



CRUNCH

A True Story



Chuck Trunks

East Nampa

I went to bed knowing it wasn't necessary to set an alarm. Whether I called it a night at nine o'clock in the evening or two in the morning, the sun would, most assuredly, rouse me awake at six-fifteen each and every day—and I didn't like it. To accomplish its diabolical mission of putting an end to my peaceful rest, the sun radiated waves of luminescence piloted by gung-ho kamikaze photons, who could steer the shards of early morning light directly at my closed eyelids—no easy task since the intrusive light had to follow a very specific path to find its targeted paydirt. First, it had to reflect off my neighbor's house and then bounce off the white pebbles in my backyard with enough speed to pierce the dark window film on my *west-facing* bedroom window. But that's not the end of its journey. As if possessed, the evil rays—with what juice remained—managed to exploit every gap in the blinds above my bed.

Normally, within moments of waking up, I'd lie there, listening to the sounds of Nampa, Idaho—a high desert hellscape of soul-crushing urban blight, agro-industrial factories, and street corner signs touting “New Family Homes Starting in the Low 400s.” But this morning was different. I wasn't dreading a morning running route that would take me past 200 densely packed houses in three different neighborhoods—where the only people I'd see were the ones sitting behind steering wheels, sunglasses, and tinted windows. Nor was I hyperventilating about having to drive to Costco—a store where every day feels like the last shopping day before Thanksgiving. Instead, I woke up feeling 50 pounds of regret pressing down on my chest and lamenting the bitter taste of buyer's remorse. *What was I thinking? How could I have been so impulsive?*

A month earlier, after completing a 10-month writing project, I moved from Raleigh, North Carolina, to Nampa because I couldn't locate a reasonably priced rental space 15 miles to the east in Boise. With my next writing project well underway, I didn't feel guilty taking time away from my laptop to see if I could

locate a local gym to augment a home-based, daily regimen that included running or cycling after 30 minutes of stretching. The around-the-clock solo act had finally grown stale. Although I already knew I wouldn't find friendship or romance or appear on anyone's radar screen inside a commercial gym, I still felt I needed to be around others—even if it was only for a few hours a week. As it turned out, my best option was not only less than three miles away, but it was also close to a Starbucks and a half-decent grocery store—all on the same side of Interstate 84. I could already envision myself grabbing a coffee or picking up a few items for dinner on my way home from Crunch Fitness. For a man who detests the fact that all of us in the slave class have to own, maintain, and drive a car to fetch even the most basic of needs, I was practically giddy imagining how efficient my future gym runs would be.

From where I lived in East Nampa, there was only one way to drive to Crunch Fitness—the same depressing route I'd have to take for coffee, groceries, or gas. I start by winding through my blue-collar neighborhood of hardworking tradesmen who look like they'd rather die than sit inside an office cubicle. Then I head east for a mile on Birch Lane past subdivisions and apartment complexes, rarely seeing people out and about on either strip of sidewalk. At the traffic light, I can see several new construction projects on the College of Western Idaho's main campus and wonder why anyone would pay to go to college these days. The fun begins when I turn right onto Garrity Boulevard. For a mile, I drive past corporate-owned strip malls, a Walmart Supercenter, gas station convenience stores, and a few car dealerships before traffic inevitably bottlenecks a quarter mile from an always-choked interstate underpass.

I realize, as I finally emerge from underneath the interstate, that this short stretch of aggravating roadway consumes over half my travel time. I wait at yet another traffic signal before turning left onto East Flamingo Avenue, a street ironically devoid of anything pink or exotic. I quickly approach a more aptly named road at the next intersection of car-centric shopping zones. If I turned right onto East

Commerce Street, I'd be able to pull into a dismal five-acre parking lot in front of my preferred grocery store, where jacked-up pandemic pricing remains undaunted in 2022. Instead, I turn left and roll past a Starbucks sandwiched between a Jimmy John's and a Popeye's Chicken. According to Google Maps, I only need to drive a half mile further to reach my destination. East Commerce Street parallels the eastbound lanes of Interstate 84 and climbs one of the few hills on this side of Nampa.

