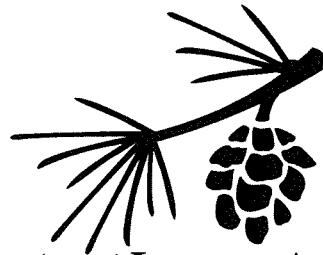


# BAD ASSES & THIEVES



**Washington Contract Loggers Association, Inc.**

PATRICIA  
SCOTT MARTIN

The author wants to acknowledge  
Bill Pickell, CEO of the Washington Contract Loggers Association, Inc.,  
and his Communications Director, Tami Au,  
for editing, promoting and designing this book.

All proceeds from the sale of the first edition of *Bad Asses & Thieves* will go to benefit Children's Hospitals in Washington State. Children's Hospitals in Western Washington, and Children's Miracle Network in Eastern Washington, provide a tremendous service to underprivileged children in our state, providing them with top-notch medical care, regardless of their parents' ability to pay for that care.

**Bad Asses & Thieves**  
**Published by Washington Contract Loggers Association, Inc.**  
**Cover Photo: Bill Pickell**

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For information:  
Washington Contract Loggers Association, Inc.  
P.O. Box 2168  
Olympia, WA 98502  
(800) 422-0074

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Pending

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## About the Author

Patricia Scott Martin

**Editor's Note:** This book, *Bad Asses & Thieves*, written by my friend, Patricia Scott Martin, has been a much-loved feature in the *Springboard* magazine, appearing in excerpts from December 2004 to November 2005. A former court reporter and Korean war correspondent in her early life, she has accumulated parcels of land around the state and is a devoted, active timberland owner. This story, with fictitious names, tells of her experiences protecting the valuable resources on her land (cedar) from thieves, along with other fascinating vignettes of her travels in life. I trust you'll find this story very entertaining as well as informational.

**Bill Pickell, CEO, Washington Contract Loggers Association, Inc.**

Dear Pat:

I'm so pleased to hear your book will be published. I have enjoyed reading it and have read the part about the mice over and over.

Your advice to not let yourself get eaten by anger or bitterness is such a good lesson for Ron and I when it comes to dealing with government agencies!

We're looking forward to the finished product...(we're ordering extra books) because Children's Hospital is a favorite charity of ours and we love to support Log a Load For Kids.

Good luck and we are still hoping to meet you someday!

Sincerely,  
Nadean Ross  
Washington Farm Forestry Association Member



Patricia Scott Martin and dogs.

## Acknowledgment

The closets of writers, like the attics of artists or the pockets of composers, bulge with projects in various stages of completion. Without the encouragement of friends, the prodding of editors and the hours of faithful fine tuning by loyal designers and craftsmen, most manuscripts die in closet cobwebs.

I have been hugely blessed. The passing acknowledgment we give to the support of friends, family, editors, technicians and, ultimately, the readers is never adequate. You know who you are. Please know how much you mean to me.



**Pat Martin**

## Introduction

Some authors change names to protect the innocent. In this book, we changed names to protect the guilty. Whether they are dead, in jail, or elected to high office, we treat them with equal compassion.

**Pat Martin**





# Thief Number One

## Chapter One

---

**T**ake a slow flight over a place I love and call home. Pick a clear day when the sun sparkles off the snow peaks and the lush green forests stretch like a downy carpet toward the Canadian border. A dozen rivers — little nervous, sparkling rivers and big, brown lazy ones — split the forest beneath you. Choose one of them. Swing west with its current toward the silver surf. Watch your river dive into that surf and disappear as it plunges to the depths where a thousand ships are buried. Then take another slow turn toward shore. Let the setting sun warm your back as it turns the snow peaks scarlet. Watch night crawl out of the valleys and turn the forests black.

From the air, a forest looks as soft as a blanket of clouds. Beneath that green canopy lie multiple layers of plant and animal life: a diverse, busy forest society.

Drab, indeed, is the human society by comparison. But just as varied. Hard working loggers and fishermen, proud of their occupations and earning every penny of their pay. Small shops in small towns. Shop owners living from season to season. Struggling to hang on. Some small mills up and running one day, down and out the next. Lots of taverns. Darn few churches.

I own a piece of this world. How I came by it is for another chapter. But from the start, I had a thief. Just one, I thought; and, if I ever caught him, that would end it. That's how dumb I used to be.

The thief knew me, or so it seemed. As soon as I left town, fresh tire tracks entered my forest and parts of my forest disappeared. Only limbs and sawdust remained where wonderful old cedar trees once stood. I began sleeping in my forest, huddled in the cab of a pickup with a rifle in my arms. Nothing happened. Then, as soon as I left, more trees disappeared. Time and again Deputies responded to my calls. This is a big county with a small budget. They did their best.

"Leave town for a few days. We'll keep someone on it as much as possible," they suggested.

I left all gates open and made myself scarce, according to plan. When I returned a few days later, there were more tire tracks and more trees down. I drove four miles to the only phone, and complained angrily to dispatch. She could only inform me that the deputy in the area had a car with a broken radio. Sorry. She'd try to have him make contact later.

"Well, when his radio is repaired, you can tell him to put my cooperation where the sun doesn't shine," I growled, and called for a dozer to tank trap the entrance to my own property. By sunset, he had dug some impressive ditches and reinforced both ends with logs for additional barriers. We went our separate ways.

By the time I finished dinner, the whole town was either talking about or rushing toward my property. A small crowd had gathered. The lights of their pickups illuminated a scene unique to any forest. Two Hyster



*As soon as I left town,  
fresh tire tracks entered  
my forest and parts of my  
forest disappeared.*

## Thief Number One

loaders were struggling to extricate each other from my new ditch. These are the monster machines that run around the relatively even surfaces of docks and mill yards, unloading logging trucks. They can grab an entire load of logs in a single bite between their monster claws and run like worker ants to deposit them in appropriate piles. They are tough in their own setting. But they do not venture into the forests. Now two of them were at my entrance. Behind them, nose in mud, was a patrol car and two very unhappy deputies. After days of patient surveillance, they had finally apprehended two men in a truck coming out of my property. The truck was loaded with cedar obviously cut on my property. Chain saws — still warm — were tied to the top. After jailing the men and impounding their truck, the deputies had returned in a patrol car with a broken radio to take photos. They emerged from the forest at dark to find that the lunatic owner had dug a moat, trapping them behind it.

Having no radio, the deputies had walked four miles through the mud and rain to the nearest mill. The mill dispatched one loader and, when it bogged down, sent a second. Across from the mill, at the entrance to my logging road, is a small tavern. It is frequented by a wild assortment of mill workers, shake rats and brush cutters. Many of these — beers in hands —

had rushed to the scene. Some volunteered help. Others just formed a festive cheering section.

All, including the remaining customers at the tavern, cheered and offered mock salute as the procession finally returned: a parade of old pickups and two muddy loaders dragging a mud-spattered patrol car back to the highway.

The mood of the two drenched and weary deputies in the patrol car was far less festive.

Thus did my relationship of many years with a pair of thieves named “Ted” and “Bob” commence. Both men had a history of arrests and understood the process. By the time most of us were in bed, they were out on bail. Then, long before dawn, they had rounded up another truck, backed it to the impound wall, scaled the wall, thrown the chain saws, cedar blocks and anything else passing for evidence bit by bit over the wall onto the new truck and driven away. Much later, they would tell me that in similar situations they had variously dynamited, burned or otherwise disposed of evidence. On one occasion they had sold stolen cedar to one mill, then gone back at night to steal it and sell it elsewhere. The plan went sour when their truck broke down in the mill yard. Most of us would find this disconcerting. Bob and Ted simply walked off, reported the truck stolen and went to bed. Theft was their business. They took pride in doing it well. Arrests were frequent. Convictions were few. Bail money was just part of the overhead.

In all the later years I knew him, I only heard Bob express one regret.

“I’m sorry it was your property,” he said. “I honestly thought we was stealing from Weyerhaeuser.”

Bob said this shortly before he was murdered. It may surprise you to learn I didn’t kill him. When I look back, it surprises me as well.

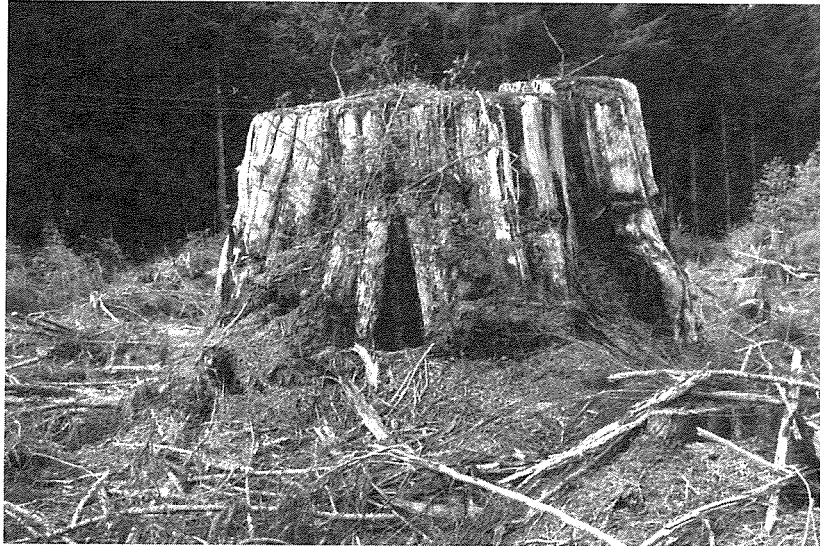


Photo by Bill Pickell

Ten foot diameter Cedar stump waiting to be cut into blocks.



# Trophy Thieves

Trapping a thief is like fishing or hunting. You always want to make a trophy out of the first catch. Bob and Ted had been caught red handed. It ought to have been a slam-dunk, open and shut case. Then they had successfully destroyed the evidence. The prosecutor was backing off. Now it looked like they would get away. This was unacceptable. I wanted their heads mounted over my fireplace. I went to work with my own camera, took comparison shots of the footprints and tire prints in my woods with those behind the impound area and on the impound wall. I pursued Bob and Ted with civil action and hounded the system to continue criminal prosecution. The pressure worked in ways I could not have predicted.

First Bob called. We met for breakfast at the local café. What did I want?

"I want names. I want the big fish. Where did you sell? Tell me the mill."

Bob choked. He had expected to buy me off. But turn? He dropped his head so far toward his plate, I could see the dandruff on his scalp.

"I can't do that," he whispered. "I can't explain it to you. But if that's what it takes, I'll just have to do the time."

Fear? I don't think so. Code of honor? Yes, in a twisted sort of way.

Next Ted called me. No such honor with this thief. He was terrified of jail. Claimed to have served time and heard someone in another cell slowly stabbed to death with a sharpened toothbrush handle. He'd tell me anything. Just help him get out of this and he'd give me any statement I wanted. Twice we met at his latest home. Off the record, he was a chatterbox. But as soon as I pulled out a recorder, he went mute.

Scared? You bet. Code of honor? I don't think so.

Both men got their wish – sort of. The prosecutor got bored and dismissed the criminal charges. I obtained a civil judgment against each of them that I would never collect. Ted distanced himself slightly. Bob stayed in business locally. He always greeted me jovially; and, if he'd been drinking, he would loudly proclaim our friendship to the world.

"No hard feelings," he told me repeatedly. "You did what you had to do. I respect you for that." It was like a business friendship between us.

One dark night, however, as I chanced into the local tavern, Bob noted my entrance to his companions with dark whispers. I did not recognize the other two men, but instantly recognized a rough, renegade quality to both. I could feel their eyes drilling my back as they whispered. Finally, Bob walked over and made a very formal invitation for me to join them. I did so. We sat a moment in silence.

"I wanted to ask you a question in front of these guys" he began. He'd been drinking, but his tone was terrifyingly soft and sober.

"Okay."

He turned to his companions. "I want you to listen to the answer because I'm pretty sure it will be the truth."

The other two men had also been drinking. But there was nothing drunk about the eyes that were now riveted on me. Sober as judges, those eyes seemed. Judges is what they may have been.

Bob posed his fateful question:

"Did Ted offer to turn?" he whispered. I nodded. Bob turned to the other two:

"What did I tell you?" he said. The other two men nodded almost imperceptibly. I felt ice run through my spine.

I saw Bob often after that – sober and drunk — but always friendly. No one ever saw Ted again. Much later, Bob was killed in a drunken gunfight. At least with him, they found a body.

# Big and Little Thieves

My forestland is next to a large Indian Reservation. One state highway runs along the beach. A network of logging roads not shown on ordinary maps connects me with the backside of the reservation. For years, the main artery for logging trucks coming off the reservation came right by my trailer door. The logs were always Indian. The trucks were not. Day after day the trucks pounded by. The timber came from a reservation that had no electricity, no running water and only a pitiful cluster of shacks for shelter.

Millions and Millions of Dollars worth of Indian Logs!

Day after day the trucks pounded by. Outbound trucks had the right of way. Inbound traffic prepared to hit the ditch. Prime virgin timber. Sometimes a single log was large enough to fill a truck.

How big, how old were the trees? Let me give you an example from my own land just south of that reservation. In 1929, fire swept much of this cedar forest, leaving the giant trees in ruins. Over time they bleached, but didn't rot. A new forest grew beneath their bleached branches. But the giant trees were always taller. Their stark limbs rose above the coastal fog and forests, like a congregation of ghosts praying to the moon.

One day, while logging, we cut down one of these dead giants to clear for road. It was bleached and weathered; yet parts of it were still solid enough to ship to market. We counted over 350 rings, one ring for each year. But there was more to the story. This tree, which was at least 350 years old when it was killed by fire in 1929, had sprouted over a larger and older fallen tree. Its roots had grown over the fallen tree, encircling it like the roots of a tooth. When we pulled the stump and exposed the older tree, it too, was preserved – not by weather, but by mud. When it was cut into segments, gallons of water drained out of it. We had to drain it in stages before modern equipment could lift it. A single segment of it filled a logging truck. We counted 400 rings in this second tree that was a windfall in 1570 but must have taken root no later than 1200 A. D. Alive and green, or dead and bleached, this was the kind of cedar forest being logged on the reservation.

Reparations from a vanquished people? Or theft?

To this day, the concept of ownership of reservation land is muddy. Some Indians have allotments of land. Other land is tribal trust land. Some ownerships may never be resolved. But at the time these logging contracts were executed, the Bureau of Indian Affairs was Guardian or Trustee and administered the sale of tribal timber. Indians were presumed incapable of administering their own affairs. Corporations logged that timber. A whole state economy saw the benefit. Political careers depended upon it. But there wasn't a single reservation Indian deemed qualified to participate!

Reparations from a vanquished people? Or theft? Year after year, the Indians on the old tribal council grew more resigned and the younger Indians grew more restless. Then younger activists inherited control and things began to change.

Change is as bewildering to an Indian on a reservation as it is to anyone in the mainstream society. For some, change is a window of opportunity. For others, it's a loss of identity. And some just use it as a chance



Photo by Bill Pickell

Picture of Big Cedar

to vent frustration and raise hell. Like the man the Indians still know affectionately as “The Brown Bomber.”

During the turbulent ‘60’s, an educated Indian from a Montana tribe decided to clear title to some of the reservation land by tracking down the heirs to land, buying them off, and then selling ocean view reservation property to rich urban folks for the ultimate private resort destination. Roads were already paved for the development and lots sold to urban whites before the Tribe took note.

Meanwhile, the state and federal Departments of Transportation decided to build a scenic highway through the reservation to join with a highway to Canada. They held the usual hearings. Again, the Tribe did not take note until equipment was tearing through the Reservation.

I can’t define the technical difference between a Tribal Council meeting and a War Council, but I sure know the difference when I see it. By now there were World War II veterans on that Indian Council; and, they knew war when they saw it.

First they passed a zoning ordinance declaring the entire reservation a “Wilderness Zone” wherein no further development or road building could occur.

Then they passed an ordinance declaring use of Tribal roads or beaches by non-members of the Tribe to be a criminal offense. Tribal Police were now authorized to slam anyone using such roads or beaches into Tribal Jail.

Transportation agencies had already built a beautiful bridge across the first river and started toward the second one, before they got the news. The bridge is still there. A wonderful place to watch the sun set over the mouth of the river as it meets the ocean. But you won’t get to Canada unless you swim.

Meanwhile, resort sales dropped after a few urban investors were arrested for driving to their lots or walking to the beach. And real estate prices really plummeted after the investors told their urban friends about the refinements of an Indian jail. The entire development was abandoned. Indians moved into the unfinished structures in the development.

And the Montana Indian – who was really one of the nicest men I’ve met — almost lost his dignity forever when the Brown Bomber and his friends blew his house and office off the map with dynamite. Of course there was the usual investigation by the usual agencies. No one ever solved the crime. But every Indian over 30 knows who did it.



*I can’t define the technical difference between a Tribal Council meeting and a War Council, but I sure know the difference when I see it.*



# Indians

## Chapter Two

---

I've lived in other countries. I've lived in other states. You get good and bad neighbors everywhere. Even next to a reservation. One thing remains consistent in every society in the world: The group least able to defend itself, forever gets the first accusations of blame when things go wrong.

Next to a reservation, just let the wind blow sideways and sooner or later some fool will blame an Indian. Any time I've complained about something being stolen, some fool always suggests it was another Indian. But only once was it really an Indian. And it wasn't gold or timber that got stolen. It was my dog.

I always have dogs. At that time, it was a shepherd and a malamute. Some folks call a malamute a sled dog. Others call it an Indian dog. At very least the dog liked Indians, because one day while I was in the local store, he jumped out of my truck and joined a van full of Indians cruising through town. When I returned and found him gone, I started a panic search. True to my own pre-programmed stereotyping, I asked all the Caucasians first. No one had a clue. As a last resort, I woke up an inebriated Indian leaning against the store wall. He happily told me the whole story. He knew the vehicle and everyone in it. He saw the young men admire the dog and the dog leap into the van. He knew where we could find them on the reservation. He'd be happy to take me there.



*Next to a reservation,  
just let the wind blow  
sideways and sooner  
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blame an Indian.*

I don't like to use ethnic cliches. This was no "drunken Indian."

This Indian was flat-out, shit-faced drunk. But I loaded him into the pickup and we headed toward the reservation. He had lost most of his coordination except the frequent urge to pee. We traveled slow and careful over the bumpy road. We made frequent stops.

We reached a house where he thought the occupants of the van lived. But the concept of "permanent domicile" on a reservation is kind of fuzzy. Sometimes you live here. Sometimes you live there. We were referred to other houses in a long sequence of futile stops. Everyone had seen the van. The boys were on a joy ride ahead of us, showing off their

new dog. The dog was undoubtedly filled with joy as well. The younger kidneys in the van were better suited to endure the bumpy road. The van was outdistancing us. Our last stop was an empty house.

We met the neighbors: a nice young couple with a toddler cute enough to beg for cuddling. Yes, they had seen the van and the dog. The occupants were drunk and loud and obnoxious. According to these nice neighbors, the van was now headed for the Indian baseball tournament in a town 100 miles away. Baseball is a favorite competition with many reservations and a tournament could last for days. My dog could find a different friendship and wind up in Wyoming!

This young couple deserves more attention in my story. Think what it must be like to raise a child on the reservation. The warmth and security of tribal reinforcement is something many of us have never known.

Children belong to and are loved by everyone. It's a beautiful security blanket. But what is their future? The temptations of reservation life are awful. Unemployment. Alcohol. Drugs. Clinical depression. How do young parents draw cultural reinforcement from that setting and still distance themselves from the temptations?

I think they live by extremes: Either they build an impervious wall of defense against such activities, or they give up and join them. Nothing in between. This was a stand-up pair of young parents who were determined to provide the cleanest possible home for a child.

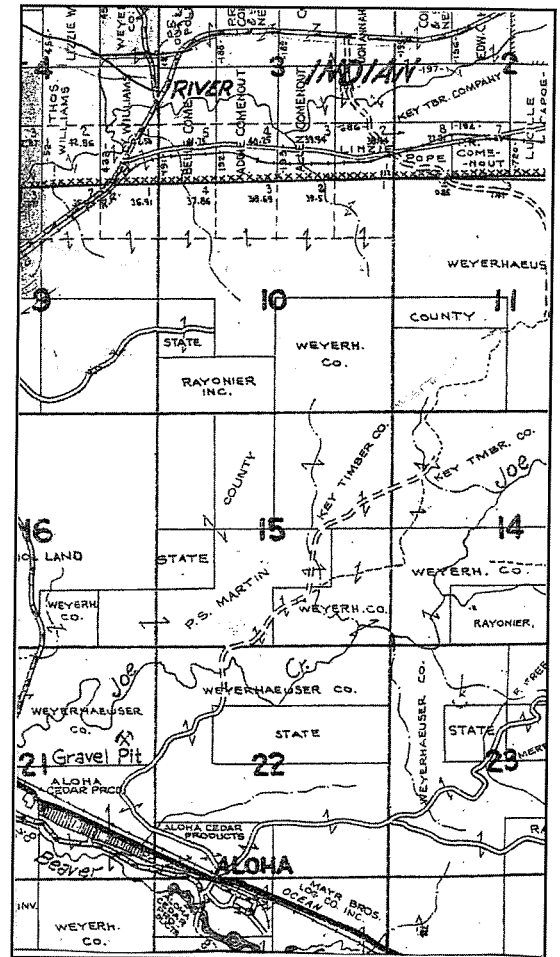
For me, this house was the end of the search. My dog was gone. Probably forever. My companion needed to find a beer or get sick. It was a sad return.

By midnight, back in my silent trailer, along a lonely logging road, deep in a lonely forest, with only a sad eyed Shepherd for companion, I was almost asleep when headlights bumped down the road and came to rest in my yard. Someone called hello and a Malamute bailed out and bounded for my door. His belly was swollen with food, his fur smelled of pot and booze, and he seemed to have a drunken smile on his face. The young couple – baby in arms – stepped shyly out of the car. They seemed surprised that I invited them into my home.

“Those guys were drunk when they came home, but my husband said to them, ‘that dog is stolen, and we know where it belongs,’ and he walked right up and took the dog from them and put it in the car,” she said. Then they had cradled their sleeping child in their arms and driven thirty miles in the middle of the night to bring the dog home.

Sometimes I still sit by this logging road and think of the years I watched the trucks roll by. Millions and millions of dollars worth of Indian timber taken from a reservation that had no electricity, no running water and only some pathetic shacks for shelter. I think back to the days when not only were those things taken from them, but they had no legal recourse, no voice, no choice. Isn't that theft?

And sometimes I think how every time the wind blew sideways, sooner or later someone blamed an Indian. That, too, was part of living next to the reservation. Yet in all those years, the only thing an Indian ever stole from me was a dog. And an Indian Family brought him home!



Map of a portion of author's property and Indian reservation.



# What is a Thief?

## Chapter Three

---

**T**imber is a volatile industry. The price of logs does not correlate to the price of lumber in the store. The latter depends, understandably, upon immediate market demand. The price of logs depends upon what one of the three large timber buyers will pay, how much they have decked out in their yards, and when the next ship is due in port. I don't think big corporations have a master plan to crush little people. But it happens. Always has. Always will.

Timber has had several major depressions in market. But the big killer in our memory is the Depression of the 1930's. World markets dried up. Corporations folded or walked away. Men were stranded in the woods. Thousands of acres of timberlands went back onto the county tax rolls for unpaid taxes. A friend of mine tells this personal story of the times:

Len's father worked in a logging camp at the base of the Olympic Mountains. In those days, men stayed in camp for months at a time. At intervals a train came, brought supplies and picked up the logs. One week the train failed to appear. The men kept logging. Another week and they were short on provisions. The men kept working.

"The old forests were more like a park," he reminds us. The trees had grown to shut out the sun. There was no underbrush like today. Not much forage for game. It would be easier to feed a logging camp off venison today, than it was then."

As food ran out, the men hiked out of the woods, miles down line to the nearest settlement. There, for the first time, they learned that weeks before the stock market had crashed, their company was gone, their hard work was wasted, and their wages would never be paid. Len's father gathered his hungry family together and begged rides back to the Midwest where they had relatives. It would take them a generation to recover from the disaster.

As a reporter hanging around courthouses in the 1950's, I would learn that thousands of acres of timberland surrendered in the Great Depression were still on the county tax rolls unclaimed. You could easily petition to have some of this land put on public sale. Why wasn't more of it sold? And why, when it came up for auction sale, did valuable timberland sell for \$100 an acre or less on a hot, 1950's market?

My first auction appeared to be a men's club of good old boy clones. Certainly I was the only woman, and one of the very few in the room who wasn't puffing a stogie. The county treasurer, after a brief formality that no one seemed to need, began to list the properties for sale, the minimum dollar bid to be accepted, and one by one, to call for bids. The minimums set were very low and there was seldom more than one bid on each property.

Finally they came to a property that no one seemed to want. A portly gentleman in the front row – without standing or introducing himself – declared that the minimum bid of \$130 per acre was ridiculously high.

"We probably have the new, young forester on your staff to thank for this off hand opinion on value,"

he growled ominously. It seemed someone wasn't playing the game. But what was the game?

The Treasurer consulted with the Prosecuting Attorney. "Can we accept bids lower than the minimum?" he asked.

The Prosecutor deliberated with his law books. The Treasurer appeared angry, though at whom I could not decide. The young forester twisted in his chair, unloved by anyone in the room. The portly complainer added further disparagement and suggested a bid of half the minimum was more appropriate, which he therewith made.

"Excuse me," I said from far in the back of the room.

"Yes?" said the Treasurer, startled by a female voice.

"I'll bid the minimum," I said.

The room froze.

"I have a bid!" cried the Treasurer. No one moved.

"Going ONCE."

The fat man bit hard on his cigar but said nothing. What *could* he say after his grouching speech? The Prosecutor looked relieved. The young Forester appeared to be praying.

"GOING TWICE ... SOLD!"

And that – despite all the wild rumors that have arisen in the years since — is how I started in the timber industry. It was also the first step in a lifelong educational process.

Sometimes looking at the timber industry is like flying over a forest. You seldom see what lies beneath. In this case, a poor, understaffed county held thousands of acres of land on its tax rolls. The county didn't even have enough staff and funds to inventory what they owned. But the three major timber companies knew every inch of it. Over the years, they had staked out territories and carefully encircled those areas with their private ownership. Then, with absolute control over the landlocked acres in the interior, they had simply waited and watched the timber grow. No one paid real estate taxes on this property while the land slumbered and the timber grew. When it was ready to harvest, the company that surrounded it petitioned it for auction. They controlled the access. No one bid against them. Minimum valuations hadn't changed since the Depression. Why?

Sometimes I look at the poor little towns in this county and the hundreds of people who live and work in those towns. I think of their little shops and their small houses with big mortgages and the way they struggle to pay their taxes on those modest homes each year.

Then I remember a room full of cigar smoke where big corporations bought hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of timber for a hundred dollars an acre, and I ask myself: What is a thief?



*Then I remember a room  
full of cigar smoke where  
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What is a thief?*

# First Impressions

With a county map and an aerial, I went to look for what I'd just bought. Can't say I was impressed when I found it. What a jungle! On one side, an old asphalt road ended near the border. Here I found an old man and a couple of scruffy dogs living in a pickup with a box over the bed for shelter. From the litter of cans and whiskey bottles, he'd been there long enough to claim homestead rights. Man and dogs all cringed liked they had been beaten in unison for years.

On another road, I found a family cutting shake bolts and loading them into a battered, unlicensed cross between a car and a pickup that had been modified with a torch into some kind of monument to poverty. Two men, perhaps brothers, cut and split the blocks. A woman with stringy hair and missing teeth, with the help of some almost naked kids, stacked them in the whatever-vehicle. I explained I had bought the land they were on and they said that was nice and kept working. I asked if they knew where my property lines might be. They offered to show me an old company survey line back in the brush. The men dropped their tools and escorted me through the salal and wild crab apple to what appeared to be a genuine survey monument. The woman and kids just kept stacking blocks until we returned.

It never occurred to me I might not return.

"Weren't you afraid, walking up on trespassers and thieves with knives and axes in their hands?" some have asked.

No. For years, I would have similar encounters. Beneath the canopy of the forest was a subculture of the down-and-out: alcoholics, loners, unemployables – a cross section of society's walking wounded – all trying to drain the forest of just enough resource to survive. Seldom did I explore a new spur road without finding some needy family or some old fellow with a dog or two, cutting a few stolen blocks between long sessions with a bottle. Most of the men appeared to be, not a threat to a lone woman, but fleeing the memory of women and the civilization women might represent. No sooner would you stumble onto their camp, than they'd move to a new retreat. And the families were something you just had to see to understand. These were people so beaten down they'd lost all resistance, much less aggression. I honestly believe if I had ever picked up a stick and whacked one of them, they would have just curled up and waited for me to stop beating, irrespective of the tools in their hands.

Drugs would change all that. Today, when you are in the woods and come across a strong young man with eyes like glass, acting irrationally and waving a machete, it's time to haul ass. The woods today, thanks to drug freaks and burnouts, can be a scary place. But the loners and alcoholics of the old days were mostly gentle – maybe too gentle to handle ordinary society.

Sad, pathetic thieves.

## It's Mine. Now What?

Exploring this new possession became an obsession. How did one fight through this dense jungle? You couldn't crawl through it or over it. Ah, but you could crawl under it if you found a bear run.

Bears make good trails. I just wish they would learn to run standing up. Instead, they run on all fours. Their tunnels in the brush are never high enough for a human to stand. You can crawl through a bear run on hands and knees. But you'll bloody both within a few yards. I developed a special bear-run style by leaning over, bracing my elbows on my knees and walking like a human sawed in half. It made better time. But you can't look far ahead with your head bent toward your kneecaps.



One day I was startled to come almost nose-to-nose with a young black bear lumbering toward me in our tight tunnel. We spotted each other at the same moment and both had the same reaction. I threw my hands up so quickly I fell on my butt and screamed, "My God, a BEAR!"

The bear was equally shocked. He threw both front legs up to his face with such force he flipped backwards over his own shoulder, rolled to his feet, took another horrified look and seemed to scream: "My God, My God, What IS IT?" Then he shook his head and staggered into the brush, while I laughed with relief until my sides hurt.

Black bears are shy. But mother bears with cubs can be dangerous, of course. It doesn't help that her cubs are always inquisitive and devoid of any caution. One day a logger friend and I were scouting timber on the north of the property. To do this we crossed a large patch of wild crab apple and berries that grabbed our clothing. Sometimes it was so thick we hung up like scarecrows. Then, fighting loose, we crashed forward onto the next clump, often unable to find footing beneath it. We were not quiet. During a moment when I was completely pinned in the brambles, we heard a couple of curious bear cubs keeping pace with us in the brush. They moved easily, just off to the right, under the brush. Mother bear was surely near. We couldn't have run if our lives depended on it.

Yard after yard we crashed and fell forward. Yard after yard the cubs scurried along with us. Once in an opening, we saw their paw prints in the mud. The outlines were perfect. The edges of the prints still trembled. Then, as we watched, the prints began to crumble and fill with water. All across the meadow they stayed that close to us. We never saw them.

Bears are thieves. But I love them anyway.

## More Jungle!

Once you buy your first jungle, you can't rest until you've added more to the inventory. After a few more auctions, I had become a land baron. But why? The land was marginal, the timber sparse.

Reps from the Big Three timber companies seemed amused at my activities. Certainly, no one considered me a threat to the industry, or even a serious factor in it. Let's face it: I owned swamps. Cedar swamps. As a landowner, I had as much prestige as a slug. Hemlock and fir were timber. Alder was a trash tree to be killed with chemicals. But cedar was a by-product to be salvaged by scavengers known as shake rats. On the social scale, you don't get much lower.

Then the market did one of those bizarre shifts and cedar was a hot item. Buyers were beating the brush for it. Thieves like Bob and Ted were



Photo by Bill Pickell

Jungle covering the abandoned Moclips High School.

## More Jungle!


building freeways into it, if need be; and, helicopters were flying it out, no questions asked. Even the big timber companies were changing course. As usual, comprehending their plans was like flying over a forest: you never saw below the surface.

Bob and Ted were my first hard losses to thieves and my first hard lesson on the need to protect my property. But while I was dealing with these miscreants on the south of my property, a crew of 80 men was invading me from the north. By the time I discovered them, they had flown out about \$15,000 worth of cedar blocks from my land. The law provides for triple stumpage when timber is stolen, so the eventual lawsuit was a substantial claim. The facts were obviously on my side. I expected a slam-dunk settlement. Once again, I was naïve.

“R”, a major corporation, owned the adjacent land. “R” had responded to the rising cedar market in typical corporate fashion. An employee, “Joe,” was placed in sole charge of all cedar salvage contracts. For motives only he could explain, (and didn’t), Joe elected to grant all salvage contracts to just one man, “George.” This private contractor had access to all corporate lands and the corporate helicopter. He was responsible for all records and accounting of cedar salvage; and, as you can imagine, the amounts he reported were minimal.

Even though he ran a crew of 80 to 90 men and logged hundreds of hours on the helicopter, he would still allege at trial that his entire operation on all corporate lands made less money than I was claiming he had stolen off of my north line.

Are you following this math? Well, neither did I. Nor did I intend to ignore a major theft.



*Bob and Ted were my  
first hard losses to  
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protect my property.*

Joe met me on site at my request to inspect the damage. Initially he assured me that I must be mistaken about the property lines. He got out a hand held compass and pointed toward a probable property line. He had no reference points. He simply held it in his palm and assured me of its

reading. We followed an arcing path farther south, deeper into my property. Still his compass claimed otherwise. He never back sighted. He never verified his position. He just held the compass out and hoped I’d believe him. At one point he even moved and hid a true survey stake when he thought I was still buried in a bear run.

This was a corporate employee. Why the game?

Eventually, the trespass got so far south; even games could not conceal or confuse its location. Now Joe simply sat on a stump and offered to write me a check. Why would a company employee supervising a private contractor pull out his own checkbook?

Do I really have to spell it out?

His offer was too small and by now I wanted the man’s scalp. If Joe and George were co-conspirators in the theft of my timber, both were probably cheating the corporation as well. Surely someone at a higher level would thank me for this information and see that I was properly paid for my loss.

I went to the next level at the local office and was rebuffed, so I climbed the corporate ladder to Seattle. Still no one thanked me. They wanted my head on a plate. What the hell was happening?

At last we got to court: plaintiff pro se against four attorneys and a front row filled with corporate executives in costly business suits. The lawyers raised every conceivable red herring including asking me to prove that cedar was a forest product. Fortunately, the Judge had no problem sorting through the smoke and mirrors. I got a judgment I could and did collect. But why the costly charades?

George had no problem with the verdict. He was a thief and he was caught. It happens in his line of

work. No hard feelings. Let's be friends and do business:

"You've got some valuable wood and you should let someone cut it before it all gets stolen," he confided with a friendly smile. "Let my crew do it and I'll pay you top dollar. We'll use the company chopper to keep costs down. Nothing on paper. You won't pay a penny tax. I'll pay you cash on site before each fly out."

Would I make it out of the woods alive with the cash if I took the deal? Probably. This man was no killer. He just did business the way he thought it was done in those days. He was a thief.

What about all the suits from the corporation? Were they on the take? Is that why they used company money and company lawyers to fight me when even the men in the field were ready to write me a check? I'll never know the whole story. A few years later the corporation hit hard times and went through a reconstruction just short of bankruptcy. The corporate executives, so far as I know, never had a financial problem. Joe never lost his job. He retired with full pension and honors.

