Law Man: My Story of Robbing Banks, Winning Supreme Court Cases, and Finding Redemption

Shon Hopwood, Dennis Burke
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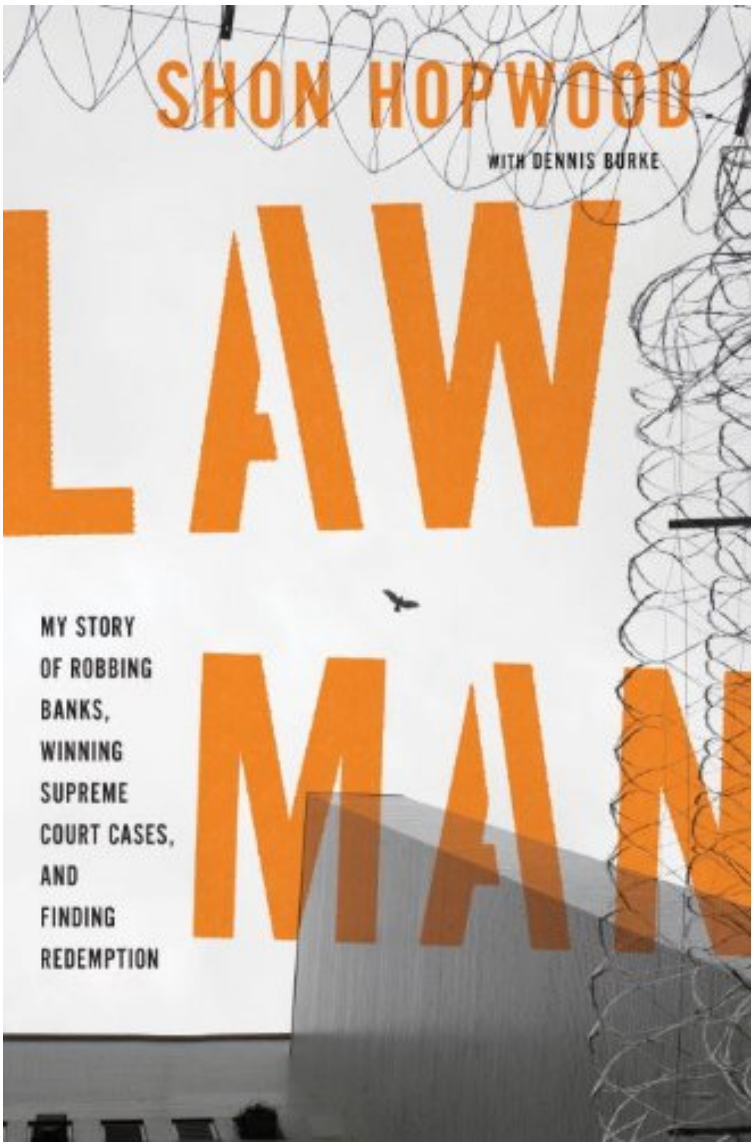

#17396 in Books 2012-08-07 2012-08-07Format: Deckle EdgeOriginal language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.50 x 1.29 x 5.88l, 1.07 #File Name: 0307887839320 pages | File size: 55.Mb

Shon Hopwood, Dennis Burke : Law Man: My Story of Robbing Banks, Winning Supreme Court Cases, and Finding Redemption before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Law Man: My Story of Robbing Banks, Winning Supreme Court Cases, and Finding Redemption:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. It's never too late to start over!By Constance ChristopherI was looking forward to reading this book for several reasons. Mainly, I came to "meet" Shon Hopwood after he got out of prison and was working for Cockle and our firm had occasion to use their services. When he first told me he had robbed banks, served time and was writing a book, I couldn't wait for it to come out as I was admittedly very curious to read "his story." I found the book to be extremely compelling and read it in one sitting. Does it talk about his past and the bad decisions he made despite growing up in what appeared to be a supportive, loving family? Yes. Does it talk about prison life and what it was like being in the system and surviving? Absolutely. But the most impressive part to me was reading about a young man who not only learned from his mistakes, but somehow ended up on a road to helping others in prison with their appeals. This is the story of someone who decided that his past unfortunate choices were not going to define him and turn him into a person spending a lifetime of being in and out of prison. Instead, he immersed himself in legal books and studied the law, so he could help those around him who needed help with their appeals and, in turn, helped him get through his sentence. He took that knowledge to work in the legal field, and is now on a path toward law school.With Shon's willingness to make amends to his family and the surprising support of his community, he learned that his life could get back on a better track. Shon does a great job showing the present time and then flashing back to discuss his past. The relationship with Annie and coming to grips with his own faith is expertly woven throughout the book as well. In short, I found this book to be an inspiring reminder that it's never too late to start over in life. We can all have a second chance if we will just make the decisions we know to be right.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. This book NEEDS to be in paperbackBy Constance McLennanHopwood's book is skillfully written, tightly edited, and moves so briskly it's hard to imagine how interminable ten years must have seemed in reality. That he survived and emerged intact is a testament not only to his own strength, but to that of his family and friends. As Anthony Hopkins said in the movie "The Edge," "What one man can do, another man can do." If there is one Shon