

MEMOIR · EXCERPTS

Richard Frederic Bertossa

Freedom Tests

Seven real tests. No theory.

Who is this guy?

People ask me that all the time. Sometimes out loud, sometimes I just read it in their eyes.

The honest answer is not the companies, not the books, not the wins. What explains me are the tests. Seven of them run through this memoir like a red thread, across three decades and four continents. Sometimes I went looking for them. Mostly they found me.

What follows are excerpts from a few of the seven. Not the whole book, just enough to show you where the voice comes from.

We don't start at the beginning. We start where it got serious.



The plane I didn't board

A small airstrip in the mountains. Propeller planes, short runways, peaks all around. I was three hours early, me, the man who is always late. At the gate the agent waved me over: someone hadn't shown, I had a seat. I stood up, walked over, and sat back down. I still don't know why. Just a physical no.

That evening in Caracas: "Richie, where are you?" Silence. "Your plane is gone." Mérida to Caracas, flown into the Andes. Everyone on board, dead.

Some tests you pass by listening to the part of you that has no words.

The friend in the dungeon

A friend was arrested and disappeared. Last known location, an airport. Then nothing. The lawyer was threatened, the embassy went quiet. This was not a normal case. This was the secret service.

I was on the same island with my young daughter. If they had my name, I was next. But leave him to rot? I researched the officers, names, faces. I paid journalists, not for lies, for the truth. They found him chained to a bed in an illegal cell. They let him go. The propaganda photo meant to prove nothing had happened became the proof of their defeat.

Some tests you pass by refusing to look away.

LEBANON · BEIRUT

The balcony under fire

I sat on a hotel balcony in Beirut and felt the pressure of airstrikes in my chest. Not heard. Felt. Like a hand pressed flat against your breastbone that will not let go. The flights were cancelled. Weather, they said first. Then it was clear: war.

First day I was the only guest in a nine-floor hotel. Next day it was full, families, mattresses on the floor. And while I waited, I did something that surprised me. I worked. I finished a project I had pushed for months. Because there was no running anymore.

Some tests you pass by going calm exactly where others panic.

PAKISTAN · NINETEEN

A rooftop in Karachi

At nineteen I hitchhiked overland from Vienna toward India. Through Iran, through Baluchistan, a desert so empty your own breathing becomes the loudest sound. In Karachi, kids threw stones at me on the open street. I knew that if one hit my head I would go down bleeding, and then it would get dangerous. I did not run. I walked on with my head up until they stopped.

Afternoons I climbed onto a roof, the whole chaotic city below me, and I started writing my own book by hand. Nineteen years old, far too young to argue with philosophers, and doing it anyway.

Some tests you pass by not flinching.

FOUR CONTINENTS

Built and lost

I built companies on four continents, and I lost some of them too. A dotcom-era firm with twenty-three people, wiped out overnight. Bank accounts frozen, won back with legal reverse engineering. A factory in China, built up from the machines. I have watched real systems break, up close, not in a model.

The calm does not come from winning every time. It comes from surviving the times I did not.

AND THAT IS NOT ALL

What else is in the book

Taking on the Austrian state, alone, partly without a lawyer. A case still running, and looking good.

A border run through fifteen checkpoints, three days of silence, with a child of eight.

An explosion in Vienna, two fingers gone, and one answer that shaped everything that followed: "No. He stays on it."

And the ones I left out on purpose, so you can still sleep tonight.

TWO BOOKS

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Freedom Tests

Seven life tests. Three decades. Four continents. The full story behind the voice.

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