

LOU

William Snyder

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This dispatch is adapted from a chapter of *The Road Here*, a larger work chronicling the unlikely chain of events that carried one man from collapse to a village halfway around the world into a life he never saw coming.

Willie drifted slowly back toward Beaverton after leaving Arizona. And when I say slow, I mean molasses-in-January

slow. He spent the better part of a year meandering West to East, South to North – like deer prints through a stand of pines after a fresh Michigan snow. Wandering aimlessly, but somehow with purpose. True to form, he'd blow into some forgotten burg, pick up part-time work and a cot in the back of a gas station, charm the locals like they were old friends just waiting to be

reintroduced, shoot a few rolls of film,
maybe fall into a woman's good graces –
and then slide out again, quiet as smoke, like
a note on the breeze.

After a long and winding circle
through the American landscape, Willie
finally found himself back in Beaverton, that
little haven of familiarity tucked away like a
worn book under a pile of glossy new
magazines. No sooner than he dusted off the
Michigan snow he confessed his true
sentiments.

Practically the minute he touched
the doorknob he said, "Oscar, the West is
where my heart beats the loudest. Skies here
are too damn low," as though the Midwest
had a permanent ceiling that kept him from
taking deep enough breaths. "The roads are
too narrow."

It was like he had to stoop his shoulders and tuck in his elbows just to exist back home now. Willie told me he wanted to spend time with the family and all of us, but he was already scheming his way back to Arizona. The plan was half-baked and vague – just the way he liked it – but it was alive between his ears.

“Let’s get on the bike and head over to Krzysiak’s” Willie barked one day.

“Krzysiak’s! It’s 40 degrees out, and Krzysiak’s is 40 minutes from here. Let’s take the truck.

“Ok, pussy”, he laughed.

Krzysiak’s is arguably the best Polish restaurant on earth, including anywhere in Poland. The Kielbasa will curl your toes and the Pierogi, my God the Pierogi.

We made our way over, ate til we burst, stopped and had a couple PBR's at some tiny, neighborhood tavern – according to local lore there are somewhere around 600 bars in Bay City, Michigan – and then headed back towards Beaverton.

Willie decided to go up along Saginaw Bay and then cut over to Gladwin and drop down from there, which was odd. We never went this way. Guess it was all that wandering he did, just decided to take a wider loop.

As we rolled through White Star, about half way to Gladwin, we passed a small block building, an animal rescue, with a sign out front that read Adopt-a-Pet Today. Willie slowed down, pulled a three point turn in somebody's driveway and pulled into the lot.

“You adopting a pet today, Willie.”

“Maybe. Wanna take a look.”

The lot was empty with the exception of a lone dusty Buick LaSabre. When we walked in, the front desk was unmanned. We looked around, waited for a couple minutes – not Willie’s strong suit – and Willie went for the door handle. You could hear dogs barking on the other side of it. There was a sign on it that said ‘Staff Only’.

“To hell with it, I’m going in.”

We went in and Willie tracked straight to the back of the building like a laser – hardly glancing at any of the dogs, like following a voice he heard in his head. He was a couple steps ahead of me. He turned the corner almost at the rear exit and as I rounded the corner he was crouched down with his fingers protruding through the

chain link gate of the very last kennel. The dog inside, an oversized Boston, was sitting regal as a lion at the rear corner of the kennel, half looking at us and half uninterested.

Willie said, "I want him. He speaks to me. I know him from somewhere."

The name on the card outside the kennel read, LeBaron.

By this time a very irritated young lady came around the corner and said, "you two are NOT supposed to be back here. Please go back up front in the waiting area."

Willie replied, "I'm sorry, Miss, I just came to get my dog, LeBaron."

"LeBaron is your dog?"

"Yep", Willie replied. "Well, he is now. I want him. We had a talk and he's agreed to come home with me."

With a somewhat annoyed chuckle she said, “come on up front, I’ll bring him up.”

