind every sale.

And here's the truth I had to learn early:

If I had to do everything myself, I'd never grow.

So I started building **systems**.

Not flashy. Not exciting. But essential.

I documented everything—scripts, checklists, processes, onboarding steps, SEO best practices.

Every tool in my belt, every trick that worked—I wrote it down.

What started as scattered notes became a training manual.

The training manual became a **blueprint**.

And the blueprint became something bigger:

A franchise model.

Because I knew there were others out there like me—

Hungry.

Talented.

Scrappy.

But lacking direction.

Lacking a brand.

Lacking *belief*.

So I gave them one.

We began opening offices across the Gulf South—each one led by someone who believed in the same core truth:

If you do good work, treat people right, and deliver real results... the money will follow.

Rhino became **bigger than me**.

And that was the goal.

I didn't want to sell every website myself.

I wanted to build a company that could sell, grow, and scale *without me in the room*.

That's **freedom**.

That's **legacy**.

There's something business school doesn't teach you:

The most profitable thing you can do... is help others win.

Because when you invest in *people*, you don't just build a team.

You build an **army**.

An army of loyalty.

Of referrals.

Of reputation and results.

That's how I became one of the most trusted names in web design and digital marketing across Southeast Louisiana.

Not by being the loudest.

Not by chasing trends.

But by **showing up**.

Every single day.

Doing the work.

Owning the outcome.

Delivering the promise.

Today, Rhino has clients in nearly every industry you can name:

Roofers. Lawyers. Restaurants. Doctors.

We're building websites that **rank**, that **convert**, that **last**.

And every time a business owner looks me in the eye and says:

“This site changed everything for us.”

I smile.

Because that’s what it’s all about.

Building something that works.

Sharing it with others.

And proving, every day, that consistency beats chaos.

We don’t just build websites.

We build *confidence*.

We build *futures*.

And we do it the same way we always have:

Do good. Sell lots.

Chapter 24: What It Was All For

There's a moment in every success story where the noise finally dies down.

The bills are paid.

The office is running.

The phone still rings, but it doesn't scare you anymore.

You stop living day-to-day and start thinking year-to-year... *legacy to legacy*.

That's where I am now.

Rhino Web Studios isn't just surviving—it's **thriving**.

We're building websites across the country, running full-scale marketing campaigns, and making dreams come true for business owners who started with nothing but an idea.

Sound familiar?

It should.

Because *that* was me.

A broke kid from Louisiana with a pocket full of daiquiri cards and a wild belief that one day I'd build something bigger than myself.

When I look around now, I see more than just offices and staff and signed contracts.

I see **the proof** that it was all worth it.

Every rejection.

Every dark night.

Every broken moment, every detox, every "no," every time I hit rock bottom and chose to stand up one more time than I fell down.

I see **Buffy**—the woman who took my hand in a courtroom and walked back into hell with me so we could climb out together.

I see my **daughters**, who only ever wanted their daddy to be present, clean, and proud of himself.

I see the **clients** who trusted me before I had a big name. Who took a chance because they saw what I saw: grit, not gloss.

And I see **the man in the mirror**—not perfect, not polished, but **proven**.

I used to chase money.
Then I chased respect.
Now?

Now I just **build**.

I build systems.
I build teams.
I build people.
I build futures.

Because I've learned something that only time and pain and perseverance can teach you:

Success isn't about what you get. It's about who you become—and who you help along the way.

And that's the secret no one tells you.

You don't need a million dollars to feel rich.
You need a reason to wake up, and the fire to chase it.

I've got both.

Every morning I still say the same four words Angela whispered to me decades ago:

Do good. Sell lots.

Back then, I thought it was about making money.

Now I know it was about **everything else**.

Chapter 25: The Best Is Yet to Come

I don't know what the future holds.

But I do know this:

No matter what this life throws at me, I've already lived through the kind of storms that level most men.

And I'm still standing.

Stronger.

Smarter.

Wiser.

I've learned that life doesn't reward perfection.

It rewards **persistence**.

It rewards those who **get up**, dust off the shame, and take one more step toward the person they were meant to be.

It rewards those who know how to fight—and more importantly, those who know **what** they're fighting for.

Me?

I fought for my family.

I fought for my daughters.

I fought for my future.

And maybe—if I'm being honest—I fought to prove to that redheaded girl on the front porch that she didn't fall in love with a loser after all.

I can still see her standing there, smiling, calling out to me as I left for work:

“Do good. Sell lots.”

At the time, it sounded like a cute little send-off.

But looking back now, I realize...

It was all the advice I ever really needed.

Those four words became my compass.

My code.

My company.

My calling.

And they can be yours too.

If you've made it this far through my story, you've probably lived through some mess of your own. Maybe you're in the middle of it right now.

And if you are, hear me when I say this:

You're not broken.

You're being *built*.

You don't need the perfect plan.

You don't need anyone's permission.

You just need to start.

Because everything you want—success, love, peace, purpose—it's waiting for you.
Not at the end of the road... but in every small, consistent step you take today.

Do good. Sell lots.

Do good work.

Do good by people.

Do good when nobody's watching.

And the rest?

The sales, the reputation, the success?

They'll follow.

Every single time.

So here's to the next chapter.

Not just in this book, but in *your* life.

Because if my story proves anything at all...

The best is yet to come.