## Which One is the Clone?

By the time the market did its bizarre jump on cedar, I had gambled on and stockpiled a lot of swamp – most of it from auctions of the county inventory of land surrendered in the Great Depression. The first auction had taught me the simple process. It took time to understand that the men at those auctions were mostly clones. For example:

Initially I bid on anything, anywhere if it was cheap. Then I tried to buy adjacent land to block out the ownership (i.e. round out the boundaries on the map). I petitioned a forty for this purpose and in due course it came up for sale. The forty had some nice timber. As usual the minimum was set low. When I bid the minimum, one man rose to outbid me. We raised each other in \$500 increments starting at around \$20,000, until we had climbed to \$80,000. No one else wanted to join the bidding, but I couldn't get this guy off my back: \$40,000; \$40,500. \$41,000; \$41,500. Would it never end?

Finally, as we got to the eighties, I took a big gulp, gave the guy an intimidating stare and blurted: \$85,000. He gave me a sheepish grin and sat down. Had I scared him? No. Clones don't get scared. He was a robot for one of the big companies. That morning they had sent him to the auction with instructions. Bid but don't exceed certain numbers on these specific parcels. Later he would laugh as he told me that his instructions that morning had been to bid no higher than \$80,000 on my parcel. I had just wasted \$5,000!

Fate evens stuff like this out. Later that same year I sold the timber, only, on that parcel to his same company for \$90,000. As part of the cutting contract they replanted the property and today I still own the land with a nice young forest growing on it.

Looking at a timber auction room is a little like flying over a forest. You almost never see what's underneath. These guys looked and acted like high rollers. They talked high roller numbers. But I was often the only one in the room spending my own money. No wonder they could lean back in their chairs and chomp cigars while I almost fainted at the prospect of gambling my life savings.

As timber prices rose, another group attended the auctions and they weren't clones. They were loggers trying to buy themselves a job. They, too, were robots for the big companies. But fear was a serious part of their equation.

Logging is expensive, risky business. Independent loggers usually struggle just to pay the bills. Between jobs they scout new timber. If a patch looks promising, they go to one of the big companies and arrange

## Which One is the Clone?

financing. Repayment will come out of the harvest proceeds if they get the job. Hopefully the job will net them a profit. If they guess wrong, they owe the company the balance. A condition of the financing is that they sell only to the company that financed them. The company sets the price.

Big companies don't need to gamble. Most of the time they don't even do their own logging on their own lands any more. They put their sales up for auction, just like the counties or the state. Certain loggers will have the bidding advantage because they've already arranged financing with the seller. These men aren't gamblers. They are hard working independent operators buying themselves a job and taking all the risks in the process.

I don't believe big companies have meetings to plan out ways to crush little people. But lots of little folks get crushed all the same.



# The Land Beneath the Timber

## Chapter Four

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If timber grew in Seattle, all loggers would be rich. The dirt beneath their harvest could be developed into shopping malls.

That, of course, is what happened to Seattle. But those days are over. Today, if a logger finds a piece of private land with timber that is for sale, he usually can't afford it unless he finds a buyer for the land when he is done.

Market swings change the formulae. In the 1970's a hot export market made every little farm with a patch of trees look good. But what does a logger do with a sad piece of pasture after he's removed the trees? Owners of these lands must care for them, replant them, pay taxes on them. Ownership can be a liability. Some loggers were happy to offload logged land at any price. I began to stockpile this type of land, replant it, watch it renew itself, and pay taxes on it while I did so. No profit. Just a hobby. I had another job to support the hobby.

It may surprise you to know that all those people in high rise offices in the concrete jungles of downtown Seattle and Portland know more about how you should manage your land than you do. And most of them work for government agencies that have the power of law to make you do it their way. Once the government starts managing your land, you better put your common sense in a bucket and drop it in the bay. You won't be using it soon.

Big companies can afford lobbyists. Their influence plays a dramatic part in the passing of legislation. Little owners of land just stand back and wait for the next shoe to drop.

The days of encircling forfeited lands and buying them when the timber matured was over. Hot markets had wiped the inventory out. Now the big guys resigned themselves to being landowners, replanting those lands, and paying taxes on them for forty years while the next crop matured. They spent a few dollars advertising themselves as good guys, growing timber like a crop, and a lot of money lobbying tax advantages for being good guys growing timber like a crop.

In the infinite wisdom of the state – gently prodded by lobbyists – the preservation of a vital industry depended upon tax breaks for people willing to become caretakers of these timberland holdings. The plan was simple: Classify the land. If it met the legal criterion of the classification, reduce the property taxes until the time of harvest. Then, when there is revenue coming in, charge a harvest tax. Seemed fair. At least most of us who owned such lands thought so.

Of course there was a catch. Now a government agency would determine whether your land met the



*Big companies can afford lobbyists. Their influence plays a dramatic part in the passing of legislation. Little owners of land just stand back and wait for the next shoe to drop.*

## The Land Beneath the Timber

description of “a timber land.” They didn’t do it alone. They had lots of help. Part of it came from the chemical industry. That’s why some of us were shocked to learn that you couldn’t grow a proper forest on a properly classified piece of forestland without using chemicals!

Here was the new, approved plan: Prepare the land by killing off all “competing” species with chemicals; then plant your evergreens. If they don’t grow, fertilize them with more chemicals.

They covered all the bases. Not only did they flood the legislature with such nonsense. They donated a few bundles of scholarship grants to the forestry colleges and we wound up with a whole generation of graduate foresters completely sold on this insane process. Most of these foresters went to work for the state and spent their careers advising us how to grow trees with chemicals, and threatening to withdraw our classification and otherwise penalize us if we did it any other way.

Of course none of us could afford these chemicals. But there was a solution. To save the timber industry from itself and preserve the future of the land, the government would now appropriate funds to reimburse us for up to 90% of the costs of these chemicals. This was your tax money being spent on my land.

Meanwhile, anyone with common sense was tearing out his hair. Forestlands on the west side of the Cascades are the watershed for thousands of streams that feed the rivers that feed the oceans. The water table beneath many of those lands is so shallow, you could drill wells and hit an aquifer within thirty to fifty feet of the surface. Water that supplies the city reservoirs comes from these forestlands. By nature, this land is so saturated with moisture and monsoon rains, that hubcaps will sprout green if you leave them in the woods long enough. Getting trees to grow had never been a problem.

Now, ostensibly to grow vegetation, we were saturating the country with stuff lethal enough to kill all vegetation, starve the animals and mutate generations in order to make trees grow with chemical fertilizers. These regulations must be met if we were to keep the land in the tax-preferred timberland classification! It was the new law!

Even local enforcement agencies were aghast. I led one agent through my latest swamp right next to a corporate ownership that had complied with these crazy regulations. On my property, the young trees were lush and healthy. Between the planted seedling evergreens, other native species of brush and berry bushes had sprouted. Birds warbled in the bushes. Deer tracks bounced everywhere. In the fall, the bushes would drop their leaves. The leaves would rot and form natural fertilizer for the trees. Eventually those trees would grow so high, they blocked out the sun. The other species would die off. Then I, or my grandchildren, would log it again and the cycle would start over. Meanwhile, it was a paradise for game and a pleasure to own.

On the adjacent corporate property, the trees were puny and had a yellow hue. The spaces between the trees were barren of all “competing” vegetation. No birds. No deer. No animal tracks. Sterile as the moon.

Against all instructions, the agent silently marked my land in compliance. I think we both had lumps in our throats as he did so.

## What is a Tree?

If you think describing a tree is simple, try making one fit these crazy new regulations. By nature, the forests are multi-species. But the state nurseries only grew Doug fir. The regulations only described Doug fir. And sooner or later if you wanted to comply with the law, you had to plant Doug fir. Not just plant it. You had to keep it alive and growing. If it died, you had to replant it again and again and again.



# Is Theft Genetically Predisposed?

## Chapter Five

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**T**hieves are miserable. Thieves are losers. They don't even have good hygiene. I've watched these wretched people brought into court in prison suits and handcuffs and leg irons. Shuffling. Pathetic. Born for the gallows, as Shakespeare observed. Don't think for a moment that I glorify them with these stories.

But a man who points a gun at your head and takes your wallet has a certain straightforward honesty. No mystery about his motives. No secrets under the canopy of disguise. You can understand this guy. He might even listen if you reason on his terms. His motives are clear. His agenda is obvious.

White-collar crime – especially on the high-stakes corporate level — is so complex it's hard to draw a clean, clear line around fraud. Most prosecutors won't pursue it. It's too costly and time consuming to prove the elements of intent or criminal conspiracy.

"It's a civil matter," they tell you, and toss your complaint into the round file.

Thieves like Bob or Ted or George have a warped sense of honesty, and certainly no respect for your property rights. But they do follow a tacit code that almost amounts to honesty. George ran crews in the woods to the day he died. The operation was mostly off the radar. They cheated the company, stole from the neighbors, paid each other in cash, appropriated company vehicles for private use, cut in riparian zones and destroyed the environment. But if a man cut a cord of wood for George, he walked out of the woods with cash for his work. He didn't have to file a labor lien to get it. He didn't have to convince a prosecutor there'd been a criminal conspiracy to defraud.

An entire sub-culture industry operated in this manner. They paid no insurance, no taxes. Many still operate that way today. Rising costs and deadly over-regulation have forced many of them into this gray area just to survive. Once they step into the gray area, other moral issues become increasingly fuzzy. The definitions of honesty, robbery and theft are no longer clear-cut. But the system does rely on mutual trust. Don't look to the local law library for guidance in dealing with these folks. All you can do is try to read the motives and allegiances of the person standing before you. It's easy if he has a gun. It's not easy if he just has a sly smile and wants to do business.

I'm not sure if thievery is a genetic predisposition, or a fine-tuned social conditioning. But scumbags like Bob and George have a certain child-like appeal because they have no inner conflicts. They have no apology, no inner torment for what they do. They've dismissed all moral issues. Thievery is a job. Somebody's got to do it. Getting caught is part of the overhead. They will come out of prison with the same confident laugh and greet you like a buddy. No hard feelings. You did what you had to do.

Thieves like Bob are about as complex as the family dog. Whether it wags its tail or snarls, you know its intent immediately. You don't see waves of indecision and self-doubt and unresolved moral questions run across its furry face. You feed it, pet it or dive for cover based on what you see.

## Is Theft Genetically Predisposed?

Men who live in the high roller gray areas of mostly legal, sometimes questionable transactions are much more complex and much harder to read. But they all have a certain smile. It isn't warm and friendly. It isn't cold and cynical, or even condescending. It seems to say, "I'm a little afraid of you because I've got things to hide. But I have more information than you do and I think I can outmaneuver you or stall until you make the first mistake."

The company robot at the auction had that smile when he saw me drop \$5,000.

Joe had that same smile on his face when he pulled out his personal wallet in the woods and offered to pay for the trespass.

When you meet a strong young man with glassy eyes, acting irrationally in the woods and waving a machete, haul ass. When you meet a businessman or politician with that certain smile, do the same!

## Bank Robbers

To the west of town lies the Pacific Ocean. To the East are the mills, a tavern and the forests. Between them runs a two lane state road north up the beach to the Indian Reservation.

A single intersection serves each of the tiny towns that huddle one by one along the state highway. On the northwest corner of our intersection with the highway is a small branch bank. A couple of employees wait with the lights on for a few customers and the next, routine holdup. They don't have long to wait.

Every so often a man shows up on foot, pulls out a gun, takes the money, runs across the highway, darts into the woods and disappears. From there he has easy traveling on a network of logging roads that can take him all the way to Puget Sound and a ferry to Seattle, if he knows the area. It's my guess he's a former local boy who used to work the woods, left town long enough to be a stranger to the employees, went bad-ass, and comes back home for a moment of crime. Many drifters identify more with the area than with any family they have had. They show it in different ways.

Meanwhile, the Sheriff and State Patrol cordon off the crime scene, barricade the highway and shake down the commuter traffic. Everyone knows this is futile; that the man has disappeared into the woods on foot. But what else can they do? They don't even have access to the logging roads, nor keys to the gates, nor vehicles to traverse the roads if they could get to them.

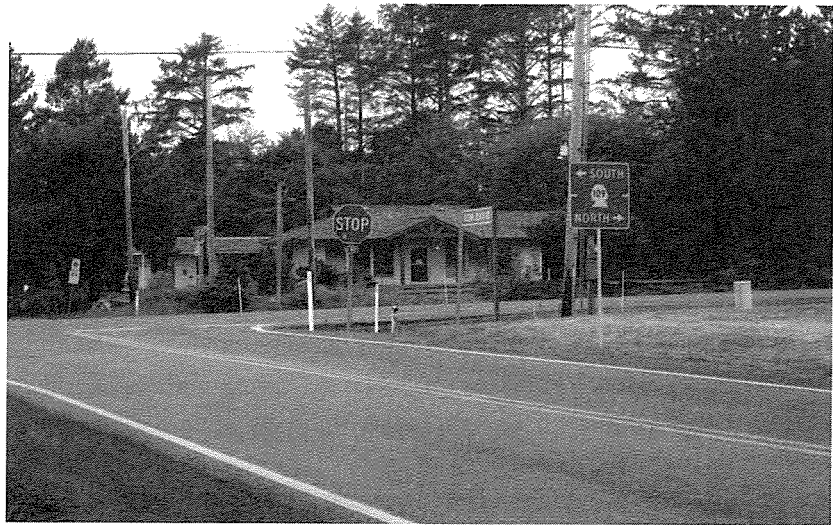


Photo by Bill Pickell

The Pacific Beach Bank - robbed too many times. Now shuttered. Waiting for a new tenant.

Prosecutors love guys like our bank robber and make their reputations on them. When he's caught, it won't take a ten-year investigation to prove the elements of the case against our robber. No fuzzy issues of intent or conspiracy here. It happened. He's the guy. Open the jail door, Charlie.

This guy is definitely a thief!





# What is a Good Bad Ass?

## Chapter Six

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In a small town, there are no secrets. Lots and lots of exaggerations and rumors, to be sure. No secrets. If you have trouble or heartache, everyone knows it. But not everyone volunteers to step up to the tribal reinforcement plate and do something about it.

One year, after my first encounter with Bob, I had some cause to be depressed over personal issues and most people knew it. Bob by then seemed to feel a certain responsibility for me and made an offer of moral support.

“Forget the shit. Let’s go road running.”

Some communities have movie houses or bowling alleys or recreation centers. In a little logging community, the favorite past time is road running. You take a six-pack or two, a friend or two, maybe a dog or two. You warm up a battered pickup, crew bus or junk car, and drive the logging roads. Why? Like mountains: because they are there.

You have no destination, no purpose. You challenge the tank traps and flooded areas. Sometimes you get stuck or the car breaks down. If it’s stolen, you leave it. If not, you get a friend with another junk car to pull you out.

The sport varies with the participants. Some, like myself, just drive the roads to feel the presence of the trees and watch for game or park and watch the water in the streams.

Some get drunk, whoop and holler, fire off guns, steal the parts off of logging equipment and raise hell of all sorts. It’s a personal sort of sport with an infinite variety of personal modifications. Bob’s invitation could mean anything from admiring the scenery to blowing up parked logging equipment. But when he added that we might take a couple of known renegades and some rifles with us and maybe poach a deer, I begged off. It was spring and definitely not legal to shoot a deer.

“Thanks anyway,” I said. “But I don’t think it would make me feel better to blow away a pregnant doe or a spotted fawn.”

Bob was crushed. All he meant was maybe find a little spike buck that needed killing. Not a pregnant doe or fawn.

“Jeezus!” he shuddered. “We may be bad asses. But we wouldn’t do nothing like that!”

# What is a Bad Bad Ass?

Protecting my timberlands from theft had become a major part of life. Of course I was not the only target. The theft of cedar salvage from public and corporate lands had become a big, off-the-radar business. With rising prices came an invading army of men like Bob, sponsored by mills that paid in cash, a community that sold them provisions, and an industry that chose to turn the other cheek.

Why was I fighting this army alone? Why didn't the big companies take a stand?

Some corporate executives may have used their position as managers of corporate lands to develop a parallel, off-the-screen business in league with the renegades. Others still held to the old policy that cedar was a junk product to be written off as a loss. Patrolling huge corporate holdings against such activities could be more costly than the loss of income from such a product. Better to toss this resource to the locals as a conciliatory bone than to risk retaliation through costly vandalism and fire.

Maybe they were right. Certainly, my own uncompromising stand toward theft was costing me a lot of time and money. And it was an excruciatingly lonely battle. Local reps of the corporations had instructions not to get involved with me. All I got was that little half smile. I was on my own!

By now, I had two judgments in my favor. I made multiple copies of the court orders and visited all the local establishments, including the local mills. :

"This is who I am. This is what I do when wood is stolen from me," I told all who would listen.

Then I bought a rifle, a couple of handguns and some ammo, and moved into a little travel trailer in the woods. Soon I was bumping the walls of this tiny shelter. That's not a figure of speech. I was turning black and blue on all sides from hitting the walls. So I traded for a 14x60 two bedroom, mobile home.

"Is delivery included?" I asked the dealer.

"Anywhere within 200 miles," he said.

I gave him one of those half smiles that, if he had known anything, would have made him tear up the contract and haul ass out of his office. But he signed and the trailer was delivered 175 miles over state highway and six miles up logging roads into the forest. We had to cut down stumps and rearrange roads with a cat to get it there. But at last I had a large, clean home in the woods. No water. No electricity. No heat. That would come later. Who cared?

Winds from the beach rocked it at night. Monsoon rains pounded the metal roof like thunder. And on quiet nights I could hear the surf, or the wild animals, or the whisper of the creek nearby. Peace personified!

No sooner would I leave this idyllic setting, than the thieves would move in, ransack my trailer and cart off anything that caught their eyes. No two thieves ever used the same break in point. If I boarded up one window, another would be smashed. Both doors were broken off the hinges so many times, they finally hung by wires. From the outside, the entire home began to look like the victim of a drunken class on first aid. Bandages everywhere.

From the usual tire tracks, I judged it was usually road riders or local kids on dirt bikes. But one break in got scary. It was dead of winter. Record breaking snows. For at least a month, I could not have reached the place except by snow cat. When I finally returned, there were no signs of traffic during the storm and no fresh signs of abuse. Yet there had been a break in and numerous household items had been stolen.



*Protecting my timber-  
lands from theft had  
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Why didn't the big  
companies take a stand?*

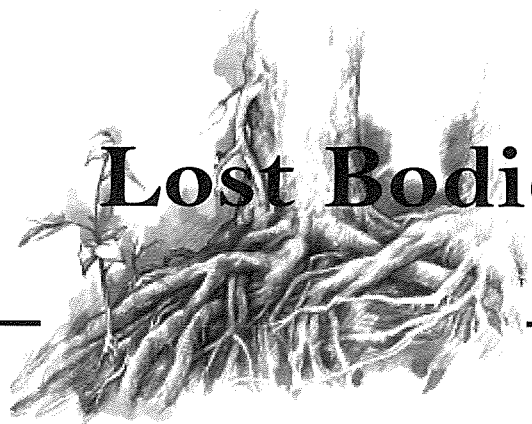
I asked around. One local resident who operated a trap line reported seeing “man tracks” in the area that seemed to come from nowhere and disappear again. Since the man was wearing shoes, it probably wasn’t a Sasquatch. We had no other clues.

The snow melted. Things began to thaw. For the first time in months I took a long walk into the farthest interior of the property. In this area there had been a cold deck where unmarketable logs were abandoned. Among these were some ten-foot cedar poles, cut to meet some order that was canceled. For years they had bleached away in an abandoned pile. Now they had been laid into the shape of an A-frame. On the side toward the wind and ocean, they were fitted together into a roof and chinked with mud. On the leeward side was a clear plastic tarp forming the other side of the roof. I recognized the clear tarp. I also recognized my shovel, my coffee pot, my portable stove, my cooking utensils, my pillow, my blankets and the empty cans of some of my food. This was no child’s fort. Someone had spent a hard, cold winter up here.

A small fire pit had been used for cooking. The ashes were cold but still dry and there was coffee in the coffee pot. Still some unopened provisions. No extra clothing, books, papers or signs of recent contact with civilization except what he had stolen from me.

I tried to imagine what kind of terror drove a man to live like that voluntarily through one of the hardest winters we had known. How did he survive? What did he think about during the long hours of seclusion. Who did he miss? Who or what did he fear? Did he ever listen to the trucks at night and think of walking out for help? Did he ever listen to the echo of the mills and almost reconsider having chosen this solitude?

I came back with the Sheriff and a truck, reclaimed my stuff and ripped up his camp. I’ll never know who he was or what he was hiding from. But this dude – at least once in his sorry life — must surely have been a very bad bad-ass.



# Lost Bodies and Artifacts

## Chapter Seven

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**T**he jungles of Mexico and South America have hidden entire civilizations. The jungles of the Northwest Coast are colder, but just as efficient at growing over anything from abandoned vehicles, to homestead shacks, to bodies.

So far, I've only found one body in the woods. It had been there a long time. He wasn't a victim of accident or foul play. Just an old man who got disoriented, probably sat down to rest, fell asleep and never woke up. Not a bad way to go if you think about it. Especially for someone who loves the woods. I've told my family if my mind goes, just take me out into the woods and point the wrong way for home.

We have a short history in the Northwest, but a lot of room for bodies. Anyone who works in the woods has a private dread of finding one.

On one sunny hike with my dogs, we came across a pile of bones. Old, green bones. Not even enough scent of flesh left to arouse the dogs. But I kicked the moss and found a lot more of them. Then came the skulls. Cattle skulls. Piles of them. Finally found an old timer to give me an explanation. Without knowing, I had purchased an original logging camp and this was the cook shack site. Cattle were brought in live and butchered on site. If you scratched around long enough, you could find a kitchen utensil or a stove lid or other bits of iron – all of it rusted until it crumbled and looked the same as any other bit of brown limbs and dead leaves in the forest.

One day while some men were working in my woods, a cleanly polished little car came up the road. This in itself was unusual. The occupants – a neatly dressed older couple – seemed even more curious.

"Are you lost?" the men asked.

"Oh, no. We used to live up here and just wanted to visit the place."

"Lived here? You must be mistaken. There are no buildings here."

Ah, but there were! We just hadn't seen them. This, too, had been the site of a logging camp. If we looked carefully, there were signs in the stream that it had once been dammed up for a millpond. Over there were the crumbled bricks and mortar from the foundation for a water wheel. And over there were bits of iron that used to be the frames for school desks. We even found pits now filled with leaves where the outhouses for the school had been. By now I had owned this property for 15 years and never known this entire community had been here. But the old couple knew exactly where to look. This was their story:

In the beginning of the century, a railroad spur had dead-ended at this site. Loggers and their families lived and worked and went to school here. This couple – a brother and sister – had been small children in this place.



*We have a short history  
in the Northwest, but a  
lot of room for bodies.*

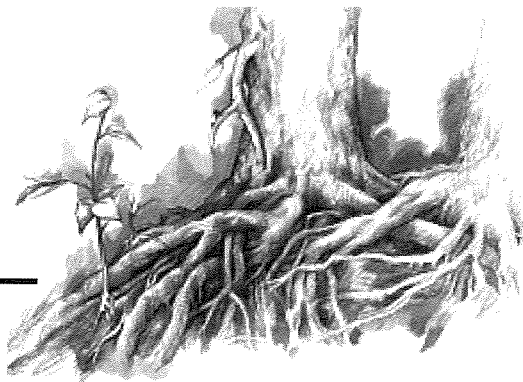
*Anyone who works in  
the woods has a private  
dread of finding one.*

A few years later they realize, too late, there are no higher rungs on the ladder. They've topped out. No alternate skills. No way out.

If, as often happens, they have also been injured, or rotted themselves with booze and drugs, or maybe both, their next step may be into the void. They disappear into the sub-culture of dropouts stealing cedar or other forest products just to stay alive.

Loving fathers often apprentice their kids in these trades. But if they truly love them, they will also send those kids back to school and college in the fall. This happens. Many of the young, successful loggers today have been to college. They've come back to logging because they love the life and the environment. They could have succeeded anywhere.

But far too often young kids have chanced into these industries and stayed until they had no other options – until age, injuries, booze and the lifestyle have robbed them of all alternatives – just like a thief in the night.



# Ghosts

## Chapter Eleven

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I've only seen four ghosts. Three I can explain. One I can't. Working long, long hours – or driving long, long distances — can bring you to a state of fatigue that warps reality.

My first ghost rose out of a foggy night at the side of a dark, country road after I had worked a straight 36 hours at the state legislature. I was too sleepy to be startled by the specter. I simply held to the wheel and noted, “My, my, there’s a ghost pointing toward Henslin Road. I wonder if he means for me to detour.”

Fortunately the apparition snapped me awake sufficiently to finish the drive home. It turned out to be nothing more than the white post of a road sign rising out of a swirling ground fog, its lettered arm indeed pointing to the alternate road.

Another ghost surely saved my life on the return from a long drive to Canada. In the early morning hours of the second day with no sleep, I was back in Washington on I-5, certain I could make it home without stopping. I was fighting to stay awake at the wheel by alternately slapping my own face and sticking it out the window. Even so, my head would nod and the road would blur.

Suddenly the devil’s own dog – an enormous animal – ebony black, mouth open, eyes blazing – charged out of the median at hell’s speed straight for the space between my headlights. No time to swerve. I braced for the collision. It never came. The apparition floated through the car and dissolved. I pulled to the side of the highway and, when I stopped trembling, made the sensible decision to drive no farther.

The third ghost was in Ireland on another long drive. I had met a man of the IRA in Dublin. A colorful man, he told his own, colorful version of Irish history and the chilling story of the martyred brothers who started the revolution that led to Irish freedom – the story of their execution – one brother for insurrection and the other simply for guilt by association. There’s a spot in downtown Dublin where anyone can stand and speak without retaliation.

An empty space in their memory. He had me stand beside it while he told me more. By now I had two sons of my own. The story touched me deeply.

Late in the night somewhere on the northern coast, I found an inn. My neat little room was in an attic with sloping wooden ceiling. A lamp by the bed bathed the ceiling in soft, warm light. I know my eyes were open. I’m certain I was awake. And yet in the soft light I saw them – the brothers – their young faces clear as a portrait on the ceiling, just as the man had described them. Then I fell asleep.

Vivid imagination and fatigue can distort reality. They cannot explain the fourth ghost.

Long before the Dog Man – long before any logging activity on my land – I had often noted the prints of a large dog obviously running down deer. Out of the brush the tracks came – a deer at full bounce followed by a dog stretched out and running hard. Too big for coyote or wolf. I assumed it was a large domestic dog



*Vivid imagination  
and fatigue can distort  
reality. They cannot  
explain the fourth ghost.*

owned by someone on the beach, an improbable, but not impossible distance away. I asked around. No one knew.

For two or three years, I noted fresh tracks from the same dog. Always stretched out, hunting.

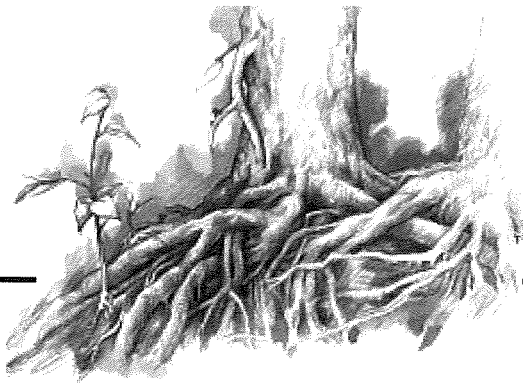
One day I was driving slowly up one of these logging roads in broad daylight. No sleep deprivation this time. No swirling fog. No tricks of light. Suddenly both of my own dogs went crazy and lunged over my shoulder as first a deer and then a huge, black dog broke out of the brush on the right side of the road, crossed ahead of us and disappeared on the other side. Sleek and healthy was this dog. Coal black, muscular body. Froth around his open mouth, but not from sickness. This was a dog that could run for hours and never tire. Stretched out as he crossed the road, he was like a classic painting of what the ultimate dog should be. Large as an Irish wolfhound, but sleek like a Great Dane crossed with a more muscular dog like a Rottweiler.



My dogs saw him, too. I could hardly control them. This was no vision.

No one forgets a dog like that. Yet no one else had ever seen him. Somehow this magnificent animal lived in the wild alone. Most strays will seek the eventual handouts around habitation, or team up with a pack to survive. This dog never did. For a couple more years I occasionally saw his solitary, running prints. Then they disappeared as surely as though he really had been a ghost.

Why did this magnificent dog of flesh and bone remarkably resemble an apparition in a distant place near Canada so many months before? My mind isn't ready to wrestle with that one. Maybe some questions are better left unspoken. One dog, on a sunny morning, gave me a thrilling glimpse of wild beauty. The other, on a dark night, may have saved my life. Surely that's enough.



# Mice

## Chapter Twelve

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**M**ice are a renewable resource. In fact, there is nothing more resourceful at duplicating itself in large numbers than mice in a forest. By day you never see them, no matter what their numbers might be. At night the forest floor can be a moving blanket of them.

My first little travel trailer had one advantage. It was as mouse proof as a hermetically sealed tin can. Initially, the mobile home was also mouse proof before the vandalism. After that there was no winning the war.

My first loggers, as mentioned, were all related except one. The high climber, who was also cat skinner, came from up north and lived in a bus on the job during the week. A bus was engineered to drive down the road faster than mice can run. Mouse proofing was not part of the blueprints. There are a hundred ways even fat mice can scramble through the wiring or gear shift tunnels, the heater vents and so on. Little forest mice use them for freeways.

Basil was a quiet man, unlike his brawling co-workers. During his long lifetime in the woods, he had developed a quiet, steady personal pattern. I never needed a clock while he was there. I knew exactly when Basil got up each morning, opened the door of his bus and walked off to relieve himself. That bus door opening was a signal for ravens to fly in and start a noisy fight for space on the limbs of the trees around his bus. Squawk, flap, flap, squawk, swoop, flap, flap, squawk. Basil methodically started his coffee pot. The ravens screamed louder. Squawk, flap, flap, screech, squawk. They all knew what was next. While the coffee brewed, Basil would empty his mousetraps. Now the ravens swooped and fought and flew off with dead mice, only to be attacked by other ravens. A mouse would drop. Another raven would pick it up and another mid air fight began. Every morning. You could set a clock by it.

Mice won't chase a car or bus. But I've had them move into my vehicle while it was still warm. One group brought enough travel food to stuff the intake manifold and nearly set the truck on fire when I warmed it up next morning.

Mice are a vital source of food for a host of predators. I had no desire to exterminate them. But after they started running over my face at night or jumping out of my shoes in the morning, or eating my soap and leather belts, it was time for action.

Everyone had a different solution. All of them involved various forms of cruelty.

My frequent absences were making the problem worse. Toward winter, the mice sought shelter in the insulation between the walls. For days they would have an undisturbed existence in a dry, quiet home, running freely through the rooms, investigating the bath, drowning in the toilet, or hatching babies in the oven. Then I would return and disrupt things. From their viewpoint, I was the noisy nuisance.

Noise gave me an idea. When I drove in, I would honk the horn, bang on the walls, kick the doors and otherwise batter my own house. For a time, this worked. Mice scurried into hiding while I unpacked. But soon they figured out the routine and we were at war again.



Radio reception was awful. I had a cheap radio that picked up one station. Unfortunately for me it was the hard rock station and my personal taste runs to classics. Running hard rock through a cheap radio filled with static was unbearable for me. Would it be unbearable for mice? Now, in addition to blowing horns and beating the walls, I would open the door, turn the radio on full blast, and drive off on other errands until the mice cleared. For a while it worked so well, I sent the radio station a thank you note, telling them I really didn't prefer their music, but they sure helped get rid of mice. The station never responded.

In time the mice either adjusted or went deaf, and we were back at war.

My friendly exterminator was surprisingly sympathetic to my reluctance to kill mice. This was something he did for a living. But if I didn't want to hurt them, he might have a solution. He gave me a large metal box with two chambers. A metal scoop between the chambers had a tension spring that you wound up with a key. Put some bait on this scoop, set the trap and wait. The mice went into the first chamber, took the bait, set the scoop off and they were flipped into the inescapable second chamber. Of course, in his profession, the next step was to dunk the whole box, loaded with mice, into a large tub of water. But in my case, he suggested I could release them in another part of the forest – preferably far across a river somewhere.



Mice flipping through an aluminum contraption and scratching to get out got pretty noisy, too. But I slept better than when they ran across my face. Sometimes the trap went off repeatedly until I had to get up and rewind it. By morning the trap was always full.

The moment I began to stir, all squeaking and scratching stopped.

"No mice here. We aren't in here," their silence seemed to say. But several long, pink tails hanging out of the trap told a different story. I'd fix my breakfast a few feet away and play their game. Then when I drove to the woods, I'd turn them loose.

A mouse in motion is startling to anyone. But contained and motionless with fright, a forest mouse is a thing of wonder. A fragile, perfect little creature. Tiny pink feet with toes as slender as threads, each joint perfectly formed. Pink tails. Fur like velvet. Soft little whiskers. Big saucer ears. Intelligent black eyes that lack any form of anger, aggression or malice. Delicate as fine jewelry. God's gift to the predators.

They all looked the same. But each one had a unique thought process, an individual reaction to captivity; and, no two mice exited the trap the same way when released.

Some people say animals lack reasoning ability. I say #@!@###!

An acquaintance with the reasoning ability of a human engineer tells of his experience with mice in Alaska. A group of engineers were camped in tents on a construction project. They, too, began to trap and transport mice. But, having the intellectual curiosity of engineers, they painted dots on the mice to identify them if they returned.

With the first releases, the mice almost beat them home, so they increased the distance. They continued to do so in increments until they were dropping mice at the farthest end of the project. They never found a release point far enough away that a few mice didn't make it back. It seems mice are loyal, as well as intelligent.

But the little rascals are definitely thieves.



# Timber Cruising vs. Woods Walking

## Chapter Thirteen

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A timber cruise is a pre-harvest guess. Nothing more. The seller guesses high. The buyer guesses low. Their agents do the same.

If surveyors never lie, timber cruisers never stop lying. It's not their fault. People are asking them a question for which there is no absolute answer. A man who is both a surveyor and a timber cruiser probably needs a lot of Prozac.

Forests grow unevenly. A multi-species forest of varying composition, on varying terrain, may have any variety of empty pockets, or hidden defects affecting volume. Foresters spend a lot of time flagging out grids, taking samples, counting areas and extrapolating them to the broader ownership, or deducting percentages for defect based on experience elsewhere. The computations go into glossy book form. It's good reading if you like fiction. It's also very, very costly. But increasingly complex regulations have made all this necessary. The forester's report that costs you between \$5,000 and \$25,000 often makes the difference between obtaining a permit to harvest and not doing so. State and federal agencies love these reports, because the forester, when he signs the report, assumes responsibility for many of the decisions the government employee ought to have made. He's off the hook. He can issue the permit and go home to the wife and kids, without fear of future heat for the decision. Meanwhile, we keep dropping trees to make the pulp to make the paper for all these reports.

When a log truck is loaded and heads for market, it stops by a scale shack. The logs are graded and measured for length and diameter. Even this measurement involves discretion. The log is not a perfect circle. You cannot see what is inside a 30' log. Yet each of these judgments — these guesses — will materially impact the eventual revenue. Small, independent loggers are forever at the mercy of unpredictable markets and the judgment and opinions of others.

Large corporations have professional foresters on staff that make educated guesses for them. Small independent companies often just use their own best guess. And sometimes — at least in prior times — they rely heavily on the guesses of a man like Chuck.

In the 1970's there was a runaway export market. Every logger and log buyer was scouring the country for anything that looked like trees. Landowners seldom kept up with these wild changes in market, and no one wanted to alarm them by sending out surveyors and cruisers. Local men like Chuck were intimately familiar with the areas. Without the landowner being any the wiser, Chuck could suggest and describe accurately a patch of timber to a buyer and get a finder's fee if the deal closed.

