#START

October 4, 2010, 10:43 A.M.
The Twitter Office

Get out," Evan Williams said to the woman standing in his office doorway. "I'm going to throw up."

She stepped backward, pulling the door closed, a metal clicking sound reverberating through the room as he grabbed the black wastebasket in the corner of his office, his hands now shaking and clammy.

This was it. His last act as the CEO of Twitter would be throwing up into a garbage can.

He knelt there for a moment, his dark jeans resting on the rough carpeted floor, then leaned back against the wall. Outside, the cold October air rustled the trees that lined Folsom Street below. Violin-like noises of traffic mingled with a muffled din of conversation near his office doorway.

Moments later, someone informed his wife, Sara, who also worked at Twitter, "Something is wrong with Ev." She rushed up to his corner office, her rich, black, curly hair wobbling slightly as she walked.

Sara checked her watch, realizing that Ev had only forty-five minutes before he would have to address the three hundred Twitter employees and break the news. She opened the door and went inside.

Down the hall, the Twitter public-relations team reviewed the blog post that would go up on the Web site at 11:40 A.M., the moment Ev

would finish addressing the company and hand the microphone to the new CEO, passing power in a gesture as simple as handing off the baton in a relay race.

The blog post, which would be picked up by thousands of press outlets and blogs from around the world, gleefully announced that Twitter, the four-year-old social network, now had 165 million registered people on the service who sent an astounding 90 million tweets each day. Five paragraphs down, it noted that Evan Williams, the current CEO, was stepping down of his own volition.

"I have decided to ask our COO, Dick Costolo, to become Twitter's CEO," said the post, allegedly written by Ev.

Of course, that wasn't true.

Ev, seated on the floor of his office with his hands wrapped around a garbage can, had absolutely no desire to say that. A farmer's son from Nebraska who had arrived in San Francisco a decade earlier with nothing more than a couple of bags of cheap, raggedy, oversized clothes and tens of thousands of dollars in credit-card debt, Ev wanted to remain chief of the company he had cofounded. But that wasn't going to happen. It didn't matter that he was now worth more than a billion dollars or that he had poured his life into Twitter. He didn't have a choice: He had been forced out of the company in a malicious, bloody boardroom coup carried out by the people he had hired, some of whom had once been his closest friends, and by some of the investors who had financed the company.

Ev looked up as he heard Sara come in. He wiped the sleeve of his sweater across the dark stubble on his chin.

"How are you feeling?" Sara asked.

"Fuck," he said, unsure if it was his nerves or if he was coming down with something. Or both.

Down the hall, through the doors that led to the Twitter office's main foyer, copies of the *New Yorker,* the *Economist,* and the *New York Times* were fanned out on the white square coffee table in the waiting area. Each publication contained articles about Twitter's role in the revolutions now taking place in the Middle East—rebellions that,

through Twitter and other social networks, would eventually see the fall of dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen and spark massive protests in Bahrain, Syria, and Iran.

Around the corner, Biz Stone, another of Twitter's four cofounders, finalized an e-mail telling the employees that there would be an all-hands meeting in the cafeteria at 11:30 A.M. Attendance was mandatory; no guests were allowed. There would be no hummus, just important news. He hit "send" and stood up from his desk, heading for Ev's office to try to cheer up his friend and boss of nearly a decade.

Jason Goldman, who oversaw Twitter's product development and was one of Ev's few allies on the company's seven-person board, was already sitting on the couch when Biz arrived and dropped down next to him. Ev was now quietly sipping from a bottle of water, despondently staring off into the distance, the turmoil and madness of the past week playing over in his mind.

