

First Drunk

SPRING 1970

Seventeen is an awkward age in a young man's life. He is still shy of adulthood yet mentally ready to refuse advice and make his own decisions. It is an age of experimentation.

I knew Doug since the seventh grade and met Bill on the first day of high school. By the age of seventeen, we were high school juniors – men who ruled our corner of the world.

We were cool, owned our own cars, and had an image to uphold. A teenager's reputation is more important than food.

Before this, I'd tried beer a couple of times and weed only once, unlike most of my friends, who experimented with numerous drugs. These minor infractions were enough to solidify my standing with my peers.

I was careful about weed. I was unimpressed by the effect when I'd tried it, but my main concern, being a Green Card carrier and not an American citizen, was that any illegal drug use was a felony, making it a deportable offense. If I were with a group of friends and someone pulled out weed, speed, mescaline, or any other illegal drug, I would immediately make an excuse and leave the area. If I walked into a party and there was even a hint of drugs, I would make a beeline to the exit. Having lived in America since I was eleven and considered it my home, I wanted to keep living here.

Late in the second semester, I was hanging out with Doug and Bill during the lunch period when Bill told us that we should get drunk. His older sister would buy us a bottle. Like the other two, I thought that was an excellent idea. Plans made, and money exchanged hands. We were set for Saturday night.

The remainder of the week felt like an eternity. Finally, D-day was upon us. At eight o'clock that evening, I climbed into my eight-year-old Chevy pickup and headed for the rendezvous. When I met up with my compadres, at the Atlantic Richfield gas station where Doug worked, Bill proudly exhibited the ill-gotten quart of Bacardi rum. We were ready to roll!

What now? Where do we go? And when we get there, do we drink the rum straight or mix it? If we mix it, what do we use? Our plan not as well conceived as we thought. Decisions had to be made. Unanimously we decided to drive thru Jack In The Box and buy large Cokes, mix in the rum, then just drive around indulging. It was a terrible plan but nonetheless was a plan. We headed to the nearest fast food location.

Taking our purchases back to my truck, we sat in their parking lot pouring ninety percent of the Coke from our paper cups onto the asphalt and replaced it with rum.

Phase one complete; we proceeded to phase two. We hit the popular cruising route around Main Street and Second Avenue. After a couple of laps, sipping our rum-tinged with a hint of Coke, Bill asked us if we were drunk yet. Both Doug and I responded negatively. Bill then suggested that we go to Outer Limits and do a little jogging and jumping jacks, figuring that exercise would speed up the process. We eagerly agreed.

Outer Limits is the stage for urban myths. Our Outer Limits was a small dirt road that wound through the thick, tall dry grass and the goat-head stickered low lying-hills of East El Cajon. The teenage legends included a resident Monk who killed bicycled riding kids, an old shotgun-toting maniac who slaughtered everyone, and the ever-popular Hook-Hand stalking young lovers. It was the perfect spot for serious drinking!

We arrived twenty minutes later, drinking all the way. All left was to finish our paper cups full of booze and start jogging in the bright, full moonlit night. It worked. We soon felt as drunk-as-lords. Mission accomplished!

Doug, Bill, and I leaned against the tailgate of my truck for a while, slurring unfunny jokes and laughing our heads off.

We did not yet realize that trouble was stalking just around the corner.

It began when I noticed a set of car lights moving in and out around the corners below the hills in front of us. We threw our cups and almost empty bottle, into a small adjacent field. There was no place to turn around, so I started driving towards the oncoming lights. A quarter mile later, I rounded a corner to come face-to-face with the impending intruder. I applied my brakes and quickly came to a full stop on the dirt road. The patrol car's lights immediately came on and started flashing red. We were caught!

Three more patrol cars, immediately, appeared behind us; all flashing red lights. It must have been a slow crime night if all four of the El Cajon City Police vehicles on duty had time to surround three teenagers in one pickup truck.

The officers behind us exited their patrol cars and start searching both sides of the road with their flashlights. The officers, even though wearing their thick black leather boots, would not venture far into the dry thorny laden field fearing the tedious job of removing the goat-heads from their uniform pants.

The officer in the front vehicle, shouting into his PA system, ordered me to exit my vehicle.

The mountain-sized officer wearing a perfectly pressed, navy blue police uniform emerged from his patrol car. Momentarily he stood beside the open vehicle's door studying the scene and his three young perpetrators. Sporting short cropped, jet-black hair glistening under the bright moonlight, he projected the perfect image you would expect to see on a late night horror film.

He called me over. I was terrified. I approached his patrol car and slyly pressed my thigh hard into his vehicle's fender to stabilize myself. This would be a lousy time to stagger around like some kind of sloppy drunk.

He approached in a regimented marching gate stopping directly in front of me. I stood alone beneath the intense, glaring red lights, repeatedly flashing on and off, and the concentrated glare of this intimidating monster man.

The officer snapped, "Why did you turn your lights on?"

I hadn't. They'd been on but obscure until we'd driven around the corner and stopped. The officer had no idea that I'd already driven my truck far away from the scene of our crime. The other officers' search for evidence of our excessive alcohol consumption would be in vain.

I answered confidently, "I didn't want you to run into me!"

His second question was harder, "What have you been drinking?"

I responded with the blatant lie, "Nothing."

Next, he barked, "Blow into my face!"

Protruding my upper lip over my lower lip, I blew straight down. It did not work; he saw right through my clever ruse and forced to re-blow directly into his face.

He smelled the alcohol on my breath and asked again, "What have you been drinking?"

My next lie, “My parents were having a small party, and I snuck a little taste.” I couldn’t possibly admit these three skinny, underage youths had downed a quart of Bacardi in less than an hour.

Unconvinced by my attempt to minimize my crime, he asked, “Can I search your truck?”

With nothing to hide I replied, “Of Course.”

A minute later, the officer slammed the empty rum bottle onto the hood of my truck. I could only mutter, “Shit!”

Doug, not wanting to lose the last half-inch of liquid gold, had stuffed the bottle under his seat instead of tossing it with the paper cups. He indeed wasn’t the criminal mastermind I could depend on.

The officers terminated their fruitless search for evidence in the grass. Thanks to Doug, they had all the evidence they needed to incriminate us. My officer dismissed them, and they left the scene, leaving only the monster standing between freedom and me.

My officer mimicked a drill sergeant teaching a new recruit as he leaned in close; his face only inches from mine. To my utter dismay, he never mentioned the ill fate of youths who got drunk. Instead, I endured a good half hour of screaming, decrying my ability to lie to authorities, and expounding on the seriousness of that critical character flaw.

The louder his volume increased, the more I saw my chances to gain my freedom shrink.

But weirdly, concluding my chastising, the officer simply screamed, “Get in your truck and go straight home! Don’t ever let me catch you again!”

I silently vowed that he never would. I jumped back into my truck, where Doug and Bill had remained sitting quietly through my ordeal, and as quickly as my drunken state permitted, I drove off. After dropping my two accomplices at their respective homes, I drove home alone.

The only remaining hurdle was to sneak past my parents. So far it had been a lucky night for me, and my luck was about to continue. It was close to eleven o’clock, and my parents had already gone to bed. Without hesitation, I snuck through the quiet house and did the same.

My parents never knew about my first drunk or my close brush with the law.

For a long time, I wondered why he freed us. I came up with numerous scenarios, none that would ever come close to reality and I can only surmise my stabilization trick against the officer’s patrol car had worked and he never realized how genuinely drunk I was.

Uncertified Dive Class

SPRING 1969

The water was bone-chilling cold. Gary and I were on our very first scuba dive a hundred and ten feet below the ocean's surface on the edge of La Jolla Canyon. I ran out of air! I was sixteen years old and unprepared to die.

My dive partner, Gary was four years older than I was and this was his first dive as well. He had no more experience than I had.

We worked together at TLC Convalescent Hospital in San Diego's East County. He was studying pre-med at San Diego State, and I was a sophomore at El Cajon Valley High School. As part-time kitchen-aides, our job was to load the dinner carts, clean the kitchen, and wash dishes.

One day Gary brought a flyer to work for scuba diving lessons. Having never missed an episode of the sixties TV show, *Sea Hunt*, starring Lloyd Bridges, I always thought, "That would be fun." I jumped at the chance to learn to the sport. Gary and I signed up.

It turned out to be an inexpensive, uncertified class taught by an older San Diego State College student named Ken. Unlicensed as a diving instructor, he was trying to earn a little extra pin money. Ken held dive class in his off-campus apartment, complete with a swimming pool for learning to use scuba equipment.

We excitedly showed up for the first class. There was Ken, and three students, Gary, myself and someone else. To Ken's credit, he was an experienced diver and put together a class outline similar to an accredited class. He taught us the dos and don'ts including dive charts. The charts are a complicated set of formulas for figuring out air consumption, nitrogen buildup in the blood, and time & depth restrictions for consecutive dives.

To Ken's, or should I say our detriment, he failed to adequately teach us about all the variations in diving equipment.

After the first two Saturday morning classes, we were ready to hit the pool. Pool instruction consisted of an additional two Saturday sessions. We started with a swim test, went on to snorkeling, ended with equipment "ditch and dawn" and buddy breathing.

Completing the sixteen-hour class, we were ready for our first ocean dive. The following week, at eight in the morning, the four of us met at the south end of La Jolla Shores' beach. Ken borrowed a mess of equipment from everyone he knew.

We had our own fins, mask, and snorkel and of course, Ken had all his own gear. The other three split up the remaining hodgepodge at random.

The standard size tank holds 72cf of air. I ended up with the top half of a wetsuit, weight belt and, unknowingly, a 50cf tank. Both sizes look the same; you have to know which size you are using. Ken overlooked informing me that my tank was a third smaller than the others were!

Worse than the size differential, my tank sported a *K* valve. Tanks are fitted with one of two valve choices. A *J* valve has a reserve, which activates by pulling down a wire alongside the air tank. The reserve gives you an additional two minutes of air, which is adequate for surfacing from any depth. A *K* valve has no reserve. Ken missed this lesson!

