

A Good Man

by Gary Moshimer

Charles tapped the anger management code on his steering wheel. He rolled down his street and saw Jack Watson throwing stuff into the trunk of his black Volvo coupe. He waved, but Jack did not wave back. Jack's face was blazing red. He looked like he might have a stroke. Charles thought he should stop and give Jack some relaxation techniques. The poor guy had his job at the bank, plus he had the daughter, Marci, who was eight and always having seizures. But Charles couldn't wait to get home to his own little daughter, who was two and the apple of his eye.

She met him at the door, hugging his legs. He started to fall, and felt that old feeling from the war. He lifted her too quickly, but she screamed with delight. His wife Ava's arm was on his shoulder. He let his air out and his shoulders drooped. He handed the girl to Ava and said her name softly: Jamie. Then he said, "I'm sorry."

Ava put Jamie in front of Sesame Street and took Charles by the arm, led him into the kitchen. "You won't believe this," she said. "It's all over the neighborhood. Jan left Jack for her mother's. Seems Jack has been molesting Marci. It came out when Marci chopped her hair off. Marci said he was taking movies, too. He'll probably go to jail."

Charles worked his fists. He counted to ten and did his breathing. He had played golf with Jack a few times. And Jack and Jan had babysat Jamie not long ago. Charles felt the bile roll up his throat. He reminded himself that he should not be judge, jury and executioner. Deep breaths. His clenched fist held his keys, and one stuck out like a blade. Ava noticed this and said, "You're a good man, Charles." Charles spun his keyring and moved for the door. Ava caught his arm. "I'm just going to talk to him," Charles said. "Get to the bottom of this." He shook off her hand as he had done so many times. But then he patted her hand. He centered himself. He said

goodbye to Jamie, kissed her head, smelled her hair. Then he got in his old Subaru and drove slowly up the street.

Jack was still there, leaning on his trunk. When he saw Charles he closed the trunk and got behind the wheel. Charles pulled his car up so their front bumpers met. Charles felt the power of the Volvo. It pushed the Subaru back onto the street, the tires squealing. Jack turned and peeled up the street. Charles floored it; the car shuddered. Jack turned left at the end of their street. This road was a mile of potholes before turning to dirt. Jack swerved, missing the holes, and Charles stayed on his butt. Jack gave him the finger out the window. Charles gave him the peace sign.

The road turned to dirt and Jack picked up speed. Charles fell behind, the car's engine missing beats. He was losing him. There was a cloud of dust. But coming around a sharp turn Charles saw that Jack had missed it, and the steaming nose of the Volvo was buried in a large oak tree. Charles parked and walked up to the Volvo. Jack's head hung there, his nose bloody from the air bag. He saw Charles and looked very afraid. He knew about the PTSD and how Charles was capable of a single death blow or twisted dog tags around the neck. But despite his fear he sat erect, ready to take it, ready to die.

Charles hung in the window. "Hey, Jack. You know how I got the way I am? I killed a kid. He was coming out of a shell of a building. He had a gun. He was just a kid, maybe ten, but I shot him."

Charles looked into Jack's eyes. "In a way, you've done the same thing. You have to live with it."

"Get off of my car," Jack said, wiping the blood from his face.

Charles took a fingertip of blood from Jack's face and drew an "X" on Jack's forehead. "We'll always know where you are."

Charles drove home. He picked up Jamie and hugged her to the dust on his face. Ava asked how he got so dirty, and Charles said he had taken a drive on the old road to let off steam.

The next day Ava went to work. Charles was a stay at home dad right now. He was astounded by the beauty of his daughter, and he held her close a lot. He thought of how she would be in a few years, and how he would not be able to touch her like this, and he thought of Jack, the evil that lies in all men and sometimes comes out.

He was carrying Jamie around the house when the cops came. They peeked out a window. The cops were examining the Subaru. Charles moved from window to window. The doorbell rang, and he just kept peeking outside. He said to Jamie, "You'll always be safe in your house. No one can get you." He ran past the windows as the pounding shook the front door. They giggled.