Although Crunch Fitness sits atop a rise overlooking one of the most congested traffic areas in the state of Idaho, it faces north, offering its gym members sweeping views of even more suburban sprawl in the distant cities of Middleton and Star. The building itself doesn't look like it was built to house a full-service gym, including a swimming pool. With its opulent facade and majestic position on top of a hill, I could understand how people might mistake the Crunch building for Nampa's City Hall. But to me, the two-story glass behemoth reminds me of the corporate offices of insurance companies that prioritize the greed of their executives over the services they promised their premium-paying customers. Despite my disdain for anything governmental or corporate, I liked Crunch's location and its clean, professional exterior—so much so that I completely forgot about the other gyms I had planned to visit that afternoon.

What About the Pool?

The sun beamed directly into my face as I walked from my truck toward the front entrance of Crunch Fitness. Since the late-morning sun was behind the building, I was rewarded with a respite of shade for the last 20 yards, allowing me to remove my sunglasses and tuck them into my backpack. Without the glare, I could clearly see several members exiting the building as I approached. The first person who caught my eye was a young lady in compression spandex carrying a toddler wearing a pink and white romper. Mother and daughter looked so much alike I momentarily forgot that men weren't supposed to speak to women in public

anymore and blurted, “My god . . . If there ever was a more obvious mini-me!” I watched her stony expression morph into a smile as she continued past me and heard her tell her daughter, who was focused on her mother’s necklace, “See that? I told you . . . We’re twins!”

The next two people I saw emerge from the front of the building looked like they, too, could’ve been twins. One followed the other out, but I could tell they didn’t come to the gym together—not a difficult assumption on my part since it seems most adult men do everything alone these days. The lone wolves appeared to be around 25 years old and looked like they were harboring secret fantasies of starring in their own post-apocalyptic action movie as gritty anti-heroes. The Terminator, complete with wraparound sunglasses, tattoos, and bulk, walked past me with his chin jutted forward and his gaze riveted on the horizon. He made no attempt to acknowledge my existence, yet I didn’t feel put off by the snub. The cyborg assassin was obviously sent from a future war-torn world to kill Sarah Connor, whose unborn son will lead the human resistance against the machines, right?

Mad Max was just as friendly. Before passing me, the lanky young man, wearing a loose-fitting tank top over jeans and boots, veered toward a gray monster truck with blacked-out windows taking up two spots next to the building. I envied his spiky, rockstar hair and Coppertone tan but not his air of self-importance or the amalgam of illegible hieroglyphics scrawled on his neck, chest, and arms. Of course, I assumed the tattoos had something to do with him being an ex-police officer and having to fight for survival in a dystopian landscape ravaged by resource scarcity and general lawlessness. Or, he was simply getting in a workout before his swing shift began as a driver for UPS. But I could be wrong.

The building’s lobby couldn’t have been more unwelcoming. Everything was black. Black flooring. Black walls. Black ceiling. Even the four-sided reception desk was black. The initial space was too cavernous for a gym reception area,

convincing me the building wasn't built with a fitness center in mind. Four private offices lined the right side of the empty lobby. Three were dark inside. One was occupied with the door slightly ajar. A big man in black sweatpants and a black t-shirt came out from one of the dark offices carrying a backpack. He walked toward me while slipping his right arm through one of the shoulder straps and asked, "What can I do for you?"

Suddenly, I felt conscientious about *my* backpack and put it down near my feet in front of the unmanned reception desk. "I'm here to check out the place," I said. "I've never been inside a Crunch gym before."

He looked at his watch and sighed before stepping behind the messy counter to pick up a grimy iPad. It was obvious the big man was on his way out. "What's your name?" he blurted from underneath a black baseball cap with a silver Chevy logo on the front.

"Chuck Trunks."

"Okay. Sign there."

"Where?"

"There," he instructed, pointing to a flat electronic signature pad on the counter to my right.

"What am I signing?" I asked brightly, hoping my annoyance wasn't noticeable.

He set the iPad down on top of a pile of scattered papers and replied, "It's just a waiver so you don't sue us if you fall or something."