Finally, the last equipment omission was buoyancy compensators; a rubber vest that you can partially fill with air through a mouth tube. If you have too much or too little weight on your belt, you adjust your buoyancy by adding or removing air in the vest. Properly adjusted buoyancy allows you to swim freely or float without continually fighting to stay up or down. Critically, if you are too heavy and lose consciousness, you will sink to the bottom. Also, a vest contains an emergency gas cylinder that you can release to immediately fill the vest and take you to the surface. It would have been good for me to have a buoyancy compensator on this dive.

On that first, nearly disastrous dive, we were hundreds of yards offshore and just below the ocean's surface when the other student couldn't clear his ears. Ken used hand signals to tell us he was staying with him. Then he waved his hand in a circular motion. Gary and I both interpreted that gesture to mean, "Go and look around. Have fun."

Gary and I made our way deep to the edge of La Jolla Canyon, half a mile offshore. The six-hundred-foot deep canyon considered an advanced dive. It certainly not recommended for a novice let alone a first dive.

However, we were young and fearless as we approached the canyon's edge, which gradually sloped downwards for twenty feet or so before dropping straight off. We glided out over the pitch-black abyss. There was absolutely no visibility below, in front, or to the right or left of us. Looking up you could barely see the hazy ocean surface. Turning back it was hard to visualize the sand leading back to the safety of the beach. If we had swum a little further out, we would have been lost in complete, utter darkness. A terrifying experience!

Squeezed by pressure of more than three atmospheres, I run out of air.

Gary and I had just checked with each other to confirm everything was okay and he was swimming away from me. I breathed in through my regulator and nothing. No air, just a hard pucker! I swam after Gary as fast as I could. I managed to grab one of his fins, and he turned around, I did a slashing motion at my throat, giving him the "out of air" signal.

I felt for my reserve wire along the side of my tank and found it nothing. I turned my back to him, pointing to my valve, and thinking, "He'll turn it on for me." Gary spun me around and shook his head. Feeling the burn in my lungs, I knew I was in trouble. If I were going to survive, I had to initiate buddy breathing. It wasn't a big deal; Lloyd did it every episode.

As I was the one out of air, it was my job to orchestrate the buddy-breathing maneuver. To accomplish this, I was to remove my partner's regulator from his mouth, take two breaths, and return it to his mouth for his two breaths. Repeat until we were out of danger.

Being out of air for more than two minutes, I was critical. I fast exhausted the remaining oxygen in my lungs and bloodstream and seconds from drowning. I reached for his regulator, not realizing a neck strap attached it. I pulled on it and just snapped his head. Gary grabbed it back out of my hands and tried to reinsert it into his mouth. At these depths, things distort. Gary couldn't find his mouth for four or five tries.

While tragedy unfolded, we swam upward. In a last desperate attempt at survival, I reinserted my regulator into my mouth and sucked in with every living muscle in my body. We were so deep! The small amount of air left in my tank was expanding as we rose and I received a short but life-sustaining breath.

Gary, finally situated, motioned to me that he was ready to commence buddy breathing. We did and quickly ascended to the surface. Our ascent was too fast and dangerous, but the risk of drowning was imminent, so we kept kicking hard. Upon reaching the surface, we jetted out of the water to mid-chest level.

Ken, who had been trying to follow our bubbles, was only a few yards from us when we shot from the ocean depths. He was agitated that we were buddy breathing and demanded to know what we were doing. He interrupted my explanation and kept repeating, "Nobody ever buddy breathes. Nobody ever buddy breathes." I interjected that we had to and he had taught us how. Ken said that was just part of the class but "Nobody ever buddy-breathes. With modern equipment, you just don't get into those situations." Glaring at me, "Why would you go so deep and do such stupid things?"

Ken's rant suddenly stopped. Looking at me, he said that my ears are bleeding and I need to get to a doctor. The four of us swam to shore.

I didn't see a doctor until the next Monday. I was young and invincible, and I could still hear. The doctor said that my ears were fine. My ear canals had bled a little when they were adjusting to the pressure changes, but no permanent damage.

We were lucky. The only thing that saved me and possibly Gary's life was the fact we did not panic through the peril and did almost everything right.

I never saw Ken again, but I suspect that we were his first and last diving class and his only students ever.

I was not discouraged. I had survived my first dive - barely but barely counts.

Gary and I dove two to four times a month over the next three years.

We never did bother with buoyancy compensators. We made frequent Canyon dives consisting of between two and two-and-a-half hours, no floating, or resting, just constant swimming to stay off the bottom, or fighting to stay down. Those dives were physically exhausting. We would lose up to five pounds on a Canyon dive. The pounds stayed off only, until we got to the nearest Taco Bell, and stuffed ourselves with as much food as we could afford from our minimum-wage part-time jobs.

Rosarito

SPRING 1969

Everyone jeered and applauded loudly waiting for the last large bottle rocket to be launched. Someone in the dark inadvertently stepped on the rocket's long stem breaking it and leaving it dangling a foot from its red paper-wrapped body. One of the students yelled, "Just break it off and shoot it!" The ignorant chaperones did just that.

As soon as launched, the rocket's trajectory went array. It flew erratically amongst the group of spectators. Students were dodging and diving to the ground desperately avoiding its unguided path. It hit a young man's arm and continued on careening off the next chest before powering into my eye. Instantly my eye swelled shut. The rocket finally hit the ground a few yards from me in a deafening explosion, leaving my ears ringing.

The concerned counselors sweep through the group asking if everyone was all right. I moved in quiet agony away avoiding embarrassment while trying to nurse my wounds and retrieve my bearings. In the dark, they never saw me.

Previously, right before Easter break, during my sophomore year in high school, I attended a Campus Life's Christian student association meeting and handed a flyer denoting a new offshoot organization name Alpha Chi. This was a San Diego countywide boy's only club. The flyer announced the club's first three-day retreat to Rosarito Beach in Mexico. I immediately paid the fifty-dollar fee and signed up for their weekend trip scheduled in the upcoming May.

The day arrived, and I excitedly drove to the designated meeting place at the old College Avenue Baptist Church. It was Friday morning, and the parking lot was filling with anxious teenage boys. I was the only guy in attendance from my school.

Around nine o'clock the forty-six male teenagers and two adult male chaperones boarded the old school bus and drove off to Mexico. Besides, two more chaperones drove their personal vehicles and met us on the beach.

We arrived two hours later. Rosarito is thirteen miles south of Tijuana on the old road leading to Ensenada. It's was a small roadside community consisting of a dilapidated gas station and a bar and a small market-souvenir combination shop surrounded by scattered shacks and sub-par dwellings.

Directly across the road from the businesses was the pristine desolated Rosarito Beach. Just north of the beach was nothing but sheer coarse sand and dirt bluffs and plateaus. We set up our camp on the largest plateau overlooking the massive Pacific Ocean filled with non-stop roaring waves breaking upon the sandy beach.

We spent the afternoon mingling with newfound friends. A couple of the guys brought surfboards and made the short hike down a slippery sand trail to our private beach area. I wish I had known to bring my board.

Late afternoon two counselors announced that they when going to the market to buy penny bottle rockets. Everyone started scrambling through their backpacks searching for dollar bills to purchase their personal stash. Figuring a couple hundred-penny rockets would suffice I forked

over two crinkled one-dollar bills. They returned an hour later and divvied up the highly prized treasure. What they spent an hour doing in Rosarito was beyond me?

For dinner, we each received a portion of a delicious fire-roasted chicken with an abundance of potato chips coupled with a Shasta soft drink of our choosing. It proved difficult balancing my chicken dinner on the thin paper plate. I ended up with many gritty sandy bites.

Penny rockets are designed to shoot and explode. The red paper, gun powered filled fuel unit is attached to a stabilizing straw guaranteeing a straight line of flight. After lighting the fuse, the firecracker becomes airborne and flies fifteen to twenty feet before exploding.

After dinner on this dark new moon night, the fireworks came out. The chaperones had also purchased half a dozen large rockets attached to four-foot stems. With everyone loosely gathered around them, they commenced shooting the missiles out over the ocean. The rockets' fuses would crackle and sparkle while burning towards the propulsion unit. A few seconds later the rocket shot, whistling loudly through the quiet night air. Seventy feet or so then the rocket exploded with a thunderous bang and brilliant flash lighting up the night sky and ocean below it.

Following the final large rocket's catastrophic flight, the time arrived for the bottle rocket war. Reeling in all the excitement, no one seemed to notice the continuing swelling of my one-eyed contorted face.

We split into two groups. My group scaled a small plateau, and the opposition assembled in the flat below us. We were set to fire our penny rockets at each other. The war started!

My team was lighting and raining rockets on them as fast as we could while they were trying to do likewise towards us. We had a distinct advantage. They couldn't escape the extended range of our rockets downward flight while most of their missiles couldn't reach the height of our position.

You need two hands to fire a bottle rocket, one holding the ten-inch straw stem while the other hand lighting the fuse. I laid my excess inventory on the ground in front of me but most of the others, not wanting the chore of reaching to the ground to retrieve their next missile, stuffed them in a top front pocket of their shirt. Not a good idea!

During our barrage, one rocket accidentally landed in an enemy's filled pocket. All his rockets started exploding at once in a massive display of light and noise during which he frantically tried to tear off his shirt. His personal calamity continued until every-one decimated. This scenario repeated twice more before our defeat. Their team was made-up of slow learners.

We were defeated for one reason, Counselor Ray. Ray was huge at least six foot four and weighing three hundred-twenty pounds. Before his retirement and subsequent move to San Diego, he had previously been a professional football linebacker for the Green Bay Packers.

He witnessed the demise of his team and decided to take matters into his own hands. As soon as someone in our squad noticed him scaling the cliff to our plateau every one of us lined the edge and commenced our attack solely on him. Unfazed or deterred, Ray crested the top and entered our domain. We scattered!

Ray, convinced he had the upper hand, fearlessly walked up to one of my teammates. He lit a bottle rocket, grabbed the neck of his victim's t-shirt, and ripped it down past his chest, exposing skin while leaving the remainder of his shirt still encompassing our soldier's abdomen. Using the attached half-shirt handle, he held his victim captive and with increasing pressure pushed the exploding end of a bottle rocket hard into the bare chest until it burst. Exploding gunpowder on your bare skin hurts!