Chapter 26: The Expensive Lessons

I've always been the guy who had to learn everything the hard way.

Not because I wanted to... but because I couldn't seem to listen until the world smacked me in the mouth. Maybe you're the same. Maybe you've made some of the same mistakes I made—chased the wrong things, trusted the wrong people, let pain become your compass, and pride become your prison.

If you've made it this far in the book, my hope is simple:

That somewhere in the middle of **my** chaos, you found clarity.

That somewhere in **my** losses, you saw how to protect your wins.

That in watching **me** fall, you learned how to get back up faster.

Or if you've already hit your own bottom—that this helps you rise.

This isn't just a story of brokenness. It's a story of redemption.

It's proof that no matter how far you've fallen, *you can rebuild*.

Brick by brick. Step by step. Failure by failure.

Until you become the person you were born to be.

These are the lessons ***I had to bleed for***.

But you?

YOU get them for free:

The Lessons

1. Pain is a teacher—listen to it, but don't let it define you.
2. Love is not a guarantee; it's a responsibility.
3. Success without integrity is just failure in disguise.
4. Discipline is more powerful than motivation.
5. You can't heal what you refuse to face.
6. Don't mistake chaos for passion.
7. The right partner will hold your hand *and* hold you accountable.

8. A moment of weakness can undo years of progress—stay vigilant.
9. Legacy isn't built in a day; it's built every day.
10. Addiction isn't about drugs—it's about escape. Find healthier ways to stay present.
11. Your story only ends when you stop writing it.
12. Forgiveness starts with yourself.
13. When in doubt, serve others.
14. The best way to predict your future is to build it.
15. Do good. Sell lots. (And mean it.)

This is your story now.

Whatever brought you here—whether it's regret or hope or hunger—just know that it's not too late.

You don't have to be perfect.
You just have to keep going.

And if you forget everything else, remember this:

The comeback is always stronger than the fall.
And rock bottom is a hell of a foundation to build on.

Do Good, Sell Lots,

Your friend,
Brett

Chapter 27: Acknowledgments

This book is the product of a thousand stumbles and a thousand helping hands.

To my wife, **Buffy**—thank you for taking my hand in that courtroom when the rest of the world told you to let go. You believed in a version of me I couldn't even see at the time. You are grace, you are strength, and you are the reason I have a home, not just a house.

To **Angela**—you were the spark. You may never know just how deeply you shaped the man I became. Every success I've earned has your voice echoing behind it. *Do good, sell lots* wasn't just a send-off—it was prophecy. You'll always be part of my story, and I'll always carry your light.

To my mother — Arlene

You were the heart in a house built on discipline.
The soft place to land. The steady hands that held everything together.

You gave me compassion when the world felt cruel.
You reminded me who I was when I couldn't see it for myself.
And through every storm—literal or otherwise—you were there, praying, believing, hoping.

I know I didn't make it easy. But your love never flinched.

Thank you for never giving up on me.

To **Morgan** and **Mina**—my daughters, my purpose, my redemption. You didn't ask for this story, but you made it worth telling. I hope this book teaches you that your father is far from perfect—but he never gave up. On himself... or on you.

To **Julian**, for standing beside me when I was just getting started, learning, building, grinding from home—you were part of the foundation. I saw the man you became, and I couldn't be prouder to have had you in the fight with me.

To my father — “Coach” — You were tough, relentless, and unyielding. You taught me how to outwork anyone, how to stand tall under pressure, and how to take a hit without flinching.

To every business owner who ever said *yes* when I was just a guy with a business card and a dream—**thank you**. You believed in me before I believed in myself. You helped me sharpen my tools and find my worth. (I'm thinking of you, Dan Burghardt)

And to the **addicts still fighting**, the **salespeople still grinding**, and the **entrepreneurs still building from scratch**—this book is for you. May you find the courage to take one more step, make one more call, and become the version of yourself you're still chasing. This book is proof that no matter where you are right now... **You can come back.**

To everyone who ever told me I couldn't—you were fuel.

And to everyone who ever said *you can*—you were oxygen.

Finally, to **God**, for grace I didn't deserve and mercy I didn't earn. You let me fall just far enough to discover who I really am.

Thank you for the pain.

Thank you for the purpose.

The best is yet to come.

—Brett Thomas

Chapter 28: About the Author

Brett Thomas is the founder and CEO of **Rhino Web Studios**, one of the most respected web design and digital marketing companies in Southeast Louisiana. With a reputation built on grit, resilience, and relentless consistency, Brett has helped hundreds of small businesses grow their online presence and reach their full potential.

But before the titles and the offices and the franchises, Brett was just a kid from **New Orleans**—scrappy, stubborn, and full of dreams. He came up the hard way. Through addiction. Through heartbreak. Through betrayal. Through failure. And through all of it, he never stopped learning how to sell, how to build, and—most importantly—how to get back up.

He cut his teeth in the trenches of door-to-door sales, learned discipline under pressure, and rebuilt his life brick by brick after losing everything. What began as a simple hustle turned into a mission—to help others find their voice, their value, and their *visibility* in the digital world.

Today, Brett is more than an entrepreneur. He's a mentor, a speaker, a builder, a husband, and a father. He's proof that rock bottom is not the end—it's the *foundation*.

Do Good, Sell Lots is his first book. It's not just a story—it's a blueprint.

