

Surviving New America: Hope Thomas and Her Enemies



Image: Sebastijan Camagajevac

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With much love to my wife Lori, who
brings laughter into my life, and to Emily
and Hailey who both are wonderful
people and enhance the laughter.

In the afternoon, when I was sitting in my
foxhole and I was looking out toward Le
Havre, toward the ocean...I said, my God, if
I survive this won't I have some tale to tell.

*Fritz Weinschenk on what he was thinking on Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944. (Quote
from About Face: German and Austrian Jewish GIs in World War II)*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, a U.K.-based commemorative organization, says that on November 11, 1918—the day World War I ended—there were approximately 11,000 casualties, including about 2,750 fatalities.

This is sad and poignant, of course. Some of the casualties likely occurred before the documents ending the war were signed. Others likely were the result of battles that took place despite the combatants knowing it was over. Orders are orders, after all.

However, it is almost certain that many of soldiers were hurt or killed simply because word that World War I was over had not been received.

My wife and I have two daughters, one in the states and one in Europe. Our family recently had a WhatsApp chat. The two kids walked through the streets of their communities. One went to a

coffee shop. We patiently listened to her order. The other arrived at her apartment and “took us” upstairs.

Using devices small enough to carry in a pocket, the four of us spent a pleasant half hour or so catching up. The video was vibrant and the audio clear. And networking is so inexpensive and the networks so robust that it all was free.

From Armistice Day to the virtual family time was just over 100 years. A handful of people were alive when both occurred. The speed with which technology evolves is remarkable and orders of magnitude faster than our ability to integrate the changes into our personal and civic lives.

That’s what this novel, which started as a hybrid COVID/bucket list project, is about. The goal is to dramatize the explosion of communications technology, which has transformed our lives, the lives of our communities and society in virtually every way imaginable.

This novel was written in the spirit of the great Michael Crichton. It is an attempt to dramatize the radical nature of the advancements and identify the profound challenges they pose.

Thank you. Please drop me an email at survivingnewamericanovel@gmail.com with comments, questions or if you would like me to let you know when the second volume is available.

Carl Weinschenk

PROLOGUE

ISLE OF CALM, FLORIDA | MARCH 5, 2040

I'm a retiree living in Isle of Calm, a pleasant but dull gated community near Naples on the west coast of Florida. A couple of years ago, I decided to liven things up a bit by giving free English lessons in our pretty little community square. My students were mostly immigrant laborers and their families. I loved it. Doing something solely to help people gave me a sense of fulfillment that is impossible to get in any other way. Helping may be the only good addiction.

A bonus was getting to know Frank Dyson. Frank approached me during one of an annoyingly endless string of bright and peaceful mornings and asked if I was interested in helping him write the story of the part he played in the great drama that pitted Hope Thomas against New America back in 2029 and 2030. I certainly was intrigued. Everyone followed that struggle. It was riveting, as we used to say, and big news for a long time.

Frank is amused easily and by many things, not the least of which is his minor celebrity. He lives in Sunny Shores, a development just south of Fort Myers. His name for it—“Sunny Snores”—is more fitting than the real one and signaled that we felt the same way about the beauty and boredom of retirement down here. I recognized that it was the beginning of a beautiful friendship, to borrow Humphrey Bogart’s great line from the end of *Casablanca*.

Frank was a lieutenant colonel in the National Guard and played a pivotal role in the most sensitive days of the conflict. The tale he told me was fascinating. I wanted to go further and pointed out that just detailing his involvement wouldn’t tell the whole story. After all, he only became important at the end. For most of the time, Frank was sitting in a big tent across a dirt road watching, the same as the rest of us.

With Frank’s permission, I began calling the principals. He helped with phone numbers and emails and texts telling folks it was okay to speak to me. Actually, he told them that I wasn’t particularly good-looking or bright, but harmless and okay to speak to if the individual was desperate for human interaction. I asked Frank about it later. He gave me his best deadpan and asked me to point out any inaccuracies.

A few people told me to get lost, usually in more colorful language than that. But almost everyone was willing to talk about it. Several spent hours speaking over the course of two or three conversations. They realized their connection to an important event in American history and relished the opportunity to feel it all over again. Some had axes to grind. Others were perfunctory. They had moved on and simply wanted to get their side of the story into the

record. Several were lonely. Those were the longest conversations. That was okay. I was in no hurry and, I guess, a bit lonely too.

Frank and I decided not to do a straight history. It had been done, and far better than we could. It was a deep, profound and uniquely American story and had been treated that way by social scientists and historians.