\$85 bucks and a few signatures later, we were headed home. Willie, LeBaron and me. Three abreast in the pickup. He wasn’t scared or shook up at all. It was like just another Tuesday to this dog. He had a look on his face as if to say, “Where we going? Meh! It doesn’t matter.” It was the damndest thing.

“LeBaron”, Willie said. “That is a stupid name.”

I swear that dog looked at Willie in agreement.

“Lou. You’re definitely Lou.”

Again, looked over, like he agreed! I watched them pull a fascinating focus on

each other almost instantly. From that day on, Willie and Lou were a unit.

Willie changed that day. Not for the better, not for the worse, just changed. He had a different focus that seemed to curb his restlessness, some. It didn't remove it, if anything he was more determined to seek out new adventure, but with his new costar. Maybe he became more of a magnet for it. His force in the universe was double dose now.

Yep, from the day they found each other you couldn't say "Willie" without "Louie" shadowing close behind – like an echo with a soul. Anyone who spent more than a minute around Lou forgot he was a dog at all. He was no ordinary dog. That's for sure. Not even close.

Not your Westminster variety
Boston Bull, Lou was thicker-set and blocky.
His forty pounds pressed the outer limits of
his breed's blueprint. But he carried that heft
like a bluesman carries heartbreak – with
swagger and grace. His eyes were steady and
deep, like a night watchman's lantern, and
behind them you saw something more than
instinct – you saw memory.

When they set eyes on each other it
was like it had been written. It wasn't just
love at first sight – it was something deeper.
An agreement, maybe. A silent contract
forged in the soft space between two misfits
who had no business being caged.

They moved through life like a
reconnaissance team. Quiet. Calculated.
Always together. Willie never trained Louie
in any traditional sense because he never had

to. Willie said they'd had a few 'discussions' early on but Lou seemed to know what Willie was after. Second discussions were never required. They were on the same frequency. Together they moved through crowds, alleys, parades, and dive bars with the precision of Navy SEALs and the calm of a couple monks – never a leash, never a collar. He didn't own either.

Willie rigged a custom seat on the Kawasaki, where the front of the seat met the rear of the tank – a Frankenstein blend of fiberglass, surplus canvas, and duct tape ingenuity – where Lou would perch, goggles strapped over his eyes and a neck scarf snapping behind him like a battle-flag of freedom. They looked like some cinematic fever dream. Willie at the helm, grin set in place; Louie just ahead of him, unmoved by

speed, wind, or stares. It was something to see.

They were a viral spectacle on that vintage steed. Every ride turned heads: windows would roll down, phones would come out, and someone always shouted, “I love your dog!”

Louie didn’t just ride shotgun – he was the shotgun. He was Willie’s compass. His wingman. His conscience. His stillness. On first dates, Lou came along. On whiskey runs, Lou came along. Through the years, through the laughter, heartbreak, and hangovers, Lou was there – an ever-present reminder that loyalty doesn’t bark or beg. It just is.

They were welded together. Man and dog. Not as pet and owner, but as brothers in arms. Co-conspirators. Living

proof that sometimes, if you're lucky, you find the one soul on this earth who already understands you – no training required.

Which brings us to the bars. You knew we'd get there...

Willie and Lou made stories for folks far and wide in all four directions. Like a beacon in the sky, wherever they lived or roamed, they tracked to the gritty, out of the way bars where only locals went. Without fail, they were always welcomed in like returning family. The rhythm of this peculiar united front was ever present and undeniable.

Beaverton had two such establishments, both emblazoned at the entrance with laminated "No Dogs Allowed" signs posted like commandments. But Louie was the exception. Same was true in a

handful of other taverns dotting across America. In each of these he had his own stool – an unwritten codex enforced by barkeeps and regulars alike. Locals knew. Adding to their nightly entertainment, they loved the spectacle. But an outsider attempting to slide onto that cushion? The barkeep would smile, point to a naked stool down the bar, and say, “That one’s free. This one’s Louie’s.” No irony. Just fact.

