

THE COST OF LIVING TRUTH

"Should Not Read"

*This book is not professionally written. Read it only if you seek
reality and can accept imperfection.*

*If you're curious, I suggest you start with book 1: "**My
Journey—Living truth, not perfection**"*

Zsan Nguyen

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The Cost of Living Truth *The second book in the Living Truth series. (Follows "My Journey - Living Truth, Not Perfection")*

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Preface: I'm Not a Good Person

Look—I'm not a good person. And I'm not going to sugarcoat it, lie about it, or pretend I am. I'll fight you to the end to prove I'm not.

Most people spend their entire lives trying to convince the world they are "good." They perform. They smile when they want to scream. They follow rules written by people who don't even know they exist. I'm done with that. When I look in the mirror, I know exactly who's staring back. That's me. No mask. No performance. No apology.

It doesn't matter who I am by your standards. It matters how I live.

I've lived through the shame, and I've lived through the dirt. I've realized that "being good" is often just a cover for being a

coward. I choose to live with integrity, with humility, and with my head held high. I don't need to wear a fake smile or play nice to be accepted by a society that is rotting from the inside out.

I write this not to preach. Not to get famous. I write this because I'm sick and tired of the "curated" lives I see every day. I'm tired of the masks. Tired of the lies. Tired of the noise that drowns out what's real. We are living in a world where people would rather be a comfortable lie than an uncomfortable truth.

I am the uncomfortable truth.

This book isn't for your comfort. It's for your clarity. It's a record of what happens when you stop caring about the "likes" and start caring about the life you actually lead. And if that makes me the most hated asshole in the room, so be it.

I've realized that the cost of living the truth is high. It costs you friends. It costs you "status." It might even cost you your

sanity for a while. But I'd rather be hated for the man I actually am than loved for the ghost of someone I never was.

Welcome to the reality most people are too afraid to see.

Chapter 1: Don't Go Looking for Truth

The world doesn't care. Listen up: chasing truth and fairness is for fools. It's a fairy tale we tell children so they don't scream when the lights go out. Life won't hand you answers just because you want them. You can beg, you can pray, and you can work yourself into the grave, but the universe isn't listening.

The truth isn't gentle. Most of the time, it's a cold bastard that doesn't give a damn about your feelings, your dreams, or the bullshit you grew up believing. It doesn't care about your "intentions" or how much you meant well. It only cares about results. It's the concrete floor that doesn't soften when you fall. You want fairness? Good luck. You'll die with your head in the sand, searching for something that never existed. Fairness is a ghost. You'll waste your whole life chasing it while the people who know better are busy taking what they want.

Everyone starts out thinking: *If I try hard, if I do good, justice will catch up to me.* Wake up. Effort gets you nowhere if you're waiting for some hidden hand to reward you. There is no judge sitting in the clouds keeping a tally of your overtime hours. There is no "justice" coming to save you from a bad boss or a broken life.

The people who peddle “the truth will set you free” are selling comfort, not reality. They want you to feel good so you'll keep buying their books or sitting in their pews. Here's the real deal: truth will break you down long before you ever taste freedom. It will strip you of your pride. It will make you look at the parts of yourself you hate.

Where I come from, nobody handed out lessons wrapped in gold. There were no fancy classrooms. You learned from empty wallets, broken homes, and cold mornings scraping by. You learned what life was when the heater broke in the middle of January and you had to choose between food or warmth. Real lessons come wrapped in struggle, in loss, in watching the world keep turning no matter who got crushed. The world is a machine that never stops. If you fall into the gears, the machine doesn't mourn you; it just keeps grinding.

Stop chasing the fairytale that life owes you something. Life owes you nothing. It doesn't owe you a happy ending. It doesn't owe you a "fair shake." If you're waiting for perfect solutions, for effort to be recognized, take a hard look at reality—it's merciless, it's indifferent, and it moves on with or without you. It's a train that left the station a long time ago, and it's not coming back to pick you up.

You get one shot. Face it head-on, cut the bullshit, and stop looking for comfort in honesty. Honesty isn't a warm blanket. It's a cold shower. Truth won't hug you, but it will set you straight. Better to walk through hell with your eyes open than sit around hoping for a handout from fate. At least if your eyes are open, you can see the flames coming.

Maybe you came here for answers. Maybe you thought if you just lived right—worked hard, told the truth, stuck to your principles—the world would finally give you a break. You thought there was a "payoff" at the end of the road. That's not how it works, and you already know it. You've felt it in your bones when you're walking to your car at 6:00 AM. Truth doesn't show up in books or sermons. It shows up when the rent is late, when the car won't start, when the boss won't look

you in the eye. It shows up in the silence of a house where nobody is talking.

I know a guy—degree on the wall, hope in his chest, clocked in every day at some soul-sucking factory. He thought he was different. He thought that paper made him special. Thought if he just kept it honest, played it straight, he'd get somewhere. I watched him. I watched him bust his back, watched the sweat bead up on his face under those ugly fluorescent lights. I heard the hum of the machines drowning out his thoughts.

I saw the way he'd try, day after day, to make sure everyone could count on his word. He was the guy who never took a long break, never stole a minute of company time. When a new position finally opened, he didn't just hope—he believed. He had a fire in his eyes. He believed that all the years of doing things right would finally count for something. He thought the "system" was watching.

But that's not how it played out. They handed the job to some other guy—no degree, no experience, just the right smile in the right office at the right moment. The other guy knew how to laugh at the manager's shitty jokes. He knew how to flatter

the right people. The college boy? They kept him right where he was—needed his hands on the machines, needed his back because it never gave out. That's the "Death" of the dream right there. That's the game. The reward for hard work is more hard work, and if honesty gets in the way of business, they'll bury you in it. They won't promote you because you're too valuable where you are. They've turned your integrity into a cage.

That's not just his story. That's the story for anyone who refuses to kiss up, play nice, or tell people what they want to hear. It's the story of the man who refuses to be a dog. Doesn't matter how smart you are, how honest, or how many nights you go without sleep for the job. If you don't play the social game, you're a tool, not a teammate. If they find you useful, they keep you exactly where you've been—no further, no higher. They'll use you until your gears are stripped, and then they'll replace you with a newer model.

There's no righteous ending here. The world doesn't care if you live honest or live crooked, just so long as it gets what it wants from you. It wants your time. It wants your labor. It wants your silence. If that makes you bitter, good. It should sting. That sting is the only thing that proves you're still awake. It should remind you that living true is a kind of

rebellion—not because anyone’s watching, but because it’s the only way you can look at yourself in the mirror when the day’s over. When the lights go out and the world is quiet, you are the only one who has to live with your choices.

I don’t write this to teach you. I don’t care to lecture or offer solutions. This isn’t a warning or a lesson. This is just how it is. I’m just describing the weather. If you don’t like the rain, that’s your problem.

Truth will cost you recognition, comfort, and sometimes your shot at the good life. You might end up with less money. You might end up with fewer friends. Don’t expect applause. Expect silence. Expect the people who played the game to look down on you from their air-conditioned offices. Expect to get passed over by people who played the game better, smiled wider, kissed more ass. That’s reality. That’s all I’ve got for you. Now, you decide if you want to keep walking or if you want to go back to sleep.

