

Kurt Chapel BOOK I

CRYSTAL
LAKE
Secrets

Jerry Snodgrass

outskirtspress
DENVER, COLORADO

This is a work of fiction. The events and characters described herein are imaginary and are not intended to refer to specific places or living persons. The opinions expressed in this manuscript are solely the opinions of the author and do not represent the opinions or thoughts of the publisher. The author has represented and warranted full ownership and/or legal right to publish all the materials in this book.

Crystal Lake Secrets
Kurt Chapel Book 1
All Rights Reserved.
Copyright © 2015 Jerry Snodgrass
v1.0

Cover Photo © 2015 thinkstockphotos.com. All rights reserved - used with permission.

This book may not be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in whole or in part by any means, including graphic, electronic, or mechanical without the express written consent of the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Outskirts Press, Inc.
<http://www.outskirtspress.com>

ISBN: 978-1-4787-5765-8

Outskirts Press and the “OP” logo are trademarks belonging to Outskirts Press, Inc.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DEDICATION

To my wife Rosemary, the love of my life--thanks for believing in me and your encouragement for me to continue writing. Without her love and support, this story would be filed in my manuscript dead file drawer.

Also by Jerry Snodgrass

Forgotten Honor

Castle on the Rhine

Broken Triangle

Moments to Remember 1957

Memories – The Class of 1957

Lone Star Legacy (Sequel to Frontier Justice)

Frontier Justice

Author's Note

The characters in this book are fictitious. This is my story created out of my own imagination. I may have added real-life adventures or plots discussed during my life experiences. I want it to be known that I have the utmost respect for law enforcement personnel, and for realtors. To the US Navy SEALs: As a retired military, senior NCO, my respect for your courage and honor cannot be told in a book.

Chapter 1

Zagreb, Croatia
Spring Current Year

Kurt Chapel inspected the six bullets in the palm of his hand before slipping them into the chambers of the French-made Manurhin MR73 .357 Magnum revolver he was holding. When the last chamber was loaded, he focused his eyes on the open space of the cold, vacant warehouse. Streaks of the early-morning sun coming from broken windows shed rays of light on the three lifeless bodies lying motionless, their blood in puddles on the concrete floor.

He placed the handgun in the holster on his hip and turned toward the young blonde woman standing behind him. Her frail body shaking; her face was covered with perspiration. She sobbed, sucking in desperate gulps of air.

Kurt, at 6 feet 2 inches, towered over the crying Croatian woman as he removed his sport jacket and placed it over her shoulders. “They won’t hurt you or your family ever again. I can tell you have never seen men killed or a floor covered in blood. Let this be a

lesson to you when making friends with people you know nothing about. Your good friends kidnapped you and they would have killed you for the ransom they asked your father to pay for your freedom.”

Still crying and shaking with fright, the woman turned her head upward toward Kurt, her eyes darting back and forth like those of a trapped animal. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she said in a weak voice. “I am so sorry...thank you so much for saving me from those horrible men. Can you take me to my father, please?”

Kurt placed an arm around her shoulders and drew her to him. He thought, *There are three important rules one should live by, to survive in the world of fighting crime. First, always look over your shoulder. Second, never trust anyone. And third, shoot first. Those are my rules for survival.*

Kurt guided her out of the cold dark warehouse and into the spring sun that was appearing on the scattered houses of a small village setting along a wooded landscape and a roaring river.

He breathed in the fresh morning air as he led her to the passenger’s side of the black BMW parked behind a row of shipping containers. He opened the door for her. She smiled at Kurt, and she slid into the seat.

Before getting into the car, he stopped and surveyed the surroundings around the warehouse.

As Kurt sat behind the wheel of the car, he placed

a hand on the shoulder of the frightened woman sitting next to him. He said warmly, "You will be with your father in twenty minutes." She returned his gesture with a smile.

The young woman, Valentina Zulim, who had been a kidnapping victim a few minutes before was now being reunited with her happy family. Her father, Dag Zulim, a millionaire shipbuilder and leader of the Croatian Independent Democratic Serb Party, shook Kurt's hand and thanked him for rescuing his only daughter. Due to his political and millionaire status, she at twenty-one years old was always a potential threat to his family.

Kurt opened the small briefcase that the father gave him. He quickly thumbed through the bundles of one-hundred-dollar bills and the bank transfer receipt for one million dollars to his Swiss bank account in Geneva. Kurt glanced at the first-class train ticket that would take him from Zagreb to Budapest. There was also a first-class airline ticket from Budapest to Dallas/Fort Worth, along with his passport. He flipped the last page of his passport and saw an official Croatian government visa stamp. His mission completed, it was time to return to his beloved United States.

