

FAITH WITHIN THE VOICES

CHAPTER 1: A DAY LIKE NO OTHER

The day starts off like any other. I'm going about my usual routine, making breakfast for my elderly grandmother and mother-in-law. My mother-in-law walks with a walker and is recovering from a stroke, while my grandmother is ninety-four years old and suffers from dementia. My wife works, my kids go to high school and college, and I take care of them full-time. I cook, clean, wash clothes, give them their medication—whatever they need, I'm there to make it happen.

This morning, I'm making them oatmeal for breakfast. The aroma of apple cinnamon fills the air. I serve them and stand by, watching their faces of enjoyment as they eat spoonful after spoonful at the dinner table.

It wasn't always like this.

I worked as a security guard for many years until I decided to take a chance and start a Christian alternative news website. It was going well, and I quit my job to do it full-time. I covered many topics that mainstream news wouldn't talk about, from government corruption and overreach to shady global agendas. I exposed the Illuminati and the New World Order, and also covered Christian persecution in the United States and throughout the world.

This was going well for a while until, one day, my website was totally erased by bad actors. This happened not once, not twice, but time and time again. To say I was furious would be an understatement, and yet, time after time, I rebuilt my website and continued pushing forward.

With all of the stress that I was going through, my wife, Sophia, and I were dealt another blow. We learned that my mother-in-law had had a stroke and was completely paralyzed. Despite

the devastating news, we decided that we were going to care for her and moved her in with us. We labored over her with love like parents to a newborn child. We had to teach her how to do everything all over again—little things we take for granted, like walking, talking, brushing her hair, eating, and more.

Between the stress that this brought and the hackers erasing my website, I couldn't take it anymore, so I did the unthinkable—I quit the news business. I started to care for my mother-in-law and Grandma full-time. This went on for seven whole years. During this time, my own health took a turn for the worse. I got sick and developed fibromyalgia, which to this day gives me pain throughout my body—a relentless pain that feels all-consuming, as though I am going to die. Now here I am today, sick and in pain, caring for my mother-in-law and my grandmother. While this is hard, I know that they need me, and if the tables were turned, they would do the same in a heartbeat. So here I am, feeding them oatmeal.

Sometime later, they finish eating. I'm still in my pajamas, with a lot of chores ahead of me, from cleaning and washing clothes, to making lunch, and cooking dinner for my family. If I have half a chance, I need to pull some weeds from the landscaped areas of my property. About midday, I take a break and decide to sit on my backyard patio for a while. I take this quiet time to relax and enjoy the moment—feel the breeze hitting my face, enjoy the sun shining down on me as I listen to the birds chirping, leaves fluttering in the wind, branches bending and creaking a familiar tune. It is moments like this that make me forget about my pain.

But just like that, my break is interrupted. Two voices begin to speak inside my mind. Unsettled, I go inside my house, but the voices follow. Panic sets in, and my heart begins to pound. I start to breathe faster and faster as I pace back and forth in my living room.

I hear a younger man and a woman talking. “He looks stressed out,” the woman says. “I’m losing my visual. Pick him up on camera two.”

Camera two? What cameras? In my house?

“I have him on camera three,” the guy says.

I start walking around my living room frantically searching for a camera. “Something is happening,” the woman tells the man. “This doesn’t feel right.”

I search for a camera, and find one on my TV. They both gasp. “He-he’s looking for cameras!”

I lunge for my tool drawer, slam it open, and find some painter’s tape. “He’s going to tape it up!” the man yells in a high-pitched voice.

As I tear a small piece off and cover the camera, they scream in disbelief. “He took out camera two,” the woman shouts.

What in the world is going on? I think to myself. *Somebody has cameras in my house!* Bedroom after bedroom, I rush to cover the TVs. Anger and frustration fill the voices in my head as they shout to each other, “He’s taking them all out!”

Desperation rises in the voice of the man as he whispers, “He knows we’re watching.” When I cover the camera to the TV in my bedroom, he screams, “Camera one is down!”

I run over to my bedroom as the lady begins to panic. “It can’t be,” she yells, “he can’t know. How could he know?”

“Mom, I’m telling you, he knows!” the young man replies.

I look straight into the camera. “I know you’re watching me,” I tell them as I cover it with tape.

“We have to call Sergeant Bradley; we have to tell him!” the woman insists.