Chuck was a shake rat and a roadrunner. Rumor had it that he once made an unsuccessful try or two at marriage and that he had some kids somewhere. If so, he never spoke of them. He moved a lot. He cut cedar blocks where he found them, sold them off the back of his truck for cash, and spent the proceeds in the town tavern each night. You might say the tavern was his permanent domicile, if he had one. At least, if you

were looking for him or wanted to leave a message for him, that's where you'd start.

He looked old when I first met him. But injuries and the shake rat life obscure true age. He may have served in the army during the war. He may have had some education at one time. But what he relied on for survival was a primal savvy and his lifelong experience with the forest. Few had spent more time in it. Few knew it better. If Chuck said there were five acres of solid hemlock trees on the far side of a swamp, you could take that to the bank. Whether they believed you at the bank is another problem. But Chuck knew trees.

He had no desire to be a high roller. For \$100 he would walk the woods and give you a report. The first time I hired him, he wanted me to know exactly what I was buying.

"I can't do them cruises," he said. "I walk the woods."

When he came out from his walk, I showed him an aerial of the property. He pointed to each area and told me what he saw. It was \$100 well spent.

Chuck, who had probably done as much as any shake rat to litter and despoil the forests, was thoroughly disgusted when burn outs invaded the woods and drugs, meth labs, and marijuana patches began to despoil his beloved forests.

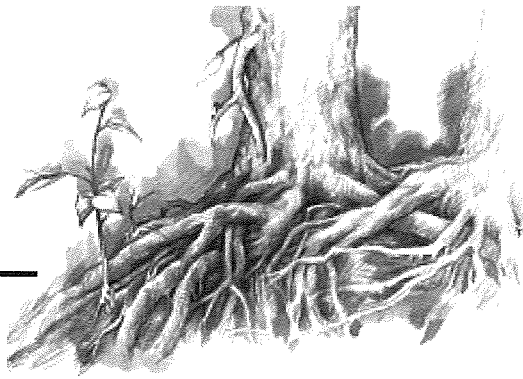
"I don't need that shit," he said proudly. "I'm an alcoholic."

No one has seen Chuck for a while. His time was probably up. I hope he's dead and not in a nursing home somewhere. Most of these men would rather shoot themselves, no matter how decent the care might be.

No one can say with certainty how he will react to a future event. But if I'm out walking the woods some day and accidentally disturb the moss and leaves on something that looks like a log but turns out to be Chuck, I'm pretty sure I know what I will do.

I'll gently replace the moss and leaves and quietly walk away.





# The Tavern

## Chapter Fourteen

A tavern and a mill straddle the highway where my logging road enters. These, and a half dozen houses, give this spot on the highway a separate name on the maps. In boom times, the sprawling mill was a large employer. Today it is mostly a rusted, shut down structure.

The little tavern has ridden the booms and depressions in lock step with the mill. It is one of the oldest taverns in the state. It rose, like a Phoenix, out of the scrap lumber of the local mills. It's shake roof and siding were split by hand by local people. The plank floors were cut in local mills. A potbelly stove is still fueled by scrap wood supplied by customers. The bar is home built, not a fancy imported one. The foot rail is a one inch galvanized pipe. The floor planks are worn into uneven ridge rows by a century of hobnail boots. Its only pattern is the imprint of the boot nails.

Three tables are made out of cross cut sections of virgin timber, polished by a local artisan. The walls are decorated with cross cut saws, peevees, blocks and tackle salvaged from jobs in the local woods and an assortment of shells and glass balls salvaged from the local beach.

For nearly a century, men have come here out of the mill and out of the woods, to get warm, to drink, to relax, to quarrel and tell lies. It has been post office, message center, social center and meeting hall for four generations. Indispensable to them. But economically it forever swings with the unnerving pendulum of the local industry.

During a temporary boom in the 1970's, Ben and Betty seemed to prosper as its owners. The tavern was filled with boisterous workers with fat paychecks. The lights were bright. The talk was happy. The beer flowed.

Then in the late 1970's, the market slid. The mill shut down first one shift, then two. The tavern lights dimmed. The talk among the remaining customers was sad. Beer didn't even pour from the spigots with the



Photo by Bill Pickell.

The "Aloha" tavern, still operating today.

same happy bubbles. Customers talked gloom and doom. Ben and Betty quarreled often. Even the stove seemed colder.

Security never changed. Here in this relatively lawless place, nestled between dark trees along a dark road, security depended on three things: luck, a billy club under the bar, and a big shaggy shepherd dog. The dog had a perfect tavern personality. From dawn to closing he was gentle. If he was outside, he greeted patrons without barking. Often he nuzzled them, waiting for a friendly pat on his massive head. If he was inside, he stretched out mid floor near the stove, listening to the arguments and lies. He never barked or growled. He never bared his teeth. Like a big, furry billy club, he just hung around in silence, keeping a lid on things. No one ever stepped on him. No one, to my knowledge, ever challenged the billy club within Ben's reach, either.

The customers dwindled. Ben and Betty continued to quarrel. Sometimes the customers joined the quarrel. There wasn't much else happening. Finally Betty took off with one of the customers and moved up the Peninsula. Ben continued to operate the tavern alone. The lights grew dimmer. The beer got stale in the kegs. The few messages coming in were from bill collectors. No one answered the phone any more.

The big dog still greeted the dwindling crowd when he was outside, or stretched out mid floor among them when he was inside. He never barked or growled or complained. Each night at closing he would take a final stroll of the lot, mark the tires of the last cars, see the last customers off, then return to be locked in the tavern for the night. Each night at closing Ben would soak the glasses, close the coolers, empty the cash register and lock the dog inside. They never had a break in.

Morning customers often stopped by for a thermos of coffee on their way to the woods. One morning, there was no coffee. No lights. No warm curl of smoke coming out of the chimney. Through the smoky window, they could see the big dog on guard. Perhaps Ben had overslept. The first customers went their way.

Noon customers sometimes stopped for a sandwich or bowl of soup. But on this day, they, too, found the little tavern locked, dark and cold. They, too, looked through the smoky window, saw the big dog on guard, and went their way.

One customer was as steady as the dog. Boom or bust, he always arrived at lunch and stayed until closing. They called him the Mayor. A big, shuffling man. Hard to understand. Possibly disoriented at times. But a fixture in the community. The bar stool next to the window was reserved for him. Now for the first time in years he was separated from that exalted throne by a locked door. Something was terribly wrong with the world. He raised a general alarm.

Eventually someone arrived with keys and let the dog out. The dog greeted the familiar faces and marked the familiar tires. He'd had a long tour of duty. The cash register was empty. So was the safe. Even the jars for Red Cross and other donations were empty. Ben was gone forever.

Betty came back for the dog and some personal items. The little tavern was locked again. Inside, the phone continued to ring. Probably bill collectors. No one answered. After a few months, there was notice of a foreclosure sale on the bulletin board at the courthouse. As usual, I was the only one who read the notice or showed up for the sale.

In the echoing marble entrance of the courthouse, someone from the Sheriff's office pleaded for bids, while a mournful lawyer in the background appeared to be praying. After a long silence, I took a deep breath, stepped forward, and, like a re-enactment of an old movie, said in a clear, feminine voice:

"I'll bid the minimum."

Owning a tavern is not like owning a jungle. Nothing about this new adventure would inspire me to repeat the folly. Clearing title to the property and paying off the old liens was the easy part. I would learn that

liability insurance was more costly than the real estate. Every punch board, every game, every activity, every item sold for consumption had a different license, set of regulations, and set of enforcement officers. Windows and signs had their own rules, too. Sitting in my tavern with the doors locked could still earn me a citation if I turned on the wrong neon displays.

And inspectors enforcing these bizarre regulations seemed to have unlimited powers to make field decisions and no sense of humor. For example, any inspector hearing a customer use a four-letter word could summarily close an operating tavern at his discretion. This could not only ruin the business, but effectively wipe out all conversation on the Olympic Peninsula forever. No way would I operate such a business. Better to leave this new possession locked up until a lunatic came along to bail me out.

Fortunately, happy news arrived that the timber market was gaining and the mill would reopen. Experienced tavern operators bought me out. They weren't even lunatics. But it was sure hard to hide the silly half smile on my face when they did so.

Lights went on. Customers came back. Some customers brought firewood and the place was warm again. Beer and happy conversation bubbled. The barstool by the window was again reserved for the Mayor. A new dog stretched out on the floor. The old dog retired with Betty and her friend. No one saw them any more.

A few years later I got a call from a nun in a hospital in another county. Was I the person who once owned the tavern? Strange inquiry, it would seem, from a nun. She had found my name in some documents belonging to a patient in her care. They believed his name was Ben. He was dying. Would I be willing to come to the hospital and identify him? Did I know if he was Catholic or Protestant? Did I know if he had family?

What is a family?

I looked down at Ben's ashen face as he lay in his final hours in the hospital bed. What is a family?

"Shall I call a priest or a minister?" the nun persisted.

"I'll try to find out," I replied.

The bartender answered on the second ring. I explained. He called the tavern into silence while I listened.

"Ben's dying," he announced. "They want to give him last rites. Does anyone remember if he was Protestant or Catholic?"

Silence.

"He's in a Catholic hospital," I suggested. The bartender relayed that information as well. More silence. Then there was some garbled conversation that sounded very suspiciously like it came from the barstool next to the window.

"The Mayor thinks Ben was Catholic."

"Thanks."

I hung up the phone and turned to the nun.

"Ben was Catholic," I told her. "I just checked with his family."

## Lost Boy?

Owning a boarded up tavern had a few perks. I could use the pool table and play music without paying. It was marginally better entertainment on a rainy night than retreating to my trailer and counting mice.

One dark, stormy night something stranger than the rising wind rattled the tavern door. He was

perhaps 14 or 15 years old and dripping wet. Slight of frame. Dark, but not Indian. Probably Mexican. The accent was more East Los Angeles than Olympic Peninsula.

“Do you have any food?”

“No, this tavern is not open for business. We have no food.

“Anything?” he pleaded. His eyes were dilated, either from the dark or drugs or both. But he seemed to be struggling for politeness and normalcy. I led him to the stove to warm himself.

“How did you get here?” I asked. There had been no traffic. The mill was closed.

“I walked.”

We sat and stared at each other.

“Please can I stay here?” He seemed unaware that he was a boy in a tavern – only that he had found a warm room and shelter.

“No. No one stays here. This is a tavern. You cannot stay in a tavern. Don’t you have friends to stay with?”

“No.”

“Where do you come from? How did you get here?”

“A man brought us here in his car. I don’t know this man. I left.”

“Did this man give you anything to eat or drink?”

“I don’t remember. Yes, maybe. I’m still hungry.”

His clothes dried faster than his first appearance would have indicated. This meant he had not run far in the storm. But which of the darkened buildings had he come from?

Did the man have a house? Yes, a house.

Was the house in a village by the ocean? Yes. Maybe. He didn’t know.

Or was it part of the mill complex nearby? No. Yes. Maybe. He didn’t know.

(Was it bigger than a breadbox? Did the man have a magic wand and hypnotize young boys? Was I being conned by a young hoodlum who would rob me at knifepoint when my guard was down? Or was this a young boy who had been lured to a lonely beach, drugged and abused? Had he escaped something potentially dreadful? What was I to believe?)

We continued to sit and stare at each other. The hour was late. Decisions had to be made.

“Where do you live?” he asked.

“Far in the woods.”

“Can I go with you?”

“No. I cannot take you there. Don’t you have friends we can call? Young people your own age you can stay with?”

“No.”

“Do you know anyone on the Reservation?”

“No.”

More silence.

“Do you have food where you live?” he asked.

“No, I eat at the restaurant. I keep no food in the woods. The mice eat it.”

“If I slept here, I would not touch anything.”

“You cannot sleep in a tavern. It would be better to sleep in the post office.”

“The police would arrest me.”

“Yes, I suppose that’s true. But a boy cannot sleep in a tavern. When did you last eat?”

“I don’t remember.”

“Let’s see if the café is still open and get you some dinner while we decide what to do with you.”

The café was closing, but the owner is a friend. He turned the grill on and fixed the boy a meal. Then he pulled me aside.

“I saw this boy in town earlier,” he told me. “But I don’t know him. He’s not from around here.” His reaction, like mine, wavered between sympathy and suspicion. Who was this boy? Was he a con artist or a boy who needed help? What were we to do with him? More precisely, what was I to do with him? My friend was limiting his participation to the meal. No shelter was included. The boy simply ate. Occasionally he smiled at us. Nothing sinister about him. No evidence of terror either.

I went through a mental checklist of all the terrible things that can happen to a young boy, lured to a lonely setting by an older man. I also went through a mental checklist of all the terrible things that can happen to a sympathetic woman who takes in a strange young man on a stormy night. Finally I tossed a mental coin.

The boy finished his dinner. I paid the check.

“Thank you,” he said. Not overly grateful. Just an ordinary thanks. Barest hint of a smile. Nothing more. He followed me to the street. I had the strange intuition that this was a boy who had lived in the streets somewhere in a warmer country. He seemed comfortable with concrete under his feet, but totally foreign to the climate. He had probably survived terror before. If it had stalked him here, he could handle it. All he wanted was food and shelter. I was his promise of both.

I opened the truck cab. He got in without a word.

“You cannot stay with me,” I said. (The mental coin was still poised mid air.) “But if you truly have no place to go, you may sleep in my truck tonight.”

“Thank you,” he said simply.

Now that I had established some parameters for my own safety, I again remembered his own possible fears.

“It’s far in the woods. But I will bring you back here in the morning.”

“Thank you,” he said again.

We drove up the lonely logging road. The boy watched the passing forest with casual interest. No apparent need to memorize the route. I had said I would bring him back. He appeared to trust that.

We passed a swamp. “I was once in a place where they experimented with aqua-culture,” he said. “It would work well in a place like that.”

Perhaps he was not a street urchin. Perhaps he was part of the migrant work force. “Once lived in a place .... aqua-culture ....” Good English with just a hint of Spanish lilt. He’d been to school somewhere. Polite. An unusual maturity in his eyes that I still found unsettling. Not ominous. Just unsettling.

I parked and removed the keys. He followed me to the door. I did not invite him into the house. I gathered some blankets and a pillow for him and told him to sleep in the cab of my truck. From the open doorway he could see the ample room inside my home. But he understood the limits. He did not ask for more.

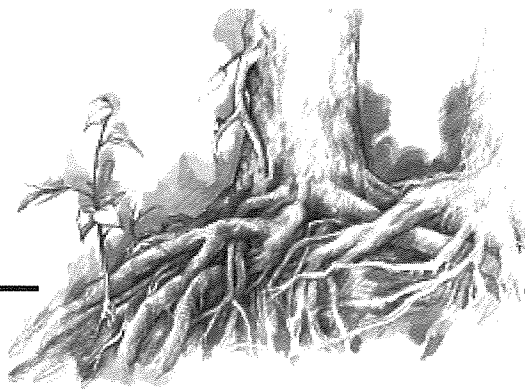
“Goodnight,” I told him.

“Goodnight,” he said as he turned toward the truck. Then he turned back and called my name. I froze, whether in guilt or fright or both, until I saw his face.

“God Bless you Forever,” he said softly.

In the morning, I bought him breakfast. We never saw him again.





# Friendships

## Chapter Fifteen

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**R**eturning to a rural setting can divide your friends into opposing camps just as surely as a few delinquents can divide a small community.

Having been raised in the rural Northwest, I made an easy return to a forest setting. Years of study and work abroad also gave me a casual tolerance for varied lifestyles. But more than a few friends proved less than tolerant. They feared the forests at night. They refused to drive over dirt roads. They regarded anyone in work clothes as suspicious. They even began to question my own sanity.

Why would any educated, sane person live in such an uncivilized, uncultured, lawless place? The fact that I spent much of my new life protecting my new properties from theft and vandalism reinforced their concerns. Many friends refused to visit. Some arrived in luxury cars, and wearing designer casual clothing. They took one horrified look at my domain and retreated to the imagined safety of their condominiums, leaving me to wonder what we ever had in common in the first place.

Of course, most of the local criminals were relatively harmless local boys. Yes, they were crude, uncouth petty thieves. But not really dangerous like the criminals of the metropolitan areas. By now gangs and drugs were taking control of large urban areas where truly senseless, brutal crimes took place. Violent crimes, drive-by shootings and gun battles were reported daily in the metropolitan newspapers. Our criminals, by comparison, were local kids who never grew up.

I found the reactions of some of my urban friends illogical, surprisingly paranoid.

Equally surprising, on the other hand, were some of the friends who delighted in the rustic setting. Mary, for example, had an urban childhood and a long marriage to an entertainer. She had followed her husband on the nightclub circuit through major metropolitan areas until his premature death. Years of fast living had taken their toll on her as well. But she treasured some of these visits to the forest during the final months of her life.

Another friend also loved the setting and took the trouble to visit occasionally. Paula's father was a Cheyenne Chief, her mother pure Irish. Paula had borrowed heavily from both cultures. She had an Irish temper, an Indian sensitivity to discrimination and unfairness, and an uncompromising Catholic interpretation of right and wrong, good and evil. It was a volatile mix, but you couldn't ask for a more loyal friend.

Paula accompanied me on a surveillance trip one day. It was to be an afternoon drive to check gates and locks, with a brief stay for coffee at the trailer. We brought no provisions for spending the night and it was one of the few times I brought no weapon.



*Violent crimes, drive-by shootings, and gun battles were reported daily in the metropolitan papers. Our criminals, by comparison, were local kids who never grew up.*

As we sat at the kitchen table, a battered little car roared past the door and disappeared into the woods. No point in pursuing this trespasser. He would reach a dead end and turn back. I simply pulled my truck into a blocking position and waited for his return. Usually this would result in the blocked driver getting out, identifying himself, and giving some sheepish excuse. I would then remind him he was on private property and let him pass. No big deal.

The car roared back. Noting he was blocked, the driver slammed both fists on the steering wheel and started shouting. With windows up and both engines running, I could not understand a word. But clearly he was enraged. Then, still yelling, he floor boarded the little car straight into the front of my truck. I hit the brake. He continued pressing the throttle, full roar. The car was no match for the heavier truck. It began to disintegrate. First pieces of grill, then the bumper and a fender flew off. Still he pounded the wheel with his fists and pressed the throttle.

From my seat in the higher truck, I could look down and see that he was alone except for a little dog in the passenger seat beside him. The man raged. The little dog stood on the seat, with its front paws on the dash and its tail wagging as though this were just another happy ride in the country. Not until his spinning wheels turned the air blue with smoke and his radiator sent up columns of steam did the driver give up. Now he got out of the car and I had my first look at him.

Why doesn't God ever make nut cases in small sizes? It's as though all of the developmental energy that is normally split in equal measure between brawn and brain, gets channeled into one, big, mindless mutated mass. The man was huge. Formless. Not muscular, nor fat. Just a big, slovenly mass. Bloated face. Inadequate shirt over a half-exposed gut, arms and legs like flabby sacks of wet flour. Now as he approached my door, I realized the shouting was directed, not at me, but at invisible people around him. He slobbered as he shouted. Not the froth of a healthy dog chasing deer, but the slack-jawed slobber of a very sick animal.

By now, Paula stood helplessly to my right. "Run, call the Sheriff," I yelled to her.

We had no phone of course. But she understood my emphasis on *run!* She dashed behind the trailer and hid in the bushes. The nut case saw her and gave chase. I honked the horn to distract him. He paused, regrouped and came back to my truck. First he tried to force the locked door. Then he raised both fists to smash the window. I could look up into his bloated face. But what I recall most vividly is his huge belly at my eye level, with the dirty navel and a few pubic hairs exposed above his sagging pants.

I'll never know the source of my own calm as I raised my hand against the impending shatter and said gently, "Wait. The Sheriff is coming."

He paused, arms raised. Something about the word, Sheriff, seemed to compute. He looked about, confused, dropped his arms, staggered to his car, backed it off my truck and drove it over fallen logs, through the bushes, and up the road, out of sight. Parts, including his license plate, continued to fall. As he plunged the vehicle around me, through the brush, I could still see the little dog, paws on dashboard, happily wagging its tail, while the man shouted to invisible companions.

The responding deputy instantly recognized our description. The man, Doug, had a hair-raising history of violence. We could expect charges to be filed and a trial. Anyone connected with law enforcement would be happy to see him put away.

The more we learned of his history, the more Paula fumed with Irish temper and Catholic indignation. Twice she flew from the Midwest at her own expense to testify at a trial that was twice postponed. Then charges were reduced to a lower court. Then a court appointed attorney negotiated a suspended sentence based on a psychiatric report. Doug, it seemed, was a diagnosed schizophrenic on medication. Any incarceration would do him irreparable harm.

I called Paula in Oklahoma to tell her the case was over. Paula's scream would have been audible all the way from Oklahoma without the phone.

"What about the harm to others? To us?"

"I guess we're all supposed to lock ourselves in jails for safety," I replied. It seemed so incongruous, I had to laugh despite my frustration.

A local friend who knew Doug's history expressed equal exasperation: "Didn't you have a gun? What a shame!"

The more I learned about Doug, the more I agreed. Putting a bullet through that ugly gut seemed like the only solution. Many years before, two young women camping on the beach had been brutally slaughtered in their tent. Doug and his brother were tried for first-degree murder. The brother was convicted and still in prison. But Doug's mental capacity raised sufficient doubt to gain his acquittal.

A hippie couple down the beach took Doug in as a roommate until the woman alleged he battered and attempted to rape her. During the investigation, the couple left the area without forwarding address. Charges had to be dropped.

Then a young woman who had been seen with Doug was missing and investigators were digging up his yard. They found nothing. Charges could not be filed.

Then a logging truck driver noted Doug's car parked on a lonely logging road. As he approached, a young woman escaped from the car and bolted for the truck. She claimed to have been abducted. Another investigation faltered when the young woman, a runaway with legal problems of her own, left without pressing charges.

Next, despite this history, some moron handed Doug a gun, issued him a badge and hired him as a night watchman for a government facility. That lasted only a few days, before something bizarre happened and he was back in the community.

Our encounter was only a minor blip in a never-ending chain of violence. Law enforcement was equally frustrated. Our little case hardly warranted the attention of a seasoned detective. One called me nonetheless. He sounded like one of those persevering officers who patiently work cold case files. He had helped investigate the murder of the women on the beach. He firmly believed Doug was an equal participant. For years, he collected any information that would confirm his suspicions. Had I heard anything? As a matter of fact, yes. The information was worthless now. Doug had boasted openly to others about his participation. He might be a nut case. But he knew, once acquitted, he would never be re-tried.

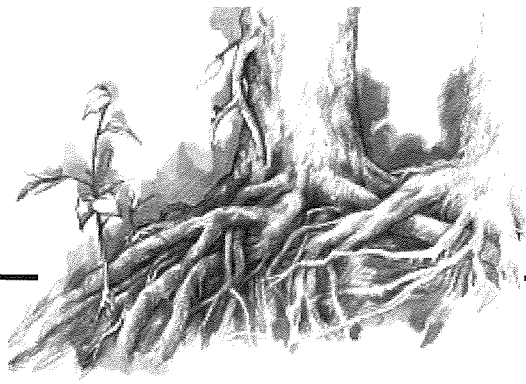
Then came the investigation of the Dog Man episode. One of the participants living in the battered bus full of garbage and dead dogs was Doug. The other occupants, also mental cases, served time. Doug was released, based, it seems, on the professional conclusion that he was too psycho to join a criminal conspiracy involving intent. The list went on and on and on.

No one has seen Doug recently. Since he invariably draws attention if he's around, it is just remotely possible he is finally dead.

Ask me if I care!



*No one has seen Doug  
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Ask me if I care!*



# Criminals

## Chapter Sixteen

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**B**efore drugs became a controlling factor in society, most of our criminals were harmless, local boys who grew old, forever thinking like children. Scrappers, of course. Violent in a brawl. Dangerous to each other, more than to someone like me.

For anyone growing up in the unstructured environment of forest and beach, any jail time was hard time. The theory of Doug's court appointed attorney, that confinement could do him irreparable harm, could logically extend to any and all of the homegrown renegades. True, they forever baited the law and invited arrest. But once in jail, they were desperate to get out. Any limit on their free wheeling life was truly cruel and unusual punishment.

They never learned. We're a small population with a very small percentage of criminals. Yet the jail always over-flowed with repeat customers. Most of them had been recycled so often, they had exhausted all sympathy with family and friends. After I got a permanent phone, it was not uncommon to receive a call from one of the very men I had reported for arrest. I never bailed one out. But I sometimes sent them generic cigarettes and reading material before such items were banned. They may have regarded me as a soft touch. But it was my way of saying,



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"Get comfortable, Charlie. You may have time to read a long novel."

Some men did not and could not understand the difference between civil and criminal proceedings. For all of their revolving experience on the short end of the law, they felt if they negotiated with me, the prosecutor and his criminal charges would be satisfied. One man offered me his home, just to make things right. There was, of course, a slight catch. He and his buddies would have to stay in it for an unspecified time until they could pay rent or find other lodging.

The home was not inspiring. He had inherited an almost worthless piece of ground and, without permits, constructed a primitive shelter where he and others in his profession came and went. But the offer seemed genuine, so I felt obliged to verify the title and discuss it.

Acquiring my own little enclave of thieves was a scary enough thought in itself. But when the title report came back, his whole sorry life was laid before me in page after page of unpaid taxes, judgments, and court imposed fines. Each lien far exceeded the value of the property. All lien holders were simply waiting for someone wanting it badly enough to pay them off. I left him a message that it looked like he had some of the finest, most patient judges and creditors in the world for a landlord already. A few days later he called back for legal clarification.

“Can them assholes do that?” he asked.

“They can and they did.”

He took it bravely. No need for further legal opinion. The law was just a mysterious force that hauled you away from time to time.

“Well, shit. I’ll have to think of something else, I guess.” He never did.

One man called me repeatedly for years, presumably just to update me on his latest cell number. He certainly knew I wouldn’t post bail. He was entitled to one call for each arrest. Probably no one else would answer the phone.

Jerry had an arrest record even he could not remember. But he was trying hard to do so. On one of his last calls, he informed me a talent scout from Hollywood had taken interest. During his dry-out spells in jail, he was making notes. Perhaps I could help him write it when he got out.

“If I can remember all of it, maybe we can sell my old crimes to Hollywood. Wouldn’t that be something?”

“Is this supposed to be a tragedy or comedy,” I asked sarcastically. Jerry didn’t know. Maybe both. Yeah, when he thought about it, some of it really was kind of sad. Jerry’s whole life was a tragedy, but why rub it in?

Of course, as soon as Jerry was released, he would get drunk, forget the project and wander until he landed in another jail. His valuable notes were lost between shakedowns. To the very end, he probably harbored the dream that my writing would make him a movie star. Twice he was found on my place in stolen vehicles. He’d tried to find me. But some temporary nuisance — like passing out — always intervened.

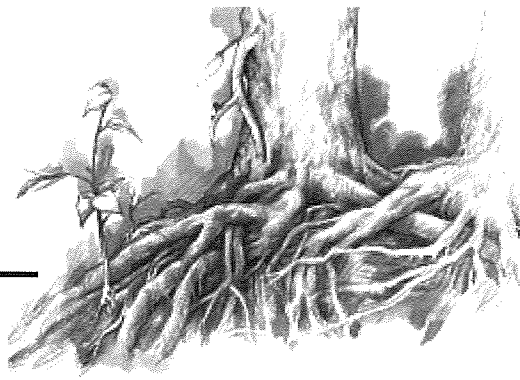
Eventually, Jerry’s battered body turned up in a hobo camp by some railroad tracks. Probably a fight between bums over something as simple as a pint of wine. By now he was in his sixties, teeth gone, every major organ rotted. No one was interested enough to claim what was left of the body. End of calls.

Women cannot ignore a ringing phone. It’s probably some warp or flaw in our genetic code — like the maternal instinct.

My ex husband, an Army Officer, had a philosophy about phones that rang in the night:

“It’s either death or drunks,” he’d mumble, “and death can wait ‘till morning.”

Then he would roll over, cover his head, and go back to sleep.



# Brushpickers

## Chapter Seventeen

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**B**rush pickers are elusive creatures. Not as rare as the spotted owl but much, much harder to find. They migrate in the spring and fall. I had seen their trails for twenty years but never caught one.

My dogs cornered the first one deep in my property, late one spring afternoon. Mexican or Central American. Short. Young. A knife in one hand and a small bundle of salal in the other. Very nervous about the dogs.

“Do you speak English?”

“A little.”

“Is anyone with you cutting wood?” As usual, I had been looking for cedar theft. He brightened at the prospect of being innocent of something.

“No, no. Just this.” He held up the little bundle, wrapped with a rubber band. In brush picking parlance, this bundle is known as “a hand” and experienced cutters can produce 100 hands or more a day. They haul it, illegally, to a Fabian type who pays them cash and stores it in unmarked barns or garages. It then is transported in unmarked trucks to an unmarked warehouse where it is again sold for cash. Here it is crated for shipment overseas.

“This is my land,” I began. The smile disappeared and he rolled his eyes despairingly. “But I am not going to call police. Do you understand? No police. I just want to talk to your people. Can you find them?”

He nodded and called out several times in Spanish. No one replied. Finally, at my insistence, he plunged into the brush to find his companions. While he was gone, I checked an old van parked nearby. There had been no attempt to conceal it. Current license. Doors unlocked. Windows down.

On the visor was a diary in Spanish indicating six to eight men had picked here daily since the first of the year. 100 hands per man per day for that period quickly computed to more than \$20,000 worth of brush disappearing from my land, leaving only some trails and a few pop cans behind. Of course it was their backbreaking work that gave the brush its value. Salal grows almost as fast as it can be cut. There was no harm to the land. Yet it was disturbing to think how often I had not been alone on my own property. I was also keenly interested in learning their observations of any other traffic, especially cedar theft.

Only four men ventured into the open. These would be the ones with documents. The others would stay hidden all night if necessary, rather than risk deportation. They would be the ones referred to in the diary as “Chico 2” or “3.” One man would go with the truck and accept their cash, having produced a surprising



300 hands that day.

The men stood in an uneasy circle. Between my broken Spanish and their broken English and a lot of pictures drawn with a stick in the dirt, we had a long conversation. As I spoke, each man might understand a few different words, but if I paused often, they would have a rapid comparison in Spanish and reach a consensus on what the lady must have said. Basically the lady said she wasn't calling the cops and just wanted information. They, of course, worked deep in the bush and saw nothing. Besides, they only just came today. It took some time to work around that concept without confronting them with their own diary.

Bit by bit I gained their story, which was far more interesting. They had a key to my gate and permission to cut here. They had each paid a man in Central Park for the permit and the key. He had designated the area, and then never come back. They sold their brush to him. They knew only his first name. Where he took the brush, they didn't know.

One man produced his own driver's license and a copy of "the permit." It was, in fact, a brush picking permit for one person on U.S. Forest land many miles away. If they were stopped on the highway hauling brush, they were instructed to show this permit. I had no reason to doubt any part of this story.

"Here's what I think," I began. The men hung on every word now. "I think this man is a bandito! He takes your money and says to you, 'I give this to the landowner,' then puts it in his pocket. He says, 'You must pay me for the permit,' and puts this money in his pocket, too. What does he pay for each hand?"

Eighty-five cents! He cheated them on price as well. Then storing the product in his garage overnight, he doubled his gain without ever getting permission from the landowners, taking any risks, or paying any costs. He paid no insurance to cover injuries, no unemployment coverage for the off seasons, no taxes, no records, no connection to the mainstream economy.

"Bandito!" I repeated angrily. The leader looked crestfallen. One young man giggled. One who spoke fair English simply shrugged philosophically. "That's the way it has to be." For the unseen men in the brush it was *the only way* it could be.

I turned to leave. Four confused men with knives whispered excitedly.

"Please," said the one who spoke the most English. "Please. They want to know are you taking the salal."

Later I would laugh at the incongruity of four men with knives and three or four more in the brush asking if I was going to confiscate the product of their day's work. At the time I was too angry to see the humor.

"No. No. Take the salal. No charge. Presento. You may also work here four more days. No charge. Presento. I will not see you." I covered my eyes with my hand. "Four days I will see no one. Then you must go. There will be trucks. Helicopters. Very dangerous. Four days only." My hand again was over my eyes. "Then no more. No mas." I slit my finger over my throat. "No mas!"

In addition to being cheated, these men had been working unseen and unwarned for months with logging nearby, trees dropping, and helicopters flying slings of blocks over their heads.

This was a common scenario. I would learn later that teams of Asians and Central Americans — many of them illegal aliens — are often dropped off in unfamiliar surroundings, with no instructions except a rendezvous time. If they make it back to the road, they and their product are picked up. If not? At that very moment, there was a body in the local morgue of a young man no one could identify. Apparently he had wandered lost



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until he died. His family will never know.

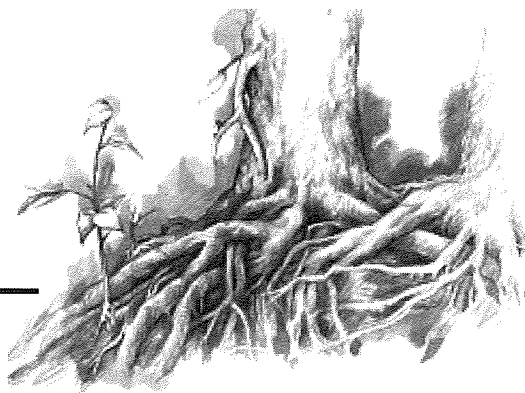
I would also learn that it is common practice for one person to get a legal permit, then sell copies to others. The legal ones on public land cost \$300. By the time they are sold in copies, they may cost much more. If a cutter actually tries to pick brush on the public land described, he may find it over-sold and saturated with pickers. Just to recoup his permit costs, he is forced to trespass onto wider areas or do hand-to-hand battle for territory. Fights easily break out between men who have advanced their savings or borrowed money for this “permission.” There is no count of the pickers. There is no count of the injuries or deaths.

Yet by the time this product gets to ships in Tacoma, Portland or Seattle, it is a multi-million dollar economy almost entirely off the radar, based largely on the backs of people who may have paid to be smuggled up a pipeline and enter the country illegally. Worse yet, they pay still more for phony “permits” and “permissions” to work, so they can sell to predators who pay them less than market.

Where do the ships go? Mostly to Asia and Central America – the very places these poor bastards have come from.

The next day the vehicle had returned. True to my word, I didn’t see it or the men. But I did slide the diary off the visor and make a hand-written copy. Some day when I learn his last name I’ll find a way to feed it, shred by shred, to a man in Central Park!





# Mike

## Chapter Eighteen

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**M**ike is his real name. I think I know him well enough to use it. He and his wife and kids live in a little cottage at the edge of town. His aunts, uncles, cousins and a grandfather live in similar cottages nearby. It would be hard to find anyone on that side of town who isn't related to him.

Mike is a short, stocky guy with a loud, rasping voice you might at first attribute to chain smoking. In fact, he neither smokes nor drinks. It comes from a lifetime of shouting. First, I suppose, at athletic events. Later, at members of his crews. He and his partner have a small cedar salvage business. They are operating a crew on my place as a write.

Traditionally, shake salvage operated off the radar much the same way brush picking does today. Mike and his partner operate a legal business in direct competition with those still operating illegally. This puts them at a terrible disadvantage. They pay taxes, insurance, stumpage to the owners of the land. The illegal operators steal the product, pay no taxes, hire no bookkeepers, file no reports, go through no audits or inspections. Yet the products of both operations sell for the same price at the mills. It doesn't seem fair. But Mike and his partner plan to stay around for a while.

