

# Shoe Box

**Stories from 1986 - 1991**

**By Dave Olson**

# To My Friends

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## **Right (as in Correctly)**

I heard that if you die in a dream, you're actually dead. I keep waking up.

I also heard that Hitler was a vegetarian. Personally, I couldn't kill fourteen million people, only about fourteen, and at least half of those would have to deserve it.

I now make a point of obtaining as many credit cards as possible so when I'm done living, I can have a real dynamic last six months.

"Dynamic" is a power word, "Capital" seems to be another.

Most things don't annoy me except when people ask me the same questions over and over and over; that does annoy me.

On account of the fact that I do plan on dying, I made a will, nothing makes people follow it however. I mean, I won't be there to bust some ass if they divide my stuff up or bury me wrong.

All I ever wanted was a green room (or maybe a nice floral print), but I keep on getting white ones.

Suicide is alright I suppose, but I don't think I'll do it. I don't think I'll need to.

I heard a story about a person who got himself thrown in jail every Christmas Eve so he would have someone to spend the holidays with. He even drove to different towns where he thought the criminals wouldn't be as hardened. I might do this if I didn't have too many other options.

"That's a sad story, but I heard worse," said the blues man I talked to once. He talked like a DRANO gargler. Good blues men always do.

All I ever wanted was to live forever; but then I would see everyone else die. That could get to be sad and inconvenient.

In my will, my house goes to Bob Vila and Norm Abrams to renovate as they see fit. It can't, in case you were wondering, go to that little wiener that took Vila's job on the show.

Regardless of how I die, I want it listed in the obituaries as a suicide. I have some good ones written up. Choose one or two.

Once upon a time, I wanted to be diagnosed with one of those incurable diseases with only three months to live. I would blow stuff up. Maybe do some looting, thieving, plundering, raping, farting, and perhaps, miscellaneous, wanton murder and mischief. Lately though, I've been concerned that I would do public awareness lectures and end up on the cover of People magazine. I would probably do telethons.

Or maybe I'd just get busted sneaking out of Denny's and spend my last two months doing community service.

I don't even like Denny's. Sambo's is far better.

I went to La\$ Vega\$ one time and tried to find Wayne Newton, I couldn't track down the right one. He can have anything he likes of my stuff anyhow. I found several other Wayne Newtons, though none of them had the tell-tale mustache or shoe polish hair.

About suicide, I heard about a guy who decided to jog himself to death. He instead got real healthy and made a video about the whole deal. He probably has a pair of those neon running shoes now and does telethons.

Vikings and pirates are buried at sea with the seahorses, but cowboys are buried with cacti and those old bull skulls on their graves. King Tut has it best.

Half of the people (7) must have deserved it.

I couldn't actually blow anything up because I really don't know how to.

Wayne Newton makes millions of dollars yet I've never met a Wayne Newton fan or seen a record. I've looked.

I'm not sure whether seahorses are real or a myth. Seamonkeys, I know are real.

All I ever wanted was to die tomorrow but then someone might be sad. That's more stress and responsibility than I want as a dead person.

I heard wills don't count unless you do them a certain way. "Who made the way and how do I find out?" I asked my brother, he's not as smart as everyone thinks. No one will pay attention to mine regardless, they'll think I was kidding or didn't know how to fill it out right.

If I were to do the suicide thing, I would push people off bridges until someone held onto my wrist too tightly. That or juggle to death.

"They call us weirdos, call us crazies. Say we're ugly, say we're lazy. Say we're just a violent type, kinda dumb, not too bright. We don't care what you say, fuck you!" That's the song around here.

I wouldn't hang myself with my shoelaces even if I had any. I have duct tape on my pants to hold them up.

My belly isn't very hairy anymore.

I've become really quite an excellent pool player; but still, the only card game I can figure out is WAR.

I had a dream. I dreamt my favorite episode of Gilligan's Island was the Great Train Robbery one. It unnerved me for several days. Gilligan was a hero, Skipper was an asshole. That's another song I think or maybe it just came to me.

When I'm dead, I don't want a mortician shaving my face or cutting me open. Leave me naked and my eyes open, this is the way I came in.

All I ever wanted was everything but I couldn't think of a reason, (or a place to put it for that matter).

I apparently wasn't qualified to give semen so I lied about my credentials. If nothing else, it should be handsome. I get twenty-five dollars a shot (no pun).

I thought if I qualified for an American Express card, I could at least qualify for masturbation. I give it by the pint.

All I ever wanted was nothing, but no one would take what I had. This denial gets embarrassing after a while.

Ronald McDonald is also a vegetarian - he is either a poseur or deviously infiltrating the system. I don't believe he's killed anyone except for several million cows. This doesn't count though because you don't have to hide them once you've killed them.

Hiding can be tricky, especially with so many nosey fishermen around.

If people didn't wear suits on hot days, they would be a lot less irritable. I'm fairly comfortable when it's hot.

All I ever wanted was to be alone, but someone might miss me. This is more stress and responsibilities than I want as a living person.

All I ever wanted was to know everyone, but then I would see them all die. This always happens at the most inopportune times. I'm doing my part to make it more convenient and predictable for everyone. I've become quite a good judge of life-span.

Bestiality is one thing I never had an interest in, although my opinions do tend to change from time to time. Presently, I don't have the time or resources for it.

Fourteen people shouldn't be so hard to hide on a planet the size of this. I mean, there are five billion or so.

Then again, there is the chance that no one would hold onto my wrist tight enough.

It always looks so easy in the movies.

They were only able to locate thirteen. It couldn't have been too tough.

My sperm should be given to a woman whose father had a good healthy head of hair. I don't want any bald children. The youngest one in curls would be appropriate and pleasant.

I think I'll start jogging.

They could have sent me to Australia instead. I don't think everything is so white and covered with paper there and people would laugh at my jokes. Also, there are more places to hide.

They probably have bridges there . . . but don't tell anyone.

All I ever wanted was to die, but then I realized how easy it all is. This somehow makes everything irrelevant.

## About Being Stabbed in the Forehead

His Part:

I'm lying in bed and my wife is stabbing me in the forehead. My skull is hard and bony so she uses a rigid dagger and a mallet to chisel it through. This is a peculiar way to die but I am coming to grips with it. I figure it's good to accept and come to grips with things, so I am focusing and channeling my energy.

I yelled at first but now I am into steps three and four, repression and denial. I don't think I'll make it to overt anguish, I hope not anyhow.

I think about her going back to her gimpy lover and his inadequate, deformed penis. This alone keeps my mind off this inconvenient pain. Apparently he has a big belly and a tattoo of her name on his flabby bicep. That is a daring and brash thing for him to do on account of her being my wife. I almost respect his boldness.

My two-bit, bitch-whore of a slut queen wife is sweating now, thick glossy lines coming down from behind her ears, and she continues to lunge at me with the mallet. She looks undignified and sloppy so I recommend a better implement. If this continues on much longer, someone is liable to walk in on this dismal sight, my wife's breasts flopping around like canteens and my lined brow being split symmetrically and inefficiently. I wouldn't want that to happen.

I was hoping to make a handsome, respectable corpse with all my push-ups and good tan but this will be hard for them to hide. She should have busted my ass with a sledgehammer instead, crushing my liver, kidneys, spleen, pancreas, etc., messy I'm sure, but it can be covered up in a casket.

I continue to concentrate, to focus and channel the pain away, I read about this in a book somewhere. Visualize, it said. I visualize her greasy lover bending her over his

bed frame and trying to dig out his sorry tool amongst the rolls of fat and then trying to move it all out of the way so he can slide his crusty stump into my wife's worn twat.

I see them getting all perspirated and her lover trying to keep it in, losing his breath, ejaculating a piddly amount prematurely on the floor, and the two of them lying together, trying to tell each other it was enjoyable and saying they're attractive and my wife saying those stupid things about true love and china patterns and things she says were her idea. He's probably saying something about football and his brother-in-law and getting her all wound up and submissive like she wants.

