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25,432 words

THE DEAD ARMADILLO

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## ***FOREWORD***

Why do people write, and why do people read what other people have written? In the case of a book or story for children as an example, about a mythical dragon discovering what true kindness and compassion is all about. It's entertainment, and at the same time, it includes that positive message/lesson or two that the author is trying to convey to his or her young readers.

With most subject matters, the writer is hoping to intrigue the reader enough that the reader just can't put the book down. Make the dragon purple, oh, and it loves marshmallows. Or maybe it's a story about "Ralph the Mouse" and his family's journey through a treacherous and seemingly impossible maze of circumstances, but it still contains a message/lesson for the children that the author purposely has included.

It's not a technical presentation like in a scientific or medical journal meant to inform other scientists or medical professionals of a better "mouse trap" or break-through discovery for a new cure for a disease. It's not a "How to change the spark-plugs on your Harley" manual or video, and it's not the directions on a bottle of some opiate drug that has been prescribed to make you more insane than you already are. With "The Dead Armadillo" story, it is purely meant to be entertaining, but it also includes a few subtle but positive messages once in a while for all my readers to grasp on to, to be enlightened, or not.

With a fictional mystery novel, the writer has laid out clues along the way, the little bread crumbs, hoping that the reader will be intrigued enough, curious that is, to continue reading because the book is so masterfully written. Written in such a way, that the reader is excited to try

to figure out the "Who did it" and why that person or persons did what they did. Or perhaps the reader solves and correctly answers some big question, no matter what that question may be.

As in the case of many successful writers like Stephen King and the "Horror" genre, as an example, the process of scaring the shit out of you, as you read one of his novels or watch one of his movies is in his style of writing, i.e., how he presents his story, and how he captures the reader's attention is what has made him a successful writer. It's entertainment, if you like horror stories. I don't claim to be another Stephen King or even another Ernest Hemingway. I just hope that my writing style IS entertaining enough to cause you to keep reading, and not put the book down.

With "The Dead Armadillo" I have attempted to write it in such a way that all the pieces of the puzzle come together over the course of the story, to entertain you, and also to convey a message or two along the way. I share with you, the bits and pieces of hardship and struggle, and the ability, that we all have, to overcome extremely negative circumstances that so many people face in life.

With this book, I share my life's difficulties similar in many respects to what we all face in one way or another. I have included messages of hope and persistence, forgiveness, and compassion, which ultimately transformed my life, and I sincerely believe it will transform your life in a positive way as well.

Ultimately of course, I want my readers to be entertained by my story. It will be wonderful if they also "get" the messages of forgiveness, persistence, hope, and what true success in life really is all about.

*Chapter One - Murphy's Chevrolet, sign "Humming" above me*

I was one fucked up dude. Childhood PTSD is real. I was AWOL from the Navy. Working for a Carnival Midway at the New Jersey State fair putting up the “Hootchie Cootch” show tent for a once famous stripper that I had hooked up with several County Fairs earlier beginning in Maine. I ended up hitchhiking south for reasons that I will get into as we go along for the ride.

It was about 2 o'clock in the morning. I had been hitch-hiking for three days from Trenton, New Jersey and was now walking through a small town of Folkston, Georgia. No skyscrapers, and you couldn't find the sidewalks because they rolled them up at midnight. Quiet, so quiet as I walked down the main street of town. The only sound being this interesting sound of electricity coursing through the power-pole-top transformers, and the even more interesting sound, hum really, of one lonely neon sign, humming, "Murphy's Chevrolet". Bugs. You also could hear the night time bugs. The large bugs flying around the six street lights, mostly moths, the other bugs, like the crickets, who apparently, we're suffering from insomnia.

Not like there actually was a brick and mortar "Downtown". There were no tall buildings to leap over in a single bound, and I didn't run through it like a speeding bullet. I certainly wasn't more powerful than a Locomotive, just a very tired, very hungry, scrawny teenager walking past Murphy's Chevrolet, sign "Humming" above me. Well, not quite past. I ended up walking around the lot with all the new cars lined up in three or four rows. Dead balloons. I remember all the different colored, mostly deflated balloons lying limp, you know, all the helium had leaked out, some had just enough helium left in them, that they were still sort of round, and not totally out of

gas, constrained by the string that bound them. Two of the balloons were still defying gravity and were floating just a little.

Well, look at this one! Brand New Shiny Red 1968 Malibu Super Sport with the 396 emblems on its front fenders. I peered in the driver's side window. Cool! It has a 4-speed Stick! A few minutes later I was at the back of the building, crawling through an open window. You know, the industrial kind of window that cranks open from the centerline. Window WAS already open. I never would have entered the building, i.e., never would have broken a window to get in the place. The window just happened to be cranked wide open, inviting me to explore further.

Raided their refrigerator. Leftovers of every imaginable kind. Did I mention I was hungry? Actually, I really hadn't eaten a decent meal in two days, so yes, I was hungry. I ate someone's leftover tuna salad sandwich, 2 bananas, some soup, and what was left of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. After this wonderful gourmet meal, I washed it all down with some Jack Daniels & Dr. Pepper. I decided to explore a little further. In those days, auto dealers didn't have the sophisticated gadgetry and electronic doodads to monitor and control all the keys to all their vehicles. Nope. Just a big peg board with pegs of car keys hanging, new & used. No Nobel Prize for new technology here.

I went back out to the shiny brand new 1968 Malibu with pencil and paper in hand, (I didn't find ONE ink pen). They hadn't invented Post-It pads yet, otherwise I would have used one. So, I wrote down the special code that was written on the front glass on the driver's side. 68Mr4. That stood for 1968 Malibu Red 4 Speed. It took me a minute or two to figure out the coded location on the pegboard. There was a total of 40 pegs. Thirty pegs had keys dangling, ten pegs were

empty. Ahhhhh, see? Simple. As I grabbed the keys with the correct code hand-written on a small circular paper tag in pencil, I noticed that this tag was almost worn out. Codes had been written and erased so many times, many of the tags were dying of overuse. Anyway, not exactly a clever system. Was the owner of the dealership Scottish? (how much do paper tags cost anyway). Then came the exciting sound as I first listened to the revving of that 396 V8, putting out 350 horses.

Along with two bottles of Dr. Pepper, which I had stuffed in my pockets along with all the "desk" change I could find in the unlocked desk drawers, I had grabbed some bags of potato chips, cigars & matches, and a typewriter. OK! This was exciting! I made the trip through the window and back inside one more time and snagged one of those mechanical adding machines and put it in in the trunk with the typewriter.

Down the road I go at three-thirty in the morning, heading south to Florida, only now I'm not walking. In the headlight's glare ahead of me I could see the wooded areas, then open areas, then wooded again then open, wooded, open, wooded, open, etcetera. I couldn't really tell what the open areas consisted of because by the time the scenery was zooming by on either side of me, (in my Red, 1968 Chevrolet Malibu, 396 with a four-speed-on-the-floor), it was dark again, i.e., no longer in the headlights. Three miles to the state line that sign just said? Folkston is the last small town off U. S. Highway 301 before crossing over the St. Mary's River into Florida. I was 54 miles from Jacksonville, Florida.

I had a map when I drove away from Folkston. I'm on a Southern Georgia two lane country road at now 3:45 AM, almost to Florida. Beautiful starry sky, nothing but dark on either side of

the road. No other headlights in sight that time of the night, well early morning. I did see one alligator crossing the road early in my drive. I guessed correctly that some of those open areas at the sides of the highway were swamp.

It was not a deer in the headlights I suddenly came upon. To me it may as well have been a dinosaur, or some creature from Mars. Seeing it from a distance, this strange creature was big enough to notice, and sat there, frozen in the high beams like Bambi. I stopped in the middle of the road about ten feet from this strange creature, got out of the car, and walked up to it to take a closer look. This thing was slowly crawling in its quest to cross the road, in spite of having the headlamps of my car probably blinding it. I picked this odd beast up and walked back to the car. Putting this monster in the trunk, I thought to myself, "Gee, maybe I can sell this thing to a zoo when I get to Florida". Try to guess what I almost ran over? No, it was not an alligator.

*Chapter Two – I'm just a "Farm Boy" from Minnesota*

At some point, if not now, one has to be just a little bit curious as to what this 19-year-old farm boy from Minnesota is doing in Southern Georgia at three AM driving a brand new 1968 "Red" Chevrolet Malibu SS (Super Sport) with a 396 and a four-speed. The story begins in Minnesota in October of 1963. That strange night and equally strange creature happened in the late fall early winter of 1967, four years later. Remember, I'm a farm boy from Minnesota. I really had never seen this creature before, not even in a book. Our school was too backward in time to believe that something like an encyclopedia would have an influence on our education. In junior and senior high, I didn't spend a whole lot of time in the school library except for a few times in "Detention", and the mention of this creature in Biology Class must have been on a day I stayed home from school. Honestly, in my stupidity, I had absolutely no idea what the fuck this thing was.

Back to the 1968 Malibu Super Sport with a 4-Speed. Dealers in those days, in order to prevent or negatively affect your little joy ride to a mile past dinosaur, did a few things recommended in their Dealer Ownership manual. The needle on the gas gauge was just a hair or two above empty. Rule number one in your ownership manual "Security" section, don't leave a lot of gas in the tanks. Instructive advice number two in that same section, disconnect the alternator or generator, so the only thing running the spark-plugs on the car is the battery, which dies shortly after you ran out of gas, and out of ignorance, left the radio on, which worked great for a while, catching some cool jazz from a station in Jacksonville, Florida, to a quickly dying battery AND radio signal.

No, you idiot! Quickly dying battery! Count Basie is down to a whisper for less than a minute before fading out to totally dead battery. Soooooo tired. It's about beddy-bye time. It's more than just spooky to be on a two-lane country road, three miles from town. Dead battery. No lights, and no radio. You start to hear all the sounds, almost like jungle music with monkeys, bugs and everything else, as you climb into the tiny back seat to try to get some sleep. Remember, you haven't slept in two days, and you really are seeing too many things in the dark that probably aren't there. Other than the jungle sounds, there eventually wasn't any sound coming from the trunk where the "Creature", one typewriter, and one adding machine were sitting.

I said eventually. When I first tried to fall asleep, the "Creature" from Planet X possibly believed it could claw, like through dirt, through the floor of the trunk. After about fifteen minutes of clawing by that thing from a Sci-Fi movie, it stopped clawing, and I finally fell asleep. I was abruptly awakened to a loud, tap tap tap of the barrel of a six-shooter on the driver's side rear window. Said six-shooter was in the right hand of the local sheriff from Folkston. I immediately rolled that rear window down as he said, "Good Morning, son".

I wasn't his son, but that's how they talked back then (and now) in the south. Think about this. I've been sleeping so soundly, that I thought he was going to break the window, he tapped so hard. I wonder how many taps on the window it actually took before I heard it? No gas, no battery, no license plates, no driver's license and no registration. He asked a few lame questions. I told him that I had to pull over to sleep, as I did not want to fall asleep while driving, and possibly put other drivers at four in the morning at risk of mortal danger.

He didn't ask me to get out of the car. After I told him that I did not have the required by law, documents, you would normally think that the Sheriff would politely ask me to get out of the car. "Yes sir! I would NEVER drive if I even thought for one minute that I was too sleepy to drive, that's why I'm in the back seat, and there's a box on the front passenger seat containing a stolen Nuclear Bomb. And that hand cranking antique adding machine in the trunk is for counting up all the dead people after I leave this Nuclear weapon at the Pawn Shop in Jacksonville". I obviously didn't say all that, I thought it, but whatever conversation that took place between the Sheriff and I was certainly strange enough.

No arrest. Instead we said our goodbyes. He drove away, waving goodbye. When he was out of sight down the road, I grabbed the stuff in the front passenger seat, the one remaining Dr. Pepper, the typewriter, and the old pull handle adding machine from the trunk, sitting next to a very still monster from Planet X, put the cigars and a box of matches in my shirt pocket, and started walking, in the opposite direction, towards Florida. I knew I couldn't take the "Creature" to Florida like I had planned, and dummy me didn't think of letting it out of the trunk either, sadly. Actually, I did think of it, but I had already walked about three miles before I thought of it, and I was not going to walk back to the car and let it out of the trunk. They will certainly discover and let that creature out when they get it back to town. Maybe they'll sell that creature to a zoo. What do you think?

My last ride was all the way into Downtown Jacksonville. "Hello, my name is Johnny Racket", kinda said with a Johnny Cash accent. No, not "Rocket", Racket, like in tennis. "Yes, I'm a tennis pro in Jacksonville. Where do I teach you ask? I teach at the tennis courts. Where?

Like specifically? All over really, any tennis court that will take me. The adding machine and typewriter? I use that adding machine to add up all the money I make from teaching tennis, and I was using the typewriter to write Short Stories for Reader's Digest, like the story about my last tournament I played in at "Widdlledumb". That was my conversation with the old couple that gave me my last long ride into Jacksonville. When they dropped me off, the first thing I did was have lunch at McDonald's, with most of that loose change from my pockets. I used up all the quarters and fifty-cent pieces and all of the dimes and nickels. I think I had 23 pennies left to my name.

At a randomly picked Pawn Shop, "Five Dollars for the antique adding machine? That's fine. Is five dollars the best you can do? What about the typewriter? Seven dollars? I'll take it" The Pawn broker gave me the twelve dollars and I headed out the door and proceeded on down the highway, walking/hitch-hiking again. Right after I walked out the door of the pawn shop, the dude starts dialing the Charlton County Sheriff's office to notify them that I have just left his store, and they in turn contacted Sheriff Jackson who had put out a bulletin about the theft. In those days, whenever there was some sort of theft or burglary, all the law enforcement folks and the pawn shops within a two-hundred-mile radius was notified by telex/teletype of what was taken from each theft. Well, Sheriff Jackson, you know, the nice fellow that had tapped on my window and woke me up, was waiting for me as I walked across the state line, back into Georgia. Yes, I got turned around. Thought I was walking south, but I was actually walking north, back towards Georgia, it was a very cloudy day, couldn't see the Sun.

Duuuuuu!!! No map, shitty, actually, deliberately false directions from the dude at the pawn shop, it's noon. The sun is up there, somewhere in the middle of the sky, but it was so overcast I couldn't tell where it was in the sky, so I had no North-South-East reference to go by. I really couldn't tell East from West or from North to South as I was walking along the side of the highway.