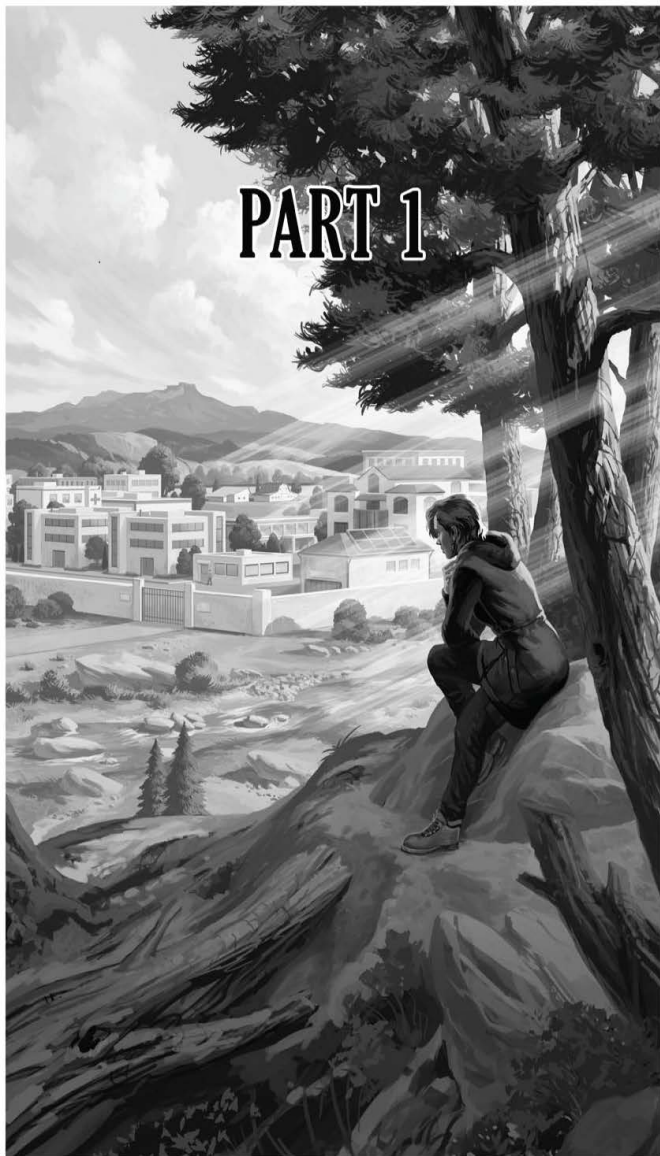
Our goal was to humanize it. So we tried to “get into” the characters. There was a lot to work with besides the interviews. Law enforcement surveillance captured audio of much of what happened in New America. There even is some video. There also are transcripts from thirty or so civil and criminal trials.

In our retelling, Frank and I invented dialog and guessed the speakers’ inner feelings. I read what we came up with to the people involved. There were some minor corrections. But I’m proud they all signed off on our recreation. That’s true even for those who didn’t come off looking so great. One called the recreation “uncanny.” Another said, “Well, I wish that wasn’t what I was thinking and what I said, but I guess it was. Could you find a way to make me look like a little less of an asshole?”

Lincoln supposedly said America could only fail from within. It turns out that it was more a paraphrase than a quote. Unfortunately, a lot of people tried to prove he was right a few years before the New America drama occurred. Luckily that drama had a happy ending.

So let’s get to it. Some people say the story began with Jayson Damond’s hubris and fear of growing old. That’s not inaccurate. But it’s fuzzy, subjective and lazy. Frank and I decided the best place to start is with an actual event. It was when Hope Thomas met with Dr. Ellen Hart on an October day in 2029...

PART 1



CHAPTER 1

HOPE ALONE

AUTUMN/WINTER, 2029

An uncharacteristically tentative Hope Thomas wished she had company as she walked up a wide El Paso boulevard lined with pretty Chinese pistache and cedar elm trees, expensive cars and graceful old money homes.

But alone she was. The twenty-one-year-old woman was on her way to a follow-up consultation at The El Paso Women's Health Project. She would have liked to have brought a friend, but didn't dare risk word leaking out about the serious problem her carelessness had caused. Hope was deeply estranged from her parents.

If Hope was pregnant—she was more or less certain she was—her carefully planned future would be imperiled. It was unexpected and scary.

