

A tragic comedy about the Toffer text messages from social media for your Lenten reflection.

By Jean-Marie Lee

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Prologue: Finding Toffer

Typically, I bring out the Toffer stories during the season of Lent for the sake of irony. Who is Jesus and why would anyone wonder in a desert for 40 days (about 1 and a half months)? Similarly, who is Toffer and why can't his friends contact him? I imagine that if the devil were to tempt me three times in a desert, I'd say something like, "I'm done, and I need a drink... can we just get this over with." We must embrace the limitations of what we can control, while recognizing we all have elaborate lives mingling with each other.

In [Micah 6:8](#) we are told what God requires of His own, "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." It is said that it is a mystical experience to see Christ in another person. In our modern world we process people through numerical data. We assign social security numbers and call each other with phone numbers. Artists create faceless images to convey a universal experience while most of us are unmoved or loathe being seen as similar to others.

We may question whether our life begins or ends with the balance in our bank account. We may question whether our life begins or ends with circumstances like education, natural disasters or disabilities or employment. We may question whether our life begins or ends with finding romance or going through a messy divorce. The truth is our lives are effervescent and ephemeral. The only constants in life are change and our need to adapt. There are so many elements that make up who we are that our quest to define ourselves with one identity is an omission of our entire identity.

The story of Finding Toffer is an evolving portrait-less illustration of current societal trends, environmental issues, and digital communication. There are three parts to this story: 1. There are text messages from unknown people that are relatable, hilarious, and downright rude. 2. There is the backstory of the person who is supposed to be receiving these messages. 3. There is you, the viewer, choosing to dismiss or process the messages coming into your phone at all hours of the day and night.

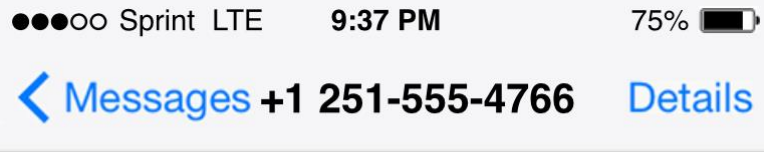
Toffer, the main character, was created from text messages I received when I acquired a new "used" phone number in 2009. The information in the texts exposed the previous phone number owner's personal life, digital identity, and corrupt societal norms. Naturally, I shared the texts on social media and Toffer took on a life of his own.

This story is loosely based on real events and real people. I really did receive a mysterious phone call from a nurse in Colorado offering me a bath on my 30th

birthday. The person needing the bath was facing tremendous hardships in all areas of their life. The nurse and I were both befuddled by the phone number remaining in a current patient's file while simultaneously being reassigned. The transfer of personal contacts and information via phone numbers being reassigned happens daily. It is enough confusion to question your own identity and wonder if you are more than "just another number" in an endless crowd.

The text messages that were sent seemed to reflect the life of someone dealing with unemployment and housing insecurity during the Great Recession. What is fiction is that the character, Toffer, was the only person residing in Mobile, Alabama. Toffer, was multiple people who lived all over the USA including California, Colorado, Georgia, and Baldwin County, Alabama. Toffer, is not a cover story for juicy local gossip. However, this story is relatable and may remind you of your own life or even a friend.

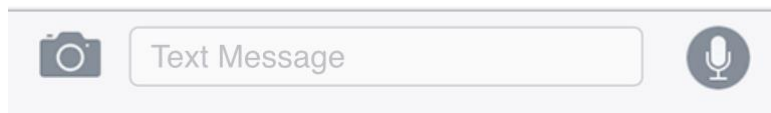
Over lent, I will post one text or group of texts a day plus some background information. This story unfolded over about three years and took me a while to process. You, the viewer, can participate in the painfully slow unraveling of this story over 40 days (about 1 and a half months) of lent or read it all at once. The gift of letting the story unfold slowly over 40 days is allowing yourself the slowness of time with Christ in the desert for 40 days suffering and being tempted. However you choose to read this story, I hope the stark contrast between the comedic texts and backstory serve as a muse to "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." Toffer, is not meant to be the embodiment of the second Christ. Toffer, is just like every person in the world; he has a layered history and many facets to his life.



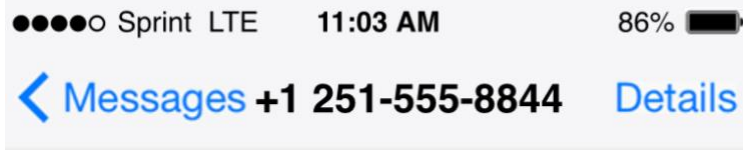
Happy Valentine's Day

Pick up your phone ❤️

Go on... feel my jacket
It's made of hot girlfriend
material.



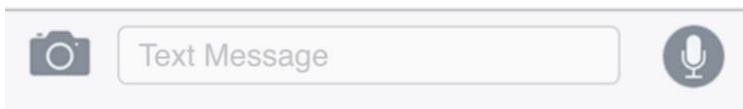
Sometime in the mid-1980's, Toffer was conceived. His parents, Valerie, and Bruce reveled in the hedonistic pre-Lenten festivities sanctioned as Mardi Gras.



You can't ignore me
Toffer. I saw you looking
at your phone.

Respond NOW

It's really hard not to
hear from you for weeks.
I don't know what you're
doing. Nobody will talk to
me. I just think it's
inappropriate for you to
just dump me and say
nothing. That's nasty
mean. We're over. I'm
gonna move on. I just
need you to know my
heart is broken I feel
stupid for even bothering
I feel stupid for still
texting. You're the worst
person imaginable you're
plain i want my leather
jacket back



Valerie ran to her Aunt Geraldine to get advice, only to discover she was also having an unexpected pregnancy.



Aunt Geraldine convinced Valerie to keep the baby and have a shotgun wedding. She married her longtime boyfriend, Bruce. They gave up fun and freedom to be Toffer's parents.

●●●●○ Sprint LTE 9:06 AM 93% 

[← Messages](#) **+1 251-555-5463** [Details](#)

Please know You are
very much in my
thoughts & prayers.....

had to share Gods
shining Love

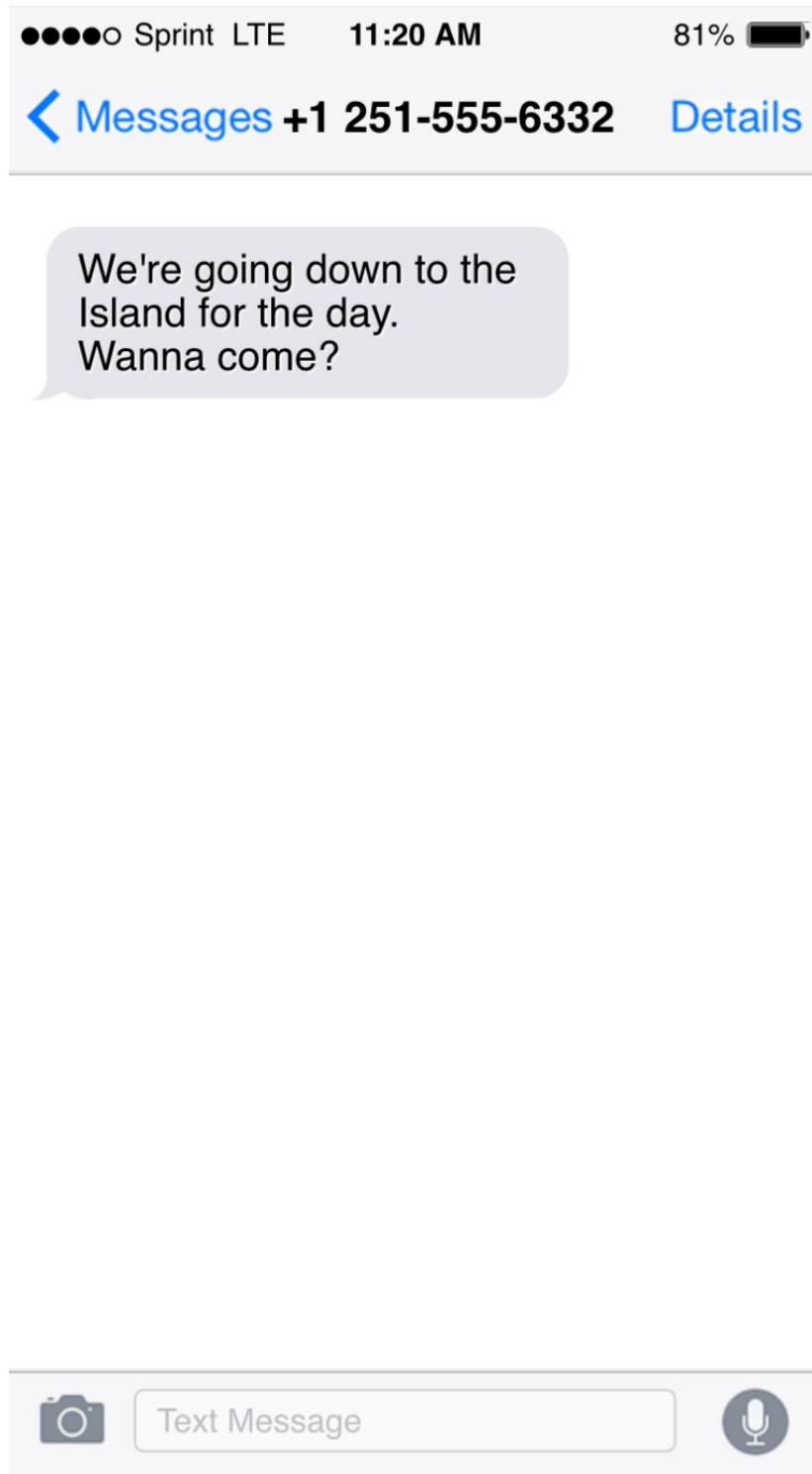
Love you always



Text Message



Valerie and Bruce's marriage quality faded fast when Toffer, arrived. Valerie struggled with perinatal OCD. A divorce was announced following a public spat about table seating at a family reunion BBQ.



By the late 1990s, Toffer was a teen frequently found playing hacky sack or moshing at rage parties. He acquired a few of his mother's OCD tendencies but kept a mostly even keel.

●●●○○ Sprint LTE

1:35 PM

40% 

[← Messages](#) **+1 251-555-7846**

[Details](#)

U back from grippy
sock?



Text Message



Toffer dodged a quarter life crisis by finding God during the Great Recession. With each life struggle more OCD habits emerged.

●●●○○ Sprint LTE

9:33 AM

88% 

[← Messages](#) **+1 251-555-4542**

[Details](#)

Home? House is not
burned.

How long they keeping
you?