Kurt Chapel, former Navy SEAL and CIA agent and now an independent mercenary on his last mission, nodded his head and smiled to the family before

he sped away in the BMW rental car. His destination was the Zagreb train station.

He drove along a winding narrow road with tall pine trees and rocks surrounding each side of the road. He stopped the car on a small bridge and tossed the French-made revolver and holster into the flowing river below. *My last job – I hope. Well, I will think on that.* He laughed to himself and laid his right hand on the briefcase containing \$500,000 US. dollars as he drove away.

Kurt boarded the train at Zagreb's Central Station at precisely 8:06 that evening for the six-hour train ride to Budapest. As he made his way toward his first-class car, the center aisle was filled with people standing elbow to elbow. The fat man in front of him smelt of cigarettes and roasted chicken. Kurt caught the smell of cheap perfume from who knew where. A man in a black suit standing to his right looked like a car salesman or a cop.

Kurt sat back in the large, comfortable reclining seat and glanced out of the window at the swarms of people talking and hugging people who had disembarked from the arriving and departing trains. *I sure as hell will be happy to set foot on Texas soil and start my new secret life. I need to stop what I'm doing, and settle down in the small town I chose, Kingston, Texas. I'll find me a good*

CRYSTAL LAKE SECRETS

woman who likes sex, knows how to cook, and can bait her own hook. He smiled at his thoughts.

During the train ride to Budapest, Kurt relaxed and let his mind take in the pinging sound and the train wheels flying over the railroad tracks. He could feel the rhythmic rocking of the railcar.

On the long flight from Budapest to Dallas, Kurt closed his eyes and thought back to fifteen days ago and his last and final mission as a CIA operative in the mountains of Afghanistan.

It was dark, cold, and rainy in the small US Army outpost positioned about two and a half hours by chopper east to the Afghan capital, Kabul. I was wrapped in a poncho sitting under armored vehicle, thinking about my helicopter ride out the next morning, scheduled for 0930. I could not help but think about all the outposts I had been assigned to during my service as a Navy SEAL. There was razor-sharp concertina wire strung around the compound. The guard towers were sitting high on nearby hills, manned by hard-core US Army and Afghan soldiers. Surprisingly, the night passed without incident, and I flew out on schedule back to Kabul. From there I flew in military aircraft to an airbase somewhere in Turkey. The next day I was escorted to Istanbul where I caught a flight to Zagreb. I then accepted my first contract as an independent gun-for-hire. I planned

JERRY SNODGRASS

on working only one contract and then go back to live an ordinary life. So far, it is working.

Kurt was brought out of his thoughts by a flight attendant asking him if he would like to eat breakfast. “We will land at DFW in two hours, Mister Chapel,” the flight attendant politely said to him.

Kurt stayed in a Dallas hotel for two days, catching up on Texas BBQ and shopping for a new vehicle. He found what he wanted and paid cash for the purchase. He bought a black Chevrolet Silverado Texas Edition 1500 series extended cab pickup.

The following morning he drove west toward the Pacific Ocean. He had plans for one of his favorite cities in the world – San Francisco.

Chapter 2

Kingston, Texas
One Month Later

No one knew who the stranger was in the small rural South Central city of Kingston, Texas. The legendary Kingston County Seat was surrounded by red barns and green pastures with dirt roads running in all directions. A white Texas stone courthouse surrounded by tall oak trees sat in the middle of town, with a square lined with shops and restaurants.

Unannounced, on a beautiful cloudless sunny Monday morning in late June, a tall man with thick black hair streaked with gray that seemed to glow from the sunlight walked into the office of Price Realty.

Norma Price, Vice President of Price Realty, glanced up from her computer at the man walking toward where she set. She could not help but notice how he moved his head and eyes around the room, and the way he carried himself when he walked. *Em, what a hot handsome hunk of a man, and he is very tall and built like an athlete. He could be a military man, by the way he walks. I like his brown sports coat, jeans, and brown cowboy boots.*

You naughty woman; you are married, she thought, trying very hard not to laugh out loud at her thoughts.

Gathering her composure, she smiled and said, “Good morning, sir. Welcome to Price Realty. I’m Norma Price. How may I be of service to you today?”

“Good morning to you.” His brown eyes locked on her as he continued. “My name is Kurt Chapel, and I am interested in a condo located in The Crystal Lake Estates that you have listed for sale.”

She rose from behind her desk and presented a beautiful smooth-skinned hand with manicured pink nails to Kurt. “I’m pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Chapel. Please, have a chair.” She sat back down in her chair. “Yes, we do have one condo listed at the Crystal Lake Estates. I’ll pull the property up on my computer.”