If nothing else, I was a tactful and skillful lover. I never had much else to do with my time. There are worse reputations to leave behind.

The interesting thing about being murdered (and the subsequent dying) is that it isn't too big a hassle. It is intrusive and annoying, but sort of a relief and if nothing else, more interesting than small talk or just thinking and wondering about dying. It's far more active and romantic, especially if it's as blissfully and stupidly poetic as being murdered in the name of love or something. If you visualize enough, the pains become enjoyable, to a point.

I tell my wife to chisel harder, I'm curious to see the gray, bloody, wormy looking mess that should spill, ooze or spew out. Then I tell her I humped her mother. I really do use the word "hump."

Her Part:

He has a motorhome. It's big and silver like a toaster and he calls it the Space Shuttle and laughs. I sit in the passenger seat (co-pilot) and take care of the drinks in the round holes in the console. It is a long, involved vehicle and extends back a long ways and has mostly all the appliances you would find at home. He calls it modular and I call it something else.

It's parked under the fluorescent lights, under the gas station canopy. The gas station is one of those new ones that is white and sells food in cellophane wrappers inside. White isn't a good color for gas stations, they're supposed to be sort of royal blue with grease spots and yellow emblems here and there.

There is plenty of toilet paper in the bathroom, also stiff, crinkly seat protectors. Gas stations bathrooms are sometimes confusing. Some of them have room for several people and some of them are definitely for only one person but sometimes you can't tell. It can be embarrassing or just awkward. They should put up signs. No one would mind. This one has four stalls, a counter with two sinks with water you have to push to keep on, and there are blowers to dry your hands. I fix my hair how he likes it the best. The mirror isn't real glass; it's shiny, polished metal.

We are driving a long ways tonight. My lover is paying the gas station attendant with new bills and looks nervous and edgy like he always does on the drives home. He probably needs his back rubbed. He says we will be home in two and a half hours. We play the alphabet game with road signs and license plates.

Your Part:

You are greasy, tired and more surprised than you should be or want to be. She tells you it happened, he's surely dead and probably rigor mortising, it's all over now, all is fine, and aren't you happy? You get that concerned look on your face that always unnerves her. It unnerves you. You try to explain to her that there are repercussions - it is a bigger issue than petty theft. He is, after-all, dead. Right? She seems serious.

She is vacuous. She says, "I know, I know." She looks like a cow tonight you think. She does sometimes, other times however, when the light hits her a certain way, she could be pretty. Tonight she is only a cow. The big brown eyes and elongated jaw. Her skin is rough and smells like lotions. She probably needs to eat better. She is not fat or thin but just fleshy and boring and now she is sweaty and wild-eyed.

She has a bottom she likes slapped and she squeals when she thinks you meant it that way, or else just looks at you with those stupid eyes. There is really nothing inside, you're almost positive, there couldn't be. Her hair is tied up like you told her you liked it, it's frayed and crazy from physical exertion, a rigorous stabbing will do that. She probably thinks she is wild and conniving, a crafty murderess. You scratch the tattoo of her name on your arm again and look at her, squinting your eyes. You hear the story again. Of his struggle and turmoil and her forcefulness and prowess. Apparently, you would have been proud.

You focus and think hard. You hope for an erection or an idea or the nerve to do something adamant. She's not worth having to wake up next to her and look at her face and have her tell you excitedly, she loves you. She's not worth dying for, not worth running for, not worth lying for. Maybe she would just go away, get bored of you, there's nothing more you can tell her to do, you're scared to tell her anything. She might do it. You didn't ask her to kill him, you just agreed to her idea. She said it, she volunteered it. There are, after, legal means of accomplishing things. You just agreed to it, maybe to humor her. You think the novelty has worn off. You're sweating and pacing now.

She's lying in bed, trying a seductive pose. You fancy yourself as a skillful lover if nothing else. This must have been the start of the problems. You thrust into her, she pants and you ejaculate on the floor and later ask her, in your kindest, gentlest voice if she would maybe just kill you. You try to focus, to hear what she says.

## Satan Lives in Moab

*This tale thanks the (long defunct) Provo, UT band, "Trees" and the Moab, UT newspaper "the Stinking Desert Gazette" for inspiration.*

### One

Satan lives in Moab, he owns and operates a small convenience store. That is where I first met him. He was selling hot dogs and six-packs to lycra-dipped, granola-yuppie types. I asked him for a job to support my sorry, misguided ass in the stinking desert.

"Bob," said Satan, "Bob, Bob, Bob...."

### Two

I first came to Moab, Utah to re-align my cosmic psyche by way of crystals, incense, Taoism, Buddhism, mysticism, jism, potions and lotions, and a bundle of printed matter all smelling of patchouli oil. Really an amazingly curious, new-agey thing that ran its course like a cold-sore.

That ambition gracefully lost itself in time, my senses returned with the assistance of longtime residents, Jack Daniels and Jim Beam. Now it was mostly Buckhorn beer and the noble, greasy camaraderie of the local poets, prophets, polygamists, tour guides, lynchers, rednecks, miscellaneous madmen and uranium miners. Several of them were acquainted with Satan; I was introduced the night the Poplar Place burned down. Things burn in Moab a lot. Things burn and grocery stores close down.

### Three

First off, Satan is not red, fuming, flaming or have goat horns. Still, he is not a particularly attractive man; balding, pasty skinned, overweight and what appeared to be an acute case of lip cancer or maybe just a horrible cold sore. Most days he wore a blue velour sweat suit and expensive, high performance running shoes, "I have bad arches," he justified. He took the time to mention the hi-tech specifications and features three times daily. I told him they made him look younger the day I asked him for a job. His shoes were usually blue to match the suit, the colored highlights varied with the pair.

### Four

"Bob, Bob, Bob, Bob," he mumbled, "a job, a job, a job."

We were sitting in the back of his store. I was perched between large crates of waxy drink cups with catchy, trademarked names distinguishing them from other drink cups. The air conditioner crooned and rattled, Satan went from his particleboard desk to turn on the sink. He placed his veiny scalp under the running water for several minutes while we talked. He patted it dry with a stiff paper towel.

I felt uncomfortable and out of my element, as I often do, and thought of trying to make intelligent conversation but stopped on account of it being impossible. Instead, I listened to the running water splash and bang on the bottom of the deep stainless sink. He held another paper towel under the stiff stream of water then tucked it under his armpits, dragging the sweat out. Undignified, but useful I figured. He stuck his thighs back on his Naugahyde and duct-tape chair and spun it around on the rollers.

"I can't pay you a lot of cash, but . . ., but there are perks."

### Five

Today, like yesterday, it was hot out. I sat in front of the store sipping sticky, orange soda from my coffee mug. Being summer, I took off my shirt to work on my

burn. Like always, between 11 and 3 o'clock, there wasn't a customer to save my life. I read a wrestling magazine that became a mess from sweat and soda-pop.

Satan rode up on his bicycle - huffing, seething and smelling of freshly killed meat. There was a large circle of perspiration sticking his shirt to his flaccid chest. He dumped his bike and walked directly into his store, the little bells tinkled and the door wheezed shut on its compression device.

Satan used to drive his 1963 Buick hardtop everyday, now he usually rode a bicycle the three blocks to work. A lot of bicycles in town these days. "I think the ladies will notice me more," Satan said a while back.

"Sure, that should gain favor with the women," I said. That's what started that.

He reappeared shortly, scalp gleaming and holding a hot dog and a quart of milk. "Cow juice and cow guts," he told me, holding them up for display. He did this most days. There was a thick line of mayonnaise sliding towards his elastic waistband.

His breath was gaseous from eating pickled hard-boiled eggs from a large glass jar by the cash register. He also ate goldfish - he won one hundred of them at the ring toss at the Grand County fair. They came in plastic bowls filled with colored water. He ate them on crackers.

"Bob," he said munching, "what's your bit."

"What?" I said.

Eventually, we had an animated conversation about hopes, dreams, ambitions, plans, etc. His were mostly very different from mine. Then we reorganized the Twinkies, Ho-Hos and Ding-Dongs.