In they’d walk, like a choreographed scene. Willie, all swagger and soft eyes, glad-handing his way through the regulars like a mayor in denim. And just a few steps ahead now, Lou – silent, deliberate – moving with the kind of confidence that didn’t require fanfare. He’d break off, nose pointed straight at his destination, weaving through stools and boots with the breath of an old sage

who'd done this all before. No leash. No nod.
No need.

By the time Willie made it halfway to the bar, Lou would already be there, at his stool like it was part of the floor plan. He'd pause for a beat, then hop up with a surprising ease for a dog built like a sack of cannonballs. Once settled, he'd square his haunches and scan the room with the quiet composure of someone who'd seen it all and wasn't terribly impressed. Not in a snide way – Lou wasn't snide. Just seasoned. Like an old jazz man eyeing the band, waiting to see if they could really swing.

A few nods came his way – "Evenin', Louie" – as if he were just another old boy at the bar. And maybe he was. He gave no reply, of course. Just a slow blink of disinterest.

If he felt like wandering, he'd slip down from his stool like a shadow peeling off the wall – silent, fluid, entirely on his own terms. He moved like he belonged to the space, not the people in it. Never disruptive, never needy, and never once glancing back to see if Willie was watching. There was no need. Their trust was bone-deep. They always knew where the other one was without ever stopping to look. Their bond felt ancient, like something borne by the gods.

He'd pad through the place like he was inspecting it – not for security, but for rhythm. A soft sniff here at the corner of a boot. A slow pause there beside a regular with another story leaking out of him. Maybe he'd scoop up a few scattered pretzels off the floor, delicately, like hors d'oeuvres at a garden party. Maybe he'd allow a stranger to

reach out and run fingers through his
brindled coat, offering no more
acknowledgment than a blink or a lean-in so
slight it felt like permission.

And then, when his internal
compass decided the loop was complete, he'd
glide back through the maze of legs and lost
conversations to his stool, hop up with his
usual grace, and sit – chin lifted, eyes half-
lidded, the picture of a monarch content with
the state of his realm. No ceremony. Just
Lou, as he was, as he always had been.

Lou never barked. Not once. Willie
told me he never heard him utter a sound.
His silence wasn't absence – it was presence.
He had nothing to prove.

And honestly, what would he even
say, if he could? "You're welcome," maybe.
Then he'd man-nod once, like he'd just

handed you the best advice of your life, and hop back up on his stool without an ounce of fanfare.

Good ol' Lou. Seen Willie through a lot. With Lou, Willie seemed truly ready to make his way back out west and see what was waiting for him up ahead.

Another few years puffed past and he was busting at the seams, his restlessness a tangible thing that followed him around like a weight that was growing heavier with each passing day. He was as restless as I ever saw him.

He called Tom, his Landlord from years before. They took on like only a month had passed. Willie asked him if his offer still stood for the RV lot. It did. Willie told him he'd be back in a few months. Tom said he'd be ready for him. And with that, Willie had a

mission and a destination. He and Lou would head West, take their time, and look for an old travel trailer along the way that they could call home. Willie's folks, his sister and a bunch of his friends sent him off proper with quite a shindig. It started in town, at the Hideaway, and ended in his brother-in-law's barn out near the family farm. What a send off. The next morning, I stopped by and helped him load the old Kawasaki parked at his sisters into the back of the truck. Like a scene out of a movie he and Louie waved and off they went.

Barely an hour into the trip he was driving through Niles when he spotted a vintage looking travel trailer for sale alongside an old country road. It was a beautiful farm house with manicured lawns and big red barns. Looked like a Rockwell

painting. He knocked on the door and a young guy answered.

“You here about the RV?”

“Yep, looks like a nice one.”