He felt the warmth of her hand. *Um, he thought. Very nice-looking woman and damn nice legs, too. She looks to be around forty years old, a few years younger than me. Sky-blue eyes and I would guess she is 5’6” and a natural blonde by her blonde eyebrows. The good ones are all taken.*

Norma swung the large computer monitor around so Kurt could see the images. “This condo is a rarity, as the turnover at Crystal Lake is low. There are two large bedrooms, both with full baths; an office or study; and you can see the big modern kitchen. Your wife will like the kitchen.”

“No. No wife,” Kurt replied with a smile.

Their eyes met briefly again. Norma broke the eye contact and smiled.

“Sorry about that, it’s just the woman instinct in me.” She smiled back at Kurt. “Well, if you cook, Mr. Chapel, you will like the kitchen.” She went on showing him pictures of the dining room, formal living room, and den with gas fireplace and glass doors.

“The covered deck is to die for. You can see the outdoor kitchen has a sink and running water. There is an oversized double car garage with a laundry room and lots of storage space.”

“I like it...do the condo fees cover lawn service?”

“Yes. And you have free membership to the swimming pool and indoor exercise room.”

Kurt nodded his head. “Sounds like the plan I am looking for. I would like to take a look at it if I could?”

“Of course. We can drive over now, as it is vacant and ready for immediate move-in. I’ll let my husband know that I will be out of the office. He is showing a house, and our receptionist is at a dental appointment. Can I offer you something to drink?”

“No, I’m good, thanks.”

“I’ll drive, if you don’t mind? I know the way, and you can enjoy our beautiful town on the way to the condo.”

Norma sat in the driver’s seat of the late-model

white BMW. She glanced over at Kurt buckling his seat belt and asked, "I'm a little forward, but I have never seen you around town before. Are you new to the area?"

Kurt grinned and turned his head toward Norma. "Yes, I'm new to your city." He said no more and quickly changed the subject. "I like the greenery and landscape you have here. The old courthouse reminds me of other cities that I have seen during road trips. I saw on the map that there is a lake located near Crystal Lake Estates. How far is the lake from the estates?"

Norma, her eyes focused on the road ahead, replied, "Of course, I am prejudiced since I grew up here, but yes, this city is ranked in the top ten of the most beautiful and people-friendly towns in Texas. Oh, the lake is two miles west of The Crystal Lake Estates. The early Indians named it Crystal Lake." She laughed out loud. "Duh, of course, the name of the lake is Crystal Lake. I'm a blonde, you know." She smiled, her lips moist and her beautiful white teeth gleaming.

Kurt liked her sense of humor. The blonde joke coming from a blonde caused him to laugh softly.

"Do you and your husband go fishing at the lake?" he asked.

"Oh yes, when we find the time. We have a boat, which I use more than Bill. I love to fish and usually go alone."

CRYSTAL LAKE SECRETS

Kurt laughed softly. "I've just got to ask you. Do you bait your own hook?"

Norma's laugh was soft when she said, "Why, hell yes I bait my own hook. What kind of question is that?"

"Just a man's thing. I hope that I didn't offend you?"

"No, of course not. I think your question was... was quite amusing." They both were laughing when Norma stopped her car in the driveway of a beautiful-looking condo. "This is it," Norma said. "Shall we take a look?"

"I'm ready," he said as he climbed out of the BMW.

It took Kurt less than one hour to inform Norma that he liked the condo and would like to make an offer. "What is your list price?" he asked.

Norma replied. "The firm asking price is \$189,500. The seller will not negotiate the price."

Kurt was quiet for a short time as thoughts rolled around in his mind. "Good. I'll take it. When can I move in?"

Norma seemed a bit stunned by Kurt's quick offer. She studied his face for a few seconds before replying. "The condo is ready for immediate move-in depending on the funding. Shall we go back to the office and finalize the paperwork?"

"Sure," Kurt replied. "There will be no financing required. I will pay cash."

"That's wonderful. Yes, sir...you will own this

beautiful condo within hours.” She glanced at the Rolex watch on her wrist. It was 12:25. “It is lunch time; would you like to have a bite to eat before we go back to the office?”

“Yes, ma’am. I never turn down an offer to eat. I remember from years ago when I was in Dallas how good your Texas chicken fried steak is.”

“I know just the place for that. I take it you are not from Texas?”