## Six

By October, the air usually cools off some. This year, however, things kept burning. It was mostly cars overheating on the road and the occasional flaming house in Castle Valley.

The big mountain biker Halloween party in the old City Market building was the last time I saw him. It was actually on the 30th. I dressed as Tarzan, Lord of the Apes, and he went as a construction worker. The band was good and I won a pair of boots for a door prize. He won ski racks.

After he was gone, I found the manila envelope he left amongst the burnt rubble of the store. The fire hadn't been terrible, although he was uninsured.

He said in the letter, that I was right about employment losing its novelty quickly when it wasn't essential, as was his situation. Included were several riddles, clipped comic strips and three moist goldfish although no sign of his whereabouts. He did say how much he enjoyed Moab, it being the center of the universe and all. Landscape Arch was his favorite, until the three-ton chunk of rock fell from the center; oddly he stopped going after that.

He went on to say he had left a gift for me in a town called Fruita; it was just across the Colorado border. I had just enough money for my gas and oil, so I drove out in my pick-up truck to investigate.

A large real estate sign with "SOLD" scrawled across in bright red paint in front of fifteen acres of sagebrush. Certainly not prime real estate, but adequate. There were fourteen, healthy black and white Holsteins, a well-charred fire pit, and a mailbox with my name on it. I grinned, and went to meet the neighbors and get cable T.V. hooked up.

## Seven

Months later, after I had skipped bail, I received a letter in Whitefish, Montana. Satan said how surprised he was when he heard about what I did with my ranch. He said he had pictured me living comfortably, raising my herd of cows, driving to the Spic n' Span Cafe and pinching the polyester bums of the waitresses. Maybe even selling pumpkins on the side of the road come next Halloween.

With the benefit of hindsight, it probably had been extreme, though naturalistic. I had left after torching my aluminum tool shed and stampeding my brand-covered cows (eight sunshines apiece, no mistaking) throughout the county with a very large shotgun. It was my first real weapon, a mighty beast I bought at a pawnshop in Grand Junction. I sawed the bitch off like the Road Warrior and drank more so I'd more bottles to shoot at. Feeling so primal and hedonistic was new, interesting and somewhat unexplainable at times. I handcuffed the sheep to the dog kennel and drove off, lobbing homemade Molotovs at the billboards. It had made for an interesting sight.

Satan wrote that he certainly understood the potentials of innate human responses, which often produce extreme behavior. He had dealt with this on several occasions so he wasn't particularly surprised.

"Bob, Bob, Bob, Bob," he wrote, "that was, however, very poignant of you." I'm quite sure he didn't know what that meant either.

## Destined Like A Great Idea

I knew I was completely in love with her the night she made the bean soup. Fourteen kinds of beans in a crock-pot like a suburban housewife would have done. She blushed like she meant it and I told her I loved her, and it still sounded inadequate, as sincere as a postcard. I felt stupid afterwards like she always made me feel, not stupid like regrettable but more adolescent like I should be awkward and nervous and gangly. But I'm not sure I was because she seemed to think was witty and occasionally brilliant and she kissed me. She kissed me often and she was gentle and fluid and involved and right. Not like she had had a lot of practice (nor did I ask, undignified I thought) but she kissed with the reckless precision that would humble you if you let it. Like someone carefully destroying you in a friendly game of pool without you noticing, like it would be a waste of their time if they weren't fully involved.

This is good, I said and sometimes I thought she thought at least the same about me, she was more vocal and always aroused.

I liked this, all of it. Especially when we were in the desert in the spring or when she would tell me stories about Spain or when she would see me on the street and follow me for blocks before she would yell to me or when she told me about her sister and herself and how would gently touch the brashest of my artifacts or when she would eat with her fingers out of the jar and how she would lie on the bed and watch everything I did. Watch me fold my socks and brush my teeth and when I twirled a pencil like a drumstick when I would write a letter. She looked and watched and stared with the eyes of a statue or a madman staring at the sun knowing that he couldn't really go blind.

Unnerving at first then only lovely and the thing that has made me cry the most in my life. Cry big, sloppy silver tears.

I would have watched her too but my clumsiness and uneasy eye could never have done the same for her. I could never do anything that flowing and pure. Instead I wrote her poems, poems borrowed for here and there at first and later more self-conscious and bewildered and I would present them to her like a genius waiting for a world in return. She never said a thing, just one pressing, random kiss. I think she put them carefully in a box, probably with a ribbon on it, but I never did see one and I never did ask. I stopped looking the day she told me she thought I was destined for greatness. An astrologer told me the same thing since my birthday fell on the day four planets lined up and the end of the world was supposed to come or at least Niagara Falls was going to start going backwards or upside-down. I took this and used it for an alibi and told anyone who'd believe it.

I was a great hockey player until I was fourteen and gave up trying to skate backwards and I was a great liar and storyteller and kids loved me sometimes and I read a Kafka book and James Joyce's Ulysses to the end which is almost a great thing to do. I had been to some great places and met some people who were pretty and great and now I'm only great at cooking Ukrainian food, filling out forms, juggling any three objects and changing the oil on my car. I remain a good liar when necessity dictates and I do eat healthy and I do plan on being a great uncle if any of my brothers could convince a woman to conceive.

Aside from the justifications, I waited for the destined part she meant and watched the seconds and weeks tick by in the corner of her patient eye. I would touch her eyelid;

she would close her eyes, smile and blow the bangs from her face -- it was then that I would remember to thank all the prophets and gods I could think of.

She listened to me carefully when I was spoke on the phone with someone, and always knew where I was. The canvasses, she painted me on were always five foot, always body length portraits and hazy backgrounds. I was usually dark purples, gray or brown and always in broad, abrupt brushstrokes. Sometimes with a beard and my hair down and tangled. The eyes were always looking straight on. They almost followed me around the room. She was deliberate and calculating in her work. I wasn't that thin in real life either. My skin wasn't stretched over high cheekbones and I wasn't pasty and gaunt and emaciated like that. She smiled when I sat still so she could set the lights right.

Sometimes on the nights when we sat on her brass bed and listened to scratchy Patsy Cline or Robert Johnson records, she would tell her dreams and nightmares about me finally finding peace of mind or something as blissfully confusing and intangible and she meant it. I said that sometimes I felt I would find all the comforts and joys if things were more predictable, that I knew one morning I would wake up and my hair would be silvery white or that I would be getting something great in the mail every Monday, Wednesday and Friday for the rest of my life, or that she would have the same glorious, vivid expression on her face every morning, or that I knew the sun wouldn't go down some days and I could go mow the lawn at three in the morning like they do in Alaska.

Only then could I worry contently about important things. About walking around like a chosen one, being as brilliant as a great idea or as enlightening as a car burning on the side of the road. I would go kissing all the babies and telling jokes and stories before I had to shatter and fall and get around to dying.

And my love would be there, sitting in the other corner of the room on the footstool, hands between her knees, looking. Looking and watching. Deliberate and aware, looking exactly like she was exactly now, her eyes filled with metaphors, something about infatuation and control, the spirit glinting and winking in the corner.

And me, sitting across from her, not being able to talk or say anything, and I couldn't even look back at her, because I just couldn't, or shouldn't, or I didn't know how to look at her when she was right in front of me, waiting.

## I Remember Florida

*Note: This story borrows a couple lines (including the title) from the fine Canadian band, Blue Rodeo. Their album "Diamond Mine" served as a departure point so to speak for this story. Cheers to them 'eh.*

Mostly now, I just masturbate. I'm not particularly attracted to my own sexuality or body, but a questionnaire I filled out in Cosmopolitan magazine said it would be both beneficial, and enjoyable. In this day and age, it's not unclean or unruly, they said. There were also suggestion tips. This fondling is mostly on account of my man being back in Florida. I do keep it under control however, I certainly don't want to prefer it. I haven't ever used foreign objects in my arousals, I've heard too many stories about women having problems. I would prefer to keep my private parts clean and in fine working order. Barry would agree - him being my man and all, and an arousing one at that.

