

HEIST AND HIGH

Anthony Curcio and Dane Batty



Portland, Oregon

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Nish Publishing
PO Box 91630
Portland, OR 97291

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Chapter Four contains a quote from *The New York Times* article “When a Drug Addict Isn’t Ready to Accept Help” by Paul Christopher, M.D., published on October 1, 2012; reprinted with the permission of Dr. Christopher.

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United States Attorney statement is from the website [<http://www.justice.gov/usao/waw/press/2009/jul/curcio.html>]

Cover by Kit Foster, www.kitfosterdesign.com
Interior design by Robin Simonds, Beagle Bay, Inc.

Trade Paperback ISBN: 978-09857945-0-7
eBook ISBN: 978-0-9857945-1-4
LCCN: 2012953647

First Edition
Printed in the USA

18 17 16 15 14 13 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Dedication

This book is dedicated to young people who are faced with an enemy that they do not even know exists. I hope that this book can help. Also to those who have already met this enemy, who are just like me, trapped by their insecurities and addictions. I pray you find your way out, because there is a very special purpose waiting for us.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to acknowledge the following people who helped throughout this journey of creating the book you are about to read.

To my wife, Emily: Her loyalty and patience has been unmatched throughout the process of this book. She's stood by my side and fought in the trenches when I couldn't fight myself. She is my best friend and I love her and our little girls more than anything in this world. The three of you are my motivation.

To my grandparents Poppa and Grammy, my Aunt Cheryl, Aunt Mary and Uncle Mario: You never quit writing to me. Your consistent love and support during my toughest times will never be forgotten.

To Dick and Kathy for watching over my family like angels: You deserved retirement but instead were helping raise my children and being there for Emily. And took care of that damn cat who scratched up everything in the house. A million thank yous would never be enough for all you have done.

To my parents, who traveled to the end of the world and back to see their baby boy that they never stopped loving: You've taught me everything I needed to know . . . I just wish I had listened earlier. I love you both with all my heart.

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Foreword

The best books teach us something new about something we thought we knew, and do it in a way that captivates us so thoroughly we don't even realize we're learning something. These books change our worldview, usually in subtle ways, short-circuiting our preconceptions and forcing us to think rather than simply react.

So it is with the book you're about to read. The next time you're tempted to write off a criminal as just another low-life junkie chasing his next fix, you're going to stop and think, if only for a minute. It's going to occur to you that maybe this perp wasn't born evil, that at one point he was just another loving son in a loving family, that he hadn't intended to become an addict and that maybe something happened that overwhelmed him and derailed his ambitions.

Anthony Curcio was just such a kid: charming, athletic, full of ambition and blessed with possibilities. As of this writing, he's in prison. His was one of those stories in the local paper that barely merits a shake of the head before you turn to the sports page. But it's a story worth paying attention to, except that you're not going to get it from the beat reporter who took down the bare facts, crafted it into the standard set of sentences, turned it in and then forgot about it. You're not going to learn anything useful from that story and there's a lot to learn.

It takes a special hand to convey chaos and direction at the same time, so that when a turning point is finally reached, it can be seen as a natural progression of the turbulence that preceded it

rather than just another in a long series of random inflection points. This narrative clearly details Anthony's harrowing story.

There is a temptation for a biographer, eager to spare us tedium, to forego critical detail and blithely hack out entire weeks or months until the life in question appears to be a series of tightly connected, well-planned and precisely executed episodes. But no life is ever like that, and this is especially true of Anthony Curcio's. *Heist and High* makes order out of a disordered life without contorting it into an invented structure, yet while still providing a meaningful arc where only discord was present, discovering underlying themes when only chaos reigned on the surface.

To read *Heist and High* is to watch a train go over a cliff, but also to see just how it got there. Like watching a disaster film for a second time, you find yourself hoping that things will turn out better, knowing all the while that they won't. Every time Curcio swears that he's clean and will never again backslide, we believe that he believes it, and we hope it's true, even though we know it isn't. The book puts us deep inside the tormented man's mind and has us rooting for him, and rooting for his wife and his mother and for his life to turn out okay.

Whether it will or not is still an open question. But I'm rooting for him, and that's because *Heist and High* has shown me a human beneath the sound bite.

Lee Gruenfeld
Palm Springs, California
Co-Author of *Confessions of a Master Jewel Thief*

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One

Monroe, Washington, September 30th, 2008

Anthony pulled the trigger on the can of bear mace, spraying the Brink's armored car messenger in the face. Howling in agony, the man's head snapped back, his hands clawed at his burning eyes.