As they walked out to the big side yard where it was parked the guy told him it was his grandparents. Age had prevented them from camping for a number of years now. It had just been sitting in the barn. They bought it new in 1996. Looked like it was still new. At just 24 feet, Willie's old truck could pull it without any trouble.

“How much ya asking for it?”

“\$2,500. Comes with the hitch and the stabilizer bars, too.”

“I'll take it”, Willie said, pulling the cash he'd drawn from the bank before he left from an envelope in his pocket. He counted out 25 one hundred dollar bills and handed

them to him. The guy already had a signed title ready – probably knowing the first lucky soul who pulled up would take it at that price. He handed it to Willie, helped him back in and hook up, and down the road they went.

“It’s home, Lou. Wherever we go, we’re home.” Lou looked at Willie and then back to the road.

The rest of that trip was as memorable as any they’d taken together before or since. For the next several months they lived hither and yon across the west – about ten towns in total, I guess. Rolling Stone Minnesota. Spearfish South Dakota. Sundance Wyoming. Oshkosh and Lewellen Nebraska. Snyder Colorado. They caught the eclipse. Stayed with a traveling nurse and her little Shih Tzu, Daisy. Explored endless trails

through the wetlands and across the plains. They dropped into Boulder through Longmont and made their way up and over the Rockies to Rifle, then Grand Junction. They settled in Moab for a few weeks before meandering down to Williams, West of Flagstaff for a stint, and finally, they landed back in Cave Creek.

With a heads up a few hours out, Tom was there to greet them. He'd cobbled together a 30 amp plug-in, a septic hookup and a water spigot. Even elevated and flattened a nice spot to park the RV.

"She's a beauty, Willie. You did good. You must be Louie!" Tom said. With a slight wag of the tail, Lou approved.

"Got lucky, really. Feels like home inside."

Tom helped him back in, level up and hook up.

Will and Lou were home. There wasn't a twig between that spot and Black Mountain, either – it loomed like a sentinel right out the door. With the awning out, a large patch of plastic lawn rolled out, Willie in an old Adirondack chair he drug over from a pile of dying lawn items, along with a small wooden table with a glass of Buffalo Trace leaving a moistened ring underneath it...this was about as close to heaven as a man could get.

Most of the cobwebs from life leading to this point had been shaken out of Willie's head. He'd been in 'The Creek' for a while now. He settled right into RV living with all the other outlaws, artists, drifters and misfits in town. It didn't take him long to

make his mark and claim his territory. He plugged into the Cave Creek scene like it was made for him. He knew every dive bar and bartender from Scottsdale north, and they knew him, and Louie. He had his truck. He had his beloved bike. He had the other half of his soul – who's custom seat was strapped on and always ready for the ride. They were a couple of men about town, making quite a reputation for themselves. Things were going well. Felt like the shoe was about to drop.

And boy did it...

It was a Monday when Willie declared, "Let's go down to Scottsdale and see Bruce at the Green Top, Lou." Bruce – the bartender with stone white hair and a perpetual scowl – loved Willie despite himself. I met him when I came out to visit. Hell of a nice guy. He'd sneak Lou a shot of

beer, complain about our timing as we usually strolled in about closing time, then join in the laughter. That night, though, the Green Top was closed. “Forgot it was Monday, Lou,” Willie said. “C’mon, we’ll try Earl’s.”

Earl’s Tavern sat a block away, on the other side of a big grassy park area. A squat building with a sticky back patio and a sliding glass door that often stuck unless you jiggled it just so. Willie reached for that door – and then it slid open from the inside, as if by sorcery.

And there she stood. Maria
Consuelo Ramos.

Willie froze. They were almost nose-to-nose – close enough he caught the sweet trace of jasmine in her hair, clinging to the dry night air. Her hair was a dark waterfall of

curls; her big dark eyes were bright and curious; her smile radiant enough to bake s'mores by. In that moment, Willie's world tilted.