Mike's partner is a tall, stubborn ex-marine. Laconic. Dependable. Always anxious to get back to business. He towers over Mike, but likes to let Mike do the talking. It works. Mike loves to talk and listen. So do I. Our coffee breaks can last a while.

Mike was an all-state champion wrestler in his weight class both in high school and college. He has done a lot of volunteer coaching ever since. His oldest son took first in state last year. This weekend Mike is taking eight local wrestlers to the state tournament. Much of the travel expense for the team will come out of Mike's pocket.

Our little community is too small for Rotary or Lions or Chamber of Commerce. But a group of fathers can always be rounded up to take kids to sporting events or tournaments. The local school never has funds to properly field teams. Most of the money will be raised in the community. Last year some fathers took part of the grade school to the Seattle Zoo and Aquarium. Some of the kids had never been to the city and were as impressed with the traffic as with the zoo. Each child was given five dollars to spend. That and the money for the trip were donated. The fathers who took them were loggers and equipment operators.

If someone is hurt, Mike or his wife often will be the ones to drive them to the hospital. If a local couple is going through a violent domestic breakup, their kids may very well spend a few nights sleeping on the couch in Mike's living room until things get sorted out. In a small town, there are few public services. The public is its own service. Stand up people like Mike and his wife hold small communities together.

Mike bears a few scars from the woods and a few from sporting events and car accidents. Back in his teens, he and a buddy were cruising around the forestland of the Upper Peninsula. A logging truck ran them off the road. Their mid size car flew over a guard rail and rolled down a bank stopping upside down and crushed

Mike recalls gaining consciousness in this trapped position, with the log truck driver on his knees, looking through the flattened hole where a window used to be.

“Are you boys alive?”

Mike said he thought so, but his partner was bleeding badly.

“Hang on. Help is on the way.”

Closer to town, help might arrive in the form of police, fire department, and jaws-of-life equipment to extricate them. In a remote forest area, you run for help to the nearest logging equipment. There you will always find tools and a first aid kit. In this case, they also found a small cat that could get down the bank to the accident scene. It took a while, even in the bulldozer’s highest gear. The boys dangled upside down, waiting. His friend dripped blood. Mike didn’t. Other than that, he couldn’t move enough to determine their condition.

“Lucky we was both short.”

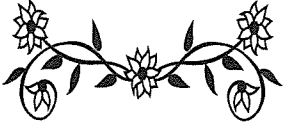
Despite four years of college and a certificate that qualifies him to teach in any school, Mike still lapses into the grammar of the Coast.

“They got the cat in position, hooked up the winch line and flopped us right side up. That made it easier to breath, but didn’t get us out.”

Another search of logging equipment produced a portable torch. The volunteers commenced cutting the roof of the car away. They began on the side away from Mike because his friend appeared to be the more injured of the two. Suddenly, there was a blood-curdling scream from the half-conscious boy. The torch had cut through the roof and hit his upper arm. It would be the worst scar from the accident either boy would retain in later years. But neither complained.

In remote areas, the public *is* its own – often its only – public service.

In our state, one section of land out of every township and range was placed into trust for schools. Some of the richest forest resources in the nation are on those lands. A state agency with one of the largest budgets in the nation manages the trust. That agency is headquartered in one of the highest buildings on the state capitol campus, with field offices in every corner of the state. It has more employees than many other agencies combined. It handles billions of dollars worth of natural resources that are in trust, as well as regulating the several million acres of corporate and private timberlands. They charge harvest taxes, permit fees, regulatory fees of every kind and description.



*Yet, after administrative costs, the funds that finally trickle down to a school in a little town like ours are pathetically small. Volunteers coach the teams. Bake sales buy the uniforms. Fathers dig into their own pockets to finance field trips. Those fathers have worked all their lives in the woods. They know the value of the timber going by. The math is not rocket science.*

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Our county services are always under-financed and almost always in the red. They get no real estate taxes from the public lands. They get almost nothing from the huge corporate forestland holdings. Tax advantages on classified land were lobbied into law because, it was argued, timberlands did not produce students, or a population demanding public services, ergo they should not share equally in the costs of same.

What's wrong with the argument? First it takes proportionately more money to extend ordinary services to tiny pockets of population distantly separated by timberlands. And, since fewer people share that cost, they pay through the nose. Each year their local taxes and costs go up. Service goes down. Some live in and pay taxes on shacks that would be condemned elsewhere. But from the windows of those shacks they can see some of the richest resource in the nation. They understand the math!

Bitterness is deep. Not always pointed in the same direction. But deep. Some blame the state. Some blame the big timber companies. Some typically blame anything resembling an authority figure or black helicopters or triad conspiracies or Canadians or Indians or people on welfare. There are pockets of every kind of umbrage and rage in this forestland. The walls of the women's restroom in one Indian hangout are completely covered with slogans of hate. Most seem to relate to men in general, white men specifically, and something to do with fish. Signs appear and disappear along the roads and on the backs of cars announcing various issues of complaint. Small meetings of disgruntled citizens gather now and then in different households like floating crap games. You can find a buddy for any kind of rage. Some of it may not make sense. But don't underestimate the potential if it ever all gets going in the same direction. And don't underestimate the combined effect it has on children growing up with it.

"My old man worked 15 years for that rusted goddamn mill before it closed. Management got relocated. He just got a pink slip."

"Man can't get a job anymore. Women got 'em all."

"Men are lazy, worthless bastards. Won't work at any price."

"No elk left. F...g Indians poached 'em all."

"Nothing left anywhere. F....g white man spoiled the whole f....g country."

"Canadian lumber destroyed the market. They get it free from their f....g government and ship it down here to destroy our economy."

"F....g Americans are trying to control Canada. Protecting their own jobs while we lose ours."

"Damn tree huggers should be strung from the trees."

"Damn polluting mill owners should be shot."

With so much bitterness forever hanging just one click of the torque off the violence scale, is it any wonder that when it occurs, the community just shrugs? Most theft and vandalism is directed toward the state and corporate lands. Many don't care. The culprit becomes part of the local folklore. You wouldn't want him in your family. But the amusing story of how a local renegade "got over" usually obscures The Commandment considerations. Surely God didn't have this caper in mind when he spoke to Moses!

After a few generations, no one even remembers Moses.

How do young people keep their balance? Why do some gather this background around them for an excuse to be renegades while others become stand up guys like Mike? Was it lessons in Moses? Mike would laugh at that. He spends Sundays coaching kids or hunting and fishing.

"The woods is like my church or religion," he says in his rasping voice.

One morning at an extended coffee, I told Mike the boring story of my fight against cedar thieves, the invasion by George's crew from the north, the long trial against all the lawyers and corporate executives. When I got to the part about Joe trying to change property lines with a hand held compass and no reference points, then finally giving up and pulling out his own checkbook, Mike exploded with laughter. Then, as usual, he had a story of his own to top mine.

He was in high school at the time. On the wrestling team, and destined for state tournament. As usual, the school had no money to send them. He and two buddies huddled over what to do.

The obvious answer to any teenager in a timber community occurred to them as well: borrow a chain saw and a pickup, go out to corporate land, cut some blocks and sell them to raise the money. They knew just the spot. They not only found some choice windfalls. They found a choice standing cedar tree to complete the load. They made the undercut first. Then as the second cut started to meet the first and the tree began to fall, Joe stepped out of the trees where he had been watching them for some time and said,

“That tree better not hit the ground.”

Next came the crash of the tree and Joe stepped into full view, addressing each of them by first name. The boys were terrified, of course.

“I’ll see you in my office Monday at 10:00,” Joe told them.

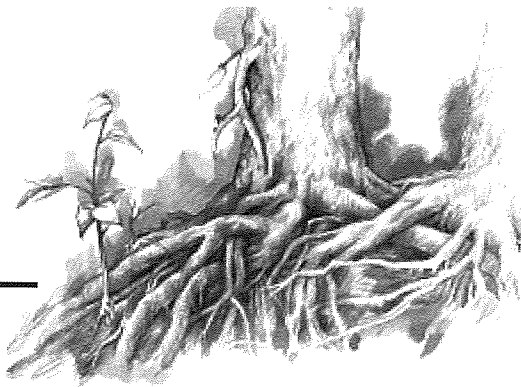
The boys pleaded with him. They had tests Monday. If they missed school, they might be dismissed from the team. Joe was intractable. “You’ll be there or go to jail,” he told them.

Monday they stood shaking before his mahogany desk in corporate offices, wondering what to expect. What they got was a cutting permit for cedar salvage on 80 acres of corporate land and instructions to pay Joe cash on site every Sunday afternoon for every block of wood removed. The arrangement was later extended to other areas. Joe never missed a Sunday and always took cash. Whether Joe had other boys captive in such arrangements, they never knew. What Joe did with the cash and whether he shared it with others in the corporation they never knew.

“You might say he started me in this business,” Mike says with a sarcastic grin.

Mike is a stand up guy. Somehow he escaped the temptations of the environment and the clutches of people like Joe. He finished college and started a legal business in an industry where that is rare. You may think I give him a lot of credit for the choices he made.

I do!



# Dead Witness

## Chapter Nineteen

The illegal cutting, transporting, processing and selling of cedar products is a major industry along the Coast. Historically it was overlooked, tolerated or endured until it has reached proportions beyond measure, beckoning an invasion of criminals and drug zombies of every stripe and persuasion. Millions of dollars worth of resources disappear from public and private lands into this parallel universe. Enforcement still plods after these hordes on a complaint-driven basis, responding to the random reports of loss. Discovery of loss usually occurs long after the thief and the resource have disappeared, leaving a cold trail for authorities. Arrests are few. Successful prosecutions are rare.

Government responds to this crisis with increasingly complex regulations in an effort to stem the traffic. Most of these regulations have done little more than increase the burden and costs for legitimate owners and operators. For example, legal owners and operators must now obtain separate permits for each stage of the harvest, be it cutting, hauling, buying, processing or re-selling. These permits cost everyone money, take time to administer, and do little to curb the illegal traffic. Many thieves simply operate outside this entire process, running the risk of discovery. The odds against discovery are in their favor. Acquisition costs are nil, overhead low. They can afford to gamble. Occasional arrests and fines are just part of the overhead.

The experienced thief takes a slightly more sophisticated approach. He simply marches up to the appropriate desk and buys a permit for a fictitious piece of timber. Thereafter, if he's stopped on the highway or in the mill yard with a hot cargo, he shows his permit. If the mill owner is audited, he presents a copy of the same document. By the time anyone can verify that the permit was for a vacant lot owned by an uncle, the wood has been processed into unidentifiable form and mingled with the mill inventory

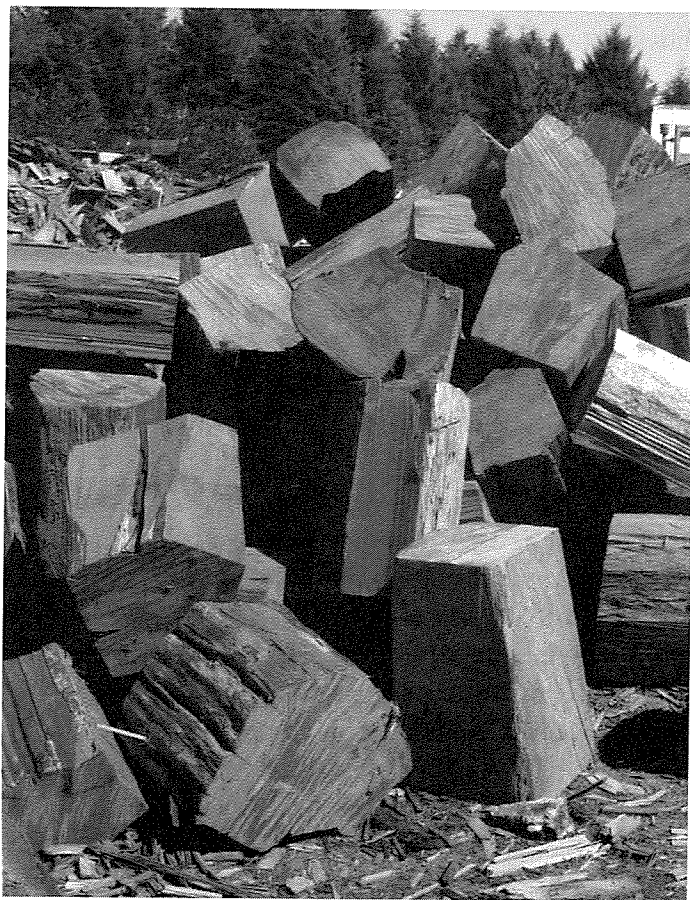


Photo by Bill Pickell.

Cedar blocks. Once they leave the tree, it's hard to prove whether they're stolen, or legitimate.

The mill records are intermingled as well. Legal operators present their permits to the mill. The mill copies the information. The operator takes his payment and departs, assuming the transaction is over. Later deliveries of stolen wood may be attributed to his permit, so far as mill records are concerned. Many small, legal harvesters with legal permits would be amazed to learn the volumes attributed to them at these mills. Some cutters have had the nasty surprise of audits and threats of tax penalties over such volumes.

Everyone knows or suspects which mills buy stolen wood. But to successfully prosecute and convict a mill owner of trafficking in stolen products, one must capture the initial thief, impound the stolen product and debunk the phony permits and alibis. One must prove that the mill owner acted knowingly, with criminal intent. Such proof requires witnesses or admissions of guilt or both. Meanwhile the trade grows, becomes interwoven with other criminal activity, and beckons increasingly unstable criminal elements from a field. The old code of silence has become a code of fear. Witnesses are rare. They can also have very short life spans, as I would one day learn.

The caller was ready to be a witness. He sounded mature, intelligent and sober. He knew me to be a landowner who aggressively challenged the illegal traffic. He wanted to “come in from the cold” and give evidence. Lots of it. Names, dates, conversations, transactions. Not just about stolen cedar. If his story was true, he was an eye-witness to a wide array of associated criminal activity ranging from drug labs, to labor laws, to tax evasion.

His tentative contacts with enforcement agencies had been a turn off. No one, he felt, took him seriously. I could envision numerous reasons. First probably was the man, himself. A middle aged man who lives in the woods in a camper with a pack of dogs and no bathroom does not receive overwhelming reception in the marble palaces of state agency headquarters when he wanders through their gleaming glass doors. More frequently, the receptionist gasps, reaches for the disinfectant and calls security.

Second, no single investigative agency was prepared to accept and utilize the overwhelming aggregate of this man’s suggested testimony. Tax departments receive tax related information. Drug enforcement agencies listen to drug information. Illegal cedar traffic might involve county, state, or federal investigators, depending upon the source of the cedar. This man’s suggested information was bigger than all of them combined. Where was he to go? How was he to get there without getting killed? Why did he want to take the risk in the first place?

Men who live his kind of life expect to be dismissed and discounted. But they have enormous pride, take offense easily. They approach cautiously, drop little hints of information, listen to your reaction, and bolt at the first hint of condescension or disdain. It would take patience to handle him. You don’t debrief such a man. You converse with him. Trade stories. Gift for gift. Only a seasoned investigator who was intimately familiar with this culture would ever learn his whole story. I thought I knew such an agent. Meanwhile, I learned as much as I could, casually swapping stories, taking notes during our phone visits, and verifying what I could by quiet inquiry in the community. The following picture emerged:

Don was a local man, in his 50’s, not known to use drugs. Parents were early settlers in a nearby county. Four or five brothers, some of whom, including Don, did their stints in the service before settling, with varying success, back into the local area. No special closeness between them. No particular family ties. No particular ambitions or achievements.

After the service, Don worked as a carpenter until he was pensioned for various medical reasons. Spent most of his bare subsistence pension once a month at the local store. Bought mostly staples and dog food. Drove an old truck. Lived, with a mixed pack of stray dogs, in a homemade camper on the back. His only amenity was a cell phone.

For the past couple of years, one of the mills had called him their night watchman and permitted him to live in the mill yard. Permission to park was customarily the only payment for night watchman services. There were no facilities.

Behind the two or three mills adjoining each other in this area are several sprawling squatters' camps. Here and in the adjoining forest, you find the true end-of-the-roaders. These are the unemployables and burnouts of last resort. Many of them are transplanted urban drug zombies who have taken deterioration and detachment beyond anything you will find in the gutters of the city. There, at least, they are surrounded with the constant, sight-and-sound reminders of society and ordinary social restraints. A dim memory of possible social retaliation still lingers in their scrambled brain cells.

The burnouts that make their last camps at the edges of the woods have lost all such frame of reference. They react from moment to moment, wholly unpredictable, totally dependent on their immediate surroundings and their own, immediate, blurry decisions. Neither more nor less violent than their urban counterparts, they are, nevertheless, pure, unfettered potential volatility at its most elemental level. These were Don's nearest camp mates once he parked his rig in the mill yard and assumed his role as night watchman.

Obviously, Don was expected to watch some activities more than others. Neither the meth cooking and consumption in the squatter's camps, nor the exporting of drugs, nor the arrival of stolen cedar in everything from backpacks to the back seats of Pontiacs were items on his watch list. Day after day he heard the deals go down. One price was paid for legal wood. A lower price was paid in cash for stolen wood. Legal wood could sit in the yard on pallets. Stolen wood went directly into the saws. On one occasion, Don was loudly scolded for permitting stolen wood to be delivered at night when it could not be processed. On another occasion, he watched the mill raided by authorities. Stolen blocks were branded and impounded. Some cutters were thrown in jail. A few days later, they had somehow stolen the wood from impound and brought the branded blocks back to the mill. Before a laughing group, the mill owner had destroyed the brands and processed the blocks. Nothing innocent or clandestine about involvement in this criminal operation, according to Don's story. It operated like a soccer game, complete with cheering spectators.

There are no fences or clear property boundaries between the mills. Don said he quickly learned the reason: If stolen wood came to either mill in such quantity that it could not be processed, it was placed in a no man's land between the mills. The first mill paid a reduced price to the cutter. If the other mill ran short of blocks, it could purchase from the no man's land inventory at a slight mark up. The first mill deserved a rightful profit for assuming the intake risk.

Another advantage: if one mill was raided, a fork lift could dart out of the adjoining mill, grab the inventory and process it while the first mill went through the motions of protesting its innocence to the authorities. Everyone, he said, understood the rules of this game plan.

Sometimes wood stacked in this no man's land mysteriously disappeared. Fights broke out. Such grievances eventually resolved themselves. The advantages of the basic agreement were far more important.

The squatters' camps also had a purpose. Mill owners claim to feel sorry for these homeless wretches and tolerate them out of sympathy. Don said the squatters in fact were charged a squatter's fee, which they



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paid by raiding neighboring properties for cedar and delivering it to the mills. The squatters also provided a cheap but unstable work force a few hours at a time, mostly at night, strictly off the books of course, and contrary to all labor laws and safety regulations.

This – and much more – was Don’s story. Day after night after day, he camped in his homemade shelter with his dogs, accepting life around him without judgment, until that one, inevitable moment.

Not once in our phone visits did Don betray emotion or tell me what had been his sticking point. I would learn from other hearsay sources later that it was the senseless killing of a dog in the mill yard that had changed Don from a passive observer, into an instrument of vengeance. Not the fights, the illegal transactions, the raids, the drugs, or even the squalid conditions. These he accepted, like a postman plodding through rain. But the mill owner had shot a dog and laughed when Don protested. This was beyond Don’s endurance.

From that moment on, Don became a criminal investigator with a mission. He worked methodically. He kept notes on names, dates, deliveries, and conversations.

“I went through the office at night, checked the books, the files.”

“What were you looking for?”

“Anything I could find.”

The owner became suspicious, installed a camera. Don removed and destroyed the camera, collected more data, took more names. Then he drove away. I didn’t want to know the location, but he assured me he was out of the immediate area.

Parked in the winter woods in another county down the beach, alone in his home made camper with his evidence and his dogs, he got out his cell phone and began to make his calls. But who would listen?

As an adjacent landowner who has lost thousands of dollars worth of timber to these clandestine operations, — and as a probable victim of some of this latest reported activity — I sure as hell listened and believed. My own experience corroborated part of his story. Both mills were the targets of current investigations. The man sounded plausible, relatively sane and sober. He was not trying to deal his way out of trouble or jail. He was articulate, even grammatical. Although I had never met him face to face, I suspected from what I knew of the life style that he might need a bath and shave before appearing in court as a witness. But properly debriefed and handled, it seemed he could close out a long list of current investigations. I referred him to an investigator who could be trusted.

A couple of weeks later, Don still had not connected with the investigator who, unfortunately, was away on an assignment. Meanwhile, Don had left word at several places for several people. Finally, a woman called him. Naively he had not asked for proof of her identity, her agency or her call back number. She had asked him what type of information he had. He had answered. She gave no instructions for his safety or the preservation of evidence. No mention was made of a future meeting or taking his formal statement.

I had some private misgivings about this contact, but Don did not seem concerned. He did not mention that his campsite was well known by several local people or that people associated with the mills had already visited him. He seemed satisfied that someone in authority had finally taken interest. It was our last conversation.

Then I learned he was dead.

The discovery of a badly decomposed body in a squalid campsite in the woods in a little county down the beach did not, in and of itself, set off alarms or precipitate full-scale investigations. It is all too consistent with the lifestyle. No obvious signs of foul play were observed. No concerned relatives were beating down the doors for explanations. He was cremated 48 hours after his discovery. As nearly as I could ascertain, there were no tests, no autopsy, and no attempt to preserve the scene. Only after I learned of his death and



raised ruckus, did anyone have second thoughts about the handling of his death. By then it was too late, of course. My belated inquiries sent the little county in which Don died into immediate defense and stonewalling mode: Revealing information, they said, would be a “violation of the man’s privacy.” I, of course, felt that turning him into a pot of ashes 48 hours after discovery was far greater invasion, so I persisted.

Off record, I learned that Don had been dead about 30 days at the time of discovery, which placed the time of death close to our last phone call and the phone call from the “woman investigator” Don had mentioned. Yet no one connected to any local investigations knew of such a woman investigator. Our local Sheriff’s and Prosecutor’s Offices were cooperative and concerned. They simply had no record of such a woman. The county down the beach, having no knowledge of any on-going investigations, had reacted swiftly to an ugly discovery.

“There wasn’t much to work with,” I was told by the squeamish local who inherited the awful job of removal.

A hasty diagnosis of heart failure, apparently based largely on the obvious life style and the remnants of medications in the camper, was scrawled on the death certificate. This, of course, is a no-brainer diagnosis: the heart has always failed in a dead body. What had caused it to fail was my concern.

Meanwhile the local prosecutor in the latest cedar traffic cases – perhaps unaware that Don had ever existed – reviewed the awesome burden of proof to establish culpable intent on the part of the current mill owners and agreed to accept pleas of guilty to substantially reduced charges. Fines were quietly paid. Life returned to business as usual.

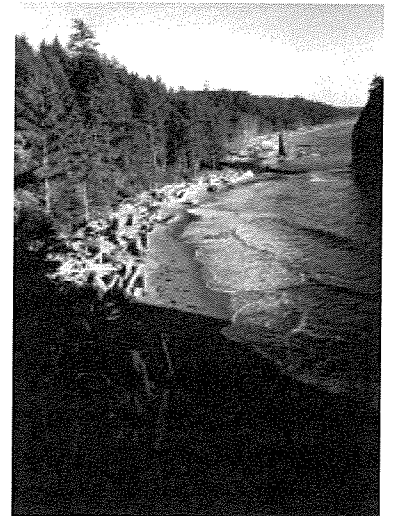
On a lazy afternoon, weeks after Don’s discovery, I drove down to Smith Creek. By now, there was no hope investigations might re-open. I simply felt obliged to view the death site as my final act of closure to the entire matter

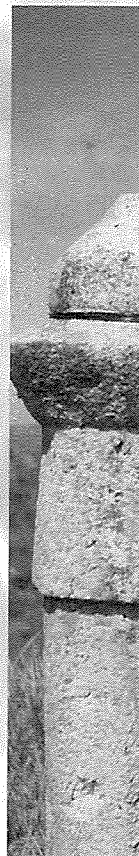
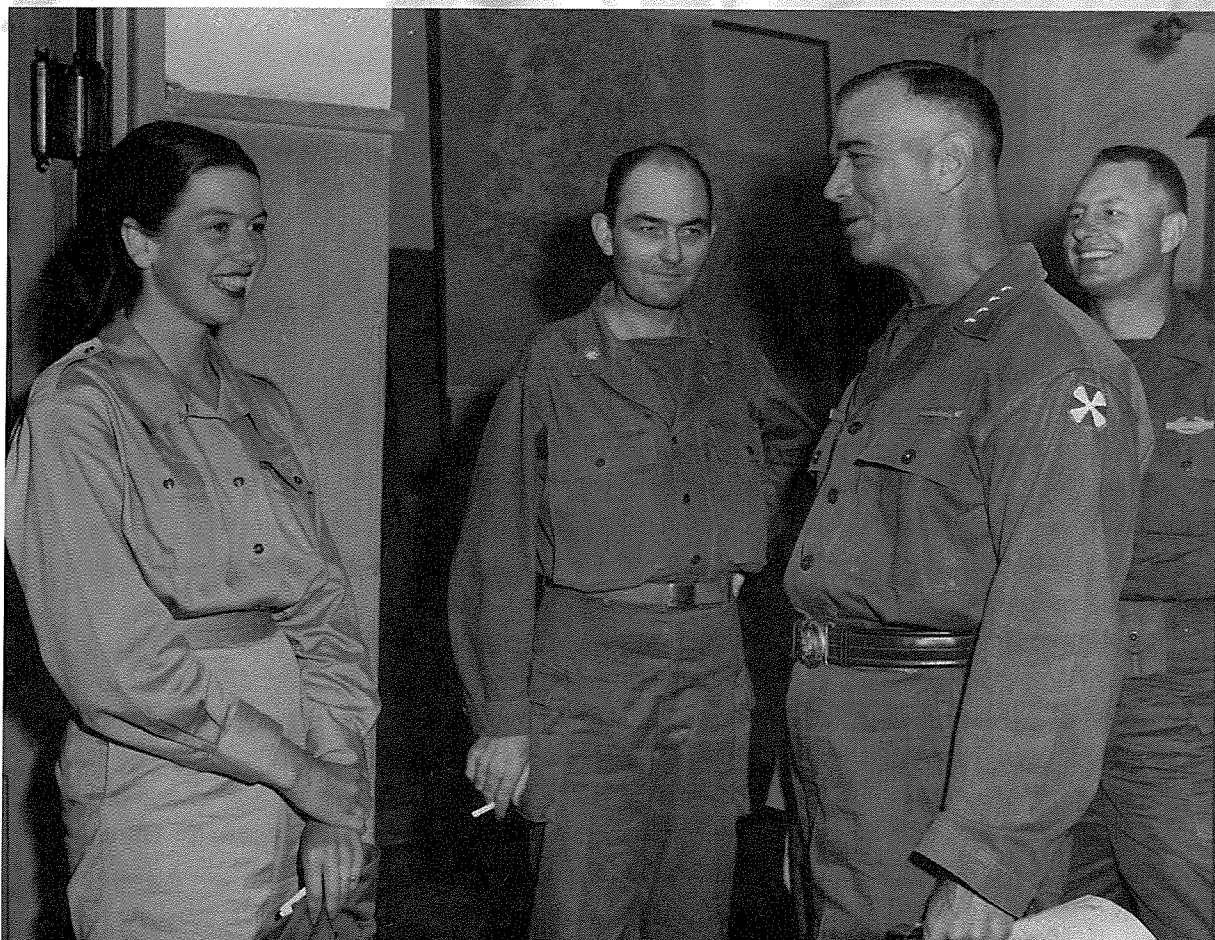
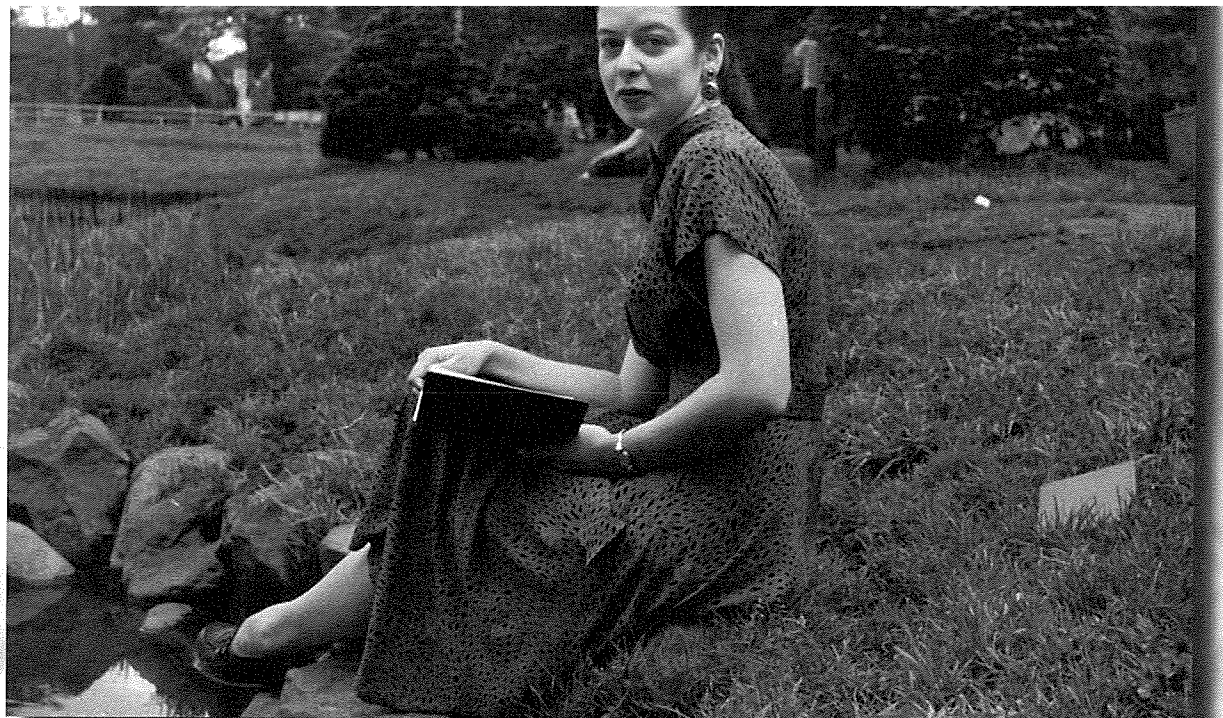
The air was crisp and damp. A cold, yellow sun burned a hole in a high, cobalt sky. Intermittent low clouds scooped water off the bay on my right, swooped like hawks over the coastal fields, and dumped their cargo over the forested hills on my left. Momentary little rainbows flicked off of the squalls and dissolved as quickly as they had appeared.

Smith Creek, like a hundred others, gathers its source from the rain-drenched hills and follows a careless corridor through the fields that separate it from the sea. A dead-end county road – now paved — follows more or less the same careless path. Once these narrow valleys were the sites of logging camps; the roads began as skid trails or dirt roads to the camps. Later they were adopted as public routes, first by custom and usage, later by dedication and county maintenance.

Poor, bare-subsistence farms of 40 acres or less sprang up, and died, in these valleys. The early owners relied primarily on seasonal work in the timber industry. A cow and garden were an after thought provision for survival. Gardens and cows were miserable in this climate. Cash crops simply drowned. The whole area is part of a land bulge into the Pacific Ocean that gets one of the highest annual rainfalls in Western America.

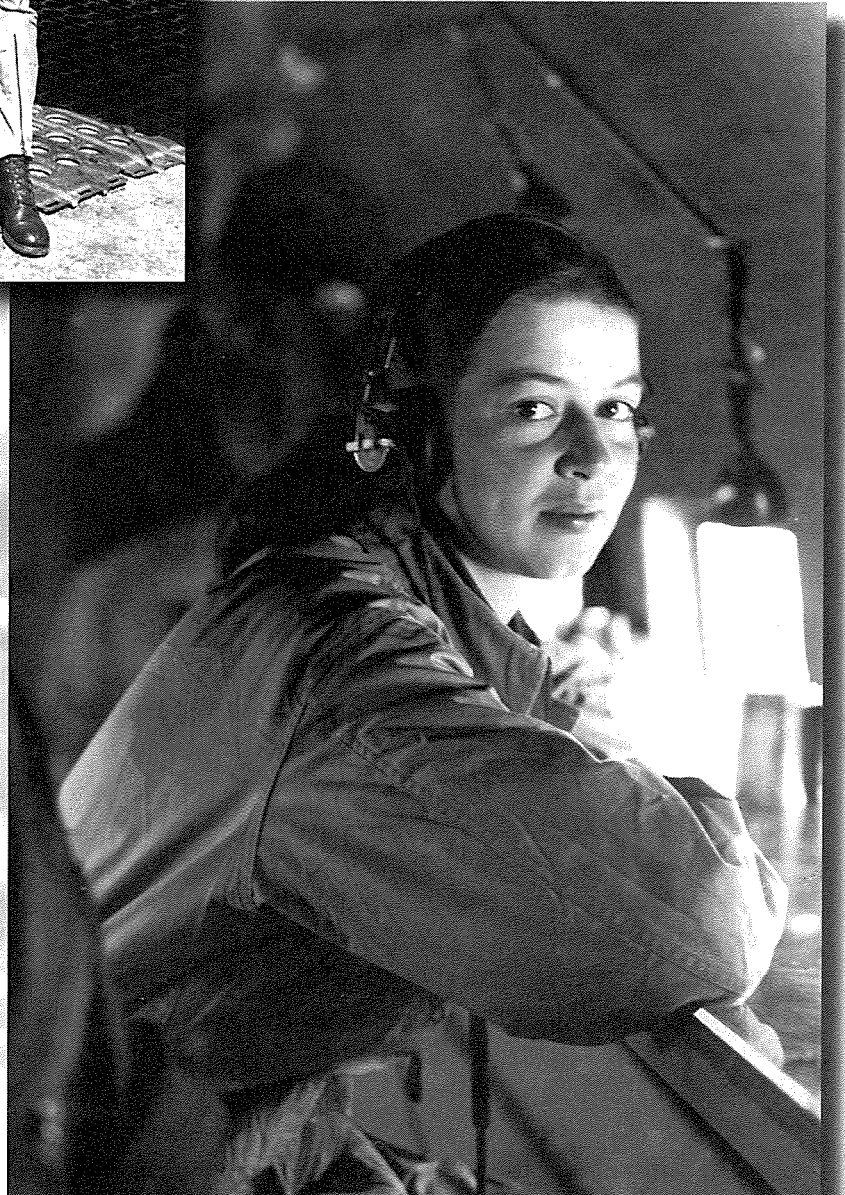
Early occupants settled close to the single, dead-end road for ease of access and close to the creek for water. Later they continued to huddle close to the road for the welcome expansion of utilities. More recently those old cabins have been abandoned or demolished. The few, new homes sit back from the road, nestled







laegu, 1952



into the hills, with a lush, replanted forest at their backs. The owners invariably work in town. Flowers grow in their gardens. Saddle horses live in their fields. This is a valley of quiet, middle-class life style, no longer fighting for survival.

Along the valley floor, willow, alder, hazelnut and wild berries quickly reclaimed any abandoned fields. In some instances, the brambles have reclaimed an abandoned piece of farm equipment or truck carcass as well. Intermittently, a forty-acre farm has been cut into fives by fast moving investors. Most tracts were purchased on low down, long term contracts by retired couples on limited incomes, living in small, out dated trailers with home made carports, storage rooms and sheds built on every side. For all its modesty, the overall effect is one of independence and long hours of careful tending, not poverty. Each site reflects the skills and dedication of its owner. Evidence of retirement hobbies and projects hang from every fence and porch. An overly friendly pet greets you in front of every friendly owner. On only one gate did I note a badly faded "Beware the Dog" sign. In this yard, a dog the size of a Bison greeted me with overwhelming enthusiasm, while the family cat rubbed at my ankles.