Three or four high school classmates had used "The Projects" services a few years earlier. Those occasions were accompanied by cruelty and its outward manifestations:

rumors, giggles and ostracization. Hope always had compassion for the girls and didn't join in the nastiness, but thought they had brought on their own problems. It was not a moral judgment. She felt they would have avoided a tremendous amount of trouble by simply being careful. Hope hadn't imagined how easy it was to make the mistake until she made it herself.

Hope was a thin woman with short brown hair. Though not classically beautiful, her personality was so authentic and she was so present in everything she did that looks mattered little. Hope was warm and empathic, though not afraid to be direct and confrontational if necessary. Even in such situations, people knew she was listening hard and the strong words were evidence of genuine concern.

The young woman arrived a few minutes early for what would be a difficult meeting. Those few moments—walking up the steps, identifying herself to the receptionist and sitting in the waiting room—would have been infinitely harder if she was aware of her vulnerability. Hope Thomas had a good chance of being the first woman charged with murder under recently promulgated Texas abortion laws. A conviction could lead to execution by lethal injection.

This dramatic endpoint was reached gradually. The state methodically enacted regulations that made performing abortions increasingly difficult. The general atmosphere became ever more poisonous. The result was unrelenting pressure on practitioners and clinics to abandon the procedure.

Hope was only vaguely aware that choice was under siege because she had not been affected. She later reproached herself for ignoring something so important. Other people her age were as busy and ambivalent but still managed to pay attention.

Texas increased the pressure significantly in 2021. Senate Bill 8 allowed civil lawsuits against anyone involved in administering an abortion after a pregnancy passed six weeks. Suits could theoretically be filed against an Uber or Lyft driver who brought the woman to the clinic, not to mention people who actually performed the abortion. These “bounty” lawsuits, which could be brought by anyone, carried a fine of \$10,000 plus court costs and attorney’s fees.

Things changed further later in the decade. The woman getting the abortion could be charged both civilly and criminally. The possible criminal penalties included execution.

The Project was the center of the resistance in west Texas. It was run by Dr. Ellen Hart, an MD and activist. She was the woman with whom Hope would meet. Besides counseling pregnant women, Hart’s days were filled with filing lawsuits against Texas, lobbying state and federal legislators and generally advocating for less draconian rules and regulations.

Hart was a gynecologist and had performed abortions until two years earlier. At that point, it became clear that her high profile made this impractical and perhaps even irresponsible. She was under intense scrutiny and feared her relationship with her patients—and their safety—could be imperiled. Hart missed practicing, but felt fighting for women’s rights took precedence.

The Project was housed in a cedar-shingled Dutch colonial Hart inherited from her parents. The mortgage was long paid off, there was only one full-time employee on the payroll and the organization offered women’s services other than reproductive care. This diversity and frugality meant that the end of choice wouldn’t close The Project’s doors.

This was the tense atmosphere into which Thomas walked

that October morning. She sat in the waiting room for several minutes before being led into Hart's large oak-paneled office, which had been her family's dining room three decades earlier.

The receptionist pointed to an overstuffed chair facing Hart's desk. The small young woman sat down. Hope's size and glum expression made her look like a fifth grader in the principal's office.

Hope had a strong sense of place and usually was inquisitive about her surroundings. On this day, however, she stared straight ahead until Hart entered the room. Instead of sitting behind her desk, the doctor motioned Hope to a small couch along the far wall.

The two sat down beneath a framed print of *Before the Shot*, Norman Rockwell's big-hearted painting of a boy studying his distracted doctor's medical school diploma before getting an injection in his rear. It had hung there since decades earlier, when Hart's parents had taught her about fairness, equality and justice and debated politics over long meals. The doctor considered it a good omen if she had important conversations beneath it. It felt as if her parents, Rockwell, the doctor and the boy were watching over her.

Hart studied Hope's chart for a moment and then looked at her. "How are you feeling?" she asked.

"I'm okay," Hope said without conviction. It was hard to hear her even though there was no ambient noise in the room.

"That's good," Hart said. She took Hope's hands as she spoke. "The news is what you expected. The tests confirm that you are pregnant. Your home tests were not false positives. I know this isn't what you wanted to hear and that this is a difficult moment, But it isn't the end of the world. Trust me on that, Hope. It's not the end of the world."

Hope knew this would be the case, but hearing it "officially" in

this setting still stunned her. Hart filled the silent Hope in on the need for proper nutrition, exercise, rest and behavior—no smoking, drinking or drugs, three things that Hope didn't do—should she decide to continue the pregnancy. Hart urged Hope to eat more.