Maria was in town for the warm-growing season, part of a familial agricultural education program – pecan orchards were her legacy back in Mexico. Willie, usually quick with a line, froze like he'd been asked to recite Shakespeare on the spot.

“This is Lou,” he eventually muttered, motioning to his sober, four-legged friend.

Maria knelt down, stroked Lou behind the ears, and murmured “Hola, Lou.” Lou leaned in – a gentleman applauding a queen.

That tiny gesture shattered the ice. Willie, suddenly emboldened, and after a bit of small talk, asked for her number. Not suave. Earnest. She gave it with a smile and a promise to meet “sometime this week.” With social cliffhangers, that was as binding as a trust fall.

On Thursday, Willie called her. She answered with a warm accent that made his heart trip. They agreed on Patty’s, a local dive bar known for greasy cheeseburgers and a jukebox that swapped outlaw country for ‘80s rock.

They arrived early – Willie, perpetually punctual, and Lou, forever ready. Maria pulled up in a ride-share – something Willie noted in the back of his head. She wore jeans and a sunset-colored blouse; in

that simple outfit she looked effortlessly radiant.

Inside, Skip the bartender called, “Hammy Dickel?” a moniker Willie learned many a bartender when referring to his beloved Hamm’s and a Dickel. Willie nodded. “And a Chardonnay” Maria added, surprising everyone including Skip. Chardonnay at Earl’s? Unthinkable. He smirked, dusted off a bottle he was surprised they had and poured it anyway, watching as they settled in a quiet booth.

Conversation flowed: her childhood among Mexican pecan groves, the beauty of Arizona monsoons, his endless motorized escapades, Lou’s silent philosophy. Laughter punctuated the air; the jukebox eventually roared to life.

When Maria's third glass appeared, Willie noticed the chaperone at the end of the bar that Maria had no intention of disclosing – a woman, alone, in heels, not of Earl's usual clientele.

Willie excused himself, sidled up, and whispered, "How am I doing so far?" They shared a grin.

Maria's friend hopped down, playfully ribbed a red-faced Maria for a "poor choice," and joined her at their table. When Willie came back Maria and her friend Ana were sitting and laughing together at the table.

"How'd you know?" Maria asked.

"You have to get up pretty early in the morning to get one over on me, Maria," Willie quipped.

She had finished her glass and ordered a fourth while he was in the restroom.

Red flags waved. Willie was too infatuated to heed them.

Weeks passed in a delirium of sunlit breakfasts, long afternoon drives, and midnight movies with Lou's makeshift dog-bed at Willie's feet. Maria had the kind of infectious laugh that lit up diners. She had a love for life, animals, music, and slow, intense conversations. A genuinely sweet soul, by any measure.

Against my skeptical forecast, I found myself hoping this wouldn't implode. Three weeks in, came the crack.

They stumbled out of a waterfront bar near the golf course, where neon lights bled into the quiet night, casting eerie

shadows over the nearly deserted parking lot. Willie's truck roared to life as they hit the road, aiming for home. But just before they reached their destination, she erupted. It was as if a switch flipped inside her, plunging her into a darkness Willie had never seen. Her eyes blazed with a wild intensity, and she came apart at the seams. Unhinged and volatile, she hurled a torrent of accusations at Willie, calling him every vile name imaginable, charging him with misdeeds so outlandish, so impossible, they seemed crafted from madness itself. Her fury raged on unchecked for a relentless 15 minutes, until she finally punched herself out, collapsing into a stupor right there, slumped over in the passenger seat.

Willie, feeling as if he had just witnessed a live exorcism, left her to sleep in

the truck and stumbled inside to his bed, his mind reeling. He lay there, staring at the ceiling, unable to find peace or rest. The events of the night played on a loop in his mind, making sleep almost impossible. The following morning, she appeared in the kitchen, her face serene and refreshed as if she had just enjoyed the most restful slumber of her life. She showered Willie with gratitude for allowing her to sleep in the truck and cheerfully inquired about his breakfast preferences, her demeanor suggesting that the previous night's episode was nothing more than a forgotten dream.