Counselor Ray went through our unit repeating the torture. We could not stop him. He declared himself the victor, and we agreed.

The evening's excitement wasn't over. We maintained our groups and set up to play capture the flag. Their team was shirts, and obviously, our already half-naked team was skins.

This is a game where each side tries to infiltrate the opposition's territory and snatch their flag before returning it un-captured back to their side. When an opposing team member tackled a foe, the tagged person is out of play for the remainder of the game.

Our flag, someone's destroyed t-shirt, placed on the edge of a cliff overlooking the beach and theirs somewhere high on one of the plateaus. We met in the middle, and Ray declared, "Game on!" Both groups scattered across their respected territories.

I stood at the edge of a dirt cliff somewhere between the flags trying desperately to see through the darkness with my one good eye. I suddenly heard two sets of runners approaching me with their feet crunching in the hard coarse sand. I never saw them but felt the wind as they both ran close past me; one after the other straight-off the cliff.

A while later one of my teammates came up to me and said it was my turn to guard the flag. I asked him to point me in the direction of it. I eventually found it unattended lying on the ground overlooking the ocean. Guard is the worst position in the game with minimal action. I stood bored over our flag for the longest time. My head pounding like an old one-lung steam engine.

I finally start to wonder if someone would take the time trudging to the shoreline and following the beach ending directly below our base position; eventually finishing by scaling the cliff and seizing our flag. I walked to the cliff's edge and strained my one eye trying to detect any movement.

Unbelievable! Counselor Ray was crawling up the steep loose sand cliff on his hands and knees ten feet below me.

I was half his weight and stood five foot eight inches high. I hadn't a hope of capturing the colossal man, but without hesitation, I jumped onto the monster yelling, "You're captured!"

As we were sliding down the embankment, Ray retorted, "The hell I am" and reached around with a huge hand. He grabbed me and threw me towards the beach. As my body passed him, I managed to latch onto one of his feet and repeated, "You're captured!" Instead of acknowledging, Ray grabbed me and tried again. For the second time, I clung to his foot.

I climbed up his body. As previously, we started sliding, further down the bluff. I continued yelling, "I got you! You're captured!"

Disgusted, Ray managed to turn over knocking me off his back, and he said, "Enough of this shit!" He picked me up threw me to the beach. I landed hard in the sand thirty feet below.

Ray got our flag and headed back for the win. Laying there in the dark I heard a few faint voices crying out, "I got you." "You're caught." "You're out." as Ray bulldozed over my teammates on his final touchdown run.

Counselor Ray stood in the middle of the battlefield waving our piece of t-shirt and declaring victory. The game was over!

The following day was uneventful. Groups of students stood around most of the day swapping stories and better getting to know one another. Not that anyone could overlook it; no one asked about my visible swollen out-of-shaped face and closed eye.

In the early afternoon, a nude woman showed up down the beach to sunbathe. Even though she was too far away to see clearly, we all wasted an hour gawking, though I could hardly see anyway.

After another excellent camp dinner, we made a substantial stacked-pallet bonfire and sat around discussing Christ, and the way good Christians should talk and present themselves to prospective converts.

I silently reflected on my previous night's battle with the linebacker on the cliff. How ironic his locker room language had been.

By the time, I got back home the next day my face was turning a multitude of red, blue, and purple colors. My Medal of Honor did not reopen for a week.

It had been a glorious trip.

Monahans Texas

WINTER 1972

A thunderous explosion of metal permeated the still night air. I immediately looked in my side rear review mirror trying to see what I ran over to cause such a raucous sound. To my bewilderment, I could see in the moonlight, the freeway filling with broken metal engine fragments flying from under my truck. My pickup had exploded!

My engine seized, and I immediately jammed in my clutch and threw the shifter into neutral. I managed to coast safely to the highway's dirt shoulder before stopping. My Mardi Gras trip was over.

After completing my second semester at Grossmont Community College, I decided to take the next semester off and go on a road trip to Maris Gras in New Orleans. I put out the word to my community of friends that I was leaving the first week in February and was looking for a traveling companion.

No takers came forward.

A few months earlier, I had equipped my eleven-year-old truck with a homemade camper shell. I found it in local newspaper's classified ads and bought it for fifty bucks. The windowless unpainted steel shell was completely rusted leaving it masked in a dirty red-brown color. It was made for a short bed compact pickup, just not my style of truck.

I pounded hard with a small sledgehammer on top of the shell forcing it onto my truck bed until it sort of fit. Still, it did not seat tight on top of the bed walls leaving gaps all around. The setup looked like it came straight out of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. I could not have been prouder!

To the living area inside the camper, I added an acquired hand-me-down single-sized stained mattress and two low single-shelved plywood cabinets which I salvaged from my parents' old worn out tent trailer.

The cab didn't have a working heater. I installed a cheap Kraco eight-track tape deck and had three tapes, John Mayall, Steppenwolf, and Cream. Much to the disgust of my friends, I listened to the blues of John Mayall most of the time.

I took a two-week leave of absence from my part-time Longs' job. By the time my last work shift ended at nine-thirty Tuesday evening I was completely loaded with my inexpensive sleeping bag, a propane-fueled camping heater, a Coleman lantern, and a hard-plastic red ice chest filled with Coke, a loaf of bread, mayonnaise, cans tuna fish, and other finger-food treats.

I hit the road a little after ten o'clock that evening traveling east away from El Cajon. I drove the slow winding, up and down the narrow highway, through the mountains of San Diego's backcountry and eventually down the steep In Ko Pah grade into the desert.

I continued on the heat destroy asphalt for seventy miles through assorted small desert towns to the western edge of the Algodones Dunes.

This six-mile-wide sand dune field extended from the Mexican Border northwest forty-five miles through the California side of the Sonoran Desert. The towering mountains of sand depicted the famed African Sahara.

It was a clear starry, crisp winter night. I wore my standard uniform consisting of a white tee shirt, Levis 501's, white socks, and lightweight suede desert boots. It was after midnight, and I was getting cold.

I pulled into the all-too-familiar rest stop in the dunes and went to bed.

The sun woke me up early around six o'clock that morning. Cold from my poorly insulated sleeping bag, I climbed out of my icebox camper anxious to drive the remaining twenty miles to Yuma and get a piping hot cup of coffee. As I walked to the blue colored outhouse styled port-a-potty to urinate, I silently vowed to use my propane heater every night for the remainder of my trip.

I fired up my old truck and dropper the gear shifter into second. I stepped on the accelerator, and my right rear drive wheel spun in the soft fine desert sand. I switched to the granny-low first gear and tried again with no better results. Cursing to myself, I got out inspecting the situation.

I've been to this rest area before, and the weather-beaten old asphalt is always covered with a layer of sand from the frequent winds. In daylight, it's hard to find a safe place to park; in the middle of the night, it's all but impossible. I had inadvertently parked in the previous Cadillac's sand trap.

Retrieving my small puke-green army surplus folding shovel and a three-foot plank from behind the front bench seat I got to work. Both these items were standard equipment in my truck, as I frequently needed them for just such situations. I dug the sand out from in front of the afflicting wheel and shoved the plank as far under it as I could.

The truck easily drove forward. From experience, I keep it moving until I maneuvered onto the safety of the asphalt. I retrieved my equipment and headed for Yuma.

I drove across the old wooden border bridge spanning the Colorado River into Arizona and into the Border Patrol inspection station. When questioned by the officer, I lied stating I was an American citizen and immediately waved through without having to produce my green card or answer any further questions.

Yuma was a highway city. The main East-West thoroughfare was a city street continuum of the highway and ran five or six miles through the business district. Though I was on a sightseeing vacation, I had been there many times and didn't bother touring the historic Yuma Territorial Prison.

I pulled into an independent gas station with a Seven-Eleven convenience store located next door. After filling my gas tank with Ethel, I walked to the Seven-Eleven for the desperately needed caffeine and a package of Hostess Ding Dongs; two small chocolate-covered crème filled cakes. I liked breakfast.

Leaving Yuma, I picked up a man hitchhiking from the side of the road. This stretch of desert from here to Tucson was flat, straight and visually unappealing unless you like Saguaro Cactus and dusty green sagebrush. I looked forward to breaking up this mundane leg of the trip with some idle chat.

The first of only two points of interest was Dateland; a highway bus and public rest area featuring mostly date shakes and other date-fruit products in its small store and soda fountain. I disdained the small odd tasting fruit and drove past without stopping.

The other point of interest was the Space Age Lodge and Restaurant built in Gila Bend during the early sixty's space race. It featured a magnificent lighted flying saucer sign and an extra-large pseudo flying saucer on its roof. The highway passed by it and I slowed to admire it but again did not stop.

The underweight hitchhiker was a little dirty and looked hungry. I pulled over on a wide spot on the shoulder of the highway, being extra careful not to park in the sand, somewhere past Gila Bend and made us tuna and mayonnaise sandwiches on the tailgate of my truck. I opened the steel can of fish and added heaped spoonfuls of the white condiment before mixing. I learned this recipe the previous summer.

He was grateful and quickly devoured two of the soggy sandwiches and two Cokes.

My truck developed a familiar loud grinding noise just as we were arriving in Tucson. I quickly pulled into the first service station I came to. The homeless hitchhiker profusely thanked me for the ride and lunch. He bid me farewell, and he headed off to find a local hostel.

The on-duty mechanic analyzed my engine problem and concluded the noise was coming from a worn out main bearing holding my crankshaft and not a wheel bearing as I had thought.

I didn't have an extra two-hundred dollars in my budget for the repair and phoned my banker for a short-term loan. I promised my father I could afford to repay him as soon as I got home and went back to work. He wired me the money.

I spent a second cold night in my camper on the station's parking lot with my propane heater inches from my face. I was naïve of the dangers of propane fumes. It was predetermined destiny that my ill-fitting camper shell had so much airflow.

The next afternoon, my truck repaired, I was heading towards Las Cruces, New Mexico.

I picked up another hitchhiker for the continuing boring desert drive. He taught me how to flick my headlights when semi-trucks dragging large trailers were passing me, signaling that they had room to move back in my lane. The truck drivers always blinked thank-you back. The highway was plagued with semis, and it helps break up the boredom.