Now sitting handcuffed in the back seat of the Sheriff Jackson's police cruiser, he's laughing his ass off about my lack of direction, and more so, laughing at the fact that the Pawn Broker gave me directions that would intentionally get me heading north towards Georgia. You really didn't pay attention to the highway signs that said things like, Georgia three miles, during that one nice long ride that took you to the driver's turnoff just before the state line.

Sheriff Jackson's vehicle was nowhere in sight until you were about a hundred yards into Georgia. Then he pulls up from behind you, driving ever so slowly in reverse, as you are sorta walking backwards, looking south, when you thought you were looking north, i.e., you are mostly walking backwards when cars are approaching, so you think the cars coming toward you are heading to Florida. Walking backwards with your thumb out precludes a person from seeing the signs like, GEORGIA-TEN MILES.

Once I turned and saw the "Welcome to Georgia" sign, everything happened so quickly. You realized that you were an idiot, and Sheriff Jackson also believed that you were an idiot. The welcome sign was NOT on the exact line. It was a hundred and thirty yards into Georgia. This wasn't some major border crossing like into Tijuana from San Diego, this was a highway

crossing a state line in the middle of nowhere, not at the state line in Lake Tahoe. Jokes on you, you thought you were headed towards Miami.

First words from Sheriff Jackson? "Welcome back to Georgia, son". I wasn't his son. I sort of felt relieved. I look back now and realize it was all good karma. What was in the trunk along with the typewriter and adding machine? We will reveal the "creature" shortly.

90 days later, still sitting on the lot is that beautiful Red, 1968 Chevrolet Malibu SS with a 396 and a 4-speed, a salesman was opening the driver's side door to show a young couple the car, and the stench of rotting flesh, that dead dinosaur, had filled up the interior from the unopened trunk. The salesman immediately closed the door and ran back into the office, asking everyone within earshot, "Isn't that the vehicle that kid took off the lot three months ago?" Well yes, George said. Bob the salesman who was trying to show the car, said, "I think we need to call the Sheriff; I think that kid left a dead body in the trunk".

Yes, everyone thought, dead HUMAN body. The Sheriff along with three other officers, the Fire Department, and an Ambulance shows up for the "Opening of the Trunk" along with a news crew from Atlanta that happened to be in the area, about thirty minutes away. The "Opening of the Trunk" could not take place until the news crews from Atlanta and Jacksonville showed up to film it (where's Geraldo Rivera when you really need him).

Finally, drum roll please, after about thirty minutes of speculation and waiting for CBS Channel 46 out of Atlanta to show up, and another fifteen minutes for the news crews to get set up, one of the reporters is telling their TV audience, "They are about to unlock and open the trunk". Who will it be? What will they find?"

By now of course everyone is obviously thinking it's a dead person. Chatter in the gathered crowd are going around that this kid from Minnesota was high on Marijuana and killed his partner in crime. Flash forward to when the owner of the dealership had visited me in the cell at the county jail a few days after the "Opening of the Trunk". "Tommy, we all feel sorry that your mom died the way she did, and everything else that has happened to you, and quite honestly, you know we care because Jesus cares (Mr. Murphy was a Born-Again Christian). We were potentially going to let the Navy take you back, but if it wasn't for that fucking dead Armadillo in the trunk, I would have let them take you. You have to be punished, and you will be punished, not by the Navy, but by the State of Georgia. We had to total the vehicle. It cost me \$2,300".

Yes, good karma. Had the U. S. Navy got a hold of me, it could have been 10 years or more in a Military Brig. Instead, the Wayne County Prison Farm in Jesup, Georgia was my next home for what was supposed to be three years. A "Chain Gang", like the Paul Newman movie, "Cool Hand Luke" if you have ever seen it.

Jesup is close to the Penholoway Swamp Wildlife Management Area, or as George Carlin would say, "The Penholoway Alligator, Snakes, and Other Lethal Creatures Management Area". At just under 5,000 acres, it's a much smaller swamp than the Okefenokee Swamp at 500,000 acres. Which Carlin probably would have renamed, "The Okefenokee Lots More Alligator, Snakes, and Other Lethal Creatures Refuge Area". Both swamps are places you do NOT want to get lost in, day or night, and they built the Wayne County Prison Farm in the early 1920's purposely backed up to the Penholoway.

### *Chapter Three - "Don't I get a Defense Attorney?"*

After the suspenseful "Opening of the Trunk" and the discovery of the rotting carcass of the Dead Armadillo, and two days after the owner of the dealership paid me a visit, I was taken to a small nondescript office building in Folkston. This was the office of the Charlton county appointed Judge who was, as far as I could tell, just a local attorney that had been appointed to the position. I was seated in his office, with Sheriff Jackson, Mr. Murphy the owner of the Chevy dealership, and a few other dudes that I did not know.

Mind you, this was not a courtroom. It was this lawyer/judge's normal, sort of plain old ordinary looking office. Could have been the Dog-Catcher's office as far as I knew. Not wasting time, they were very polite, and the judge, Mr. Brown, whom I guess had been told about the trauma regarding my fucked-up childhood and my mother's death, spoke to me in a very sympathetic manner, telling me like Mr. Murphy had, how sorry he felt for me (maybe they attended the same church?). He asked me a few basic questions which I can't remember, and then read off three charges.

Breaking and entering, which I didn't do because the fucking window in the back of the building was open/ Burglary, which was correct I'm thinking to myself, I had stolen a typewriter an adding machine, some loose change, leftovers from the refrigerator, a few cigars and of course, that beautiful Red, 1968 Chevrolet Malibu Super Sport, with a 396 and a four-speed ". The theft of the vehicle was the third charge he read, and that was the one that mattered.

It's funny now when I think about it, that when he was reading off the items for the burglary charge, in addition to the typewriter and adding machine, he included some of the food that I had taken and eaten from the refrigerator, plus the four Dr. Peppers, one Milky Way Candy Bar, three packages of Potato Chips, and the half-empty pint of Jack Daniels. After he read the charges, I asked him, "Don't I get a Defense Attorney?", and the "Judge" responded, "Son, Mr. Williams sitting over there will be your "Court Appointed Attorney" this morning. Right after that he asked me how I was pleading to the crimes and without hesitation I said remorsefully "Well sir, I AM guilty of all of it, so I guess I plead guilty as charged". As soon as I said that, my "Court-Appointed" attorney got out of his chair, and without a word, left the room. As he was leaving, I commented, "Where you going, Mr. Williams, sir?" He was gone without saying a word. No good luck, or good bye, nothing. Mr. Brown, (the Judge) immediately answered for my attorney who had just walked out the door closing it behind him, "Well, you see Mr. Saxe, down in these parts, if you plead guilty like you just did, we figure you no longer need legal representation".

Several minutes later, some papers were being signed, and I received my sentences. Not guilty for the "Breaking and Entering" charge because the window I climbed through WAS open, guilty for the "Burglary" charge, three years, and guilty for the "Auto Theft" charge, three years, both sentences to run concurrently. That meant that I was going to spend three years instead of three plus three equals six years in prison. Whew, that was a plus. Fifteen minutes later I was back sitting in my cell at the city jail.

*Chapter Four – “Cool Hand Luke” I’m not*

It's six in the morning the following day, and I was being transported, to where, I had no fucking clue. Jesup, Georgia is 55 miles north of Folkston, heading towards Savannah. That's where we were heading the Deputy said. It took us a little over an hour to get to Jesup, which was a much smaller town than Folkston was. As we got closer, I noticed that part of the scenery looked a little swampy.

We arrived at what I soon found out, was the Wayne County Prison Farm, bluntly, a "Chain Gang" kind of place, but being just a poor farm boy from Minnesota, I had no clue what a "Chain Gang" was. The movie "Cool Hand Luke" had just been released and I did not have the opportunity to see it yet, and I didn't know that the movie existed at that point. I eventually saw it for the first time on television maybe ten years later. I think I was living in Southern California when I watched it with some friends. Boy, did THAT inspire some conversation that day, and to this day a life-time later.

After stopping at the gate, I was removed from deputies' vehicle, and taken into a small building that looked like an add-on type of construction to a much larger, main building. This was the Wayne County Prison Farm. The main building, which I will describe for those readers who have not seen the Paul Newman movie (for which he received an Oscar Nomination for his role as "Luke") I'll try to describe the prison farm in as much detail as I can remember as I write this chapter. For those of you that HAVE seen the movie, this prison farm was very similar to what you saw in the movie. This one originally built in the 1920's.

Inside the little add-on building I met my first inmate, who was the intake processing staff, and a prison guard. I was given my prison outfit, a towel and a washcloth, a pillow, (which I found out later I only got the pillow because I was a white dude). I also was given an old, what appeared to be, an Army Blanket from the Civil War. I lost, transferred possession of the pillow AND the blanket that first night, to another convict who threatened to bash my skull in.

Okay, I can say I was a scrawny little teenager, and he was an African-American dude, twice my size, and twice my age. I did not put up a struggle. It was in the middle of Summer so it was pretty hot at night anyway, no real need for a blanket

*Chapter Five - "I'll see your three cigarettes and raise you five"*

My first week in, I was hired by another convict, a white dude named Jack, to make cigarettes. For every pack I rolled, he gave me a choice of payment of either ten cigarettes, or 10 cents. Sometimes I took the cash, sometimes I took the cigarettes, since I was a smoker. The cash doesn't sound like much, but after a brief tutorial on the hand-held rolling machine, I quickly became one of the fastest "Rollers" in the whole "Camp" as some of us called the place. I could roll twenty packs an hour, and that was good money, \$2.00 per hour. The drawback was that Monday thru Saturday from six in the morning until sometimes as late as seven at night, we ALL were working outside the camp, somewhere. My big money day was Sunday, putting in at least five hours, and I usually rolled for a few hours every work-night while everyone else was kicking back from a hard day of labor.

My cigarette rolling money amounted to an average of \$30 to \$40 dollars a week. Within two months I had enough money to buy my own rolling machine, papers and tobacco. That dude, Jack, that I had rolled for? He sold those packs of cigs for 75 cents a pack. He had one other dude besides me rolling for him, and I figured he was clearing at least \$200 dollars a week because there were about a hundred convicts in that camp, and most of them smoked. There also were two other cigarette manufacturing operations, but Jack's business was by far the biggest, I tend to believe that was because I rolled really good cigs for him, and everyone wanted MY cigarettes as opposed to someone else's. Prince Albert in a can, and Bull Durham, a great combination.

It's a great thing when you are incarcerated, to have a steady income from a business like rolling and selling cigarettes, or leather work like hand-tooled wallets, purses for women, belts you know, the belts that have some dudes name embossed into the leather in the back, so the bikers know which cowboy they were butt-fucking, well that's if you have taken your buck-knife and cut a gaping hole in his jeans right where his ass is. There were dudes doing oil paintings, water color paintings, and other small arts and crafts. Every Sunday during visitor's hours, you could really make some dough if you had something to sell because half of the visitors we received were not there to visit their husband or brother, they were there to buy shit from the entrepreneurial dudes like myself, because in addition to eventually owning my own cigarette rolling business (three hired rollers at one point), I also had a leather tooling business, making mostly wallets and small purses. So about eight months in, I was making some serious coin.

After twenty months when I was transferred to Augusta for the "Work-Release Program" I left the Wayne County Prison Farm with \$684.73 My mother would have been proud. A sizeable portion of that Dinero was from my poker winnings, which leads me to a poker-related story about the one and only real fight that I got into while I was there. I had only been there for a few months and the poker games that I played in literally were penny-ante games. There were much higher-stake games that I would eventually get into, but in the early days all I could afford was the smallest-stake games. The smallest games you could bet with "Singles" as we called them. Single cigarettes, both hand-rolled on a little machine, and what we called ready-rolls (short for all ready rolled) like Camels and Marlboros. The ready-rolls were worth five times what a hand-rolled cigarette was worth.

***Chapter Six – “Yeah, they call me the Minnesota Kid”***

Now we come to the reason for my previous chapter’s title. Poker. Need I say more? I was good, really, really good at Texas No-Limit Hold-Em. Within my first six months I probably made an additional \$200 just from playing poker.

Sunday was our only free day to do whatever we pleased, as long as it did not violate the “Rules”. Some dudes spent their time immersed in reading. Reading all kinds of different things, from paperbacks to smuggled-in Playboy and other soft-porn magazines, to Reader’s Digest, the Bible, etcetera. Some dudes slept. Some dudes, (many of them) were out in the “Yard”, playing basketball, pitching horseshoe, lifting weights (we did have a pretty good selection/variety of weights, and a similar variety of dudes lifting them. Scrawny dudes like myself, when I did try lifting a few times, more than once, with the Arnold Alois Schwarzenegger types, in Black and white (race wise), along with the average dudes who were serious about becoming an “Arnold”. Some dudes were working on their cigarette manufacturing biz or leather tooling biz, and some dudes were playing various table games amongst themselves, like Monopoly, Checkers, Chess, etcetera.

My game quickly became Texas No-Limit Hold-em Poker. Thanks to my Great-Great-Grandmother who taught me the game when I was five-years-old, I came to that Chain Gang at a much higher skill-level than the average convict. One day I was playing with three other dudes, and we had an incident that would forever change my status while I was there in Jesup.

We had been playing for about two hours one Sunday afternoon, and I was up about nine whole dollars, and THAT was a whole lot of pennies, nickels, dimes, and cigarettes. During this one particular hand, I caught this dude cheating. The dude was twice my size, built like he had been frequenting the weight lifting equipment in the yard for most of his sentence (he had been there for two years). “Chief” as he was called, was the biggest fucking Indian I had ever seen in my whole life, the movie, “One flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest” didn’t come out until 1975, so when it did, from my memory I could compare “Chief” to Will Sampson, the 6-foot-7-inch actor who played the silent Indian in the film.

Chief was bigger. A Seminole Indian from Florida, Chief was a Safe Cracker. Not your typical run-of-the-mill safe cracker however, Chief’s Modis Operandi was way different. The first time we played poker at the same bunk, he had shared a little of his story with me. Back in those days, stores and pawn shops, and other places of business did not have fancy burglar alarm systems. Doberman Pincers, Pit Bulls, or German Shepherds, that’s what the store owners used to protect their property.