Nobody home. just came
by

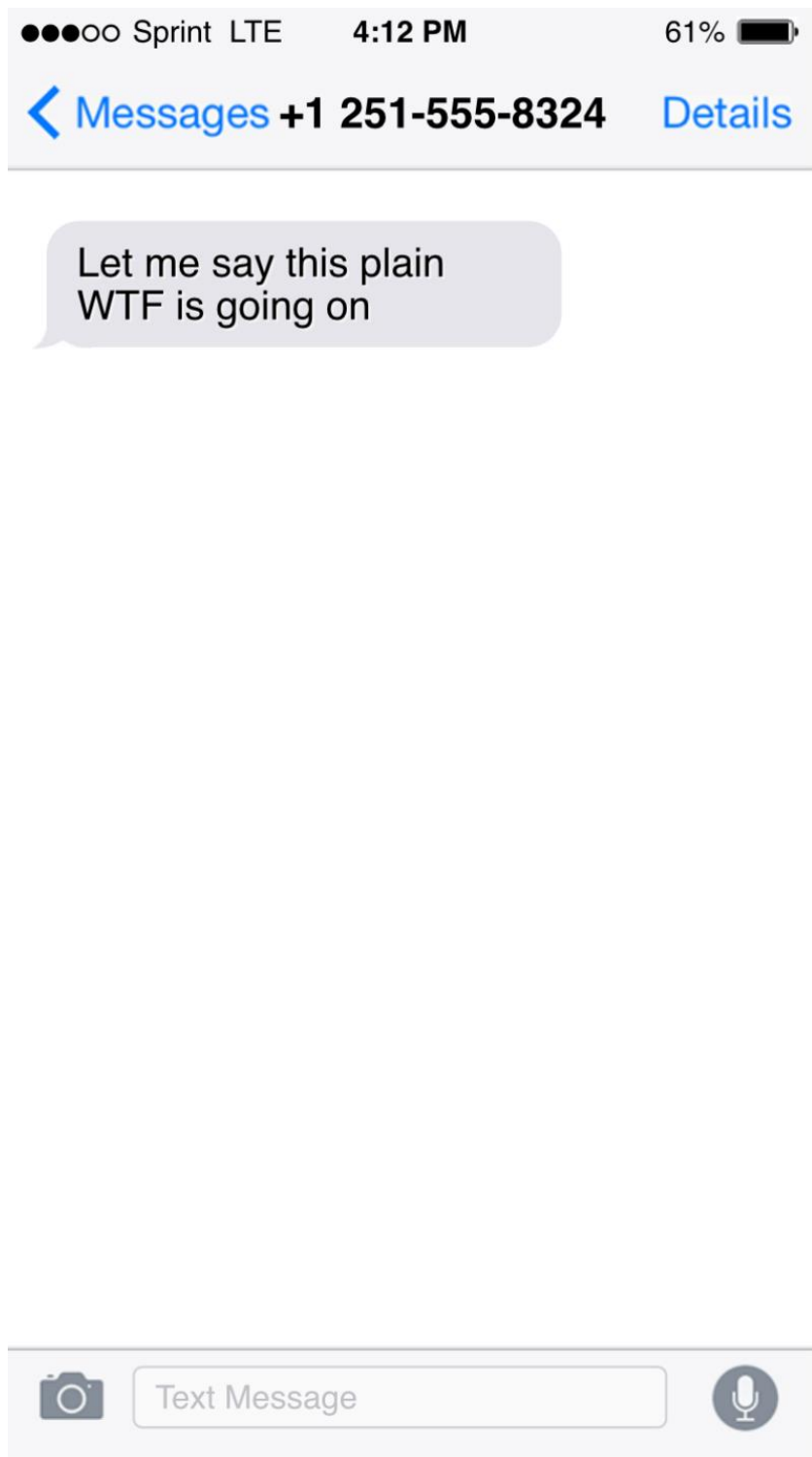
nerdola spilled tea



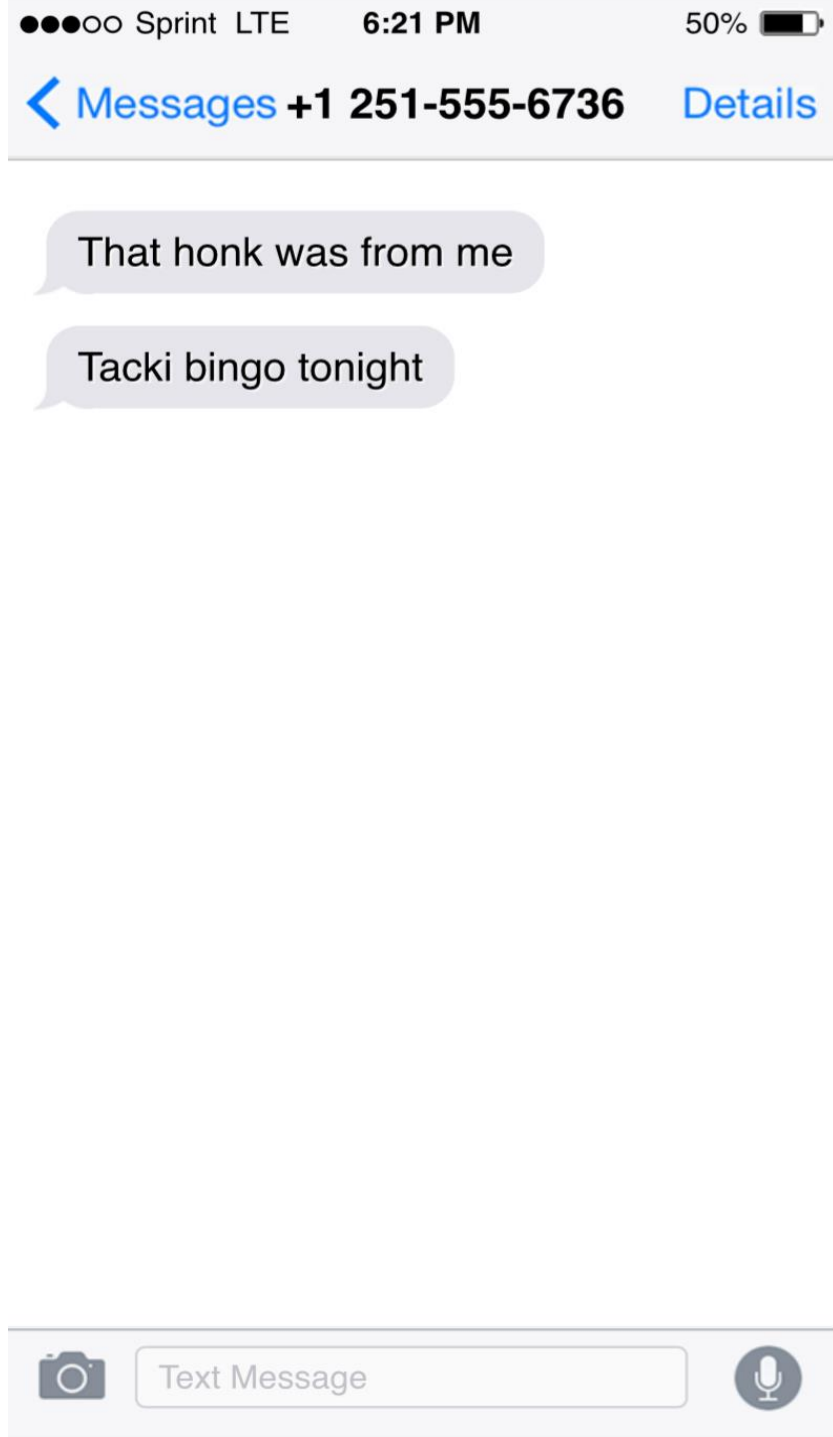
Text Message



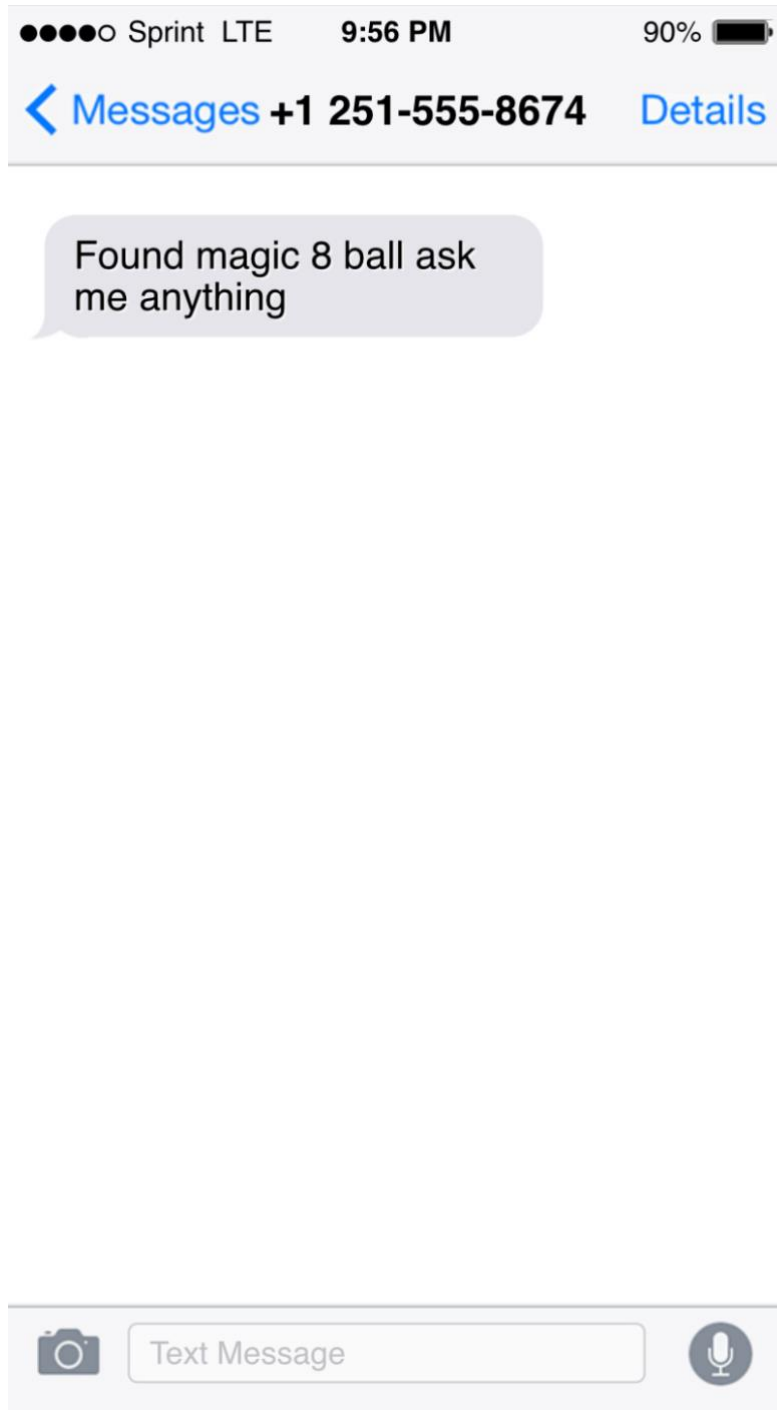
Everyone enjoys the season of Mardi Gras. Toffer, followed in his parent's footsteps marrying Candice in his own shotgun wedding.