I cover all the cameras on every television in the house, but then I hear them talking to someone on the phone. The woman’s voice is angry as she tells Sergeant Bradley that I took out all of her cameras—that I know I’m being watched. “That’s impossible,” Sergeant Bradley responds. “Did he see you?”

The lady assures him that I didn’t. She hangs up and shouts, to no one in particular, “He doesn’t know who he’s messing with!”

I sit down on the couch in my living room, thinking to myself, *I can’t believe this is happening to me. What am I going to do?*

“Mom, we still have audio from his TVs!” the young man crows triumphantly.

Immediately, I get up and unplug television after television. “We’re losing him!” The young man reports. “He’s unplugging everything! How—” The man’s voice goes quiet in what I can only assume is a moment of pure disbelief. “Mom,” he says, voice shaking, “h-he can hear us...”

“He can’t hear us,” the woman replies dismissively.

“He can,” the young man insists, nervous now.

The woman doesn’t respond for a few seconds, taking it in, then whispers, “I have to tell Sergeant Bradley; he’s not going to be happy about this.”

As I go to unplug the last TV, I turn and tell the camera, “Leave me and my family alone.” Then I jerk out the plug.

“He just *spoke* to us!” the woman says, reeling in shock. She whispers frantically to her sergeant on the phone, explaining all that’s happened.

Sergeant Bradley tells her to calm down and assures her and her son that I can’t hear them. “Tonight,” Sergeant Bradley says, “you’ll go into his house and install cameras throughout. We can use the Wi-Fi. We’ll map out his house and give you an image of him to follow in real time.”

Immediately, I unplug the Wi-Fi.

“He unplugged the Wi-Fi!” she reports.

“He’s definitely listening to us,” the young man affirms. “This guy is a hacker.”

After a moment of shocked silence, the Sergeant responds. “Check your computers for malware, and sweep the house for bugging devices and cameras. I’m on my way to you.”

The pair search for cameras and listening devices, but don’t find any. They go outside to talk, probably thinking I won’t be able to listen in.

“Mom,” the young man says, “I’m a capable hacker, but this guy... I don’t know how he’s doing this.”

“The malware scan came up clean,” the mother replies. “If we don’t have bugs in our house, that means he must have a listening device pointed at us. And *that* means he knows we’re his neighbors.”

At that moment, I realize that I recognize the voices. The people watching me are my neighbors, Mary, and her son, Jason. I know them well.

What’s going on? My neighbors are watching me? They must be police, maybe CIA, FBI... but I didn’t do anything illegal, so I have nothing to worry about. Still, why can I hear them in my head? And why do they think I’m watching them? I figure these people must be part

of the military—some black ops organization conducting an operation on me. It makes sense, considering they have a sergeant. I sit down on the couch, contemplating my next move.

That evening, the sergeant arrives. Mary and Jason meet him in their driveway, and I hear them at the front of my house. I stand close to the window, holding the curtain slightly open while trying to get a peek, but I'm unable to see anyone. I hear Mary and Jason get into a car. Sergeant Bradley explains that he's going to take them to another house, and they'll talk there. He has other people screen them and their equipment for malware, cameras, and listening devices, and sends another group back to their house to do the same. After everything is cleared, they speak freely. "He *is* able to hear us somehow," Jason insists.

"He must be a stalker, or a pervert," Sergeant Bradley replies, "possibly filming and listening to Mary using a device from his house." He assures them that they haven't been hacked. "I can buy spyware online right now. These devices are cheap—anyone could buy them. It's the most likely explanation."

He explains that they have agents in the front, rear, and sides of my home in the neighborhood houses, surveilling me. These agents are well-trained—over the course of years, they've made me genuinely believe that they're normal neighbors and that I know each one of them. I sit on the couch in the living room, stunned. *I can still hear them, and I know exactly what house they're in. How am I doing this? Is this all some kind of big experiment?* Visions of the Truman Show enter my mind—not the kind that make me giggle, the kind that make my

heart sink into the depths of my stomach and make my head spin. The kind that both freeze me to the spot and make me want to get in my car and drive until I run out of gas.