Chief went on to explain the secret of his success as a “Safe Cracker” (not telling us how he got caught, yet). “Boys, it’s quite simple. I would first case a place out, you know, go into let’s say, a Pawn Shop in a small town like White Spring, (I generally worked in Georgia and then went back home to Florida after each job). So, I’ve “pawned” a TV that I had from another job, and got a pretty good idea of wether that pawn shop was worth my time and effort. In this case, yes, it was worth my effort, plus they only had one dog, which is always better than trying to subdue two or more dogs. I gave up the idea on a liquor store once just because they had two

really vicious looking Dobermans. Anyway, what you do with the dog like in this case, is bring along a piece of raw beef (with the bone), tainted with some shit that puts them to sleep. You only have to wait about ten minutes, and when the dog doesn't bark anymore when you knock loudly on the back door, that's when you know it's safe to gain entry. Having gained entry, I would walk over to where I knew the safe was, and roll it (had wheels) out to my pick-up truck". Almost all of the stores in those days had these safes on wheels that you could roll around.

Chief continues, "Once I have at the backend of my pick-up truck..." "Let me guess, Chief, you simply picked it up and placed it in your truck?", I interrupted. I had just won the last hand, and Chief continued with his story, "Yeah, you're right Minnesota". There's a favorite place in a swampy area that I go to, and once there, I lift the safe out of the bed of my truck, place a logging chain around the safe with a 25-ton railroad jack between the chain and the safe's door, and crank away. Usually five or six cranks of the jack, and the door has crushed in and off the hinges. I remove the chain and jack and the safe's door usually just fall away. Take the goodies out of the safe, which besides cash, is the most valuable shit like diamonds, Rolex's and so forth. One time, out of a safe from another Pawn Shop, I pulled out a set of "Choppers". I guess they were in the safe because some dude thought it was cute to have some gold teeth instead of the carved ivory that older dentures had, and the dude pawned them (because of the gold) I suppose. Then I throw the empty safe into the swamp, watched it sink, and drive home. Simple".

So, I catch Chief cheating. A deck of 52 cards normally only has four Aces. I'm sure the other two dudes who were playing with us that day, observed him cheating, but they were wise enough to keep their yaps shut, and take their losses. Me? I was pissed. This type of visual

reaction to something like this was completely due to my PTSD, plus I was a crazy fuck anyway. So, what did I do? I not only accused Chief of cheating, but I stood up!

Now, that was pure insanity on my part. Chief stood up with a growl on his face, denying any guilt, and I yelled, “You fucking Indian! You cheated us. I saw what you did!” Approximately one hundred inmates quickly went silent. You really could hear a pin drop, along with a few whispered comments like, “Chief’s gonna kill that kid”.

Right about that moment, Chief swung and slapped me open-handed across the face, but not hard enough to knock me off of my feet. It’s called a “Bitch Slap”. I immediately reacted with what had to be....what they call.... a rush of adrenalin. I picked Chief up damn near above my head, turned slightly and slammed him down on the Army Cot that we had been using as a card table. The legs on both ends of that cot splayed outwards resulting in Chief lying face up on the mattress and the Army Cot, which was now on the floor.

Still the entire building was silent as a funeral, waiting for Chief to pummel me into unconsciousness and/or death. As I prepared my mind for what I thought would BE certain death, I looked down, and Chief for a slight moment, did have the look of my death on his face. Then all of a sudden, a slight uplifting from the corner of one side of his mouth, then the other side of his lips lifted up and he was now grinning slightly, then as a full smile began to emerge, Chief started chuckling, and then broke into a full-blown laughter as if he had just heard Red Skelton tell a joke. I laughed, then the entire place broke into laughter, as I reached my hand down and helped Chief get up to his feet. “Sorry kid, you caught me fair and square. No one’s ever been brave or stupid enough to do what you just did”.

From that day forward, Chief and I were best friends, and NOBODY fucked with me, if you know what I mean. I wasn't his "boy", I was his friend. Besides, Chief wasn't into fucking other dudes anyway, as he was really a pretty nice guy with a wife and three kids at home waiting for him to eventually get out. "Yeah, they call me The Minnesota Kid, and I'm one crazy-assed mother-fucker that you don't want to piss off". In reality, no one fucked with me because of my friendship with Chief. There's more to the story about my good friend Chief, which is coming up in another chapter.

### *Chapter Seven – The Pool Hustler and the Stripper*

Everyone has a story to tell of how they ended up at the Wayne County Prison Farm. This was an “Equal Opportunity” prison farm. By that I mean, the population consisted of dudes that had committed heinous crimes like murder on one end of the rainbow, to dudes that were sentenced to spend six months of hard labor for refusing, or just not being able to pay, child support payments, and everything other reason in between. I shared my “story” one day while playing poker, on a later day from my brief "fight" with Chief.

Here's my story, prior to Chapter One. I was AWOL from the Navy. It began at the Naval Hospital at the Great Lakes Naval Training center in North Chicago, Illinois. I had been in the Brig for a few weeks, sent there from the Naval Air Station Twin Cities at the International Airport in Minneapolis, Minnesota after I had turned myself in. My back had been injured, compression fractures of three vertebrae, partially paralyzed, the Captain in command of the Brig, just to be responsible I guess, had me transferred to the hospital, where I was placed in a guarded wing of the hospital.

They didn't have fancy devices like MRI machines in those days, just X-Ray equipment. After much testing and Doctor's analysis, it was decided that there was not enough to my back injury to preclude me from going back on limited-duty status. From the hospital, I was transferred to a barracks, only this time, not under guard. We were free to walk around the base, free to go on “Liberty”, which I partook of many times (another story or two).

Our barracks was full of every kind of medical excuse there was. Most of the other dudes were really fucked up due to injuries/wounds, and/or their psychosis from having been to Vietnam, coming back home, and having to deal with their trauma. It was fun while that lasted because we had no real duties except keeping our barracks clean. We had two Pool Tables so I played a lot of pool during the day.

After about four or five weeks in this barracks, I was summoned to the Clerk's Office. Orders had been cut to send me to Vietnam. I immediately thought, "This is BULLSHIT"! That evening I snuck off base, caught the "L" to Chicago, and kept on going, out of Illinois, into Indiana, then Ohio, down to Tennessee where I hooked up with a traveling carnival group.

The "Carnival" was a great place to hide, if you were a criminal on the run from the law, or a dude like myself, working/doing whatever job you could get hired for. It was great because you got paid in cash, no W-4 form to fill out, and you were constantly traveling from town to town, County Fair to County Fair, sometimes a State Fair, and traveling state-to-state. A perfect gig. For me, I lucked out right off the bat and was hired by a Hoochie-Couch stripper and her husband/manager.

*Chapter Eight – “Let’s see you do that with a Quarter this time”*

She was no "Gypsy Rose Lee" the really famous stripper from the 1920's. However, she was very well known in her younger days (according to other Carny folks who knew her). Her husband/manager was a skinny dude in his late fifty's early sixties. I guessed the once famous stripper, who I will call Betty, was around sixty. Her and her husband/manager, I'll call him George because I can't remember his name either, had a daughter named Susan "Susie". I remember her name because I thought I was in love with her at the time. It was astonishing to me that Susie also stripped in their traveling "Hoochie Cooch" show, at fourteen years old. At least that's how old her Step-Father, George, had told me she was, probably to put me off from pursuing her.

Susie didn't snatch Silver Dollars stuck in a crack in the wooden floor boards of the stage like her mother did, but oh man, the few times that I actually saw her doing her fully-naked dance on stage I was awestruck. Typical for a young teenaged girl, she had still developing titties and a small, delicate looking bush. Red hair she had, and she was a real redhead.

The reason that I only had the opportunity to catch a few eyefuls of her doing her thing was because Betty and George had given me the riot act about their daughter. I was not allowed inside the tent when she was performing. The two opportunities came as a result of my guard duty outside along both sides of the tent. Guard duty to keep dudes on the outside, from lifting up the tent and sneaking in for a free show. Twice I had to chase some dudes away with my baseball bat, and twice I lifted the bottom of the tent up because I knew that my boss, George, was working the ticket booth in front of the show.

I wasn't restricted from watching Betty do her thing. The first time that I watched a healthy portion of her show was when I was on a break. That's the first time I discovered that a woman could, with the proper training, snatch a Silver Dollar that was stuck in a crack between the two-by-six floor boards of the stage. An incredible thing to behold for a teen-aged farm boy from Minnesota like me.

I sold tickets in the ticket booth quite often, mostly at times when Susie was dancing. I learned how to short-change the drunks which was so easy to do. I also accompanied George on periodic trips to the main office trailer where we took the money and ticket counts.

On a good night in an average County Fair crowd, we pulled in two thousand dollars at four dollars a ticket. That's at five hundred horny dudes a night, seven shows on average, seventy or so dudes per show. There were horny dudes everywhere we went. The owners of the Carnival group got a thousand dollars per night and Betty, George and Susie kept a thousand dollars. The average fair lasted eight or nine days, so we made seven-five hundred dollars a week, tax free I might add.

Well, I didn't make that, Betty, George and Susie made that. For my help, I received twenty dollars a day, plus a percentage of the "Drunk Skimming" which usually was an additional twenty dollars a day. I know that doesn't sound like much, but the money was great because Betty and George paid for my meals/food, plus I slept in the trailer.

The trailer by the way, was a forty-foot trailer especially built with a front, crowd-facing stage/platform the entire length of the trailer that folded down with welded steel legs on the front and side edges to hold up the stage. Many different types of shows utilized the same type of

trailer. This front stage in all these shows is where the Carnival Barker would advertise his show, wither it was the "Fat Bearded Lady", "Snake-Skinned Baby" or a "Sword Swallower", or like in our case, Hootchie-Cooch girls.

Once you bought a ticket, you would enter the tent through an opening on either the right or left side of the front stage/platform. The tent was fifty feet wide, ten feet wider than the trailer/front stage, with an opening flap that lifted up and was secured, as the entry into the tent. From that "doorway" flap, it was thirty or so feet from the stage where the "Show" took place.

Chief interrupted my story at that point saying, "You can tell us more another time, Kid, it's late, and I think we're going to have a rough day tomorrow. Mr. Cooper said that our crew is going to be removing a bunch of tree stumps somewhere".

*Chapter Nine – Bullets flying everywhere, goodbye Trenton, and goodbye Susie*

During my career as a Hoochie-Cooch Carny, I would frequently still feel pain in my mid to lower back. Not the dull achy kind, but the “Bolt of Lightning” combined with a huge needle-like pain in T-11, T-12, and L-1 area of my spine. Betty and George knew this from the very get go when we had first met. Every set-up and every take-down required that we hire temps. This seemed to be like an ordinance or law in every single town we did business in. Made sense to me I thought. Help the unemployed and so forth.

Betty and George both understood my condition, perhaps feeling sorry. Maybe they saw a son in me, a son they could never have to replace their first-born. His name was Brian. Brian died at the age of seven of some heart issues, a few years before Susie was born. Whatever the reason, Betty and George especially made sure that the temps would do most of the heavy work, set-up and breakdown, and most of the time, I felt like I was a Boatswain’s Mate, walking around with a beer in my hand.

Trenton, New Jersey was the location for the State Fair in 1967. A huge Fair, a huge Midway, that lasted 9 days in August. The Midway alone hired 500 temps for set-up and take-down, and at least a hundred temps were kept on to help run the rides, work the shooting-galleries, knock-the-bowling pins-down games and other games of chance/skill, sell tickets, and anything else that a Carny required help with. I had been with Betty, George and Susie for five months, first meeting them and getting hired when I walked up to their Hoochie-Cooch ticket booth at a County Fair in Tennessee. I met them quite by accident one day (I’m lying, I like looking at female tits and ass as much as the next dude). Trenton was the largest fair for me and

it was fun. In addition to the six or seven various Hoochie-Cooch shows, the Midway had 2 tents for the “White” Paris/Broadway type of shows and one tent for what they called, “The Black Review”, an all-black musical show obviously. Compared to our measly audiences of fifty to sixty horny dudes per show, the two large white shows were almost twenty times the size at nine hundred and fifty people “Fire Marshall Approved Capacity” The black show was even larger at twelve hundred people for each show. All three had shows from noon until five o’clock in the afternoon. At a show per hour, they had five daytime shows and then at night they had five shows from seven until midnight. This was HUGE bucks coming in every day.

This State Fair did not have county fair prices, which I thought was kinda high to begin with. Shit, our little show charged six dollars a ticket instead of the normal four. I made a lot more money as well, from the drunk skim, and my salary was increased because I had to supervise two temps that we had hired as additional tent guards. My back seemed to be doing pretty well that week, so I helped set up one of the “white” tents, and the really big one for the Black Review.

For my labor, and I think for being a farm-boy with my lack of the typical white kid racism, the set-up manager for the Black Review not only paid me well for helping them with setting up their tent, they gave me five free tickets to their show. I used two of the tickets for myself and saw the show twice, and I gave Betty, George, and Susie the other three tickets. George and Betty had trusted me from the beginning, and I did understand why they did not want me to watch Susie do her thing. Looking back, if they DID look at me as sort of a son, they surely would never allow Susie’s brother to watch her dance naked. Makes sense.

In any traveling show like a Carnival Midway with all its splendid diversity, drugs were everywhere. You could buy any illicit drug that was available on any street corner in America, Heroin, Coke, Uppers and Downers, Crystal Meth, and Weed. Myself? I was Hippie so I stuck to just the Weed. I never did have enough curiosity or stupidity to try harder shit. Also due to its nature, these traveling shows had a fair share of crime. Fights between Carneys and “locals” as we called them were very common.

The Midway for the New Jersey State Fair was like a small city in itself. One “Carny” woman gave birth that week. A few people that I knew had to be transported to the local hospital. The State Police raided some dude’s motorhome/meth factory, and I suppose some visitors to the fair went home with food-poisoning. When we were working a fair, 99% of our caloric intake was from food booths on the midway. Besides the normal fair food, we had foods that were specific to the cultures/populations in the area. My favorite was the ready-made to-order “French Fries” with Malt Vinegar sprinkled on them. At the Lawrence County Fair in New Castle, Pennsylvania I tried the Dutch Funnel Cakes, four times.