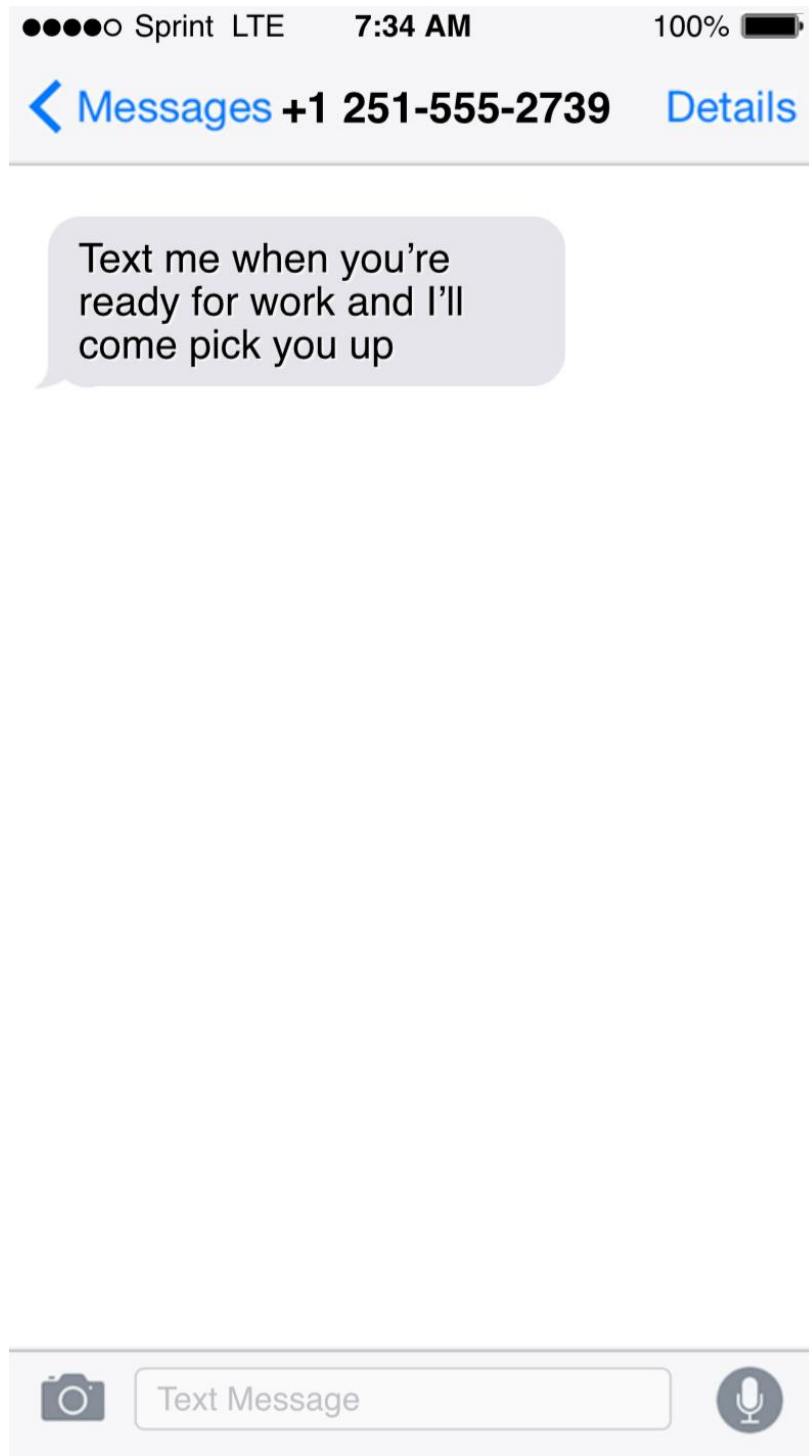
Toffer, got sober with the birth of his son, "baby Bruce." He might have gone overboard with his 12 Step apologies but remained close to his father.



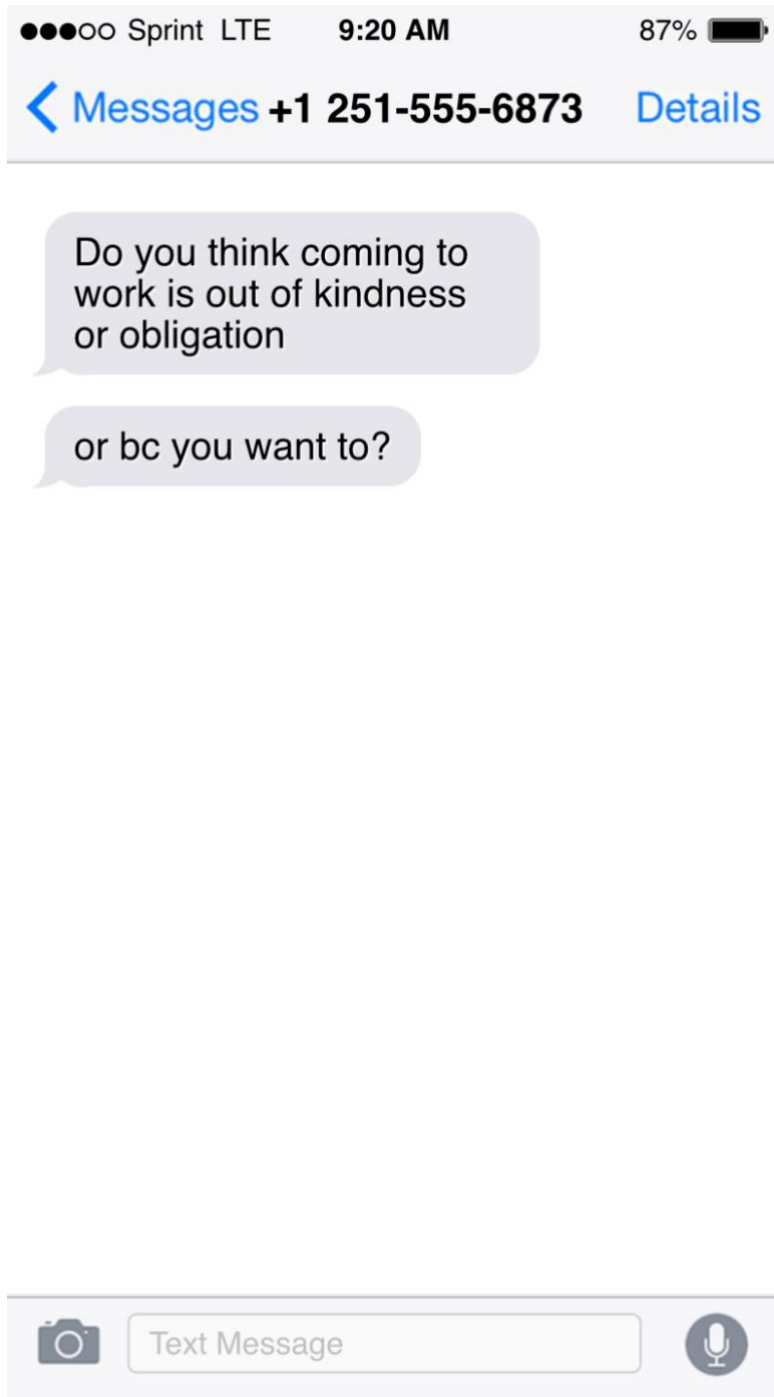
Candice and Toffer, bought a home in the midtown area of Mobile, Alabama. They lost everything in the Christmas Day tornado. The strain of circumstances ruined their marriage. Consequently, Toffer, started drinking again.



Ruminating on “what if” scenarios deteriorated Toffer’s mental health. He regretted missed opportunities. Wondering what could have been if they bought a different home. Wishing he had gone to Asheville for Christmas instead of staying home.



Toffer, struggled financially and moved in with his mother to avoid homelessness. Toffer's mother got sober and said too much with her own 12 Step apologies.



There were many misunderstandings, high anxiety, and generational mental health issues festering behind closed doors. Toffer, threatened to burn the house down. His mother, Valerie, had her son involuntarily committed for a mental health evaluation which lasted much longer than expected.

●●○○ Sprint LTE 1:48 PM 41% 

[← Messages](#) **+1 251-555-6639** [Details](#)

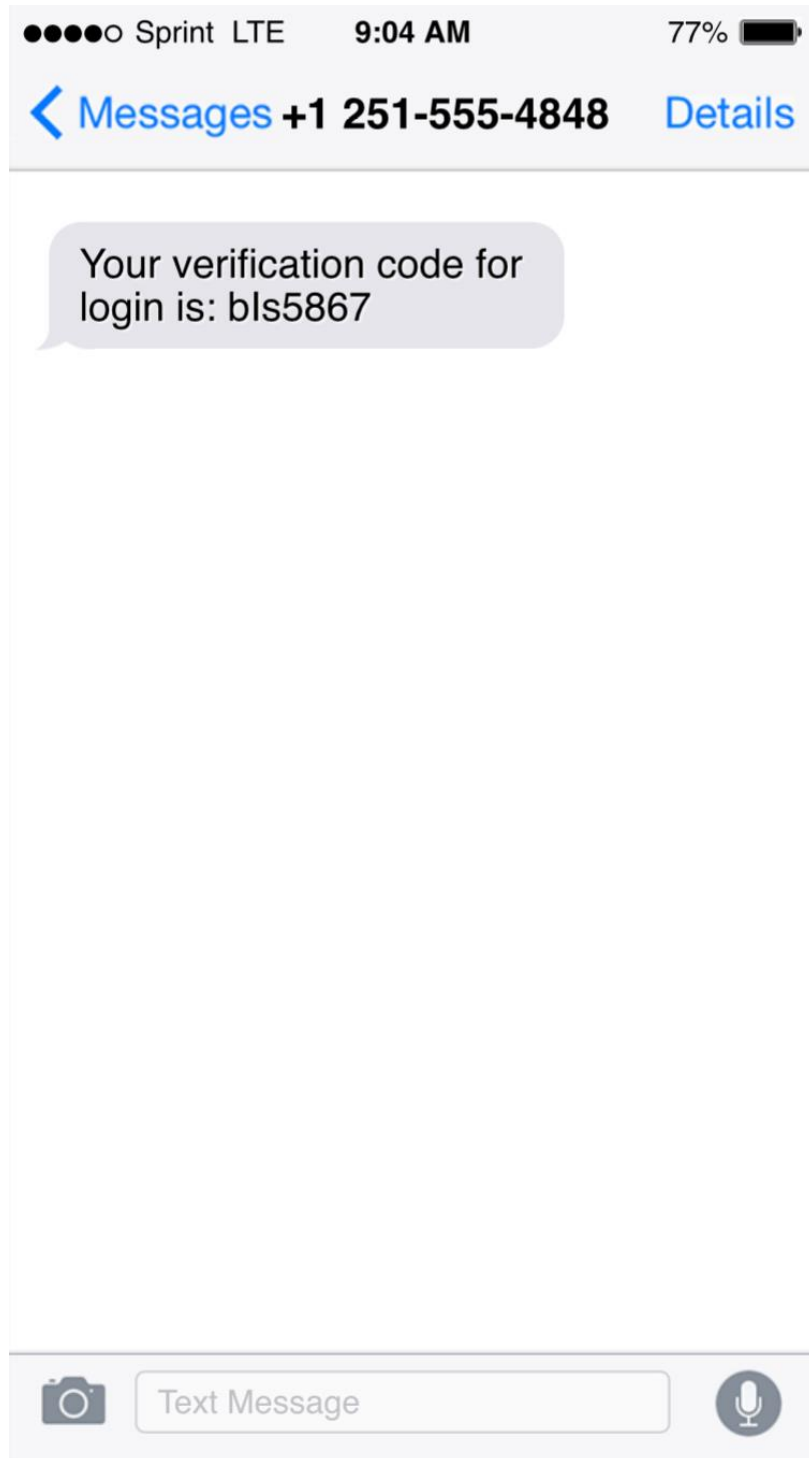
Shelving arrived if you
want to come by and put
it together



Text Message



Toffer, struggled with his mother's choice to hide the identity of his biological father. Being delivered to a psychiatric institution by a sheriff did little to console his grief over his father, marriage, and tornado.