Perplexed, Willie cautiously asked, "Do you remember last night, all the things you said?" Her eyes widened with concern, and she replied, "Oh my God, Willie, did I say anything mean to you?"

As Willie recounted the strange events, her expression shifted from confusion to distress, tears welling up in her eyes and spilling down her cheeks.

“I am so sorry,” she stammered, her voice trembling. “I have no memory of saying any of those things... I will gather my things and leave. You don’t need this. You don’t need to deal with my issues.”

True to his nature, Willie’s heart softened instantly, and he slipped into his familiar role of nurturer, healer, and solver of problems.

“It’s ok, don’t cry. Everything will be ok...” he reassured her, his voice gentle and soothing, promising that everything would indeed be alright.

Willie had always possessed an unshakable confidence in his ability to tackle

any problem that came his way. Later, in a moment of quiet reflection, he discreetly picked up the phone and called her mother, seeking her seasoned wisdom. Her voice was tinged with concern as she cautioned him, "You don't want any part of this. We've been struggling with it for 30 years. She's the most wonderful person in the world, but she's a chronic alcoholic and she needs serious professional help. You can't help her."

To Willie, these words were not a deterrent but rather a challenge – a call to action. In his mind, it was an invitation to roll up his sleeves and find a solution. With determination burning bright, he resolved to tackle this issue head-on, not just for her, but for her entire family.

Willie had never been exposed to real alcoholism before. Neither of us had,

really. Ya there were a few out of control drunks in town all the time, but they weren't part of our everyday lives. We had never seen real, full blown alcoholism up close before. I don't think Willie even believed it existed. Willie is a dreamer. And while he has plenty of problems, he never sees them as problems. He's a Pollyanna, to his core. So his girlfriend has a little drinking problem, no big deal. He'll fix it. With a little love, a few hugs, some counseling sessions with Louie - she'll be fine. Good as new.

He had no idea what he was in for.

Astonishingly, and against all odds, Willie remained by Maria's side for almost five more years. Unwaveringly loyal. He adamantly refused to abandon her. And those years were a relentless repeat of that fateful night just three weeks into their

relationship. The situation spiraled into chaos. She lashed out at Willie physically, not just once, but repeatedly. She hurled objects at him, shattered belongings. She struck him. She accused him of every conceivable transgression. She unleashed a torrent of verbal abuse, branding him with every vile name imaginable. Each outburst was claimed to be a blackout, erased from her memory by the next day, leaving Willie trapped in the relentless storm of her fury.

Willie was torn, believing with every fiber of his being that she didn't remember anything. Things had deteriorated severely. Yet, amidst the chaos, there were fleeting moments of connection and normalcy that fueled his hope. He kept reminding himself that she didn't choose this disease. Between the episodes of terror and

destruction, she was tender, sincere and vulnerable. That, Willie insisted, was the real Maria. It was enough to keep him in the fight, even if he sometimes doubted whether it was worth it. He knew she would fall but believed she'd rise again and push forward. He thought that as long as she kept fighting, he would too. I think he genuinely loved her. Still does. Deeply. Though, he struggled with the weight of it. He believed Maria was the one for him, even if it felt like an impossible battle. He was determined to slay the beast within her and give her the happy, peaceful life she craved, even if he wasn't sure he was up to the task.

The entire situation was a tangled mess, and I could see how it shattered Willie on so many levels. Emotionally, he was drained. Spiritually, he seemed adrift.

Financially, he was nearly bankrupt. Mentally, he was running on fumes. He poured almost every penny he had into trying to solve an unsolvable problem, often in ways that backfired. Part of him knew he was enabling her, yet he couldn't stop himself, like he was pouring gasoline on an already raging fire.