Chapter 2: The Real Cost of Being Honest

Living truth is brutal. It's not some pretty story. It's a gut-punch every single day.

Everyone says they want honesty. They walk around claiming they want "the real deal," but that's a lie. What they actually want is a comfortable story wrapped in a fake smile. They want the kind of truth that doesn't make them change, doesn't make them look in the mirror, and doesn't make them admit they've been living wrong for twenty years. They want a truth that has no teeth. They want it safe.

Take off your mask, stop keeping the peace for the sake of people who don't even like you, and watch how fast the room clears out. It's like turning on the lights in a kitchen full of roaches.

Friends you've known for a decade will suddenly stop calling. Your phone stays quiet. Family members will start whispering in the kitchen the moment you walk out of the room. You can feel the heat of their judgment on your back. Coworkers will keep their distance in the breakroom, treating your honesty like a disease they don't want to catch.

Why? Because you stopped playing the clown. You stopped being the "buffer" that makes their own cowardice feel okay. You stopped telling them the sweet lies they need to hear to sleep at night, and you started speaking about what is actually sitting right in front of their faces.

Being real costs—sometimes it costs everything you thought you owned.

You lose relationships that you believed were built on solid rock, only to watch them melt away like salt in the rain. You lose the "respect" of people who were never real to begin with. These are the people who only liked the version of you they could control. When they can't pull your strings anymore, they'll call you difficult. They'll call you negative, cold, or "angry." They will use every label they can find to protect

their own fake lives. Because if you aren't the "problem," then they have to admit that they are.

Let them talk. You're done lying just to make them feel comfortable. The only thing you need now is the ability to sit in a room by yourself, look at the man in the chair, and not hate what you see.

I tried being fake. I played the game until my throat was dry from swallowing my own words. It's easy to be "liked" if you turn yourself into a mirror that only shows people the bullshit they want to see. It's easy to fit in if you're willing to cut off pieces of your soul just to squeeze into their small, crowded boxes.

But every time you play the game, you trade your soul for a shadow. The regret of shutting up just to "keep the peace" is a slow poison. It sits in your gut, turning into bitterness and a tired feeling in your bones that sleep won't fix. It eats you from the inside out until there's nothing left but a hollow shell wearing a uniform, waiting for a life that's never going to start.

Being honest costs you jobs. It costs you the "big promotion" that requires a handshake and a lie. It costs you invitations to the parties where everyone pretends to be happy while they're actually drowning in their own stress. It might even cost you the dream you had of a "normal" life—getting married, having a Golden Retriever, living in your dream house with a white picket fence.

So what? Faking it is a death sentence. It's just a slower way to die.

Here's the real deal: you pay a tax for being honest, and you pay a tax for being fake. One buys you hard-earned freedom. The other buys you a lifelong debt of shame. I'd rather walk through a winter storm alone and honest than live as a fraud in a house that could collapse the second someone tells the truth. Take the hit now, or you'll pay interest on that lie until the day they put you in the dirt.

Let me tell you how it really looks. I remember being at a party once—the air was heavy, thick with the smell of expensive food and the unpleasant smell of cheap perfume.

There was singing, loud laughter, and the clinking of glasses. Everything looked "perfect," like a commercial.

Then someone "important" walked in—the guy with the big title, owning the latest iPhone and driving that shiny new car. In an instant, the whole room shifted. Everyone leaned in, trying to get close. The smiles were so wide they looked painful. They treated him like a king, laughing at jokes that weren't even funny and agreeing with things they didn't even understand. They were playing the game. They wanted to be liked and to be part of his circle.

But the second he walked out that door, the masks didn't just slip—they fell off. Before the door had even shut all the way, those same people started carving him up like the main course of a Thanksgiving dinner.

"Who does he think he is? Did you see that watch? Showing off." The smiles turned to knives faster than you could put down your drink. I sat quietly, in shock, at a party with total strangers. I realized in that moment: if they did it to him, they were doing it to me. And they were doing it to each other. It was a room full of people pretending to be friends.

That's the game. It's the same game played in offices, at family Thanksgiving dinners, and in every crowd that cares more about "politeness" than reality. There is a heavy, invisible tax for saying what you really think. I've watched good men—men with spines of steel—get labeled and distanced simply because they didn't play along with the lies.

This isn't a rare case. It happens more than you think. You probably don't realize it's the person at your workspace, the kid living next door, or someone in your own house. Most people are too terrified to be alone, to not fit in, or to not be popular. It's a choice we make, the status we want. No matter what it is, it comes with a price tag.

Some days, I wonder if it would be easier to just play along. To just nod, smile, and go along to fit in and be accepted. But then I look at the people who chose that path. I've seen people in their 30s who look 50 years old because they've been lying for years just to make themselves look good. I see the silent, cold anger in marriages where the truth hasn't been spoken in a decade. I see the deep, hollow ache in their eyes that doesn't go away because something inside is eating them up slowly.

Because they traded their dignity and integrity just to look good, get along, and fit in with the crowd.

That's not living. That's acting. It's like burning your money for lap dances on Saturday night, thinking going to church Sunday morning still makes you a good person. If I sing the loudest, receive communion, then no one will know. Shoving that dollar down between those stripper's titties last night is forgiven.

I'm not here to settle scores or drop names. I couldn't care less what others do. I know they feel that way about me. What I care about is my own sanity, my peace. Think about it. Is your life going to change if you're outside the circle? Most people choose the endless torture of their conscience over being left out.

To live honest is to be a stranger in your own town sometimes. It means sitting on the porch while the party happens down the street. But at the end of the night, when the lights are out and the world is finally quiet, I can look in the mirror. The person looking back is me.

Don't let anyone tell you it's easy. Living your truth will cost you friends, money, and comfort. It will hurt like hell. But having to put on a mask every time you walk out your front door will cost you more than you think. That's the price I pray no man should be willing to pay.

Chapter 3: Words That Cut—And Why You Should Never Lie

People always say, “Be a team player,” or “Leave your negativity at home”—but what they really mean is, “Keep it comfortable.” They want the world to be a giant room where everyone is nodding their heads like puppets. They want you to keep your mouth shut about the things that are actually happening so they don't have to deal with the mess. When you tell people your issues, that's you being negative. But when they do it, they expect you to listen, give them comfort, and empathize. What kind of shit is that? If you do it, you're being negative and poisoning their environment. And if you don't act like you care about their issues, you're a dick, selfish, and heartless. Oh, I could write a whole book on this. They label you, use every known word to describe you, and then they pull a guilt trip on you. They want the "positive," “caring,” and

“agreeing” vibe because it’s a shield that protects them from having to work on themselves.

The minute you stop filtering your words and stop faking nice, everything shifts. The air in the room gets heavy. It’s like you’ve just turned off the music at a party and everyone is forced to stand there in the silence. When you stop being "that guy" who just agrees with everything, you become a threat. You aren't their friend; they keep you around because they know you will always play the supporting role. When they try to make themselves look good in a crowd, they know you'll play along, even if it's a lie.