As he grabbed the canvas bags of cash, Anthony prayed, *God, I know you don't like what I'm doing, so I won't ask you for your help. But please do what's best for my family and take care of them.*

God was listening, but He had His own plan.

Anthony dashed away from the bank toward his getaway, but he felt as if he was running in slow motion. *Am I being followed?* He risked glancing back, but no one was there. *Are they trying to figure out if the other landscapers are part of the robbery?* He turned his attention back to trying to get out of sight. The bank bags were terribly heavy and he realized he couldn't carry both, so he dropped the small bag while crossing Old Owen Road. Still, the larger bag with most of the loot was heavy and bulky; it was putting him off his stride. It wasn't as easy as making for the end zone with a football. Although there wasn't an opposing team he could see, he knew they were out there—and soon there would be helicopters and police cars.

By his calculations, he was off all of the cameras, but it was hard to concentrate with the terror of the robbery, coming off his

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high and trying to get out of there. *What's my next step?* His mental fog cleared a bit: *Right. Down this way next.* He crossed Old Owen Road, raced down a gravel road, past a lumber yard and headed into the park. He stopped and looked back, but still didn't see anybody. That's when he realized he was gasping for air and needed a hit. *I'm not the high school all star wide receiver anymore.*

It seemed safe to ditch his disguise now. He removed the painter's mask and sucked down deep gulps of pine-scented air. Then he took off his hat, wig and goggles in one quick swipe and chucked them on to the dirt road. Anthony knew all the police reports would say that the suspect was wearing a blue landscaper's outfit—but he'd made sure the area was filled with suspects. He'd placed a Craigslist ad for landscapers that got over a dozen guys to come to the bank parking lot, all dressed in blue shirts and pants, as cover for his move. But he'd been wearing a special tear-away outfit. Unfortunately, the pants had come off when he jumped the guard, revealing his shorts. He still had on the Velcro shirt with long sleeves sewn in. Once he ripped it off there was one less landscaper suspect. Anthony knew he'd left no prints on the radio, pepper spray canister or other tools he'd left at the scene. This wasn't just from careful planning. He was good at not leaving prints at this point in his criminal career. Even today he finds himself avoiding leaving prints on things that no longer matter, although he's slowly trying to cure himself of these habits.

He was aware he was leaving DNA evidence behind in the painter's mask, but since he had never been a felon, there were no DNA matches for the authorities to link back to him. In his extensive research on the Internet, he couldn't find evidence of a robbery ever being solved using DNA in Washington State anyway.

Finally unencumbered by his disguise, Anthony "opened her up," as they say with cars, and made for the far side of the park. He felt as he had back in college when he ran a 4.5 second 40-yard dash. Of course, with the sack of money, and his college days far behind

him, he was quite a bit slower. But at that moment, he felt like the fastest man on the planet. The great Jamaican sprinter, Usain Bolt, couldn't have caught up to him this day.

He scrambled down the embankment to Woods Creek. Anthony quickly found the markers he'd left in the shallow water course leading right to the brightly-colored yellow inner tube waiting for him. When he had first started to develop his plan, he'd discovered the hard way that the creek bed was lined with slippery rocks, and fallen into the freezing water in street clothes. If the slimy stones had caught *him* unaware, it would certainly do the same to his pursuers. As Anthony reached the inner tube, he threw the fifty pound bag of shrink-wrapped money onto it and jumped on top. Then he reached up and located the cable he'd strung over the creek the week before. Quickly, he pulled the inner tube, himself and the money down the lazy creek.

Once Anthony got to the bend in the creek, he dropped the clothing and the radio on the inner tube, grabbed the plastic-wrapped cash and walked up the embankment under the train trestle to the street level next to Al Borlin Park off of Highway 2. Sirens were going on in the near-distance. Two black sedans with flashing lights roared past him.

“I had just robbed an armored truck for nearly a half a million dollars, not even two football fields away, and the cops were everywhere but where I was.”

—Anthony

He walked confidently to the waiting newer four-door Ford sedan. Anthony gave the driver a thin-lipped smile and asked him to pop the trunk. He tossed the money into the back and climbed in after it. Pulling the trunk shut from the inside, he hollered “Let's go!”

In the cramped space, Anthony pulled out a small flashlight and stuck it between his teeth. He went to work ripping apart the

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bag. Carefully, he sifted each stack looking for the GPS locator he knew the armored car company installed in each bag of money. It had to be there.