Hopwood, there are others who have the same potential. Failing to identify and salvage them is a tragic, unacceptable failure of our current system of justice. Convicted felons and their families need the perspective, hope and encouragement Shon's story offers. I will be following his progress and looking forward to knowing "the rest of the story."1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Why No Paperback Edition???By Mike O'NeilThis book is a great read for anyone. If you like a romance, you get that. If you like stories of redemption, its here. Its a fast read and a real page turner.But this book could do so much more good if it was available in paperback. Why paperback? Because this book can't be sent to prisoners as a hardback book. Only paperbacks are allowed to be mailed into prisons. I think books like Lawman should be required reading by every prisoner. Its one thing for someone to do their time in prison, quite another to build a life once they get out. This book gives a vital ingredient needed....HOPE. Shouldn't every prisoner read this story so they have an example of hope that can inspire them to build a great life once they get out?

Law Man is an improbable-but-true memoir of redemption -- the story of a young bank robber who became the greatest jailhouse lawyer in American history, and who changed not just his own life, but the lives of everyone around him. Shon Hopwood was a good kid from a good Nebraskan family, a small-town basketball star whose parents had started a local church. Few who knew him as a friendly teen would have imagined that, shortly after returning home from the Navy, hed be adrift with few prospects and plotting to rob a bank. But rob he did, committing five heists before being apprehended. Only twenty three and potentially facing twelve years in Illinois Pekin Federal Prison, Shon feared his life was already over. Hed shamed himself and his loving family and friends, and a part of him wanted to die. He wasnt sure at first if hed survive the prison gangs, but slowly glimmers of hope appeared. He earned some respect on the prison basketball court, received a steady flow of letters from hometown well wishers, including a note from a special girl whom hed thought too beautiful to ever pay him notice and, most crucially, he secured a job in the prison law library. It was an assignment that would prove his salvation. Poring over the librarys thick legal volumes, Shon discovered that he had a knack for the law, and he soon became the go-to guy for inmates seeking help. Then came a request to write a complex petition to the Supreme Court a high-wire act of jailhouse lawyering that had never before met with success. By the time Shon walked out of Pekin Prison hed pulled off a series of legal miracles, earned the undying gratitude of numerous inmates, won the woman of his dreams, and built a new life for himself far greater than anything he could have imagined. A story that mixes moments of high-adrenaline with others of deep poignancy, Law Man is a powerful reminder that even the worst mistakes can be redeemed through faith, hard work and the love and support of others.