After dropping my guest off in Deming, New Mexico, I stopped a few times, to gas up, or to consume assorted finger foods, coupled with cold drinks from my ice chest or to pee along the roadside behind scattered cacti.

Las Cruces' night-lights sparkled in the clear air as I drove down the grade into the small city late that evening. The day's mundane drive was not over as I continued driving around the hodgepodge of city and country roads for more than an hour looking for a suitable place to spend the night. At the end of a long desolate dirt road on the east side of town, I pulled over and went to bed. I spent another restless cold night snuggling my heater.

Early the next morning, again after digging myself out of the sand, I desperately wanted out of the desert. I located a rural highway leading north-northeast and continued.

After visiting White Sands National Monument late that morning, I turned east and drove through the traffic-free beautiful mountains and valleys leading to Roswell, New Mexico.

Roswell is famous for its unconfirmed nineteen-forties extraterrestrial spaceship crash-landing, complete with alien occupants. Everything in town centered on this event. There are flying saucer, alien, and spaceship icons everywhere. I did not believe a word of their Fantasyland advertising.

For blocks in the old downtown section, the streets lined with bookstores and private storefront museums capitalizing on the occurrence. I spent hours perusing the tourist trap area; still unconvinced.

Late in the afternoon I made the two hour trip south in the Guadeloupe Mountains to Carlsbad Caverns and spent another cold night hugging my heater in the cavern's parking lot.

I browsed the gift shop, drinking coffee, for a half-hour the following morning waiting for the caverns to open. There were very few mid-winter visitors, and the caverns were void except for two other couples.

At eight-thirty, I followed the rock-bordered dirt path to the cave's entrance. I climbed down the cavern's vertical natural opening leading to the Main Corridor. The steep, sometimes narrow, winding Main Corridor descended one and a quarter miles to more than seven-hundred and fifty-feet into the earth. It's a constant chilly fifty-six degrees Fahrenheit.

The path leads you through bat fill rooms dripping with water. Stalactites and stalagmites protruded up and down everywhere. After more than three hours sauntering alone through the halls, I encountered the Big Room containing a snack bar, restrooms, and more importantly, elevators; saving me from the long, tedious return hike.

I left the area shortly after noon and kept traveling south stopping about two and a half hours later in the small desert town of Pecos, Texas. I could not believe I was back in the desert.

The only interesting landmark in the tiny town was an old cemetery. I strolled through the grounds and located the gravesite of Clay Allison, "The Gentleman Gunfighter." The old weathered and cracked wooded headstone decried, "He never shot a man who didn't deserve to die." I thought about this and wondered what the deserving standards were between living and dying by Allison's gun.

Leaving Pecos, I headed east on a rural highway to what would be the end of my Maris Gras run.

After the annihilation of my truck's engine, two miles from Monahans, Texas, on the side of the divided highway, I opened the hood. I used a flashlight and sought out the damage. A piston protruded through the top left engine head.

I hadn't seen another car, traveling in my direction, since getting on the highway and only a few passing me in the opposite direction. Rather than walking in the dark for two miles into town, I decided to spend the night where I was and figure out my next move in the morning light. In disgust I slammed the truck's hood and when to bed.

I dozed off and on throughout the cold night, again with my arms wrapped around the propane heater. Every so often large trucks swished by me and rattled my camper shell.

It was seven o'clock Saturday morning, and I had just finished a full examination of the damage. All my engine oil had drained out creating a long stained and wet path from the incident site to my final resting spot. I was eternally grateful no semi had slid in my oil slick and crashed into my truck in a fiery ball.

I discovered beside having a piston sticking through the top of my motor; there was a second piston lodged through the bottom. The engine was unsalvageable.

I was standing behind my open hood, positive the Tucson mechanic had botched my crankshaft-bearing job when a white Cadillac pulled over. It quickly stopped in a cloud of sand a few hundred yards ahead of me.

The driver put his caddy in reverse and slammed on the gas. I never saw anyone drive in reverse at such a high speed and was terrified he wouldn't be able to stop on the loose shoulder before completely finishing off my truck and me. I stood there frozen in disbelief!

It was after he actually made the stop that I noticed his oversized set of steer horns attached to the top front of the long hood. I stared at them mystified because I thought Long-Horn Steer

adornments were only for movies. I glanced around for the *Candid Camera* crew. Apparently, this was Texas and movies reflect reality.

Ralph introduced himself and was vigorously shaking my hand for an unusually prolonged period. I thought to myself, "He has to be a salesman or a preacher." He stated he had a mechanic friend in town who owned a repair shop.

Finally releasing his grip on my hand, he quickly pulled a rope from his car trunk and offered to tow me into Monahans. I could not believe his willingness to tow me with his Cadillac. Having no other current options, I agreed to the much-needed help.

We tied the vehicles together and proceeded to drive into town. He led in his Caddy, and I followed, controlling my trunk's steering and braking at a mere six-foot rope length behind him. To my relief, the rescue ride turned out a lot slower than I was worried about after witnessing his previous lead foot.

After safely reaching the station and introductions made, his mechanic friend let me park my truck in the unpaved area beside his shop. We untied the vehicles and hand pushed my pickup into the allocated space.

Ralph told me he was the preacher at a local church and invited me to the following morning's Sunday worship service.

I was using the trip as a personal crusade to find direction in my life and spent time every night on the road reading the Bible under the light of my Coleman lantern before falling asleep. I struggled with Christianity for the last five years and for a brief period; I thought I would like to become a pastor. By the time I left Monahans, I had finished reading the New Testament and a large portion of the old.

Grateful for Ralph's help and unable to fabricate other plans, besides feeling duty-bound; I told him I would see him in the morning.

Ralph met me at the door of his Episcopal Church's Sunday service. I believe he was praying I would show up. What else did I have to do in a one-horse town on a Sunday?

He asked me, "Do you know what an altar call is?"

I responded, "Yes," and explained I participated in one before.

Dennis and I attended a special showing of the Christian movie *For Pete's Sake* at our local theater a year earlier and we had both gone forward at the altar call. Ralph told me that he was planning to end his morning sermon with one. I responded with, "I better find a seat" and entered the church. He either hadn't heard me or felt my previous conversion hadn't counted.

I was thankful the front pews were packed and found a seat in a sparsely filled pew at the back of the worship hall. All Bible-belt towns' churches are full on any given Sunday. I sat there looking over the congregation happily talking and chuckling amongst themselves. I concluded the church was filled with regular saved devotees and the altar call was designed solely for my benefit. My suspicions were confirmed when he called for first-time visitors to stand. I was the only one stared at.

When I hadn't responded to his altar call, Ralph must have thought I needed more persuasion and set me up with Sunday dinner at his second in command's home.

I rode with the family to their lovely middle-class home directly after the service. They were nice people; mother, father, and two young preteens; a girl and her younger brother.

While waiting for dinner to cook and be served the father and I sat on the living room couch. He brought up the subject of rock 'n roll music. He wasn't a fan and didn't think I should be either though he never said it outright. He expected me to interpret the lyrics to Three Dog Night's popular hit *Never Been to Spain* and then other songs they had written or performed. His

list also included a few Beatle's songs. I uncomfortably struggled to try to appease him and assign Christian values to all the words. Dinner could not be, served, soon enough.

The Texas pot roast and vegetables were delicious. I craved a decent meal.

After dinner and dishes finished, I anxiously looked for an exit opportunity. I wanted quiet relief alone at my truck. The father announced, "We only have five minutes to get to the Sunday night service." The trap sprung, and I was the unsuspecting prey.

The church was considerably less crowded, and I'll be damned if there wasn't another altar call. No one participated.

As I was escaping towards the door, Ralph stopped me and mentioned that if I was still in town Wednesday evening, there was a bible study.

I walked back to my truck.

The winter nights in West Texas were freezing. Every morning I woke up with my camper shell covered in frost and water condensation dripping on me. All week long I hugged my propane heater and even burned my nose and forehead a couple of times. I shivered myself to sleep every night.

I woke up Monday morning knowing I had to take care of business. First, I talked to the mechanic about my options. After he explained the estimated costs for a used engine, if he could even find one, and the unacceptable period to install it, I decided I would have to sell my truck for parts or call a junkyard to see if I could get anything for it. He said he would make a couple of calls for me to see if anyone was interested.

Ralph's friend was on the phone when a customer walked in. While waiting for the mechanic, the new arrival and I got to talking. He owned the local milk delivery business, and upon hearing, my predicament immediately offered me a job delivering bottled milk. I declined to explain that I was obligated to return to my current position in San Diego. I refrained from telling the man I wasn't enthralled with the white Good Humor uniform he was wearing. I had an image to uphold.

Anxious to get started, I couldn't wait for the mechanic to get off the phone. I left walking on the dirt path beside the roadway to downtown Monahans. The business region consisted of one short block of conjoined shops on the south side of the street and a few separated businesses on the opposite side. I won't even call it a town.

I entered every shop and explained my situation and the condition of my "for sale" truck. This was thirty years before networking became vogue.

I was in the small market when a customer overheard me and said he was interested and wanted to stop by and take-a-look. We arranged a time for that afternoon.

Another overhearing customer approached me and suggested I go with him and work in the oil fields scattered around the surrounding desert. Again, I declined. I was a big city boy, and Monahans could not have been further from it.

I felt less pressured due to my upcoming appointment and knew I would close my sale one way or another.

I returned to the small jewelry store that was going out of business and heavily discounting their inventory. I purchased a thirteen-dollar pearl necklace for my girlfriend; patiently waiting for me back home.

I return to the service station that afternoon, and the mechanic called me over saying he had found a potential buyer for my truck. I spent the next two days conducting a bidding war between the two interested parties and settled on a one-hundred-ten dollar final price. I sold my old piece of junk!

The winning bidder agreed I could keep my father's two wooden cabinet units and he would pick up the truck Thursday morning.

With no other pressings engagements, I attended Wednesday's evening Bible study. I shouldn't have been shocked at the last ditch effort for my conversion. Once again I passed on Ralph's final altar call.