\*

He first attracted my attention by dropping a quarter near my feet at a pizza restaurant in Tallahassee. He bent over to pick it up and bumped his head on the edge of the table. The pitcher of root-beer spilled all over his shiny shirt and I said, "Nice try."

"Darlin', you got the wrong guy," he said back, he looked right into my eyes, sort of squinting.

"Nice try," I said again.

He put the quarter in a juke-box with big, silver stars and played a Nat King Cole song about the rain and clouds. He asked me to dance. "There is no one else dancing because you aren't supposed to in a restaurant of this kind," I said. My cousin nodded and rolled her eyes.

Then he whispered in my ear, "My senses have been shocked and I'm alive to every pain, your quiet laughter comes to me , it echoes in the rain."

"Holy smokes, that was lovely," I said. We left my cousin at the restaurant with Nat King Cole and the silver stars and wandered off into the stale air with the neon lights.

\*

Florida looks like old Elvis movies with convertibles and blondes and people smiling and giving high-fives. We bought ice cream cones and went to his home. He called me his Mona Lisa and I blushed. My head bumped on the edge of the vinyl siding when he carried me through the door, "You make me so clumsy darlin'," he smoothed my hair and kissed the bruise.

While we were kissing, he stopped, looked me in the eyes, paused and whispered, "Make love with me," like they say in movies. The shadows were right and his voice was soft and husky. The blue freeway lights came through the window and the trucks downshifted loudly. His skin smelled peppery and clean. I fell back on the couch and he covered me warmly.

After it was done, he held me and whispered in my ear. He told me not to go back to Gary, Indiana, not to cheat destiny and to stay with him. He said he'd build me a white picket fence or something. I told him it was very important that he come visit me but I have my life back home to think about, I have my job and all.

"Sometimes you get what you want so be careful what you ask for," he said sighing.

"I'll be tossing my pennies in the wishing well everyday Barry baby." I slept soundly and smiling.

We went to a diner in the morning for a late breakfast. Everyone knew him and the waitress knew right what he wanted. She winked and nudged me when we sat down. He rubbed my feet under the table and fed me homefries off his fork.

I left and thought about his promise on the busride home. My cousin had said he was a dime a dozen and I told her if that was the case, here's my dime and she could have the other eleven. She laughed and said I'd never learn. "You can't hurry love, you just have to wait," I said back.

\*

Barry was there waiting for me when I got home, "I was in the neighborhood and thought I'd drop by," he smiled like Clint Eastwood and looked at the ground like a little boy.

"You crazy you!" I said and hugged and kissed and hugged him. "You must of drove like a bandit, you fool."

"Just a fool in love, a bandit out to steal your heart," he said as he carried me through my front door.

The next morning, he got up early to make coffee and scramble up eggs and bacon-bits. I told him to stay and not to go back to Tallahassee. He liked his coffee the same as he liked his women, blond and sweet. He did the dishes and stacked them to dry.

"But Gary is so ugly and wet," he said.

"They say its on the upswing with the economy," I said.

"One day I will baby, one day I will. In the meantime, can't let the world pass me by."

After breakfast the next day, he threw his duffel bag in the bench seat of his El Camino and headed south.

\*

I told my best girlfriend, Cherice about Barry, she said he sounded wonderful. I think it might have been just because there wasn't much else to say. I told my co-workers at the catalog order center that one day I will be set free, one day I will. They were mostly indifferent but I worked harder to make some extra money.

I got blue and warm at the same time thinking about drinking in those air-conditioned bars and putting the quarters in the juke-box and what Barry looked like naked, all strong and sinewy and with those coarse black hairs making a line down his chest. I hadn't even realized that it had been forever ago. I wrote him a postcard with a spray of perfume on it and teased him about all the suntanned, college girls he was probably hitting on.

The next day, he arrived into town like a cowboy, "Barry, baby, you're the magic man." We were passionate and both laid in bed for two days telling stories about childhoods and relatives.

"Come meet my girlfriends," I said to Barry.

"Darlin', I've met all the girls I need to meet," he said twirling my hair between his fingers.

"Oh, don't be selfish with your time," I slapped his hand, "I've told them all about you at work, you're half-way a legend."

"Don't you be selfish by depriving me of a single moment of being alone with you." He said with his steady eyes looking into mine.

"You're always so poetic." He certainly was.

\*

"Baby, this town is full of losers and its dragging me down." I didn't bother to argue, I figured he was a lonesome wanderer just like he had told me. I told him he wasn't lonesome or didn't need to be anyhow.

It was then that we ended up in a trailer park outside of Reno. We drove out in a rented truck with a picture of the beach on the side. He drove the whole way and I tuned the radio.

We arrived at night when the lights were bright, the machines were noisy, and people were having fun.

"Darlin', this is a town that knows how to swing. This is our town and our oyster!" Barry knew his way around and we went right to gambling.

"Barry baby, this is the biggest little city in America if not the whole world!" It reminded me of Pleasure Island from the Pinocchio movie I had seen two years before.

"Darlin'," he said as we walked to our room at the motel, "I don't want you working any of those two-bit, floozie jobs like those cocktail girls."

"And I don't want you packing a side-arm," I said.

"I love you baby, don't ever die."

"Damn, Barry, you could make any girl blush with a line like that."

\*

Barry said if I earn the potatoes, he'll earn the gravy. He spent the day being a gambling advisor to tourists looking to be high-rollers. He told them how to play five-card stud, set them up with sports bookies, and how to beat the odds at this and that. He mostly just spent their money for them. I worked selling time-shares to pre-fabricated condominiums. Barry said it was the only job in the town that doesn't require showing cleavage. "How do you know I don't, baby?" He came to visit me more often after that.

I teased him that his was the only job in the town that didn't exist. "I'm a redneck stockbroker," he said. (He eventually put that on his business card.)

"And life is grand." I smiled and helped him count his pile of change, crumpled bills and I.O.U.'s on cocktail napkins. I gave away three car rentals as incentives to view the properties and made a note of it on my graph chart Barry made for me. He made Salisbury steak and peas with butter for dinner. I looked at the lights through the window of the mobile home. You could see the waving cowboy and the giant clown a ways off.

"Take me dancing, swing me like a cowgirl, get me drunk on those blue drinks with umbrellas and cherries," I said, I was tired of lounge acts.

"Darlin', you ain't no cowgirl and I'm trying far too hard to be a cowboy and those drinks taste like antifreeze."

"If there was such thing as a cowgirl, I'd be one. There aren't even real cowboys anymore."

"Are you disappointed darlin'? I could go find you some cattle rustlers with dusty hats and leather chaps, guys named Lefty and Slim. Maybe I'll invite them over for pork and beans."

"You're right, there's only rednecks and old men in Winnebagos or those shiny pick-ups with four wheels on the back. No real cowboy would eat at Howard Johnson's or have embroidery on their pockets."

"There might not be surfer boys in California either."

"Barry baby," I said with my head in his lap, "you know my favorite part in old cowboy movies? It's when the boys would ride into town and go right to the bath house and pay good money for a warm bath. They'd pour in those sweet smelling powders from the glass jars and just as they were getting clean, someone would come in to shoot them. They'd leap into action, pull a gun from nowhere, shoot the bad guy and say something clever. But they would always get out and pull on their dirty, dusty clothes and just be all wet and muddy. I guess they'd go over to the bar or ride out of town or something. It happened everytime. It was so sad."

"Goddamn, ain't it the truth."

"You're so poetic Barry."

We had sex again, it being more interesting than shooting pool or playing bridge with the neighbors, and then Barry fell asleep with his hand cupped between my legs humming a Blue Rodeo tune.

\*

"This towns full of deviants, cheats and fools," he said frying eggs and potato pancakes. It had been raining for three days which was probably to blame.

"That's why we fit in so well baby."

"It's dragging me down. You see darlin', my uncle owns a trailer park off the freeway right near Sacramento, California's capital city. It's a real town, no phoney's. Not too far from the coast either, we could go to the beach sometime. I think they have a big mall and maybe a zoo or something."