“Every time you go to a restaurant, order something for you and something from the kid's menu,” the doctor said she said with a laugh. “I always liked ‘The Kangaroo,’ which was the mac and cheese.”

That was the easy part. The hard part was educating Hope on the medical, political and legal battlefield that abortion was in Texas. She knew from their first meeting that Hope was intelligent but had only superficially aware of the ongoing fight.

Hope grew increasingly anxious as Hart described the situation. The doctor recited the recent history as even-handedly as she could. She did not mention the possibility of a death sentence for having an abortion. There would be time for that later.

It was left for Hope to ask the obvious question: “Why would anyone do all the things you describe?” she finally asked. “I mean, letting some poor Uber driver get sued? Making women have babies even if it puts them in danger? If they were raped? It makes no sense.”

Hart resisted the temptation to stray into politics and discuss what she felt was the disintegration of the once disciplined and principled conservative movement. In Hart's view, it had devolved into a small core of good people with deeply held religious beliefs alongside a much larger clown car of shysters, opportunists, racists, cultists and misogynists. The focus needed to be on Hope's plight, not her political analysis.

“There are lots of reasons, Hope, and none of them in my opinion are very good,” she said after a moment. “But let's leave it at

that. It's a question for another day. The most important thing to think about right now is what you'll do."

Hart asked two questions to which she already knew the answers. "Do you have support at home? How would your parents react?"

"My parents would kill me," Hope said with a cold chuckle. "They seem to have gotten very political. Weird politics. Besides that, they don't like or trust the boy. I don't either, actually. The funny thing is that that's about the only thing we agree on. If they found out they would kick me out. They might beat the crap out of me first." Hart noted that it was the only time Hope had come close to being animated during their two meetings.

"Do you have friends or relatives in other states that have not passed these types of laws who would help you?" Hart asked. "You're actually lucky. New Mexico and Colorado are really good on this. And, of course, if you have money you can go anywhere."

Hope thought for a moment. "I do have a high school friend who lives in Santa Fe," she said. "Amy Aster. Amy and I were close once but fell out of touch when she moved. But it's possible. I heard she's still there."

Hope felt the walls were closing in. The opportunity to fulfill her plans—college, law school and a big family—seemed to be evaporating. She was near tears, but managed to hold them back.

Hart, who would face her own challenges as a result of the meeting, paused for a moment. The doctor-turned-activist drew her face closer to Hope's and spoke quietly, calmly and with a directness that made her words compelling.

"Hope, if you choose to get an abortion, the temptation will be to have the procedure done by the first person who comes along who promises you that everything will be okay. But they might not

be qualified," she said. "You do need to do it soon, but you have to find the right people. You will want to just get it done, to put all of this confusion and pain behind you. Don't give in to that. First of all, it's not true. It won't be behind you. These people will try to punish you no matter what you do. You're a pawn on the political chessboard to them. And pawns get sacrificed."

Hope saw the passion in Hart's eyes. It both frightened and reassured her.

"More importantly, this is a serious procedure. If it is done poorly you could get an infection. You could lose the ability to have children. You could bleed to death. It happens. One of the reasons the new laws are so destructive is they make those awful outcomes more likely for many women. You need to be as sure as you can that you are not dealing with a quack who only wants your money. There are a lot of those people out there."

Hart paused to let that sink in. She continued a few seconds later in a more businesslike voice. "There are people in Texas who are performing abortions properly, despite the risks they are taking," she said. "I am in contact with people here in west Texas doing it. If you decide to terminate your pregnancy, I suggest you have the procedure done by these people. I know they are good, have proper equipment and care about the women they treat."

Hart continued talking as she walked to her desk. "If you go to New Mexico or somewhere else I won't be able to advise you. I don't know where to send you outside of this area. We purposely isolate ourselves so that if somebody from one group is arrested they can't provide information on others. If you decide to have it here, call the number I'm going to give you and follow their instructions. You should leave the state as soon as you can after you have

the procedure. The farther you get away from the Texas authorities, the better off you'll be."

Hart returned from her desk with a piece of paper and an envelope and handed them to Hope. A phone number was written on the paper. Hope noted that it was on plain paper that didn't have the firm's logo or contact information.

"We refer to these folks as 'the helpers,' which is corny but intentionally vague," Hart said. "This number will only be good for a week."

The envelope contained six fifty dollar bills. Hart explained that the procedure itself would be free if it was performed by the helpers. The money was to cover expenses.

"Hope, look at me," Hart said. "You need to promise that you won't use the money to get an abortion on the street. You need to take a sacred vow that whatever way you choose—in Texas or elsewhere—that you will only use qualified medical professionals. If you don't, it means these evil people win. They hate you and they would win. Do you understand me? Do you promise you'll do it right?"