"Remember when . . . ," Goldman and Biz chorused, trying to cheer Ev up with humorous memories of the last several years at Twitter. There were lots of stories to tell. Like the time Ev had nervously been a guest on the *Oprah Winfrey Show,* fumbling in front of millions of viewers. Or the time the Russian president showed up to the office, with snipers and the Secret Service, to send his first tweet, right at the moment the site stopped working. Or when Biz and Ev went to Al Gore's apartment at the St. Regis for dinner and got "shit-faced drunk" as the former vice president of the United States tried to convince them to sell him part of Twitter. Or other bizarre acquisition attempts by Ashton Kutcher at his pool in Los Angeles and by Mark Zuckerberg at awkward meetings at his sparsely furnished house. Or when Kanye West, will.i.am, Lady Gaga, Arnold Schwarzenegger, John McCain, and countless other celebrities and politicians had arrived, sometimes unannounced, at the office, rapping, singing, preaching, tweeting (some others were even high or drunk), trying to understand how this bizarre thing that was changing society could be controlled and how they could own a piece of it.

Ev struggled to smile as his friends spoke, trying his best to hide the sadness and defeat on his face.

There was one person who might have been successful at making Ev smile: the man who was now pacing in the office directly next door, his bald head bowed, his phone cupped to his ear. Dick Costolo, once a well-known improv comedian who had graced the stage with Steve Carell and Tina Fey. The same Dick Costolo Ev had "decided to ask" to become Twitter's new CEO, the third of a company that was only four years old.

Yet Dick wasn't in a jovial mood either. He was talking to the board members who had been involved in the coup, confirming the wording of the blog post that would soon go out to the media, and also what he would say to the hundreds of Twitter employees when he took the mic from Ev.

He paced as they plotted what would happen next: the return of Jack Dorsey.

Jack had been the first CEO of Twitter and another cofounder. He had been pushed out of the company by Ev in a similar power struggle in 2008. On this particular morning, he'd been expecting to make a triumphant return to the company he had obsessively built before his own ousting.

As Jack had been informed by the board a few hours earlier, though, his return to Twitter would not happen today; it would be delayed again. Jack was only a few blocks away as the scene unfolded that morning, pacing in his office at Square, a mobile payments company he'd recently started.

He had woken up in his wall-to-wall-concrete penthouse apartment in Mint Plaza and dressed for work in his now-signature several-thousand-dollar outfit of fancy Dior shirt, dark suit blazer, and Rolex watch. It was a very different ensemble from the unkempt T-shirt and black beanie hat he had worn two years earlier when he was ousted from Twitter.

But although he wore a different uniform that morning, he was equally disdainful of Ev, his once friend and forever cofounder, who had foiled Jack's planned return to Twitter. Although Ev had been

successfully removed as the CEO, he had not, as was originally sup-
posed to unfold, been publicly fired from the company. At least not yet.

Back in the Twitter office, Ev looked up as the clock approached
11:30 A.M. Time to go.

Ev had no idea that within just a few months he would be com-
pletely out of a job at Twitter. Biz and Jason followed Ev out the door
and down the halls, as they had for years, clueless that they would also
be pushed out of the company in due time.

They walked silently toward the company's cafeteria, past the col-
orful walls and white sleigh rocking chairs and the confused employees
who were grabbing their seats. None of Twitter's staff members knew
what they were about to hear from their beloved boss, Evan Williams.
They had no idea that the company they worked for, a company that had
changed the world in countless ways, was itself about to change forever.

I.
#FOUNDERS

@Ev

Ev's bicycle tires crunched on the gravel as he drifted along the dirt road, past the endless rows of green and yellow grapevines. The orange glow of the morning California sun warmed his back, his bright orange sneakers pressing down on the pedals as he picked up speed to begin his dreaded daily four-mile bike ride to work.

As he approached Sebastopol's Morris Street, cars swooshed by, leaving pockets of moving air in their wake, which helped dry the small droplets of sweat that had gathered on his brow from the morning commute. This was the moment in the ride when he once again told himself that one day soon he would be able to afford to buy a car to get to work, rather than have to use an old bicycle borrowed from a coworker.

Of course, he had never imagined people needed to own a car in San Francisco, where he had thought he was moving when he arrived in California earlier that year. It was 1997, the middle of the modern-day gold rush called the tech boom. Young, nerdy tech enthusiasts like Ev, along with designers and programmers, had set out for the area in pursuit of a new dream where, rumor had it, you could get rich by selling ones and zeros rather than nuggets of shiny yellow gold.