"Baby, the mountains are so pretty here, besides, we've barely been here long enough to meet our neighbors," I didn't particularly care either way.

"All the more reason." He flicked the frying pan up and flipped the pancakes over. He knew I was watching.

I knew what was next. He looked out the window and said, "Darlin', maybe what I need is a temporary diversion, I think I need a stiff drink and a drive down to Florida to visit the alligators and the silver stars."

Perhaps it would be healthy and beneficial for him. "What do you want to go for, baby. It's a bog down there."

"It's a swamp darlin', the water comes in and goes out, in a bog it just sits there until it smells." He was probably right.

"Barry baby, don't leave me being so poetic, you'll drive me loopy crazy." I touched his sinewy forearm, the dark hair was still there but the tan had faded some. He put steak sauce on his eggs and touched my nose and smiled. After that, he drove off like a cowboy again - except with the sunset on his back.

## What I Thought in Sweetgrass

"Where you going?" His first question. A little vague.

Well I'll tell you. That's a toughie. I wish I knew. Finish school, get a job, wife, kids, that sort of thing. Or maybe not. You know how it goes. It was just a thought. A logical answer to his question.

"Utah." The reply.

"Where you been?" Another question. A thinking man's question at that.

A whole load of places, Disneyland even. Remind me to tell you about this great little diner in Nebraska sometime. How about you? Religiously speaking, however, I couldn't tell exactly. Too deep for me. Just another thought.

"Just up skiing in Banff."

"How long were you out of the country?"

Long enough to spend every bit of our money, see the sights, take advantage of the 18 year old drinking age, lock the keys in the car, get three flat tires, get ripped off, be savagely humiliated, not to mention the headaches and general frustration. Kind of a hellish trip all in all.

"Oh, about four or five days."

"Four or five?"

Well, sorry, Mr. Picky. You writing a book?

"Since Wednesday night."

"What's your purpose?"

Ah! There we go, the eternal question. Why the heck are we on this sphere anyhow? Tell you one thing though, I'm pretty damn sure my purpose isn't the same as yours.

"Just four college boys taking off for Thanksgiving to go dig some scenery."

"What's your status?"

Basic flesh and bones, mostly H2O, carbon, et cetera. These questions are getting boring. How about a game of Trivial Pursuit? He really ought to be more specific.

"American and one resident alien."

"Alien, huh? You boys park over there and go inside. I'm going to need some identification from each of you."

Grrrrr. The bastard.

Sweetgrass, Montana. Functional, run of the mill, one story prairie town with an uncommonly cool name. The home of the valiant border station that would herald our return to the land of the free and the brave. Functional, run of the mill, one story, cinder brick, sterile, plain, not real big but not too small. Basic government issue building.

We traded slices of I.D. for small, white, typewritten pieces of interrogation. They came with quarter-inch thick instruction manuals. Basic government issue forms. Believing for a moment that we would be treated fairly in this bastion of justice, we collectively scribbled nothings on the form and slid them across the warped counter top. We stood and looked at them until some dude in tight, polyester, basic government issue border guard garb came over to perform his part of the slow mental torture. He stared over at us. His beady pig eyes staring. This could really suck rocks.

"You through filling out these forms?"

"Guess so, found them a bit confusing though, on this part here it said ..."

"Anything you would like to correct?"

"Uh, no." He checked a box saying that he asked the required questions and left to talk to another border dude, a guy wearing piss-yellow shooting glasses, just in case he had to cut down some illegal at 100 yards or maybe just to look cool. They whispered, pointed at us, then laughed.

Laughed. Not a good sign.

He came back fully armed and barraged us with a salvo of questions. "Do you have on your person or in your vehicle any firearms? Controlled drugs? Alcohol? Products of endangered species? Stolen goods? Mexicans in the trunk, slave chicks..." A red flush began to boil, filling his slab of stinking, leathery flesh.

Checking boxes like a mad man, he continued, "Do you understand that any mistruths, intentional or not, will be held against you as evidence and be cause for you to forfeit all of your belongings to the government of the United States?" His pulse was going through the stratosphere. What the hell was he so excited about? I was nervous. Pretty damn nervous. "Fresh fruit? Wild animal products? Food? Minerals?"

We started to categorize, justify, qualify and beg for every meager possession we had in our car. Sweaters from thrift stores, maps, free pamphlets, food in our bellies, rocksalt from the road.

"So now the truth comes out. Why didn't you put that on the form? What were you thinking?!" His ears, his baldhead, his hands, his sideburns reddened, or maybe even purpled. The veins in his neck were throbbing, pumping. Ka-thump, ka-thump, ka-thump. Hey careful Mr. Borderman, don't let your neck explode. "You didn't claim anything on Form # d-2 62USDA X-1 w3456!!! Are you kids dumb?!"

"Well, gee. What do you know? Guess we forgot a few things."

"Forgot!" Ka-thump, ka-thump, ka-thump. "Do you realize the potential consequences?"

We listened to one of those speeches you hear a lot in third grade. Something about how the world of customs duty would collapse causing the world to crumble if he forgot to brush his teeth, filled out his forms wrong, picked his nose or something. "We have no choice but to search your car."

So began the bargaining process.

"Well, come to think of it, we do have a loaf of bread and a few cheese slices to get us home, and a friend donated a big chunk of deer sausage and...."

But he didn't care. His veins were really thumping now. I hated him. I wanted to grab his goddamn jugular vein between my canine teeth and pull until the stinking bastard lay withering on the floor. Then I would laugh with my faced smeared with his blood, arteries hanging from my teeth. Maybe not that, but I hoped with everything I had that his children would know what a ass their father was. Bastard.

Half an hour later, ten minutes had past. We slouched in four chairs, our backs towards the windows for all to see. Give us your hungry, your tired, your forlorn, your stupid; it says something like that on the Statue of Liberty, I think. But as forlorn as we were, we waited. And waited.

Waited as our emotions twisted and contorted through the hours, zooming between realms of depression, frustration, rebellion, hostility, and helplessness. Across in another room was a portrait of President Ronald Wilson Reagan. Something to stare at as the noonday sun heated backs of necks and fueled fires of nasty thoughts.

"Ron, stop laughing at us, give us a break, I didn't mean any of those things I said about you. You're the President, it's up to you to help us out. You appointed someone, who appointed someone, who appointed someone, to okay the hiring of these meatheads. We've been through a lot. Forgive us, we know not what we do. Hey, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, or any of those other constitutional dudes wouldn't approve of this garbage, really."

That's it! I've figured this whole mess out. It has something to do with the Constitution. The guy just doesn't understand. But it's too late. We told the guy everything, and he didn't care and now he was out tearing apart the car just sure a kilo of cocaine somewhere.

The guy with the piss-yellow glasses walked by, I asked if the oil pan had been taken off yet. He said maybe. I thought he was joking. He wasn't. I had been.

Not a good sign.

Cars kept passing through. We were the only ones they had called in. Little old ladies who probably had a dozen illegals in their trunks, cowboys with a ton of pot mixed in with the horse poop in their trucks, Indians, Rednecks, tough guys, bikers and Hutterites with funny looking beards. They all went through with no hassle, except for us.

I watched them and thought of how to gently tell the guy that he didn't have to go through the trouble of searching us. The Constitution had been written to make everyone free, to do away with dumb rules. He would probably thank me. His job would be so much easier. I'd figured the whole thing out after all. I was now a political science wizard. Either that that or just a bored person who was trying to be smart.

I would tell him that it was all right to ask a few questions--necessary precautions and all--and look up your license plate number maybe, but remember friend: Government that governs least, governs best. I'd allow him the opportunity to apologize and let him keep his job if he had cute pictures of his kids (sympathy factor) after all, government by the people, for the people and all that. He would breathe a sigh of relief and send us on our way.