Friends step back, relatives squirm, and coworkers keep their distance. I’ve seen the way people start looking at their phones the moment you say something real. They start talking about the weather or the game just to drown out the truth you just put on the table. They don't want to eat lunch with the guy who reminds them that they’re surviving by faking it. Speaking your truth makes people nervous—it’s easier for them if you just keep the peace. They want you to be the "buffer" that makes their day go smooth. If you don't provide that buffer, they have no use for you.

Every honest word costs. It's like tossing bricks into a glass house. You aren't trying to be the "bad guy." You aren't waking up in the morning looking for a fight. You're just tired of acting. But truth is heavy, and most people live in houses made of thin glass and ego. You don't mean to break anything, but sooner or later, somebody's going to bleed. When you tell the truth, things break. Plans get ruined. Fake reputations get shattered. And when that glass starts falling, people get hurt—and they will blame you for the mess instead of blaming the person who built a glass house to begin with.

Once I gave my honest opinion—not what people wanted to hear—and overnight, I was “too harsh,” “bad for morale,” and “angry for no reason.” I remember the looks I got at work just because my opinion made someone else look stupid. And here I thought I might get praised for it. If you don't smile and agree with the bullshit, you're the "problem." Management doesn't want the guy who points out the rot; they want the guy who paints over it. That's how it goes. Say what matters and you're a problem; stay silent and you're a team member. You become just another tool in the box, something they use until it's worn out and then throw away without a second thought.

But that's nothing compared to the cost of lying. Lying is a full-time job that pays you in stress and gray hair. When you start a relationship with a lie, you've already imprisoned yourself. You might be sitting on a nice couch in a nice house, but you're a prisoner. You're always looking over your shoulder. You're always worried that one person or that one phone call is going to come and expose you.

One lie leads to another, then another, and before you know it, you're lost in a maze of your own making. You have to remember every version of the story. You have to remember who you told what to. It's exhausting. It's on your mind. It ruins your health. You spend your life sweating in the dark, trying to stay cool with that fake smile around others. I've seen men in their 30s look like they're 50 years old because they've been carrying the weight of lies for years.

I've seen it—not just once. Couples split, families turn cold, and children grow up confused—all because someone wanted to look good for a moment or fit in with the crowd. There is nothing sadder than a relationship that was built from lies. I've seen kids lie to their parents and parents lie to their children.

Sooner or later, someone is going to slip. Ask yourself: do you know anyone that's able to take their lies to their grave?

Once the truth comes out—and it always comes out—there's no fixing it. You can't un-say the lie. You can't put the glass back together once it's smashed. That single lie, just to make yourself look good for a night or win a fight, can tear apart years of living right. You could be a hero for a decade, but the moment they catch you in that one cheap, stupid fraud, that's all they will ever see.

Your whole story unravels, no matter how righteous you've been. It's never just a white lie. It leaves a stain you can't wash out. It's like dropping black ink on a white shirt. You can scrub and scrub, but that mark is there. People will always look at that spot. They'll always wonder what else you're hiding. You lose credibility, trust, and more.

So if the truth hurts someone, let it hurt. Don't be a coward and turn a blind eye. You might lose friends, family, and people around you for living the truth. But hey, the pain and the loneliness will heal—maybe slowly, maybe imperfectly—but the pain of a lie festers forever.

Comfort is cheap; integrity costs. Most people choose the cheap way. They want the easy life, the fake smile, and the "positive" vibes. But they die inside a little more every day. I'd rather let my words cut than live in the wreckage of what was never real. I'd rather stand in a room alone, knowing I said what needed to be said, than sit at a table full of "friends" who don't even know who I am.

Truth is the only solid ground there is. Everything else is just a swamp that's waiting to pull you under.

Chapter 4: Your Excuses Aren't Personality

People love to defend their misery: “That’s just how I am.” They use it to justify being difficult, bitter, lazy, or weak. It’s a convenient lie. If you can convince yourself that your flaws are just part of your DNA, then you never have to do the hard work of fixing them. It’s the rallying cry of the stuck—the anthem of people who quit on themselves and want everyone else to play along. They want you to validate their mess so they don’t feel so alone in it.

Let’s not dance around it. You weren’t born toxic, lazy, angry, or a victim. You weren’t born with a chip on your shoulder or a reason to hate the world. Somewhere along the road, you started choosing comfort over change. You took the path of least resistance. Bad habits hardened into personality. Traumas

became identity. You started wearing your past like a heavy coat you refuse to take off, even in the heat of summer.

Now you guard your scars like trophies and tell the world you can't be different—while secretly wishing you were. It's bullshit. You know it, and so does everyone else. We see through the act. We see the man hiding behind the "tough guy" routine because he's too scared to admit he's just sad or stuck.

The real truth: growth hurts. Facing yourself is hell. It's the hardest fight you'll ever have, and there are no rounds and no referees. Most never try, because it means ripping off all your comfortable excuses and proving you could have changed years ago, but didn't. That's the part that stings the most—realizing how much time you wasted blaming everyone else for a life you were in charge of. Don't call your pain who you are. That's weakness dressed up in fancy words. Your pain is just something that happened to you; it's not the driver of the bus unless you hand it the keys.

If you keep replaying the same miserable script, stop blaming fate, parents, trauma, or genetics. Those things might have loaded the gun, but you're the one pulling the trigger every

morning. You are not a rock. You are not finished unless you decide to be. You aren't a statue sitting in a park waiting for the weather to change you.

You want to change? Drop the act. Kill the catchphrases. Stop arguing with reality and admit—if you aren't where you want to be, it's on you to pick the lock and bust out. Nobody is coming with a spare key. Harsh? Maybe. True? Every damn word. People sharpen their flaws and call them character.

“This is just who I am.” That’s the excuse for everything—anger, laziness, bitterness, chronic quitting. It’s the ultimate “get out of jail free” card. “I had a hard childhood. I don’t trust people. I’m not a morning person.” It makes a nice shield. But a shield also keeps you from moving forward. It keeps you heavy. Old hurts, old habits—none of them excuse a lifetime of the same moves. If you're fifty years old and still blaming your father for why you're a jerk to your wife, you aren't a victim—you're a coward.

I’ve watched people live behind those shields for decades, hiding their real selves behind stories about the past. They tell the same stories at the bar, at the job, and to anyone who will

listen. They pretend they're stuck, doomed by something they can't change, something they stopped fighting years ago. They've settled into their rot like it's a warm bed.

I get it—changing hurts. Letting go of who you used to be, even if who you used to be was a wreck, feels like losing a limb. You've spent so long being the "angry guy" or the "unlucky guy" that you don't know who you are without the story. It's easier to put a flag on your history and plant it deep. You'd rather be a "well-known wreck" than an "unknown beginner."

But pain, trauma, and bad luck don't have a monopoly over your story. They don't own the copyright to your life. At some point, your choices belong to you. The clock is ticking, and every day you spend blaming the past is a day you've stolen from your future. Nobody's personality is set in stone, no matter how many times they repeat the story. You can change your mind, your tone, and your life this afternoon if you really wanted to. Your misery isn't a birthright—it's a habit. And you can lie to yourself all you want about that, but deep down, you know what's true. You know that you're choosing the familiar pain over the scary work of being better.

You stay stuck because it's easier to explain than to actually change. Change takes sweat. Change takes admitting you were wrong. At least if you stay the same, nobody expects much, and you never have to risk trying for more. You keep the bar low so you never have to worry about failing to jump over it.