I wouldn’t remember the star of the “Black Review” until several years later when she became a real star, known to the whole world. The first time that I saw Ike & Tina Turner was on some television show in the mid-seventies. I was blown away by the fact that the first time that I REALLY saw her and her husband at the time, Ike, performing, was that “Black Review” in 1967 in Trenton, New Jersey. It’s was one of those things many years later that I could say to friends, “I knew her before she got famous, in fact, she shared some Southern Fried Chicken and Cornbread with a few of us Carneys on set-up day”

***Chapter Ten - Emancipation Proclamation? What's that? And what a beautiful butterfly***

Back to Jesup, Georgia. A couple of things first. This was NOT Minnesota. This was the Deep South where there had been several hundred years of slavery of people of a color other than white, plus all the racism that for endless generations had festered and grown into a real cancer upon society. This was 1967, and I had just been sentenced, and now was in the "Chain Gang".

Upon my arrival, and processing, I was placed in what was known as Section Three. Big point here, this was two weeks after the desegregation of the Wayne County Prison Farm. Integrating blacks and whites does not produce gray. The arduous process of desegregation in schools full of children is one thing, integrating a prison full of mostly non-white dudes is a whole different ballgame. Mixing the two colors black and white, instead of getting gray, you get violence.

The building was divided into three sections. Section One was small, housing twelve or so white dudes. These convicts were what were called "Trustees". The Trustees were free to come and go as they pleased, anywhere within the fenced-in perimeter of the "farm". Section One was home to the three cooks, the dude who managed the laundry, a few drivers, and the dude that worked in the intake/new inmate processing room.

The building was approximately sixty feet wide, five hundred feet long. It had a slightly-pitched roof about twenty feet high along the center-line and fifteen-feet high at the outer walls, with exposed beams internally to hold the roof up. Section One was forty feet long by the sixty feet wide, with single cots/beds with nobody in a bunk above you. Section Two was

approximately eighty feet long by the sixty-foot width, also, with single beds/cots. There were twenty dudes in Section Two, fifteen whites and five black dudes. Consisting of seven drivers, two laundry workers, and six work/gang dudes that could not be housed in Section Three because they were potential targets of terminal violence. I later found out that one dude in particular that probably would have been killed if he had been housed in Section Three, was this white dude, Andy, a pedophile that had raped his five-year-old niece some five years ago. He was serving a nine-year sentence. I didn't like the dude at all, but I had to work along side of him for several months on Section Two's "Road Crew".

In between Section Two and Three was a catwalk raised about five feet off the floor. This was where a prison guard sat, at the end of the catwalk, in a chair, watching all the shit that went on in the evening. Along the five-foot wall on both sides of the catwalk was a row of about seven toilets. With no partitions separating them, when you took a shit, the whole world was watching. The shower in both sections, fitted with two shower heads, was at the end where the guard sat five-feet above you, watching you scrub your nuts. Section Three, approximately three hundred feet long, was all bunks, upper and lower sleeping arrangements. Section Three's population was about forty blacks and ten white dudes, (after integrating the population).

My first night there in Section Three, two black dudes opened up a can of whoop-ass on a white dude. The other nine white dudes, including myself, stayed in our bunks like good little boys, and watched the shit-kicking that went on that night. I realized that night what having a very large pad-lock for your footlocker really was for. For lack of having a pair of brass knuckles, a large padlock was the next best thing. You stuck your "Fuck You" finger in the space

between the lock and the U-Shaped shackle, and swung it, using it like you would use brass knuckles.

The fight only lasted for a few minutes or so. It wasn't really a fight. The victim woke up about an hour later. I was still awake, listening to all the sounds of the late evening, the sounds of dudes "Spanking the Monkey", snoring, oh my God, the snoring. The combined sound of thirty or more dudes snoring was in a way, almost like a hellish symphony, a sound not quite worthy of a Grammy Award. I was still awake when the dude that had been attacked that night literally crawled to his bunk-bed, and climbed in. Lucky for him I figured, that his bunk was the bottom bunk. There were fights almost every day after that, like I said, it wasn't an "Ebony & Ivory" kind of thing.

You don't go into any prison anywhere as a caterpillar and come out like some beautiful Butterfly. You might go in completely innocent and naive, but if and when you do come out, you are a trained criminal with a lot of various skills (I know how to destroy a door on a safe, thanks to Chief). A person not only comes out trained in how to crack a safe open with a logging chain and railroad jack, your attitude towards life and especially towards authority is dramatically and negatively changed as well. From a "I'm sorry" when you first go in, to a "Fuck You and the Horse you rode in on" mentality when you eventually come out.

There were hard-core career criminals like Chief that didn't know any other way of life, dudes that had short sentences, like six months for DUI or some other misdemeanor, and a few that should have been in a asylum for the mentally-fucked-up, for going on a "Serial Killing" spree. Regardless of who you were, prison of any kind was not a healthy place to be. In those

days, prison was NOT for your “Rehabilitation” to prepare you for your eventual return to society. There were no “On-Line” College courses in Philosophy or “How to become the person that everybody loves”. Prison and everything about it was used strictly to punish you for your crimes against society.

*Chapter Eleven – Tree Stumps, Rattle Snakes and “Suck and Spit, Suck and Spit”*

We built roads, the old-fashioned way, unplugged drainage culverts under the highways that were plugged up by Beaver Dams, and most of the time, cut the sometimes-three-foot-high weeds along the highways and byways. I think the words *labor* and *laborer* were invented by some convict dude in some Chain Gang somewhere. I spent three very cautious weeks in Section Three. Cautious, because I didn't know from one day to the next, if or when some “Big Black Bubba” was going to beat the crap out of me, or rip me a new asshole, or both. I escaped Section Three unscathed, as they transferred me to Section Two.

In Section Three, all the road crews were transported by window-less “Paddy-Wagon” type trucks. When you were closed inside those window-less trucks, being transported to a work-site, it was dark, sweaty smelling, and it was the beginning of an almost two-year “Life-Experience” that would eventually set me straight, wake me up, and be a Good Karma thing for me. I quickly developed a strong desire to get moved to Section Two, as it had a road crew that traveled in an old school bus, with WINDOWS.

Section Two's “School Bus” crew sometimes did work that the warden could only trust us to do, like sometimes really easy work doing handyman/home repair type jobs for him and a few of his relatives, close friends, prison staff, and local politicians. The warden's house was just outside the main gate and maybe fifty yards or so west of the main road. I never did figure out why, but one time his wife actually asked for me by name, to help her blow up and hang a bunch of balloons and other decorations in their house for the Warden's surprise birthday party. My

cheeks hurt for several days after that from grinning so much. She gave me a carton of Marlboros when I was finished that day.

Most of the time, our School Bus crew was out on regular assignments just like every other crew, re-paving roads or turning dirt roads into asphalt highways. Cutting the weeds along the roads was a major pastime. Swing-Blades and Bush-Axes, that's what they were called. Swing-Blades to cut the normal weeds, and Bush-Axes for the weeds that had become small trees alongside the country roads in and around Wayne County. With the Swing-Blades, we would all be lined up in a row from the top of the road to the bottom of the usually sloping sides of the ditches on both sides. Swinging and cutting, cutting and swinging our Swing-Blades, methodically walking almost in a rhythmic fashion, a lot of times singing some old black spiritual song from a time not so forgotten when slaves sang their songs as they were doing what slaves do. "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot", or "Follow the Drinkin' Gourd", or "Go Down Moses". These were songs that took your mind off of the grueling hot Sun, and put you in another place in time. It was those days when we would be singing and harmonizing, that I recognized that I had a better than average voice and really got into the "Spirit" of it all.

One day, our School Bus Crew and another crew from Section Two was assigned to "pull" tree-stumps on some vacant property that belonged to the Warden's brother, who was a Jesup Town Councilman. This area we were about to clear was going to be a road at some point. The tree-stumps that needed our excavation skills were pretty large, old remnants of what had to be beautiful Oak Tress at one time. Five stumps in all. In those days people didn't use tractors or dynamite, to get rid of stumps, especially if they had an in with a local prison farm like ours. We

used axes, shovels, rope, and muscle. First you dig out the ground around the base of the stump. If the stump was ten feet in diameter, you had ever-growing hole around the stump that was twenty feet in diameter, in other words, you had to dig around and down in order to expose the root system of the tree. Then using your typical Abe Lincoln Axe, you would chop away at the root system until you had enough of the root system removed that you could use rope to slowly pull the stumps over on their sides. For one particularly large stump that day, there were twelve of us pulling on a rope, plus we added another rope, hooked up to the backend of the bus. We pulled that huge stump over and out of its nesting place where it had comfortably sat for a hundred years or so. Sound easy? It's not. It's what we did though, because we didn't have a tractor or bulldozer, or a stick of dynamite.

That was one tree-stump that I will never forget. Did I mention yet that I hate Snakes? Well, while this stump was having a tug-of-war match with twelve other inmates and the bus, myself and "Chief" were on the opposite side, chopping at the remaining roots that refused to give up. When the inmates won, and the tree-stump lost, the stump was pulled over and mostly out of its home in the ground, exposing this huge area that had been like a small cave directly beneath the center of the stump. No longer a cavern, it was now a bigger hole in the ground than the one we had dug out around the tree. Guess what. It was filled with hundreds of baby Rattlesnakes, middle-school Rattlers, and several adult-sized rattlers, and they all were withering around, hissing, with their tales wagging, most of the new-born with just their birth button as they are called, and many of the older but not quite adult Rattlers, and the fully-grown adult Rattlers "Rattling" their "Rattles".

At that precise moment, as that gigantic stump was finally pulled over on its side and partially out, Chief and I stood there momentarily, gazing down into this massive hole filled with snakes, (both of us were already three feet down in the hole because we had been in the excavation portion of the hole doing our “Root-Chopping”), he said, “Minnesota, step up, out of the hole”. Too late. I was bitten by one of those Teen-aged medium-sized Rattlers while Chief was finishing his short dissertation about getting out of the hole. It sprang at me and bite me in the calf of my left leg.

Now you can imagine, if you are a well-prepared Boy Scout, exploring the wilderness with a bunch of other Boy Scouts, you would have what’s called a “Snake-Bite-Kit” in your back-pack. I never was into scouting when I was younger, and Chain-Gang work crews did not carry snake-bite-kits everywhere they went. I screamed, Chief pulled me the rest of the way out of the hole, and dragged me, literally, several yards away form the den of snakes. Chief calmly asked where I had been bitten, and pulled a small pen-knife from his pocket (Section Two inmates were allowed to possess/carry small pocket knives). I had already pulled my pant leg up above the slightly bleeding obvious spot on my calf where that Rattler had just bitten me a few minutes earlier, and Chief cut a small X on the small puncture mark on my leg. Now I’m bleeding slightly more and I have the shivers, as Chief started sucking and spitting, sucking and spitting, sucking and spitting. That’s what you did back then with a poisonous snake-bite, you sucked and spit the venom out.

Two things that were a positive, well three things. One, is that the Rattler was not a full-grown adult. Two, remember I said “Puncture” as in “Singular, I had been bitten by a “One-

Fang” Rattler and Chief commented later that one fang is better than two fangs any day. He also said that sometimes snakes break off a fang. I was taken to a local clinic in town where they gave me a shot of whatever anti-venom and some aspirin. The doctor said it appeared that the Rattler had not given me a full dose of venom when it bit me. The third positive thing, I didn’t have to work for a week after that snake had bitten me. The nausea lasted for a few days and my calf was swollen and bruised. I still hate snakes.

*Chapter Twelve – Why it smells like “Cookies” in here all the time*

So, after almost a year of working on the School Bus Crew, and living in Section Two, I was transferred to Section One and became a “Trustee” and worked in the prison laundry for “Scottie”. Scottie, the Laundry Manager was certifiably one crazy-ass mother-fucker who I worked for in the prison laundry for six months. Serving three life sentences for killing three dudes in a bar one night with only a small pocket-knife (and his bare hands). I can just see the scene in the bar that night, three dudes with Crocodile Dundee size knives, and Scottie, with a small, in comparison, folding pocket knife. One dude says to Scottie who had just pulled his tiny knife out of his pocket, “You call THAT a knife?”. The dude was dead a few minutes later, according to Scottie.

Scottie was cut up pretty bad, (his scars were there for all to see whenever we were lifting weights, shirtless). He was defending himself, according to Scottie. Broke one dude’s neck, and he cut/stabbed the other two in strategic enough areas to cause their deaths. Brutal. I really believe that justice would have been better served if they would have put him in a mental institution after that instead of prison. I remember the first time I actually had a one-on-one conversation with him when they first transferred me to Section One, where he also bunked, he had a look in his eyes that told the whole story, before I even knew what he was doing time for. You know, that crazy look some returning combat veterans have. As I later found out, Scottie was a Vietnam Vet, with serious PTSD issues. Those three dudes in that bar just fucked with the wrong person that night. I’m just glad that I never was in a situation where I was on the receiving end of his anger, like I said, I really believe that justice would have been served

properly if they would have put in a VA Hospital for treatment of his PTSD, or at the very worst, some Looney-Bin.

Working in the prison laundry was nice in that we had the freedom to walk about, back and forth around the prison grounds, and between the main building and the small building that housed the laundry. We also had it pretty nice in that our work-day was much shorter than working on a road-gang/crew. We usually had time to sit and play cards, chess, or lift weights while waiting for clothes to wash and/or dry. Yes, we had our own set of weights, and for at least an hour a day, we were working out. Scottie was “Pumped-Up” not grossly pumped up like a professional bodybuilder, but pumped-up enough that you could see the physical results of years of lifting. Me? Scrawny dude trying my best to impress. I actually did see more muscle in my arms, shoulders and legs after working out every day for three months.

Doing the laundry for the inmates was easy. Throw it in the four industrial-strength washing machines and wash, then throw the clothes into the two huge dryers, easy. No ironing, no folding, back in the large gunny sacks. Inmate clothing, the shirts and pants, were marked with their names with a stencil. The T-Shirts and Boxer-Shorts had their names hand-written with a black, felt-tip large magic-marker. Inmates laundry was divided up by Section in that we collected the large sacks of laundry individually from each section. Section Three’s laundry was washed and dried once a week, on Monday. Section Two’s laundry was washed and dried once a week, on Wednesday. Section One’s laundry was done once a week as well, and done on Thursday.