He came in for a moment. He was carrying our box of treasure, our lifeblood, provisions to feed four hungry souls for the long journey home; a nine-pound box of

mandarin oranges. Japanese Mandarins! Panic. Things had gone a little bit too far. I went up to have a little talk.

Marching boldly up, I swallowed hard and looked him in the eye, "Umm, where's the bathroom?"

"Can't allow you to use it in the event that a more thorough search becomes needed." Yikes!

I returned to my seat to contemplate the now huge and still growing list of bad signs. It was bad enough that he was reaching into our packs to find brown-streaked underwear; but now he was going to probe us. The border bastards stood around, talking and laughing. "So who gets this box? No thanks, I already have plenty. The back room empty? Is it gonna get used? Ha, ha, ha." They aren't border guards; they're a bunch of food pirates and amateur proctologists.

My accomplices in innocence and I sat locked to our chairs with verbal chains, left alone to dwell on the horrible things we couldn't see. All our tough guy aggressions that we had managed to muster up again crashed to the floor as the sight of his pulsing veins reminded us that we were prisoners, not of any country but of a room full of government issue border guards. Horny, cavity-searching, rednecked border guards with flashlights and piss-yellow sunglasses.

He had managed to think up a new load of redundant, meaningless questions which partially rekindled the thirst for direct and forceful contact. Almost. But not that much.

He explained how we almost single-handedly destroyed the agricultural machine of the U. S. of A. Quite a serious guilt trip, I'm sure. We thanked him for saving our intestines from the delightful chunks of fruit that apparently overflowed with miscellaneous larvae. Then with a bit of fanfare he proclaimed our humble bundle of oranges seized. We asked if we could each have one to eat. His veins almost blew up. Ka-thump, ka-thump, ka-thump. So much for the philosophy.

We zoomed off after urinating on the bathroom floor (we couldn't kill him, so our adolescent prank had to suffice for revenge). Miles away while reassembling our car, four oranges appeared from under a seat. Laughing, we enshrined the peels in a field. I reckon Thomas Jefferson would've let us keep our oranges.

## Uncle Weed's Red Rock Adventure

A story about  
a boy named Bob,  
his Uncle Weed,  
and Bob's friend Otto

Words by  
Dave Olson

Pics by  
Brandon G. Kiggins

Bob was going camping. His mom's brother had invited him. "Let me take Bob down to the desert for a few days," Uncle Weed had asked.

At first Bob's mom pretended to be a bit hesitant, "I don't know if I want you taking my young, impressionable boy on one of your crazy adventures to never-never land," she had said.

Uncle Weed assured her everything would be fine, and after listening to a heavy amount of pleading, Bob's mom finally said, "Okay."

Bob figured his mom would've let him go either way, it was just her way of being goofy.

\* \* \*

Bob really liked his Uncle Weed. He came around fairly regularly, but not so often that it was too much, or not a treat when he did. Bob's dad would tease about Uncle Weed's visits, "Here comes that long hair looking for a free meal again," he would say. His dad always winked when he said it so Bob would know it was a joke, he enjoyed the visits as much as everyone else.

Uncle Weed brought along curious items to show and presents to give. Since he was a gardener, he often brought fresh vegetables or fruit. Sometimes he brought crafts he'd made (like pottery) or objects he'd found on his adventures (many Indian arrowheads from the Anasazi tribe). You could count on him for a load of stories and a stack on pictures as well.

According to Bob's dad, Uncle Weed didn't have a real job. Bob's mom said he didn't need one, and Uncle Weed himself said he didn't have time for one. In summer, he took tourists on river trips and mountain bike rides; in fall, he sold pumpkins on the side of the road. When winter came, he sold firewood he cut from old Christmas trees he gathered. He kept busy helping different groups of people, and donating his time to well-meaning organizations. Bob noticed he thought that this is what made Uncle Weed happy and successful.

\* \* \*

And so, Bob and Uncle Weed were going camping. Not only them, but Bob's friend, Otto. Bob told his friend all about his uncle, so he thought he'd ask if Otto could come along. They were, after all, best friends.

Uncle Weed said, "Alright, but under two conditions: One, if Otto likes wedgies and will laugh at my dumb jokes." Agreed.

\* \* \*

First off, the boys had to trek to Uncle Weed's cabin in the canyon. It wasn't too far, but far enough that Bob's Mom wanted to drive them. They thought it would be better if they hiked instead. It would get the adventure off to a good start they figured.

They went through a cemetery (it was daytime), through a canal (it was empty) and up and down a hill into the canyon. A busy road wound through the canyon but they easily found a path along the river that would led right to Uncle Weed's cabin in the woods.

\* \* \*

Bob couldn't remember which of the huts Uncle Weed's lived in so they yodeled and hollered for him. It wasn't too far away and before they knew it, he came running at top speed down a side road pushing a wheelbarrow. They leapt in and he pushed them along for a while. Then they just threw the backpacks in and took turns pushing.

\* \* \*

Uncle Weed's hut sat amongst a bunch of trees, bushes, flowers and gardens. All around lived rabbits, squirrels, butterflies and bugs. Tree-forts, doghouses and bird-feeders appeared here and there around the colorful yard as did the dogs, birds and even a few wiener pigs with bright collars and name tags.

Inside was filled with boxes, shelves, crates and closets filled with stuff. It was one of those places you could stay for a year or two just looking. Looking and touching a lot. Sort of like a museum and petting zoo mixed together. There were bicycle parts, wooden toys, plenty of books, paintings, pots and pans, garlic bulbs, mobiles, photographs and sculpture. Bob and Otto decided that Uncle Weed was certainly creative and handy.

\* \* \*

Bob's favorite thing was a collection of about a half-dozen wooden drummer statues. Some were brown but most were black. Otto's favorite was all the bikes, four that actually worked and a bunch more in a haphazard stack in the corner.

They emptied their backpacks on the bed so Uncle Weed could make sure they had everything they needed. "Leave the chewing gum and foam mattresses here and make sure to bring all your paint-brushes and granola bars," he suggested. He threw a toothbrush, spare socks, pocketknife and a big floppy hat into a burlap sack and off they went.

\* \* \*

They all sat in the front seat of the 'Earth Ship' which was the old van's name. It looked a lot like Uncle Weed's house except it had wheels. A built-in ice-box, a propane stove and a sink sat, ready for use. The table and back seat folded into a comfortable bed and the cupboards were full of useful equipment and tools.

The three happy nomads headed south, singing along loudly to songs playing from an old stereo that was duct taped to the dashboard. Bob and Otto were soon laughing too hard to sing because of the words Uncle Weed made up for the songs. He was a good singer too, or at least knew a lot of songs.

\* \* \*

They took their time and stopped several times along the way. They stopped in small town city parks to monkey on the monkey bars and talked with old folks in motorhomes at rest areas. At one point, Uncle Weed made an abrupt turn and headed up a skinny, twisty road. They hiked over some slippery rocks and climbed over a ledge to see a cliff with a sun etched in it. Bob and Otto decided everyone should know where these things are or at least, have an uncle who does.

\* \* \*

After a while, Uncle Weed landed the Earth Ship, hopped out and threw on his pack. He carried almost everything so Bob and Otto could run around and dig the scenery. They stopped often so Uncle Weed could point out interesting rocks, plants and lizards or answer questions about things Bob and Otto found peculiar. Uncle Weed knew the names of most things and they made up names for the things he didn't. "Someone has to or did at one time," the three of them determined.

\* \* \*

When they found a comfortable box canyon which met their needs, Uncle Weed kicked out some sand and threw down his bedroll. He flopped down, pulled his hat over his eyes and was asleep in no time.

Bob and Otto continued exploring, with so much to see, sleeping seemed a waste of time and a burden.

\* \* \*

By the time they returned to the campsite, Uncle Weed was almost done with dinner. They all sat down amongst the tiny cacti and ate pinto beans and homemade salsa wrapped in flour tortillas. They washed it down with fresh spring water which poured from a nearby crevice. Blossoms from a prickly pear provided a tasty desert.