Hope felt like a recruit to a military outfit being brought up to speed by a hardened vet who had seen lots of action. She nodded and managed to look Hart straight in the eye. This suggested to the doctor that she was serious, at least at that moment. Hart knew that regardless of how bright and committed a patient seemed, stress and fear often caused them to act impulsively. She used every tool to drive home the importance of not taking unnecessary risks.

Hart paused for a moment and smiled self-consciously. "Hope, this sounds like a movie, pretty cloak and dagger, but if anyone asks you, you don't know me," she said. "We never met. You weren't here. Also, please burn the paper I gave you as soon as you decide. Burn."

Don't toss or shred. I wish things were different. I wish I could give you the care you need and deserve. But I can't. The wrong people have gotten a lot of power. This is all I can do."

Hope nodded and tried to say "thank you" but was only able to mouth the words. No sound came.

The doctor smiled. "My daughter is your age," she said. "You could be her. Hope, if you decide to have the baby, God bless and good luck. If that's the case, send the money back. No return address. And I'd be happy to give you a referral to a doctor. But if you do choose to terminate the pregnancy, I suggest very strongly that you try to mend fences with your parents. No matter what happens, this is a hard thing, physically and emotionally, even for a person with support. It's doubly hard alone. I'm sure your parents love you. Try. Will you try?"

Hope gathered herself. "It would be nice," she said with a weak smile. "But I don't think that's in the cards. At least not now."

Hart hugged Hope, holding it a brief moment longer than usual in such a setting. Hope put the envelope in her pocket and left.

CHAPTER 2

JAYSON DAMOND'S MOMENT

It was a coincidence—and one that later was considered novelistic foreshadowing—that Hope's meeting with Dr. Hart occurred during the same week that a new community just north of Trinidad, Colorado, was being dedicated.

A farewell cocktail reception capping off the three-day event at the facility—which over time would be referred to as Damondville, The Compound, New America and, finally and legally, Compound City—was held that Wednesday evening.

There were last-minute concerns about the increasingly gusty winds and low clouds that had turned the late afternoon sky an ominous slate gray. Administrators crossed their fingers and didn't change the plan, which was to take advantage of the unseasonably warm weather and hold the reception in a tent on the great lawn of the administration building.

There indeed was a storm. To the great relief of the planners, though, the rain and wind were moderate and only lasted about twenty minutes. The evening turned pleasant.

The officials and VIPs were in a celebratory mood. The construction phase that was winding down had brought significant business to southern Colorado and parts of New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas and Kansas. The common belief was this was just a taste of things to come. This made Jayson Damond and Theo Penminen—the men whose companies financed, designed and built the facility—rock stars.

During the previous three days, six tours of about thirty VIPs each had been conducted. The large open-sided people movers used to convey crowds at expansive venues such as zoos and amusement parks ferried guests around the campus. The tour had seven stops and took about three hours.

That there was so much where nothing had been before made the impact staggering. The relaxed and jovial mood with which the tours started gave way to surprise and awe as what had been created by Damond's companies became evident. It was stunning, especially when juxtaposed against the rolling plain on which it rested.

Damondville was Oz. People were handed a brochure as they entered the people mover. On one side was a map with sites indicated by number. The facilities represented by those numbers were on the facing page.

The list: Six four-story barracks, a state-of-the-art gymnasium, an Olympic size pool with a retractable roof, a greeting/administration center, a fifty-room hotel, three two-story office buildings, a social center, an old-fashioned village green with a gazebo, two dining halls, a sophisticated infirmary, two industrial size greenhouses, a power plant, a water purification facility, a 3,000-seat theater/meeting hall, an art gallery, an outdoor theater, a mini-mall with a supermarket and space for eight shops (including two

restaurant-ready units), an industrial laundry, three structures capable of supporting light industry, a man-made lake, schools from preschool through high school, guest and family housing, a security office, an airstrip able to land a medium-size jet and related support structures and garages. There were solar panel and wind-mill parks, a ranch and assorted athletic fields and playgrounds.

Much of the community was built along five semicircular streets: "Patriot Road," "Founding Fathers Avenue," "Citizen Soldiers Way," "Constitution Boulevard" and—perhaps with tongue-in-cheek—"Henry Ford Drive." The semicircle faced a dramatically backlit fountain that sent columns of recycled water forty feet into the air. Behind it, at least during the dedication, was a seventy-five-foot-high crucifix.