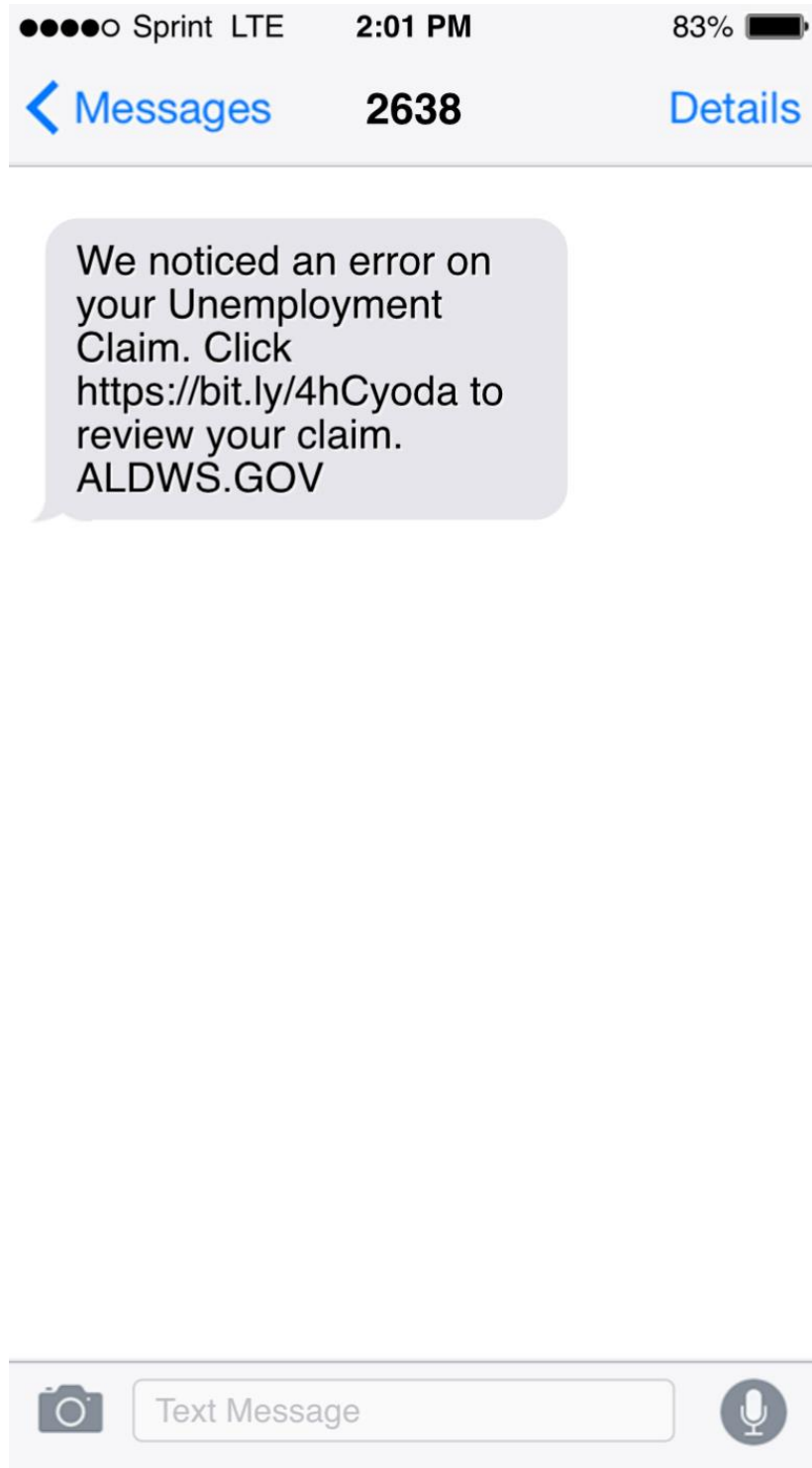
The only thing Toffer could agree on with the other hospital patients was that Fat Tuesday was the best day of the year.



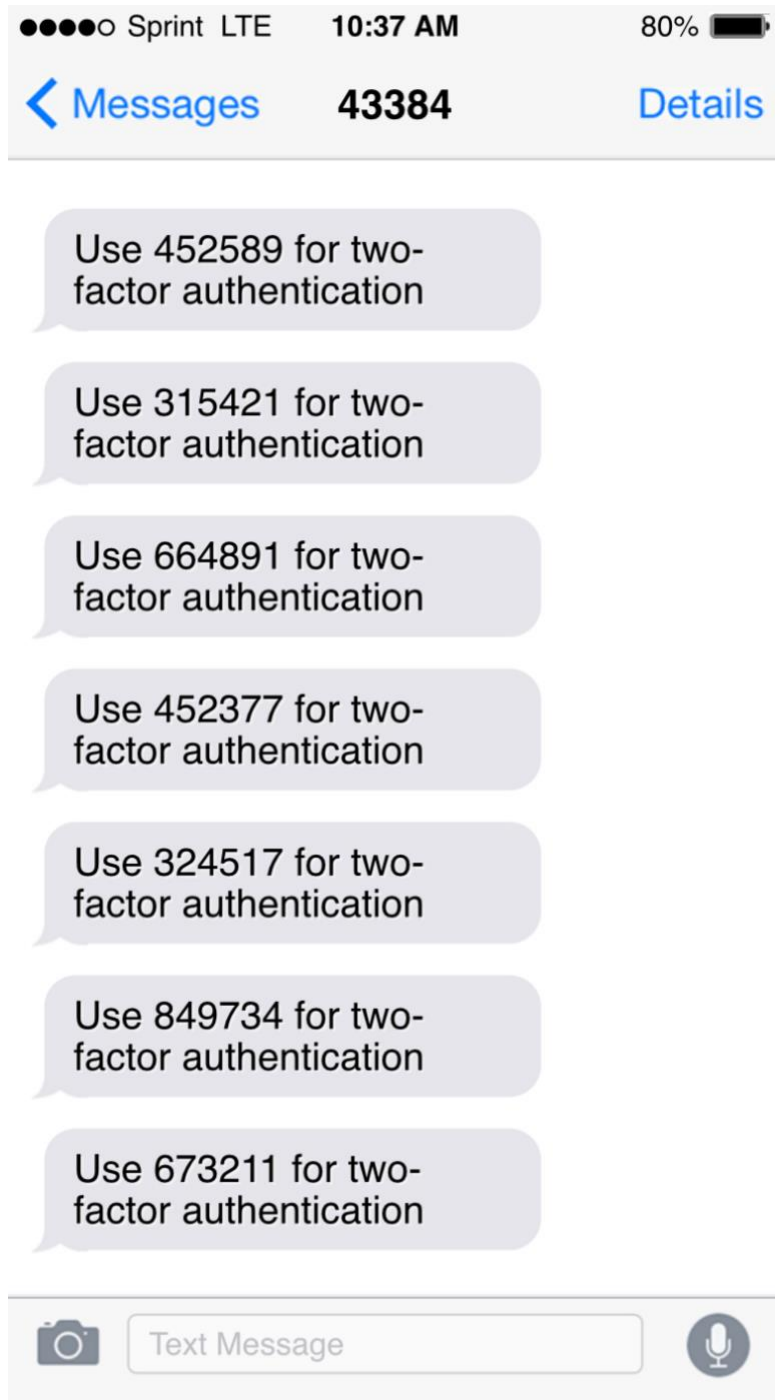
Eventually, Toffer, warmed up to cooperate for the sake of leaving the hospital. He revealed to his counselor that he heard a ghost the night before the tornado saying, "You need to leave. Get out!" He admitted that he could not forgive himself for not leaving immediately.



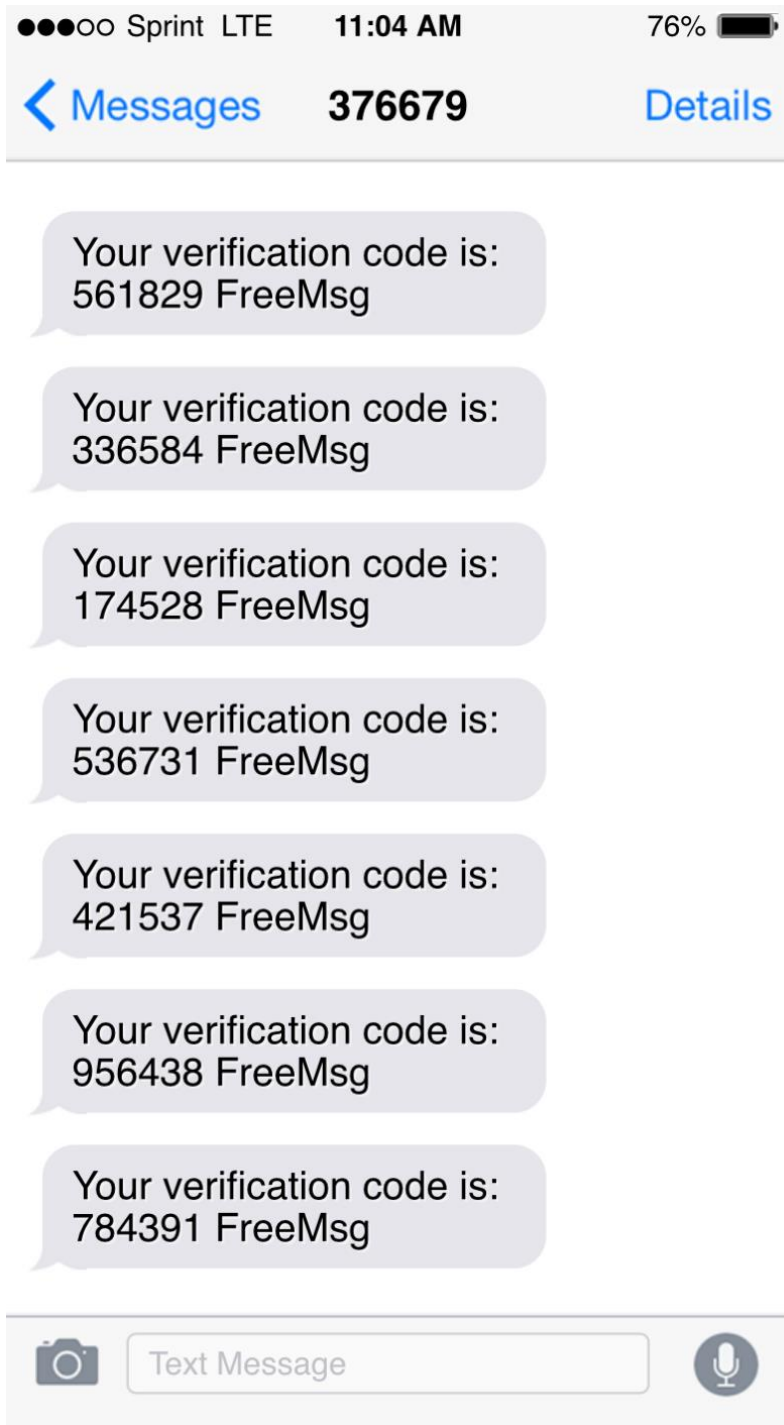
Toffer said his anguish was a fine line between being mocked by a ghost's prophecy and survival. He had been willing himself to live for his ex-wife and son.



Toffer owed tremendous debts plus child support while being unemployed. He felt castrated and emasculated for failing to provide and protect his family.



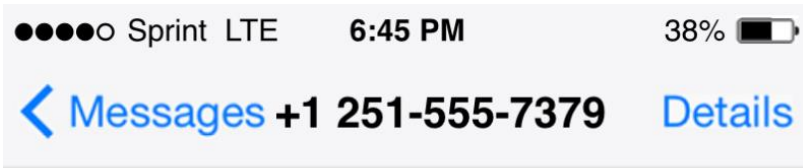
Toffer worked with his psychologist and social worker to create a plan to get back on track. They did remind him that following through was still going to hurt and take some time.



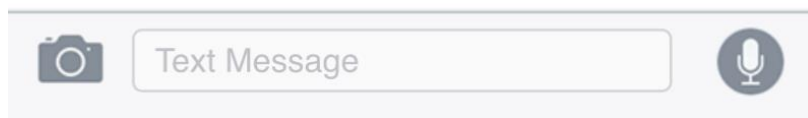
Toffer needed to file for bankruptcy, file for unemployment, not live with family, get sober, and find a new purpose.