Magnificentthe story will inspire anyone who reads it.--Michael Santos, Huffington PostA story that moves from bleak to fairy-tale fantastic[the] transformation is both moving and inspiring.--BookpageTells a good story of the deepest kind of redemptionWell, written, inspiring and thoroughly enjoyable.--Tim Challies, Challies.comAffectingan unusal tale of punishment and redemptionreaders will root for Hopwoods attempts to follow a different path.--Kirkus s"The only thing more remarkable than Shon Hopwood's against-all-odds redemption is the skill with which he's told his story. A good lawyer needs brains, compassion, insight, and a sense of humor. LAW MAN displays all these traits in

abundance. The verdict is in, and this is an outstanding book."-- Jeffrey Ian Ross, Ph.D., coauthor BEHIND BARS: SURVIVING PRISONLAW MAN transcends the 'prison memoir' genre andoffers a redemptive tale of the human spirit. From his damning portrait of his own transgressions tohis exploration of criminal law, family, God, and love, Shon Hopwoodpaints a broad, troubling, wonderful canvass of a life transformed."--James S. Hirsch, New York Times bestselling author of HURRICANE: THE MIRACULOUS JOURNEY OF RUBIN CARTER A magnificent book that captures the complexity of the American prison system both its casual savagery and its unanticipated ennobling aspects. What is ironic about this tale is also what is hugely intriguing, that a man sentenced to ten years for flouting the law is ultimately redeemed by his passion for the law, and for justice. This amazing story provides hope that people really can change their lives and make a difference.--Erwin Chemerinsky, Dean of the University of California, Irvine School of Law, and author of THE CONSERVATIVE ASSAULT ON THE CONSTITUTIONAbout the AuthorSHON HOPWOOD found love, a professional calling, and redemption while in prison. He now lives in Seattle with his wife and two children and attends law school. DENNIS BURKE cowrote the bestselling The Translator.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.1LIKE TRASH BLOWING IN"Take a look at those clouds!" someone behind me said. I strained hard against my chains, leaning over a guy to see out the plane's window. A wild storm was building over Oklahoma City, our final destination. Lord, please just let this plane crash was my silent prayer. The storm seemed like an opportunity for an easy exit from life. I was through with it. Growing up in Nebraska I had seen enough poached green clouds to know the most beautiful sky is the one about to kill you. As a kid I had often heard the town's tornado siren and scampered to the top of the roof to see for myself, watching horned monsters form in the clouds until Mom shouted me down. My brothers and sisters and I would huddle with her under the splintered stairway of our basement, safe in her embrace. My mother, I think, liked the drama of those moments. Over the years I'd given her plenty of that. Under the stairs was probably the only time she felt in control of her three headstrong boys; my two sisters were well behaved. Dad's red rusted toolbox was down there. I saw it in my mind when I thought of that basement. On one of my bank jobs I had borrowed it just to drop it a few feet to the shiny floor tiles. The bang was loud enough to draw everyone's attention. That's how the first bank robbery began, a year and a half earlier--already a lifetime ago.In the plane, downdrafts were rattling our chains and bucking us around like a two-dollar state fair ride. I was nervous enough just to be going where I was going--federal prison. If Marty Barnhart still wanted to pray for me, this would have been a good time, I thought. Marty was the pastor of our church, and when my downward slide had first started, my parents had asked him to come visit me in county jail, where I was staying after buying beer for my barely underage brother. Marty came because he had been asked to, but also--I could see it in his face--because he sensed I was on the brink of something a lot worse.Marty held my hands through the bars and prayed for me. Little did he know I had already robbed one bank and would rob four more. I liked him, but I figured I was too far gone for his medicine.My hometown of David City is an hour and a half due west of Omaha, or forty-five minutes northwest of Lincoln, the home of the Cornhuskers football team--football being the state's second religion. The land is mostly flat. Modest hills of corn, grass, and soybeans rise just enough to spoil your view of the Empire State Building and the Golden Gate Bridge. Those hills play havoc with the crop pivots, which are quarter-mile-long steel sprinklers that look like shiny backbones left over from some science fiction war. They come alive once or twice a week, spitting water and chemicals as they roll slowly in great circles. They save work, allowing sons and daughters who once toiled with irrigation pipes the time to get into trouble. I certainly am not blaming the sprinklers for what my best friend, Tom, and I did. For us, David City was about fifteen hundred miles from anywhere fast enough and slammed up