Throughout my life, I've met people just like this. The way they talk, treat others, the words they use—it all says "take me or leave me." It's an arrogant way to live. I run into them everywhere. I've seen them on the factory floor, in the grocery store, and in my own circle. Sometimes they say things that hit me like a slap. They say something rude or out of line, and when you call them on it, they don't apologize. When I ask them not to use certain words, when I ask for basic respect, they say, "That's just who I am." Like it's sacred, like being rude or offensive is some kind of badge. They think being a "straight shooter" gives them a license to be an asshole. They think that "being real" means having no filter and no respect for the person standing in front of them.

But it's funny—when someone else says something that offends them, suddenly they expect the world to change. Suddenly, they have all these rules. They want everyone to

bend so they feel respected, but refuse to show the same courtesy themselves. They want the world to be soft for them, but they want to be sandpaper for everyone else. It's all an act, a show of being tough or real when it's really just small and selfish. It's the behavior of a child in a grown man's body.

If you can't give respect, you don't deserve it. If you want people to treat you right, you've got to offer the same. It's a two-way street, and the toll is your ego. I stay away from those types. They're narrow-minded, hard-headed, and can't see past their own habits. They are anchors that will pull you down into the mud with them.

Courtesy isn't weakness. If you can't understand that, you're unreliable, untrustworthy, and not worth my time. If you can't control your mouth or your temper, you can't be trusted with anything important. You're a liability on a team and a poison in a house. Don't mistake your excuse for your identity. Don't think your flaws make you "unique." They just make you difficult. You may wear your wounds, but only you choose if they become your uniform. Take off the uniform. Start being the man you actually want to be, instead of the man you've been making excuses for.

Chapter 5: Stop Begging for Change You Won't Work For

You want things to change, but you're not moving. I've known so many people—hell, I've been that person—sitting in the same rut every day, waiting for a lightning bolt to hit and save them. We sit there hoping for a miracle, a lottery ticket, or a long-lost relative to leave us a fortune. We wait for the world to notice how "hard" we have it and hand us a trophy just for surviving.

They talk a big game about wanting more. They'll whine, complain, and criticize every little thing about their job, their weight, their friends, or their luck. They are experts at pointing out what's wrong, but they're ghosts when it's time to fix it. But that's all it is—talk. When it comes to making a move, putting some skin in the game, or taking the first real risk, they sit on their hands and wait for a sign. They want the prize

without the fight. They want the view from the top of the mountain without the blisters from the climb.

You want better, but you keep coming home to the same couch, eating the same food, and making the same tired promises to yourself. “Next week.” “After the holidays.” “When things settle down.” These are the lies we tell ourselves so we can sleep at night. We treat "tomorrow" like it's a magical place where all our problems disappear. But tomorrow is just another today. You blink, and half your life is gone, and nothing's changed but the wrinkles and the regret. You wake up one morning and realize you've spent twenty years "getting ready" to start, and now the clock is running out.

Let me tell you a story. I know a guy—struggling with money, always talking about living paycheck to paycheck, waiting for a break. Always complaining life's not fair, that he never gets a chance. He'd go on and on about the "system" being rigged and how the small guy can't get ahead.

Then I visited his house. His place was better than mine. Nice furniture, the biggest flat-screen TV I've ever seen—80

inches. It took up the whole damn wall. State-of-the-art sound system, a cable subscription with every sports channel you could dream up—satellite pumping in hundreds of dollars' worth of entertainment a month. Yet, every month, he's scrambling to make rent. He's sweating the electric bill while he watches a 4K version of a game he doesn't even play.

He's got it all, except the basics covered. How does he pull it off? Who knows. Maybe credit cards, maybe high-interest loans, maybe just plain stupidity. But the point is, he's choosing luxury that impresses others over actually getting ahead. He sacrifices tomorrow for the show he puts on today. He wants the neighbors to think he's made it while his bank account is bleeding out. Then he sits back and wonders why life never cuts him a break. Life didn't buy that TV—he did. Life didn't sign that cable contract—he did.

That's what I see all around me—people sleepwalking, begging for a rescue, but refusing to burn the bridges behind them. They want to move to a new island, but they're too scared to let go of the old boat. They want more but won't give up the comfort that keeps them broke. They want the

promotion, but they won't put down the remote. They want the health, but they won't put down the junk food.

If you want your life to be different, you have to be willing to live with less right now—to sacrifice security, comfort, and pride for something better on the other side. You have to be okay with people thinking you're "struggling" because you aren't showing off what you don't have.

Change demands you do the things no one wants to do: cut the cable, live without the shiny toys, and admit you want something different more than you want everyone's approval. It means being the "boring" guy who stays home to work while everyone else is out spending money they haven't earned yet. Maybe you're waiting for your boss to see you, your luck to turn, or your friend to give you a secret. Keep waiting. The world owes you nothing. Nobody is coming. There is no rescue team. There is no "secret" that the rich guys are hiding from you. The "secret" is that they worked while you slept, and they saved while you spent.

Every change I ever made was ugly. It wasn't a montage in a movie with upbeat music. It was messy. It was lonely. I lost

friends. I lost people who didn't like that I was changing, because my progress made them feel bad about their own stagnation. I was called selfish, stubborn, and impossible. They'll throw every word at you to try and pull you back down into the crab bucket. But none of those people paid my bills, none lived my days, and none lost sleep over my regrets. I did that alone. Their opinions didn't put food on my table, so I stopped letting their opinions run my life. If you keep living for their approval, you'll never move an inch. You'll die in the same spot, surrounded by people who "liked" you because you were just as stuck as they were.

No one gets rescued from a life they refuse to climb out of. If you're sitting at the bottom of a hole, don't be surprised when people look down and keep walking. They can't pull you up if you aren't reaching. If you finally do get tired enough to try, don't wait for applause. Don't expect a parade. The only sound will be your own footsteps—finally moving forward. It's a quiet, lonely sound, but it's the only sound that matters. It's the sound of a man who stopped begging and started building.

Chapter 6: I'm Poor, I Drive a Wreck, and I'm Not Ashamed

Let's get it straight: I'm not winning any contests for wealth, style, or status. I don't have the designer labels or the house on the hill. I drive a car with more rust than paint. When I turn the key, it groans, it rattles, and sometimes I have to pray to the engine gods just to get it to the grocery store. It's loud, it's ugly, and it smells like old coffee and hard work. My shoes see more use than most people's vacations. I wear them until the soles are thin and the laces are frayed, because shoes are for walking, not for showing off. Bills come in, and I don't always know how I'll cover them. I've sat at the kitchen table with a stack of envelopes, doing the math three times over, trying to find money that isn't there.

But I'm not ashamed. I used to be. I remember that burning feeling in my chest when I'd pull up to a red light next to a

brand-new truck. I'd look away, hoping they didn't see the dent in my door or the smoke from my tailpipe. I used to play their game—pretending, trying to keep up, thinking having more would mean I mattered more. I thought a newer phone or a better jacket would make people listen to me. I spent money I didn't have, tried to fit in. I bought rounds at the bar I couldn't afford just so I wouldn't look like the "poor guy." All it did was dig my hole deeper and keep me broke for the approval of people who forget you the minute you leave the room. I was bankrupting my future to impress people who didn't even know my middle name.