Toffer accepted his humiliating fate for the sake of survival. His spirit was broken. He did not like the stigma of mental illness or the stigma of financial hardship.



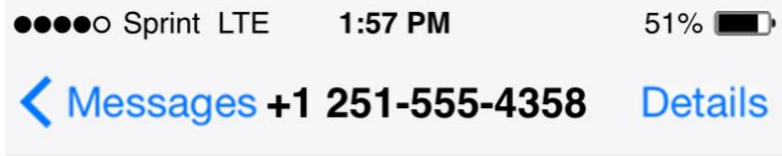
Who is this?



He was released from his involuntary commitment. Toffer found housing at a mens homeless shelter.



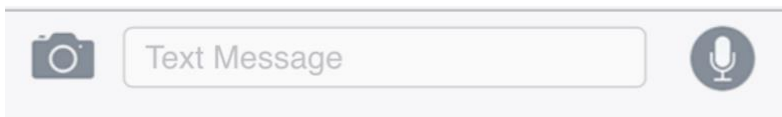
Nothing in life is easy. Toffer's shelter allowed him to stay 10 days at a time. He then had to leave for 10 days before returning to stay another 10 days.



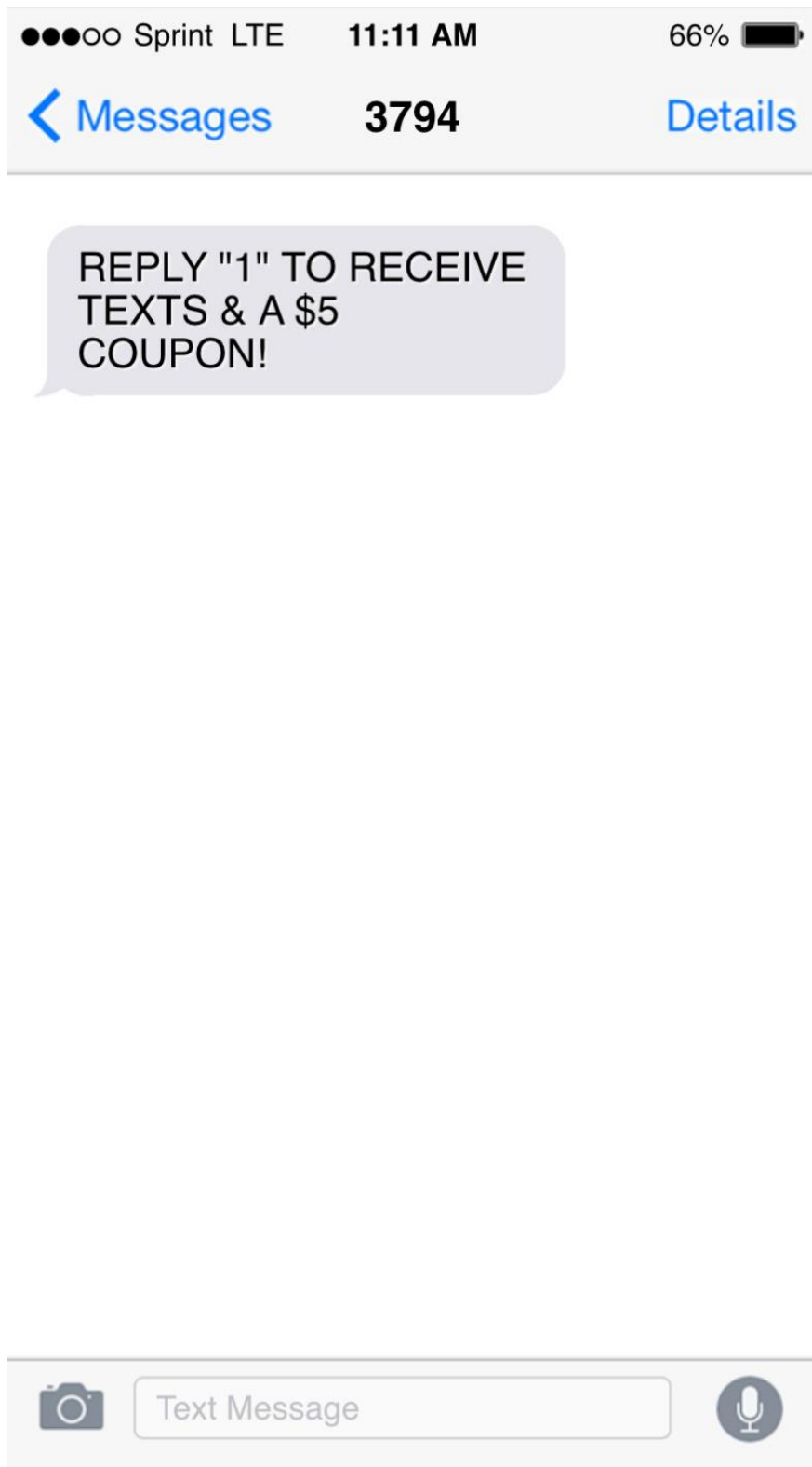
Ren fair leader dropped
pen leaned over farted
loud everyone was
rolling

Peggy snort laughed.

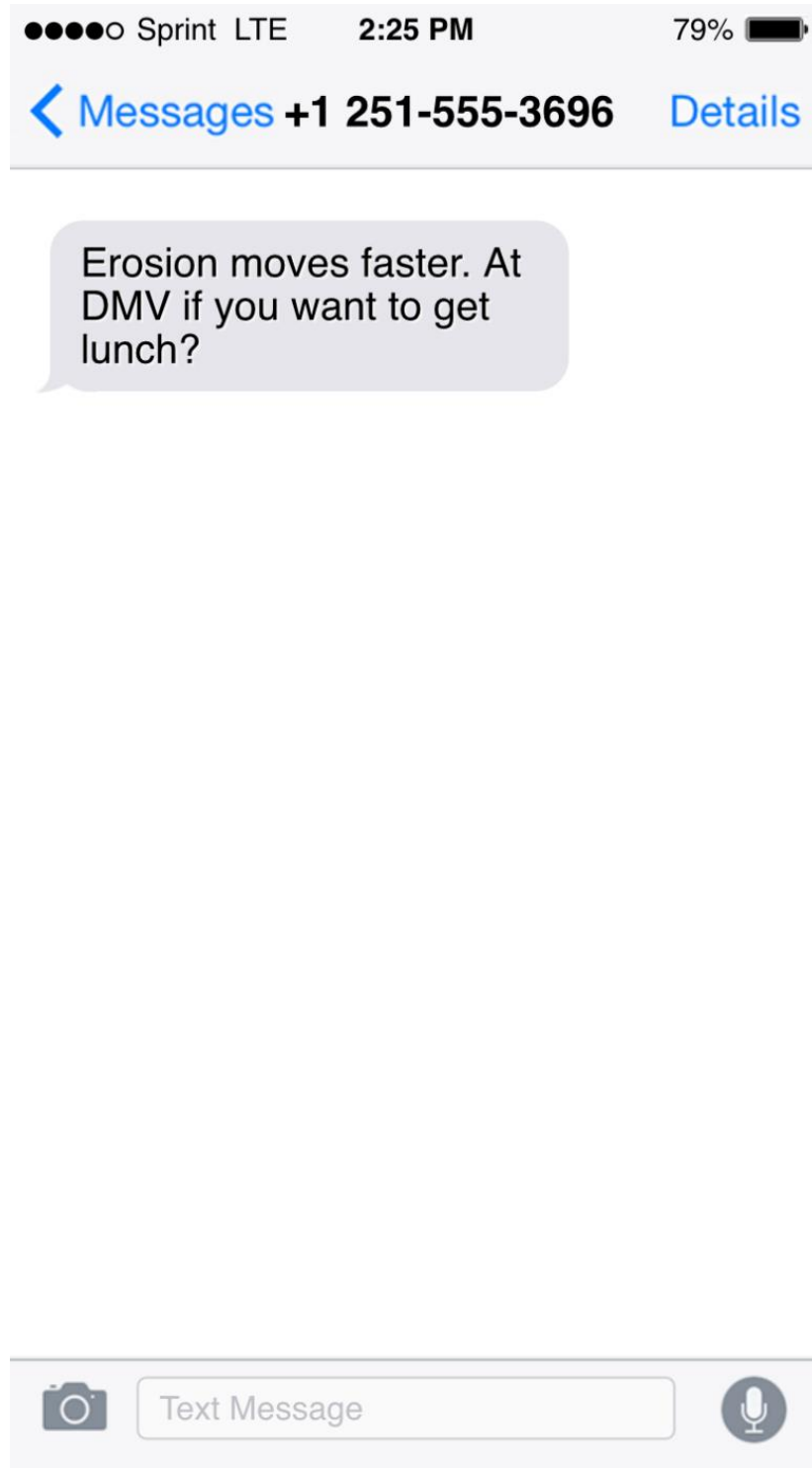
Can't do this shit going
bowling 8



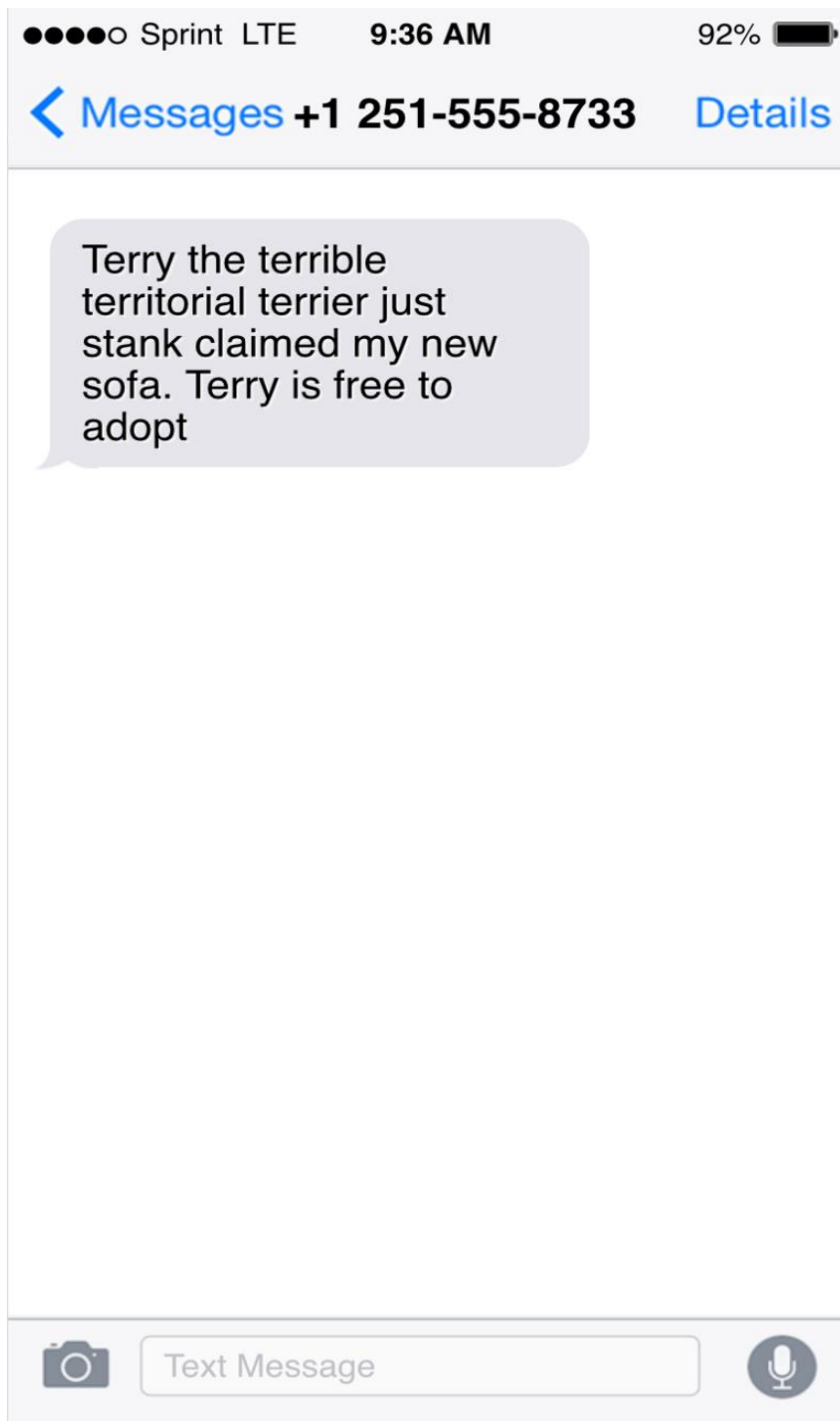
Toffer memorized Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." It was painted in the shelter's entry way.