And to make an impossible situation worse, amid all this dark turmoil, the unthinkable happened. He tragically lost his beloved Louie to brain cancer – his anchor, his confidant. He watched Louie deteriorate into a shell of his former self. It didn't take long. Willie would never let him suffer long. Lou started having seizures, long ones. Fifteen, twenty minutes. When it started happening daily, Willie told him, "Louie, if you do this tomorrow we're going

to have to bring in help. Please don't make me do it, Lou." Four or five more tomorrows came with the same, devastating seizures. He made the call. Doc Schneider would come out the next morning. Willie and Lou slept that night as they had every night for almost 12 years. Lou inching Willie off most of the pillow and over to the very edge of the bed. It was a long night. They both knew. The next morning the doc showed up, visually shaken. He'd been with Lou for nearly a decade himself. Out on the rolled up turf in front of the RV, under the watchful presence of a now distorted Black Mountain, Lou laid in Willie's lap and drifted off without a sound. Willie was torn apart, shredded, lost in a sea of grief and confusion.

The last couple of years he was connected to Maria, none of us recognized

him. Not even his parents. Between losing Louie and the draining battle with Maria's disease, he didn't speak with the same voice. He didn't live with the same vigor. He didn't believe in any of it any more. He became withdrawn. And he started drinking heavily. No longer for the cheers. To forget. He gained weight. He looked like hell. I know to this very day he carries a lot of guilt around knowing he failed to solve Maria's problems. He feels like he let her down. I tried to tell him it wasn't his problem to solve. We've all told him. I think he went too far down the rabbit hole.

Towards the end of what I refer to as 'the Maria incident', about a year beyond Lou's departure, I went to see him, still genuinely concerned for what some of us feared might come next. We met up at a

quiet tavern on the edge of town. I walked in, he was already sitting there with a Hamm's. And in that moment I saw what could pass as the faintest glimmer of light back in his eyes, thankfully. Like he might have seen a spot in the distance, beyond the rubble to focus on. The conversation and his tone revealed he was still shaken, and still nowhere near himself. But I could also see he'd found a switch inside, like he was finally looking for a way back to Willie. A handful of beers in, towards the end of our conversation, he told me he was going to take the last of his money and spend a month in Japan, that he'd figure out what was next while he was there.

Willie converted to Buddhism when he was about 25. He has an affinity for the practice. It resonates with him. The temple he joined is in downtown Denver. He'd found

it when he lived in Golden and he's stayed close to the Sangha ever since.

The Reverend was a Sensei who had been recruited away from the mother temple in Kyoto. He was immediately captivated by Willie, sensing a unique spirit within him. Together, they forged a profound and enduring friendship. In a gesture of deep respect and connection, the Sensei bestowed upon Willie a Dharma name, 'Shaku Goho,' a name that perfectly encapsulated his role, meaning 'protector of the dharma.' To this day, the Reverend, members of the Sangha, and a handful of others linked to Willie during this time still call him Goho. The temple is affiliated with the Pure Land Buddhist community. Its world headquarters and original temple stand in the center of

Old Kyoto, Japan. Both have stood in that spot for more than 850 years.

It was there, amidst the serene gardens and ancient halls, that Willie aspired to recenter himself, and to find solace and purpose. Remaining in his current situation felt perilous, a choice that threatened his very survival. Yes. For Willie, there was only one way to shed the burdens of the past five years: return to what he viewed as his source.

Kyoto beckoned with its ancient allure. The promise of deep meditation and profound quietude drew him in, offering a sanctuary where he could be truly alone. The mother temple, a place steeped in history and tranquility, called to him.

He would spend the next year meticulously planning his pilgrimage, crafting an itinerary that would take him far

from the chaos of his current existence. He sought solitude, a reprieve from the cacophony that clanged in his spirit, and most importantly, a retreat from the distractions of grief, and of relationships...

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