Thursday morning I stuffed all my personal belongings into the two plywood box units and plastic ice chest. I struggled to carry the first heavy cabinet topped with the ice chest a short distance towards town and then followed up by moving the second heavy unit a little further past the first. I used this leapfrog method, with a needed rest between each carry. The five-block trudge to the bus station took two hours.

I had a choice to make. I could get a ticket to New Orleans or back to my waiting job in San Diego. I bought a ticket home. There weren't any express buses, and I purchased a regular ticket. This meant stopping at every station between Monahans and San Diego including dreaded Dateland.

I sat on top of my cabinets on the sidewalk for eight hours until the bus's departure at six o'clock late that afternoon.

The nine hundred and fifty-mile bus trip took twenty-five hours. I hate buses! I disembarked at the El Cajon Greyhound station at seven o'clock Friday evening on February 18.

We lived a short distance from the El Cajon depot and not wanting to relive my leapfrog ordeal; I phoned my father. He picked his cabinets and me up and drove home.

It was my birthday, and I was excited to be home in time to celebrate with my girlfriend. I borrowed my mother's older Chrysler New Yorker with a push-button transmission and drove to my girlfriend's house. I stuffed my pearl surprise into the glove box.

I knocked on her front door. Her parents and I never had the best relationship and as soon as her Mother opened the door and before I could sputter a word, she glared at me and stated, "She's out for the evening." SLAM!

I drove all over El Cajon checking places her girlfriends, and she usually hung out to no avail and finally ended my search sitting across the street from her house for two hours. Around eleven o'clock she and a friend of mine pulled into her driveway ending their date.

They hadn't expected me back or recognized my mother's car. I drove home unnoticed and went to bed. I had to be at work at eight o'clock the next morning.

Vancouver Street Life

SUMMER 1965

When a boy is twelve years old there is only, one thought to consume his mind! My father had not given me the proverbial birds and bees lecture yet. Actually, he never did and hadn't needed to.

We were on summer vacation. My family stopped at a hotel in the heart of downtown Vancouver, Canada. My dad's parents traveled to the city from Northern British Columbia and anticipated our visit.

We were heading to Port Alberni in the center of Vancouver Island. Following our move to the San Diego, this is our first visit back.

Vancouver was a large old city. The streets were narrow and crowded. Parking is a nightmare. The city is the leading Canadian West Coast seaport and overcrowded with a variety of people, from roughnecks to tourists. It was filled with immigrants from all over the world, most seemed to be standing around the streets, chatting in their native languages.

It was still a harsh wild-west environment.

My grandparents stayed in an ancient grand hotel in the older downtown section. Arriving at their building, we took an elevator to the seventh floor and located their room at the end of the hall.

The old hotel appeared to have the original burgundy and gold flowered wall-to-wall carpeting. The center contained well-worn footpaths. In addition, the carpet held numerous faded stains and musky smells that refused to mask, by their attempt to perfume over them. The light green patterned wallpapered walls complimented the hallway's post-war decorum. Spaced dreary-yellow ceiling lamps dimly lit our way. Despite the hotel's appearance it was immaculately clean.

My parents and grandparents had a nice visit chatting away like clucking chickens. Thom, my younger brother, almost six and I sat quietly under the only double-hung window overlooking the street far below. Our reverence was not by our choice.

Boredom set in almost immediately. After an hour, watching the bustling street traffic heading to wherever they had to go; I could not take it any longer. I stood up and announced, "I going downstairs." I don't know if anyone heard me but no one objected, and I slipped out the door.

Once free, I ventured onto Robinson Street. It packed with cars and foot traffic. Its wide sidewalks mostly lined with old stores and hotels. There were many modern skyscrapers visible from the neighboring blocks. Construct sites dotted here and there. It appeared this three-block section under modernized with new buildings and reconstruction updating.

I moseyed down the block and leaned against a brick wall. The street chaos and noises were exciting. Yellow taxis were honking. Every few minutes a street trolley clamored along with its dual pole electrical connector reaching high over its roof and intersecting twin wire feeds. At

every junction, the overhead wires sparked wildly as the buses bounced along. All Vancouver's main city streets crisscrossed with a maze of feeder lines and plagued with snarling traffic buses.

I was a sponge, filling my mind with the hectic cityscape as fast as I could.

I hadn't been enjoying the surroundings for long when I noticed an overly intoxicated man staggering my way. Not wanting to stare, I continuously snuck intriguing glances at his progress. He could barely walk as he banged on and off the chipped and cracked stucco storefronts. I was stunned when he stopped face-to-face in front of me.

The drunk announced, "I'm going to piss on you!"

I could not believe my ears. I stood as straight and tall as a small boy could, "The Hell you are!" My feeble larger-than-life intimidation failed.

He responded, "Yep I'm going to pee right here," reaching for his fly.

Flabbergasted and without options I could only say, "Go ahead." and hurried to the opposite end of the brick wall.

He was true to his word. The smashed man swayed in place wetting the wall with the splattering sound of streaming urine. The street's foot traffic continued along their way without notice. I could not imagine anyone being oblivious to this man's lewd outdoor bathroom scene. It certainly couldn't be commonplace!

I was thankful when the inebriated man finished. He fumbled with his zipper for a while. I don't know if he ever got it squared away or not before returning in the direction from whence he came.

It was an easy decision for me not to return to my now wet spot at the other end of the wall and remain dry where I was. Soon again, I was hypnotized in the activity surrounding me.

Only a few minutes later, three beautiful women walked up the sidewalk. Each of their different solid colored satin skirts blew freely in the gentle breeze coming off the bay. Their breasts bounced up and down under their sheer pastel blouses. I was mesmerized in fantasy.

They were less than ten feet away when they noticed me and stopped. Almost on cue, the three hiked their skirts to their waists. They were more beautiful by the minute.

The middle one asked, "Do you want to buy some?"

I was too embarrassed to sneak a peek. I slowly shook my head and declined. Sadly, I had not a dime to my name.

The women let their skirts slip slowly down over their firm slender legs and continued past me. They hailed a taxi. Before the last one slid in the back seat, she turned back to me, "Are you sure?"

The only thing I was sure of was the pitiful state of my wallet!

Soon after the incident my parents emerged from the hotel and found me, "What are you doing here?"

"Just hanging around," I asked if I could come downstairs." It hadn't mattered if I asked or stated it; no one listened to the wants of a now fasting maturing young man.

My dad announced it was time to leave.

There was no doubt in my mind the small island town could compete with Vancouver. I suggested I met them at our car and begged for a couple more minutes on the street. I thought better of asking for a loan.

Road Trip

SUMMER 1972

I abruptly awoke by insufferable loud screeching of un-turning tires. Jumping to attention, I looked out the driver's side window. There was a full-sized car sliding sideways beside us down the freeway.

"Pull over I'm driving!" I screamed.

Mike and I left El Cajon at noon the previous day for a road trip to Humboldt State University. I had taken a prior semester hiatus from Grossmont College and needed to get back to my education. I thought a transfer to Humboldt State would fit the bill.

I told Mike I was going to Northern California for an informational gathering trip and he immediately informed me he was signing on.

Our first stop was at Universal Studios in Universal City; part of the Los Angeles metroplex. After a few hours, scouring the park for movie stars, we headed to Ventura for a Denny's meal; "Denny's is Always Open."

Later that evening we were playing car tag with a couple of cuties, and I followed the girls into Santa Barbara. We got the message when they started flipping us off and yelling obstinacies in our direction. I abandoned the pursuit.

On the way back to the highway, we saw a movie theater featuring *The Godfather* flick. It just released, and the show houses in San Diego circled with lines of people, standing for hours to see it. There wasn't a soul in front of this theater, and I pulled in. The movie was starting in less than five minutes, and the auditorium wasn't even half-full. It was a long movie and Mike, and I did not get back to our trip until one o'clock in the morning. We stretched our day, and it wasn't over yet.

As I was turning right, back onto the two-lane highway north, a man was standing on the side of the road next to a disabled car. I pulled over to offer help. He was as drunk as a skunk. We chatted for a few minutes. I could hardly understand his garbled speech. He asked where we were going. Mike responded, "San Francisco."

No sooner had the words parted Mike's lips than this intoxicated stranger slurred he was going with us. Shocked I asked about his car. He wasn't concerned. It might not have even been his.

He was defiant in the fact that he was joining us. I told him he needed a change of clothes for the trip. He said he only lived a block or two away and would be right back. He left, and so did we.

Many miles and hours later, I pulled into the Morro Bay campground. After a couple hours of sleep and a Denny's breakfast, Mike and I went to Hearst Castle in San Simeon and stayed there throughout the morning gasping at all the ancient wonders.

Hearst bought a quarter of all the art sold every year worldwide. He had warehouses full of unpacked treasures. William Randolph had so many stored pieces that he didn't know what he

owned. He scoured the earth looking for a particular Rodin sculpture only to find it years later buried deep in one of his warehouses.

His opulent castle, located high on a hill overlooking the massive Pacific, was nothing more than a colossal museum he called home.

Continuing up Highway 1 our next stop was the Winchester House of Mystery in San Jose. The home opened to public tours for years, and yet it was dilapidated and vandalized. At that time, the home was bare of any furnishing and wallboards were missing throughout the building. Our guide was well versed in Sarah Winchester's mythical life. Her tour turned out to offer exceptional, factual, and fraudulent, insight into Sarah's life and the raw mansion.

The widow of gun magnate William Winchester owned the Queen Anne Style Victorian Manor. She was terrified of demonic possession and sincerely believed her family cursed.

Sarah was anything but ordinary. Her life consisted of following fake advice received from mediums, soothsayers, and fortunetellers. She attended a séance with a Boston con artist in eighteen-eighty-one and was informed; she had to build continuously in repent for the sinful deaths caused by the Winchester rifle.

The Winchester widow complied, and carpenters started building her edifice; twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, until her death thirty-eight years later. I think the constant non-stop hammering must have significantly contributed to her unstableness.

The nineteen-o-six Great San Francisco Earthquake knocked her, over five hundred room, seven-story mansion down to four stories.

She continued remodeling and was the sole architect. This explains the stairways and doors to nowhere. It is an incredibly haunting place.