The crucifix had been the subject of intense debate within J&T. Some said it would attract evangelical and other Christian denominations, groups with lots of money and a tendency to hold large gatherings. Others argued that the crucifix would discourage secular groups from renting or leasing space.

The compromise was to build a portable crucifix that could be disassembled into three sections and loaded onto a one-car train that ran on a narrow gauge track between the pedestal and a big storage shed near the ranch, which was about a mile away. It therefore could be brought out or stored based on the group using the facility.

"You don't want to give up on either the pious hypocrites or the godless atheists," Damond joked at one planning meeting. "Everyone's money is green."

Henry Ford Drive was the furthest street away from the fountain, which was the nominal center of the campus. The street was bounded by an arcing 25 foot-wide grassy band that was sprinkled

with picnic tables and barbecues. The farm and ranch were beyond. Still further away were windmills and solar panels. The design was modular, so land use could be shifted as population increased, energy generation grew more efficient and other changes occurred.

Credit for the project was diplomatically given to both Damond and Pennimen. Everybody knew, however, that Jayson Damond was the money and brains behind J&T as well as the majority owner. It was his project and he was the man of the hour. Indeed, Pennimen didn't like the spotlight and hadn't even made the trip. He was more than 1,600 miles away at the corporate headquarters in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

The attention paid to Damond bordered on hero worship. It came to a head during the climactic reception. He was surrounded by local residents thrilled to have a celebrity in their midst—especially one creating jobs and generating revenue for their community.

The reception began in the tent. People got their drinks and walked out into the comfortable night air. Damond's handlers led him toward a small podium, mic and speakers. A tarp that had protected the electronic equipment from the rain was being folded by a workman.

Damond was a man of medium height. He was broad-shouldered enough that the extra weight of later middle age made him appear robust and healthy rather than fat and faded. He had wavy black hair that still was thick and only graying slightly. People often said that they hoped to look as good when they reached his age. Damond would smile and respond that he'd prefer to be a fat

and balding thirty year-old. “You can work off fat on a treadmill. Years? Not so much,” he would say.

Though he dressed elegantly and in a manner that suggested wealth and status when necessary, his public persona stressed informality. When making an appearance he wore a hoodie and baseball cap embroidered with that community’s name. Afterward, the PR team would collect the used clothing, certify it had been worn by Jayson Damond and auction it off. J&T would then donate triple the winning bid—usually funded by corporations trying to curry favor—to that community for technology-related civic improvements.

In this case, both the cap and the hoodie said “Trinidad!!!” The exclamation points had not been used previously and indicated the occasion and location were special. The clothes raised a million dollars, which was donated to Las Animas County libraries and public schools. The funds were used to upgrade WiFi, enhance emergency communications and support science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs.

Damond greeted everyone with a “Hey! Howya dune, bro?” in a good approximation of a New York accent. He extended his hand, palm up, to youngsters he passed. The child would try to “give him five,” only to see Damond withdraw the hand. The kid invariably laughed and tried again. Damond would do the same thing while asking the child why his friendliness was being rebuffed. The child would get the joke and struggle to stop laughing long enough to explain that he or she was trying, but Damond was withdrawing his hand. Damond would indignantly deny this while doing so yet again. After two or three more back and forths Damond would let the child connect and then blow on his hand as if to say that the

slap hurt. “Why did you hit me so hard? I may start crying!” he would say to his new fan as he moved on.

The first item on the short program was a performance by the local middle school band and choir. Awkward and uncomfortable-looking kids toting trumpets, clarinets and other instruments filled the three-level bleachers adjacent to the small podium. The kids struggled through “America the Beautiful,” “Don’t Stop Thinking About Tomorrow” by Fleetwood Mac and “Thank You” by Natalie Merchant. They finished and, with looks of great relief, shuffled off the stage.

Next came a video tribute. It was dusk, but the hi-def video monitors had such high resolution that it didn’t matter. J&T produced the slick video. It featured statements from five people whose lives had been touched by Damond’s technology: A veteran living far away from health services, a single mother of three young children who earned her degree from her basement, a man who worked from home in a call center while caring for his ailing wife, a formally isolated paralyzed woman who had established vibrant virtual relationships and an executive who didn’t have to choose between his dream home in Phoenix and dream job in St. Louis.

The first vignette set the tone. It began with a few seconds of archival combat footage from the Vietnam War. That faded into a video of a smiling eighty-four-year-old Tony Clarke. He was shown playing piano and singing with his wife, looking through old photographs, buying ice cream for his grandkids and laughing with buddies at his VFW post.