Occupants invariably greeted and visited with me in their yards. This custom was clearly related to the cramped sizes of their dwellings, not a measure of their sociability. Any one of them would have shared shelter in a storm.

Everyone recalled the event of Don's death. Nothing newsworthy had happened in this valley before or since. They remembered him as someone different, a loner living in a camp with animals. The kind of guy you nodded to in passing, never really got to know well. Kept to himself, bothered no one, asked for nothing. His dogs could be a bother at times. No one complained. It's a valley of patience and tolerance, as well as rural charm. They understood he and his brother were buying five acres on contract. Only later did they hear that Don had given his share of the contract payments to the brother who found other uses for the funds. It seemed that, without Don's knowledge, there had been a foreclosure and resale of the property to an absentee investor. Meanwhile, Don had continued to assume his right to live there; the sellers and new owners had been unaware of his continuing presence until the discovery of his body.

A short gravel road that quickly dead-ended in the woods could reach the camp. Most had never been to the site. All could point to its general location.

I explored one of the several private driveways leading to one of the newer homes hidden in the hills. Screened from the county road, but commanding an enviable view of the valley, was a lovely home of practical ranch design: probably three bedrooms, two baths, two car-attached garage. Clean, neat middle class family life in a million dollar, pristine, pastoral setting. By road, the house was a mile from Don's camp, yet only a short, easy trail hike through the woods at both their backs.

The house had the unmistakable feel of no one home, family gone for the day. Kids were in school, parents at work. Yet the garage door was wide open with tools, bicycles and hobby equipment an easy reach inside. A basketball waited for some teenager to come home and toss it through a hoop on the wall. From the windows on either side of the entrance door, I could see through the entire middle of the house to a balcony overlooking the valley, its deck more or less even with the tops of the young trees beyond it. Inside, a living room with fireplace, soft furnishings and all of the usual comforts of family life waited as family had left it in the morning – an open book and coffee mug still next to the easy chair. I made one courtesy rap on the door, knowing no one would respond. Yet I also knew that had I tried it, the door would be unlocked.

From the moment I drove in, a large black dog had watched my every movement with riveted, unblinking attention. Nothing about his appearance, demeanor or smell was consistent with the casual confidence of this home. The dog gave no bark in alarm, made no movement to follow as I got out of my car. It

simply watched with hypnotic attention. As I turned from the silent door, he took a couple of crouching steps toward me.

“Hello, Boy.”

He responded with two more unsteady steps, tail and rump down, eyes steady. He had the half crawling look and unsteady gait of a dog that has recently piled weight onto a skeleton more accustomed to starvation and abuse.

“You’re one of Don’s dogs, aren’t you?” No question in my tone. Facts seemed to speak for themselves.

The dog cautiously crawled toward my extended hand, tail curled under his belly, eyes never wavering. Like a blind palm reader, his black nose explored every crevice and finger of my open hand. Finally, he let the hand pass softly over his neck and back.

Suddenly the dog lunged. I was wholly unprepared and stumbled backward against my car for balance as huge paws landed on my chest, pinning me against the car. Even more overwhelming than his lunge was the awful stench of squalor that permeated his fur. This dog had been adopted, fed abundantly, but not yet bathed. The stench that accompanied his sudden embrace would permeate my clothing and ride with me for the rest of the day. But most overpowering of all was the sudden outpouring of relief and slobbering happiness that accompanied this assault. All of his experience with starvation, abandonment, rescue and re-abandonment exploded in that moment of transformation.

“You’ve chosen well with these folks,” I said softly, as I gentled him down again. “You’ll be okay here.”

For several minutes, the huge head cuddled in my arms. Then, with silent dignity, he permitted me to drive away.

Two trailer homes share the gravel road to Don’s camp. Both are modest. Both have swing sets waiting for the occasional visits of grandchildren. In the first yard, a boat was parked on a trailer for winter. Fishnets and other gear identified the owner’s connection with the bay. The owner was away for the day.

Along the shaded drive to the other trailer, stages of hand split fence, a garden and a few unfinished hobby-projects seemed to connect the owners more seriously to the land than the sea. Outrigger porches and plank walks and trellises had been carefully added to an old, singlewide trailer. Everything, including a couple of sheds and utility rooms had been neatly painted. Flowering baskets hung from the trellises at the porch. A mesh fence completely enclosed a couple of young fruit trees from marauding deer.

A small, shaggy dog resembling a dust mop with feet yapped greeting as I drove in. The occupants were summoned to the yard by his delighted ruckus. The man shook hands and leaned with his back against his pickup as we visited. The woman stood to one side, smiling and nodding approval to our conversation without once speaking. I judged them both to be temperate, reliable people living on a very modest retirement income. A wading pool and swing set marked them as grandparents. They accepted my presence and inquiry about Don’s death without any hint of suspicion.

Their property adjoins Don’s campsite. But the sites are totally screened and separated from each other by a seasonal brook and a solid wall of wild willow and other brambles. They led separate lives from each other. Spoke seldom. Usually the talk pertained to Don’s dogs. Man has a right to live as he pleases. They “pleased” in different styles. No closeness. No bitterness.

One day the dogs became a terrible nuisance: barking, roaming, and getting into things. Here the wife nods in enthusiastic agreement. The man’s voice rises a note.

“I went over to investigate, talk to him about the dogs. Walked part way in that road where I could see

his pickup. Knew something was wrong. All them flies buzzing around the cab. You could hear them way out there. And the smell! Awful smell like rotting meat. Clear out there you could smell it. And hear it — all them flies!”

March had brought a few warm days, but not fly season. Swarms of flies together with an awful smell were omens of a disaster too terrible to investigate alone. He had retreated to get help.

“Besides,” he added, “with all them dogs — excited and probably hungry — I was kinda scared. I went back across the road and got Lee.”

Together the two men had cautiously picked their way through the agitated animals. Lee approached the pickup.

“Lee looked in the window. I never did look.”

“The window of the pickup?”

“Yes.”

“I thought he was found in his camper.”

“No, the cab of his pickup. Lee looked in the side window of the pickup. He didn’t open the door. Just looked in and saw something like this hand, raised up like this, he told me, and swollen with maggots. That was enough. He didn’t try to open the door. He turned around and went to call the Sheriff. I never looked in.”

“Was the body on the driver’s side or the passenger’s side of the cab?”

“Lee looked in the driver’s side window to see him, but, now that you ask, I don’t know where he seen him. Later the cops said the man probably had been asleep in the cab, like he was lying down. But Lee said his hand was raised up — I thought he said it was on the wheel. But that don’t make no sense if he’s lying down asleep, does it?” The inconsistency only now, under my questioning, began to occur to him.

“Were you ever asked to give a statement about this incident?”

“No, never.”

“Ever interviewed or questioned about it by anyone?”

“Not ‘till you drove up today,” he said firmly. Then he thought a moment and qualified, “Well, now, wait a minute. I was asked one question. The ambulance driver that come for the body — he got lost — stopped me and asked directions how to get there. I told him. Other than that guy, no. Nobody ever questioned me about it.”

“Did anyone ever question Lee or ask him to give a statement?”

“Not that I know of. He’s gone today, but if you leave a note with your name, he’ll call you. I don’t think anyone ever talked to him.”

Lee’s trailer sits directly opposite the entrance to Don’s camp. It would have had commanding view of all traffic and visitors. Both of these neighbors seemed to be the most likely source of vital information regarding any events surrounding Don’s death. Yet it seemed no one had questioned them regarding traffic, noise, observations of any kind. The unusual discovery of a rotting corpse covered with maggots had not, for all its uniqueness

to this pristine valley, inspired more than a ripple of official curiosity before it was summarily disposed of. An overworked, under-financed staff in a bleak little county had probably done their best. The truth of Don’s death was now beyond retrieval. Further inquiry would only send local officialdom into deeper denial and stonewalling.



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“What happened to all the dogs? Were they shot?”

“No, ma’am. Them dogs was not shot. Not at all.”

A small community may be short on funds, but never short on compassion. The animals had been fed on site from time to time until a few could be adopted. Others just disappeared, finding alternate refuge or dying in the surrounding forest. Their fate, like Don’s, is a permanent mystery.

By now, I had learned many details about the life of a man I had never met. But the more I learned, the greater the mystery of his life had become. Once he had been a son and brother, gone to school, attended community college, served in the military, worked at gainful employment. Yet for years he had lived like an animal, barely distinguishable from the burnouts and drug zombies of the squatters’ camps; barely connected to surrounding society. Why?

I continued to make futile inquiry of every local, state and federal investigative office Don might have contacted about his evidence. None had any record or recollection of him. None could identify the woman caller nor knew what might have happened to the collected evidence.

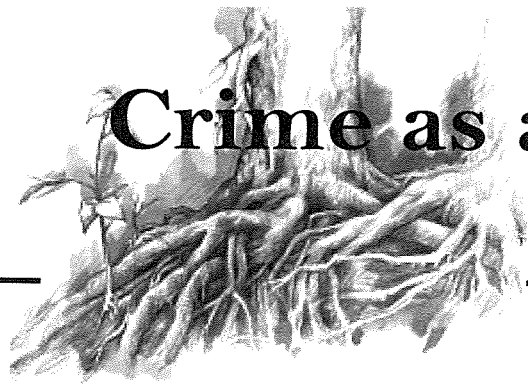
Don has vanished. It happens more often than we like to believe. In different ways, people simply disengage from mainstream society, until they become invisible. Their eventual deaths are hardly noticed. No memorial services or funeral processions for these folks. No color guard or bag pipes. No family photo albums or Christmas videos remind us they ever lived.

The local paper treated Don’s death as a routine statistic. No picture or personal biography. Only passing reference that he was a local man, attended local school and served in the military.

Knowing some of the circumstances, I might have added that he was a man with pride and courage. In eulogy, I might also have noted that our segmented and confused bureaucracy is ill prepared to recognize such courage or give it proper audience; that we all deserve a better system than the present marble labyrinths of administrative confusion. These paper-shuffling power centers have disengaged from humanity as surely as Don and his ilk ever did. Unlike Don, they show no sign of fading.

Don, whatever else, was a man brave enough to defy his peers and their morbid local code of silence – not for personal gain or bargaining position — but for personal, moral principles that simply could not let him stomach the senseless killing of a dog. Perhaps the local paper unwittingly captures some sense of this in the final words of his brief, otherwise impersonal death notice:

“He loved animals and adopted any stray dog he found.”



# Crime as a Career Option

## Chapter Twenty

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**C**rime does not pay. There are innumerable, easier ways to make a living. In this respect, at least, crime resembles farming. Either you like the lifestyle sufficiently to devote your whole life to it, or you get a decent job.

The average timber poacher leads a miserable life, forever hovering below the poverty level. The only fringe benefit is time in jail. Yet the modest fortunes many of us have made in the legitimate timber industry would pale by comparison, could we but find a way to harness the hours of energy and dedication spent by our illegal shadow counterparts in pursuit of their profession. Of course, you or I also pursue our chosen careers for personal satisfaction as well as profit. Criminals, however, pursue their pathetic lives with an almost monastically religious devotion, readily sacrificing all human relationships and any ordinary human luxuries, purely for the sake of the pursuit. In other words, they take their business seriously.

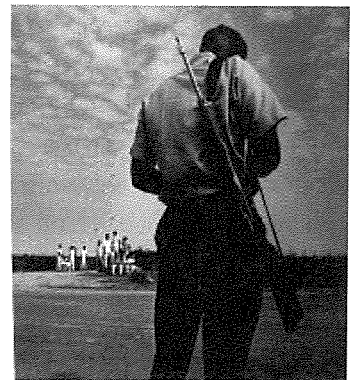
Their eyesight is different from ours. They do not see signs, barriers or armed patrols the way we do. What they see in each is an exciting new challenge or a public invitation. It's immaterial that the sign says "No Trespassing." What it *means* is that the owner feels he has something beyond that sign worth stealing. The thief does not rip down your sign out of malice. He removes it to keep your invitation down to a limited guest list. He may even re-install your sign on a nearby, worthless piece of property just to divert competing criminal traffic. It's his version of "bait and switch."

The timber thief, typically, is a crude, uneducated sort. Yet, as a social class, they continue to evolve at far faster rate than the retarded science of timberland protection. Take, for example, the matter of gates.

In early days, there were no gates. Major companies adopted a bunker mentality, and the rest of us followed suit. The costs of barriers and patrols were presumed greater than the potential losses through theft. Stands of timber grew to maturity, complete with bald spots here and there where trees had disappeared. Eventually, the stand of timber was put out for auction. Loggers bid on those stands after carefully discounting for the bald spots. Thereafter, they proceeded to log.

As soon as equipment moved on site, the logger was faced with protecting both his equipment and his investment in timber. Often this protection took the form of barriers across the logging road entrances. An old tow chain or a broken dragline cable was looped around trees on either side of the road and padlocked at night. You or I, driving down the highway and witnessing a heavy chain or cable strung across a freshly improved entrance to a logging road might view this as some form of barrier. We would be wrong.

The experienced thief, driving his battered pickup down the same road, steering with one hand and





holding a beer can in the other, comes to a screeching halt. He knows valuable, unattended equipment has moved on site. Valuable, unattended logs are already decked and waiting for removal. The lock indicates everyone has left for the day. He sees, not a barrier, but a public notice, as conspicuous as a Goodyear Blimp, that conditions are now optimum for invasion.

Chain saws and cutting torches are standard tools for a timber poacher. He cuts one link out of the chain, enters and fills his truck with anything he can lift. He may even neatly replace the chain to fool passing security patrols. If a cable has been used, it is easier to cut down the trees holding it from either side of the road. Instant access. Eventually, thieves taught the timber industry to stop using chains and cables.

Now the industry adopted tank traps. Ditches deep enough to hide a tank were dug, like moats, across the entrances to logging roads. You or I, driving by, might assume that a moat full of water deep enough to attract ducks was some form of a barrier. Again, we would

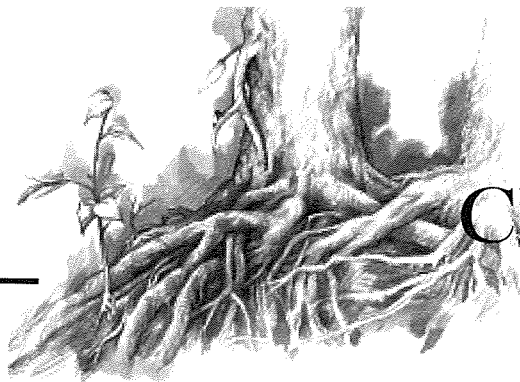
be wrong. The Bad Ass sees another Goodyear Blimp! Either this property is closed down and unattended, in which case he can poach at his convenience behind the barrier, undisturbed. Or, it is temporarily closed down to protect major equipment preparing the roads and area for a future harvest. He walks into the construction area, finds and hot wires the dozer, marches it back to the entrance, fills in the moat, drives across the fill and loads his truck.

Some of the thieves have gone relatively high tech. They may be equipped to steal, not just the tools and saws and smaller items. They may steal dump trucks and dozers as well. One group arrested a few years ago had a major “chop shop” in the brush where they dismantled an assortment of stolen heavy equipment in order to resell them in parts. Apparently they operated successfully for several months. Finally, they stole a piece of equipment so large, it was beyond their immediate ability to handle, so they raided an equipment yard near town and stole a cherry picker to aid in their secluded venture. The brazen, high gear march of a stolen cherry picker down the highway came to someone’s attention and they were at last arrested. Just another anecdote in the slowly evolving science of timberland protection.



Remains from a “gutted” cedar log.

Photo by Bill Binkell



# Gates

## Chapter Twenty-one

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The great mass of regulations adopted over the years to curb theft invariably heaped additional costs and responsibilities onto the landowners, without curbing the illegal trade. Not only was the landowner primarily responsible for protecting his property. Now he would bear the entire cost and burden of riparian repair or the cleanup of garbage or toxic wastes resulting from these invasions. Big timber companies outgrew their bunker mentality and became pro-active. Now we had gates. Big gates. Heavy metal gates. Gateposts came in on low boys. They were swung into place in holes dug by backhoes and reinforced with concrete. They slammed shut, steel against steel. They were secured with pins as big as my wrist and padlocked for security. At least you or I, driving legally down the highway, might see this as security. The thief sees another Goodyear Blimp invitation to do business. A valuable gate means something valuable must lie behind it. Why else would it be there?

Each thief, like each little forest mouse, has his own personal approach to problem solving. Some simply circumvented the gates by finding alternate routes through the brush. In an area repeatedly penetrated



*Some trespassers love locked gates. Gates provide them with total privacy while they continue their exploration and mischief undetected.*

by old, grown over logging roads, this is easier than you might think. For example, on one occasion I was startled to note fresh tire tracks deep inside an area that, to all appearances seemed locked and secure. It almost seemed that a helicopter might have dropped an old pickup with mismatched tires into the forest for a joy ride. The mystery deepened when I found the same tread marks in an entirely different area on an abandoned spur road that seemed to dead end in a beaver pond. The tracks simply drove to the water and vanished as though the vehicle had flown into the sky. I put on boots and waded across a quarter mile of beaver pond. An old roadbed was still solid beneath my feet as I waded. On the far side of the pond, the tracks again emerged and continued along an old grade, freshly brushed out for a couple of miles. Eventually, this volunteer project circled around to the

backside of the first area and connected to miles of free roaming. Some trespassers love locked gates. Gates provide them with total privacy while they continue their exploration and mischief undetected.

Others chose a more direct assault on the gates and locking mechanisms. Gates in remote areas had a short life expectancy. They were noisily pulled apart, cut in half, or otherwise destroyed either with tools and equipment brought for that purpose, or with equipment hot-wired from the site.

For gates more visible along highways or routine security patrol routes, less conspicuous methods were preferred. A carefully opened and replaced lock or pin in a gate would not alert infrequent patrols or curious passers by. Patrols seldom got out of their vehicles when they saw a gate in place. The thief had absolute privacy. Occasionally, the thief would replace a broken lock with one of his own. This not only

provided optimum security, but prevented the owner or his hired security from effectively investigating and pursuing any activity.

On early gates, the locks were exposed, easily accessed and clearly visible to passing patrols. These locks were easily snapped with bolt cutters. In its slow response, the industry adopted various methods to protect the locks. The most common style was a metal housing, like a drum, around the lock and its connections. This frustrated the easy operation of bolt cutters. It also frustrated the owners and employees who fell to their hands and knees in mud and rain and tried to operate keys in rusted locks they could hardly see and only reach with difficulty. Keys were lost in the woods. Locks jammed or were vandalized. Employees were locked in or out and had to be rescued. The damaged locks were removed with difficulty and replaced. Meanwhile, practiced criminals simply attacked the other end of the gate, removed the hinges, dragged the whole thing off the road with a choker and proceeded on their way.

Locks were dying and disappearing at a faster rate than keys could be distributed, so the industry turned to combination locks. Now owners and employees crouched in the mud and rain and tried to read faint numbers on rusted locks housed in a dark, protective drum. Meanwhile, the thieves who had so easily once gained copies of

keys from a contact who worked for the timber company now obtained and memorized a list of probable combinations from the same source. Thieves did advanced networking long before the Internet became a part of mainstream life.

If thieves had no friendly source from which to obtain lock combinations, they watched an entrance until an owner or employee opened a combination lock. Knowing human nature, they also knew that while the owner was inside, he would probably leave the gate unlocked, with the combination lock dangling in an open position or simply snapped in place without changing the position of the numbers. The thief had two options: He could memorize the combination and thereafter use it as freely as the owner, himself. Or he could, with a simple tool, reset the lock to a new combination of his choosing. The owner would return, find the lock open as he had left it, pass through, close the gate, snap the lock shut, spin the numbers, and drive away unaware he had just locked himself out of his own property.

A state nature preserve surrounds one of my properties. The single road to my property leaves a state highway and plunges first through the heart of the preserve and then onto my land. There will be more of that story in a later chapter. After years of legal warfare with the state agency that manages this preserve, I now have a new gate at the entrance to this road and optimum communication. Optimum is a relative term, of course. Communication with any government agency means leaving messages with a receptionist at a district office, who then passes your message into a pipeline consisting of multiple layers of bureaucracy until it is either lost or reaches someone in the field. This field person may take a couple of weeks to evaluate your message and pass a reply back through the same chain of command. Weeks can elapse.

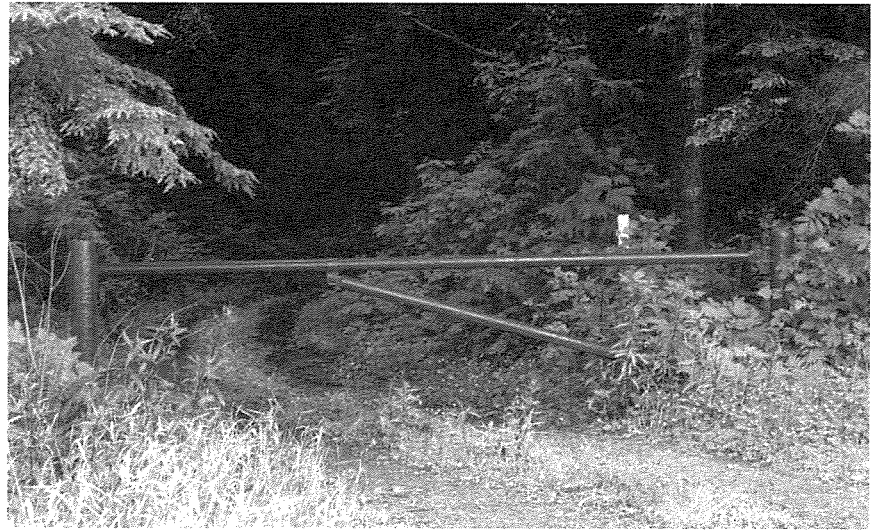


Photo by Bill Pickell

The system is not effective if you have a criminal trapped on site and are calling for backup.

I began to see evidence of repeated invasion along this route. No vandalism to the gate. Both the state combination lock and my padlock were in place. Possibly, I thought, the state had increased its interest in the preserve, although the pattern of invasion did not seem to fit their profile. I called them for clarification. No reply.

I increased my own vigilance and imposed upon Mike to help. Mike is a trusted friend in such circumstances. I've never paid him for his time. It's just something he does to help. Mike had a plan. He set the state combination lock to specific numbers and waited, knowing the improbability that anyone using that lock would randomly return it to his numbers when they spun it closed. After several scouting trips, he noted fresh tracks in and out, and the numbers changed. This clearly identified the user as having the state combination. But what was the purpose.

Eventually I found a broken dog collar from a bear hunting pack, and together, Mike and I found numerous trails where bear carcasses had been dragged out of the backside of the nature preserve, onto my property, and hauled away. Dog packs for bear hunting had been outlawed years before, and killing anything on a nature preserve is flagrantly illegal. Yet uncounted numbers had been killed here, the parts probably sold on black market for black magic purposes. Later from the air we also discovered two fields of marijuana completely enclosed and covered with mesh screening to prevent their discovery. We disposed of these before the wildlife population got hooked on pot. The preferred point of access for all this activity had been a state gate and state combination lock. I raised a lot of hell and caused a lot of embarrassment, but no one was caught. The lock was changed and I got several letters of reassurance on expensive stationery with flashy letterheads, but it would be months before someone actually met me in the field. This would be a new manager for the preserve who traveled all the way from Port Angeles where he is stationed. No one from the Game Department met with us. We didn't expect anyone. By now, Mike and I had already heard the sole field deputy for that agency in this area had been found in the woods in his pickup, dead of an overdose of heroin. So much for backup!

Meanwhile, locking mechanisms and gates were dying faster than the bear population. One of my gates is riddled with so many bullet holes; it looks like a piece of art in a modern art museum. The bar of this gate is bent in a half moon shape from a past attempt to yard it away with equipment of some sort. My neighbors have a metal gate that lies helpless in two severed pieces on either side of the road. Victim of a cutting torch. Another gate swings freely without a pin to secure it. Initially, pins were exposed and vulnerable. The tops were easily cut off. The rest of the pin and lock dropped out.

On older gates, the pins were unattached or connected with a small chain that was easily broken. Pins disappeared so often, the industry began welding protective shields over them to prevent their complete removal. Owners and employees invariably skinned their hands on these protections and cursed the new frustration. Thieves had no problem. They went back to picking or attacking locks. Like diverse little forest mice, each thief developed his own method for dealing with locks.

Bear in mind, these were not sneak thieves in ski masks furtively pursuing their careers. These were the good-humored local bad asses who greeted me warmly as their friend when our paths chanced to cross at the local café or tavern. There was no mystery about the direction of their careers. They readily shared stories. They seemed to respect me as a noble adversary, even complimented some of my pathetic efforts, in this endless game of logging community espionage. In a coastal village with no movie house, I provided entertainment. I tried to be a good sport about it. In truth, I even grew to like some of them and they were always a ready source of information in areas where I was clearly a novice. Take, for example, a winter

## Gates

morning at the local café. I am grumbling about another ruined lock on another broken gate somewhere, and speculating upon the methods used in this latest destruction. A crusty type in oil stained clothes and muddy boots rubs the stubble on his chin and looks at me, straight on, with bloodshot eyes.

“Do you understand locks?” he asks, as though addressing an uninformed child.

I ponder the philosophical concept, the Karma and destiny of locks, and reply: “I think so. Isn’t security the ultimate purpose of a lock?”

The room falls silent, waiting for the air to clear of such an alien suggestion. It doesn’t warrant response. Just some long pulls on cigarettes and a few sips of coffee while the speaker and his buddies wait patiently for me to grow up and listen. He’s trying to educate me. Locks don’t have Karma or inner spirits. They are a puzzle, like one of them there Rubik’s cubes. A lock is a problem. Now, what you do with a problem is solve it. Any fool understands that. But not every fool knows how to solve it.

“A padlock is just two pieces. There’s the base. Then there’s this thing fits into the base. Inside that base is a catch. All you got to do with any lock is spring that catch. Don’t matter if it’s combination or key. Just figure out that little catch inside.”

Apparently there are various levels of expertise and finesse. The crudest operators gut the base with tools, screwdriver or bullets. Everything falls out, including that “little catch inside.” If the neck of the padlock is long enough and accessible, you can cut it with a torch or bolt cutters, leaving a broken stub hooked to “that little catch inside.” Or you can run a cable through the neck, hook it to your vehicle and pull until the lock, the gate, or your bumper dissolves.

None of this is rocket science and it sure doesn’t open up any philosophical issues about anything’s inner spirit or ultimate destiny. Unless, of course, you infer that destruction and dismemberment is a form of destiny.

Now the speaker opens his wallet and dramatically reveals something far more precious than the few bank notes it contains: a fine, flexible sliver of metal that will mold itself around the neck of the lock and slither like a snake on hunt down into the base where it quietly releases “that little catch inside.” Most of the younger toughs are impressed. So am I. An older man is more cynical:

“Just one big problem with that thing,” he chides. “You get picked up and shook down with that thing on you, you’re in big shit. Might as well be carrying a gun.”

Most of these men long ago forfeited their right to bear arms after various prior convictions. They understand this implication. Now the second bandit has their undivided attention, while the first quietly slides his treasure back into his pocket. He, too, gives the older man his rapt attention.

It’s the second speaker’s very reasonable position that everyone’s future holds so much probable jail time, it’s foolish to chance going back to jail for no reason at all, just because you happen to be carrying something like an illegal tool, when you might not even have an opportunity to use it. There is, however, no law against carrying beach sand, and this man claims any keyed padlock can be opened with wet sand. Just tamp it in tight and turn the whole thing with your finger.

This beach sand method seemed so outrageous, I couldn’t wait to experiment and urge you to do the same. After several evenings, I was left with two results:

1. a sack full of ruined padlocks jammed with beach sand; and,
2. the inescapable proof that this bandit could have been a concert pianist of international renown, had he applied the same hours of practice, dexterity and perseverance to a Baldwin that he un-

## Gates

doubtedly applied to minor hardware during the perfection of his art. Instead, he was a pathetic old renegade who didn't even warrant the dignity of a wanted poster to commemorate him.

Meanwhile, back at the café, there's a break between rainsqualls. The rag tag group of late morning customers takes a few last sips of coffee, a few last draws on cigarettes, and ambles on its way. My daily lesson is over. I, too, leave the little café and return to the other side of these timberland wars to join with other landowners against this same gaggle of miscreants. We're losing the war, of course. But we're brave. We, too, persevere. Frankly, we don't know what else to do. It's dispiriting to be eternally the victim of petty crime. It's doubly humiliating to be consistent loser in a battle of wits with such a scruffy, unschooled bunch of misfits. Even if fate is just a crapshoot, it seems we ought to win a battle once in a while. Maybe I don't understand fate. Maybe I just don't understand anything.

*"The owl knows a little about many things. The hedge hog knows only one great truth."*

Clearly I'm just a part-time owl, not a hedgehog. I don't understand fate. I don't understand how to win a war with thieves. And I sure don't understand the inner spirit of padlocks.

## Bigger Gates

Multi-user gates serving several landowners are a recent development by the timber industry. Several separate bars, each with provision for its own padlock, meet in a common central chamber. When a padlock is removed and an individual bar is raised, it triggers release of the gate within the common central chamber. Landowners do not share a common key or combination. Each is responsible for his own security. Unfortunately, if one neglects his responsibility, the security of everyone is compromised. Multi-user gates are usually located at common entrances near highways where obvious vandalism might be seen and reported. I share one such gate near a highway. It appeared secure. Yet we suffered constant invasion, vandalism and theft. There had been no damage to the entrance, no missing locks. Perhaps one of the owners had become careless with keys or combinations.

Mike frequently checked on this property for me when he was in the area. Like the rest of us, his suspicions were running high. Over and over we discussed the possible suspects and possible modes of entrance. Then, one morning, he called with the solution.

"You better sit down." (Not a promising start to a phone call. I sat down.)

"There's fresh tire tracks all over up here. All the locks on the gate are in place and locked. But we finally figured it out. I dropped my key on the ground and while I stooped down to get it, I happened to look at the under side of the center box where the trigger is located. There's a hole drilled in it, right under the pin, just big enough to run a stiff wire up there and lift the pin. The hole is rusted, so it's been like that for a while."

"Good Grief! What next?"

"That's not all. We started looking at other gates all the way up Highway 101 and down the beach and over by Carlisle. They're all drilled the same way."

We alerted the sheriff, state security patrol and the other landowners. Dozens of gates were hastily mended and reinforced against this latest method of invasion. Meanwhile, the culprits had roamed free and easy over thousands of acres of forestland. We may never know their identity or purpose.

Padlock technology improves each year. The locks are heavier, tighter and more costly. No amount of engineering improves their life expectancy. Fortunes are spent on locks and barriers that serve no purpose

but to frustrate the legitimate traffic. One day, in a moment of profound despair, I bought several bulk packs of small, cheap padlocks to carry with me as band-aids. I certainly didn't expect them to last, but I felt a duty to continue the façade of at least appearing to lock gates. Mike was thoroughly offended when he found one of these token locks on our bar on the main gate.

"That thing's a toy. It won't last five minutes. I'm going to change it, even if I have to pay for the lock."

"I know it won't last, Mike. But the expensive ones don't last either. Someone will bust it off soon. Then we'll change it. Let's see how long it lasts."

Mike wasn't just concerned about the safety of my property. He was downright embarrassed to be seen opening a huge metal logging road gate with a key to something that looked like it ought to be fastened to a girl's diary. A man has *some* pride, for gosh sakes!

Time after time, he pleaded with me to change the lock. The thing was just too humiliating, sitting there in a row of industrial grade padlocks.

Week after week, Mike's agony grew worse, then turned to awe and grudging admiration, as this silly little lock survived in shiny splendor, while larger, far more formidable locks were destroyed.

"That thing's lasted longer than any lock in the area," he conceded. "No self-respecting thief will stoop to tamper with anything so junky."

It may be that I had finally stooped so low as to offend even the crude pride of poachers. It's equally possible that both the science of locks and the thieves who break them had evolved into a new, industrial era. Heavy-duty locks require heavy-duty solutions. Thieves were armed with drills, torches, portable sawsalls, even an occasional skidder or dozer. None brought hairpins and nail files, the tool of choice for such a tiny padlock.

Now according to rumor, one of the latest tools was a thing called a "Twister." None of my friends on the legal side of the industry had seen a Twister. All of us had seen the evidence of it: heavy metal locks, nestled snugly inside heavy metal enclosures, were being wrenched apart with superhuman force and snapping like twigs.

The inventor of the Twister is, of course, anonymous. He dares not apply for a patent. His product is illegal in a timber county. It has no practical purpose anywhere else. It is custom made by unidentified craftsmen and sold for cash. There were no known records of its existence. It required weeks of quiet negotiation to obtain my very own, personal Twister. I paid in cash. The deal was struck after I swore never to reveal my source and I was admonished not to drive around with it lying openly in my pickup. I kept that promise. However, I made a point of showing it to anyone in the industry who would take interest. It was, in every instance, the first time any of the legitimate owners or operators had seen one.



Photo by Bill Pickell



Considering the rather complicated legal ramifications of its intended purpose, the Twister is marvelously simple: a square channel of extremely heavy metal, open at both ends and hollow inside. The top end is just small enough to fit inside the metal protective housing popularly protecting the padlocks on most logging gates at this time. The bottom end extends below the protective housing. A wrecking bar is inserted into holes on the bottom end of the twister. The lock on the gate, of course, has fallen inside the top of the twister. One quick turn and VOILA! Lock is toast! The heavier the lock, the quicker it breaks. Cheap locks are sloppy. They rattle and resist a bit longer. If it's a smaller, household padlock, a flat spacer is added to the inside of the twister to give it purchase. I've seen the results. They are impressive. I've never used my twister. It's so heavy, I'm not sure I could do so alone. But this thing can tackle any heavy barrier. Nothing can withstand its power. The one thing it cannot do is gain purchase enough against a tiny lock to destroy it. The little lock that so offended Mike simply rattled around the inside of such a weapon.

Of course, we all appreciate that a lock like that belongs in a teen-age girl's bedroom. It has no business being in the woods and no self-respecting bandit goes into the woods prepared for such a development.

After I had shown this latest state-of-the-art burglar tool to several in the industry, one logger friend called back with a stunning report.

"That twister you showed me?"

"Yes."

"Last night my son came home from high school with one of those twisters in his car!"

"You're kidding. You know they are illegal. Better take it away from him. He could get into serious trouble."

"Oh, I know. I've got it. It isn't going anywhere. Incidentally, it's a much nicer one than yours. Even has the name 'Twister' etched neatly on the front of it. He was really proud of it. The kids are making them in metal shop class. I don't think they know what they're for. Someone in class has a market for them when the class finishes."

Apparently these shop students were graded on their workmanship and design, not the purpose of the tools they created and would later give to a fellow student to sell on their behalf. The teacher was probably proud of the work, as well.

Crime doesn't pay. The timber thief is a scruffy rascal forever hovering at the lower edge of poverty. He leads a miserable life. So do the landowners who are forever losing resources as well as a battle of wits in a war without end. Once in a while there's a positive side effect. A few kids earn some lunch money and learn a trade in metal crafting. It seemed like bright news in an otherwise bleak world.

## Surviving Crime, a Life Option

Like diverse little forest mice, each of us ultimately must choose his own technique for survival. Criminal attacks on our property, like assaults on our person, hit us where we live. The crimes are similar. Our personal reactions are the wild cards.

Crime upsets the delicate social balance we take for granted in our daily lives. It unleashes barbaric levels of anger and depression within us. We are wholly unprepared and surprised — not by the fact that crime exists — but by the sense of violation, helplessness and indignation boiling inside us. Until we deal with this perfectly natural inner turmoil, the crime will gnaw and claw like a badger in our belly.