Mike was sleeping between stops. I hadn't received more than two hours sleep in the previous twenty-seven hours. I wasn't planning on letting him drive my brand new two-week-old Datsun 1200 but badly needed rejuvenation; I asked him to get us to Fisherman's Wharf.

It was late in the afternoon, and the freeway into San Francisco packed with rush hour traffic. I had been asleep for only a few minutes when the sliding vehicle jolted awake, and I demanded to take back the wheel.

Mike voluminously complained. It hadn't been his fault. Mike was an excellent driver, and I hadn't doubted him though I still insisted he relinquishes control. Mike pulled off the next off-ramp, and I slid into the driver's seat.

After perusing the wharf and eating a fresh cracked-crab dinner, we left the city and continued north.

Hours later in the middle of the giant Redwood forests we passed an isolated bar. They had a long vertical-board redwood fence covered with roadside salvaged hubcaps. My girlfriend's outdated Pontiac Catalina was missing a front hubcap. I turned around.

Though we were both underage, we went into the bar, and each had a beer.

On the way back to the car, I searched the fence for a matching disk. Thinking I had found it, I ripped a pitted chrome hubcap from its home and headed for my car. I thought the display was a public service program where original owners could retrieve their missing car part. Mike shouldn't have been shocked.

A few miles up the dark, early morning, empty Redwood Highway a California Highway Patrol car passed us driving in the opposite direction. He immediately spun a U-turn and followed us for a couple of miles. I think he was bored with nothing better to do than tail the only car on the road. Mike thought otherwise.

As we rounded a sharp curve, Mike Frisbeed my hubcap out the window into the bush.

I screamed, "What are you doing?" I risked limbs and death for that hubcap.

He informed me he was getting rid of the evidence. It seems he thought we were about to be busted for stealing. My girlfriend was going to be disappointed.

The police officer, satisfied with my driving, made another U-turn and returned heading south without ever stopping us.

We pulled into Denny's around two-thirty that morning. It was graduation night in Eureka. Every high school student in town packed the standing-room-only restaurant. We wouldn't be seated for hours and weren't willing to wait.

As we walked back across their parking lot three-fire trucks including a large hook and ladder screamed up the street past us; lights flashing; sirens blaring. I looked at Mike, and he looked at me. "Let's go!"

I swiftly exited the parking lot. Unfortunately, I cut off a trailing squad car. I cut across to the inside lane and made an immediate hard left. Fortunately, the officer had a more pressing commitment. Apparently not!

With no other place to go, we spent a restless night trying to sleep in my small car on the local docks.

The next morning, on our way out of town, I swung by the courthouse and paid the fifty-dollar failure-to-yield-right-away ticket.

Mike and I headed northward, continuing up Highway 1 the eight miles to Arcata; home of Humboldt State.

Just outside Arcata, there was a girl with a large bentwood rocking chair hitchhiking. Never one to pass up an opportunity to help a young woman in distress, I slammed on the brakes.

As we spent fifteen minutes or so trying to squeeze the chair into the back seat of my sub-compact, Mike on one side of the car pulling and me pushing from the other. She stated, "It's not going to fit."

"Yes, it will."

"No, I don't think so."

"Sure it will."

"I'll wait for a truck."

"The road's deserted. It could be hours."

"Not a problem," She responded

"I almost got it," I lied.

"No, you don't."

Eventually, we squeezed the oversized chair into my tiny back seat. She shoehorned in next to it.

I drove a mile up the road before repeating the process in reverse.

Shortly after that, I pulled onto the university grounds and retrieved one of their catalogs from the bookstore. My objective was complete.

Mike and I decided to see what was further up the still forest-lined highway and continue north.

For more than an hour, we passed numerous cars displaying "Trees of Mystery" bumper stickers. I rounded a corner and there it was! I pulled into the tourist trap.

The hook was a huge, at least thirty foot tall, painted sheet-metal Paul Bunyan statue in their dirt parking area. Paul's left hand was holding an ax and his right hand in an upright waving position. A sheet-metal Babe, the Blue Ox, situated beside him.

As we walked toward the gift shop, Paul's waving hand started to rock back and forth.
"Good morning boys."

Clunk! Clunk! Clunk!

"Welcome to Trees of Mystery."

Clunk! Clunk! Clunk!

"Please proceed forward to our gift shop."

Clunk! Clunk! Clunk!

I quickly glanced around the dusty lot hoping no one had witnessed this embarrassing display. After all, we were not boys but men of nineteen.

Mike and I each paid an outrageous entrance fee to wander around a short dirt path looking at ocean wind-swept bent trees.

Returning to my car, I noticed someone had wired the obnoxious green and yellow cardboard plaque, advertising "Trees" to my front bumper. Pissed, I pulled a pair of dikes from my trunk toolbox, promptly cut it off, and discarded it into the dirt. I certainly was not prepared to advertise this rip-off.

It was time for Mike to take a crack at driving again. He took us back to Arcata and over the mountains on Highway 299 east to Redding. This backwoods-twisting highway always wrought with hillside slides and cleanup construction. I was exhausted but kept waking up at the various flagmen stops.

Finally, almost off the mountain, we stopped at the last detour. I briefly peered out over Whiskeytown Lake before sliding back into slumber. I was sorry I missed this picturesque drive. However, my dreams had also been charming.

After our Redding Denny's dinner, I drove to Sacramento. Mike slept.

Night had fallen by the time we walked California's beautifully lit Capitol grounds. Suddenly a voice came over a loudspeaker, "Get off the Capitol grounds NOW!"

I looked around trying to see where God was calling. Mike and I quickly retreated to my vehicle, and I drove back to the southbound freeway. Mike went back to sleep.

I woke Mike up, hours later, in Bakersfield and suggested our next stop should be Palm Springs. He stated, "No way!" and promptly returned to dreamland.

The last thing I remember was flying down the Grapevine into Los Angeles with the radio blaring obnoxious country music on the only station I received. All the car windows were down letting the cold early morning air to blast into my cockpit. I was trying to stay alert or at least awake. From Los Angeles to El Cajon, I was on autopilot.

I pulled into Mike's driveway late that morning, three days and twenty-five hundred miles later.

Get Out to Jail Free

SUMMER 1975

The desert heat was scorching. We were working sixty to ninety hours a week. The days were long and the nights short.

After working until ten o'clock one evening, five of us managers decided to relax and have a beer at a local bar. Gary wisely opted out. It was only the second time I had gone to a bar since turning twenty-one a year earlier.

My first time was the afternoon I graduated from Grossmont College. Mike was driving and suggested we stop at the Navajo Inn for a beer. Unbeknownst to me, Mike prolonged taking me home so my parents and friends could get to my duplex before we arrived for my surprise party. My parents presented me with a twelve-gauge Winchester shotgun for my graduation gift.

At the El Centro bar, I quickly downed two beers. I turned to Mark, "Let's go. I'm exhausted." I was driving, and Mark didn't have a choice. We got into my car and hit the divided highway north to Brawley. Four miles up the road, I was lighting my pipe and swerved slightly. We were a mile out of the small town of Imperial.

I hadn't seen the highway patrol car until he turned on his flashing red lights and pulled me over. The patrol officer and his partner, the first female highway patrol officer in California, instructed me to exit my vehicle and proceed to the shoulder of the road. It was a soft sand shoulder similar to all desert road shoulders.

The lead officer asked me what I had been drinking. I answered, "I've had a couple of beers." Police agencies teach their personal that all criminals lie and whatever they're told to multiply by four. I learned this from the patrolman years later after we became good friends and socialize together frequently.

They conducted a field sobriety test. I thought I had passed. So did my future friend. The women thought otherwise and insisted on taking me to jail. She had something to prove.

The officers asked Mark what he wanted to do. They offered to call him a cab or drop him off at the bus depot. Mark opted for the bus.

Mark was an obnoxious, sarcastic individual. We got along fabulously.

He relayed his story to me the next afternoon. Mark knew he had twenty dollars. But at the bus station, he checked his wallet and pants pockets and couldn't find the bill. He went to the counter and asked if he could take the bus to Brawley and pay when he got there. Of course, they refused him.

Not knowing what to do, he decided to look for a taxi outside. As Mark was walking across the empty depot, he arbitrarily stuck his hand in his coat pocket. Sure enough, he found the missing twenty-dollar bill.

He marched back to the counter and slammed down the bill, "Give me two of those God Damn tickets!" They obliged, took his money, and printed out two tickets. He immediately asked where to board the bus. They explained only two coaches a day go Brawley and the next one left at seven-thirty in the morning.

Mark repeated the slam down with the tickets, "Give me my damn money back! I have to back in El Centro by seven." He found a cab and went home.

In the meantime, after a breathalyzer test, I was booked into the county jail. I passed on my one allotted phone call. I had no one to call. My wife was staying with her parents in El Cajon. She spent most of our first three desert-living months there.

They escorted me to a cell. I was alone and beyond tired. I instantly fell asleep and slept soundly through the night.

A guard aroused me at six o'clock the following morning. I went to the mess hall and ate breakfast with the rest of the criminals.

After my meal, they took me to a small office staffed by another officer. A man walked down the hall past the open door. The officer asked me, "Have you talked to him yet?"

I replied, "No. Who is he?"

He told me he was the bail bondsman. "If you haven't talked to him how do you plan on getting out of here?"

Gleefully I answered, "I staying." Mark was a good mentor.

At that moment, a commander entered the office. He picked up my file and looked it over, "Get him out of here!"

I signed the appropriate forms and released. Before I left, I demanded, "Who's giving me a ride to my car?"

"Nobody. Now get out of here!"

"Protect and Serve? Where's my service?"

The officer stood in an intimidating stance and repeated, "GET OUT OF HERE!"

It was after eight and already hot. I walked miles to my car and drove home. After a shower and clean clothes, I went to work.

Later that morning I called my new friend, Mayor Alex. "Good morning Alex."

"Good morning. What can I do for you?"

That was the right question, "I have a problem... "

The mayor cut me off, "Was it a city cop or a highway patrol?"

How did he know what I wanted? I guess he has many friends. I told him, "It was the highway patrol."

He went on to say, "That's too bad. If it had of been a city officer it wouldn't have been a problem."

After a few seconds of silence, "Let me know what day you're scheduled for court, and I'll talk with the judge and see what I can do."