As he searched, Anthony could hear the driver talking to himself. The man was getting louder as Anthony started to go through the stack again. Finally he shouted: “I can’t do this! You gotta get out now!”

“Listen, just drive, it’s all fine,” Anthony reassured him calmly.

“No, bro’! We’re gonna get caught. I can’t get in trouble. . . this is your fucking deal!” the driver yelled. Anthony felt the car slow to a stop, and assumed the car was readying to turn left onto Main Street. “They’re everywhere! They’re fucking everywhere! Oh my God! They see me! They are looking right at me!” screamed the driver.

Anthony took a deep breath and said, “Dude, turn up the music. Smile and rock out. *Sing!* Trust me, just sing. It’s all good.”

The driver didn’t reply. Anthony froze and listened hard. He could hear the sirens much closer now. He couldn’t hear any cars nearby. Were they as close as the driver said, or was he just tripping? He heard a vehicle pass. Then another. Were they cop cars, or just some passers-by? *Shit, I have a fifty-fifty chance of getting out of here if this guy doesn’t lose it.*

“You gotta get out now! I’m popping the trunk,” the driver shouted.

Anthony heard the *thunk* of the trunk latch releasing. “I’m not crawling out of a Taurus trunk in the middle of Main Street!” he retorted. He fought down his anger. He needed the driver to hang on for just a little longer, then his part would be through. In a calm voice, Anthony said, “Okay, turn left onto the next street and I’ll get out and you can drive away.”

The car started down the busy road. Anthony hoped the guy would complete his mission. Then the driver shouted, “No! Now! Get out now!”

Anthony tried to imagine how he could get out of a moving car with the loot in the middle of a town searching for him. He had to get the driver to calm down. “If I get out now we’ll be caught. *We will go to jail.* Listen to me: in thirty-seconds this will all be over safely for you, and you can go see your girl and have a beer. But right now *you need to drive!*”

The driver didn’t respond. The car kept moving. Anthony felt the car make a left. Then the car stopped with a jerk, making the trunk pop open.

“Get out!” the driver shouted. “I mean it! Get out now!”

Shit! Anthony jumped out. The driver started to leave with the trunk still wide open, money strewn all over the back. Anthony had to jog behind the car to shut the trunk, before it sped off.

Anthony stood still for a moment, totally shocked. All that money he’d planned so carefully to take had just driven away, he was on a side-street in a small town where everyone was searching for him, and his truck was clear across town.

Why did I trust that guy? Where the hell did he go?

Anthony took a deep breath and tried to focus on what was important—because wondering what was going on with his friend wasn’t going to solve the immediate problem of what to do next. *Did anyone see me get out of the trunk?* He quickly scanned the area, but he didn’t see any one. That didn’t mean no one had seen him getting out, though. Noticing the apartment complex beside him, he made a quick decision and jumped the fence. He knew the place well, and made his way to the co-op laundry room inside. The door was locked, so Anthony put a shoulder to it and shoved it open. He found an all-white Polo shirt that was two sizes too small, and swapped it for the shirt he had on.

Casually, he strolled outside, trying to look like a resident who was trying to find out what all the commotion was about. It didn’t take long to see that the cops were everywhere. They weren’t buzzing around with sirens now. They were creeping the side streets

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silently. Anthony had to crawl under some bushes and wait it out until one left. He noticed that it was a sheriff's car, not a regular cop car. He realized they must have every available car looking for him—and probably more on the way. He had to reach his truck across town, but he certainly wasn't going to get there on foot. His stomach was sick from all the adrenaline.

Man, I am so out of my league. Although he had committed many crimes by this time, he was well past his comfort zone. Nothing really could have prepared him for this day. As he sat in the bushes, he could hear dogs start barking in the distance and wondered if they were cop dogs.

The D.B. Tuber armored car robbery—a name the media quickly applied to Anthony—was portrayed as a carefully planned out, smooth operation on TV, in magazines, newspapers, and even the police report. It wasn't. Anthony was scrambling, making shit up on the run, one move at a time. All the pre-planning in the world couldn't have prepared him for getting dropped off in the middle of the escape!

Anthony realized that the one place the cops weren't was the police station. It sounded crazy, but that's exactly where he decided to go since it was right around the corner. Ducking and weaving as if he was in a game dodging tacklers, he managed to get to the shared fence of the police station. He leaned up against it to collect his breath. Then the helicopters flew in and started circling the bank.

I need to get to a phone. And I need to get away from these choppers. He looked over and spotted a real estate office where he knew several agents. Smoothing down his hair and straightening the too-tight shirt as best he could, he strode into the place as if it were just an ordinary day. He smiled and started smooth-talking the receptionist: dropping a name, asking a few questions, and got the receptionist to laugh. He looked down while he was chuckling with her. .