You want to know what real strength is? It's showing your flaws without fear. It's walking into a room knowing you're the poorest guy there and not giving a damn. It's being real about struggle, about being broke, about driving that shitty car. There is a massive power in saying, "I can't afford that," without lowering your head. I learned that the hard way. I thought being poor was shameful—that if I didn't fake it, nobody would respect me. I thought I had to wear a mask of "success" just to be treated like a human being. But the truth is, when you stop pretending, you win back your life. You stop being a performer. You stop being a puppet. Pride isn't in what

you show, but in what you earn honestly. A clean conscience in a rusty car is worth more than a guilty one in a Mercedes.

There are people out there with nicer cars, bigger houses, brand-new toys, and the latest phone. You see them every day, looking like they've got it all figured out. But ask yourself: what do they really have? Look past the shiny paint and the big windows. Some work ninety hours a week just to stay afloat. They are zombies in suits. Their weekends are gone, and their minds never rest. They are one missed paycheck away from a heart attack. They buy the dream even when the job could vanish tomorrow—and I've seen it happen. I've watched it play out like a slow-motion wreck.

A couple scores a big job, goes out and buys two new cars, a big house, and throws a party to show off. They invite everyone. They want the world to see their "winning" streak. They think the good times will never end. A year later, both get laid off. The economy shifts, the company moves, or the luck just runs out. The cars get repo'd. The house is gone. The "friends" who drank their beer and ate their food are nowhere to be found. All that's left is debt and a mountain of stress.

They traded their peace for a year of pretending, and now they're paying for it with their lives.

Meanwhile, I have peace of mind. My car is ugly, but it's paid for. My house is small, but the lights are on. I have weekends free. I'm not a slave to the overtime just to pay for a boat I never use. I don't owe anyone. I don't have the bank breathing down my neck or a credit card company calling me at dinner. If my job disappears tomorrow, at least I'm not chained to payments for stuff I don't even need. I can walk away clean.

No one gives a damn what you have. They are too busy worrying about their own piles of debt to care about yours. When it's gone, you find out who's really in your corner. When the money dries up, the crowd disappears. Most of the time, it's just you—and that's enough when you are really honest with yourself. You realize that "you" are more than the sum of your bank account. You realize that your value isn't something you can buy at a dealership.

So let them laugh. Let them show off. Let them think they're better because their leather seats are heated. I'll keep my pride, my freedom, and my ability to wake up without fear. I

don't wake up wondering how I'm going to fake it today. I don't wake up terrified of the mailman. That's real wealth. It's the ability to breathe easy in a world that's suffocating on its own greed. That's what's left when you strip everything else away. At the end of the day, I'm just a man who owns himself. And that makes me richer than half the people on my street.

Chapter 7: Laugh If You Want, I Live Truth Anyway

Life's never short of people who want to laugh at your hardship. It's the easiest thing in the world to do—point a finger at someone else's struggle so you don't have to look at your own. You pull up in a busted car or walk in with worn shoes, and someone's always ready with a joke. They think they're better than you because their tires are new or their shirt is pressed. They think a lack of money means a lack of character. They whisper, nudge their friends, and fill social media with fake pictures, judging by what they think they see—never what they know. They see the rust on the car, but they don't see the man who paid for it with cash and honest sweat. They see the worn shoes, but they don't see the miles of progress those shoes have made.

There's freedom in letting people talk. Once you realize that their words don't put gas in your tank or food on your table, they lose their power. All the laughter, the sideways looks, the "advice" about what you should fix or hide—it's a mirror of their own fear, nothing else. They aren't laughing at you; they're laughing because they're terrified of being where you are. They think if they mock the "poor guy," they can keep the poverty away from themselves. It's a defense mechanism for cowards.

At some point, the sting fades, and you realize most people who mock your mess could never survive it. If they lost their credit cards and their fancy titles tomorrow, they'd crumble. They don't have the calluses on their souls that you do. They put on fresh shirts, chase clean smiles, and live terrified of anyone seeing the cracks under their foundation. Their whole life is a theater production, and they're always one bad day away from the curtain falling down.

I've been poor. I've been the punchline. I've been the guy people talk about when they want to feel superior. I've sat across the table from people too embarrassed to be seen with me during hard times. I've seen friends "forget" to invite me to

things because they didn't want my "vibe" ruining their fake perfection. I've heard the rumors float: "There goes Zsan, probably walked here, probably gonna ask for help." They love to speculate. They love to imagine you're desperate just so they can feel powerful. Sometimes I was, sometimes I wasn't. Still not ashamed. Asking for help when you're down isn't a sin; lying about needing it is.

Truth: laughter fades; reality lasts. The jokes stop being funny after a while, but the strength you build during the struggle stays in your bones forever. All those times I stood out, showed my struggle, and owned my dirt—those are the days I grew. You don't grow when things are easy and everyone is clapping. You grow when you're standing in the rain and people are driving by splashing mud on you. You can laugh if you want. Your opinion stops when you shut your mouth. My life keeps going. I'm the one who has to walk the path; you're just a spectator on the sidelines making noise.

If you're living for the crowd, you're never really living. You're acting. You're a slave to the "likes" and the nods of people who don't even care about you. You're auditioning for a role you'll never own. You're trying to be the "successful

guy" or the "cool guy" based on someone else's script. At some point, you realize the only applause worth hearing is your own—the one you earn for surviving, not for blending in. It's the quiet "well done" you say to yourself when you finish a hard day's work and look at your own hands. That's the only standing ovation that matters.

Here's my rule: never cover up the mess. Never apologize for being real. If you're struggling, own it. If you're broke, say it. If you're working your way up from the bottom, wear that like a badge of honor. If people want to laugh, let them. Their laughter is the sound of people who are stuck in the audience. Their comfort is a costume. They're wearing it to hide their insecurity. My struggle is my truth. And truth is the only thing that doesn't burn away when the fire gets hot.

So let them nudge their friends. Let them whisper. I'll keep driving my wreck, wearing my worn shoes, and speaking my mind. Because at the end of the day, I'm the one who is actually awake, and they're all just dreaming.

Chapter 8: The Truth Needs an Asshole, and Sometimes That's You

Being honest will not earn you friends. Sometimes it loses you everything. We're told from the time we're kids that "honesty is the best policy," but they forget to mention the part where people will try to ruin you for it. The world likes honesty in theory—until it's their mess, their secrets, or their comfort on the line. They love a "truth-teller" until that person starts looking at their bank statements, their fake marriages, or their lazy work habits. Then, suddenly, you aren't "honest" anymore—you're just a prick.

If you walk through life always telling people what they want to hear, you'll get invited to more parties. You'll be the "nice guy" that everyone wants around because you never challenge their bullshit. You'll be the guy who nods while the ship is sinking because you don't want to upset the captain. You'll

have a longer contacts list, but a shorter sense of your own worth. You'll have a phone full of names, but you'll feel like a ghost every time you look in the mirror. You're trading your soul for a seat at a table where nobody actually knows you.