I gave him the information and thanked him.

Court day arrived. First called were all the drunks. We formed a line across the courtroom in front of the bench. I was shocked there must have been twelve or more. I was last in line at the far left end.

This court proceeding was a preliminary hearing, and no lawyers were present. The judge started at the right end, "How do you plead?" "Not guilty."

He proceeded down the line with the same question. Everyone pleaded the same. They needed to retain attorneys for their trials. It seems I was the only first-timer.

Finally, the judge arrived at me. The fix was in. "How do you plead?"

I was the only defendant wearing a coat and tie, and I confidently stated, "Guilty!"

The shocked judge looked up from his papers, "What did you say?"

I had not been coached on what to say. Maybe I had blown it. I mumbled softly, “Guilty... I think.”

The judge retorted, “Do you mean you want a trial right now?”

This was getting confusing. Where is good buddy Alex? I responded, “Yes?”

“OK.” The judge started reading my file.

He finally looked up, “Why did they give you the breathalyzer test three times?”

“Because I wasn’t drunk?” I eked out.

He excused himself from the bench, “I’m going to call the jail. I’ll be right back.”

Later I found out his dilemma; it is illegal to give any suspect the test more than twice.

The judge came back and fined me \$195.00. He told me to go to the clerk’s window in the hall and make arrangements; I could pay in full or make payments for up to three months.

“Wait a minute! If they illegally arrested me and performed illegal tests, why am I getting fined and not just found innocent?” I thought but refrained from voicing. Quickly I decided not to press my case. It was the right decision.

I paid my fine at the window. My case closed and I left. My insurance company never notified.

Without delay, I called Alex to thank him. He didn’t have time to ask me what had happened but starting right in apologizing to me.

Apparently, the judge he talked with was called out of town on a particular case, and Alex forgot to notify me. He probably never spoke to any judge.

I had been standing “balls out” in front of a stranger.

First Funeral

SPRING 1976

“No, No he’s not dead! Go back and try again!”

“I’m sorry he’s gone. We’ve done everything we could, and there’s nothing more we can do.”

I collapsed into my wife’s arms. We both stood as one with tears streaming down our faces. Our clothes soaking.

Keith, my first child, was born and died at Grossmont Hospital.

We were still living in El Centro. After working Saturday morning my family of four; my wife, almost three-year-old, Keith, his newborn younger brother and I made the two-hour drive to her parents’ home in El Cajon. It was Easter weekend, and we were planning to spend the night with them and celebrate Easter Sunday the following day.

They lived in a new upscale home my father-in-law built on the low eastern edge of Mt. Helix, one of San Diego’s most affluent communities, filled with gated mansions and large, expensive properties.

The plans for Sunday included getting up early, and after Keith found his hidden Easter basket, we were going to attend a sunrise in an outdoor amphitheater atop Mt. Helix. The theater sits in the shadow of a huge white cross; visible throughout East County It has a three-hundred-sixty-degree view of San Diego and the surrounding communities. This beautiful location hosted a yearly Easter sunrise service for as long as I can remember.

Following the services, we planned to go to a brunch buffet at the fashionable Tom Ham’s Lighthouse restaurant on Harbor Island overlooking the San Diego Bay.

In the afternoon, we were going to hide eggs for Keith’s Easter hunting followed by a backyard barbeque and then return to our home on Sunday evening.

The exciting Easter celebration never happened. Keith drowned Saturday afternoon.

After arriving, we were preparing for the next day’s activities. My wife and her mother were puttering around the kitchen, and her father took Keith with him to sweep and clean the back patio. They told me there was nothing I could help with. I decided to watch TV in the back room. I sat in a sizeable over-stuffed recliner. No shows caught my attention, and I was snoozing within minutes.

I snapped from a deep sleep at loud, hideous shrieking! Jumping to attention, I bolted to the dining area. Keith’s grandfather was standing in the open sliding glass patio doorframe holding my infant son. He looked terrified and distraught standing there with Keith’s pure white, limp body cradled in his arms.

“Call 911! Start CPR!” his grandmother was screaming. My father-in-law laid my boy on the floor and started pounding his chest. I ran to the phone and dialed. I was trying to explain our location to the operator. I wasn’t sure if their new partially complete neighborhood was in El Cajon or La Mesa and it seemed to take an ungodly amount of critical time it for the operator to understand where we were.

I galloped the block to the corner as fast as I had ever run before. It was an eternity waiting to flag down the fire rescue vehicle and the following ambulance so I could guide them to my beautiful baby boy. Standing there, with tears streaming down my face, I could only think, "Keith...Keith... my perfect baby Keith! What kind of father was I sleeping and not watching over your every move? I should have known better than that!"

Finally, I heard the blazing sirens coming over the top of the hill and started frantically waving, afraid they might miss me and drive by. They saw me. By the time, the two-vehicle caravan turned onto the street I was already halfway down the block distraughtly running back to where my baby's lifeless body lay.

Immediately they went to work. Two black bag-carrying paramedics ran inside while two more unloaded a gurney. They worked on him only a couple of minutes before knowing they had to get him to a hospital as fast as they could.

They threw his wilted form onto the gurney and headed for the ambulance. As they rounded the corner leading to the front door, Keith's small frame slipped off and fell to the floor. Immediately an emergency worker scooped him up and ran on while the others pushed the empty gurney behind.

The emergency team worked at lightning speed loading the gurney and leaping inside the vehicle. The man holding my son handed him up to one of the waiting men. They held Keith in place on the stretcher, slammed the doors shut and took off like a rocket, again with earsplitting sirens and flashing lights.

Not knowing where the ambulance was heading, my wife, and I sprinted to our car. I ran the stop sign at the end of the street desperately trying to catch them. I barely saw the top of the ambulance over the crest of the hill make the left hand turn and instantly knew they were going to Grossmont Hospital.

We arrived seconds after them and ran through the emergency room urgently searching for our son. A nurse led us to a small area just outside a private emergency treatment room. My in-laws showed up with our newborn minutes later.

I went into a small adjacent office and phoned my parents. I told them there had been an accident and Keith was dying. Also, that we were at Grossmont and the doctors were saving him.

Fifteen minutes later, they entered our waiting area. My mother, a career RN, came over to me and asked what was going on. I told her the doctors were still working on him. My mother looked me straight in the eye and emotionlessly stated, "You know he's dead. It's been too long."

With tears welling in my eyes, I blurted out, "No he's not, they're saving him!"

Minutes later a doctor emerged and told us he was gone.

Solemnly everybody walked to their vehicles and went back to their respective homes except my wife, baby Wayne and I. We went for a long, disheartening drive.

While we were driving aimlessly, I asked my wife what had happened. She explained it to me. When Keith's grandfather was pouring cement for the patio, he had heard about a new doggy duty system and cemented a stainless steel bucket into the corner of the courtyard. He would hose their dog's droppings into it. He never finished the installation; adding a secure lid.

He had been sweeping and not paying attention to his grandson son. When he went to look for Keith, he found him lying face down in the fetus-filled sludge at the bottom of the bucket.

We returned to my in-laws hours later and spent a tearful sleepless night.

On Easter Sunday, we had to go home to pick up an outfit for Keith to be buried in. I was too distraught to make the four-hour drive there and back. I phoned my father asked if he would

fly me to El Centro. Of course, he agreed. He rented a four-seat Cesena, so my wife could come along.

I called my boss and told him what had happened and asked him if he could pick us up at the local airport in Imperial and drive us to our mobile home ten miles away and then return us. He instantly agreed.

Al was waiting for us as we landed forty-five minutes later. He grabbed and hugged me hard for a long time.

After we flew back to El Cajon, my wife and I went to the Lakeside Funeral Home. I chose this mortuary because the caretakers were friends of my grandparents and I had been to their apartment above the first-floor mortuary.

We picked out a small white coffin and arranged for a Tuesday funeral.

My wife and I went back to my in-laws and made tearful call after tearful call notifying relatives and friends.

Monday morning we went to the El Cajon Cemetery and purchased a plot. We spent that afternoon with Keith at the funeral home. He looked so mature lying silently within his tiny coffin dressed in his best outfit. We also added some of his favorite toys and keepsakes beside him. I took off the cheap wedding band that I had purchased in Las Vegas and worn since my wedding day. I slipped it over Keith's thumb.

After another desperate sleepless night and I knew, we could never put this behind us.

When we arrived at the mortuary Tuesday, it was packed, and quite a few attendees stood throughout the service. After the mortuary, the procession went to the cemetery for a graveside service. At the close of this service, my wife and I laid a single red rose on top of his coffin and said goodbye to our son.

I was so out of my mind with grief I never heard a word of either service. It was the first funeral I had ever attended.

My mother and father invited everyone to their house for an after service gathering.

We stayed only as long as we emotionally could before our family of three drove the two hours home.

Do You Want a Woman

SPRING 1979

“Do you want a woman?” the lawyer asked.

“Yes. Get me a woman.” I responded.

I was sitting in the bar at the Walnut Creek’s, California, Marriot Hotel with our company attorney and company accountant. We were bar hopping for hours, and the three of us were too drunk to function normally. The last stop’s only redeeming feature; I was staying at this hotel and didn’t have to drive. I was only required to make it upstairs to my room. Thank God for elevators!

Another hour and many drinks later Brian asked again, “Do you want a woman?”

“Yes. Get me a woman.” I repeated.

“I’m going to get you a woman.” Brian staggered across the early morning nearly empty barroom and out the door. We didn’t see him again until at the following morning. Actually, our meeting was only a few hours later.

John, the accountant, and I had another drink before he decided to report home. Luckily, I found my room numbered key in my coat pocket and swayed upstairs.

I attended the new assistant manager’s meeting at Longs Drugs Stores General Offices for the past two days. This morning was our final meeting before I flew back to Southern California.

All forty-something newly promoted assistants, from throughout our retail chain, attended. En masse, we showed up for dinner with our company president, a couple of vice-presidents, the company attorney and the company accountant earlier that evening. The banquet broke up shortly before nine o’clock after which, I continued drinking with the two upper management professionals.