I sit back, take a deep breath, and try to calm down—try to think back. I’ve noticed that each of my neighbors watch me from time to time. Most of my free time I spend tending a garden in my backyard. I thought that they were unhappy with me having a large vegetable garden because we live in the Arizona desert—not much water to go around. I remember often feeling like I was being watched when I was in the garden. I even saw one of them taking pictures of me. I didn’t think much of it at the time. At worst, maybe they were going to report me to the county office or something. But now...

I sit on my couch, wondering, watching, waiting. Panic is setting in. I know that they’re running a surveillance operation on me, and they can see right through my curtains. So, I staple tarps over my windows to block them completely.

Right on cue, I hear them. “He’s covering his windows,” Jason reports.

“Unbelievable!” Sergeant Bradley says, disgruntled.

As I’m putting up the last tarp, I see binoculars peeking out of the side of the window in the house across the street from me. “Sarge, he saw me! He looked straight at me!”

“That’s it,” Sergeant Bradley says, anger rising in his voice. “Let’s show this guy who he’s messing with.”

Sometime later, I’m sitting on the couch in my living room with my dog by my side, wondering what’s going to happen next. I can feel my energy depleting—feel a weight settling over my

entire body, and what seems like a slight vibration all over. I start sweating profusely. My dog begins to whimper and cry as he lies on my lap. I know something's not right.

"You feel that? We're cooking you," Jason crows triumphantly. "You're in a microwave, and you don't even know it." Jason laughs aloud as he continues, "I know you hear me. This is for surveilling us. You've been watching me and my mother, you sick pervert! We're going to barbecue you. Slowly."

They're using a military weapon on me? Immediately I feel the radiating heat from my body stop, and just in time. *I don't know how much longer I can take this.* Fifteen minutes later, they begin radiating me again. I feel sick and nauseous. I'm salivating and feel like I'm about to throw up. I tell my dog to move away from me. I don't want anything to happen to him. He thinks I'm reprimanding him, and looks at me with a sad face, slowly inching his way back to my feet, where he lies down to rest. The cycle of radiation continues until my family gets home in the evening.

I hear Mary and Jason speak excitedly. "His family's arrived. Their car just pulled up."

I hear Jason, like a kid with a new toy, asking Sergeant Bradley, "Can I cook his family?"

"No," Sergeant Bradley answers definitively. "We can use them as leverage."

The joy of my two daughters and wife as they walk through the door is a strange contrast to the turmoil in my mind. They greet me with a hug, then go to greet my grandma and mother-in-law, who are sitting in their chairs watching television as usual, unaware of anything that has happened throughout the day. I don't want to get my family involved, so I don't tell them anything. They ask me if I'm not feeling well and tell me that I look sick. My wife and kids plug back in the televisions. I let them, revealing nothing. But eventually, my wife asks me about the tarps that I stapled to cover the windows, and I'm left with little choice.

I tell her the truth—or at least, what I think is the truth. But I can't tell the kids. Now that the TVs are plugged in and the Wi-Fi is connected, my persecutors are able to see and listen to us. I know they're watching. After telling my wife all that went on throughout the day, the great irony of being married to a mental health counselor hits me like a ton of bricks as she dismisses it all as possibly being a psychotic episode. I hear my persecutors erupt all at once, laughing and mocking me. "She doesn't believe you, you idiot. Nobody will! Call the cops, call the hospital—*nobody* will believe you."

I know in my heart that they're right.

Sometime later, I sit down to watch TV with my wife and kids in the living room. I know that my family and I are being observed through the very same television we're watching. Anger bubbles up in my veins as my kids and wife stare at the screen, their faces lit up with smiles and interest. I stare too, all that has been happening replaying in my mind's eye. My wife looks at me and whispers, "We'll go talk to somebody. They'll put you on some meds. Everything will be okay."

Right then, I hear Mary tell Jason, "Cook him." I sit there as if nothing is happening while the heat rises, sweat breaking out on my forehead.

Sergeant Bradley yells at the top of his lungs, "We can do this the easy way, or we can do this the hard way. You're going to work for me. You have no choice." One after another, they mock me, radiating me on and off throughout the night, speaking as if they were observing a lab rat. In the end, I'm delirious, exhausted, and don't sleep at all. This goes on for three more days

and three more nights. On the fourth day, my wife tells me that she's worried about me—that maybe I should check into a hospital. I look into the mirror and realize that I've made a helmet out of aluminum foil to stop the voices. I've had enough. Maybe I *am* going crazy. But one thing's for sure.

I need help.