He had arrived a twenty-five-year-old with empty pockets and fierce idealism, only to find that the job he had been hired for, writing

marketing material for a company called O'Reilly Media, was in Sebas-topol, a small, quiet hippie town fifty-five miles north of San Francisco.

When viewed on a map spread out on his mother's small kitchen table in Nebraska, it had looked much closer to the big city. Ev decided he didn't have much of a choice but to keep the job. He had no college degree and no idea how to write code. The odds of finding work else-where were slim to none. Plus O'Reilly was paying him $48,500 a year, which would help deplete his tens of thousands of dollars in credit-card debt and student loans from the single year he had made it through college. He also reasoned that his new employer, which published technology how-to books, would be the perfect place to learn how to program. So he settled in on the outskirts of town, renting a six-hundred-dollar-a-month shoebox that sat atop a stranger's garage.

Ev felt a surprising sense of comfort in the solitude of Sebastopol, surrounded by the sounds of nothingness. It reminded him of the farm in Clarks, Nebraska, where he had grown up. The day he left for Califor-nia, Clarks's population went from 374 people to 373.

At his new office, he often sat quietly at his computer, wearing baggy, cheap jeans, an oversized T-shirt—almost always tucked in—and, if the day afforded it, a strange hat.

When your parents are farmers, style isn't usually part of the morn-ing breakfast discussion. Neither is talk of tech start-ups and San Fran-cisco, which is why his father, Monte, hadn't quite understood why young Ev was heading to California to play with computers rather than tending to the family farm. But the Williams family had never really understood Ev.

From the time he could walk he was a daydreamer. As a young boy, he would sit on the side of the family's green tractor in the deep fields and stare up into space. He was shy and sometimes socially awkward and rarely fit in, often spending hours alone with his thoughts. As he grew up, normal life in Clarks required that he go hunting with his dad and brother. Like all midwestern boys, he was supposed to learn to fire rifles, shoot a bow, gut a deer, and fish for bass or trout in the Nebraska lakes. He was also expected to fall in love with football. And, of course,

all of these things should be done while driving a very large pickup truck. All part of the American Dream.

Yet Ev preferred to sit in his bedroom and glue together plastic models, or spend hours taking apart his bikes before painstakingly putting them back together, or draw ideas for video games he wanted to make when he was older—when he could afford to buy a computer. Guns, football, and hunting were simply not his thing.

When Ev grew up and it was time to buy his first car, rather than procure a big, brawny truck, he opted for a bright yellow BMW. Owning four wheels and four doors helped catapult him to high-school popularity. A car in the Midwest for a teenager is like a watercooler in the middle of the desert. He was soon whisking his new friends to parties, where he started hooking up with girls and drinking beer out of red plastic cups.

But his carefree new lifestyle came to a halt when his parents got divorced during his senior year. The small-town gossips whispered that his mother later fell for the fertilizer guy. Ev was dragged over to a different town and a different high school, where he once again fell into obscurity and isolation.

His mind was always filling up with wacky business schemes. Most of them never quite clicked, especially with the local Nebraskans. As the Internet stared to gain speed on the coasts, Ev came up with the idea of making a VHS tape explaining what this Internet thing was. He then spent a summer driving around in his yellow Beemer trying to convince local businesses to buy the tapes. He didn't sell many.

But once Ev got an idea in his mind, he was determined to make it a reality. You might have had better luck stopping the earth from spinning than barring Evan Williams from raising one of his idea hatchlings.

After high school he didn't stray far from home and attended the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, but after a year and a half he felt that college and his professors were a waste of time. One afternoon in 1992 he was sitting in his dorm room reading, when he came across an obscure article about an advertising guru who lived and worked in

Florida. Ev was so taken by the subject of the article that he tried to call the man to ask if he was hiring. After a few conversations with an answering machine, Ev said "Fuck it!" and got into the family's old Chevy van. He drove the two thousand miles to Key West, Florida. As a runaway student he was flat broke. He paid for gas with plastic and slept in the van. In the morning, as the southern sun woke him, he would pop an audiobook tape into the car's cassette deck—often a marketing or business book—and listen as he coasted along the empty roads. When he arrived in Florida, he knocked on the advertising exec's door, demanding a job. Impressed by Ev's tenacity and persuasiveness, the exec hired Ev on the spot. Yet after several months Ev realized the man was more bullshit artist than advertising artist. So, playing everything in reverse—with a brief stay in Texas—he drove back to Nebraska.