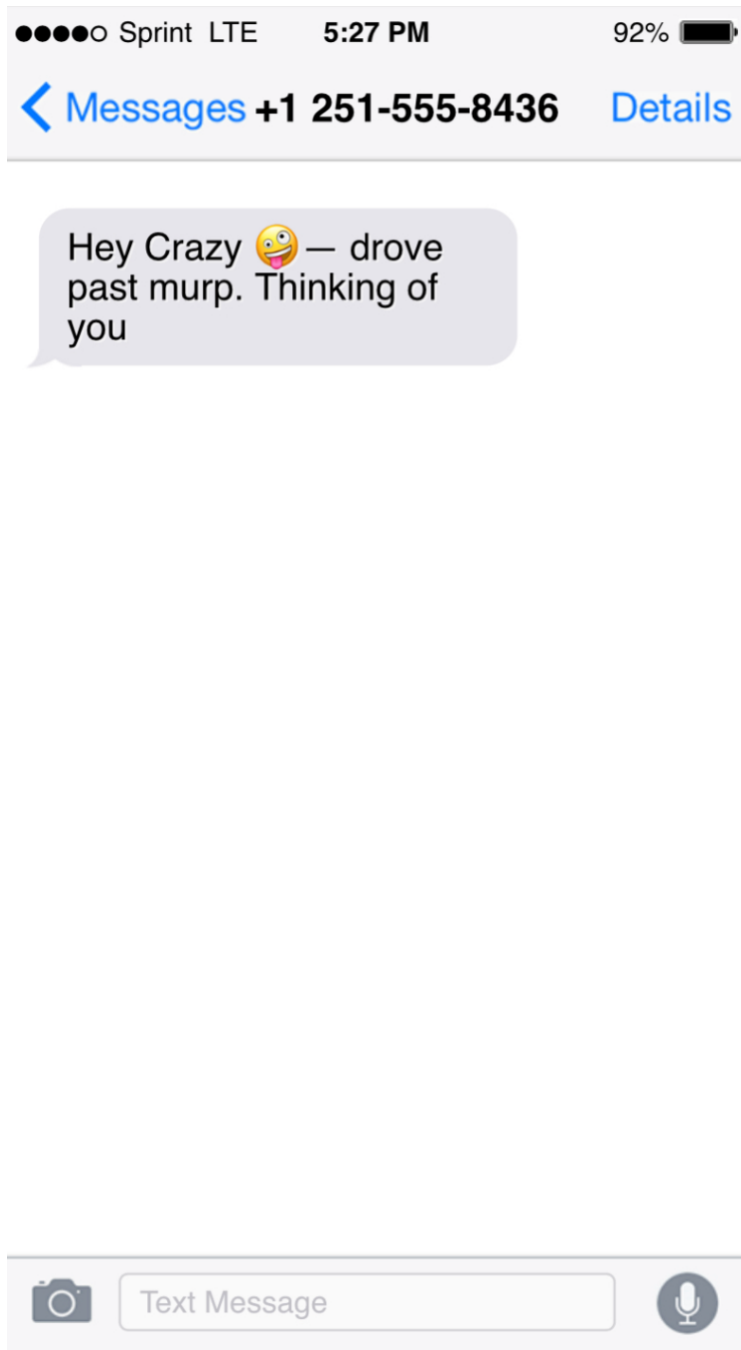
It was easy for Toffer to avoid his mother because she was out of town.



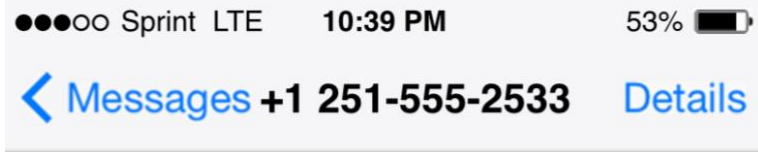
Despite current circumstances, Toffer, remained hopeful that his homelessness would be brief.



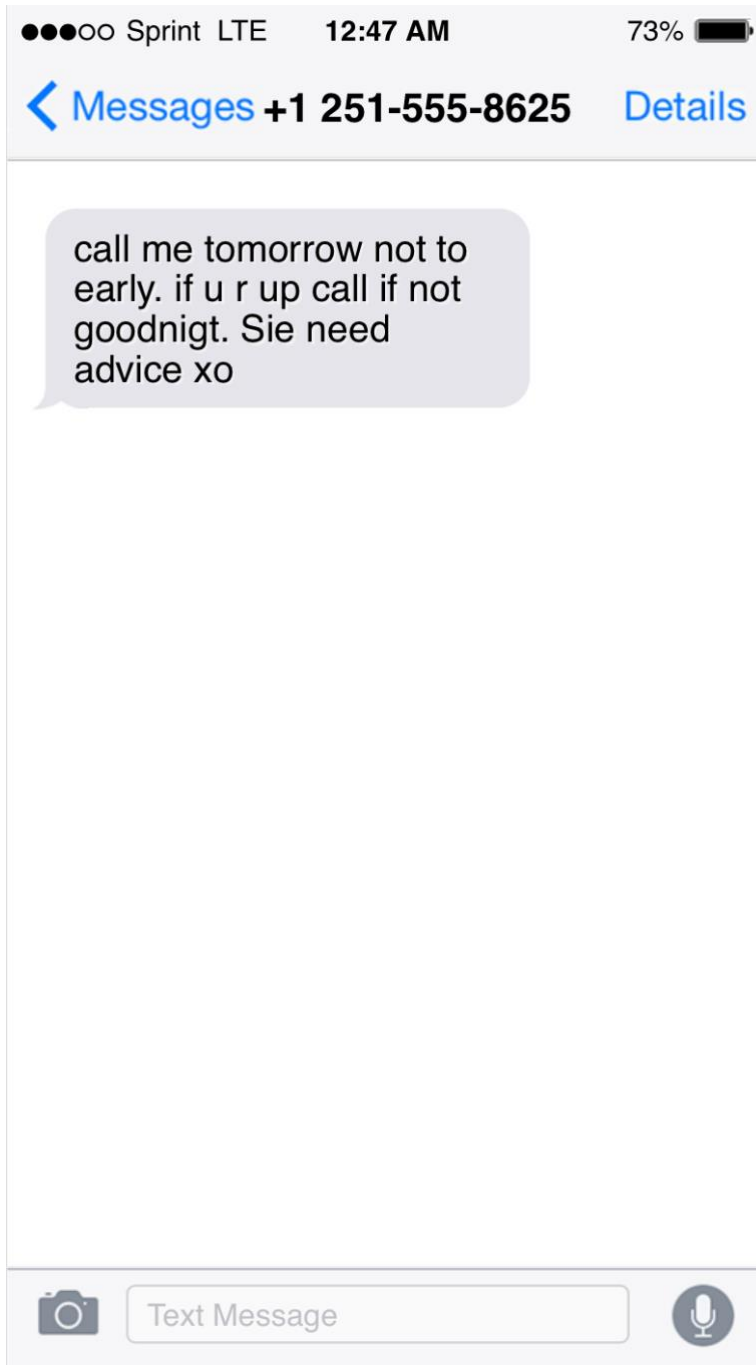
Nobody paid Toffer's phone bill for the 45 days he was in the hospital. His cellular plan was disconnected, and his phone number was reassigned. This was a ridiculous setback.



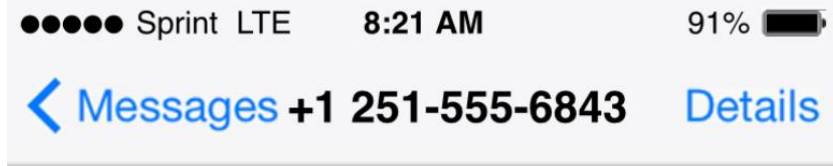
Toffer was unable to log into his accounts: bank, unemployment claim, social security, email, and social media could not be verified with his now disconnected phone number that had already been reassigned. He also lost his wallet with his identification cards at the shelter.



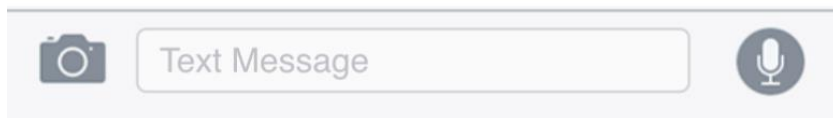
Old friends and neighbors passed by their friend Toffer who is trying desperately to make contact with anyone. No contact is ever made. Nobody stopped to embrace or communicate with Toffer.



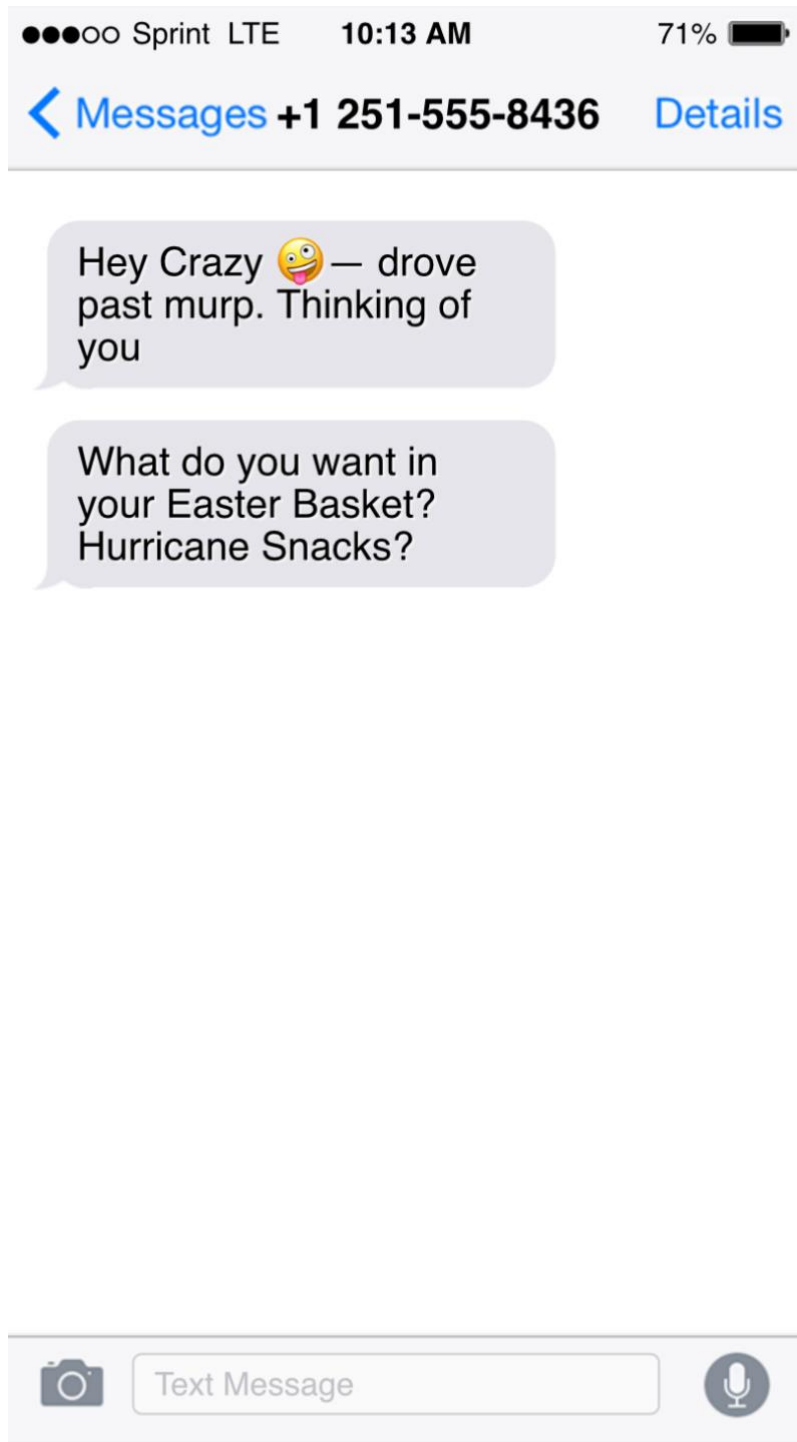
This is Toffer's last night at the shelter. He breaks down and tries to make contact with his mother but there is no answer. She is still out of town.