I've learned you have to be willing to take the blowback. When you speak up, the room is going to get cold. The smiles are going to turn into sneers. Someone has to be the first to call bullshit, to point out the rot under all the perfume and smiles. Someone has to be the guy who says, "This floor is falling through," while everyone else is busy talking about the new drapes. If that makes you the asshole in the room—good. Wear that title like a badge. Sometimes, that's the price to pay for waking yourself (and maybe others) up. Most people are sleepwalking through their lives, drugged on comfort and lies. You're the alarm clock they didn't want to hear.

If it costs you, so be it. Better that than rotting quietly from the inside out. I've seen men hold their tongues for thirty years to keep a job or a "friendship," and by the end, they don't even have a voice left. They've swallowed so much bullshit that it's all they are made of. I'd rather be the guy who gets kicked out

of the party than the guy who stays and loses his mind trying to fit in.

Don't let anyone shame you into silence. They'll try. They'll tell you you're "too much," or "too loud," or that you "don't know when to quit." What they're really saying is, "Please stop making me feel guilty about my own fake life." Don't swallow your truth because someone else can't handle the taste. If they want sugar, tell them to go buy a candy bar. You're serving meat. Respect isn't about making everyone comfortable. It's about holding the line, no matter who tries to talk you out of it. True respect isn't given to the guy who agrees with everyone; it's given to the man who stands his ground when the wind is blowing against him.

In the end, the people worth your time will stay—even if you scare a few off. The real ones—the ones who actually give a damn about reality—will respect you for being the "asshole" who told the truth. They'll realize you're the only person they can actually trust because you don't have a filter. You don't owe soft words to anybody whose comfort requires your silence. If someone can only be your friend if you keep your

mouth shut about the truth, then they aren't your friend.
They're a jailer.

If you have to be the villain in their story to be the hero in your own, so what? Let them write whatever they want about you in their little diaries. Let them tell their friends how "mean" or "harsh" you are. While they're busy gossiping, you're busy being free. Tell the truth, live with it, and let the cowards and mask-wearers run. They were never going to help you anyway. They were just weight you were carrying.

Being the "asshole" means you finally stopped caring about the audience. It means you've finally decided that your own respect is worth more than their applause. It's a lonely road sometimes, but the air is a hell of a lot cleaner out here.

Chapter 9: Stop Trying to Cover Up the Stink

Look. Everyone out here wants to look clean. It's a global obsession. They want Instagram smiles and the lie of a polished life—clothes pressed, stories edited, and pain hidden where nobody can see. They spend hours choosing the right filter to hide the dark circles under their eyes and the gray skin that comes from a life of stress. They post pictures of their dinner and their vacations, trying to convince the world—and themselves—that they've made it.

But you know what follows you everywhere? The stink of the truth you never face. You can't outrun it. You can't drive fast enough in a financed car to leave it behind. It doesn't matter how nice your house smells on the surface. You can buy the expensive candles and the automatic sprayers that go off every twenty minutes. If you shove your mess in the attic, close the

door, and hope nobody notices, life catches up. The stink always leaks out. It seeps through the floorboards. It gets into the vents.

It's in your words. It's in your decisions. It's why your smile feels fake and your dreams rot before you ever get started. People can tell when someone is "perfumed." They can sense the desperation underneath the expensive clothes. We live in a world obsessed with appearances. People scrub their floors but never their conscience. They want the neighbors to see a clean porch, but they don't care that their own heart is a junkyard. They light candles in rooms full of secrets. They smile in photos while their soul is screaming. It's a special kind of torture—living a life that looks great on a screen but feels like hell in your chest. And they think if they just keep the surface clean, nobody will smell the truth.

I've been poor, embarrassed, and sometimes desperate—but never a coward about it. I've stood in the wreckage of my own mistakes. My failures are out here for everyone to see, because I know damn well what happens when you try to bury them. When you bury a mistake, it doesn't stay dead; it ferments. It turns into something toxic. You don't get rid of the stink by

adding perfume. You get rid of it by scrubbing down what's real, facing every ugly part, and living through the cleaning. It's hard work. Your hands get raw. You have to get down on your knees and look at the filth. But it's the only way to get the smell out for good.

People say, "Why share your dirt? Isn't that shame?" No. Shame is what you feel when you spend your life hiding in fear—covering up, lying, pretending tears are just water. Shame is the shadow that follows the liar. Truth is messy. It's moldy closets, broken mirrors, and the smell of everything you tried to forget. It's looking at the debt, the failed relationships, and the times you were a straight-up jerk. But it's also the only thing that frees you. You can't fix what you won't admit is broken.

Truth be told, people who put on the best show usually have the worst stains. The louder the boast, the bigger the lie. The difference between misery and freedom is this: the ones who own their dirt are the ones who clean it for good. They don't have to look over their shoulder. The ones who keep covering up—living for likes, living for status—they wind up chained to a stink that never goes away. They are prisoners of their

own image. I've seen people spend years building a perfect image, only to collapse when one crack shows. They lose their job or their spouse leaves, and the whole house of cards comes down because there was nothing solid underneath. Because they never built a life—they built a mask. And masks rot from the inside.

I'm not here to make you feel nice. I'm not here for comfort or fake hope. I'm here to light up the closet and laugh at the mess, because that's the only way you ever get rid of it. I'm pulling the junk out into the middle of the yard for the whole neighborhood to see. So if you've got dirt, show it. Scrub it raw. Cry if you have to. Bleed if you must. But don't pretend it's not there. There is a dignity in a man who says, "Yeah, I messed up, and I'm cleaning it."

Be real enough that you scare a few people off. At the end of the day, that stink is just the proof you lived—and anyone who runs from reality is just stuck with their own rotten mess. Let them run. They were never going to help you scrub anyway. The truth doesn't smell like roses. It smells like sweat, tears, and the courage to clean what others hide. It's a heavy, honest

smell. Don't cover up. Air it all out. Only then can you breathe free.

And if this chapter makes you mad? Good. That means the bleach is hitting the wound. That anger you feel? That's your shame throwing a tantrum. That's your ego kicking and screaming because it's been exposed. Your ego wants to stay in the dark where it can keep lying to you. You think I'm being harsh? I'm being honest. And if honesty feels like violence, maybe you've been living too long in a padded lie. You've become soft. You've become addicted to the "nice" words that are killing you.

You don't need another soft sermon. You need a mirror and a mop. You need to get to work. You need to stop blaming the world for the stink you refuse to clean. Stop pointing fingers at your parents, your ex, your boss, or your trauma—when you haven't even opened the damn closet. It doesn't matter who put the mess there; it's in your house now. It's your job to get it out.

You want healing? Start with truth. You want peace? Start with war—against every lie you've told yourself to survive. It's a

fight for your own soul. Because survival isn't living. And pretending isn't healing. You aren't "getting by" if you're suffocating on your own secrets.

So go ahead. Be pissed. Slam the book shut. Curse my name. I don't give a fuck. But when the silence creeps in and the stink starts rising again, remember this chapter. Remember that the smell won't go away just because you're angry at the guy who pointed it out. Remember that someone told you the truth when everyone else was selling you Febreze for your soul. You don't need a mask. You need a mirror. You don't need applause. You need accountability. You don't need to feel better. You need to get real. And if that offends you—good. That means it's working. Now, put down the perfume and pick up the brush. We've got work to do.