Ah, yes . . . It's always a pleasure doing business with Corporate America. I drew a squiggly line in the shape of an infinity symbol above the signature line on the pad with my finger, thinking I should wash my hands as soon as possible. "What's next?" I asked.

The big man put on his sunglasses and exited the reception desk. "You're free to check out the gym. When you're finished, come back here. Someone will be here to help you." He angled toward the double glass doors I had walked through moments earlier. "The locker rooms are over there," he said while pointing somewhere behind the reception desk, "and the gym is upstairs."

"Okay," I acknowledged. I removed my keys from my pocket and squatted down to put them inside my backpack when I remembered something. I spun my head around and blurted, "What about the pool?"

But the big man didn't hear me. He was already on the other side of the glass doors, leaving me to fend for myself inside what was beginning to feel like a post-apocalyptic gym. Still, against a cacophony of red flag alarms going off from deep inside my gut, I swung my backpack over my shoulder and proceeded toward the door of the men's locker room.

Go Greyhound

There was nothing remarkable about the locker room at Crunch Fitness. A handful of sullen men, interspersed among industrial-grade particleboard lockers, sat or stood equidistant from one another in the dimly lit space. They were of various ages and states of undress as I walked in. While inspecting the area, I made sure to avert my eyes from their increasingly suspicious glances. As I peered into a couple of empty lockers and checked out the bathroom and shower areas, I noticed that a few of the men had stopped looking at their phones to see what I was doing. Since none of the walls displayed any signage, I entered a

corridor between the changing area and restroom facilities, figuring I'd eventually locate the advertised sauna, steam room, and lap pool amenities.

With the smell of chlorine growing stronger the further I walked down the tiled hallway, I knew I'd chosen the correct path. To my left, a glass door separated me from what I hoped was a 25-yard pool with at least four divided lanes wide enough for two people to comfortably share. I opened the door, stepped inside, and immediately liked what I saw. To my astonishment, the three-lane pool had most everything I was looking for; plus, it was illuminated by natural light streaming through rooftop skylights and windows along adjacent walls. Except for two senior citizens floating atop two of the lanes, the pool looked refreshing and inviting. Since the old woman in the lane furthest from where I was standing appeared to be mimicking the movements of a 100-year-old sea turtle on muscle relaxers, I decided that the elderly gentleman in front of me would be a much better source of information. Although he was on his back, flailing his arms and legs like an *upended* turtle, I could at least make eye contact with him.

"Excuse me, sir," I said while bending over with my hands on either knee. "Is the pool normally not crowded this time of day?"

"I wouldn't know since I come here sporadically," he replied unhelpfully without pausing his reptilian-like exercise. And then he added what I was hoping to avoid at the Crunch Fitness pool. "I do know that a swim team practices here, and I've seen people conducting swim lessons, too."

"Oh, that's good to know," I said sincerely. "Thanks for telling me. I'll be sure to ask for a pool schedule before I leave." I stood up, avoiding direct eye contact with his enormous pink belly, and asked him where the sauna and steam room were located.

"They don't have a steam room here, but the sauna works pretty good when it's

not broken,” he replied. “It’s behind that door over there next to the rack of kickboards.”

“That seems to be a given these days,” I said before thanking him for his time and telling him I’d see him around.

I was tired of slinging my backpack over my shoulder every time it slid down my arm, so I slipped it over both shoulders like a third grader and walked toward the sauna. I wanted to pout over the absence of a steam room, but if I did, then I’d *really* look like a third grader. After verifying that the roomy sauna was indeed in working order, I retraced my steps through the locker room, thinking how the lack of aesthetics, inadequate lighting, and shuffling men reminded me of all the sad times I’d spent in Greyhound bus stations back in the 1980s. Since I didn’t see another set of stairs other than the black ones in the lobby, I returned to the Dark Lord’s welcome center only to find it deserted along with the reception desk. I climbed the two flights, turned to my left, and immediately recalled the famous line uttered by Tina Turner’s character, Aunty Entity, in the third installment of the Mad Max movie series:

“Welcome to the Thunderdome!”

