



Free short story from Hank Ellis:

# HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL

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We were warned, but we didn't believe the rumors. How could it be that bad? I guess it didn't matter because we had no choice. Or maybe I should say, my son had no choice. I could have stayed home and avoided the entire matter. But he needed to finish something he had started quite some time ago. And I knew he could use the support. I had his back. If he went down I was going with him.

As I think back about it, there should have been a sign over the entrance: Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.

The first hour was expected. We entered a long serpentine line that wound back and forth at least five times. A baby was crying and several young kids were fidgeting in line. I felt bad for the mothers dealing with the unfortunate experience on their own. I suspect newcomers to the situation were hopeful the line would move quickly. Some people would make eye contact and others wanted nothing more than solitude and conclusion. The wait was becoming burdensome.

Halfway through the second hour people were getting agitated. The line had moved, but not nearly as fast as anticipated. Waiting to move forward we could hear conversations in the adjacent lines. People were complaining to one another. Some were calling on cell phones to tell others they were going to be longer than expected or they called simply to pass the time. My son and I talked and joked about anything and everything. We were not about to lose all hope.

It was probably near the end of the second hour that we finally reached the counter—the place where a person would solve our problem. The endless wait was finally over! It's good that hope springs eternal because we soon discovered this was only a checkpoint—a place to determine if we had all the necessary information for our business. We were given a number and told it would be called. The line behind us remained as long as ever and the one in front had now scattered throughout the room—every man, woman, and child on their own. People were spread out on the floors because all seats and windowsills were already taken. The wall became a premium for people who needed back support.

The third hour was not expected. Numbers came and went at a snail's pace. We started up a conversation with a man sitting next to us on the floor. He clearly didn't want to be there either, but he laughed with us. As I sat on the floor I thought it ironic that a state with the word HOPE emblazoned on its flag continued such an onerous system—a system that affected so many people. Maybe those who adopted the motto back in 1664 were preparing us for the future.

My son and I still had that hope—albeit quite different from the founders. Our hope envisioned a fitting end to this interminable wait. Maybe not as grand and lofty as the hope that

resided in the minds of our founders, we entered this place in the hope that lines would move quickly, that we would be treated fairly, and that our business would be concluded in a positive manner.

Unfortunately fatigue has a way of sapping the hope from the best of us. We were both tired. Me, because my lower back was hurting and my son because he has a new family and works hard at what he does. I looked around the room knowing that everyone else, in some degree, was experiencing the same tiredness. Near the end of the fourth hour we were frustrated. It wasn't obvious that a good outcome was assured.

But then it finally happened—our number was called. Our faces withheld any sign of celebration because we had watched many faces before us. Some were jubilant and others were fit to be tied after they had finished their business. We couldn't imagine waiting more than four hours only to be told "I'm sorry". Not knowing what to expect, we approached the small cubicle with apprehension.

When the man behind the desk smiled we knew—we knew that he understood what we had endured over the last four hours. His helpful and caring attitude made our wait bearable. I wondered if we were lucky. Perhaps things might not have gone as well with another person. We were thankful he wasn't irritable, tired, or angry and that we had enough energy to engage in a positive manner. It's amazing what a kind word, smile, or helping hand will do.

Leaving the building at the end of the day I couldn't help but look back at the top of the doorway and think—I guess things can always be worse.

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**Hank Ellis** began his writing career with letters from boot camp and journaling during his U. S. Coast Guard deployment in Vietnam. The next seven years involved research and report writing while gaining his B.S. degree in Natural Resources and M.S. degree in Animal Science/Wildlife Management from the University of Rhode Island. Field and scientific reports, memos, law and research review requests comprised most of his writing during the next thirty-two years working for a State environmental organization. It wasn't until the late 90's that he briefly began his first book, and after many years finished *The Promise: A Perilous Journey* in December 2017. Since that time he has written two more books in "The Promise" series, several short stories, and poetry. His poetry and short stories have been featured in four anthologies published by the Association of Rhode Island Authors: "*Selections*", "*Past, Present, and Future*", "*Hope*", and "*Green*".

Hank, an ardent athlete, outdoorsman, explorer, hiker, rock climber, scuba diver, and runner at different stages of life, now enjoys writing, gardening, walking and spending time with his wife, family, grandchildren, and friends. He's also a tinkerer, builder, and woodworker at heart.