We have poor role models for addressing these issues. We've built a culture around movie heroes who live for single-minded purpose: championing the helpless victim or avenging the wrongful death. This fictional hero has no sense of humor and only one goal in life. He relentlessly rides without rest, on a horse that hasn't been fed or watered, until he prevails at a shootout or exacts his final revenge. Then the movie fades into a pastoral scene where everyone presumably lives in restored happiness. We see no more of this hero because, in truth, he is dysfunctional. We cannot integrate him with reality. He won't be there when we repair the damage, pay the bills, feed the cattle or shovel out the barns.

Crime alters reality forever. We cannot survive crime until we learn how to deal with the new reality. We don't do this by brooding over such things as restoration, retaliation or closure. There is no restoration; and, "closure" is a state of mind, not an external circumstance. Even the victims of horrible, personal crimes eventually reach a point where they must let it go, or go mad.

Initially, I reacted with an outrage worthy of any movie hero. I camped in my woods, huddled around guns, while I brooded over my losses and my dark dreams of pay back. I listened to and seriously considered any plan for entrapment, capture or revenge. Nothing was too ruthless. Eventually, I realized that none of this would bring back the trees or restore the world to its former balance. Worse yet, I was losing my own balance!

For some weeks after this moment of truth, I put all weapons in storage, safe from my own hands, and considered becoming a Buddhist. Instead, I continued to aggressively protect my property, both on site and in the courts. But I fought crime as an external fact of life, not an inner turmoil churning my guts apart. As a result, I became a more effective warrior.

Theft was a reality. I had no magic bullets. The best I could do was discourage or divert it. My numerous calls to authorities almost never resulted in captures or convictions. Yet the frequent arrival of squad cars and investigators got local attention. My civil lawsuits for damages almost never resulted in restitution. Yet they were a potent element of drama, serving notice that here was an owner who had little tolerance for crime and would make it as inconvenient as possible for the perpetrators. I regret this often resulted in the criminal attacks simply shifting to my neighbors. But most of those neighbors were large corporations who had established reputations for tolerance and indifference. I have never quite forgiven them for the years I spent fighting this war alone.

Acts of theft were random. The potential for theft was a continuum: sometimes dormant; always present. I never baited or tempted it. I could not carry the trees with me for safekeeping. But I never left anything of value in my mobile home. The tableware and cooking utensils were mismatched seconds; the furnishings and incidental tools were the same. My bookcase was filled with dog-eared books and a set of ancient encyclopedias to help absorb the long winter nights. Such things, when stolen – as they always were – left no hole in my heart when they were gone. I replaced them with more of same.

On one occasion, I found that the bright new pump and pressure tank had been stolen from my well house. The absence of water is not a philosophical concept. It's a puzzle to be solved, like "one of them there Rubik's cubes." Brooding over one's inner rumblings at such a moment is pure luxury. I chose to address the reality and solve the puzzle. At the junkyard, I found a replacement pump – probably stolen elsewhere. At the dump, I found an abandoned water heater to replace the pressure tank. Water was restored.

I kept no luxuries or art treasures. Nature and the sounds of the forest were sufficient. For a time, one large painting in my bedroom served a dual purpose. It covered a spot of vandalism and provided bright color in a Spartan room. It was the black silhouette of an old Spanish galleon, superimposed over a blazing sunset. Although it had doubtful value, I was fond of it and should have safeguarded it somewhere else. Eventually, it

was stolen during one of the many break-ins.

The robbery was unremarkable. Tire tracks indicated several dirt bikes. Entry was gained through a smashed window, exit via a door left hanging open and banging in the wind. Probably teenagers, doing their apprenticeship as petty thieves, training to be timber poachers when they grew up.

They had hauled away an ambitious volume for bikers: Tools, kitchenware, linen, books, clothing, even the complete set of old encyclopedias, minus one volume I had been reading in bed and left on the nightstand. This volume had been kicked under the bed. The nightstand and lamp were gone. So were my sheets and pajamas and, worst of all, the old Spanish galleon. I tried to visualize these items departing in precarious balance on dirt bikes and laughed to myself. What else could I do, except pick up the pieces of what was left?

About ten years later and a hundred miles away, I was visiting with a nice young man who was moving into an apartment. Chris was a recent transplant from California with no connection to our Coast, so I was surprised to watch him offload a large, familiar painting of a Spanish galleon.

“Interesting painting,” I commented. “Where did you get it?”

“Oh, I met this girl a couple of weeks ago who invited me home for dinner. She said it had been in her family for years. When I admired it, her folks gave it to me.”

“How old is this girl?”

“About my age, late twenties.”

“By any chance, do her folks live at the Coast?”

“Yes.”

“Does she happen to have a younger brother who might have ridden dirt bikes about ten years ago?”

“Why, yes! Do you know them?”

“Not really, but I think I know the painting.”

I told him the story of the break-ins. We checked the painting for some individual marks of identification. They were there, along with a few scratches that might have occurred while it rode precarious balance on a dirt bike as it rapidly departed through the forest. Chris was hugely embarrassed.

“Take it,” he insisted. I replied that the Statute of Limitations had long ago expired on the theft and that the painting was now his. Chris would have no further part of it.

“I don’t even like it anyway,” he decided.

So the galleon hangs safe again in my bedroom, miles away from its disappearance. As an art treasure, it has no value. Yet, as parable, it reminds us, perhaps, that we should never give up hope and it’s okay to dream of happy endings or “closure.” Just don’t let the dreams eat your lunch. Reality will probably be quite different, and we only survive if we deal with reality.

The old bandits and bad asses taught me that the reality of most theft and crime is nothing more than the convergence of temptation with opportunity. These external forces have no deep, dark motives, no Karma or inner spirit and you shouldn’t let them unbalance yours. Deal with the reality and, “Don’t take it personal.”

As Bob once said by way of total explanation for raiding my property:

“I’m sorry it was your land. We honestly thought we was stealing from Weyerhaeuser.”



# LICENSE TO STEAL -

## Government Agencies

### Chapter Twenty-two

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**G**overnment agencies don't steal. The reason is simple. Before doing so, they change the definition stealing.

Next to our little town on the beach, there is a state park. For years, it was just a wild, sprawling campgrounds with a couple of outhouses. Next to it was an old, fire gutted motel and private campgrounds with a sweeping view of the Pacific Ocean. I bought the motel property on a whim and cleaned it up in preparation for rebuilding something, someday when the mood struck.

Increased public interest and new legislative appropriations brought the long neglected state park to everyone's attention. At a lightly attended public meeting on a rainy winter day, plans were announced to upgrade and expand the park. The old outhouses and crude campsites would be replaced with modern bathrooms, showers, neat campsites, water hookups for motor homes, and an ocean viewing picnic grounds. Three private properties, including the motel site, would be required for the expansion. The community and adjacent owners embraced the concept. Not a single voice was raised in protest.

The rules for acquisition seemed fair: the state would hire an independent appraisal and pay market value for the acquired property. We could accept or reject their offers.

Months went by. The state assured us of its continuing interest. They were just waiting for the appointment of the private appraiser. The process seemed unduly slow. But who expects more from the government?

We did not, of course, suspect that during this delay, a companion state agency housed in adjoining headquarters offices would quietly enter the scene. Without notice to any of us, they held a regular business meeting in a branch office on the other side of the state and adopted new regulations severely restricting any activity or development on our little cluster of coastal properties. Under this new resolution, adopted, they said, in the interests of public health and safety, it became a criminal offense for me to build anything on my land or to use it for any purpose other than to sell it to the state. A few days later, an appraiser was appointed, advised of the restrictions, and asked to give his impression of value. He took a long look at the view, stared even longer at the restrictions and decided there was little value left. Now the state made its "fair market" offer at a fraction of true value.

Of course, I didn't sell to the state. They modified their project without me. But it took months of effort, meetings, and political lobbying to reverse this bizarre resolution and undo the damage.

Meanwhile, another state agency had taken quiet interest in me elsewhere. Consistent with their new, and politically popular environmental awareness, our legislature had appropriated millions of dollar for the acquisition of wetlands, habitats and natural areas. The appropriations were sweetened with millions of



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dollars in federal matching funds and private grants. The acquired lands were to be managed by the same state agency that manages, as trustees, our publicly owned timberlands. The Commissioner of that powerful agency is elected. The incumbent had made environmental issues a cornerstone of her campaign. She had no forestry background and quickly alienated much of the timber industry. But she had a solid political base among environmental activists and surrounded herself with equally aggressive, motivated staff.

I was never a political animal. Like many coastal people, I prided myself in being an independent voter, unaligned with any political party. But I loved the land. What could be sinister about programs to preserve it?

Much later, through a series of public disclosure requests, I would learn just how far the definition of theft could be modified and morphed. In the process of that bitter education, I would come to grieve for some of the old, unapologetic bandits I had known over the years.

The state manages a huge trust land inventory. Not all of these lands were prime forests, of course. Some were non-productive swamps, cliffs and deserts. Now, with millions to spend, the agency launched a series of scholarly, in house reviews of some of the marginal lands and found amazing new environmental dimension to them. They reclassified them as “environmentally sensitive.” Then, during a sample ten year period, they used about 73% of the funds to purchase them, from themselves as trustees, and buy them back for their new, reclassified purpose. In other words, new public funds were used to buy publicly owned land and resell it back to the public.

Of course, a simple recitation of their intent to manage these lands as natural areas could have accomplished the change without cost to anyone. Under regulations administered by this same agency, private owners were already forced to do so at their own expense. They had different standards for themselves. Having artificially reclassified these public lands, they could raid the appropriations for other purposes. It also permitted the Commissioner and the agency to claim, for political publicity, that they had acquired thousands of acres for environmental purposes. The media, the public and the legislature were delighted. The Commissioner’s re-election appeared to be a slam-dunk. More and more appropriations and matching funds rolled in.

Per acre values set on these artificial transfers were surprisingly high. No single person was responsible for the complex system by which these lands were transferred. The agency kept a short list of accredited and approved private appraisers. These were hired, at three to ten thousand dollars per property, to give advisory professional opinions on values. Tiers of state employees, who, in their turn, approved each stage of the transactions, then reviewed this work. Unanimous approval at the next regular meeting of the commission invariably followed. These meetings were open to the public. But there seems to be no record of dissent, concern or protest.

Having burned up the majority of the appropriations, the agency still had a few million left to purchase private lands, such as mine. The same lineup of appraisers was again hired to give their professional opinions on values. Suddenly the market on swamps dropped through the floor. A ten-year sample of transactions obtained later under public disclosure reflected that private land was acquired at \$300 to \$500 an acre. But the public lands were artificially transferred at values as high as \$18,000 per acre. Open market transactions between individuals during the same period were somewhere between the two extremes.



How could this happen? Why would private owners willingly sell below market in a purely voluntary transaction with the state? I was about to get a whole, new education.

One day I received a pretty letter expressing interest in my land. It was not from the state, but from a private, non-profit agency often hyped in the media. A glossy brochure outlining their fine works in the field of environmental protection was enclosed with the letter. This initial contact was followed with friendly meetings, during which I got a convincing pitch on their fine works and the various reasons why I should either gift or sell my land to them at gift prices for the benefit of nature and posterity. They were, they said, operating internationally with donated funds and grants. Being a worthy, non-profit they could not always pay market values. But they could give me around \$300 per acre for my 120 acres of land, timber and half a mile of beach front on the bay.

My neighbor was a third generation owner of a key parcel consisting of nearly 500 acres of land, timber and a mile of bay frontage. His acquisition would turn out to be the first step in a much larger acquisition plan. Convinced by the self-promotion of this group, he finally agreed to sell out at \$540 per acre. Later, he would testify that only after the deal was signed and the check forthcoming, did he learn the buyer was actually the state. The private group was nothing more than an undisclosed agent taking temporary title by pre-arrangement with the state or federal agency. Sometimes they took enormous markups on these pass-through holdings. Sometimes they retained portions of the property, itself, as payment for their services. Either way, they were taking a healthy bite out of the deal with no investment, no public accounting, no taxes and no rules of conduct.

Early in our state history, our legislature had recognized the inequality in bargaining power between a small landowner and an acquiring state agency. They adopted some very modest rules to keep the negotiating table relatively level. The rules were minimal compared to the standards later set for licensed realtors and brokers. They were minimal compared to the ordinary expectations of private citizens engaged in ordinary commerce. These rules had been adopted in conjunction with the laws on condemnation or eminent domain – the only acquisitions at the time. State attorneys would one day argue that none of these rules applied to the massive wave of new transactions for environmental acquisitions. Theoretically they were purely “voluntary.” And since the new appropriations contained no new guidelines, none, in fact, existed. But just in case a shadow of the old rules could be inferred, the shadow decoys deflected any possible taint of impropriety from the state.

In other words, the state did not have the power to make us sell. But it had carte blanche power to make us damn sorry if we didn’t.

Meanwhile, there were innumerable side benefits to the on-going game. Strange bedfellows, with no environmental motives, had a critical interest in preserving it. For example, the decoy group was stockpiling a large inventory of marginal lands as reward for their services. These could be sold to developers for mitigation purposes. In this scenario, the developer wants to build a shopping mall on his own land near town. The state denies him permission to convert his land to commercial use because the state has recently reclassified it as habitat. He happily buys a replacement swamp from the non-profit group at an inflated value and gifts it to the state. The state gets a free swamp. He takes a tax write off for the inflated value of the gift. The “non-profit” group uses their tax-free profit to buy more cheap land from innocent owners. Another cycle of transactions begins.

Small landowners were clueless before this ambitious combination of forces. State participation was limited only by the personal ethics and imagination of the administrator of the moment. Administrators change, of course; and, the direction of an agency changes with them. But the law and its potential for abuse have never

been revised.

After my neighbor sold, the state's cover was blown, so the state buyers came directly to the rest of us. We still had no understanding of their real plans or the amount of work already accomplished by them. Every feature, boundary, road and trail had been mapped. Every vegetation and soil type had been studied, every animal species sampled. A couple of small, peripheral owners were hastily bought out at prices twice and triple the per acre payment to my neighbor. He went into seclusion to lick his wounds.

The state buyer was not lacking in self-confidence. She claimed to have training in forestry and experience in real estate. Neither would prove to be true. She claimed to have obtained a professional opinion that indicated my timber had no market value. This, too, was false. She also claimed to have a fair market appraisal based on a fair sample of market sales. In fact, the primary comparable sale used by the appraiser was the prior acquisition of my neighbor, a highly suspect transaction that had closed at a fraction of fair market. Based on the purportedly fair appraisal, she now offered \$80,000 for 120 acres of land, timber and a half-mile of bay frontage. Stunned and confused, I rejected the offer.

There was a long, ominous silence. Sensing impending storm, I decided to log the "worthless" timber before it evaporated completely. The same state agency also regulates logging activity. Fortunately, the local office had not yet received marching orders. They issued my harvest permit in routine manner. On a sunny morning the following spring, I arranged to meet with log buyers at the entrance to my property. This ancient access road was shared with my only neighbor, a large timber company. It was on all the state and county maps and aerials, including the studies preliminary to this new activity. Now the entrance to the road had physically disappeared! Gone! Stolen!



*When I protested, they first alleged it had been removed as a safety hazard; perhaps I could reinstall it at my expense along safer lines.*

*But when I hired a contractor to do so, he was advised that anyone coming to my aid risked loss of his license and any future state business.*

*The contractor fled.*

During the ominous lull, the state had purchased the land from the timber company. So quiet were the transactions that not even the local manager was aware of them. Shortly after the deed was recorded, state equipment swept in and ripped out the road approach, culvert and connection to the state highway. When I protested, they first alleged it had been removed as a safety hazard; perhaps I could reinstall it at my expense along safer lines. But when I hired a contractor to do so, he was advised that anyone coming to my aid risked loss of his license and any future state business. The contractor fled. Later, as lawyers got involved, the state claimed the road never existed. We pointed to their own studies, which even contained a marginal note advising its future removal. No marginal note, of course, recommended paying me for the damage.

Although I could hurdle the ditch and visit my property, it would be impossible to log it. No trucker could risk his state license by defying the barrier. My property was in limbo. The industry had been warned. Even the bad Asses were scared.

Defying the threats, I built a campsite, set up a mailbox and prepared for a long, long fight. Now another state crew arrived with at least a half million dollars worth of state trucks and equipment. First my mailbox was ripped out and impounded. It seems it was a threat to public health and safety. Then, while flagging crews diverted highway traffic and state crews off loaded excavation equipment, I planted myself in their destructive path and placed a panic call to my lawyer. The crew shrugged and took a break. Some sunned themselves on the side of the road. One fell asleep. One or two seemed genuinely

embarrassed about their mission. Finally a cell phone rang. A signal was given. Without any explanation, they loaded up and left. My mailbox went with them. I never saw it again.

My plight began to attract sympathetic local attention. There were blurbs in the local paper and comments on local radio. Soon I got letters and calls from others throughout the state who had gone through similar abuse. Most had eventually sold out under the pressure. Some were waging costly legal battles. All of them felt isolated vilified and betrayed by their own government.

Local, sympathetic media were no match for the barrage of slick, self-congratulatory releases issuing from the state agency to the urban media. For every moment of local attention, there were at least two feature articles in the urban press regarding the wonderful on-going environmental programs and goals of the Commissioner and her agency. Hand-in-glove with this manipulated publicity was the ever-present inference that people like me were unreasonable, reactionary, anti-environment nut cases. If an indignant citizen raised the issue of my plight at public meetings, there was a canned response to the same effect. It seemed that some situations like mine were uniquely troublesome despite all reasonable efforts to resolve them. Accompanying this canned response was a rehearsed, sad eye rolling that said the rest.

Had these abuses come from a private source, I might have had recourse to various law enforcement agencies including the state Attorney General. But the Attorney General is the publicly elected defense attorney for these state agencies. That office goes into instant damage control mode on behalf of their state client on such matters. Delay and frustration is the best you can expect from that source. And young lawyers, representing a politically powerful client can be surprisingly naïve. Despite their professional training in the distinction between fact, rumor and hearsay, they were usually quick to adopt their client's slick innuendo that I was simply a wild card with my own, nut case agenda – a thorn in the posterior of those pursuing lofty goals. My complaints and eventual damage claims to this group were treated with increasing rudeness and disproportionate hostility. It was blame the victim time.

Timber markets rose and fell. Months went by in pointless wrangling. Intermittently, I received another invitation to sell to the state. Meanwhile, the bullying, intimidation and stonewalling continued. My life and any personal projects remotely dependent upon state review were on indefinite hold. Only the costs and taxes continued without interruption. Routine management of the property was impossible. For example, we had a winter ice storm. Ordinarily the damaged trees would be salvaged. Mine rotted where they fell, while the lawyers continued their dilatory games.

I became a political football. I was defying the goals of a political powerhouse. Hell hath no wrath like a woman with political power. She had enemies, of course. Some embraced my story as a cause. One particularly courageous local legislator from the opposition party proposed modest legislation to curb the obvious abuse. I was invited to testify before a House committee. It was a wasted trip. The committee had been briefed and was sharply divided along party lines before I arrived. Behind-the-scenes lobbying had swayed the majority. The merits went down in flames.

Years elapsed. My case finally reached Superior Court. I was seeking damages and other relief. The state lawyers seemed resigned to picking at the edges of my case and making increasingly higher offers to buy my land. By the third day of trial, the original \$36,000 offer was up to a suggested \$400,000. No one will ever know the public funds spent on this game in the interim.

I was bone weary, frequently ill, often close to tears, but I would not cave in. I had a good feeling about the fairness of the Judge and the common sense of the local jurors. Never have I felt so grateful toward total strangers and the dimension of reality their presence brought to an otherwise nightmare experience.

When I rejected the latest offer, the state fired its final shot. They would discuss a settlement solution,

stop the harassment, replace my road and return us to our original condition. But, if I persisted with a trial for damages and any assignment of guilt or responsibility, they would appeal any verdict in my favor and keep me tied up in litigation forever. After the crippling costs and pressures of the recent years, the threat was more effective than a bullet in my kneecaps. We agreed to hammer out the details of a settlement.

Late that night, while I was working on a list of our demands, a logger called me regarding another instance of regulatory abuse in the field by a state employee who was taking an active part in the present litigation. It was already my opinion that he had misplaced his own ethics and had slanted evidence and testimony in any way that suited his superiors. With my first smile in months, I added one final condition to my list of settlement demands: that this man be enjoined forever from entering any of my land. I fell asleep, never once dreaming the state would concur in anything so outrageous.

Surprisingly, the state had no problem with jettisoning this employee as their first concession in the next day's negotiations. It would be a career breaker for a loyal subject. But they sacrificed him without hesitation.

While a hot line buzzed between the courtroom and state headquarters, the lawyers wrangled over other details. The Judge retired to his chambers. The jurors waited to return to the courtroom if the negotiations failed. I took a long walk in the rain. The café was open. I settled into the same booth where, so many years ago, I had met with Bob, the cedar thief, and tried to persuade him to turn rat on his fellow thieves and the mills. Even he, the unapologetic bad ass, had a twisted sense of integrity that seemed desperately lacking in my present world.

"I can't explain it," he had replied heavily. "But if it comes to that, I'll just have to do the time."

Miserable, slouching, pathetic thief. Brawler and poacher. Possibly a killer. Definitely killed. Certainly not a man anyone would miss.

So why was I suddenly crying?

## What is a settlement?

"David and Goliath" is a Cinderella story for men. Don't take it seriously. Neanderthals probably grunted similar legends to their children. No matter how primitive or helpless our circumstances, a trace of romanticism leads us to cherish the hope that the little guy can win. The worse life gets, the more desperately we cling to such fantasies. Fairy tales grew out of European poverty. Rags to riches movies thrived during the Great Depression. Without such dreams, most of the human race would have killed itself and its own children.

Real fights are quite different. Real little people should take a real hard look at Goliath before they step into the arena. This is not easy in today's complex society and shifting alliances between unimaginable power concentrations. We like to think we can choose sides between good and evil, like "corporate greed" and human need, or "political corruption" and honest citizens, or "environmentalists" against polluters. There are no sides. It's an endless dance of shifting partners, between obscenely huge "Goliaths," dancing to music only they can hear.

No one could or would rescue me. No one could or would fix things. My life would never be the same. It had been re-written too many times. Even the property would never be the same. Roads could be replaced. But the myths, legends and fear surrounding it could not. If, to some, I had become a David legend, I pray it gave them comfort as they huddled by the fires in their caves – or more probably the dim lights of the local taverns – and retold it. I no longer recognized the person in their story.

For anyone taking note, the trial appeared to end with the oral agreement before a Superior Court Judge. But it took months of costly wrangling over every word and phrase to reduce it to written form. The



state was hopelessly sluggish to repair the damage. Each item of performance was willfully slow. Industry was still on notice that nothing about this property would be easy. No one would even bid on the timber. And any of my projects elsewhere rode to oblivion if they required this agency's review. My latest re-created persona was that of wild card, a little scary to cross, something to be avoided. I didn't recognize that myth, either.

The Commissioner had announced she might run for Governor and was certain she could win. However, she was so proud of her environmental work, she might prefer to stay at her present job. Some of us smiled at this. The Lands Commissioner had become a more powerful post than that of Governor.

A new Supervisor was imported from Washington D.C. to spruce up the agency and turn it into an administrative show case of perfection before the next election. He had a whispered reputation for performing quiet miracles of administrative restructuring and efficiency without taking any of the credit away from his boss. Apparently he brought with him the baggage of honor and integrity as well. My first clue came in the form of a weaseling letter from the Assistant Attorney General seeking to escape the bizarre agreement regarding the restraint against the state employee.

The agency has over 1500 employees. Many are highly trained professionals with advanced degrees in science, research, and so on. Much of this staff had been alienated or pushed to the sidelines in favor of young activists in touch with the political base of the boss. Some had seen their careers shelved. But few had been so conspicuously sacrificed as a totem and left on the pole to twist in the wind. Unquestionably, the new Supervisor had suggested that such action did not build loyalty and devotion with an intelligent, professional staff.

We had been frustrated over endless details of the settlement. I refused to give ground on this one. Now the AG wrote that he was concerned for my properties. The same agency also has statewide responsibility for fighting wildfires. It seemed this employee was critical to that effort and the restraint might put my own property at risk. I responded that this sounded like one more threat; that I would keep the letter in case I had a mysterious fire.

Less than two months later, my ranch went up in a fire tornado of such intensity, trees were ripped out by their roots and launched into the sky like flaming arrows. One hundred and sixty-five head of my neighbor's cattle were trapped in my creek canyon and perished, leaving tons of rotting flesh in the ashes. My neighbor and a friend, trying to save the cattle, were also trapped and nearly perished. Two fire fighters with a dozer were trapped and had to deploy shields. The heat of the inferno was so intense; it sucked the creeks dry with immediate evaporation. It sucked all moisture out of an underground spring that didn't return until winter. Barb wire fences and steel posts melted. This was no ordinary skip-and-run range fire. My ranch had been ground zero between a wildfire and a back burn deliberately set by the state fire crews.

Before the ashes cooled, I was waving a copy of the AG's letter in one hand and pounding on the Supervisor's desk with the other. My anger subsided as I slowly realized I was finally dealing with a gentleman. Not a man of imposing stature. Not a face anyone would remember. Just a mild mannered, courteous guy trying to do the right thing.

This was a major disaster and investigated on several levels as such. The Supervisor shared the results as they came in. No games. No secrecy.



*I responded that this sounded like one more threat; that I would keep the letter in case I had a mysterious fire.*

*Less than two months later, my ranch went up in a fire tornado of such intensity, trees were ripped out by their roots and launched into the sky like flaming arrows.*

I filed a claim for the damage. Investigations revealed no connection between this fire and my other problems. It had been a horrible coincidence. But the investigations certainly raised issues of negligence in the handling of the fire fighting and the setting of the back burn. Portions of the investigators' conclusions were downright critical of the agency. The Supervisor shared it all. Let the legal chips drop where they may. Meetings to discuss settlement were equally open and cordial. Neither side wanted another war.

Suddenly the music changed. The Goliaths heard it and changed partners. Several top executives in the agency, including the Supervisor, resigned "for personal reasons." All negotiations and communication stopped. My correspondence brought no response. The state attorney involved in our prior talks met with me one last time. We discussed a solution both sides could reasonably live with. When he presented it to the agency, they shot their messenger. He was censured for talking to me and was transferred to the other side of the state. I called him from time to time just to wish him well. It was, after all, a bit of fun to finally meet an attorney who could listen, but was not permitted to talk.

The Commissioner did not run for re-election. She retired from political life "for personal reasons" and left the state. We mortals were not privileged to hear the music to the secret dance that preceded her departure. Trends change. Alliances change. Perhaps her political base was no longer valuable enough to the national party to offset the controversies. Perhaps there were quiet discussions. Perhaps there were, in fact, purely personal reasons.

My claim would never be resolved. It has been handed off regularly to a succession of new, young state lawyers, each with his own inspired ideas for further delay. Each grasps it eagerly as his chance to make his first win. He usually grasps, as well, the myths of the past that I am the nut case with a private agenda frivolously suing the state. It seldom crosses his mind that I am the victim of a tragedy. I am usually treated with mounting rudeness and disproportionate hostility as an enemy of the state. It's blame the victim time again.

My neighbor was quietly paid for his cattle, plus enough money to replace the shirt burned off his back in the fire. But the state has spent a fortune far in excess of the claim, looking for new ways not to pay me for my loss.

A new administration has set the agency on a new course directed more toward expertise and professionalism than emotion. Environmental issues have not suffered. But they are no longer the property of activists. They are part of everyone's responsible management – public and private. Matters pertaining to my projects no longer fall into black holes or get isolated for special regulatory treatment with the agency. But a new administration will not re-open the past and reclaim the old case now stuck in the bowels of the AG's office.

My letters to the agency over current matters are answered promptly, although I often note in them a tone of extreme caution. The myth that I am looking for traps to bolster a secret, destructive agenda will never go away. I do not recognize the person in this fairy tale, either.

Once in a while an especially courageous legislator will recognize some part of the problem that might be corrected with a new law. These folks are, after all, our last bastion of defense against concentrations of power most of us cannot comprehend. The proposed bills, often nothing more than partial band-aids, invariably go down in flames. The legislative branch of government grows weaker each year. It's their own fault. They delegated these enormous powers to the agencies years ago. Those powers are now limited only by the imaginations and ethics of the administrators. None of them, however ethical, wants to relinquish this reservoir of power. No legislative branch has the power to force reform.

Meanwhile, we distrust our legislative branch more each year: "All politicians are corrupt," we say, like obedient school children reciting a mantra. I sometimes wonder how much of this popular myth has been

created and nurtured by the administrative agencies, themselves. After all, I know first hand just how effective such negative press can be. Legislators are even more vulnerable to it.

David is a myth. So is the slingshot. Only the Goliaths are real. They dance to a mystic music only they can hear. And they change position and partners so often and with such lightning grace; David could never have found a target anyway.



# When is Money Dirty?

## Chapter Twenty-three

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**L**oggers always need money. Drug dealers need to legitimize their cash by co-mingling it with legitimate money and activity. Inevitably, they would find the timber industry.

With the real estate boom and timber export markets of the 1970's and 1980's, came an invasion of speculators in Armani suits with deep pockets. They registered foreign sounding corporate names with our Secretary of State. They opened branch offices in metropolitan banking centers. Some of these offices were elaborately furnished and staffed with friendly, multi-lingual employees. Some were simply mail drops or desk space in established institutions. All of them had phones over which they could summon enormous sums of investment capital. No one locally seemed to ask who might be on the other end of that phone line.

Large money infiltrated large lending institutions that, in turn, passed it along to smaller ones in a complex chain of transactions. Sorting out tainted money and proving the elements of criminal intent and conspiracy under such circumstances is an investigator's nightmare. It takes enormous appropriations and years of dedication to bring the activity to trial. No local enforcement agency had the resources to pursue their suspicions.

Perhaps "suspicion" is not the right terminology. Local deputies were frankly informed in at least one briefing that if any and all tainted money and influence could suddenly be erased, every segment of commerce might come to a halt. They had no choice but to concentrate on the drug traffic, itself, and leave the high finance investigations to higher authority somewhere in another universe.

Traditionally, lending institutions did not extend loans on raw land, timber or agricultural land. Loggers had been wholly dependent upon the log markets to advance them money for the purchase of timber from private landowners. This made the logger equally dependent upon the lender to set the terms of purchase.

Now, for the first time in anyone's memory, there was a smorgasbord of speculation money begging for a piece of the action. It invaded local lending institutions that happily doled it out through their infrastructure. It was available in luxury metropolitan offices or little storefront stalls. It was even available from passing Cadillacs if you made the right appointment. Whether the source was legal or illegal, there was always a hook in the fine print of the terms.

Loggers may look tough but they were sitting ducks for this new influx. They could visualize the unprecedented opportunities of the new, export market. Of course, most of them didn't have enough cash reserve to take advantage of it. The man in the Armani suit had come to the right little struggling community and the right industry. Loggers aren't stupid, but some of them did stupid things.

Drug money had already invaded every angle of real estate financing. But real estate transactions leave a paper trail hard to conceal. Timber, on the other hand, — especially the small, private harvests — often went to market based on handshakes and promises, or unrecorded written agreements. Now, payment in advance

could pass with the handshake. No one wanted to read the fine print of the documents the lenders brought with them to this new field. No one seriously objected to the lenders' terms. The rising market more than compensated for the high interest rates on these short-term loans. Equipment was fired up and running high gear. So was the local economy. Why would anyone, even law enforcement agencies, question this sudden influx of investment capital? It went with the market, right? Even the crime rate was down. People were happy to be at work.

Meanwhile, back in town and ever farther away, weird paperwork was piling up. To this day, the motives behind that paperwork remain unclear and largely uninvestigated. Among the complex, unanswered questions is: Why did some of this paperwork appear to be designed to show huge losses during a time everyone seemed to be making money?

Shifting vast sums of money is a highly sophisticated and variable game. The trail is muddied by cross-pollination. Parallel corporate structures move money back and forth, designing their own bookkeeping for their own special purposes. Nowhere is this more sophisticated or better financed than with drug money. The hood that loans out cash and breaks your legs if you don't repay him is a small time, mostly fictional operator. But a few small time loggers probably expected nothing better. They made late night appointments in parking lots to close transactions that turned out to be sting operations by federal agents in Armani suits, impersonating Mafioso lenders. As usual, it was the poor fish at the bottom of the food chain caught on the hook. Judges and jurors understood these guys were small fish in a big sea of problems and sentenced them accordingly: short time in jail with work release provision. They were back on the job until bed check. One such logger happily reported that, while the beds in jail weren't great, it was the first time anyone had fixed him breakfast before he went to the woods.

Meanwhile, creative bookkeeping seemed to keep things rolling. Who cooked the books and why? What was the true business purpose of some of these corporations? And where are they now?

Some may have been set up specifically to show net losses, to be used as offsets by other, more permanent corporations with a legitimate (or otherwise) net gain. These corporations move in quickly, grow like toadstools on paper, and are bought by the second corporation who is always an "innocent purchaser in due course" one step removed from any of the questionable elements of the first. In banking circles they may even get bonus tax credits for bailing out the sick puppy. Meanwhile, the sick puppies are sunning on the Riviera, or they're creating a new corporation somewhere.

Some may have been planned pyramids from the beginning. In this scenario, the lending corporation makes numerous high risk, short-term loans at high rates of interest. We never seem to know whether the original funds they worked with came from private savings, foreign transfers, or dropped from the sky along with a crate of heroin. As lenders, they always demand collateral for these shaky loans, of course. It can be land, equipment or the borrower's back teeth. In-house appraisers grossly inflate the value of the collateral. Now, this package is given as collateral to a foreign investor in order to obtain even greater transfers of money. Just before the pyramid falls, the corporation dissolves and the principals leave for an extended vacation.

These games endlessly morph. The motives behind them are as varied as the players. Some may have been nothing more than crude local skimming; and, some may have been as genuinely stupid as they now look on paper. Some may have even been inadvertently the product of special tax incentives and loopholes. Whatever their purpose, the records reflect that hand-in-hand with boom times, a lot of money was lost on paper. Take a simple local example:

The County Auditor's records reveal that one local builder obtained and defaulted upon more than a dozen loans in rapid succession, from the same lender, before he went to jail on unrelated charges. A dozen or

so similar loans appear to have gone to his relatives or names using his address. The bank simply foreclosed and recycled the collateral at a loss. No one seems to have pursued deficiency judgments. No one seems to have objected to the losses or tried to trace the money. Take another example:

In the center of our largest town were several old, derelict buildings with crumbling foundations and collapsed roofs. These had been vacant for years and were threatened with condemnation proceedings.

Condemnation is a double-edged sword. The city or county serves notice that either the owners must demolish, or the city or county will do so, applying the bill for demolition against the property. Usually the demolition costs more than the property is worth, so the city winds up funding the demolition and owning worthless property. Under-financed counties and small cities simply don't have the funds for this exercise, so they proceed slowly. They grant extensions of time for any reasonable excuse or promise. The process moves at warped snail pace.

Meanwhile, these pockets of ghostly structures continued to be recycled with ghostly improvement loans extended to ghostly contract purchasers who invariably defaulted and disappeared. Why?

Apparently federal regulators take different levels of interest in commercial loan transactions than they do in residential loans. It also appears they take less interest in regulating the follow-up pursuit of residential loan defaults under \$50,000. The bulk of the questionable transactions I scanned in the Auditor's Office met one or both of these criteria. But what was the underlying game?