Inside the Thunderdome

None of us have lived in a post-apocalyptic world, and yet, Hollywood producers and directors seem to be in agreement over what we’d look like if those dark days ever came. Would I emerge from a hole in the wrecked landscape months after a nuclear war with designer stubble, tattoos, and a trucker hat? Would I greet a brave, new world with a roofer’s tan, ripped muscles, and an alpha male aura? Would my clothing appear distressed, dirty even, but still offer teasing glimpses of my pumped biceps, pecs, abs, and quads? But that’s only half the story. What about the women? Can I expect them to be tatted up and sun-kissed, too—fit and

sexy on the outside, masculine on the inside? Could I imagine me and my Armageddon angel running the gauntlet of nuclear fallout on Garrity Boulevard in search of water and gasoline? Yes, I could—especially after soaking in the scene on the second floor of Crunch Fitness, whose slogan “No Judgments” begged me to do just the opposite.

Like many unfortunate souls who had yet to wake up and reject the shameless hypocrisy of Corporate America, I, too, have spent my fair share of time slowly dying in a lifeless cube farm, the parallel and perpendicular gray half-walls reminding me of mazes where the chance of escape is on par with winning a game of tic-tac-toe. But I’ve also seen what an office floor looks like before the perimeter offices and interior cubicles are put in place. Despite floor-to-ceiling windows on three of the four walls and a massive amount of square footage, the incomplete space still felt confining and claustrophobic. That was my first impression of Crunch’s gym floor, a vast space with windows along only two of the four walls. The precious natural light was more than sufficient for those members exercising near a window but practically non-existent for others working out elsewhere in the gym.

Where the natural light ended, recessed lighting took over. However, the painted black walls and dark flooring absorbed much of the light, leaving most of the second floor and its inhabitants shrouded in shadows. For some inexplicable reason, the owners of this particular Crunch franchise thought it best to paint the 20-foot ceiling black as well, creating the same lighting effect I’d suffered through in the homes of people who oddly preferred watching movies underneath a weak fan light rather than turning on a couple of table lamps. From what I’ve experienced and seen on TV, nothing good ever happens in rooms where the light source emanates from a naked bulb hanging from above. Although Crunch had installed dozens of canister lights in the ceiling, their effort was dismal—and so was the gym floor.

50 or so gym members between the ages of 25 and 35, who looked like they could've been co-stars alongside the two young men I saw earlier in the parking lot, pushed, pulled, and lifted weights in virtual silence. Most wore earbuds or headphones, so piped-in music wasn't necessary. I left my backpack looped around both shoulders, figuring I already stood out as a nerd in my bright orange shorts and white t-shirt with a waving Mickey Mouse on the front. All I needed was a juice box in my hands to complete the look. I began my cursory tour of the space, quickly noting that the gym offered what I had expected. However, I was more interested in the men and women I saw working out around me than the condition of the cardio machines or the popularity of the dumbbell racks.

Banging weights and humming cardio machines weren't the only sounds I heard that Tuesday morning. There were voices, too, but not between two present people. These were mostly one-way instructional words directed at phones either attached to tripods or propped up against nearby equipment. As a modest introvert who avoids the spotlight as much as possible, I'll never understand how people can knowingly choose to annoy everyone around them by having the audacity to film themselves working out. What are these people thinking? Don't they know they're telling everyone in the gym—who expect some modicum of privacy and reasonable access to equipment—that their delusional sense of significance and entitlement comes first? Where do they get the nerve?

From my experience, it's usually women who film themselves in gyms. I've toyed with the idea of asking them to stop what they're doing, but I wouldn't dare. Even if I was polite and appealed to her sense of decency, I can't imagine a boss lady interpreting my request as anything other than an act of war. With a camera in her hand and access to social media, what's stopping her from wanting to go toe-to-toe with me? Women are no longer intimidated by men—and they certainly won't take orders from them either, opting instead to manipulate something as simple as being held accountable into a personal attack on her gender. No, thanks.