\* \* \*

They lay down, bellies full, beside their little fire and told stories. Bob and Otto told about the Arches and the cave they found while exploring. "Now you tell us a story, another good one," the boys asked.

"Alright, alright, once I had a job repairing lawnmowers and one day this guy comes in and says; Well I reckon my valve cover gasket is blown to tarnation and my piston rings aren't seating in the proper circumference in the cylinder which is resulting in an acute lack of synchronization in the timing, so as a result, the camshaft is opening the intake and exhaust valves on the wrong lobes causing premature wear on the crankshaft main bearing on account of the push-rod tubes spurting because the oil cooler isn't. . . "

"Uncle! We told you a good story!"

\* \* \*

"What, you didn't like that one?" Uncle Weed teased. "Well, here's a good one, an important one in fact." Uncle Weed sat up to tell the story better and collect his thoughts. "Back when I was about your age, I think I was eleven, I went with my dad on

a trip to a place not too far away from here. Our friend Ed and his daughter who was about my age came along as well. Before we left the city, we bought an old rubber dinghy at an Army-Navy surplus store and taking just a couple bags of gear and the clothes on our back, we pushed off a sandy bank into a beautiful, vibrant river. We floated down this cascading river for about two weeks."

"Two weeks in a boat with a girl and the same clothes!"

\* \* \*

"Don't say anything yet you two, it was amazing. Anyway, everynight, whenever we felt like it, we pulled up to a sandy shore or rocky beach up a side canyon and throw our sleeping bags down on the ground. My dad would cook up a pot of grub, he used plants, roots, berries, whatever he could find around. You Grandpa's real good at that sort of thing you know, cooking and all."

"Then," Uncle Weed continued, "We would lie around the fire and tell about what we had seen, heard, touched, smelled, tasted and thought that day. Sort of like what we're doing here. You might think that after a couple of weeks, you would run out of things to say, but you wouldn't. Those two weeks could've been a thousand and you'd still want more. Every time you would find a perfect view, you would turn around and find one twice as stunning. Then you would turn your head again and find something more breathtaking still."

\* \* \*

"There I was, a youngster, out digging the scenery, while all the other kids went to Disneyland. I wouldn't trade it for anything, I couldn't. I learned how important it is to notice every detail possible, to remember the majesty of the Earth and respect all living things. There's so much to see and experience but people still don't notice or even take the time to look and when they do, it's through the window of a car. Well, all the more space for us to roam 'eh?" It almost looked like Uncle weed was crying, not exactly, but sort of leaking around the eyes.

"Is that where we're going tomorrow or something?" The boys figure that anyplace that got Uncle Weed this emotional had to quite amazing.

\* \* \*

"I wish we could, but it's closed. Closed for renovations."

"How can they close a river? You're teasing again."

"Well, I'll tell more of the story. Shortly after we finished our adventure, a bunch of government guys came and said; "Wow, sure is nice out here but all canyons look the same and there's plenty of them anyhow. This one would be ideal for our purposes. Barely anyone comes here anyhow, we could probably score us some medals and high-paying office jobs for fixing this place up."

Uncle Weed continued, "So they built a huge concrete plug of a dam. "One of the biggest in the world," they were proud to say. They went on to build a matching visitors center, highways and byways, hotels, marinas, liquor stores, bridges, convenience stores, government offices, fast food chains, trailer parks and eventually, a whole town. They called it a National Recreation Area and received their shiny medals and increase in dollars. I call it a National Recreation Slum, a filthy, bathtub playground for the inconsiderate and wealthy to play with expensive, polluting toys."

"These politicians felt it was more important to create electricity to light giant clowns and waving cowboys in Las Vegas and keep the malls in Phoenix air-conditioned then it is to preserve a natural splendor filled with life and history. "All in the name of progress, can't let technology pass you by, it ain't worth anything unless it shows a profit," they said, so they abused it until it did. Now bus-loads of people go down and gaze with wonder at this glorious piece of cement and steel, buy postcards and motor on to their next stop. I don't know about you guys, but I find it hard to love concrete."

\* \* \*

"Well that's lame. If they did that, why don't we go down and torch the waving cowboy! Yeah! and throw rocks at the buildings and tear down the dam!" Bob and Otto were excited.

"Well boys, direct action speaks louder than words!" shouted Uncle Weed.

"Talk minus action equals nothin'," yelled Otto and Bob.

Then, all of a sudden, Uncle Weed hollered, "Who wants wedgies?" Bob and Otto ran for cover as the crazy, bearded man chased after them, "Come here you little revolutionaries, this is tradition." He yanked Bob from his sleeping bag and climbed up a tree after Otto. After pulling boths' underwear clear up by their neck, they groaned, laughed, wrestled and went to bed.

\* \* \*

It was one of those nights where the air is warm yet crisp. The moon was fat and full and made everything radiate. The prickly pears, scrub oak, pinyons, junipers, little flowers on hardy plants cast long, sharp shadows against the deep orange slickrock. The

desert sounds of scurrying feet, rustling breeze and creature calling out bounced around the canyons. It made everything seem comfortable, alive and content. It was a good night, a good night for just about anything.

\* \* \*

Awhile later, someone singing off in the distance woke Otto up. "Bob, Bob, hey wake up guy."

Bob heard it too. Uncle Weed wasn't in his sleeping bag or anywhere to be seen. "Should we go find him and see what he's doing?" Bob wondered.

"No, he's probably just throwing a whiz or something," Otto answered.

"Not for that long, c'mon, let's go find him, we'll surprise him." They could barely make out the words of the song but it was loud enough to find him easily. He was just over a few slickrock hills and through a few stream washes.

\* \* \*

"He looks like the lady in the Sound of Music," laughed Bob and Otto, perched up on a hill watching as Uncle Weed danced around a field. He was spinning and whirling in just his cut-offs and floppy hat. Every few feet, he pulled something out of the ground and tossed it off into the darkness.

"What's he doing?" the kids wondered. It looked goofy whatever it was they laughed quietly some more.

As Uncle Weed got closer, the words became clearer:

*Stealing survey stakes, on a friday night  
stealing survey stakes, by candlelight  
you better not get caught  
you'll be thrown in an institution  
they'll give crazy shots  
then a long conviction.  
Someone's got to do it  
to prevent the mass destruction  
of Earth's private property  
from wholesale degradation.*

\* \* \*

"Survey stakes! he's yanking those wooden things, you know, the ones with the orange on top!" said Bob.

"What's wrong with those? Are they dumb?" asked Otto.

"I guess, we should ask."

\* \* \*

Uncle Weed's song continued;

*Some people say that we're crazy  
sick and all alone  
we pull up your stakes  
and roll on the ground  
Ha ha hah ha.*

Bob and Otto started throwing pebbles at the dancing man to startle him. All of a sudden, he vanished, disappeared.

"Where did he go? Dang, we must of spooked him," said Bob.

"It was your idea you meathead, we better blaze back to camp before he discovers us," said Otto.

\* \* \*

They started quietly running back to camp, but within seconds, Uncle Weed was tackling them into the sand.

"You maniacs," he said, out of breath, "You scared me half to death." He turned around and started galloping back to the field as if nothing had happened. Then he turned around and told them to wait up.

"See that sign over there," he said, "That's why we're doing this. That sign announces the building of a smooth new road that will wind right through here. The weird thing is, a strong, healthy gravel road goes the exact same places, it may take an hour longer, but it works fine."

"Some people feel that the land belongs to them only or to one group of people just because they have a piece of paper stamped by someone," continued Uncle weed, searching for the best words, "This is alright sometimes, you need some sense of order,

but often, people try to find personal gain by irresponsibly manipulating, damaging or destroying the land when its not necessary."

"Like stinky factories with thick orange stuff coming from the smokestacks, making it hard to breathe?" asked Bob.

"Or buildings big hotels in the middle of national parks?" Asked Otto, "Or dumping dangerous trash in the ocean?"

"Exactly!" said Uncle Weed, "Sometimes you have to help the rocks, plants and lizards out a bit, give the land back the Mother Nature. A lot of great men and women have been fighting for the planet for years and we can't let their efforts die."