These two men conducted most of the meetings previous two days and our last get together wasn’t planned any different. We congregated in the assigned headquarter educational room just before the nine o’clock start time.

I was hung-over and already thrown up my previous evening’s dinner and libations numerous times. Still, I made the meeting on time; showered, shaved and dressed in a clean pressed suit. I looked considerably better than I felt. I was confident I could get through the next couple of hours if I did not have to speak, eat, or move.

I entered the room and grabbed a black coffee. Locating an empty inner-middle row chair a couple of rows back from the front stage area, I plopped down between two unsuspecting assistants.

I previously learned, never to sit in an aisle seat at any meeting. If you fell asleep or passed out, you would crash into the walkway. To save yourself from being publically chastised and humiliated you desired to sit deep within a row where persons on either side of you would bump you back up as needed.

Our group sat patiently as the clock slowly ticked minute by excruciating minute; nine-o-one...o-two...o-three...before finally hitting nine-thirty; my expected magic starting time

uneventfully passed. The clock's hand continued to move slowly but steadily forward until nine-forty-eight.

Brian and John entered the room quietly through the back door and made their way to the front. They never removed their eye covering dark sunglasses. Neither one spoke. They stood swaying silently for minutes surveying the crowd. Everyone in our group, except me, wondered what was happening.

Finally, John eked out a couple of sentences, "This is more or less a question and answer session. We've already covered everything. You've already asked all the questions, and we don't have any more answers. Catch your planes and go home." and they both walked out the nearby side exit. The meeting was over.

Inquisitive buzzing immediately escalated around the room. I gulped my last swallow of cold coffee and alone, headed for the door.

I waited in the parking lot for Hector. He was the new assistant in our Calexico store located fifteen miles south of El Centro. We traveled to the meetings together.

When Hector finally emerged from the building, I tossed him our rental car's keys, "You're driving." and wobbled across the parking lot.

On the drive from Walnut Creek to the Oakland Airport, he tried to drill me on what just occurred. I told him I had no idea and promptly went to sleep.

My newfound association with Brian and John became invaluable for the remaining years of my Longs employment both as an assistant and store manager. Whenever I needed any information, confidential or not, I picked up my Batphone and called their direct numbers.

All our stores took complete inventories every three months. Six weeks after inventory taking the district manager received each of their store's quarterly figures. They were required to meet individually with each store manager perusing the numbers.

These were not social visits and usually degrading. No store ever achieved an acceptable report. The manager, on the hot seat, forced to come up with reasonable explanations and improvement forecasts on the spot.

From the time of our shared indiscretions, I always phoned John four weeks after the close of each quarter and got my store's figures prematurely. Mark, my store manager and I were always well prepared ahead of time for our meetings. There are no secrets!

I also felt free to phone Brian for any legal advice I might need. He was always helpful.

One instance after the shoplifting laws changed I was in dire need of his counsel. Previously you refrained confronting a suspected shoplifter until after they exited the store with the merchandise. The new law stated if a person concealed any merchandise on their person and passed a checkout area you could retain the suspect within the store's perimeter and make a citizen's arrest.

I was still an assistant manager when I busted two young adult women stealing cosmetics. They were still on our sales floor when I detained them and called the police.

Once an officer takes custody of a suspect, he has determined the incident is a legal arrest and assumes all responsibility; relieving the store's liability.

One or both of these women filed a complaint. My district manager phoned me and chewed me out for making a bad bust claiming I hadn't known what I was doing and screwed up; putting our company at risk of a lawsuit.

I explained the situation to his deaf ears. He ended our conversation telling me to fix it or heads were going to roll. He specifically meant my head was going to roll!

I phoned Brian.

He told me I was completely right and he would call my district manager.
I never heard another word about the incident.

Wide Ride

WINTER 1982

My wife and I arrived home early morning, January first after partying away New Year's Eve with friends at a local El Centro nightclub. Our two young children were spending the night at the daycare center.

As soon as we entered our front door, my wife's attitude towards me turned one-hundred-eighty degrees. I thought we had a great evening of fun, dining, drinking, and dancing. Now home and alone I had expected our fun to continue.

She had expected me to stay out of her sight while she retired to our bedroom. We forgot to share our New Year's resolutions; I had no idea that hers did not include me.

On Friday morning, exactly, one week later, my wife phoned me at work and asked if I was free at noon to take her to lunch.

We went to a lovely, and one of the most expensive restaurants in the area. My wife and I talked and laughed through the extended lunch hour. I suggested we make an every Friday lunch date.

She was non-committal, "We'll see."

She seemed to be having a good time, but I hadn't really known her for at least a year. Almost every time I arrived home from work, she needed to see her Mary Kay mentor or conduct a home demonstration show. There were continuously Mary Kay events or disasters that required her attention away from home.

Later that Friday afternoon, I was sitting in my office talking with a department manager and a clerk. I glanced out my window overlooking the sales floor. A woman, marching with purpose, was coming down the front aisle inside the cashier's stations. She was looking up at my office. I assumed she was a salesperson desperately needing to secure a last minute purchase order.

This woman entered my office without knocking and interrupted my meeting, "Are you, David Whalen?"

"Yes," and she handed me a thick Kraft envelope, pivoted and left. I peeked in. I was served!

I instructed the two men sitting in front of me to shut the door on their way out.

Spreading out the envelope's contents across my desk, I started scouring them for understanding. First was her attorney's county filed and recorded divorce paperwork. I perused every word. I could not understand the listed reasons for the divorce. I certainly understood the words, but not how they applied to me.

The next issue was a judge signed a restraining order. It stated; I was not to go home or have any contact or be within five hundred feet of my children or wife.

This was a little extreme. We had known each other for more than twelve years and been married for almost a decade. We lived through three childbirths and a death together, and now she can't talk to me?

Evidently, she had been planning this for a while. At lunch together less than two hours ago, she could have said, "Oh, by the way..."

I immediately phoned her. I hadn't expected her to answer. I am sure she was at Mary Kay emergency.

I walked to my empty darkened home and packed some clothes before walking to a local hotel. It was a long sleepless night; tossing and turning, up and down, head spinning in confusion.

The next morning I went to work as usual. Longs Drugs still held to their old work hours. All their management and clerks were required to work a forty-four hour week, five full days plus a half-day. Saturdays were my half day, and I was off on Sundays.

At noon, I was called to our garden center. When I walked out my store's front doors, I saw my wife and children standing on the sidewalk waiting for me. I continued past them to the end of the walk stopping at the edge of the garden department's fence away from any foot traffic entering or leaving the store. I turned facing them and stood dazed in incoherent silence as they approached me. My wife started with the standard lies, "I'm sorry. I tried to tell you yesterday at lunch. You can see your children any time. There is nobody else."

I wasn't buying there wasn't anyone else? No matter how good or bad a marriage, it always endures until a third party enters the scene. By human nature, a man or women will not change their situation unless there is a perceived better offer.

She went on to say, "Come home until we find you an apartment."

Hadn't she read her own restraining order? We both knew it was bogus. Now she unwittingly admitted it offering to overlook my unchecked temper and threats of violence; broken bones, torture, rape, murder, or worse, with, "You're welcome home, honey."

I stayed in my house with all the amenities including sleeping in my bed for the next three weeks, before moving to a small one-bedroom apartment the first day of the following month. I rented it from an older US Custom's pilot with whom I regularly played racquetball.

My soon-to-be ex's lawyer's office was halfway between Longs and my apartment. I left work early one afternoon and stopped by, on my walk home.

Her representation I chatted for a few minutes. I explained we were going to have an easy uncontested divorce while simply spitting our assets fifty-fifty. If he wanted to write up the paperwork, I would sign, and it would be over.

Apparently, our plan would have cut his bill below his standard of living. He told me I needed to retain my own attorney and asked me to leave his office. I do not know how she found this legal thief.

After a few days, Mark and I went for a drink. The lounge was sandwiched in a continuous building between a Denny's restaurant and a Holiday Inn hotel. We consumed more alcohol than I was accustomed to.

Mark parked towards the Denny's end of the lot, and upon leaving the bar, he insisted on giving me a ride back to my apartment. Mark only lived two blocks down the street. I certainly hadn't wanted to be responsible for him driving me drunk across town and back, besides I needed some air.

We stood at his truck having a cigarette and talking. Finally, I said, "Good night."

He opened his vehicle's door, but before getting in, he looked around. In this parking spot, we could view part of the back lot. Mark said, "Hey, isn't that your car?"

Sure enough, there was my former vehicle parked against the cement wall in the back lot.

I went inside to the restroom before my hike home. When I returned Mark, was gone. I looked back at my car. My wife was not in the bar where we had been and looking through Denny's large front windows, I confirmed she wasn't there either. That left only one option even though she still maintained there was never another person.

I decided to confirm the vehicle identification by walking around the building past the parked car before taking the delivery alley out to the street. I always knew there had to be a man! I should have walked directly home.

I almost made it, but halfway to the alley past the doors my wife and her boyfriend emerged from the hotel. As soon as they spotted me, they ran for his, puke-green VW Vanagon. After watching their Buster Keaton performance, I kept walking and turned the corner into the alley.

It stunned me when they came around the corner behind me. I never understood why they hadn't just driven away through the main exit on the other side of the building. He stopped; his bumper inches of my legs. I pointed my index finger at his face and shook it from side to side. That should have ended of it, but my wife started screaming, "GO! GO! Run him over! Just drive!" He hit the gas!

The delivery alley was narrow, and I should have hugged the building wall and let him by. Instead, I instinctively jumped onto the bumper grabbing the Vanagon's front-mounted spare tire. We bounced down the alley face-to-face through his windshield. She was screaming. He was picking up speed. I was hanging on.

I desperately needed off. At the end of the building, he slowed to make the right hand turn into the street. That was my chance. I certainly had not wanted to go bouncing all over El Centro on the front of a Vanagon.

I dove for the grass boulevard between the blacktopped parking lot and the asphalt street. I missed the grass and landed hard in the street. I staggered to my feet as they disappeared into the night. My arms scraped and bleeding, my shredded pants absorbing oozing blood. The only thankful outcome was that my head missed the curb.

I staggered home. After cleaning up, I went to bed. Sleep needed before clothes shopping the next day.