enough to be worthwhile, meaning L.A. or New York. The very tranquility of the town irritated us. We felt landlocked and depressed. So we lived from weekend to weekend, party to party, inventing half-assed rowdiness after the football games and speeding off to drinking parties out under the stars with girls. That would pass for happiness for a while. Tom and I were both sports stars in high school. I had worked for that brief stardom. Back before I was old enough to start driving, I would dribble a basketball with my weak hand all the way to school each day, and all the way home each evening. At home, I practiced endlessly under the old hoop in our driveway, even when it was dark and so cold that the ball was hard as a rock and full of bounce. The purpose of life was tracked on scoreboards in those years.I had always been determined to have an interesting life. Not a superstar life necessarily. But, you know, at least something--not the wasted life of a wage slave shoveling cow manure--my last real job before the banks.Now I was on my way to spending a decade or more in federal prison, which wasn't exactly like heading off to summer camp. It would be heavy weather no matter how you looked at it. And if I didn't make it, well, I had always figured I would die young anyway.The plane banked sharply and I saw the suburban fringe of Oklahoma City close below--clean little cars on clean little streets in shopping center parking lots, and the green and brown athletic fields of perfect high schools. Regular life can seem small and too well ordered, but seeing it, I longed for all that suddenly, to be small and well ordered and free. All those people down there were doing whatever they wanted today--or at least choosing who would tell them what to do.The airline flying us through this storm was JPATS. Trust me when I say you don't want frequent-flyer miles on this one. The initials stand for the Justice Prisoner and Alien Transportation System. It is operated by the U.S. Marshal's Service, and it moves a few hundred thousand federal prisoners around the country each year. Inmates call it Con Air. The planes are similar to commercial jets, though a bit worn inside from

years of handcuffs, belly chains, ankle shackles, and sociopaths. The seat belt sign always stays on, though mine had a little broken blink to it. The bathrooms are for the marshals. The conversations with seatmates differ from other airlines--they're mostly about robberies, drug deals gone bad, snitches, and news about who is now in which prison. We banked hard again, and I took another look at the town below, now a worried brown. The hardworking people down there were no doubt looking up fearfully, but not at us--we were the lesser danger that day.You have probably looked up and seen, without knowing, these prisoner planes flying over like white and mostly unmarked Pandora seeds blowing in the wind.The marshals, mostly in their thirties, were more professional than the guards back in the county jails. The county guards looked like people who had fallen into those jobs, not by choice, and while they had grown a bit mean, you could at least picture having a drink with them someday. Not these federal marshals. They resembled mercenaries who had come back to the States after working in tough places, doing tough things. I was sure that if they suddenly received an order to march us out the back door without parachutes, they would not hesitate to do so.Shortly before landing, to my surprise, they handed out apples, bone-dry crackers, and tiny boxes of juice. "Eat up fast, we're almost there," they repeated as they tossed the food from the aisle to a chained wave of big tan hands that shot up like rattling tambourines.My seatmate, a black kid a few years younger than I was, watched as I struggled to place the drinking straw into the juice box and into my mouth."Why you got special handcuffs?" he asked. He seemed too young to be going to a federal prison. "Bad luck," I answered. "They think I'm a flight risk."He looked confused. "Like this flight?" "No, like flight in general, as in run away."He still didn't get it."It's just some bull." He accepted that with a nod. I guess his ears were plugged, or maybe he was just slow or had an undiagnosed hearing problem. Maybe something like that had screwed him up in school, and here he was. When you come from poverty and a bad neighborhood, you're always walking the tightrope, and any wrong move or bad luck can knock you into a free fall. This kid should have been flying to meet his iron-willed grandmother instead of meeting armed guards and years of steel doors. But in my ten months in county jails I had learned to toughen my feelings about the many young lives you see wasted by bad drugs and bad drug laws. Most of them seemed so beaten down. The smarter and nicer ones--those qualities usually go together--really stood out. Some would even return a smile.My special handcuffs had a rigid plastic piece between them that kept my hands stiffly apart like a stockade. Called a black box, inmate lore says it was designed by a former convict. The rigid piece connects to a