I've been poor. I've struggled. I've known the kind of hunger that makes your stomach feel like it's eating itself. I've picked up half-smoked cigarette butts just to feel something in my lungs. I've stood on street corners looking at the ground, hoping for a miracle, but settled for the scraps others threw away. I've burned wood pallets in my fireplace because I couldn't afford the gas bill to stay warm in winter. I remember

the way that wood popped and hissed, the chemical smell of the treatment burning off, and the way I had to huddle so close to the flames I could feel my skin tightening. I remember the frost on the inside of the windows.

And I'm not ashamed of any of it. Because those moments taught me what survival really means. They stripped away the bullshit. When you're cold and you're broke, you don't have the energy to be fake. They taught me that pride doesn't keep you warm, that ego doesn't pay the bills, and that pretending doesn't build a life. I watched people who were just as broke as me spend their last ten dollars on a six-pack or a lottery ticket just to forget who they were for an hour. I decided right then I'd rather remember who I was, even if who I was was a man shivering in a cold house.

I've had to bite my pride. I've walked into offices and asked for help when I wanted to spit in their faces. I've had to do things people would call embarrassing. I've worked the jobs nobody else wanted. I've cleaned the messes nobody else would touch. But those people don't feed me, don't carry my burdens, and don't live my life. Their judgment is just noise—it has no weight. It doesn't put boots on my feet.

So I stopped living for their approval. I stopped looking for a "thumbs up" from people who were just as lost as I was. I stopped hiding the stink. I opened the doors and let the truth out. I stopped lying to myself that everything was okay. That was the biggest lie of all. And that's when everything started to change. The moment I admitted I was in a hole was the moment I finally picked up the shovel to climb out.

If you're reading this and you feel exposed—good. That means you're ready. Ready to stop performing. Ready to put down the mask and let your face breathe. Ready to stop shrinking. You've spent too long trying to be "small" and "polite" so you don't offend people who don't even care about you. Ready to stop waiting for someone else to fix what only you can face. The rescue boat isn't coming. You are the boat.

You don't need to be perfect. You just need to be honest. Perfection is a lie sold by people who want to keep you feeling inadequate. You just need to be brave enough to live your truth—even if it's messy, even if it's hard, even if it scares people off. Let them run. If they can't handle the real you, they don't deserve the seats at your table when you finally make it.

Because the truth doesn't just set you free. It's not just a nice feeling. It makes you strong. It gives you a spine of iron. It makes you real. It gives you weight in a world of ghosts. It makes you whole. It stitches the pieces of your soul back together.

So take a breath. Take your truth. And take your life back. Don't ask for permission. Don't wait for a "fair shake." You've got one shot. One trip around this sun before they put you in the ground. Write the next chapter. Not on paper, but in the way you wake up tomorrow morning. Make it raw. Stop editing your life. Make it yours. Stop living someone else's script. Make it matter. And when the world tries to hand you shame—hand it back with pride. When they look at your car, your clothes, or your past and try to make you feel small, look them in the eye and show them a man who knows exactly who he is. Because you're not broken. You aren't a victim. You're building. You're under construction, and the work is loud and it's messy.

And that stink they judge? That's just the scent of someone who's finally living. It's the smell of sweat, the smell of effort,

and the smell of a man who finally opened the windows and
let the air in.

Live truth. Die real. That's all there is.

Chapter 10: The Price of a Soul

I didn't want to write this chapter. I wanted to keep the focus on my own struggle, my own pallets, and my own cold nights. But then the world reminded me that the worst kind of cold doesn't come from the winter—it comes from the people who claim to love you while they're reaching for your throat.

I was just betrayed. Not by an enemy I could see coming, but by someone who promised to stay, someone who said they understood me. They wore a mask of kindness while they were scouting out what was most important to me. They used my own heart as bait. And when I realized what had happened, I felt a shame that was deeper than being poor. I felt a disgust that made me want to burn the whole world down.

We live in a society that rewards the hollow. We live in a place where people have traded their "Face" and their "Culture" for a few dollars and a moment of ego. They think that because they “got away with it,” they’ve won. They think success is measured by how much you can take, rather than what you can build.

But I'm telling you now: there is nothing more expensive than a cheap soul. When you use someone’s love or trust to get ahead, you’re not just stealing their money—you’re stealing their ability to feel safe in the world. You’re pushing them into a darkness that a bank account can’t fix. You’re killing a part of their humanity to feed your own greed.

I could have stayed silent. I could have followed the old “*xǎu thì che*” rule—and hidden my embarrassment. I could have pretended I wasn't hurt so I wouldn't look "weak." But that's exactly how the rot spreads. The liars count on your silence. They count on your pride to keep their secrets safe.

I have to choose to be the mirror. I’m not just talking about one person; I’m talking about a social disease. If my words make you angry, if they make you uncomfortable, good. That

means you still have a conscience left to sting. If you've ever sold your integrity for a "win," look at the wreckage you left behind. Was it worth it?

To those of you who have been broken like I was: Don't let their rot become yours. They took your peace, they took your trust, and they took your energy. But they cannot take the truth. Use the pain. Use the disgust. Let it turn into the kind of strength that no mask-wearer can ever understand.

You don't need revenge. You need to be real. While they are busy hiding behind their lies, you are standing in the light. And in the end, the light always lasts longer than the mask.

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking I'm a fool for telling you how I got played. In our culture, we're taught to hide the ugly. But I look at my children, and I realize that my silence is a gift to the criminals. If I don't speak, they prosper. If I don't tell you I was weak, you won't know how to be strong. My sacrifice of "face" is the down payment on a brighter future for the next generation. I'll take the laughter and the judgment today so my kids don't have to take the hit tomorrow.

Don't just read the book. Watch the battle.

If you want to see the face behind the truth—and if you want to join me in breaking the silence that lets these scammers flourish—connect with me here. I don't post for "likes." I post to keep us awake.

YouTube (OAC): www.youtube.com/@zsannguyen

Instagram: www.instagram.com/zsan.nguyen

Facebook: www.facebook.com/zsan.nguyen

TikTok: www.tiktok.com/@zsannguyen

Website: ZsanProductions.com

Closing Chapter: The Real Truth

I've been poor. I've struggled. I've picked up half-smoked cigarette butts just to feel something in my lungs. I've burned wood pallets in my fireplace because I couldn't afford the gas bill to stay warm in winter.

And I'm not ashamed of any of it.

Because those moments taught me what survival really means. They taught me that pride doesn't keep you warm, that ego doesn't pay the bills, and that pretending doesn't build a life.

I've had to bite my pride. I've had to do things people would call embarrassing. But those people don't feed me, don't carry my burdens, and don't live my life. So I stopped living for

their approval. I stopped hiding the stink. I stopped lying to myself that everything was okay.

And that's when everything started to change.

When you stop caring about looking "good," you start being "real." When you stop trying to fix your image, you start fixing your foundation. I realized that the people who judged my struggle were terrified by their own truth. They stayed in the shadows while I stood in the cold, and that cold made me hard. It made me sharp.