The guard's uniforms are a whole different story. We took care of the guard's uniforms whenever they brought them in, 24/7, all the time in other words. The memorable thing about taking care of their light-gray uniforms, shirts and pants, is that in addition to washing/drying, we ironed them. Here's the memorable part. For starch, we used "Corn Starch" mixed with water in a spray bottle, and it had to be the precise ratio of water and Corn Starch to get it just right. Too much starch combined with too hot an Iron, and the result was the smell of cookies, sort of. Too little starch, and the pleats in the clothing article just did not have that smartly-creased, can cut you like a knife pleat or creased edge. It took me a few days to get it just right. If you fucked it up, shirt or pants, you had to wash and dry them all over again. Needless to say, that first week, the laundry room smelled like a bakery, and I was re-washing a bunch of uniforms every day.

*Chapter Thirteen - Don't eat the Warden's Favorite Ice Cream and why I hate Peaches*

I loved Sunday dinner, especially the last Sunday of each month. Along with a better meal than our typical weekday dinner, that one Sunday a month we also had ICE CREAM, in addition to whatever Sunday specialty the cooks had come up with, like Southern Fried Chicken, Mashed Potatoes and veggies, Black-Eyed Peas, Fried Okra, etcetera, the typical "Southern" food. We had Vanilla, or Chocolate ice cream, and once in a while Strawberry, but that was seasonal. Chocolate was my favorite. The last Sunday for two months in the Summer when they were harvested, we had Peach Ice Cream made with peaches from our own Georgia Cling-Stone Peach Trees.

As I quickly found out, this was the Warden's favorite, he loved his Peach Trees and he loved his Peach Ice Cream, and most of the convicts loved it as well. The first time I experienced the Warden's Peach Ice Cream just happened to be my fourth Sunday there, at the end of my first month. When you walked through the serving line in the chow hall, everyone got a small scoop that was plopped onto your military style aluminum tray. It was a randomly plopped scoop of ice cream that sometimes ended up on top of your mashed potatoes, collard greens, fried okra, succotash, or cornbread.

That first time for me, I happened to sit down next to Chief. I was excited to try this "Wardens Peach Ice Cream", and as I took my spoon and pushed the little ball of Peach Ice Cream off of my cornbread, I was almost to my wide-open mouth with my spoonful when Chief said, "I wouldn't do that if I were you. Dump that lump of ice cream and wipe your spoon off with your napkin". As he said this with my spoon an inch away from my mouth, I momentarily

stopped and asked, "What do you mean, Chief" as I thought perhaps there was some prison etiquette involved or some kind of protest going on because it was the "Wardens Favorite Ice Cream". "Just trust me on this one, don't eat it and don't lick your spoon", Chief said to me. Chief looked across the table at this dude whom he had already given his own scoop of Peach Ice Cream to, and said, "Minnie doesn't want his ice cream". The dude said, "great, I'll take it". Then Chief grabbed my tray and scooped my Peach Ice Cream off of my tray and onto the dude's tray. I was still thinking to myself, "What the fuck. I wanted my Peach Ice Cream". Chief repeated himself, "Trust me, you don't want it". I noticed at a few of the other tables, four or five other dudes were giving away their Peach Ice Cream, but I really didn't think too much about it at that time.

The following month I found out why Chief was so adamant about my not eating the Warden's Favorite "Peach" Ice Cream. The dude that made the ice cream every week was a trustee by the name of Ross. He was the prison farm's mechanic, and worked in a big barn-like building, which housed a few farm tractors and equipment. This was the building where prison vehicles were worked on when they needed things like oil changing, tires replaced, engines tuned, etcetera. The equipment barn/garage had a room/office in the front where this industrial-sized ice cream maker was kept. As I found out, it could produce ten gallons of ice cream at a time, and I guess Ross was the dude that made the ice cream instead of one of the cooks because the ice cream machine was in his building, and not in the kitchen. I had already worked in the kitchen one day and could see that there wasn't enough room for the machine anyway.

Originally, I had just figured that the ice cream that we had one Sunday a month was "store-bought" ice cream instead of homemade.

Ross the mechanic was a squirrely looking convict in his early fifties. He was skinny, had really crappy teeth, sunken eyes, and a quiet almost feminine voice. The following month after that first Peach Ice Cream Sunday, I had just finished taking a shower after a long day working out on the road. It was early evening, and Mr. Jefferies, one of the guards on duty that night, had called me over to the gate/door and told me to follow him to the "Barn" as we called it. As we were walking, Mr. Jefferies explained to me that Ross the mechanic needed some help making the ice cream that evening for that weekend's Sunday dinner. Okay, I thought, maybe I'll get a little taste of ice cream when we're done.

As we approached the door to the equipment barn, it opened and a convict, Johnny, young dude like myself, was walking out, carrying a carton of cigarettes in his hand, and Mr. Jeffries took him back to the main prison building and I went in. Ross was standing there and said, "Come on in kid, thanks for volunteering" (I didn't volunteer). Now Ross and I are sitting there in the office/storeroom where the Ice Cream Machine was already churning away. Sitting next to the machine was a bushel of ripe Peaches which Ross indicated that he needed help in taking the skins off and cutting them up for the ice cream concoction that he was in the middle of making. "Would you like a brewskie"? Wow! I thought, beer. "Sure, sounds good to me" I responded.

Now, I had heard that there was a certain amount of drugs and booze that was available in prisons, but I assumed it was prison hootch and drugs smuggled in somehow. As I took a big swig of my beer, Ross was rolling what I first thought was a cigarette. As he lit it up and took a

hit, from the smell, it quickly became obvious that it was “Weed”. Wow! I thought. This dude is smoking a fucking joint. He took another hit and reached over and offered his joint, not saying a word. I said, “Are you for real? Aren’t you afraid of getting caught?”. Ross had been holding in his toke/breath when I said that, and then blowing the smoke out responded with a smile on his face, “I get this shit from Mr. Jefferies. No worries, go ahead, take a hit”, which I did. We talked for a bit and as we were discussing the weather or whatever, I noticed that Ross had a lot of magazines laying around. Stacks of them on his desk, on the floor, everywhere. Along with a lot of Playboy magazines, Ross had magazines like Dude, Rogue, Gent, and he also had a lot of magazines like Physique, (porn for gay men). We finished the “Joint” and I asked Ross what he would like me to do to help him with the ice cream.

“Mister, I’m not a Faggot”. Ross had just politely asked me if he could suck my dick. “I’m not into that shit”, I said. Ross in a calm voice said “I didn’t think you were, but I am, and I promise you it won’t hurt, and it will be our little secret”. Then the thought occurred to me that the young dude that was leaving as Mr. Jefferies brought me over to the barn, was one of the dudes that was giving away his Peach Ice cream a month ago. In fact, as I thought about it for a second, the other four dudes that I saw graciously giving their Peach Ice Cream away, ALSO were around my age.

“I’ll slip a condom on you just before you cum”. I struggled with that thought of my penis in this dude’s mouth, and I still thought it was disgusting. “I really would prefer to go back to my section now. There’s a poker game starting in a little bit”. Ross said in response to my plea for mercy, “Minnie (my nickname for Minnesota), I can make your life here better than normal, or

hell on earth. Just give it a try. You'll see. In fact, I think you'll like it. I'll also give you a carton of ready-rolls". I gave in, and Ross lit up another joint, asked me to stand up. He undid my belt, pulled my pants down, and there he was, on his knees, cupping my balls in his hand, gently pulling on my limp penis, trying to get me to an erection.

I tried, really tried hard.....to get hard, but I was just too embarrassed. After about five minutes of fondling and kissing my dick and balls, Ross gave up and said' "Let's cut up the peaches". We shared another joint, drank another beer, cut up the bushel of Peaches and I guess an hour or so had gone by and Ross said it was time for me to leave. As I was leaving, just before I opened the door I asked if we were "OK" and Ross said, "Don't worry about it kid, you tried. We're good" (I didn't get a carton of cigarettes, but he did give me five packs). Ross must have had a stopwatch timing my visit because just as I opened the door to leave, Mr. Jefferies was about twenty yards away, approaching the door with another young stud, Josh. As Josh and I passed each other, he had a big "Cheshire Cat" grin on his face. Mr. Jefferies asked me how I was doing as he escorted me back to the main building. Guess where all that collected condom-filled jizz went. You guessed it, into the ice cream machine. I reckon at least five young studs contributed to the Wardens Favorite Peach Ice Cream that night. THAT'S why I hate peaches to this day. Oh, and I sold that five packs of Camels for poker money that night.

***Chapter Fourteen - Swimming with really smart Beavers, and how long did you say YOU can hold your breath under water?***

Most of the roads around Wayne County were two-lane black-topped roads. Near swampy or marshy land, the various roads had these concrete culverts going under the roads from one side of a marshy or swampy area to the other side in order to provide proper flow/drainage, preventing the water from overflowing and covering the road, especially during the late winter / early spring rainy season.

Occasionally, as I found out, some of these roads did get swamped over with water, sometimes a few feet deep preventing or making it a real nuisance and sometimes impossible for vehicles to pass through. This was due to the marvelous ingenuity and engineering on the part of beavers. When beavers chose to build their dam in a culvert under a road, they didn't do so at one end or the other, they built their dam directly in the center of the fucking culvert, which was directly under the center of the road. Our job was to eliminate the blockage by tearing the beaver dams apart bit by bit.

I participated in this effort and I particularly did not enjoy it. Imagine if you will, a beaver dam far inside a culvert under the road, and mind you, totally filled with water which also was covering the road. Wading to one end or the other, two teams, one on each side, by time we reached the culvert, the standing water already was over your head. With a large grappling hook on a rope, I swam under water, no scuba gear by the way, until I reached the beaver dam which this time, was at least eight feet wide at the base. The process of setting the grappling hook at the top of the dam, swimming back out, under water that was full of debris, leaves, twigs, frogs,

garbage, and sometimes snakes, was the worst part of the job, probably the most insane thing that I have ever done in my life.

Although I had a few encounters with Water Moccasins, luckily, I was never bitten. Thanks for volunteering "Minnie", a fucking Navy Seal without his scuba gear would have refused to do what I was "Volunteered" to do. This process had to be repeated many times until enough of the top of the beaver dam was pulled away that the standing water began to flow. Once enough of the water had receded, at least we no longer had to swim under water, and we could wade in with the water chest-high to continue setting the hook and finish tearing the beaver dam apart. Sorry beavers, I know it's a sucky job, but somebody had to do it. Since I was a "Navy" dude, and from the "Land of 10,000 Lakes" everyone thought I was a Jacques Cousteau or Mike Nelson (Lloyd Bridges) in "Sea Hunt". After three beaver dams I actually became quite good at my assigned job. I also developed a hell of a lot of respect and admiration for Beavers.

### ***Chapter Fifteen - "The Bridge Too Far"***

The work we did was typical of the "Chain Gangs" in the Southern United States, like cutting weeds along the main highways, re-paving, or paving new asphalt roads that were out in the middle of nowhere, or picking up trash along the highways. Some of the work was absolutely miserable, like the three times I was "Volunteered" to assist in the tearing down of those fucking Beaver Dams in culverts under flooded roads.

One such job which took us a week to finish, everyone included in the category of miserable. We all called this job the "Bridge Too Far". This bridge was only ten miles from our prison camp, but it may as well have been in Timbuktu. It was in an area that was part of the Penholoway Swamp off the main road going southeast from Jesup to Brunswick, Georgia.

This bridge, or what was left of it, was on land owned by one of the Warden's close friends, Mr. Alder. Built originally in the mid-1800's as a railroad crossing over a creek, this bridge and the entire area, including the old rail line, had long been abandoned and forgotten, until one of Mr. Alder's sons and a few of his buddies discovered it one day while hunting alligators.

The story we heard was that the bridge had been blown up by Union Soldiers during the Civil War leaving scattered timber and railroad ties. What remained of the timber deck and the rail line was partially submerged in the swamp.

Okay, I understand why Oak was used for the deck of this bridge, for strength and all that, being a dense, hard wood, as we all were soon to discover, that even Georgia White Oak as dense as it already is, will absorb water over, let's say, 70 years or so since the creek had turned

into a swamp and claimed it. This friend of the Warden, Mr. Alder, wanted that timber, and our crew of six and one other crew of five was assigned to extricate his timber from the swamp.

The mostly intact deck, was constructed from massive Georgia White Oak timbers about 14" by 14" square, averaging around fifteen to twenty feet in length. At least half of the deck was slightly submerged in three or four inches of swamp water, it was sort of like dipping your Oreo Cookie in a glass of milk. That submerged portion of the timber had become water-logged over time, and the upper portion, the part we walked on, was dry, at least that first day we worked on it. It rained for three days out of the five that we worked on that assignment, which did give us a little relief from the early spring Sun.

So, getting to the "Bridge Too Far" first via an abandoned road and then walking along what was used to be a rail line, was an arduous adventure to begin with, getting all those enormous timbers up and out of the water, and out of the swamp was the real adventure. The large timbers were fastened together side-by-side with enormous iron spikes that surprisingly had not rusted much after a little over a century. We used these six-foot long "Spike-Remover" pry-bars, a kind of "Crow-Bar" on steroids, to pry out these huge spikes that had been hammered in at angles to connect the timbers, (picture a railroad spike, only a bit longer). Then one by one, timber by timber, we lifted each water-logged timber up onto our shoulders and carried them back the way we came in, about a quarter of a mile to a flat-bed utility truck waiting on what was an semi-impassable road.

Picture a team of eight to ten dudes like myself, first lifting those huge partially water-logged timbers up and onto our shoulders (think Navy SEAL "Log-Lifting" training here), then

walking/stumbling under the heavy load, down the tracks to the road that was overgrown with plant-life, like a jungle, then to the truck, and placing the timber on the truck, maneuvering the timber around with our pry-bars until we had each timber placed in what eventually became a stack of timbers six-foot high.

Have you ever had to remove large wooden splinters from your shoulders? We did have gloves on, but even with some of us taking our shirts off, rolling them up and using them as a pad on our shoulders, we all managed to get a few splinters or two, or more, embedded into the flesh of both shoulders, which had to be pulled out frequently. Each night after the day was done, we all went back to camp with bloody shoulders. My right shoulder actually got infected from a piece of wood that was still under my skin. Eventually Chief cut it out with a pocket knife. I still have that scar.