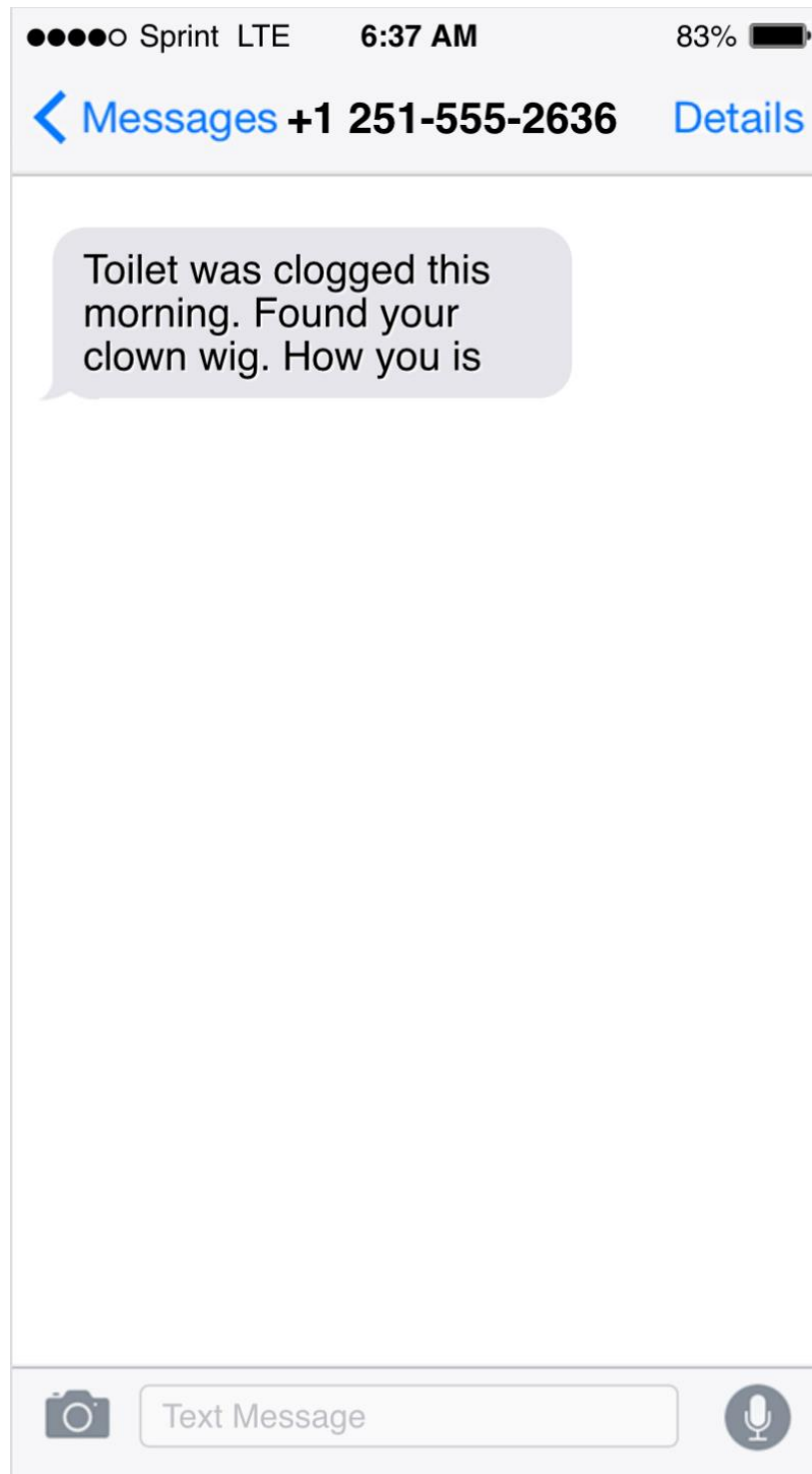
I'm at gas station Ru at
court bldg?




Toffer takes a bus ride out to Dauphin Island Parkway thinking he would leave downtown Mobile, Alabama but he never got off the bus. He returns downtown and catches another bus to his childhood home.



Toffer's first night outside of the shelter, he sleeps hidden in the back yard of the house he grew up in. The following morning old friends see him walking through the neighborhood. They honk and yell his name — startling, Toffer, but they never stop to make contact.



Toffer rides the bus back downtown to try to get lunch. He finds another place to sleep at for the night.