If you're reading this and you feel exposed, that means you're ready. Ready to stop performing. Ready to stop shrinking. Ready to stop waiting for someone else to fix what only you can face.

You don't need to be perfect. You just need to be honest.

You just need to be brave enough to live your truth—even if it's messy, even if it's hard, even if it scares people off. Because the truth doesn't just set you free; it filters your life. It drives away the fakes and brings in the few who are really worth your time.

The truth makes you strong. It makes you real. It makes you whole.

I used to think my past was a series of failures. Now I know it was my apprenticeship. Every pallet I burned, every cigarette butt I picked up, was a lesson in resourcefulness. It was the training I needed to build a life from sheer willpower.

So take a breath. Take your truth. And take your life back.

You've got one shot. Write the next chapter. Make it raw. Make it yours. Make it matter.

And when the world tries to hand you shame—hand it back with pride. Because you're not broken. You're building. You are designing something that lasts.

And that stink they judge? That's just the smell of someone who's still living.

Author's Note

This book wasn't written to impress you. I didn't sit down to win an award or get a pat on the back from people who have never had grease under their fingernails. It wasn't polished for comfort or dressed up for applause. I didn't filter the language or soften the blows to make it easier to swallow. If it tastes bitter, it's because the truth usually does.

It was built from the bottom—from cold nights, hard truths, and the kind of struggle most people are too afraid to admit. This book wasn't born in a library; it was born in the quiet moments of desperation when the world felt like it was closing in. I've lived through shame, poverty, and silence. I know what it's like to feel invisible—to be the "nobody" in the room that everyone looks past.

I've picked up half-smoked butts just to feel something. I've known the humiliation of scrounging for a moment of relief. I've burned wood pallets in my fireplace because I couldn't afford heat. I've watched the smoke rise and wondered if things would ever get better, all while shivering in my own living room. And I'm not embarrassed by any of it. Not one damn bit. Because those moments taught me what it means to survive. They burned away everything that was fake and left me with something solid. They taught me what it means to fight. What it means to live truth—even when it stinks.

If this book made you uncomfortable, good. That means you're still alive enough to feel the sting. If it made you feel seen, even better. It means you've finally found a voice that speaks your language. But if it made you stop, breathe, and ask yourself what you've been hiding—then it did its job. If it made you look at your own "closet" and realize the smell isn't going away on its own, then every word I wrote was worth it. You don't need to be perfect. Perfection is for statues and liars. You don't need to be rich, polished, or liked. You can be broke, rough, and hated by the crowd and still be the most powerful person in the room. You just need to be honest. And brave enough to live that honesty out loud. That's the real

courage—not being fearless, but being real when everyone else is performing.

This world is full of noise, masks, and people who quit before they even begin. It's full of ghosts who are terrified of their own shadows. Don't be one of them. Don't let the world turn you into another edited, filtered version of a human being. You've got one life. One shot to stand for something. Buy your freedom with truth. Pay for it in pride, comfort, and easy answers. It's a steep price, but it's the only thing worth buying.

And when it costs you something, remember: nothing real comes cheap. If it didn't hurt, it wouldn't be worth having. If it didn't cost you friends or comfort, it wouldn't be the truth. If you're still here, still reading, still breathing—then maybe you're ready. The talking is done. The pages are finished.

Now go live it. Not for them. For you. Go out there and be the man who doesn't give a fuck about the mask. Be the man who owns his dirt. Be real.

These books are not stories.

They are not fiction.

They are not written to impress.

Every chapter is a piece of my past.

Every line is carved from something I lived, something I saw,
something I endured.

I don't invent. I don't imagine. I don't decorate.

What you read here is my journey—raw, imperfect,
unpolished.

It is survival turned into sentences.

It is scars turned into lessons.

It is persistence turned into proverbs.

I don't know what the next chapter will be until life writes it
for me.

When something happens, I live it.

Proverbs by Zsan – Book 1: My Journey – Living Truth, Not Perfection

- “Knowledge is not power; applying knowledge is power.”
- “Tools don’t build houses; hands and discipline do.”
- “Wisdom isn’t earned in comfort; it’s forged in persistence.”
- “Talk fades, but results remain.”
- “True change does not come from what you know— but from what you risk, build, and pass on.”
- “Authenticity doesn’t come from perfection; it comes from honesty.”
- “Respect isn’t given. It’s recognized—earned by action, not words.”
- “Appearances fade. Struggles remain—but struggles make you solid.”

- “The ripple of action is what changes the world, not the collection of information.”

Proverbs by Zsan – Book 2: The Cost of Living Truth

- “I’m not a good person, and I’m done pretending.”
- “Better to be hated for living truth than loved for living a lie.”
- “The reward for hard work is more hard work.”
- “Living truth costs you more than you think—but not living it costs everything you are.”
- “Every honest word costs, but every lie is a prison.”
- “Your excuses aren’t personality—they’re just comfort dressed up as identity.”
- “No one gets rescued from a life they refuse to climb out of.”
- “Pride isn’t in what you show, but in what you earn honestly.”
- “Truth won’t hug you, but it will set you straight.”

- “Respect isn’t about making everyone comfortable. It’s about holding the line.”
 - “You don’t get rid of the stink by adding perfume. You get rid of it by scrubbing what’s real.”
 - “Survival isn’t living. Pretending isn’t healing.”
 - “You don’t need applause. You need accountability.”
 - “Nothing real comes cheap.”
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Proverbs by Zsan – Book 3: The Book

I Never Meant To Write

- “I don’t fear the devil; I fear the power I have to make the one I love cry.”
- “I’ve been living in this prison because I lied to myself; every lie is a prison.”
- “Every day the wall still stands, we lose more than workers. We lose dignity. We lose hope.”
- “I want a country where compliance is not the price of responsibility.”
- “If you want to protect jobs, protect access. If you want to protect safety, protect affordability.”
- “You can’t preach self-reliance and then outlaw it.”
- “Eligibility is a quiet gate with a loud lock.”
- “I only struck one match. And today, the flame caught.”

- “It wasn’t about fixing a car. It was about rebuilding a person.”
- “Sometimes, saving someone else means losing yourself. And sometimes, letting go is the only way to hold on to who you are.”
- “You need to write your own chapter. Your life is yours —not anybody else’s.”
- “If you don’t believe in yourself, how can you expect others to believe in you?”
- “The stupid person becomes the smart one when someone finally believes in them.”
- “The smart person becomes the stupid one when no one invests in them.”
- “God does not need to punish us; the conscience He gave us makes us punish ourselves when we betray our own souls.”
- “A conscience can be locked deep, but it never dies; it waits for one spark to burn down the prison of lies we built.”
- “We choose our path believing it is right, but the price of a ‘merciful’ lie is a lifetime of facing what we destroyed.”

- “I have seen the devil cry; no matter how cruel or merciless you are, there is still a conscience buried deep inside.”
 - “In this world, what defines us is not who we are or what we do, but what we treasure enough to sacrifice ourselves to protect.”
 - “Sometimes we act not because we want to, but because we think it is right—even when it goes against what we desire.”
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Stay Real

Thank you for reading. This continue our conversation after book one “***My Journey – Living Truth, Not Perfection.***” If you’re ready to stop performing and start living, let’s connect.

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