To test the waters, I attempted to present offers to purchase two of these monstrosities for cash on closing. Predictably, the lending institution was not interested. One of the buildings was already being recycled and refinanced to a distant corporation with a tropical sounding name. Within months, the corporation had defaulted. To the best of my knowledge and investigation, the lender never pursued the debt or a deficiency judgment action, but simply wrote off more evaporated dollars and recycled the building again and again until it collapsed and was hauled away. The second structure, a condemned residence, was repeatedly recycled right up to the moment the city demolished it and sold the vacant lot to the house next door to help cover the teardown expense. Yet no one seems to have objected to this form of management or auditing!

Probably no one knows for sure the purposes of all these games, the sources of all the money that moved in for such purposes, or where it went when it left. Like road running, the game of moving vast sums of money is a very personal form of entertainment with an infinite array of personal modifications. Some of the "persons," of course, were very big fish who invariably swam away at the first sign of trouble. It was the poor little local fish left dangling on the hook. Take for example the sad experience of "Mark."


Mark was a typical logger and equipment operator. He and "Warren" operated and paid taxes under a corporate name. The community, however, knew them personally and did business with them accordingly. Market transactions, contracts and extensions of credit often required their personal assurances and signatures. Few tradesmen in any small business have the expertise to keep such operations wholly separate from their private lives and fortunes. Once they co-mingle their personal and corporate personae, the presumed division of liability is destroyed forever. "Piercing the veil" of small corporations is a favorite past time of lawyers. Although they gleefully and repeatedly create them for their clients, they just as gleefully destroy them for other clients. Some lawyers will tell you there is no such thing as an impervious corporate barrier for these



types of corporations.

Big, interstate and international corporations are quite different. They can establish a separate corporate persona. Individual officers are rarely held financially accountable for mistakes made on behalf of a corporation. Even when the mistakes are outright fraud, it takes years of investigation to trace the activities and prove individual intent. Meanwhile, the corporation dissolves and the individuals retire in Bermuda.

Mark and Warren were never going to retire in Bermuda. They worked in the woods all day, wrote checks for the bills at night, left the bookkeeping to their wives, hoped each morning that income would cover their continuing debts. They seldom knew until tax time whether they had made or lost money in the process. Corporate assets, like the equipment they bought on credit, invariably required them to sign as individuals. Often they dipped into their private accounts for operating funds. In other words, they had repeatedly pierced their own corporate veil.



*Mark and Warren were never going to retire in Bermuda. They worked in the woods all day, wrote checks for the bills at night, left the bookkeeping to their wives, hoped each morning that income would cover their continuing debts. They seldom knew until tax time whether they had made or lost money in the process.*

Eventually, Warren grew weary of their marginal, crap-shoot operation and elected to sell his share of the business to Mark, who now assumed this additional debt load, along with the ordinary expenses of the logging activity.

Mark describes the next person to enter his life as a “salesman.” This traveling salesman, however, had only one commodity in his sales kit: **Money!**

The “salesman,” according to Mark, came to the field with all the necessary paperwork and a notary stamp, all of it reflecting the name and address of a foreign sounding corporate name with offices in a metropolitan location. Even the notary stamp reflects a metropolitan location. Mark, however, says he never went to the city or saw the inside of a corporate office. He never checked to see if they owned a skyscraper or a mail drop. After all, he was borrowing money, not investigating the potential lender.

Twenty years later, the details of the complex negotiations, as well as Mark’s memory, have grown fuzzy. It’s a nightmare most folks would prefer to forget, so we must plow through a handful of recorded documents to form our own conclusions.

A few obvious facts emerge: Mark borrowed money. He pledged collateral for the money. He signed documents that were recorded. Four years later, he was in bankruptcy and the foreign corporation had disappeared, leaving a trail of unresolved clouds on title to property Mark had once owned.

For example, during this time period, Mark bought 40 acres of swampy timberland from private owners for about \$40,000, according to the County Auditor’s records. After logging this marginal land, he sold it for \$20,000 – a fair market price at that time for clear-cut land. Title search would reveal recorded debts on this property of more than \$685,000 in favor of the foreign corporation.

Subsequent documents produced by the archives of the Federal Bankruptcy Court reflect that Mark’s actual, agreed total debt with the lender was closer to \$150,000 and that the foreign corporation participated in the distribution of Mark’s assets accordingly. Nothing explains why loans of either amount were extended on marginal swampland worth \$20,000.

One of the zingers in vogue at the time was a practice known as cross collateralization. It may or may not explain what happened to Mark and why a huge debt came to be recorded against an insignificant property. In this scenario, the borrower easily obtains a large operating capital loan on what appear to be easy

terms. Either in the fine print, or in a companion document, he pledges every asset in which he has any equity, as collateral. The practice was not unique to just the hard moneylenders or loan sharks. Legitimate lenders often used this method, but they would, for balloon payments on the debt, release their interest in specific property so it could be sold. Less legitimate ones simply disappeared; leaving a tangled web of clouded titles that would take years of costly litigation or quiet title actions to unravel.

Cross collateralization does not, however, explain the huge difference between \$685,000, (the amount recorded with the County Auditor) and \$150,000 (the amount of the debt suggested in the Federal Bankruptcy Court's archives). Mark says the first one "must be some kind of mistake," that he never got such a loan. From the records, anything is possible. We have no way of knowing. But a titillating question does arise from the Auditor's records:

Mark signed a two-page document. Page 1 contains the legal description of the parcel and the amount of the humongous, \$685,000 loan. Page 1 is neither signed nor initialed. Page 2 contains his signature and that of the big city notary residing at a location Mark claims never to have been.

The bankruptcy records reflect that at the time Mark sold the logged over land, the lender accepted most of the \$20,000 sale price for their release of interest in the property. It is the legal responsibility of the lender to record that release. However, they failed to record. By the time this lapse was discovered, the corporation had filed a Certificate of Withdrawal with the Secretary of State, and had left the state, leaving only a mail drop address for future reference.

No one pursued Mark or the subsequent owner for the \$685,000. No one even sent them a picture postcard from Bermuda. But the debt was of record. The property, itself, would lie in limbo for years, waiting – like many others — for some lender from another universe to come back and clear the record.

Mark was a small fish in a big ocean. Where did the big fish come from? Where did they go? Some were foreign investor corporations from Asia and the Middle East who opened little branch offices and registered with the state. Their major interests were elsewhere. They felt no allegiance to our area or anyone in it. When the boom was over, they would dissolve the local branch and move on. Were they just doing business in unfamiliar ways? Or were they part of something more sinister? No one, including investigative agencies, could sort out the details or draw a fine line between what was and was not legitimate. No one could know where their influence began or ended. No one, except perhaps the guys who tried to borrow money in parking lots, knew whether they were going into the laundry business or not.

Government employees and regulatory agencies could be as gullible as Mark. Operations on the lands of foreign investors sometimes seemed to get preferential treatment. Infractions could somehow be overlooked as innocent error, while small operators seemed invariably skewered for the same offenses. Were they targeted as part of a larger campaign of elimination? Or were the regulators just being stupidly impressed by foreign fast talk and displays of money?

Money talks. It does not always speak the truth.

Lenders of money always control the terms. Even government loans, administered by local institutions, worked in mysterious ways. The terms could seem patently arbitrary. Yet who could prove ulterior motives?

One large, local industry obtained a huge government-backed loan to take advantage of the rising market and to buy additional timberland. They already owned, outright, a lot of prime timberland ready for harvest. They signed a floor-planning type agreement as security for a loan in order to add to that inventory. This method of financing is often used by retail businesses such as auto dealerships. It rarely demands, however, that such a large, unencumbered inventory be included as collateral for the all-encompassing transac-



tion. The *understanding* is that both the lender and retailer are interested in promoting commerce, not killing it. The borrower continues to market parts of that inventory. *The fine print* frequently gives the lender power to halt sales if he feels threatened by an unreasonable depletion in inventory. By custom and honorable tradition, lenders do not invoke this remedy without good cause. Now a timberland owner, relying on such honor, signed such a document, intending to log its old and new holdings, in stages, based on market and the maturity of the timber, and to pay off the debt in installments.

Suddenly, the lender pointed to the fine print. No logging would be permitted on any of the inventoried lands, unless they paid the entire debt *first!*



*Suddenly, the lender pointed to the fine print.*

*No logging would be permitted on any of the inventoried lands, unless they paid the entire debt first!*

This arbitrary decision was completely contrary to the purpose and intent of the loan. It seemed wholly out of context with the obvious solvency and reputation of the local business. But it was legal. By now the industry had extended itself by committing to the new purchases. They were trapped. Instead of reaping the benefits from long held timberlands once owned outright, they lost everything and collapsed. Now a corporation from Asia, with only a local secretary and phone number, was permitted by the lender to assume the debt and to log the same property without any similar demand for accelerated payoff. Then, without replanting or repairing the logged over land as a local operator would be forced to do, they sold the land to a government agency, to pay off the final balance of the loan. The purchasing agency just happened to also be the regulatory agency for timberland operations.

No one locally understood any of these game plans. We simply watched, spellbound, as the big fish moved into our world, turned it upside down, and disappeared, leaving a wake of paranoia and disaster.

After the boom times, several large mills closed. Large timber companies foresaw the increasingly hostile regulations and remedial legislation that would invariably follow the foreign feeding frenzy. They began to pack up and explore third world investments. Large parcels of timberland came on the market. The sale prices were not only multi-million dollar figures. They were multi-times the values anyone locally reasonably expected. The local logger could only park his rigs and wait to bid on specific portions after new owners arrived.

Some of these new owners never arrived. They couldn't even be identified. They all had the same registered agent: an office in Seattle whose sole purpose is to receive and redistribute mail for foreign corporations. Meanwhile, the county Auditor was flooded with complex financing documents from lending interests in Chicago, New York, Atlanta and points beyond. When, out of curiosity, I called one of these East Coast lenders about one such recording, I was told they had so many transactions in that realm of high finance, that neither the name of the corporation, nor the state, nor the amount of the multi-million dollar loan held any immediate recognition.

If we had a private jet and unlimited funds to pursue this money trail, where would we fly? Hong Kong? Amsterdam? The Cayman Islands? Tokyo? Switzerland? Colombia? Djakarta? Singapore? How much of the world would we see in the process?

Now take a slow, low flight over a little coastal community, struggling year after year to survive the ups and downs of economic forces far beyond their control. A two-lane road follows the coastline north, until it dead ends on the Indian Reservation. Huddled around our intersection with the two-lane, we see the grocery store. The tavern. The schoolhouse with its leaking roof. The little bank with two clerks waiting for the next

holdup.

Traffic is light on the road beneath us. Mostly pickups. A few cars. Now and then a logging truck, lucky to make three round trips a day between the woods and the port. A tribal deputy is gassing up his jeep so he can continue his lonely patrol on the reservation. An unpaid volunteer is coaching soccer on the playground to a mismatched group of kids in T-shirts of various colors. There will be no uniforms. The district can barely afford a soccer ball.

A couple of guys in work clothes are drinking beer and swapping lies in front of the café. Two kids ride bikes down the centerline of Main Street. A large dog sleeps, undisturbed, in the middle of Central Avenue.

Around the edges of the town we see a cluster of modest homes, several weathered mobile homes and shacks. Here, side-by-side, the stand ups and the renegades reside: the hard working men and women who pay their bills; the bad asses who don't.

Mostly these are folks who pay their taxes and obey the laws and try to understand the indecipherable foreign influences and deadly after-the-fact-regulations that have invaded their local lives.

Once in a great while, one of them blows up a patrol car.



# Close Portrait of a Bad Ass

## Chapter Twenty-four

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Thurston County Jail  
May 3, 1989

Hello Pat

Well in jail again I  
stayed out for a while any how.  
I thought I'd give you a  
line seems like the only  
time right is when I'm in jail  
I'm at the city jail until  
about the fifteenth. If you  
get into town some and  
see me I would like to  
talk to you that might  
benefit both of use. I don't  
need any money so don't  
let that keep you away.  
Will Pat might see you  
here or when I get out.  
I've got a lot to talk  
about.

Love Ya

Jerry

The smartly uniformed jailer accepts my package. He takes it with ill-disguised loathing, as though already anticipating the untidy hand that will accept it through the bars. He turns the fresh packs of generic cigarettes over like dead rats. Neither they, nor the new magazines nor my note fit the profile in his mind. Suddenly aware of his reaction, he tries to make amends:

“Visitors’ day is Sunday,” he offers apologetically.

“That’s okay, thanks. There’s a note in the sack telling him to write whatever he’s got in mind. I’ll be out of town on visiting day.” It’s a lie, but the gentlest one I can come up with. Jerry won’t mind. He’s been lied to all his life. And all his life, he has lied.

I turn on my heels and flee to my car, leaving a puzzled young officer to speculate on the thread of continuity that binds my life to the withered form residing in his jail. Only one thought controls my own actions: *Lord, let me out of here!*

Out. Out. Out. I grind my heels into the sidewalk with each step, but can’t out drum the echoes. Fifty years of echoes, starting with anger and reverberating back into my own childhood where a child cries.

Later, as I trim spring flowers in my garden, there will be a collect call from the jail.

“Collect? I thought he was in the local jail.” The operator starts to explain. Jerry’s rasping voice interrupts.

“They charge for jail calls,” he reminds me. “Ninety cents.” For the first time in years, he doesn’t promise to pay me back. Other than that, it’s the same old tale of mishaps. Why do I listen?

The last time I saw him, this same garden was bent with snow. In the twisting, bleak light of icy dawn, a gray shape stamped its feet and waited, with all of the anticipation of a stray dog at a barbecue, for the first stirring in my house and the first faint scent of brewing coffee. He smelled bad and looked worse. As always, his face beams when he sees me through the window. I hope my own face does not betray me. Nothing in the re-appearance of this shadow in my life can make me optimistic. But I will endure the visit, inviting him in, because he is alive – just barely – and he will die if I don’t.

“Shit, it’s a cold fucking day,” he offers in effusive greeting. He bubbles enthusiastically over the coffee, the toast, how good I look. Manipulation. The last tool in his box. He tries to distract me with anecdotes while he fumbles through my refrigerator. I pretend not to notice: my part of the game. *Is that all life is? A f...g game?*

There! The questions have started again. Everything about this man casts shadows of uncertainty. Why? I try, from the vantage of my middle class luxury, to match his effusiveness and fail. My mind is clicking its heels on cold concrete: Let me out .. out ... out!

“Damn, you sure look great! How long since I’ve seen you?” Here he is, the homecoming queen for a day, making like we are old friends. What is friendship? Love? I shudder. Last time he showed up, a broken drunk, vomiting in the hedges before he could ring the bell, I paid to have him hauled away.

“Where shall we take him?” the men had asked.

“Anywhere too far away to walk back,” I had answered; and, later they had conned him into a car and disappeared, along with fifty dollars worth of my tools. To be fair, some greasy gear had been left behind in exchange. It’s never pure stealing. Just a jackdaw swapping of mementos between stopovers.

At least he never lacks for transportation. Someone always wants to be rid of him badly enough to pay his way a little farther down the road. This time someone upstream of me has deposited him on my snowy, predawn doorstep. This time, I’m the end of the road. Later I will find an escape. For now, we visit over my coffee. He bears no hint of malice over his succession of evictions.

“Stopped by to visit some old friends,” he grins. “They had some place to go, so they give me a ride


## Close Portrait of a Bad Ass

out here. Sure nice people. Known 'em for years. They got this nice place and the cutest kids."

In my mind, I picture a neat, middle class family trying to keep their freshly washed kids from touching the mangy stray dog, its tail wagging in ill-disguised manipulation, its rheumy eyes promising eternal devotion—at least until it's fed.

*Out in the snowy pasture, my horses call for their morning feed. Chores to be done. There will be no help from Jerry. Do I dare leave him in the house while I do them?*

"Did I ever tell you about my pony?" Jerry asks. Again the horses call. Jerry has no sense of time. His lengthy story begins: His old man got drunk, traded somebody out of a shaggy pony, and, in a rare moment of paternalism, presented it to his brood of kids. One night while it was on a short rope, the bears killed it. It's a long story, filled with details about a lifestyle at the ragged edges of civilization where neither kids nor horses get a frequent combing, and disaster is daily fare. He makes no judgments. Just tells the story. His whole life is nothing more than an unrelated series of ups and downs, between ponies on the up side, blood and horsehair on the down side. Things just happen. Like the seasons of the year.



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He makes no judgments.  
Just tells the story.*

The stories turn to weather. Snow. Years we both remember.

"Coldest I can ever remember was when I was about eleven, we was living in this shack down in Maytown, and the snow was so deep, no one could get out. The Old Man had been off drunk for several days and we didn't have hardly no food in the house, so I got the tractor out and spent all day cleaning drives for the neighbors, and got enough money so Mom could buy food for the kids, but later when the Old Man come home and seen I'd been driving the tractor, he beat the shit out of me before I could explain. Anyhow, the kids had food."

*Why, when he tells these stories, is he never sad about the pony, bitter about the poverty, angry about the beatings?*

His life is a textbook example of the cyclical nature of domestic violence. But to him, the beatings just went with the territory of being eldest son. Later, you turn the same violence on successive packs of innocent children spawned from a dozen different liaisons. I want him to be angry with the cycle, but he is not.

"My Old Man and my Uncles, they taught me the trades. When I was fourteen, I could build a house alone if I had to." Jerry has worked in every stage of construction and gypo logging. Afraid of nothing. Quickly bored with anything, including formal education. Yet frequently smarter than the Uncles and Old Man who trained him in the trades. The training included drink, swagger, brawling. Jerry's arm bears a telling tattoo burned into his hide at age eight during a fit of his father's drunken bravado. Jerry had been "helping on jobs" even then; and, after the jobs, he was dragged along the endless chain of bars and concessions on skid row. How long, I sometimes wonder, did the scrawny child sit alone in the tool truck, parked in some hot alley behind a bar? What did the tired, thirsty, hungry child do to kill the time, while he waited for his role models to emerge?

Jerry relates no rancor about the fact that he was ushered into a tattoo parlor, instead of a café or home for dinner. He wears the scar proudly, as a "gift from the Old Man." It is, perhaps, the nearest thing to a gift he ever received. In its brief message, it probably embraces the sum and substance of his father's approval and expectations, for it is an elaborate portrait of a devil, together with Jerry's date of birth and what could be his epitaph:

## Close Portrait of a Bad Ass

“Little Jerry. Born to be Bad.”

My horses continue to call for attention. There is one sleek saddle horse for each of my children, now in college. Jerry can't remember “where his kids is at.” Presumably they have learned to live off the land, using a combination of laboring skills and manipulation to get by. Is life nothing more than a pre-destined cycle? Is the continuum held together by segments no more substantial than Jerry? My stomach buckles as something in my gut screams: “Shit, let me out of here!”

Jerry had acquired his first brood and had gone through his first messy divorce before he was twenty. Those were the swashbuckling years. High wages. Hard work. Harder play. A combination of raw cunning and raw energy compensated for the awesome holes in his formal education. And the jobs were easy to come by – from me and from others – because he knew his trades and because he was absolutely fearless about tackling anything in construction. But first you had to find him, sober him up, and get him on the job. You had to extricate him from a messy bed and out of the arms of one or several women, hand him his pants, and escort him to the construction site. You had to listen to a gross recounting of his night's misadventures, shake down the job for hidden booze, and keep pouring coffee. And if you left the job unsupervised for a moment, you had to plan on finding a replacement for Jerry when you returned.

“I've got a lawyer working on getting me custody of my kids,” he told me once. He was living in a shack with all of his younger sisters, whom he had encouraged to run away from the abuse at home. Like unchained animals, they had embarked on non-stop partying.

“My ex-wife, she can't make no decent home for them kids like I can,” he assured me. Possibly the statement was true. What terrified me most was the manner in which the definitions of “home” and “decency” would forever after warp in my own mind.

Eventually hospital bills superseded the lawyers' fees and the custody issue was abandoned. Jerry's swagger brought him nightly fights. There was, for example, the night that he lost, to a well-placed fist, all of the teeth on one side of his face.

“Doctor said I'm lucky I didn't choke on the blood and shit on the way to the hospital.”

Jerry grins, despite the fact he has not yet learned to talk without losing spit and part of his tongue out that side of his mouth. During another fight, his spine absorbed the jagged ends of a broken whiskey bottle.

“Doctor said the edges went around both sides of my spinal cord. Guess I'm lucky.”

Somehow the uninterrupted series of disasters didn't strike me as being all that fortunate. But luck, like so many other terms, would dissolve into gray areas by virtue of my long acquaintance with Jerry. Luck, after all, was in the eye of the beholder. Like a leprechaun you can only see if you believe. Take for example the night Jerry and some buddies party-ed all the way to Reno, gambled for three days straight and had several thousand dollars to the good, but lost it all. Not one of them had the foresight to save gas money home.

“The casino give us breakfast, so we was lucky there. But we was hung over, 'cause you know they keep pouring the booze as long as you gamble, so here we are stranded, and we think maybe we could go out in the desert and kill some rattle snakes and sell the rattles for souvenirs 'cause we'd seen some of them rattles in the shops.”

You could always assume Jerry would think of a plan for living off of the land.

“Well, we walked the desert all day and never even seen a snake, but finally this old woman, all wrinkled and ugly, she says, what you guys doing, and we told her we're hunting for snakes, and she says she knows an old abandoned mining pit up near that place above Reno where the silver mines used to be. I can't remember the name. And she says, you want snakes, that place is full of them, and she told us right where to look, and we went up there, and looked over, and, shit, the bottom of that shaft was filled with snakes, all

## Close Portrait of a Bad Ass

wrapped around each other, writhing around, I don't know what they're living off of, maybe each other, and we looked over the edge and seen that, still hung over like we were, and we got sick and puked and left. But we run into a guy needed a patio built, so that got us money to get home, so we got lucky there."

Jerry's grossness is genetic. You could scrub on him for weeks, bathe him in cologne, clothe him in the finest, and grossness would still ooze out of his pores, his breath and his speech:



*Jerry's grossness is genetic. You could scrub on him for weeks, bathe him in cologne, clothe him in the finest, and grossness would still ooze out of his pores, his breath and his speech.*

"Did I ever tell you about the time I got the clap?"

The point of this story will be a long, amusing conversation with the doctor during his treatment. But he'll preface it:

"Incidentally, I got it from a real lady, one of the nicest women I knew. She was no tramp or nothing. She got it from her husband 'cause he was playing around on her and she didn't know it." However much Jerry may have otherwise abused the women in his life, it is inconceivable to him to afterward blame one of them for what ensued.

In the middle years, he is addicted to thrills as well as booze. From each adventure, he will slink, like a battered tomcat, back to those of us who employ him. There is less and less to employ each year. A series of work related and fight related injuries take their toll. Most of the injuries on the job result from climbing scaffolding or walking rooflines while drunk. "Shit,"

he says, invariably, "it's my own stupid fucking fault." He breaks his back, his shoulder, and his legs in separate accidents. But his calls from the hospital are jovial, witty, and always crude.

"Got this great looking nurse to bathe me. But she makes me wash my own jewels."

He scalds the flesh off of one foot with hot roofing tar. His call from the hospital is still upbeat.

"I invented this way to keep ice in a bag around my foot by wearing this size 12 snow boot. Doctor told me I should patent the idea. He says I'm lucky I didn't lose my foot. Says he ain't never seen nobody heal up so fast as I do."

"Did you tell him you've had lots of practice?" I counter. Jerry laughs. He likes rough jokes, even on himself.

The thrill seeking ends in increasingly longer jail terms. His calls are from bigger and better jails. Still upbeat.

"Well, I really screwed up this time. Thought we had an easy way to make some money, but landed in the shit pot again. But, hey, a movie studio wants to buy the story, so maybe when I get out of jail this time, I'll sell my crime. Ain't that something?"

Another call:

"Hey, I talked the warden into letting me do the roofing work on our wing of the pen and he's so pleased, he's giving me more work, and I think he's going to give me a letter to the parole board."

Another call:

"I'm coming up for parole and it would sure be helpful if you could write a letter to them. But if you can't make it good, don't writing nothing. Okay? Maybe you could just tell them about my trades."

It is his one claim to respectability: the trades he has learned as a child at his father's side. The beatings, the lies, the bad checks, the un-kept promises of payment were part of the apprenticeship. Like the trades, he will pass these lessons, too, to his children. For a man who was raised with beatings and spent most of his life in brawls, he holds surprisingly little bitterness. I want him to get mad, as I have done. I, too, remember an alcoholic family background. I, too, remember the beatings, the poverty, the shame and the lies.

## Close Portrait of a Bad Ass

But I got mad and got out. Get mad, Jerry. Break the cycle.

Once I thought he was going to make it to real anger. He had stumbled in, broke, broken, begging for a handout, promising work that would never be accomplished in exchange. Suddenly his eyes flashed:

“This is bull shit, me begging you for money for smokes. You know that? It’s bullshit. I could have had it all.” And it’s true. he had the plans, the energy, and the trades. “Well, I fucked up. It’s my own goddamn fault.”

In all the disastrous years, I have never heard him blame anyone but himself for his fate, yet I have never seen anyone’s fate so predestined by environment.

Jerry’s raucous, intermittent visits into my life always leave a shadow in their wake. I do not hope for Jerry’s transformation. His life pattern was set before he was born; and, he is disintegrating markedly. The deterioration is irreversible. Yet some atavistic sense of justice and fair play churns in my gut long after Jerry has departed. His very presence challenges my dearest values. What use, after all, is goodness, loyalty, education, work ethics, if our future is pre-destined by external forces? Of what value are honesty, integrity and nurturing domesticity if life is nothing but an unrelated sequence of events? And, if life is nothing more than the “luck of the draw,” why are the cards so unfairly stacked for some and against others? Sometimes I wonder if God is trying to teach me something by returning Jerry regularly to my doorstep.

Months pass. I am at a nightclub with a friend. Suddenly a wiry young macho and his date take over the dance floor with the sheer energy of their dance. Earlier in the day I have had another call from Jerry who is lodged in a prison and needs smokes. This fellow taking over the dance floor is a ringer for Jerry in his youth.

“Do you know that guy?” asks my escort, suspiciously.

“Just his type,” I reply. Then, overcome with a forlornness I can’t explain, I add, “Let’s get the hell out of here.”

Jerry’s succession of women continues. They are less attractive, more disturbed than the women of his youth. Some clearly make a life pattern of rescuing down and outers, and I wonder if my testy tolerance of Jerry is really a sick need on my part to be a Samaritan. Was the Samaritan sick? Even the Bible gets re-examined after Jerry’s visits.

It’s Christmas and Jerry is living with “a really good woman.”

“You know what she done for me? She got ahold of all of my kids and got them together. Some I hadn’t seen in years.”

It’s a costly, well meant gesture, and Jerry appreciates it verbally. But one can hear the strain. Perhaps the tension starts somewhere behind our inner ear where each of us hears and defines our destiny. Some of us think we control our destiny, that we can change it. Jerry’s destiny just happens. Like an egg. Try to reshape it and it cracks.

Jerry and the Good Woman give a Christmas party. It is a big spread of food and lots of booze, attended by a mixture of construction workers, neighbors and drinking buddies. Jerry introduces me to each and all as his oldest, dearest, truest friend. Since he doesn’t hit me up for money, the experience leaves me with profound confusion over this new definition of friendship.

Six months later, I will observe that someone has been sleeping in my basement. The visitor enters after I am asleep and leaves before I wake. Finally a phone call explains. “I needed a place to crash. Me and her split up. It’s all my fault. She’s a good woman. She really done a lot for me.”

The Good Woman blames Jerry’s friends. “I tried to keep him off booze, but they fed it to him when I was gone and he got so he was drunk all the time.”

Jerry’s version is different. “It’s my own fucking fault,” he says, and drifts out of town for a few



## What is Need?

store and gas station had escaped the fire and I saw the first signs of life. A lone helicopter was scooping water out of the river and dumping it on the two remaining buildings and the bridge. The door of the store was open and the gas pumps were turned on. I started filling my car. A young man walked over and stood next to me. I assumed him to be in charge of the store. He had the dazed look of a tranquilized animal. Perhaps I looked and acted the same. Neither of us spoke. We didn't ask each other for help or information. We didn't offer greeting or aid. Our throats were frozen. Our minds were numb. I handed him the correct money for the gas and drove on into the fire ravaged land without looking back. To this day I don't know if he was in charge of the store or a refugee too stunned to ask for my help. Nor can I explain why I couldn't speak to or seek information from the first and only living human I had encountered in this disaster. But I believe it is a typical reaction, probably connected to our survival instinct.

Perhaps ten miles later, I found a dead porcupine in the road. The landscape on all sides was so devoid of any other remains of life or vegetation, that I stopped to marvel at something recognizable, even if it was just a carcass.

Around another bend, I saw a shallow pond amid a field of smoldering ashes. Brush that once grew out of the pond had burned to the water line. The silver surface mirrored only the blackened landscape and the smoking sky. Then I thought I saw it ripple. I rubbed my eyes and realized my face was black with soot and my cheeks were stained with tears. *What had happened to all the animals?* The water rippled once more. I parked and walked through the fields of ashes to investigate. As I approached, a fat beaver broke to the surface, sat bolt upright in the shallow water and chattered at me. I sat down in the ashes and listened to him complain. It was my only conversation in three hundred miles. He had a lot to tell me.

"I'm sorry," was all I could manage to reply.

War, natural disaster and fire. These are the ultimate crucibles that suck sophistication and fear out of our bones and reduce us to the silent world of our animal instincts. We do not run in screaming mobs like the movie scenes portray. We grow very quiet, transfixed. Everything is being erased so we can concentrate on our survival and the survival of those upon whom we depend. In dirt poor rural communities, we were far more aware of our mutual dependency, far quicker to break through this first transfixed stage and become proactive. As a result, most of us survived.

Animals did perish. Barn fires invariably started with spontaneous combustion in the hay lofts, then descended to the stalls of the cattle and horses. They, like my climbing trees, struggled to break loose and fly. Farmers wrapped themselves in wet blankets and raced into the flames to rescue them. Cows could be turned loose. One slap on the rump and they would bolt for the nearest exit. Horses went crazy with fear and had to be pulled, one by one, out of the flames. Often there just wasn't enough time, but God knows everyone tried. Today most people would simply call 911 and wait for the trucks. The luxury of our lifestyle, the lack of habitual need, has brought us to this level of disengagement. Living at the edge of desperation, we fought hunger, weather and fire together. We honed our survival skills and western ingenuity. But I'd rob banks before I'd live like that again. So would most other Americans.

American ingenuity created the concept of mass production. It's given us an enviable life style. But it relies on conformity and uniformity. Both of these depend upon a rigid system, centrally controlled. There is no wiggle room for individual adaptation or field decisions. Each element grows increasingly dependent on direction from above. Interrupt this chain of command and the whole system dithers in uncertainty until it self destructs. Credit Von Clausewitz for that insight. And don't forget to thank him for publishing his thesis after our Revolutionary War. Otherwise we might still be speaking English and bowing toward Windsor Castle.

If Western ingenuity and survival instinct have fallen, through neglect, into the hands of people who

## What is Need?

don't give a damn if they survive — if the only non-conforming or experimental shelters are being built by people sleeping under bridges and smoking dope — if criminal elements have become heirs, by default, to the last vestiges of Western inventiveness — then we better be grateful those folks are drunk or wasted most of the time. The way I see it, if they ever go on the wagon, our entire civilization is in deep, deep doo!



# Hooves and Wheels

## Chapter Twenty-Six

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The West Coast of my childhood was over the day my 70 year old neighbor jumped onto a dirt bike, rounded up his cattle, herded them to new pasture and secured the cross-fence in less time than it takes to saddle a horse. Smokey, the Border Collie – older in dog years than Harold, himself – tried to follow. Once she had been an equal working partner on this farm, just like the cutting horse. Now she lay panting and exhausted in mid-field. Harold gathered the old dog in his arms and brought her back to the porch on the bike. The horses had been put down years ago. Their stalls were silent.

“Nice thing about a bike, it don’t eat all year round like a horse. Just eats gas when you use it. And if you drop the reins on it, it stays put. Never runs back to the barn without me.”

Yes, Harold, that’s true. We also know it will never call to you in the mornings or nuzzle your shoulder in the field; that it has the personality of a rock. On the other hand, you’ll never sleep in the barn with it when it’s sick, or hide from your friends for weeks when the time comes to shoot it.

Bikes and quads have replaced the cutting horse. Farm machinery and logging equipment have replaced the massive draft horses that worked as equal partners in the fields and forests of the West.

The old dog crawls next to Harold, sitting on the edge of the porch. Instinctively he wraps his arm around her. His gnarled hand on her fur seeks as much comfort as it imparts. Warmth for warmth. Partner to partner. How do we form similar bonds with machines and computers?

Like many old farmers, Harold had both a saddle horse for herding cattle and a working team of draft horses, Dick and Babe, for the hard farm work. Dick was a powerful, headstrong gelding, always one step ahead of Babe when they were harnessed and pulling equipment. In summer, Harold let me hold the reins while the men pitched hay on the wagon. The team knew their duty. Guiding them was an easy job for a kid. Farming was hellish work for the partnership of animals and adults.



My uncle tilled his fields and garden with a one horse plow. Row after row, back and forth, the big gelding strained to drag the plow through the earth, while the man stumbled behind, fighting to keep the plow upright and manually lifting it around each turn. Soon the horse was covered with frothing sweat, the man soaking wet and caked with dust. Equals in a partnership of misery, except the horse had a better view. At the end of the day, each had earned the respect of the other, and both had earned their dinner.

## Hooves and Wheels

Some retired loggers can still remember the days they skidded logs with teams of horses. They describe crazy, man and horse killing work. Yet when they speak of the horses, they refer to them by name and disposition, like old friends, not machinery. They miss the bond. One local, retired logger got so nostalgic, he bought a team of Percherons and talked seriously about going back into horse logging. His wife talked just as seriously about having the old fool committed. For several weeks, he felt it was safer to sleep in the barn and bond with the Percherons, while his wife reconsidered their bond of marriage.

Of course, no one was interested in hiring a broken down old horse logger who was beginning to look a little wild from sleeping in a barn with Percherons. The horses were looking good with no work and constant attention. They were eating him out of house, home and barn. Reluctantly, he sold the team. So far as I know, it was the last team on the Coast, except for the ones in the annual parades.

Life today is a lot easier for people and animals. But the bond between them is broken. In western counties today, the saddle horses are either pets or dog food, and the only remaining draft horses pull beer wagons at the fair. That doesn't stop us from trying to bring back the past, or our nostalgic vision of it.

A few years ago, some investors opened a Western motif combination rodeo, riding arena, dance hall and night club south of our Capital City. The place was instantly packed with government office workers in polished cowboy boots and brand new Stetsons. A Western band belted out shit stomping tunes to dancers who migrated between the lounge and the dance floor. From the lounge and bar, you could look out upon a well lit arena while you sipped your drinks, or, if you sipped long enough, you could stumble down to the arena and join the steer riding.

Down in the arena, three riders presided grandly over the steer riding. The steers were passive, dehorned creatures, probably raised as pets. They seemed confused about their job.

When a computer geek puts on a tight new pair of unfamiliar cowboy boots, downs a couple of shots at the bar, wobbles down a flight of stairs and climbs onto a steer for the first time in his life, it's difficult to judge just how drunk he is. But the steers caught on real fast and they, at least, were sober. Some marvelous face plants ensued.

Occasionally dancers crowded the lounge windows to see which of their friends had done the latest face plant, or they would surge to a well lit alcove where other adventurers were riding the mechanical bull with even worse results.

There probably weren't ten people in the crowd who appreciated the difference between a real and a mechanical bull.