As I snaked my way around the gym floor, I couldn't help but feel conspicuous. While I might have appeared to be searching for an ice cream truck on my way to story time at the library, the individuals surrounding me resembled what I'd expect to encounter at a Black Sabbath concert. An occasional pink, purple, or turquoise crop top broke up the homogeneity of black- and charcoal-colored clothing. Predictably, the uniformity didn't stop there. Like many of the gyms I'd been in since the internet, smartphones, and social media replaced actual discourse, the members of Crunch Fitness—men and women alike—looked as if they were competing against one another to see who could look more disinterested in the people around them. I felt hemmed in by a room full of superiority complexes requiring a steady influx of equal parts dopamine and validation. I know they wanted me to look at them, but of course I didn't because I'm either too petty or too analytical. To me, if a man sees me looking at him in the gym, I feel like I'm supporting his wannabe alpha male persona with beta envy. Or if a woman sees me looking at her in the gym—or anywhere else for that matter—I tend to get the sense that I'm feeding her insatiable ego with simp adoration.

With nothing more to see in the Thunderdome, I angled toward the black stairs to return to the black lobby. My mind churned as I descended each step. Despite a dozen or more red flag warnings overruling what I liked about the pool and cardio equipment, I still wanted to talk to someone about the membership process and costs. If I wasn't feeling so desperate and lonely, I would've walked through the glass entrance doors and made a beeline for my truck. Instead, I walked across the lifeless lobby and around the abandoned reception desk to knock on the door of the one office that appeared to be occupied by an actual staff member.

“Yes?” a voice echoed, carrying the annoyance of a college professor who hoped no one would bother him during his open office hours.

I pushed against the slightly open door and saw another big man in black behind a cluttered desk. From the door's threshold, I explained that I had just walked through the gym and wanted to talk to someone about joining. "Is there a manager on duty?" I asked.

"I'm the manager," he announced without getting up.

We both stared at each other for a second or two before I said, "Um . . . Are you coming out here? Or should I come in your office?"

"Come in," he said, pushing backward on his cheap, all-mesh desk chair. "So, do you have any questions?"

I walked inside and stood in front of his desk. Oddly, I felt like I had just been called to the principal's office. There were two other chairs, but they were pushed against the wall with boxes piled on top of them. He didn't offer me a seat; instead, he remained seated and began telling me all about the wonderful benefits of hydromassage that, of course, only come with a top-tier membership package.

Derrick the Manager

My mind drifted to past thoughts as I stood listening to Derrick. Years ago, I found it strange that people who could do something well in the workplace were often promoted to supervise their less inclined coworkers. Many times, these same individuals not only went on to manage departments but also direct entire organizations. Just because someone is exceptional at doing, say, accounting work, doesn't automatically mean they'd be as competent managing the careers of other accountants. Accountants, like anyone having to work within a hierarchical organization, deserve to be managed and led by individuals who've been specifically trained to handle the inherent complexities of human beings who are more than just replaceable cogs. But I wasn't standing in the manager's office of

an accounting department; I was in an unwelcoming room that perfectly matched the uninspired personality of Crunch's manager. Even if I had not seen or heard Derrick, I still would have felt confident he wasn't promoted because of his people skills just by looking around his office.

As my gaze shifted from the dust-covered clutter in the back of his office to a black computer desk that looked like it hadn't been wiped down in months, I interrupted Derrick, telling him I was interested in the cheapest membership tier at the advertised \$21.99 per month. "I would rather not commit to any timeframe," I added. "I'd like a month-to-month arrangement."

"That price comes with a 12-month commitment," he replied. Although seated, I could tell he was a large individual—especially when he folded his tatted arms across the front of his black t-shirt. "It's \$26.99 if you want a month-to-month plan with a base membership."

"Got it."

Derrick, who appeared to be in his late 20s, scooted under his desk and began typing on a dusty keyboard. While his eyes scanned the flat-screen monitor, he offered, "I recommend going with the peak membership package. It's a month-to-month plan that gives you access to any Crunch Fitness, and it's only \$29.99. Would you be interested in hearing about the peak *results* membership tier? It's only \$10 more per month and grants you access to everything the gym has to offer."

"Thanks, but no, I wouldn't. I think the \$29.99 membership will work for me."

"Okay. Let's get you signed up," replied Derrick, who suddenly seemed motivated to get me out of his office as quickly as possible.