●●●○○ Sprint LTE 2:45 PM 68% 

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we should hang out
sometime

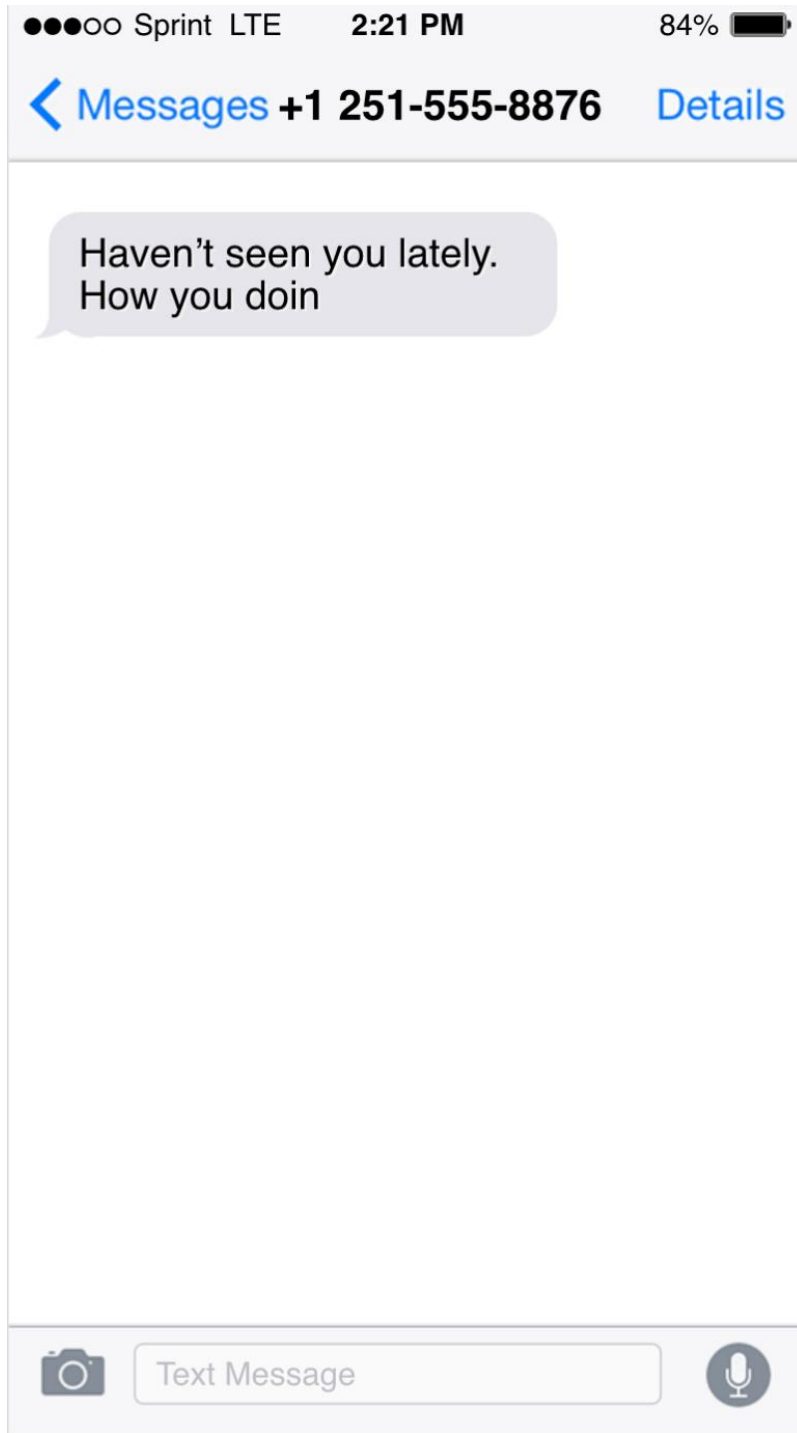
what're u up to



Text Message



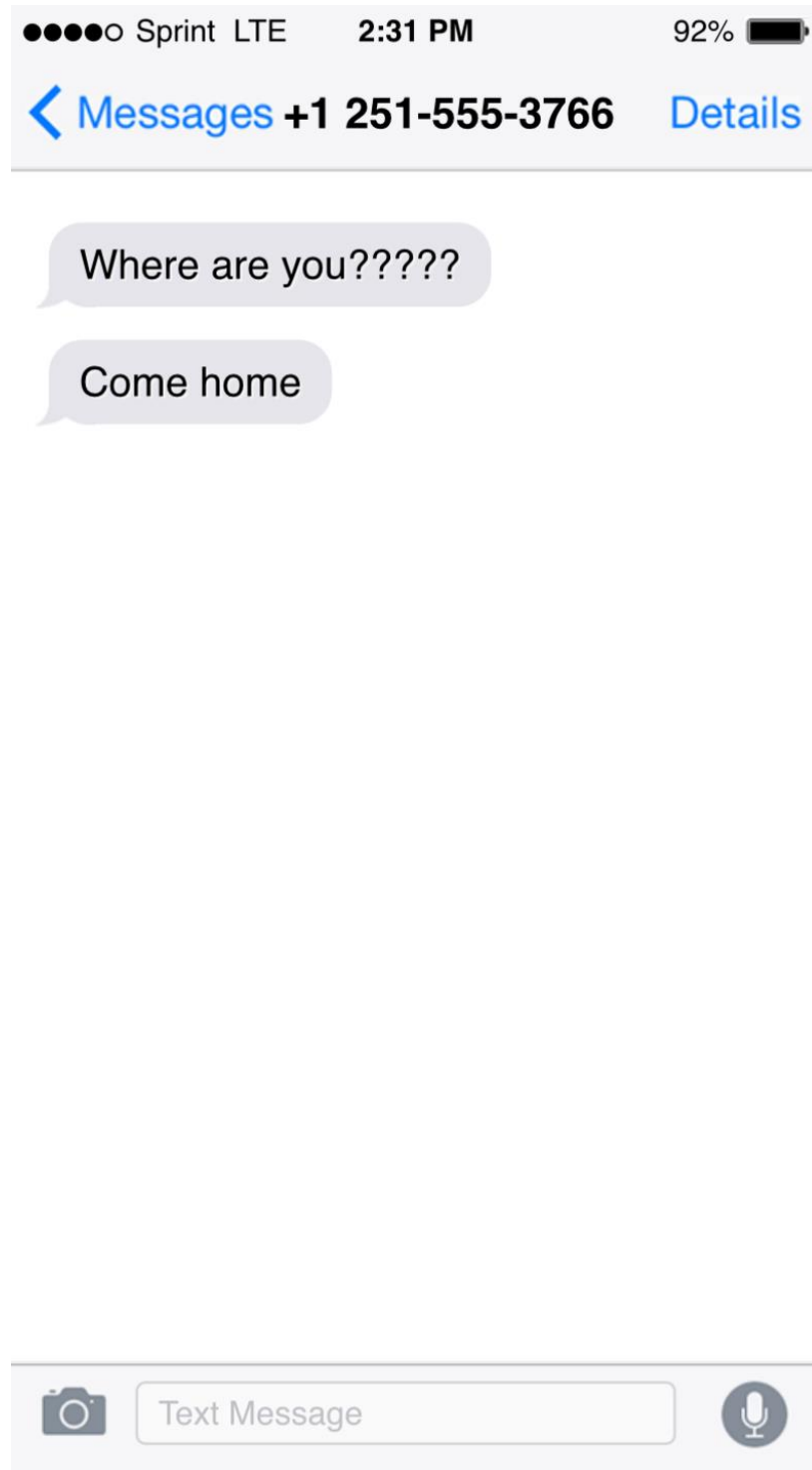
Toffer was beaten while sleeping in an abandoned house. He gets admitted to the hospital as Christopher Doe.



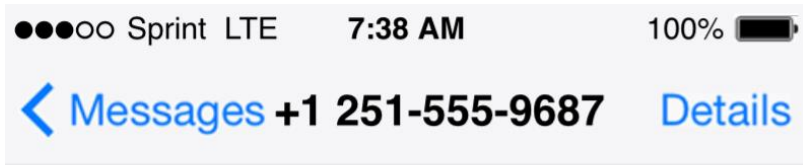
Toffer's friends catch wind that he is homeless. They try to find him to give him money and shelter.



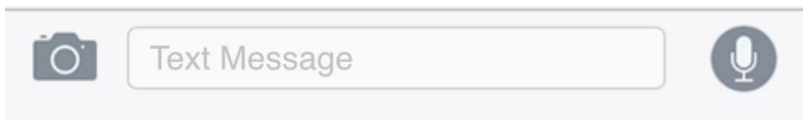
Hospital staff released a photo of Christopher Doe to news stations asking for the public to help identify him.



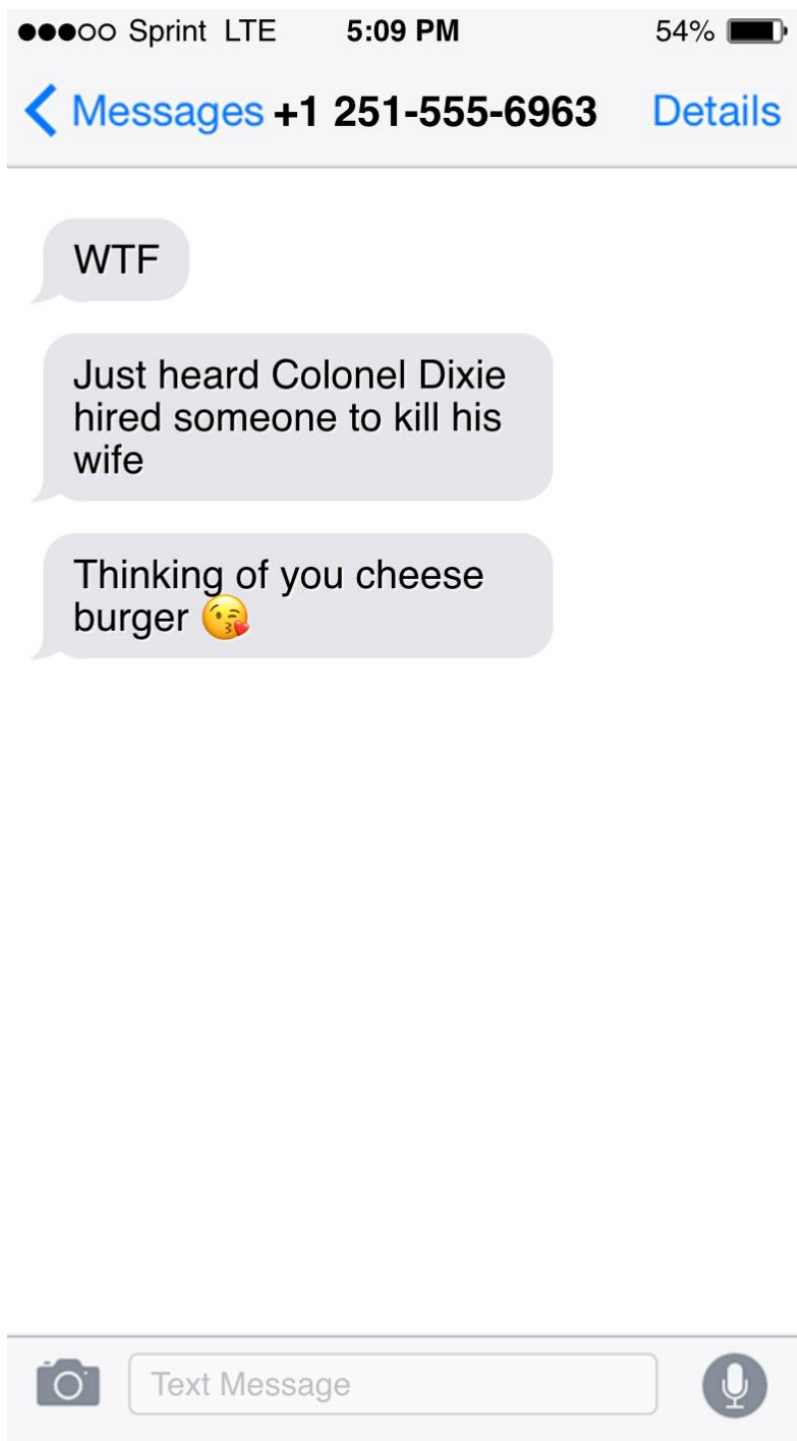
Toffer is unrecognizable because he was severely beaten. His face is swollen and bruised. He is expected to recover despite his injuries.



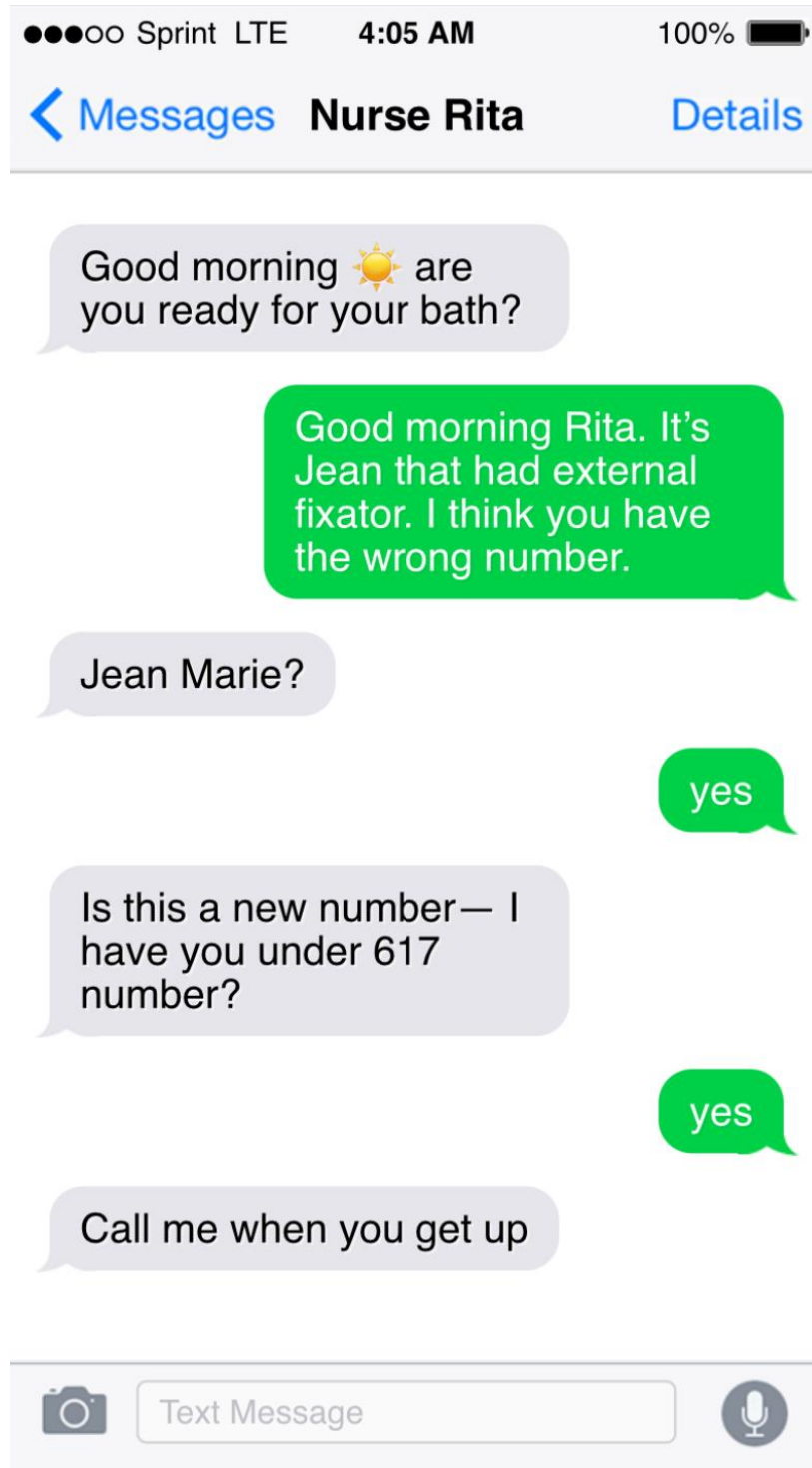
Call your mom



Valerie arrives back to town, she finds out her son, Toffer is homeless and missing. She starts looking for him.



Valerie was able to identify her son at the hospital. His medical records are updated, which include his previous phone number. Nurse Rita is covering the Easter holiday, and I received the text that was meant for Toffer.



Toffer remained in the trauma ward. He is still unconscious.

●●●●○ Sprint LTE

2:46 PM

55% 

[← Messages](#) +1 251-555-2632

[Details](#)

Hope you have a better
Good Friday than Jesus
did

Let's hang soon

Miss you




Text Message



Valerie stays with her son Toffer in the hospital. He wakes up in the middle of the night unaware of where he has been.

●●●○○ Sprint LTE

1:17 PM

93% 



Messages +1 251-555-5663

Details

Making cruze spam and
ham hock lima beans

Come on out to Fowl
River tomorrow

Just a little Easter
Hurricane party would
love to see you



Text Message



Happy Easter

The End.