***Chapter Sixteen - "Wow! This is awesome! Let's party!"***

I'm guessing that a lot of people that end up in prison say that they really are not the "Criminal Type", even though they know full well that they DID commit a "Criminal Act" that resulted in their imprisonment to begin with. "Oh, I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time". Seriously folks, that one doesn't wash, or, "I was a victim of circumstances", now that one I can fully understand because of my own experiences.

I wasn't a bad kid, maybe a little off because of the shitty environment that I was raised in? Later in life I did realize what PTSD was all about, and mine was what I call "Childhood PTSD". There are millions of us. I did have a little bit of a mischievous streak going for me and on rare occasions did things that you just should not do, but that ornery part of your psyche triumphed over reason, like a particular incident when I was in the 3rd grade, now that's a funny story.

From 1<sup>st</sup> grade through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I attended the Glen Cary School near Ham Lake, Minnesota, an old country school until the new school, Johnsville Elementary opened for business. Glen Cary was what was typically called, a "One-Room School-House", that had originally been built in the late 1800's. Kind of like a "Little House on the Prairie" school if you remember that TV series, with one bathroom, so the boys & girls AND the teacher had to share that one single-toilet bathroom.

Outside there was still an old outhouse which we all used when we were outside during recess. The plumbing and the inside toilet came much later in the school's history. Our school had six grades, 1<sup>st</sup> through sixth. There were six rows of desks facing the front of the room and the teachers' desk with each row being a grade, i.e., first row was 1st grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> row was 2<sup>nd</sup>

grade, and so on. This whole thing that I'm about to describe right now began with the teacher wrongly accusing me of masturbating in the bathroom. The problem is, Billy, this sixth grader/masturbator forgot to lock the door while he was doing his thing and this 1st grade girl, (Mary I think it was) had walked in on Billy much to her shock and his dismay.

I suppose that Mary was shocked enough, that she waited until the following day to rat on me. She had confused me with Billy and told the teacher, "Yesterday, I saw Tommy touching his pee-pee (Mary uses a motion with her hand), Mrs. Hathaway". All of us dudes sorta looked alike in those days, being that we were all farm-boys with crew-cuts, but shit, Billy was a bit bigger than me being a sixth grader and I was a 3rd grader. I guess it was "Hard" for Mary to distinguish the difference between Billy and I since he was probably sitting on the toilet at the moment when she opened the bathroom door.

The rule was that when you were finished going to the bathroom, you were supposed to leave the door open, for the convenience of others, and I also think to sometimes air it out. Farm kids, with our healthy diets left really smelly shit in the toilet sometimes, either forgetting to flush, or deliberately leaving the surprise for the next person. Everyone also knew that IF the door was closed because someone forgot to leave the door open, the next obvious thing was to knock on the door, which apparently, Mary didn't do.

Billy told me a whole month later that it was him and we laughed about it all the time because the teacher never did unravel that mystery of who actually jacked-off in the bathroom. Anyway, I wasn't even at school that day, so I WAS innocent, but the teacher was really distressed, and just on Mary's eye-witness testimony I was "Guilty-As-Charged". I guess Mrs.

Hathaway didn't think of looking at her "Roll-Call Sheet" from the day before, that's the document teachers mark with a check next to your name first thing in the morning when the teacher calls out your name, and you respond with "Here" or "Present, Mrs. Hathaway" or whatever.

Had she looked at that Roll Call Sheet, or just remembered for God's sake that I was absent the day before, when the "Spanking of the Monkey" incident occurred, she would have realized that fact, and that I WAS innocent of the charge. In her mind I was guilty, and I ended up cleaning the blackboards for the next four days while all the other kids were outside for recess. Mrs. Hathaway also gave me a note to take home to my mother, but somehow, it was eaten by my dog, Shakespeare.

It was the during recess on the 4th day of this "Blackboard" detention when I decided to take my revenge in what would become a significant story that followed me all the way through the ninth grade. While everyone including Mrs. Hathaway was outside for recess, I went into the bathroom and gently picked up a "Floater" that someone had left in the toilet. It was a small turd, perhaps two inches long, dark brown and hard as a rock. I wrapped that little turd up in a little toilet paper, walked back in the main room and placed it on Mrs. Hathaway's desk next to her coffee cup. Don't ask me why, I guess it was mostly anger that made me do it. The funny part is my thought process as I was wiping down one of the blackboards, feeling the anger rise, and the urge to get back at her for falsely accusing me of jerking off in the bathroom. The workings of an eight-year-old boy's mind, "Should I take a break and go to the bathroom? HEY!

Look what I just found, floating around in the toilet”. I decided that Mrs. Hathaway’s desk was “The Final Destination” for that turd.

When recess was over and the other children came running in, I was nonchalantly finishing up with the second blackboard, as if nothing was wrong. Some of the kids happen to pass by Mrs. Hathaway’s desk and spotted this semi-hard gift, (less the toilet paper), that I had left on her desk. Giggles and outright laughter greeted Mrs. Hathaway when she came in the room. All Holy Hell broke loose as soon as she approached her desk and saw the two-inch turd resting next to her coffee cup. I have to admit, I tried my best to keep a straight face and deny any wrong-doing on my part but based on my inability to hold back the smirk on my face, and the fact that I was in the school doing the blackboards while everyone else was outside for recess, she whacked me with her ruler and ordered me to go stand in the outer hallway with my face/nose pressed up against the wall where we kept our jackets and coats. Then she called Mrs. Sandersen, the principal who came about an hour later. Mrs. Sandersen basically was a "Traveling Music Teacher/Principal/Librarian" who actually believed me with regards to the masturbation incident after she looked at the Roll-Call Sheet, proving my innocence of the penis massaging incident four days earlier. I actually did get a half-assed apology from my teacher that day for accusing me of something I didn't do. Before she left, the Principal did angrily scold me for the "Turd" incident which I did confess to. I surely would have welcomed a DNA test if that type of testing had been available back then because that little turd was not mine, yes, I confessed to putting it there, but I told Mrs. Sanderson that it was NOT my turd. And, another note to Mom was eaten by my dog.

From the onset of this situation four days earlier, even though I knew that I was not the alleged “Masturbator”, I had not told my Mother about that or my blackboard punishment out of fear of getting beat with the “Razor Strop” by my Step-Father. I was always getting beat for shit I did or didn’t do. Plus, to further hide something that I did not do, my dog somehow “Ate” the teacher’s note that first day. After I was exonerated, I did tell my Mother, and at some point, later, she did have some choice words with Mrs. Hathaway. She also kept the “Turd on the Teacher’s Desk Incident” a secret between the two of us, because of HER fear at what my Step-Father would have possibly done to me, a secret the two of us kept forever.

The rest of the year I was a hero to all the other kids, and Mrs. Hathaway? Her and I never did see eye to eye after that, and I think that little discussion between her and my Mother had something to do with Mrs. Hathaway leaving me alone after that. By the time the school year finished in early June of that year, in spite of the fact that it was a turd that I had scooped out of the toilet, the "Story" that got around was “Hey! Did you hear about the little kid who shit on the teacher's desk?" That false story had begun to spread far and wide, to maybe three other schools? That reputation as “The kid who took a shit on his teacher’s desk” carried with me all the way to 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Every now and then, some other kid, or a teacher would ask if I was the kid that had crapped on the teachers’ desk way back in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. I always either said no (because it really wasn’t my turd), or I plead the 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Nothing a person should really be proud of, but I was. Looking back, I think it was absolutely hilarious, and a great memory to this day.

### *Chapter Seventeen – Miranda Rights*

When my mother died in her hospital bed as a result of years of physical abuse (beatings) by my stepfather, I was fifteen, 11 miserable years (since the age of 4), that I lived in a nightmarish, extremely violent home. When the final incident happened, and she died in the hospital a few months later, it sealed my PTSD fate and it would affect me for a good portion of my life after that.

I know it still sounds like a lame excuse for the things that I did wrong, but I sincerely believe there IS a difference between a real "Career Criminal Type", and someone like myself. I'm sure there are a large percentage of people in prisons, some doing hard time like 20-30-40 years that ALSO were "Victims of their Childhood/Circumstances".

It's these people that deserved a second chance, and because of the color of their skin, or other differences from normal white folks, or like being white or ANY color, but unfortunately just too poor to afford proper legal representation, they ended up in prison with improper adjudicated trials, convictions, and most importantly, extremely long prison sentences compared to their actual crime that they committed.

I'm a white dude, farm-boy from Minnesota. I committed a crime, non-violent, but still a crime. I did my time. And here's the difference between a white dude like me, and let's say, the average person of color the same age that I was at that time, 19. I served 20 months of a 3-year sentence, a young person of color probably would have received a fifteen-to-twenty-year sentence of which he/she would have had to serve probably ten to twelve years before even being considered for release on parole.

Another huge difference, I was granted parole my first time up. Being that it WAS Georgia, AND I was a "Fucking Yankee" as I was often called, I was told by experienced inmates that in Georgia, a person NEVER made parole first time up, and even then it normally would take at least a \$5,000 payoff (bribe) to the Parole Board to even be considered for parole first time up.

This is true with many of my fellow inmates that had been denied parole several times. I not only made parole with no cash up front, or legal help, after four months on parole, while living in Augusta, Georgia, they granted my request for "Parole Transfer" to Minnesota. Go figure, either I was just one very lucky dude, or they recognized that I really WAS a victim of my "Circumstances", or was there something else going on that I didn't recognize at the time?. Fun fact that I need to verify, I believe, because I was told, that Jimmy Carter, our 39th President of the United States, was on the State of Georgia's Parole Board at that time. I can verify that if I can find my parole document, I sort of recall that his name was on my parole papers.

Before making parole, I was put on Georgia's newly created "Work Release" program in Augusta. What's interesting is that I was the second person in that new program's beginning that was given/granted that status. The first person was a person of color, younger than myself, that was put on that same "Work Release" program. Amazing. He also must have been a "Victim of HIS Circumstances", instead of being the "Career Criminal Type".

Many years later I would figure out that the reason that I was put on the Work Release Program, and the reason that I was granted parole first time up, and the reason that my parole transfer to Minnesota was approved, and the reason why the warden in Jesup had put me in Section One and assigned me to the prison laundry, WAS, because somewhere along the way,

someone had raised a red flag that way back when I was sitting in that attorney/judges office when I was sentenced, and before that, when I was initially arrested by Sheriff Jackson, I was never read my “Miranda Rights” which was adjudicated by the U. S. Supreme Court in 1966, just a year before my situation in Georgia. I surmise that all of the officials, from Sheriff Jackson to the Warden in Jesup to the Warden in Augusta, to the Georgia State Parole Board, were made aware that this major violation of Federal Law had occurred, and that the State of Georgia would have been liable for a major lawsuit for the lack of Sheriff Jackson not reading me, notifying me, of my Miranda Rights. Makes sense to me why I was treated so good.

*Chapter Eighteen – Mom, you said you were going home tonight*

My brother and I shared the same Mother, but we had different fathers. Mom had divorced my biological father when I was three and she married Johnny's father, my step-father Ed, when I was four. Seven years later she gave birth to my "Baby Brother" Johnny. I loved that little dude, however, it was a real "Love/Hate" relationship about the time he turned four, because he enjoyed watching me get a whipping, and he was always making shit up, "Tommy hit me Daddy".

I never EVER touched a hair on his little head. Sometimes, something would get broken, like the time he tried to ram his little tricycle thru the back-porch screen door. Who can forget the time he took a shit in the middle of the kitchen floor? "I swear Dad, that's NOT my poop". Guess who got blamed for everything? Me of course. Many broken yardsticks.....broken over my ass, (mom had thrown the "Razor-Strop" in the trash early on when I was about five).

My brother Johnny and I were as close as brothers could possibly be, up until they buried our Mother that is. I was fifteen, and Johnny was eight years old when Mom died. I have always thought that at the time of her death, Johnny was young enough, although her death did have an effect on him, he was young enough to just not quite fully understand it all emotionally or mentally for that matter, i.e., it went completely over his head, so I thought.

For myself it was a radically almost insane departure compared to Johnny's coping mechanisms, because for me, Mom's death occurring just a few months past my fifteenth birthday, I WAS old enough to fully comprehend, but NOT old enough to cope, at all. I think

anyone at that age would have suffered in the same way that I did, a suffering that stayed with me for a very long time, long into my adult years.

Years and years of physical abuse eventually took her life. Over a period of eleven years, from the time I was four until I was just turning fifteen, Ed had put her in the hospital about five different times. Spousal abuse back in the 1950's was not prosecuted like it is today. He liked to hit mom in the stomach because it was easier to hide the damage as there usually wasn't much to see as far as physical damage/evidence, unlike a black eye or two, or a bruised and swollen face.

Two of the times she was hospitalized, there was major internal damage. One time the doctors removed her Spleen, and another time her Gall Bladder. There certainly was damage to other organs as well, just not damaged beyond functionality like her Spleen and Gall Bladder. I wasn't given the gruesome details for a few years, and it was Aunty Alice that had explained why mom had died at so young an age. She died at Saint Mary's Hospital in Minneapolis, the same hospital where she was born. Johnny and I both were also born there.

Basically, what the doctors had told all my aunts and uncles, was due to the fact that mom had to have her Spleen and Gall Bladder removed years prior to this last "She fell down the stairs" bullshit, this time a Kidney was badly damaged, but the doctors could not operate or do any more "damage control" because due to the years of abuse, "Her insides had so many issues like massive blood-clotting, that they could not do anything to prevent her from dying. She died on the third day of her hospitalization.

I remember that night. Johnny and I were staying with our Great-Uncle Jim and Great-Aunty Erma. That third evening we were taken to the hospital to see Mom. It was late, like 10 in the

evening, and as soon as Johnny and I walked into Mom's room, I knew that something was up because EVERYONE was there in the room, aunts and uncles, some older cousins, and our Pastor was there as well.

There had to be twenty people crowded in there, assholes to belly-buttons as the saying goes. The room was dark and sort of surreal with only the light above Mom's bed lit. Everyone else were like shadowy figures, and no one spoke a word. Johnny sat on one side of Mom's bed, and I sat on the other.

My vivid Memory of her was a look of peace, almost Angelic. We talked, but the only part of the conversation that I remember, was my asking her, "Mom, when are you coming home?" To which she replied, "I'm going home tonight Tommy". It would take me a few years to figure that one out. No, she wasn't giving me false hope, which subconsciously for a few years angered me, she was telling me exactly how it was for her, that she WAS going home, to that magical, mystical, heaven that she believed in.