His determination often rubbed people the wrong way. At O'Reilly Media he was once asked to compose the marketing material for one of the company's latest products. Ev responded by e-mailing the entire company that he wouldn't write it, because the product "was a piece of shit."

His abrasiveness didn't help win many friends when he arrived in California, either, so each night he would ride his borrowed bicycle home, back past the vines of grapes that would soon end up in a bottle of something he couldn't afford. Once atop the garage, he would sit and sip cheap beers alone in a single room that was large enough for a mattress, a small brown kitchenette, and Ev's prized possession: his computer.

There he would teach himself how to write code, his only friends the crickets he could hear gathered around the garage cheering him on as he learned to speak a language only computers could understand.

He eventually escaped the confines of the sleepy northern California town and darted south to Palo Alto to work for Intel and later Hewlett-Packard, building mundane software and slowly making friends who worked in the industry. On weekends he would take the train to San Francisco, where his new buddies took him to start-up

parties. The draw of the city eventually enticed him to rent an inexpensive, crooked apartment in the Mission area of San Francisco.

He met a girl, Meg Hourihan, a sprightly programmer who shared Ev's passion for opinion and computers, and the two began a brief love affair. Although the relationship didn't last long, they decided to start a company together. They set off with a small group of friends, and opened a bare-bones start-up called Pyra Labs that operated out of Ev's apartment. The group planned to build software to increase workplace productivity. But, starting a pattern that would follow Ev through his career, something better accidentally grew out of Pyra.

Ev and an employee had built a simple internal diary Web site that would help Pyra employees keep up to date about work progress. Meg didn't like the side project and was not shy in expressing her views, calling it just another Ev distraction. One week in the summer of 1999, while she was away on vacation, Ev released the diary Web site to the world. He called it Blogger, a word that had not existed until then. He believed it would allow people without any computer-programming knowledge to create a Web log, or blog.

After Blogger rose in popularity among the tech nerds, Meg eventually came around to its potential, but not Ev's. Meg was concerned that he didn't have the skills to run a business, as paperwork was piling up and bills going unpaid. A mini power struggle quickly ensued, wherein Meg tried to take control of the company and Ev refused to step down. In the end, the five-person Pyra team disbanded, leaving Ev friendless, single, and running a company out of his living room.

At around the same time, the tech boom, which had since turned into a tech bubble, went *pop*. The stock market started to spiral down, with trillions of dollars eventually falling out of the NASDAQ. Within months the parties disappeared. Jobs became sparse. Start-ups closed down. And most of the people who had come to the Valley in search of wealth left the area, broke.

Ev wasn't going anywhere, though. He had a vision for Blogger, where anyone could have their own blog, the equivalent of their own

online newspaper. Unlike his lonely high-school days, Ev's seclusion was relieved by a connection to the world through the hundreds of blogs that were popping up in this town he had laid the foundation for: Blogger, population tens of thousands.

On his own blog, *EvHead*, he forged digital friendships with other people. By day he wrote code by the pound, often for fourteen or sixteen hours at a time, expanding Blogger and building new features for the service. At night he wrote on his blog about the "electronica" he was listening to, recent movies he had seen, a run-in with the IRS for some back taxes. Then, as the moon crested in the sky, he checked the blogs one last time, said good night to the people of the Internet, scrunched up into a ball on his couch surrounded by week-old pizza boxes and empty Snapple bottles, and fell asleep. No friends, no employees, no money. Just Ev.