I watched his fingers move about the keyboard, taking note that he had a bald spot in the middle of his blonde buzz cut and that he wore a black wedding ring. *Oh my god! What's with all the black around here?* “Would you mind if I move those boxes off that chair so I can sit down?” I asked.

“No. Go for it,” he said as he pushed an electronic signature pad like the one on the reception desk closer to my side of the desk.

For the next 10 minutes, Derrick and I played a game where he'd summarize a section of the nine-page contract and I'd ask, “What does *that* mean?” After a few back-and-forth exchanges, I'd inevitably draw a squiggly line on the signature pad with my finger and then press the green OKAY button. *But nothing was okay! What was I doing? Have I lost my mind?* While I compliantly signed documents that served every stakeholder but me with heartwarming titles like “binding arbitration,” “consent waiver,” and “release of liability,” I attempted to look through the one window in Derrick's office for momentary comfort only to be denied by a disgusting buildup of dust, dirt, and pollen. From the appearance of the window, windowsill, furniture, clutter, and carpeting, I figured I was sitting in a room that hadn't seen a sponge, cleaning rag, or vacuum in at least a year.

“Okay. That about does it,” blurted Derrick while abruptly standing up.

I started to get up but stopped when I saw him turn toward the door. He walked out, but I could still see him from where I was sitting. He entered the reception desk and began typing something on another computer without sitting down. I felt foolish sitting alone in his office, so I followed him into the lobby and asked, “So, are we finished or what?”

“Almost,” he replied without looking away from the monitor. “I just need to collect the five-dollar enrollment fee. After that, you're free to use the gym.”

Ahh, yes, of course, the all-important enrollment fee—Corporate America's endearing way of welcoming its new customers by charging them for choosing their business over another. What's next? Pouring fees at coffee shops? I removed my wallet from my backpack and obediently handed Derrick my credit card. "I almost forgot to ask you for the pool schedule," I said. "I'd hate to show up and find out I can't swim laps."

I was tempted to ask Derrick if there was a fee for processing my enrollment fee but thought better of it.

"We don't manage the pool," he announced as he handed me back my card. "A third-party company manages it for us. Check back with me next week. I should have a schedule by then."

Great. The right hand doesn't know what the left is doing. "Okay. I'll check with you then," I said while sliding my credit card into my wallet.

Derrick nodded at me and began walking toward his office.

"So that's it?" I asked.

"That's it," he replied.

"Can I have a copy of the contract?"

"I already emailed it to you."

"Okay, thanks."

Derrick disappeared into his office, most likely thinking about what he was doing before I interrupted him. I disappeared from the lobby, walking across the parking

lot toward my truck and thinking about how uncomfortable the last 30 minutes were. *Did I see anyone smiling? Would the pool hours for lap swimming be a source of constant frustration? Did the big man or Derrick say my name even once? Was this the price I'd have to pay to do something I enjoy around other people?*

I slid into the driver's seat and pulled out my sunglasses from my backpack. In the distance, far beyond the cities of Star and Middleton, I could see a lone mountain in the shape of a squished gumdrop rising from the horizon. At its base, the city of Emmett, too, couldn't escape the cancers of urban sprawl and cookie-cutter strip malls. I started the engine and drove out of the parking lot, thinking that since I'm on this side of the interstate, I might as well grab a coffee at Starbucks and pick up a few groceries.

Same As It Ever Was

It was six forty-five when I finally peeled the sheet back and kicked the comforter to the foot of the bed. After having spent the last 30 minutes imagining the worst possible scenarios at Crunch Fitness, I completely forgot about my morning caffeine addiction. Instead, I was hopped up on a bitter cocktail of remorse, regret, and shame. I bounced out of bed feeling like a trapped animal who had only himself to blame for taking the bait. How could I have done this to myself? Am I *that* desperate and lonely? I've written *books* warning readers to stay as far away from Corporate America as humanly possible—and yet here I was breaking my own rules!