My Mother was a sincere, and humble Christian, Sunday School Teacher, and loved by EVERYBODY in our little farming community around Ham Lake. When she was buried at the Glen Cary Lutheran Church cemetery, there had to be two hundred people in attendance. Of course, all my relatives were there, which had to be thirty or forty of them, so I figure the entire community was there to pay their respect. Mom WAS loved, as I said.

*Chapter Nineteen – After the funeral, business as usual*

After the funeral I was naturally, continuing to live with Ed and Johnny, but that only lasted about a month, as one day, my English teacher, (my first class of that day), was the first to notice how badly beaten I was, thinking that I had been in a fight with another kid at school, so she sent me to the Nurse's office. Besides my dual black eyes, I had huge welts across my back, two cracked ribs, and a fractured left arm. Needless to say, I was taken to a local hospital Emergency Room first, and after getting a cast on my arm, I was escorted back home by two Anoka County Deputy Sheriffs to pick up my shit, and then on to some county agency to get assigned to a Foster Home. Luckily for them that Ed was at work that day I was rescued.

I would later find out that he told the authorities that it was I that was abusing him and he was just defending himself, what a fucking joke. Ed was around six foot three, and I was about 5'10" at that time. Here's a "By the Way", he lied about how mom was injured, telling the local constable, who was also an Elder at our church, that regarding this final incident, mom had fallen down the stairs, which were about 25 steps up to the second floor where Johnny's and my bedroom were.

That day that I was escorted home to get my "stuff" as I said earlier, Ed was at work. Johnny was at school, so the last time I saw him was breakfast several hours earlier, before school, and we did not see each other again for twenty years. We both had parted company abruptly, and we took different paths growing up. I survived in my own way, and learned how to cope, spending the next few years in Foster Homes.

I ended up in three different foster homes, until the day after my 17th birthday, the day I stood with about 30 other dudes at the Hennepin County Courthouse in downtown Minneapolis, raising my right hand, swearing to defend the United States from enemies both foreign and domestic, as I joined the U. S. Navy.

My real father, Harold Saxe, had signed the "parental permission" paperwork at the Navy Recruiting Office since I was "under age", and he died two years later, beaten to death by a few other bums, fighting over some woman is what I eventually was told. Although it was obvious that he was beaten to death, the coroner listed his "official" cause of death as Sclerosis of the Liver, that's what they did back then and that's what they still do, if you are just some "John Doe" homeless bum, and the evidence shows that you were murdered, they are NOT going to waste their time investigating your death, period.

*Chapter Twenty – I often wonder what it would have been like to have a sister*

It was 1958, and I was ten years old, Johnny was three. My baby sister Mary was born. I remember, this was one of the times when Ed was put away for spousal abuse. However, rather than receiving a prison sentence, they put him in a Mental Hospital. He was gone for quite some time, at least 9 or 10 months. I remember it was different at home, better for sure, and I think things were getting better for me at school as well. I tended to "act out" what happened at home. I wasn't a Bully, but when someone would bully me, I would most often go a little berserk fighting back. It's a little scary when a skinny little ten-year old screams, "I'll RIP your fucking head off Asshole!!!" That is usually when an adult, like a teacher, would step in and stop the fight. The fighting became less frequent when Ed was gone.

Mom was reclusive that first week home from the hospital with the baby. Maybe she knew that Mary was going to die, and the Doctors knew, and just let Mom take Mary home anyway. We buried her at the church cemetery in a grotesquely small coffin. Maybe it was a shoebox, I don't know. It would be years later when I asked Mom for the one millionth time, "Mom? Why did Mary die?" Mom quietly said, "She had some things wrong with her that caused her to go be with the Lord sooner, rather than later".

Many, many years later, Aunty Erma told me the nitty gritty of it. Ed had hit her in the stomach at about the seven months stage. That was one of many times when I "visited" cousins while Mom was in the hospital. The doctors ran tests, took X-Rays, and gave my Mom the thumbs-up, and the hope that maybe the baby would be OK. Well, the baby survived all the way

through the birth, was NOT okay, and died seven days later. I still think they put her in a Florsheim Shoe box.

At the time, I was too young to understand what happens to people in the Booby-hatch. That's what we called it, besides Looney bin, or Nuthouse. Shock Treatments. Google it. It's not pleasant. It doesn't help. Ed eventually came back home crazier than ever. Of course, I was too young to say, "Why didn't they give him a fucking Lobotomy!" This would be the beginning of the final down-hill slide for my Mom physically, and for the family mentally.

*Chapter Twenty-One – And you think YOUR life has been shitty?*

So, it's not just a story about a dead Armadillo and the consequences/results of my actions. It's also a story about how a person like myself survived a childhood of insane violence growing up in such a dysfunctional and violent environment/manner, and how those various elements we are subjected to, contribute to the formation of our permanent character as adults. Most people that grow up in a normal way, (if they have a normal childhood with normal, nurturing parents), still have the off-chance that they will end up a total mess as an adult in spite of having great childhoods with loving, nurturing parents.

Some say it's the "Luck of the Draw" like in a Poker game, that no one is guaranteed to come out of the "Game" a winner. The odds are in their favor however that they will grow up to become normal adults, with normal lives, having families of their own, and taking part in society, living a normal life. How I was able to turn my own life around began with forgiveness.

When I found my brother after 30 years or so, it was about four years before his death. Johnny was living in Orange County, about an hour and a half drive from me. I drove down one Saturday, and we spent the afternoon and evening together. What a reunion that was. We sat up all night long reminiscing our childhood over a bottle of Wild Turkey and a few bong-loads. We talked, and we talked, and we talked, about a lot of things, family, life experiences, childhood memories. The good things and the bad things. We laughed and we cried, and sometimes we just sat there in silence. One of the things Johnny said to me was how, as an adult, he recognized how much more I had suffered because of our Mother's death in comparison. Johnny and I laughed as we remembered that he was never spanked for anything, and how I was always blamed, AND

whipped, for everything He admitted that as a kid, he was a real asshole for getting me into trouble all the time.

One of the funny stories that Johnny shared, that I did not recall at first, was the time Mom in a fit of brilliant rage, dumped an entire pot of Franco-American Spaghetti O's on Ed's head as he continued to yell at her for not having dinner ready when he came home from work. As my brother and I sat there in shock, (I just knew that Mom was going to get a beating), Ed stared at us for a moment, then came a slight smirk on his face, which turned into laughter, then together, we all laughed at Mom's anger and bravery. From the sound of the headboard rhythmically banging their bedroom wall that night, I knew that Ed got laid. That Spaghetti O's incident changed things, at least for that moment.

Although through his early childhood Johnny was pampered and spoiled by his father, the evil that he endured beginning at the age of twelve is mostly what caused his PTSD. That night Johnny shared a totally different kind of suffering, unimaginable and horrific. They had migrated to Southern California when Johnny was ten years old. Johnny told me that they were basically homeless for two years. Ed was pretty weird, and they were living out of their car. Which was a step up from pushing around a shopping cart. They found a nice park in Long Beach where they could park the car for days at a time. Imagine how "Crazy" one has to be to actually sell your own 12-year-old son to a pedophile. That's what Ed did. He sold him to some dude that hung around that nice little park, and had a special fondness for little boys.

Ed had told my brother that he was going to Northern California for a job, and that in a few weeks, once he was settled in, he would come back for him.

The two weeks turned into two months which eventually turned into two years. That's two years as a captive. "Kid, your dad is not coming back for you. I bought you. I paid your father \$250 for you". Yes, the dude was a scumbag pedophile, abusing Johnny in every way. He was never allowed out of the house. Use your imagination when it comes to the horror Johnny experienced for those two years.

Johnny told me that he was a few weeks past his fourteenth birthday when he finally escaped. No need here to describe how he was abused for that two years, or how he eventually escaped, but I can guarantee you that my brother shared enough of a detailed story to convince me that it was real, and a horrible experience for any child to experience. Use your imagination folks.

Johnny had experienced that horrifying couple of years along with trying to cope with our Mother's death and somehow, he survived, sort of. Johnny, now 35, had not seen his father since he was 12. He spoke conversational Spanish, and he was learning French. Smart kid, chip off the old block they say, except unlike his father who was highly educated, Johnny was self-taught. He was a reader of many books. He credited his French to a Rosetta Stone course, and his Spanish to having been married to a Mexican gal when he was younger.

A year later, Ed and Johnny would somehow find each other. Their reunion lasted a few days, and was not a good one. They went their separate ways after that brief encounter. My encounter with Ed was a brief one also.

I loved Johnny when he was a baby, and I loved him until the day he died. At five, he turned into the typical kind of sibling that did shit and blamed it on his older brother. Not unheard of,

just typical because when I got the blame for something he did, I got the "Razer Strop". No lectures, no stand in the corner and face the wall like Mom had made me do, straight to the "Strop".

Ed used the same Razor Strop that grandpa used on him. For those of you who have never heard of a Razor Strop, it's a long flat piece of thick leather that Barbers used in the old days to sharpen their straight razors. Eventually, Mom put her foot down and convinced Ed to use a wooden yardstick. Clever on her part.

Over the years, I lost track of the number of wooden yardsticks Ed broke on me. He would still get in a lot of whacks before it broke, but at least he did stop every time he broke the yardstick. I have to laugh now thinking about the look Ed would get from the clerks at the hardware store. Eventually he would purchase five at a time, and if I happen to be with him, the clerks gave me a special look that made me feel better. Ed wasn't stupid. He knew he could have used something else to whip me. I think part of it for him was a game, to see how many times he could hit me before the yardstick broke. I saved the broken pieces and made things with them. One time I made a little airplane. That night I shared with him the experience that I had searching for, and finding his Dad years earlier.

I started this chapter with a brief description of how our environment shapes us and prepares us, or not, for adulthood. How my brother and I managed to survive our Mother's horrific life and death, our own horror stories, and our own coping mechanisms are a part of this chapter.

I believe that children, and spouses, can suffer from PTSD also. Whole families can suffer from PTSD. My PTSD manifested itself in different ways compared to my brother's. None the

less, I believe we both suffered from PTSD. Johnny was eight when we lost our mother, and I was fifteen. At fifteen, you are old enough to comprehend what's going on, but NOT old enough to cope with it, at least in my case. At eight years old, Johnny was old enough to feel some anguish and pain, but too young for it to really sink in. In other words, he didn't have to activate his coping mechanism like I had to. Beginning at the age of twelve however, Johnny suffered what no child should experience. Not just the abandonment issues, but being sold off to a pedophile? Give me a break!

So, at Mom's funeral and burial ceremony, Ed was holding Johnny's hand and comforting him, and I was crying my eyes out. The entire community came to her funeral and burial. The church and town folk took up a donation for a headstone. They gave Ed the two hundred dollars or so, which he was supposed to give to the headstone people. I remember visiting her grave over the next year or so, and I recall that she had a pretty nice headstone. I left Minnesota at the age of 17 when I joined the Navy. The headstone was still there when I left. Years later I would visit her graveside and discover that someone had removed her headstone.

The church told me that the monument company had removed it because Ed had failed to pay them. Someone, I think my Great-Aunt Erma, had told me that Ed had spent the donation money on booze. I replaced the headstone with a new one years later.

Johnny and I two totally different experiences "growing up" after that. In spite of my own horror story, I was able to cope, and overcome. Without any help, Johnny was able to cope, somewhat. Johnny died twenty years ago of a sudden Aortic Aneurysm. When he died, the Riverside County Coroner told me that along with his obesity, (he weighed 390 pounds), his

habitual use of illegal drugs also contributed to his overall health and sudden death. That was how he coped, and I question still if that was really surviving.

*Chapter Twenty-Two – Popsicle Ed, frozen til dead*

What kind of father would sell his own child to a Pedophile? How in the world was I moved to forgive my step-father? What happened to Ed, my Step-Father you might ask. His parents had committed him to a mental institution several times for what they called in those days, "Shock Treatments", google that, it's just a mild form of electrocution. The parts of the brain they fry, the brain tissue, is destroyed and never re-generates. It's no wonder he got crazier and crazier over the years. This time, I think they released him from the hospital shortly before Mom's funeral.

The amazing part for me is that twenty years after Mom's death (I was around 33 or 34), somehow, someway, overnight, I experienced forgiveness in my heart for my Step-Father, Edward John Elavsky.

For that prior two decades, I had sworn to myself, vowed really, that if I ever saw him on the street, I would beat him to death with my bare hands, (and I had added a couple of inches to my height, and beefed up a bit). I would have torn him apart. THAT was MY anger, and MY bitterness, and MY lack of forgiveness that had been ruling my life up until that point, and that's why I was not all there, mentally and emotionally. That one incredible day of feeling that forgiveness in my heart began a slow healing process and a positive transformation in my life. Go figure!

I called Ed's younger brother Uncle John one day, who gave me a contact number of a "Free Clinic" attorney, incredibly, in Los Angeles. What's the odds? After 20 years, we end up living so close to each other. Uncle John had told me that every summer, Ed would hitch-hike to Minnesota, stay for a couple of weeks, and then disappear. He thought that maybe Ed would

work his way back to California via the Pacific Northwest. The attorney had been helping Ed with some Social Security paperwork issues. Ed had been living on the street for so many years he no longer had a copy of his Social Security card or remembered his number. He had no identification papers at all, and the attorney was trying to help Ed so he could start receiving his Social Security.

The attorney arranged for Ed and I to meet. I drove down to a building in the eastern part of downtown Los Angeles where Ed was living in some sort of “Half-Way” type of housing for the homeless, picked him up. We went through the drive-thru at a McDonalds, and ended up in McArthur Park. We sat on the grass under a tree for about two hours, eating our burgers and fries.

For almost that entire two hours, Ed talked, rambled on, and I listened. In his “Mind’s Eye”, I was still fifteen-year-old Tommy. He talked about fishing on some remote lake when I was about five. He talked about things, and brought up various rambling thoughts, I knew his mind was gone. You know, that crazy look in his eyes. He didn't mention Johnny, and when I asked how Johnny was, he looked away for a second, and then asked for more ketchup for his French Fries. His mind was so far gone, at one point in the one-sided conversation he asked, “How is Evie doing?”. That was my Mother’s nickname. I simply responded, “She’s fine, doing well”.

