

CHAPTER EIGHT JULIAN UNITED STATES

When Julian got home, the first thing he did was take his dog, Marco, into his room. “Do you have anything to say to me?” “We need your help. Please design a new computer coding system.”

The phone rings. Julian’s best friend loved to joke. “Are you in *Paine* reading *Common Sense*?” Haven’t started yet.” “So, what’s up?” Julian turns to Marco for advice. “Tell the truth.” Julian - “The animals and the natural world are hoping to change our species’ thinking. They’ve asked me to help them.” The response (and immediate hang up) was predictable. “Yeah, sure.”

Having to choose a subject for a school research assignment, Julian couldn’t make up his mind: the Underground Railroad, the WWII Buffalo Soldiers, or Wilson Bentley, who photographed snow crystals, to prove no two snowflakes were alike. He decided to do all three.

Every day after school, everyone met at the Banana Leaf, a soda fountain from the 1950’s, a long curved marble counter with high stools. Eucario was always there with the same greeting. “Hi. We’re open 7 to 7, 367 days a year.” Newcomers always took the bait. “Don’t you mean 365?” “No, it’s a joke.”

When Emilie wrote that she’d decided to learn to fly, Julian answered. “What happened to Shy?” “I’m learning how to be a sheep in wolf’s clothing.” “You mean a wolf in sheep’s clothing?” “No, the opposite.” “Sounds like you’re on the way to alpha female.”

The headlines continued:

TURTLES CLOSE AIRPORT RUNWAYS
SUPER BOWL OPENING DELAYED
GROUND HOGS OCCUPY TV STATION

It was February.

He kept in touch with everyone he'd met at the Games. Julian and Wayne made plans to visit each other, hopefully during the Summer. Their last phone conversation ended with laughter. "Do you think it's just a matter of time before snail mail, paper money and watches are obsolete, the horse and buggies of our time?"

Ever since Julian arrived home, there never seemed to be enough hours in the day to do everything he wanted. Learning about the indigenous people of the San Francisco Bay area would have to wait. His priorities now were the computer code, getting his driver's license, and learning Spanish.

Julian's Dad, a systems' analyst, shared his passion for technology and, happily, had unlimited patience with his endless questions. "Can coding appear to do one thing when it actually produces the opposite outcome?" Julian wondered if people understood that coded documents, plans and designs weren't just a computer issue, but could be deciding factors affecting every aspect of life.

After a late night talk with his Dad, Julian was very tired. It was Marco, jumping on his bed very early the next morning, who woke him. Rubbing his eyes, Julian saw lights flickering on the opposite wall. Were they coming from the spaces between the curtains? Julian was certain that, though the shapes were far from precisely formed, he was looking at a sequence of numbers.

Researching the story of the Underground Railroad, Julian learned how, before and during the Civil War, codes were used to help black Americans escape across state lines to freedom. At the time it was against the law to teach a slave to read or write. Every house had several beautiful homemade quilts. Each quilt design, a *monkey wrench*, a *crossroads*, a *wagon wheel*, carried a specific message. Airing a certain quilt on a window sill or over a fence in the front yard sent a message - not safe to stop here. Another design hung out to dry - safe! The concept of hidden in plain sight would play a part in his new coding system.

In WWII the only black American Infantry Division to fight in Europe was called the 'Buffalo Division.' Buffalo Soldiers wore an emblem of a Buffalo on their sleeves. The name came from the all black 9th & 10th Cavalries who fought with the Unionists in the Civil War and later were sent west to keep peace on the frontier and to fight the "Indian" wars. Despite their absence in the movies, over a third of America's cowboys were black. Native Americans gave these soldiers the compliment of calling them after their sacred Buffalo because they were fierce fighters. In WWII, the segregated troops fighting in Italy retained the compliment.

Even though it was a school night, Julian and two other friends had been invited to a sleep over at Eduardo's house. The next morning, watching as Eduardo's Mother was making their bag lunches for school, Julian asked politely, "What are you doing?" "I'm scoring an orange." One of the other boys standing nearby was transfixed, a look of complete disbelief on his face." Seeing this, Julian turned to him. "Are you okay?" "I've never seen anything like this. . . caring enough to make it easier for your child to peel an orange?" A small moment. Julian would not forget how lucky he was to have the parents he did. He'd always taken it for granted.

It was a yearly tradition. Once school was out for the Summer, Julian and his parents crossed the Golden Gate bridge, through the Rainbow Tunnels, to go to the State Fair. From the most delicious pie and jam to the tractor pulls, the Fairgrounds were acres of endless surprises. For the first time, Julian was intrigued by the area set aside for farm animals. Young people had spent the past year raising pigs, goats, steers, chickens and rabbits. The animals had been judged and would now be auctioned. Julian asked a boy standing near one enclosure. "Do you ever talk to your animal?" "All the time." "Does he or she have a name?" "Yep", pointing to his pig. "That's Inky. . . because he's always running out of his pen." Julian laughed. It was the first time he had ever thought about it. Everything he ate came from somewhere.

It was August when Julian's best friend, David, phoned. Trying to talk, repeatedly catching his breath through his tears. . . "Can you come over?" "What's wrong?" More tears. . . "Folded flag. . . folded flag." "What do you mean?" "Please come over!" What David meant was that his Mother, a pilot in the Air Force, had been killed. Julian had never known anyone who had died. Of all his friends' mothers, Mrs. Blair was his favorite. She and Julian had always joked about how they were the only two people in the world who would happily subsist on sauteed mushrooms and raspberry sherbet. That their favorite animal was the sting ray cemented the bond. Julian had never been to a funeral.

It was easy to compile all the necessary addresses for the message he had been asked to prepare. One hundred thousand lines of code. Julian was ready!