Kurt knew Norma was trying to find out where he had lived before relocating to Kingston. He also knew that for the processing of the title for the condo he must provide a former address. “No, I am not from Texas. I grew up on a ranch in Wyoming and have always admired the Texas cowboys. I have always worn cowboy boots and I like country music. I spent a few years working in the Dallas-Fort Worth area a few years ago.” He did not share with Norma that he was the only surviving member of his family. *No need to tell about the tragic death of my parents and sister who were all killed by a drunk driver three years ago.*

“We do love our cowboys in Texas--and country music, of course. I hope you enjoy our laid-back life here in Kingston. There are not many cowboys around these parts. Oh, there are the young ones, you know...wanna-bees.” She laughed softly.

CRYSTAL LAKE SECRETS

During their lunch, the two discussed various topics to include the city police and county sheriff's department. "We have a low crime rate here, mainly due to our sheriff, Dan Martin. He and my husband have been friends since they were little boys growing up in the country outside of town."

"That is what I like to hear: a city with a low crime rate and a good police department and sheriff to protect us. I will sleep better at night knowing I am – protected."

Norma looked at him for a few seconds and then she said, "I get the idea that you are not fond of law enforcement. Did I read you correctly?"

He grinned. "No, I respect a good honest cop. But, I have no tolerance for a bad cop – none at all. Just saying."

"Well, we had better get back to the office and finish the documents on your new purchase. I do hope you enjoyed the lunch?"

"Oh, the meal was excellent and the company was enjoyable, thank you. I'm ready when you are."

Norma and Kurt returned to the real estate office and talked briefly about the city events and organizations on the drive back to Price Realty.

Upon entering the reception room, they were greeted by a slender man with a receding hairline and wearing rimless glasses. Norma introduced Kurt to her husband, Bill Price.

“Pleased to meet you, Mr. Chapel...welcome to Kingston. Norma phoned me about your purchase of the Crystal Lake Estates condo...congratulations.” He glanced over at a middle-aged woman working at a computer. “Vivian is completing the necessary paperwork on the condo. She only requires your previous address for the title. If you would come into my office Norma and I will finalize the documents.”

I will list my address as the San Francisco Hilton, which is the truth. I was there before coming here. No need to tell them about being raised on a ranch in Wyoming and living all over the world. Kurt provided Vivian with the physical address of the downtown Hilton in San Francisco, which satisfied her without asking further questions.

Kurt excused himself, informing Norma that he was going to the First Texas National Bank and that he would return with a bank draft for the purchase of the condo.

During the short drive to the bank, Kurt’s thoughts turned back to the gorgeous realtor, Norma. *I wonder what in the hell she sees in that dorky husband of hers? He probably is loaded with money and they were college sweethearts. It’s none of my damn business. I don’t get mixed up with married women. She would be worth taking a chance on.* He grinned at his thoughts.

CRYSTAL LAKE SECRETS

At 2:30 Monday afternoon, Kurt was the proud owner of a beautiful condo at Crystal Lake Estates. Norma and Bill Price thanked Kurt for choosing their real estate company, and they invited him to a house party that they were hosting on Sunday.

“We would love for you to meet our friends. They are all friendly people and successful, with businesses in town,” Norma said.

“I might just take you up on the offer. I’m not much of a party man anymore.” He smiled at his remarks.

Norma wrote the directions to their home on the back of one of her business cards. “We start around noon and finish whenever we wear ourselves out. Bring your swimwear if you like. We have a pool and pool house. Please, don’t bring anything. Oh, you are welcome to bring a guest if you like.”

“I don’t know anyone,” Kurt replied with a mischievous grin on his face. “Thanks anyway.”

Norma could not help but again stare into Kurt’s brown eyes. “We have quite a few unmarried women in our group. I think you will enjoy them. They are loads of fun. Hope to see you Sunday.”

“I’ll do my best to be there. Thanks for asking.”

The three shook hands again, and Bill and Norma watched Kurt walk out the door and climb into a black Silverado Chevy pickup truck.

“He is a very unusual man,” Norma said to Bill.

“Yes, he is. Damn good-looking guy...and with hair,” Bill said rubbing his hand over his thinning hairline.

Norma laughed. “He is very handsome and mysterious. I like you just the way you are my dear,” she said. “He may be a serial killer for all we know, but I don’t think so. I like the guy. He has a college and military background, I bet. We will see...we will see.”

She Googled Kurt and found out a few answers to her thoughts about him. *Yes, he is a retired Navy commander and former security consultant. She saw that his Navy occupation was security analysis. That seems like an interesting job. I think that kind of work would be kind of boring for a big man like him. He is not a killer, that’s for sure. Oh, he was born in Wyoming. I thought he listed San Francisco as his residence. Oh, well. He is entitled to move around, being a single man and all.*

Norma was satisfied with what she found on Kurt – so far!