belly chain. My leg shackles ensured that I could take only baby steps, but we all had those. I had been flagged as a flight risk because back in the St. Louis county jail where I had been warehoused for two weeks an albino meth addict with two teeth had gotten angry at me and Craig, one of my codefendants, for changing the channel on a television. He told the guards we were planning to escape, and they believed him. We were all on the eighth floor of a high-security jail, a place where the elevators didn't move unless you had a key and a security badge. Only Houdini would have tried it from up there. But whenever I was transported after that I received the special restraints otherwise reserved for murderers and terrorists. At least they made me look dangerous; I would take anything that might help protect me.My travels that morning had begun with a St. Louis guard pushing my face into a wall and calling me whiteboy, emphasizing the boy part. He was yelling in my ear that he would take care of me if I tried to escape, as if my even thinking about it was akin to challenging his manhood. He had me by the hair and could have cracked my skull like a coconut against the bricks. Even so, I mouthed off. I said he must be incredibly stupid to believe a meth-head and think I was trying to escape, and that I would announce it to the world. That basically did it. I could feel it coming. But another guard intervened and held the guard's arm. They compromised on a kidney punch that sent me to my knees.A dozen of us were taken by bus to an airport on the other side of the river from St. Louis and there we were met by fifty or so men with rifles and shotguns. They thanked us for our visit and showed us the way to the plane. We flew to Terre Haute to pick up more prisoners, then Detroit, Chicago, then Rochester, Minnesota, then somewhere in South Dakota, then finally to the back of the Oklahoma City airport, where there is a large holding facility for federal prisoners. It was like a garbage run: we were coming into the Oklahoma City transfer station, on our way to a landfill somewhere. Assuming we didn't crash, of course. I knew there was a tornado or two in the storm. On final approach, my seatmate began mumbling. "I never done this before," he finally blurted out. "You mean going to prison or flying?""Both I guess. They always jump around like this?""It's not unusual." I lied. There was in fact a tornado coming, and more than one. The Oklahoma tornadoes that day were among the most powerful ever recorded. The main one was a hair under a category six--almost unheard of. In those four days of tornadoes, in the first week of May 1999, sixty-six twisters would kill forty-eight people in and around Oklahoma City. We touched down and tipped slightly to the right as the pilot fought to keep us on the runway. He throttled the engines louder and then back, and we settled in. As we taxied, marshals rushed through the cabin to unfasten our seatbelts. "Get ready to move fast when we give the word," they yelled a dozen times. "We're racing a twister, so move when we say move." Everyone contorted to look out the windows. I could see a black funnel cloud approaching, maybe two miles from the airport. All the guys on my side of the plane could see it. There were a lot of comments, all beginning with the word "holy."The plane rolled past the civilian terminal to the federal facility. Extending from that large fortress were two Jetway ramps like a mother's impatient arms. The pilot was making fast turns and hitting the brakes at odd times. He stopped at the gate with a sudden deep dip like a teenager in driver's ed, sending the marshals into an aisle dance that drew some laughs."Move it, boys, up, up, up!" the marshals shouted. We

clanked our way through the aisle and shuffled as fast as we could into the tin corridor outside."Faster, men, go, go, go!" The federal guards in the Jetway seemed anxious for their own survival as they shoved and shouted us along. There were about seventy-five of us, each with ankle chains, belly chains, and wrist shackles, all running in baby step rhythm now: chink chink chink--go go go! Running in ankle chains is like running with skinny jeans around your ankles.We fast-stepped it as the apocalypse roared louder overhead. Near the front of the line a man tripped, and down went fifteen behind him. They were pulled to their feet by guards and each other, and the line again started jerking ahead, with the men in the back yelling to hurry up and the men in the middle, including me, trying not to trip. My basketball years helped me move better than most. The metal corridor was rocking. The kid in front of me, my seatmate, glanced back for moral support. I gave him a smile like this is always the way we do it. I was actually okay with all of it. I was hoping the funnel cloud would take us away to Kansas or home to Nebraska or wherever it had in mind--right into the next life would have been fine. Had the whole chain gang swirled up into the cloud, most of the dots would have been black; I would have been one of the few white charms in the necklace. I was twenty-three.