In my heart I knew that afternoon that I had forgiven Ed for my mother's death, even though I never said the words out loud. For me, it was a tremendous burden lifted, and from that moment on, things would get better and my general attitude towards life improved.

I saw Ed one more time when he unexpectedly showed up at my work one day. I gave him the grand tour of the place. My next contact with Ed would be a few years later via the Riverside County Coroner's office, and arranging for his remains to be cremated. A Park Ranger had found his remains up in the mountains north of Lake Elsinore. Wintertime, there IS snow in the mountains in Southern California.

Next to his perfectly preserved, perfectly frozen body, was a Ralph's Supermarket grocery cart, filled with crap, and several empty whisky bottles. This was no easy feat, getting that grocery cart up that mountain. The Coroner suggested that Ed had gotten so drunk that he couldn't tell that he was SLOWLY freezing to death. Funny, opposite of "Burning in Hell", isn't it? "Popsicle Ed, Frozen til' Dead".

I paid to have him cremated. Johnny sent his ashes back to our Uncle John in Minneapolis, and he was buried at the Fort Snelling Military Cemetery with full military honors, 21-gun salute and all. At Johnny's request, Uncle John placed a family-size can of Franco-American Spaghetti-O's on top of the jar of Ed's ashes.

After his death, Uncle John shared Ed's incredible story, a story that he had promised to keep secret for whatever reason, until his brother's death. Quite amazing really. Ed was a genius. Before WW2, he had excelled in certain skills that the U. S. Army desperately needed and wanted. He spoke five languages, so he was a "Linguist", plus, long before the word "Electronics" came about, he was highly-skilled/educated in radio/telecommunication equipment. So skilled, that in the early fifties at Honeywell, he was directly responsible for, and

was listed on the patents for, “Electronic” equipment that was the precursor for what we know of today as modern-day electronic flight-control equipment for aircraft.

When the United States entered the war, he entered the Army as a Lieutenant, and was immediately assigned to a military intelligence unit and sent to Europe. Ed was the dude that set-up and maintained the radio equipment behind enemy lines, “This is Victor-Mary-Bravo calling Pa-Pa Bear, over”. He was captured and tortured by the Nazi's for being a spy, and actually discovered and captured in Berlin. Dudes like Ed were not sent to a prison camp, he was held in a special facility/prison in Berlin for two years. They, (the Nazis) fried his fucking brain on truth serums, etcetera, and they physically tortured him as well, for that two years prior to the end of the war. It's no wonder he was as whacked-out crazy as he was. Talk about PTSD issues! By the time my mother had met and married him in 1952, he was somewhat normal, at least normal enough that Mom had no clue what she was in for.

Forgiveness. Forgiveness is a mighty powerful tool to have in your “Tool Box of Life”. It was decades of “living” later, that I truly recognized in my own life, just how powerful a “Tool” that forgiveness really is, because it was instrumental in helping me defeat my own version of childhood PTSD. I had no idea what my step-father had been through during the war when I forgave him. After his death, when Uncle John had shared the story, it all made sense to me, why he deserved forgiveness from me in the first place, that is.

*Chapter Twenty-Three – Mom’s Gone, Texas is really hot, and, “Let’s party!”*

I felt inspired to share this chapter here in my book because I truly believe that our justice system needs a thorough overhaul. There are way too many rich white dudes that really deserved harsher punishment for their crimes, but got off with a slap on the wrist. There also are far too many non-white people being sentenced to unjustifiably longer sentences than normal.

The "Scales of Justice" are certainly out of balance and need to be changed. I guess you could call this chapter a part of the "Social Commentary" portion of my book. There was only one other time when I was incarcerated, and that first time was a month after my mother's death in October of 1963. Without getting into too much detail, the infraction occurred in Lubbock, Texas. I spent three months in the city jail, was never actually charged with a crime, and I should have been. Although at fifteen-years-old I would of, should of, at the very least been sent to a "Juvie" (incarceration for juveniles), I was released to my Great-Uncle Chuck and Great-Aunty Wilma who happened to be returning to Minnesota from a Catholic Church convention in Phoenix.

Okay. I do have a few interesting experiences about that 90 days in the Lubbock City Jail. First, I was in jail the day JFK was murdered/assassinated. I remember that day clearly. I was playing Dominoes with three other dudes, drinking coffee out of a tin-can, and "rolling my own" cigarettes with a mixture of Prince Albert and Bull Durham.

All of us were deeply shocked, and saddened when we heard the news on the radio. We were in Texas, so most of the dudes obviously knew what an asshole LBJ really was, and they expressed their bitterness and anger at LBJ becoming President that day. Some in fact, were

convinced that he played a central role in what we call the "Deep State" conspiracy to eliminate JFK just so he could become POTUS.

All these years later there are still many folks that believe that LBJ connection, except now the fingers are pointing at the CIA, MOSSAD, and the Zionists because of JFK publicly announcing that he wanted to break up the CIA, shut down the Federal Reserve and Israel's Nuclear Weapons program.

I remember one of the other dudes that was playing dominoes with me that day we heard the news about JFK on the radio. A Hispanic dude, Jose, with only one arm, (an early 1960 casualty from the war in Vietnam). I remember him for how he could use his one hand to fold a match over the striking patch of the matchbook, and with his thumb, strike the match, ignite it, and light his cigarette. He also rolled his cigarettes one-handed. Over the years, I would nonchalantly and arrogantly use Jose's little match-trick that I learned from him to impress my friends, and sometimes chicks that I sat next to in bars. I still can't roll a cigarette or a joint one-handed. I use a bong anyway.

Another interesting factoid that comes to mind as I'm writing this chapter, is Christmas Eve, December 24th, 1963. The month before, (the day before Thanksgiving), the Lubbock Sheriff had let everyone in his jail go home for the holidays, as a good will gesture. About ten other dudes, all of them in jail for minor offenses, like public drunkenness, non-payment of Child Support, Drunk Driving, or other non-felony infractions of the law, were released upon their promise to return on January 2nd of the new year to finish out their sentences. I was the only dude left in the jail.

My solitude lasted almost a month, until just a few days before Christmas. I pretty much had the run of the jailhouse and cooked my own meals in the kitchen for those lonely weeks. Grits, Cornbread, Eggs, I became a world renown Chef in my own mind. I still love Grits to this day and I can prepare Eggs twelve different ways.

So, it was two days before Christmas, and another dude named "Joe" who appeared to be in his early thirties, was locked up with me. Of course I was just a little bit curious what "Joe" was "In" for and when I asked him, , he responded by telling me that he was in there for robbing a bank. How naive I was, I really believed his bullshit story, and believed it for another ten years.

Christmas Eve came, and boy, did the two of us party. Joe, the "Bank Robber" (or whatever his real name was), and I got shit-faced drunk that night, let me explain. Joe and I had that full access to the jailhouse, the kitchen, and the outer corridor that surrounded the "Cell" portion of this two-story jailhouse that had been built in the late 1800's behind the county courthouse.

The outer walls of the corridor around the cell block had windows on all four sides of the jailhouse. These windows rolled up and down like regular windows. Each widow had vertical bars about an inch in diameter. Attached to the bars at each corner top and bottom, were U-Bolts that held a thick metal mesh screen on the outside with the nuts to the U-Bolts outside.

A few days had gone by, Joe and I played a lot of poker and dominos, and on that Christmas Eve, Joe says to me, "Hey, come over here and help me carry some of this shit". Here we were, standing at a window, another dude was on the outside standing there in the dark, taking the nuts off of two of the U-Bolts, pulling the metal screen back from the bottom far enough to pass shit through the bars to Joe and I.

Potato Chips, some kind of Salsa Dip, Candy Bars, three Turkey and two Ham sandwiches, a bottle of Jack Daniels, a bottle of Vodka, several joints, and several porno-magazines. After Santa Claus had left us, I thought, "Wow! This is awesome! Let's party!"

Here's where the night gets even more bizarre. Right after we both ate one of our sandwiches, and had a few shots each of JD, Joe whips out a large tablespoon that on the end of the handle he had either used a file or some other means to notch a "Key".

In so much that I immediately thought he made that "Key" to escape, after all, he WAS a bank robber, to my surprise, when he unlocked the main door with the "Spoon Key", we grabbed our "Christmas Presents" and sat on the hilly portion of the grounds surrounding the jailhouse (at midnight) and commenced to get shit-face drunk/stoned, at least I was.

Up until then, for that almost three months, to everyone, the other inmates, to the various Deputies, and the Sheriff, I was some 20-year-old dude named Sam or whatever, (I can't remember what name I used), and I was from Connecticut, or whatever.

After our little Christmas Eve party, (I don't have a clear recollection because at 15, it doesn't take much alcohol or weed to get me totally wasted), I woke up in my jail cot/bed the following day. My guess is either I had stumbled back inside the jail under my own power the night before, or Joe had carried me in and put me to bed.

Five days later, on December 30th, much to my surprise, I was picked up by Uncle Chuck and Aunty Wilma for the road trip home to Minnesota. Now, sometimes it only takes a few minutes to put two and two together. For me, it took about ten years.

When the light-bulb finally did come on many years later, I had figured out that my pal "Joe" really was one of the deputies, and NOT a bank robber. The whole thing was a ruse to get me to fess up to who I really was, and where I was from so they could contact my relatives. I must have really blabbered that night Joe and I partied.

The moral of this little story is that the Sheriff had obviously known all along that I was a minor, he just didn't know how to contact family in order to see REAL justice administered.

That REAL justice was his compassion, and common sense, his proper use of his authority, to know that I wasn't the "Criminal Type", the common sense to realize that I WAS a "Victim of Circumstances", to let me go back home after they got me wasted enough to tell "Joe" my "Story".

Today, that same compassion and common sense probably IS being used in very limited and isolated situations like mine was, I just think it should be the norm and not the product of "Being in the Right Place, at the Right Time".

Only a few times in my life that this special kind of compassion, mercy, and common sense was used for my benefit. Someday, perhaps the justice system will be changed so that everyone has a chance at a normal life, especially those younger folks that are/have been, "Victims of Circumstances".

### *Chapter Cannabis (Chapter 24)*

This chapter which I have decided to include in my autobiography "The Dead Armadillo" that I've been writing, was born out of a Sunday night story-telling contest with my next-door neighbor whose name is "Tom" (like me). Enhanced by a bong-load of some really fine Lake Havasu home-grown, we swapped stories.

The topic of the discussion was to share times when we were totally hallucinate-ibly out of it, due to whatever reason, like, my driving from Minneapolis to Phoenix in less than 24 hours. More to that story, or, "Things" appearing to change size, miraculously, while stoned". More to THAT story, well, two stories.

So, as I have been writing my autobiography, mostly stories of survival and fantastically incredible things that I have done and/or experienced in my life, I thought that adding this chapter would be a great way to share as a distraction from my other more serious chapters, using a few light-hearted stories, as "Comic-Relief" as they call it in show-biz.

Imagine if you will, you are following your cousin on a journey (two vehicles) as you both are moving together, with your "Stuff" packed in your cars, from Minnesota to Oregon. Somewhere in Montana at three in the morning, as you are following your cousin Harry in his Chevy Suburban, your Nissan SUV is having some engine problems, sputtering, not running out of gas, but some issue with the engine that later turned out to be a fucked-up timing belt.

You flash your lights at Cousin Harry and he sees you slowing down and pulls off to the side of the highway and stops. Your SUV sputters and dies about ten feet behind him.

Harry walks back, you get out of your vehicle and pop the hood. “Not out of gas, something else is going on that acts like it’s an ignition problem”. So, it’s too early in the morning, as I said, three AM, and you and Harry get in your Nissan and smoke a few joints.

“Yup. Let’s sleep. Wait until morning and call AAA” Harry says, and he walks back to his Suburban.

You are watching your Cousin Harry as he’s getting back in his vehicle, the tail-lights come on, and somehow, as you are staring at his tail-lights, they miraculously are shrinking. What the fuck? You are thinking. Not only are Harry’s tail-lights shrinking, but his whole vehicle is shrinking, (or so you thought for about two minutes as Harry’s Suburban is shrinking, and THEN totally disappears).

What the fuck? Has Harry been kidnapped by aliens? No. He fucking drove away and left you alone on that highway out in the middle of nowhere in the middle of Montana. THAT’S why his tail-lights were shrinking.

Harry decided to drive to Bozeman which was ten miles away to get a motel room for the rest of the “night” (early morning). So, you suddenly realize that Harry’s Suburban did not disappear and you climb into the back of your SUV and sleep it all off. Harry DID show up at seven in the morning with coffee and a few breakfast burritos. The AAA tow-truck was there within an hour, and you did get your engine issues fixed that day in Bozeman.

Here’s my “Shrinking/Enlarging/Shrinking/Enlarging” story.

My friend Tim Anderson had his own grow in a clearing about a half of a mile into the woods behind his family's farm. He was able to grow his "Crop" which covered about an acre, without his parent's knowledge because they were in Sweden for the summer.

Tim's plants were seven to ten feet tall, and his bud was some of the best I have EVER smoked in almost sixty years. So, one night Tim and I are in the backyard of my Uncle Bob's house, blazing it up. We both were so stoned; I laugh even now when I think about it. So, there we were talking, laughing, and as I was sitting in a patio chair and Tim was still standing up, (I think he had just come back from his car with more weed), as we were talking, I noticed that Tim's head was slowly getting bigger, staying bigger, and then slowly getting smaller, getting really tiny actually. Then getting bigger quickly...then getting smaller, quickly. This seemingly odd, miracle, defying the laws of physics, kept going on for what seemed like a half an hour.

This phenomenon, growing, shrinking, growing, shrinking, repetitive event had me laughing uncontrollably for that entire thirty minutes.

Well, his head wasn't really shrinking and growing over and over again, he was moving closer as he talked, actually, when he was at his largest, his face was about a foot away from my face, and when it was gradually getting smaller and smaller, he was backing up to about five feet away.

Tim had one of these huge Cheshire Cat smiles on his face whenever he talked and laughed, huge gaping, laughing smile. I WAS the most stoned that night and nothing to date even compares. The shrinking head, hahahahaha.

More to be written.....That less than 24-hour drive to Phoenix in another post.

***STILL WRITING, STAY TUNED***