The audio:

My name is Tony Clarke. I was a Marine. I served three

tours in Vietnam, including two weeks in the Battle of Hue during the Tet Offensive in 1968. After the war, I moved to a rural town in Arkansas. It's a life I love. I hunt, I fish, I nap, I get on my wife Margie's nerves. We're lucky and comparatively healthy, but we do have some issues. Everyone our age does.

Just to get the most minor care—heart rate, blood pressure, that type of thing—we had to drive about forty-five minutes to a clinic. It's most of a whole day between the driving and the visit. We get tired. If the doctors see something they want checked out, we'd have to drive to our regional center. That's all the way over in Fayetteville. It's at least a couple of hours each way. So we'd have to pay for a hotel.

Well, the telecom equipment that we've gotten through insurance that J&T developed has changed things for the better. That's putting it mildly. There's a lot of stuff that would require a trip in the past that now can be done remotely right from our kitchen table. We can talk to the doc face to face. He can see our records, take remote readings and tell us how to do things in front of the camera that can help him figure out what's going on. It's 8K high definition, so he can see things almost like being there.

He then tells us we're okay, prescribes something—or says he needs to see one of us and we book an appointment.

So in that case, we go. But now it's a last resort. And they are adding new features all the time. like alerts to tell me to take my meds. Every time I have a checkup there seems to be something new.

And on top of that, we're monitored 24/7. If there is a dangerous reading they would call 911 immediately and have an ambulance dispatched. If it's important but not an emergency, they would try to reach us for a day or so and use 911 as a last resort.

Nothing like that has ever happened, thank god. But it's great knowing that somebody is watching out for us. There's a plan in place, like a battle. And think about it: Using Jayson's technology means we are being tracked more fully and efficiently than somebody living down the street from the hospital who isn't.

I understand that J&T is not the only source of this great technology. It's a big industry. But he's developed a lot of it and has been as responsible as any one person over the years for pioneering the stuff and for making it such a big deal— and affordable enough for insurance companies to offer. Mr. Damond is a good man. He has helped a lot of people lead longer and happier lives. And I'm not a jealous man: He deserves to enjoy his life as much as he seems to.

I'm not a writer or public speaker. The folks at J&T helped me with the language. I insisted we be clear about

that. But I jumped at the chance to make this video. Every word of what I've said is true. God bless Jayson Damond. He's been a godsend to my family.

All the stories were compelling and unique but at the same time shared a common theme. What Damond had developed had improved people's lives. In some cases, the improvements were breathtaking and transformative. This combined with a raffish image made him a folk hero.

When the video ended, everyone stood, turned toward Damond and clapped. It became an extended standing ovation. The man of the hour waved meekly and wiped away tears in a way that everyone present, including his many detractors, knew was heartfelt and genuine.

The next item on the program was Las Animas County Executive Tom Garcia's introduction of the man of the hour. It now was fully dark. Garcia walked to the lectern and spoke:

Just over seven years ago, early in 2022, representatives of J&T called our offices to speak about the prospect of building what would turn out to be a new town in our county. To say we were floored is an understatement. We were not even sure at first it wasn't some sort of prank or scam. Well, of course, it wasn't. We checked and saw that Jayson owned this huge tract of land and that the contact was real. We quickly agreed to work with J&T and felt like we just hit the jackpot. It was the wisest choice in Trinidad's civic history.

Slowly, the process moved on. We pinched ourselves

every day. We knew what Jayson had done. We heard stories—dozens of stories—along the lines of those you just saw. We are in the presence of a man who has made a difference, a real difference, in people's lives.

As time passed, Trinidad and the surrounding communities in Las Animas County got to know Jayson Damond and Theo Pennimen. Not just as universally respected giants and pioneers in their field. Not just as men who bring business to our region. But as men. Men who believe in giving back. Men who see our families and think of their families, when they weren't so rich and influential. We love what Jayson and Theo are doing. We love the good it will bring. But it starts with the fact that we love Jayson and Theo.

So, gentlemen, thank you. We look forward to working with you both, men with special places in our hearts, for decades to come.

Damond walked over and embraced Garcia as the crowd clapped. He complimented the young musicians on their "wonderful performance" and said how honored and proud he was to help a hero such as Tony Clarke and the others in the video. Damond thanked Garcia and the community and said how much he looked forward to continuing to work with Trinidad.