Pickup riders in an arena are usually present to save the fallen hero from the raging revenge of bucking horses after the bell has rung. These steers had no rage. They ambled into a corner and waited, like the rest of us, to see how each geek unscrambled himself from the sawdust. There was little for the pickup riders to do except sit grandly on their horses. One horse did, however, make a move toward rescuing a fallen geek and walked right out from under his rider who seemed to be floating on something the rest of us had not shared. There was a moment of surprise on his face as he hovered, then dropped on his butt on the arena floor. The horse looked quizzically between the two men in the sawdust and shook his head. I think the horse was sober. I know he was embarrassed.

Yes, it was all wild fun. Make believe mayhem. But it sure didn't recreate the West. We can dramatize, mechanize and computerize. The one thing we can not simulate is the bond that existed between humans and animals working in partnership. Once they shared as equals. How can the balance of that partnership have shifted in such a way that both wound up losing?

# Love and Wheels

Some psychologists draw sexual inferences from our relationships with machines: a sports car, for example, is a man's surrogate mistress. Of course, these are the same experts who draw sexual inferences from ink blots and tea leaves. They tend to get stuck on the same explanation and miss a few important details. First, a car has wheels and gets us from place to place. A mistress or lover does not. Furthermore, I've never seen a man park his mistress in front of the office on Monday morning. I have, however, heard many men call their car a female expletive when it fails to start, while I address any and all non-functioning machines with male expletives. Those moments are anything but bonding or sexual in nature. Frankly, I think psychologists would feel better if they had a surrogate kitten to hold.

Rednecks do love their pickups. Do the pickups love them back? Do rednecks, or any of us in this high tech age, even want a two way involvement? Or are we more comfortable with love we can regulate with an off switch?

I've had the good fortune to experience a wide assortment of cultures. I've led a varied life and used a lot of different machines and vehicles. In urban settings, I often drove flashy cars to impress those around me. In rural settings I drove pickups. They all had wheels. Expediency was the first and most important common denominator in the selections. I loved all of them when the engines hummed. I hated all of them when the batteries were dead or the tires were flat. The emotions were all on my side.

In the ever widening leaps between my life as a reporter and my worlds of logging and construction and ranching, I frequently mixed errands and machines by arriving at the court house or capital in a mud spattered truck, or in the woods with a convertible. On one occasion, after a formal meeting in town, I was driving a little MGB sports car, top down, through some forest back roads. The little car hummed over the mountain passes and around the hairpin curves. At one sharp turn, a loaded log truck had been less fortunate. It lay on its side, teetering on the brink of a steep drop to a creek. Fortunately, the load had broken loose instead of dragging the truck into the draw. Logs were scattered everywhere. The driver mournfully paced the road, surveying the damage and addressing his vehicle with female expletives. I do not believe there was a sexual intent to his comments. The truck lay lifeless on its side, making no emotional response to his outbursts.

Anyone connected with the rural West knows that log truck drivers are the most dependable first arrivals at any accident scene. They have rescued people, put out fires and saved lives. It's unimaginable for a log truck driver to pass an accident scene. It was equally unthinkable to pass a log truck driver on a country road in this kind of distress. Instinctively, I stopped to offer help.

The driver took a long, pained look at my out of place city dress, my bright scarf and designer sun glasses, my little red MGB with its bright chrome wheels. Up to that moment, he had been brave about his accident. But this was too much! He shook his head angrily and waved me by, addressing my little red car with an expletive that had no sexual connotation whatever.

If humans can bond with machines, it wasn't happening on that particular day.



# A Grandfather

## Chapter Twenty-seven

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“Two things I can’t tolerate: a whining kid and a bawling calf.”

The disgust in the old man’s voice is as dry and ugly as tobacco stain as he watches the departing car raise dust. Same dust he’s eaten every summer for half a century now. .

Everyone you love is in that car, Old Man. Why the hairball?

From the driver’s window, his son grins and gives the old man a mock salute. The daughter-in-law beams and waves. In the back seat of the vehicle, his twin grandsons obediently wave goodbye and blow kisses. They are bright, handsome children. Spitting image of their father at their age. They love this crusty old man, his farm and his animals. But sometimes he seems so angry. Ah, well, soon they will be back to the comforts of a home with TV and video games.

The old man waves and smiles goodbye. The visit has not gone well, but he loves this family as only old men can: forever conscious of the long sweep of time and the precious brevity of our moment within its context. Women love in the here and now, hands on, the way they cook supper. Men live and work with seasons, forever aware of horizons.

At least that’s the way it used to be, before sons went off to high paying city jobs and professions.

As the car turns onto the highway, everyone waves and smiles one last time. Then they are gone. The old man drops his arm to his side and coughs like a man who has swallowed his tobacco.

You were hard on the twins.

Damn it, they were whining. I can’t stand whining.

That’s a pretty big hairball over a simple thing like whining. Is it your daughter-in-law who upsets you?

His voice softens, just as his heart has done ever since this attractive, educated city girl came into their lives. Always polite and friendly, calls him Dad, probably shows him more respect and coddling than he deserves. No, she’s not the problem, even if she doesn’t know jack shit about raising boys. Not her fault. Women aren’t supposed to raise boys. Everyone knows that. At least they did, before sons went off to big city jobs and everybody changed the rules. Men have no part in raising their own sons any more. Spend all their time working in offices and traveling to meetings. Sons raised by women grow up thinking and acting like girls. Hell, some of them are girls. Or they try to act like thugs they’ve seen in movies. Is that the kind of future you want for this country?

Probably not. But I’m not the one with the hairball. Let’s deal with what you want. Are you bitter because your son did not return to the farm after college; that he chose a career in town?

Damn it all, Stranger, you must be as stupid as a box of rocks. Take a look at this farm. Should have



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been sold to developers years ago. Ain't no money in farming. I worked my ass off on this place so he could get an education, so he wouldn't be forced to come back to this. Take a walk with me. Look at this ground. Do you have any idea how much work this place represents? How many years we lost crops to weather? How many spring calves we lost in late snows?

I thought you loved this old farm.

Well, that don't make me the smartest bear in the woods, does it?

Weren't you and your wife happy here?

Happy ain't got nothing to do with anything. Happy is what's wrong with the world today. Everybody expects to be happy. People got to be happy with their work, or they quit. Wives have to be happy or they take off. Kids have to be happy, or they quit school, or turn to drugs.

You quit school when you were 14.

That was different. I had to go to work. Happy or not, we did what had to be done. No excuses. No goofing off. No pick and choose between jobs. No overtime. No fringe benefits. When we got married and had kids, we took care of each other. If one of us was sick, the other did double chores. My wife and I grew up that way. Both of us. Hell, I went down into the mines in the Appalachians when I was 14 years old. No safety provisions. No overtime pay. No medical or death benefits. Some of that stuff was just getting started, thanks to old John L. Lewis. Now there was a real American hero. Man with a seventh grade education, facing down the Congress of the United States and making them listen. You had to live those times to know just how bad conditions were for a working man and just how much courage it took for a man like John L. to stand up for them. Kids like me weren't union, of course, so we got the dirtiest, most dangerous jobs in the mines for the least pay. Now everything's gone the other way. Benefits for this. Benefits for that. And everybody has to be happy. We worked any job we could get. Had to. We couldn't lie around, telling ourselves we were too smart to get our hands dirty. We couldn't run off to counseling every time we had a problem, or run to a doctor every time we had a cold.

Your son is a doctor.

So what's your goddamn point?

Is that why you seem angry?

I ain't angry at nobody – except maybe you for not listening. It's good to have doctors and medical benefits. We grew up without them. That's why we don't believe in abusing the privilege. 'Cause that's what they are, you know. They ain't a God given human right. People earned those benefits the hard way. See this arm? Broke it on a ranch in the Dakotas. Neighbor tried to set it. Bones never knitted right. Do I wish there'd been medical benefits and a doctor handy on that job? Hell, yes. But you don't hear me whining that I was deprived of some darn Constitutional right. I got a crooked arm. That's it.

Do you think kids grow up stronger during hard times?

Well, now, Stranger, that's a good question. God knows I wouldn't wish our winter diets off on my worst enemy. No fresh fruit or vegetables. Never heard of vitamin pills and couldn't have afforded them if they existed. Kids was scrawny, like wobbly calves. They worked hard, but didn't build up none of this muscle mass you see today. Stayed lean. Lots of them looked sick. Some of them really were sick. But I think there was something stronger inside kids who grew up in hard times. I look around at all these fat, healthy



## A Grandfather

brats we have today and wonder how many of them could tough out a real disaster. If nothing else, we were bred for disaster and ready for it. Above ground or below.

Seems like there was always a disaster in the mines. Just part of the work. I escaped the mines by joining the Navy. Lied about my age. Still just a scrawny kid, three inches short of growing up. First time I boarded ship, they said it looked like a duffle bag had sprouted feet. Couldn't see the kid under it. Troop transport. Convoys of kids, some of them no older than me, headed for the ETO. Dodging German subs all the way. Lots of us learned to pray on those trips, but I never saw nobody cry or whine or demand to be made happy. We stuck it out. Isn't that what life's about? Could these fat, healthy brats do the same?

Would you want them to?

Stranger, you have to have seen war to know how awful that sounds.

I've seen it, Old Man. There have been other wars since yours. Each one is just as horrible as the one you remember. The young people always go. Somehow they see it through.

But they look so soft now, so unprepared. I want them to be strong enough to survive. My whole life just drove away in that car and I'm scared. The world is changing so fast. Nobody knows the rules. How do you give kids everything and still make them strong enough to sort it out? How do we sort it out? This ain't no goddamn hairball. It's fear.

I know, Old Man. I know!





# Volcanoes

## Chapter Twenty-eight

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**R**obert Louis Stevenson so often described, with a beauty and sensitivity almost beyond adult comprehension, the first sweet interaction between children and the earth:

“When I was down beside the sea, a wooden spade they gave to me to dig the sandy shore. My holes were empty like a cup. In every hole the sea came up, ‘till it could come no more.”

Every earth-based culture on this planet has provided its children with opportunity to connect with the earth and the formative forces of nature. The connection is rooted in intuition and feeling, not intellect. It is expressed, without embarrassment, in legend, lore and song. Only urban children lose this wonderful opportunity for connection and the privilege of expressing it without shame and apology. They can never quite attain it later from a purely intellectual study of textbooks – especially if the textbooks commence with the premise that intelligence expressed in intuitive terms is nothing but superstition and primitive ignorance.

The earth sleeps and wakes according to its own needs, not ours. Too often, we reach for intellectual understanding of these rhythms and forces of nature when, in fact, we should search for the *feel* of them. We study the facts of tidal action. But nothing gives you the *feel* of it like watching the dizzying swirl in and out of Anchorage or the enormous surge and flow in Inchon Harbor. We can understand, intellectually, the formation of mountains. But nothing gives you the *feel* of it, like comparing the haunting antiquity of the mountains of Australia with the jagged, raw youth of our western mountain ranges. We can study the effects of erosion on the landscape. But nothing gives you the *feel* of it like spring breakup on the Yukon when all of inner Alaska seems to be moving in one, cold, molten mass toward the Bering Sea and maybe defecting to Siberia.

Children and primitive cultures are open to such feelings without embarrassment. Educated modern adults can wind up on medication for expressing them. It’s best to indulge your childlike curiosity unobserved.

If your culture chooses to bypass this part of the education of its youth, then for Heaven’s sake, give your kid a shovel! Let him make his own opportunities. The bigger the kid, the bigger the shovel.

An acquaintance once left me with his D-6 cat and basic Instructions on its operation. Now there is a digging tool to delight any waif! I warmed up the cat and made some exploratory runs, looking for a likely site for a house and well. All the topsoil looked the same and seemed to slant in the same direction toward a little lake. Yet, beneath one area was brown hardpan filled with nasty iron ochre. A few yards farther, I found sand and gravel. Beyond that I hit a streak of bright, blue clay. I had uncovered the probable edge of an ancient glacier and these varying streaks represented stuff it had picked up in its travels. Now it made sense to follow the gravel seam up hill toward my future home site. We drilled a 47’ well and hit the purest water anywhere around the lake, thanks to a brief, basic lesson with a shovel.

Later exploration and another well established that the seam was not an isolated surface accident. This well, farther up hill and drilled to 160’, again went through the purest sand and gravel, finding clear, sweet water in an area known for wells that smell like hardpan and taste like creosote. In this well, at a depth of about

100', we hit a fine layer of charcoal, as though there may have been a prehistoric campfire between the glacial ages.

Early settlers and the Indians before them often had an eerie ability to feel their way to water. Early farmers seemed to have an almost sixth sense for selecting the one home site in a fertile valley that would not flood. Of course, a lot of folks without this sixth sense died trying. You'd think the Darwinian selection would have resulted in a fine tuned instinct in our present generations. Unfortunately, urbanization seems to have wiped it out.

I don't intend to discredit scientific inquiry and the orderly accumulation of data. We need both types of intelligence. Too often we don't have enough of either one. Take, for example, understanding volcanoes.

Northwestern America, in earth years, probably lies somewhere between the thrashing, active youth of Alaska and the snoring deep slumber of Central Australia. Beneath all of us, sleep the layers of past eras. Some are preserved as fossils. Some as oil.

In the 1950's, our state went a bit crazy over the discovery of oil. A few pockets had been found. Surely boom times were imminent. Everyone, including the legislature, got prepared. Laws and regulations were adopted. Treaties for offshore drilling were signed. Oilrigs moved in. Then they moved out. Our rugged part of the earth is too fractured with recent movement to contain consistent, large reservoirs of oil. We needed a few more eons to get our stomachs settled. The rigs went back to Texas and Saudi Arabia, while our part of the world continued to rumble on its own schedule.

Our volcanoes don't spill over like pots of hot syrup. They Blow!

I was born on a volcano, Mt. Tabor, one of Portland's oldest parks. Not a single child playing on its grassy slopes or splashing in its pools ever thought of it as anything but a permanent, peaceful playground. Yet the porous lava rock reflects this was once one of the most explosive places on earth. Our parents should have handed us shovels, instead of playground equipment. We might have learned something.

Later I was raised in the foothills of Mt. St. Helens: a perfect, permanent snow cone on the horizon – one of the “everlasting hills” the Mormons sang about on the radio on Sundays from their tabernacle far away in Utah. In summers we climbed its lower slopes and stumbled over the moonscape of porous lava rocks – the mute evidence of past violence. We just admired the view. Didn't learn a thing!

In school, we read that Crater Lake was formed in the crater of a volcano that blew with such force it altered the landscape of Central Canada with its deposits. We studied our textbooks and dreamed of recess. Didn't feel a thing!

Early explorers, both by land and sea, verified their courses by the reliable smoke and fire of volcanoes along the entire coast of the Western Hemisphere. We read these lessons. But those were old guys in old books.

In summer, we swam in another volcanic crater near our school. We called this lake bottomless because no one had ever reached the depths where a thin crust now separated it from the boiling fire below. Snow cones on the horizon and cold lakes in summer. We could rely on their permanence.

The Indian kids knew better. They had cut their teeth on legends that accepted the earth's changing moods. Permanent landscape was as subject to change as the concept of permanent domicile on a reservation. Sometimes you live here, sometimes there. Sometimes a swimming pool, sometimes a pool of fire. St.



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## Volcanoes

Helens was not an “everlasting” snow cone or a dead rock on the horizon. She was a dignified woman with a mind and schedule of her own. In another time, when all the younger mountains around her argued and threw fire and rocks at each other, St. Helens distanced herself from these silly quarrels. She pulled her white blanket around her shoulders and went to sleep. She would wake again when the younger mountains stopped their noisy warfare.

Why was that useful bit of earth science missing from our textbooks?

Long before we had any scientific warning, an Indian from a local tribe had a vision. As was his duty, he shared it with others. St. Helens was going to wake up. Soon. He even warned that the power of that awakening might shake the bases of the nuclear power plants along the Columbia River. He was a modern, educated Indian with a good job in a local industry. But he quit his job, packed up his family and moved to Eastern Washington shortly before the mountain blew up. Unfortunately, there was nothing in his vision about prevailing winds. The westerly winds on the day of the eruption deposited the deepest ash over the area to which he fled. Still, he had more warning and preparation than most of us.

After the eruption, there was no end to the fatalistic speculation over the meaning of this event. Dark references about Armageddon, sick societies and God’s wrath. The sky was indeed falling and a lot of Chicken Littles were squawking their alarm. One young man asked me seriously,

“Do you think this is the end of the world?”

“Good Lord, no! The earth is alive and vibrant, not sick and dying. Look at the energy. This is the way the earth has renewed itself since the beginning of time. The only difference today is that we have built a lot of three bedroom ranch homes with attached garages directly in the path of the earth’s urban renewal plans.”

Try selling that philosophy to people who believe a mountain should be a permanent snow cone on the horizon! Especially when they are running ahead of the ash and fire. Yet I believe it with all my heart.

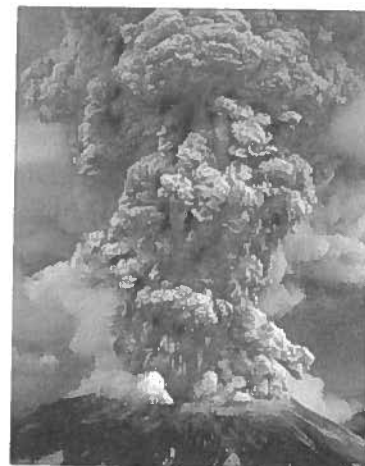
Yes, we had a mess. Motors and engines were ruined, had to be rebuilt. Planes were grounded for extensive repairs. Tons of volcanic ash shifted with the slightest movement or breeze. Roofs and gutters sagged with it. After the first rains, the stuff turned to glue or concrete. Every tree and branch and leaf was coated with a layer of goop. Globbs of it rolled on the surf like Easter eggs. By winter, the ash deposits formed into pools of sludge where equipment bogged down and waited for spring.

Closer to the mountain, streams altered course and whole forests blew flat from the blast. Logging crews moved in to salvage the down timber. Load after load of skinned timber was removed – trees with every trace of bark blown off and nothing but the bright wood showing.

Humans and animals moved with dream-like lethargy, dazed not just by the initial blast, but what was left behind. All of the permanent factors like time and horizons had suddenly become variables. We stumbled through the ash and glue, searching for new parameters we could trust.

There was something vaguely familiar about all this ash now turning to concrete. Where had I seen it before? Suddenly I remembered: My cedar swamps!

Most of the swamps were only a few feet above sea level. Why didn’t the water in these bogs flow away to the ocean, instead of standing in brackish, black pools? Streams regularly cut through the topsoil and tried to form channels. The banks and bottoms of these channels were a molten goo, just like the stuff collecting on our roofs. Had this goo collected in accidental streaks along the streams? Or had some prehis-



## Volcanoes

toric eruption laid down a consistent layer that now held the water just like a saucer? My mobile sat in the middle of a swamp and was forever plagued by standing water. I decided to investigate. Obviously, I would need a shovel.

Neal lived alone in a cottage near the beach. A backhoe was parked in his back yard. The backhoe ran better than Neal did, so it gathered a lot of rust while Neal contemplated the relative merits of working or relaxing on any particular day. He worked when he pleased, smoked and drank when he pleased, and tossed the ashes and empties where he pleased. Neal had reached an age and frame of mind where he had decided that women were, in general, more darn trouble than they were worth and I was no exception. It took some lengthy persuasion to get him and backhoe cranked up. We quarreled all the way to the site.

The quarrel continued during the offloading of the backhoe. The only thing that interrupted our banter during its warm up was the intermittent backfiring of the backhoe and the crippling attacks of Neal's smoker's hack. When they erupted at the same time, everything came to a stop.

I tried to explain that I wanted an exploratory hole. Neal started digging a ditch. He'd dealt with swamp water all his life. Either you ditched, or you brought in fill. Nobody dug a hole.

"Dig a hole, or load up," I yelled.

"What the hell's the hole for?" he yelled back.

"I'm digging a swimming pool," I shouted in frustration. He obliterated my instructions with another coughing fit and continued digging a ditch.

"Goddamnit, Neal, either do it my way or I'm going to jump on you like a chicken on a Juney bug."

"That won't bother me none," he fired back. "I was married once. Even miss it sometimes, too. But *not very much!*"

We faced off, like two unlikely warriors, then suddenly burst into laughter. Neal finally widened the ditch into a cavity that might become a swimming pool. I was standing in water almost over the tops of my boots. The backhoe sat in water. The hole was invisible below the brackish, black water. Water and a brown sludge came out with each plunge of the bucket as Neal deepened the hole. Six feet down. Eight feet down. The boom was extended as far as it could reach, when suddenly the glop changed texture. We had broken through and hit sand!

As we did so, water in the hole began to swirl and disappear like water in a sink when the plug is pulled. Soon the brackish ponds around us followed suit. The whole swamp began to drain away while we stood in silent amazement.

How far had we reached into pre-history by digging an eight-foot hole? When was this impervious layer belched out of the angry mountains? How old was the layer of sand beneath? What Neolithic cultures or prehistoric animals lay buried there? We kept our thoughts to ourselves, too awed to express them aloud.

"What next?" Neal finally asked.

Still thinking in bathtub plug parameters, I suggested we really didn't want an empty swimming pool or a dry swamp. Maybe we should tamp some clay back in the bottom of the hole so it drained slower. Neal quietly did so. He was no longer in a mood to quarrel. Neither was I.

A few weeks later, Neal came back to visit. "Just wanted to see how the swimming pool was doing," he said.



*Neal lived alone in a cottage near the beach. A backhoe was parked in his back yard. The backhoe ran better than Neal did, so it gathered a lot of rust while Neal contemplated the relative merits of working or relaxing on any particular day.*

## Volcanoes

By now the water had adjusted to a steady level, draining slowly. We visited over coffee and admired our handiwork, just like any friends sitting by a swimming pool on a sunny day. Except this swimming pool happened to be rather isolated in the middle of a forest.

After a spasm of coughing, Neal admitted he'd finally gone to a doctor at the insistence of his family. Didn't want to go. It was all their idea. Bad news of course. Cancer. Too far advanced for treatment. Nothing to do but face the pain and die. Who needs news like that? Told his family he hoped they were satisfied with their darn meddling. He might have gone a few more months without the worry if they hadn't stuck their noses in. Why couldn't people mind their own business?

We left that subject as quickly as it had come up. Who needs talk like that anyway? Especially on a sunny day, sitting by a swimming pool you built together. Just small talk, friendly, nothing to quarrel about. Then there was a surprising question from Neal:

"Why aren't you married?"

"Oh, Neal, I was married once."

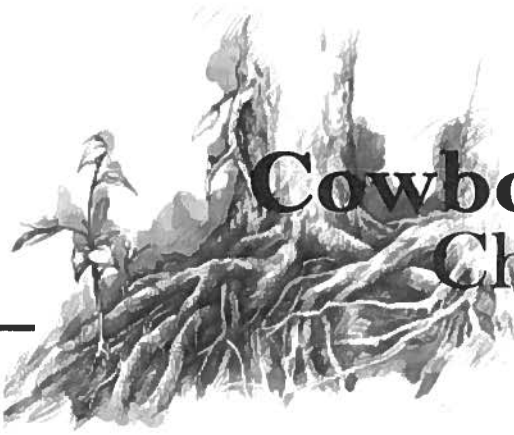
"I know that. But why not again?"

"Well, like you, I just don't miss being married very much."

I'd hoped to make him smile, reminding him of his own comment. Neal, however, was balancing his books before the final audit. Time to speak plain:

"You should think about getting married again. Lots of guys would like to marry a woman like you. I know I sure woulda been glad to marry you."

As far as dying declarations go – especially from a confirmed woman hater – I guess that's about as good as it gets.



# Cowboys and Loggers

## Chapter Twenty-nine

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**W**hy do we Western Americans idolize the cowboy? Not the owner of the cows or the land. Not the owner of the stockyard or the slaughterhouse. Not even the real cowboy as he was then, or as he lives and works on ranches today.

Our cowboy is always young, healthy, brave and, above all, independent. Never sick, hungry, drenched with rain or haunted by concerns for family. In our heart's legend, we prefer he have no family ties, no commitments. Free as the winds of the plains.

In a state that was built on the timber industry, we idolize a mythical logger. He is our cowboy. There are pictures of him in every museum. He is engraved in bronze on our capital doors. He adorns public buildings. He stands on platforms, working a crosscut saw. He drives oxen dragging one log at a time down a skid road. He is always strong, healthy, muscular, brave. Never injured, sick, frostbitten or haunted by concerns for loved ones.

Such myths sell the men short. They stood taller in real life.

Neither the cowboy nor the logger was truly independent and carefree. Both occupations exacted an appalling toll. Both men wandered – often broke, hungry and desperate – not because of some mythical gypsy spirit, but in search of jobs.

It took tremendous investments to open the west. The ancestors of most of us simply followed those investments. They didn't own the railroads or the logging companies. They were totally dependent upon them for jobs at any price and under any circumstances. The cowboy didn't own his horse or the cattle. He dreamed of doing so. The logger didn't own the oxen, the logs or the misery whip. He dreamed of doing so. Meanwhile, he often paid borrowed money just to have a chance to work. My great uncle paid \$5.00 of borrowed money to join a crew on the Oregon Coast. There were no fringe benefits for these men, no insurance if they were injured, no public services for their families if they were killed. My uncle lived in camp, while his family waited in Portland and made soup from donated ingredients until his first pay arrived in the mail. Fortunately, in those days there were backyard gardens and local butcher shops that tossed scraps and bones away. Drinking and gambling were not a temptation for a married man in the camps. Thieves who exacted his money up front or picked his pockets while he slept were his downfall.



My grandfather was a ship's carpenter on sailing ships. We have a picture of him posed between stacks of lumber on the deck of a ship taking on cargo in Portland. He didn't own the ship or the lumber. He didn't own a pot. A ship could be at sea for months. The family waited for the mails. Men were injured or died at sea. Children were born and family members died while they were gone. A married man was not

tempted to squander his pay in foreign ports singing “Yo, ho ho.” The pittance he earned was sent to his needy family.

Let’s love our legends with the compassion and gratitude they deserve. The yoke wasn’t just on the oxen; the saddle wasn’t just on the horse. Theirs was a generation that lived under awesome pressure for our sake.

With the next generations came the small farms, owner-operated ranches, small businesses and small logging companies. A middle-class Western America emerged, gradually without revolution, to live the independence dream of their fathers. The nation was healthier economically and politically for it. The larger the middle class, the greater the stability of the country. Company-owned or single industry towns come and go without warning. The economy and political stability are forever at peril. Life is transient and rootless without a stable middle class.

Logging and farming methods have improved dramatically in the past century. But the middle class is being strangled. Bigger and better machines definitely improve production. But the cost of those machines and the support system of consultants, managers, tax planners, quality control experts, accountants, and lawyers behind their efficient use, are driving the small operator and farmer into history. Modern machines can roll through a forest like a field of wheat – cut, limb and snip trees to length in a single operation. To pay for themselves, those machines must keep rolling. They cannot sit in a back yard and rust for a few weeks out of each season like the skidders and cats of the gypo loggers. The owners of those machines, both on the farms and in the forests, are under awesome pressure to expand, consolidate. The small farmer and small logger are under tremendous pressure to get out.

More than methods are at stake. Vast social changes that impact all of us will result as well. The fabric and texture of our society is changing at alarming rate.

Perhaps the museums of the future will have a special alcove for pictures of independent farmers, ranchers, loggers, butchers and grocers. Tours of identical clones, spawned in a society of chain store marketing and automated farming, logging and education will file past those portraits each day. The men and women in the paintings will be forever young, strong, brave and independent. They will have no commitments or family concerns. There will be a glint of wild freedom in their eyes as they ride their skidders, tractors and delivery trucks into the setting sun.

## Museums for Thieves?

If thieves are hung, it won’t be in a museum. No need to cast them in bronze. The real thing will always be with us. They dogged wagon trains and stagecoaches. They wormed their way into logging camps and aboard ships. They followed the gold rush.

Thieves, like rats, adapt to any social condition from rural to urban to military. In every generation throughout history there have been thieves. They don’t get any smarter from generation to generation. But apparently neither do we.

When I was a grade school pup during the Great Depression, we had a visitor to our little farm. He drove a car with hardly any broken glass. He wore clean overalls with a crease dead center down each pant leg. He carried a polished valise. Obviously, a suspicious type! Con men explored every remote corner looking for vulnerability. We knew this, of course. Yet, they were always invited in for coffee and biscuits. We had no other entertainment.

## Museums for Thieves?

Conversations with them were like warm up preludes to boxing matches. Both sides used the first rounds to test each other. This man was good. My folks were better. Between biscuits, he steered the contest ever closer to a sales pitch. When his mouth was full, my folks led it in another direction again. Mom's biscuits were like old hockey pucks, but the man ate an impressive quantity, slathered with a sinful amount of butter. He was at a hungry disadvantage while his mouth was full.

Dad's specialty with such visitors was direct confrontation, especially with the religious reformers who aggressively canvassed rural areas for converts. His contests with the Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses always went ten rounds and became so outrageous, they brought backup and held prayer meetings in our yard. Wide screen entertainment to be sure!

Mom had a more cerebral approach. Less fun to watch, but effective in its way. This man was selling books and magazines, a family weakness. Each of us was vulnerable to any pitch that promised something to read. Our ultimate shield and secret weapon against such pitches was, of course, that we had no money so there was little danger on our part. Meanwhile the conversation and biscuits continued. The kids gathered around in a quiet circle to watch the show. I felt my folks were clearly winning the contest both in points scored and knock downs until the man accidentally mentioned a magazine that had published some of my Mom's short stories. Her eyes went BOINNNG! The man saw it and moved in for the kill. He would, he said, make any sacrifice to ensure that she had a subscription to this magazine. He would take poultry or dairy products in payment and send the publishers the money himself.

My mother was on the ropes. Dazed. Punchy. She wouldn't hold up much longer. Then a sly look came over her face. Would he take just one chicken? Yes, he would. We had one old hen that didn't lay eggs and was too old to eat except in a winter emergency. I was sent to catch the chicken. The man gave Mom an official looking receipt for her subscription. My mother accepted it with one of those tell tale half smiles on her face that I, in future years, would come to identify with crafty high rollers.

The man drove away with a chicken in a sack and a half smile on his face, too. The last thing we ever saw of him or the chicken or the subscription was the tail end of his car. Thieves will find you anywhere.

## Bluebells

Near the headwaters of three streams, secluded by thickets of wild crab apple and blackberry, there is a marsh where bluebells grow. Neither roads nor logging equipment penetrate this area. Even exploration on foot is arduous.

Once there was a cabin in this place. A small, single room. Log foundation. Plank floor. Walls and roof of rough-cut boards. The shelter was just wide enough for a tall man to lie down on a pallet, or sit out the winter storms with back to wall.

*He was not alone. He brought a woman with him. She even planted bluebells.*

The forest has reclaimed everything but the bluebells. The cabin has melted into the mud. A cattle or goat pen made of rails now rots beneath the waist high marsh grass. There is no evidence of barn or shed. The animals were probably tethered beneath the trees for natural shelter in storms. Once this meadow was cleared with fire and turned by hand to plant a





## Bluebells

garden. It has been nearly a century since that fire was lit. The snags in the meadow are mostly bleached by weather now. Once ditches were dug by hand to channel floodwaters to the streams. Now they are eroded and choked with brush. Beaver have dammed the streams, and most of this meadow lies deep under water in winter. Trees are mostly shore pine. Fir can't survive the high water. A few old hemlock, over laden with massive limbs, rise stubbornly above the dense undergrowth. Their trunks are gnarled, their limbs strung with moss that hangs like wet laundry from their grotesque branches. No market value to these trees. Just grouse ladder.

Who were these people who worked their hearts out in this place? Did they have children? Did the woman live through childbirth alone in this setting? How did she make this place a home for her family? No evidence of sink or stove or bed frames. No evidence of books or musical instruments. Yet, each spring an apple tree blooms amid the brambles. A few daffodils rise out of the mud around the door.

*And every spring there are bluebells.*

We have no pictures of this family. We do not know their names or where they came from. But these are the kind of men and woman who opened the West. Not with grandiose schemes and investment dollars. We know the famous names of those players by heart, because they are etched in steel and granite on the faces of buildings, the approaches to bridges and the cornerstones of edifices across America. Those were the high stakes gamblers who bankrolled the West.

*But they never planted bluebells.*

They never dug the soil and split wood until their hands bled. They never gave birth in a rustic setting. They never schooled their children without books or outside contact. They never sat up nights protecting a precious goat from cougar or washed clothes in a muddy swamp stream or planted a crude garden for survival.



*One man looks up just as the picture is taken. Eyes straight toward the camera. He is a tall young man, lightly clad, well built, muscular arms, handsome, intelligent face...What happened to that young man on the deck of that ship? Where did he come from?*

History is damn unfair. It belongs to the guy with the camera; and, that guy is usually a narcissistic SOB who only takes pictures of himself.

In those rare moments when the camera turns away from the owners of history, and onto the men and woman who are building history, it pans briefly over a sea of nameless faces. Take, for example, a wonderful documentary that frequently replays in our area on the building of the Panama Canal. Certainly that incredible project was a pivotal point in Western history. A successful engineering marvel, despite every conceivable peril. Pictures of every stage of construction have been preserved. But it was built at terrible human cost. What do we know of those people?

One photo in that documentary chills me to the marrow. From a higher point on land, the camera looks down onto the deck of a ship teeming with workmen arriving for their first day on this massive job. The angle of the shot is not unlike others we have seen of immigrant shiploads landing in New York, or San Francisco, or Seattle. Except this shipment is entirely men, mostly black or mulatto, and they bring nothing with them but the desire to work and be paid. They have no baggage and no names.

It's standing room only on the open deck under the blazing sun. Faces glisten with sweat. Bodies press forward in restless anxiety. Most eyes are fixed, with hope, upon the unfamiliar shore. We now know the statistics. We know that many of these men will die on the job. But they don't know it yet, and we cannot warn them.

## Bluebells

One man looks up just as the picture is taken. Eyes straight toward the camera. He is a tall young man, lightly clad, well built, muscular arms, handsome, intelligent face. We see on that face the same mix of courage, apprehension and determination that brought our own ancestors to the various shores of this New World; and, for a brief moment, we are reminded of the awesome debt we owe to similar nameless faces who built our own history without being recorded in it.

History is so damn unfair. So much good stuff is left out. What happened to that young man on the deck of that ship? Where did he come from? Did he make it home alive, or was he one of the statistics? Except for that brief moment when he chanced to look up at the camera, we would not know he ever lived.

Back in the Northwest, at the headwaters of three streams, a man and woman made their home. It's gone now. Collapsed and overgrown. The forest has reclaimed the scene of their heartbreaking years of work. We don't know who they were.

*We wouldn't even know they existed if the woman hadn't planted bluebells.*

## Summer Sunset

Take a slow, summer flight over a land I love and call home. Drift past the snow peaks sparkling in the sun. Glide over the green forests and the ghostly skeletons of old snags reaching into the sky. Follow any of a dozen rivers – nervous sparkling rivers or big brown lazy ones – as they tumble toward the sea. Take a wide turn over a shining ocean where a thousand ships are buried. Swing slowly east, with the setting sun at your back, to see the mountains turn to flame and the forests pull the dark shadows out of the valleys.

But do more. Much, much more.

Look below that magnificent canopy of trees. Try to understand the rich varied plant and animal societies that live beneath it. Don't study them. Feel them. Watch the ravens fight over mice until you can feel their weightless flight. Let the evening winds play in your face until you can feel the sunset. This is not a laboratory. It's a church.

More drab, but just as varied are the people who live here. Rough or smooth, white or brown, stand up or renegade, this is their home. Try to understand and feel them, too.

This is not just a book about thieves. It's also a book about love.