I left the cramped bedroom wearing a threadbare t-shirt and a pair of boxers and trudged toward my cozy writer's nook in the den with only one thing on my mind. "It had better be there," I said out loud as I flipped open my 10-year-old laptop. I frantically scrolled past the daily scourge of junk e-mail and found a correspondence from Crunch Fitness with a draconian "Your Document" across

the subject line. I swallowed hard and opened the attached PDF. And there it was—the undeniable proof that I had indeed gone insane the day before. If I were committed to the psyche ward of an insane asylum, my contract with Crunch would be paper-clipped to my intake papers as Exhibit A.

It didn't take long to zero in on contract entries that justified my suspicions. The first thing I noticed was that I'd be paying \$33.79 per month instead of the discussed \$29.99. Apparently, monthly dues are subject to taxes and, of course, a processing fee. Next up, I came across an annual membership fee of \$63.59. *Huh? That's like an insurance premium that doesn't apply to the deductible. The nerve!* The contract went on to state that the month-to-month agreement doesn't go into effect until *after* the second month—and that I wouldn't have access to every Crunch Fitness as Derrick had declared. I pushed back on my chair and stared at the screen. I wanted nothing to do with this corporation, its members, its staff, or its self-serving contract. There had to be a way out.

I don't know how I missed it the first time, but I discovered the phrase “Buyer's Right to Cancel” on the first page of the contract. It went on to state that I could cancel the agreement without penalty if I notified Crunch Fitness within five business days in writing—through written correspondence or by email. I wasn't going to take any chances. Since I didn't have a printer, I went straight to pen and paper. If I had to camp out in front of Derrick's storage locker or an office, then so be it. My day wasn't going to amount to anything if I didn't come home with documented proof that Crunch acknowledged my cancellation within the five-day grace period. My sense of urgency was fueled by the fact that I actually gave Derrick my bank's routing number to my checking account—a cringe-worthy act I had vowed never to repeat. Again, if the good people of Nampa were hellbent on sending me to a mental institution, my giving Crunch the freedom to withdraw money from my checking account would, without question, serve as Exhibit B in the case: *The People vs. Chuck Trunks*.

Luck was on my side when I walked into the lobby. Not only was the big man in black standing behind the reception desk, but also Derrick's office door was wide open—and Mr. Personality himself was behind his desk.

“Excuse me, Derrick. Yeah, it's me again. Can I talk to you for a minute?”

Derrick sat up, his big hands motionless but poised over the keyboard. “What's up?” he asked.

“I've changed my mind about joining the gym,” I said while handing him my written notification.

“Okay,” he replied.

“That's it?” I asked.

“That's it.”

I looked at Derrick and thought about how he possessed just about every quality I didn't like in a person: dismissive, detached, and devoid of anything resembling warmth or kindness. “May I please have a printed confirmation of my written cancellation?” I asked while noticing that the boxes and empty chair were where I had moved them the previous morning.

“Sure,” he replied, pushing back his chair and standing up.

I followed him into the lobby, where he mumbled something to the big man before typing something on the reception desk computer. 30 awkward seconds later, he picked up what rolled out of the printer on the other side of the desk and handed it to me.

I quickly scanned the confusing document in front of both men in black. “This confirms my cancellation?” I asked.

“Yep,” chirped Derrick.

“Could you sign and date it, please?”

“What for?” he challenged. “That’s all you need.”

I extended the piece of paper toward Derrick and said, “I hear what you’re saying, but this looks like something I could recreate on my computer at home in about 10 minutes. By signing and dating it, especially in front of your partner here, you’ll be validating my request to cancel the membership. What can I say? I watch a lot of Judge Judy.”

Neither man laughed as Derrick took the document from me. After doing what I requested of him, he handed it back, essentially ending our short-lived and unsatisfying relationship. I returned to my truck feeling vindicated but also emotionally exhausted. I exited the parking lot and turned right onto East Commerce Street. I didn’t stop at the Starbucks, grocery store, or any of the gas stations. I just wanted to go home to stretch, do some exercises with my dumbbells, and go for a run. I drove over a set of bumpy railroad tracks across Garrity Boulevard and turned left onto Birch Lane, thinking, “Same as it ever was. Same as it ever was.”

The End (of Chapter 6)