Damond's remarks mostly were perfunctory. The man who spent years and more than a billion dollars building the campus only came alive toward the end of his brief remarks when he described "the

amazing and unique human ability to work together to build things that are permanent.” Those who followed him closely knew that the public Damond truly engaged only when that topic was discussed.

The crowd was divided between locals who saw Damond as a celebrity and savior and those who actually knew him. While those in the latter group acknowledged that the innovations he pioneered did a tremendous amount of good, they knew the avuncular public image was a small piece of a complex and less flattering whole.

Damond’s awful reputation was not a result of his main business, which was investing in and nurturing telecommunications companies. He was a legend who was respected, admired and even liked in that field.

His image problem began when he was between his fifth and six billion dollars in net assets. At that point, Damond decided to reinvent himself and launched real estate, architectural and construction-related firms. He was rich and powerful and no longer needed to pay attention to fair business practices, his reputation or the law. He adopted the Trump strategy, which he thought was brilliant: Renege on promises to subcontractors and vendors and invite them to sue. The victim inevitably would reach the painful and humiliating conclusion that the lawyers Damond had on retainer would use every crack and crevice of the legal system to delay and waste their time and money. To them it would be a game. The companies that had worked for him in good faith came to understand that efforts to get what they were owed were futile and self-defeating.

The cornerstone of Damond’s strategy was that being right, just or fair is meaningless. The only things that matter are money, leverage and power—and the willingness to use them ruthlessly. At the

same time, he was a contradiction. Though he didn't blink an eye at cheating those with whom he did business, he was big hearted and sentimental in his human interactions.

Damond was at heart a worker whose favorite aphorism was that "the only way to grow old gracefully is to refuse to." He periodically visited work sites and joined crews. The billionaire would be incognito. He would grow his beard and pull his hat down as far as possible. The foreman would be forewarned and tell the crew that "the new guy" didn't know much about the job at hand because he was part of a special program that integrated the chronically unemployed into the workforce. The man had experienced hard times and should be treated respectfully and helped when necessary.

If Damond had fun and the workers were industrious and reasonably friendly, an assistant would show up the next day with a \$2,000 check for the foreman and \$1,000 checks for each crew member. Any worker who revealed that the mysterious worker was Jayson Damond would be terminated. Damond "dropped in" six times while the community was under construction. He would have done so more but his beard grew slowly and he had to wait for enough workers to cycle out to ensure secrecy.

Word circulated that this was going on despite the termination threat. It led to strange situations in which every arriving worker was intensely scrutinized. Workers eagerly looked for any hint that the newcomer was a billionaire. Not knowing anything about sports was a good sign, for instance. What self-respecting billionaire would waste time watching baseball? Conversely, a well-worn lunch pail was a bad sign. How many billionaires even own a lunch pail, much less one that's been used?

Newcomers were treated with a level of tenderness not generally

associated with construction workers. When it became clear that a new worker was not Damond, frustrated coworkers would glower ferociously as if it was the man's fault. In one instance, an unsuspecting soul who committed the sin of being an authentic steel worker had three toes broken when an indignant window installer "accidentally" dropped a fifteen-pound drill on his right foot.

The spark for the massive project was Damond's desire to pay homage to Henry Ford, another imperfect giant. Damond won many of the original plans for two Ford projects at auction. One was Fordlandia, a city in the Brazilian Amazon built in the 1920s to supply rubber to Ford's burgeoning automobile empire. The other was Greenfield Village in Michigan, a living museum Ford opened in 1933. Many of the aging brown pages had notes scribbled by Ford.

Honoring an icon who had been dead for about 80 years was a poor rationale for a project that would cost more than a billion dollars to build. The reality was that there was no plan. Ideas came and went: Hosting religious retreats, leasing to the military as a training site, renting to huge groups for weeks or months at a time (sort of a massive Airbnb), creating a biosphere to study self-sufficiency, establishing a temporary home for refugees from disasters, housing underprivileged and/or troubled youths or creating tech incubators.

The lack of a clear mission—or even a cloudy one—was a challenge to J&T's public relations department. The group planted the idea on social media that the purpose was set and would be divulged at a time and place of Damond and Pennimen's choosing. Insiders—including high-level J&T executives—whispered that spending so

much without outlining the project's purposes and goals was narcissistic, arrogant and wasteful. That hubris was the closely held secret, not the plan.

Jayson Damond finished his surprisingly brief remarks and, unable to think of a better way to show that he was done, hugged Garcia again. Reporters have a savant-like ability to know when free food and alcohol are about to be served. They rose as one and began walking back to the tent. The rest of the crowd took their lead and headed back as well.