

## The Large Metal Box

Two strange conditions had been roughly engraved into the metal box's lid when I first found it behind one of the walls I had just knocked down inside our new house. The conditions read:

1. *Do not open upstairs.*
2. *When on the lowest floor of the house open only at 2:56pm on the 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2016.*

The container was a little bit bigger than your standard shoe box and quite heavy. It was metal and rusty. Those words stared back at me, incredibly rusted from apparent age, though I had no idea how old the box was. It wasn't ominous because of what it said, nor how old and decrepit the metal box looked. It disturbed me for one simple reason. The engraved warnings looked exactly like my handwriting and today was the 16<sup>th</sup> June.

My mind raced. I was trying to remember ever having a box like this, and more importantly, inscribing these apparent warnings but it failed. I had never seen this box before.

I gazed at my watch while setting the box on the floor of the master bedroom whose inner wall I had just finished demolishing. My wife and I had plans to make two smaller rooms into a larger room and I had made a start on the easiest part, destruction. Sweating from the recent exertion I gazed over to the alarm clock sitting on my bedside table.

*2:34pm.*

If I was to follow the strange box's engravings prior to opening it I had 22 minutes to make it to the garage downstairs, the lowest floor in the house. My wife had gone out and I was alone and would not be back for hours.

The familiar handwriting gave me pause and I decided in that moment to follow the conditions set on the lid of this strange box. I walked down to the garage, taking the wooden back steps to get there. I set it down while in the middle of the empty car space under the house and fetched a glass of water from the laundry sink.

*2:42pm.*

How long had the box been there? The house was quite old, early nineteen hundreds. It was an original wall. Why was it left in the wall cavity? My mind drifted at the possibilities.

*2:50pm*

Six minutes left. I could hear the faint rumblings of a ride on mower. My mind floated back to the familiar handwriting.

*2:55pm*

My hands drifted to the lid. The metal was cold as winter. There were two firm latches that held the lid in place. They looked rusted over. Noting the time, I quickly went to my main toolbox and grabbed a flathead screwdriver in case I had to wrench the latches loose.

*2:56pm*

It was time to open the box. I felt myself exhaling as I started working on the latches with the screwdriver. Sweat appeared on my forehead. The first latch came undone. It was then I heard the engines of an airplane growing louder. I did not live in an area that had a flight path. Maybe the aircraft diverted? The screwdriver was prying loose the second latch and the jet engine noise increased. It came from somewhere overhead. The noise became deafening and it was then I heard the familiar whine of engines slowing down.

I dropped the screwdriver and put my hands to my ears. Moments later I felt the house whole shake and was flattened to the ground by a huge shift in the earth. I lay on my stomach holding my ears as a loud series of bangs and explosions followed. I suddenly feared the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the house would collapse on me because the sheer violence and movement scared me. There was a final almighty bang and suddenly all was still.

Completely forgetting about the metal box I rose tentatively, checking for anything broken or bruised. I had been lucky. I walked outside and stared in mute horror. Half of the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of our house was completely destroyed and levelled. Where I had been working and breaking down a wall was now completely gone and I saw the trees blowing at the front of our house, a giant hole in them as well. My eyes followed the swathe of destruction and I noticed for the first time the sound of fire engines and emergency vehicles blaring as they arrived on the scene.

Lying in the neighbours land across the road was what appeared to be a Boeing 737. It had crashed landed right through our house. It would be hours later before I returned to the metal box that I had left the latches undone, but unopened. I had helped assist all the emergency vehicles and survivors from the crash.

I couldn't believe what had just transpired just a few short hours ago. Opening the metal box suddenly I saw a piece of faded leather with two familiar scripted words inscribed into it:

*You're welcome.*

*(James Culverhouse)*