He soon learned that if you give a microphone to enough people, someone will yell something into it that will offend someone else. Complaints flowed into Blogger constantly. People were vexed by political blogs, religious blogs, Nazi blogs, blogs that used the words "nigger" and "spic" and "kike" and "retard" and "whitey." Ev realized it would be impossible to police all of the posts that were shared on the site, so as a rule, he opted for an anything-goes mentality.

As Blogger, and the art of blogging, continued to seep into everyday society, Ev started making just enough money, through ads and donations from people who used the site, to gradually hire a small gaggle of programmers. In 2002 they moved into a tiny four-hundred-dollar-a-month space that looked eerily like an old detective office.

By then, Blogger had grown to house nearly a million people's blogs from around the world, with close to ninety million blog posts—both huge numbers in 2002. Yet the "office" was no bigger than a New York City studio apartment: a meager twelve feet by twelve feet. The room was dark and dank. One of the three small white clocks that hung on the wall had stopped ticking a long time ago, looking as if it had simply fallen asleep, the little hand napping on the seven, the large hibernating near the ten.

It soon became apparent that Ev needed an office manager to handle all the mundane tasks, like bills and paychecks and the onslaught of complaints about the content of the site. So he hired Jason Goldman, an already-balding twenty-six-year-old who had studied astrophysics at Princeton University but dropped out for the tech promised land and was now willing to work for the cash-strapped start-up for twenty dollars an hour.

Jason Goldman wasn't the first Jason in the six-person start-up. He was the third. To avoid having three people looking in his direction when he called for one of them, Ev referred to all the Jasons by their last names. Jason Sutter, Jason Shellen, and Jason Goldman were Sutter, Shellen, and Goldman.

"Goldman!" Sutter barked in a playful tone on one of Goldman's first afternoons at work. "You're going to be in charge of the customer-service e-mail."

"What's that?" Goldman responded, peering up at him through his glasses in confusion. "And why are you grinning?" Goldman was tall and wiry with an egg-shaped head. As unstylish as Ev at the time, he often wore clothes a little too wide for his shoulders and pants a little too long for his legs.

"Oh, you'll see. It's the e-mail address we use on the site where people complain about other blogs." Slight laughter came from others in the room as Sutter showed Goldman how to check the account. "Start with that message," he said, pointing to the computer screen. Goldman clicked on the e-mail, which was a complaint from a woman in the Midwest who had come across a blog that she demanded be taken down immediately. He opened the link in the message and his screen was quickly filled with an animated picture of a group of naked men having sex on a trampoline.

"Ahhhh . . . man. . . . What . . . what, what am I supposed to do about this?" Goldman asked with an uncomfortable laugh, as they all giggled. He squinted at the screen, his head half turned away, trying to understand what the men were doing and who, if anyone, would be interested in such bizarreness.

"Nothing," Ev said. "Push-button publishing for the people." It was Blogger's motto and meant that anyone should be able to publish whatever they wanted. There were mugs around the room that declared this statement, brown coffee stains dribbled over big, bold letters that laid out the moral code of Blogger: push-button publishing for the people. And it was a motto Ev was determined to stand by. In one instance, a coal-mining company in Scotland threatened to sue Blogger if it didn't take down a union blog that was being used to show a coal mine's wrongdoings. Ev always stood his ground, preferring to go out of business rather than to give in to corporate pressure. Eventually, the coal mine gave up.

Blogging had an unintended side effect for Ev. As the company grew, along with other blogging services, Ev was written about in the technology trade press, and he started to grow slightly popular in Silicon Valley. Soon his endless nights on his couch alone with his computer started to change; his personal life started to grow. Just as in his early days with a car in high school, he was now being whisked off to the few tech parties that still existed in the area, hooking up with girls, and drinking beer out of red plastic cups.

Outside the small enclave of the Valley, most people didn't believe in the promise of this weird blogging thing. Some called it "stupid" and "infantile." Others asked why anyone would care to share anything about themselves so publicly.

But not Ev. Ev was determined to see Blogger grow, to allow anyone with a computer to publish anything they wanted. To disrupt the publishing world. To disrupt the world in general. One line of code at a time.