. and with a start realized his shoes were soaking wet from the creek. *God, I hope she didn't notice when I walked in.* Yet, he didn't miss a beat when he finally asked, "Hey, can I use your phone?"

"A realtor without a phone? Isn't there some law you guys have to have one glued to your ears at birth?" she joked.

Anthony laughed with her. "Yeah. I have two. And they're both out of juice! And so is my car battery. Wouldn't you know?"

"Bummer of a day for you, huh?" She pointed to the phone on the edge of her desk. "Go ahead. Just don't call China."

He chuckled. "Thanks." He quickly dialed his driver. Anthony tried to act as if nothing was wrong and he didn't want to kill the guy. "Hey, I'm at the real estate office on Main Street. My damn battery went dead. Can you pick me up?"

"Yeah, I'll be right there," his driver told him.

The receptionist gave him some real estate pamphlets to look at while he was waiting, and Anthony continued to joke around with her. He was constantly monitoring her face to get a gauge on her thoughts and kept the conversation open.

Ten minutes went by, but no ride showed up. Anthony called the driver again. "Where are you?"

"Hey, I'll be right there. I'm close," the driver said.

Another few minutes went by. Helicopters continued to circle overhead. A group of agents migrated outside to stare up at the choppers. It was such a commotion that the receptionist headed out there, too.

Anthony called his driver back for a third time. The guy said, "Hey man, I can't," and hung up.

Anthony called back; no answer. He redialed. No answer. *Shit!*

Figuring it would look weird if he was incurious about all the noise, he went outside to join the group. "What happened?" Anthony asked.

"I heard there was a bank robbery just down the street," one man said.

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“I hope no one got hurt,” another said.

He spent several minutes speculating with the agents about what was going on. He could tell the choppers were focusing their search over the Skykomish River, and was glad he'd ditched the idea of a jet ski. The urge to run swelled in Anthony's chest. It was difficult to remain calm. Another ten minutes went by before the agents and the receptionist got bored and went back inside. Anthony followed them in, trying not to look as anxious as he felt.

“You need to call someone else?” The receptionist smiled and pushed the phone his way.

Anthony called his lookout. “I called Bob, but I guess he can't come. Would you mind swinging by the real estate office and picking me up? My battery died.”

The lookout was there in less than five minutes. Anthony got in the car and quickly explained his situation.

“Do I get half his share then?” the lookout said jokingly.

Anthony wasn't in a humorous mood. “I'll double yours!”

The lookout glanced at him. Anthony could see the sweat on his upper lip. During the heist, the lookout had come apart as badly as the driver. But at least he hadn't fed Anthony to the wolves. “Um, thanks, man.” They drove in silence.

When Anthony got to his truck, he changed his clothes and drove out of town. He had the lookout follow him.

Anthony called the driver from a prepaid cell. This time, the guy answered. “I hope you're all right,” Anthony said.

“Yeah, I'm good,” driver answered awkwardly.

“Meet us where we agreed.” Anthony instructed.

They all met where they had planned after the robbery. Anthony got out of the car, walked up to his driver, grabbed his coat and pushed him against the car. He looked him in the eyes and said, “I oughta beat the shit out of you.”

“I . . . I . . . I'm, I'm so sorry,” the driver replied, obviously scared.

Anthony turned his back on the driver. “Whatever,” he grumbled. He transferred the cash to the duffle bags he’d brought. “All right [lookout], I’ll call you in a few. [Driver], you’re coming with me,” Anthony ordered.

The sight of all that cash turned the men back into old friends. Besides, they knew Anthony wasn’t a violent man. The feeling of a successful crime has a certain forgiving quality to it.

At a Motel 6 in Everett about an hour later, Anthony and the driver counted out the money. Anthony lost count after \$330,000. Over \$100,000 was in twenties, so it looked like way more. After Anthony gave the driver a cut, he drove him home. Then he went to the YMCA where he had a gym membership and put the money in two separate lockers.

He checked his watch. *Shit*. He knew he wasn’t going to make practice. The football coach was his planned alibi. As the assistant coach, Anthony was well-liked and a fixture in the daily drills. He sent a text message to Coach RB telling him he was running late. But he had no intention of trying to go pretend everything was fine.

Anthony went home as if he had just come in from work. He kissed his wife and two little daughters, then he ran upstairs to take a shower.

And just like that, it was over.

Or that’s what he thought.