\* \* \*

The boys sat confused for a minute sorting out what they had heard.

"C'mon guys, don't let it get to ya, there's still a lot more to it then that. Just remember to question everything someone tries to convince you of and always think clearly. Let's go back to bed."

They started back to camp following the trail of survey stakes, pulling them up along the way and tossing them into the sagebrush.

\* \* \*

Someone threw a stake and it didn't make the soft thud of landing on the ground. Instead, there a sharp metallic ring sounded from the darkness. It must of landed on a trailer or a bulldozer or something.

\* \* \*

Searchlights came on, the three of them dove and hid.

"Bob, bob, is there anyone there?" Otto asked nervously.

"There must be, there's lights," answered Bob.

The bright, yellow lights scanned back and forth across the area, then a new voice spoke up and it didn't sound too friendly. "Hey, what's the big idea? Who's there? What's going on?" The man walked around poking his flashlight beam under every cactus, bush and beside every rock.

"Whoever you are, you better surrender yourselves now or you'll be in even bigger trouble," called out the man.

\* \* \*

"Yikes, what are we going to do, where's Uncle Weed? He didn't ditch us did he?" Otto whispered.

"Relax guy, he's over there doing something to that earthmover machine," answered Bob.

The new voice spoke again, "I can see you so stand up and walk towards me with you hands up or else they'll be some real problems."

"Bob, what are we gonna do, I think we're in trouble."

"Don't worry, he's just trying to psyche us out, he doesn't know where we are. Uncle Weed won't let us down, we're safe here I think."

The man spoke softly now, "Ah, I see, there's the culprit, there on the machine. a monkeywrencher, toying with the equipment." He rushed over towards the action, "Well I ain't letting this maniac radical get away this time I tell you for sure." His heavy shotgun made one noises it does before it a fires, a loud CLICK-CLUNK. Uncle Weed disappeared again. Vanished.

\* \* \*

The man stood confused for a moment, "Son of a gun, where did that madman feller go." Then he started blasting his shotgun all over the place, screaming, yelling and shooting.

"Fools, you can't win, you just can't, it's not in the orders. That's just the nature of the way things is," he bellowed, his voice shaky and rough.

\* \* \*

"Holy smokes," said the boys, looking down from their hiding place, "Did he shoot Uncle Weed? This sucks!"

"Calm down, Uncle Weed's fine," a voice said. Bob and Otto turned around to see an exhausted Uncle Weed lying down right behind them. "Shh, stay quiet and don't move." He took off again into the night.

\* \* \*

The man continued blasting off his blunderbuss. "Gosh dang it, you terrorists, thieves, bad guys, criminals, justice obstructers, malcontents. You won't get away!"

Uncle Weed crept up behind him and leapt into action. He tackled him to the ground and grabbed his weapon and tossed it away. They wrestled, kicked, yelled and worked up a furious cloud of dust.

"C'mon Uncle Weed!" Bob and Otto cheered, "Waste him! Give him a wedgie! Piledrive him!"

"How am I doing guys?" Uncle Weed called back, "Should I supplex him?"

"Arghh!" the man said, "You won't get away, let go of me! Don't hurt me!" The man huffed and puffed.

"Hey, don't worry old man, I mean you no harm," said Uncle Weed as he hauled his struggling body into the government issue, corrugated tin trailer.

\* \* \*

He propped his chubby body up against the refrigerator and duct taped him securely to it. "Well that ought to hold you for the night my silly friend," said Uncle Weed.

"Mmmmmmm," struggled the man. From the freezer, Uncle Weed selected a variety of creamsicles, fudgesicles and drumsticks. From the cupboard, he borrowed a handful of popcorn kernels and marshmallows.

"Listen, my misguided captive," said Uncle Weed, "I would think twice before I pursued this further, I'd be quite embarrassed if I was you being defeated by a skinny, longhair. They might even put you back on garbage patrol on account of this slacking. I would sure hate to see that happen. Cheers!" He tipped his hat, walked out and secured the outside door handles with the barrel of the gun.

"Mmmmmmm," mumbled the gagged man.

\* \* \*

Bob and Otto ran up to Uncle Weed, "Wow, you could probably take on Jimmy Snuka!"

"Ah, stop it guys. Hey, go gather up some survey stakes and three long, skinny branches."

The compadres sat around their little fire, eating creamsicles, roasting marshmallows, and talking about what they had seen, heard, smelled, touched, tasted and thought that day. It was a good night, a good night for just about anything.

## So the Legends Go

Grandpa was asleep in the back. I was driving. Driving into the burning, morning Arizona sun. I thought it was Arizona anyway. It's not like I was lost or anything, just didn't know where I was. Or where I was going. Mostly because I wasn't going anywhere. Nowhere particular to go whatsoever. Which, incidentally, is often the best place to go. Last I remember was somewhere around Marble Canyon. Maybe. I think. It was nighttime then and daytime now, but an altogether different daytime than yesterday. We were around Bryce Canyon then. So that means we're somewhere else. That settled, motor on.

CAMEROON!?!?! No, Cameron. Cameron, Arizona. Navajo Nation rather. Whatever. Can't ever figure it out. Must be an alright place though. Suddenly savage, no Denny's or J.B.'s. Not many of those on these half-paved, roughneck, tertiary roads through nowhere and beyond. Maybe that's why I like them so much.

I drove through town. One road, a half-paved one. But the town ended after two miles of tar-paper mobile homes, satellite dishes, broken bigwheels and shiny, dented pick-ups. I turned around, there was too much to see to just drive past. I pulled into a gas station but didn't stop, instead went into a dusty parking lot bordered by the gas station, "The Phoenix" (a bar advertising family fun) and Navajo Joe's Indian Trading Post. A big store boasting not only authentic, real-life, honest to goodness, Indian hand-crafted arts and crafts at the best prices in the Geronimo Valley but also the best breakfast anywhere in their *dee-lux* (sic) restaurant. My kind of place. Maybe. I wasn't exactly sure, yet.

It wasn't open though. Not until seven. My concept of time had stopped at 9:09 a couple of days earlier in the land of twenty-four hour diners and a lack of desire to keep winding my wrist-worn antique.

I asked. Another obvious outsider-not tourist, outsider. He mumbled something about inefficiency and opening stores late and moving with the modern world. He continued reading the myriad of handbills splattered across the poles, walls and windows. He seemed a little upset that his grand Hemingway-esque adventure had been so rudely interrupted. He and his new safari clothes were anxious to continue their search for something.

I sat for a while and watched. Just watched. More people started to appear, only a few but I moved the car anyway. I didn't want people peering in through grimy windows at Grandpa slumbering, tangled amongst backpacks, sleeping bags, backseats and empty cigarette packs. Sleeping, wrinkling, and wheezing. No use startling anyone,

especially my dozing co-pilot and compadre. I listened for him to breathe, a habit I'd acquired lately. Just to make sure.

In the gas station, two Native Americans dudes sat in uniform. Jeans, flannel shirts, boots. I almost fit in.

"Hey guys, you know what time it is?" I waited for them to say "no".

"Six-fifty."

"Twenty past seven." One right after another.

Not even going to try to figure that one out. They didn't catch it or acknowledge it, so I didn't. Maybe I wasn't supposed to.

Needed another question. "So, how much is your gas?" bravely assuming that the sign saying \_\_\_\_9 a gallon wasn't correct.

One looked at a different wall, towards the ceiling. Stared for a moment.

"One dollar, fifty-two and nine-tenths cents," he said slowly, eyes closed.

"Thanks, appreciate your help." Back out the door. Back into the dust, sand and sun. Back to Joe's and my seat on the porch. I couldn't leave yet.

An Indian kept on walking back and forth, slowly, almost gingerly but thoroughly lazy, picking up litter. Back and forth. Back and forth, then to the garbage. And back and forth. I couldn't see any more scraps but he continued, filling his hands with the dusty pieces of nothing. Looking ahead, there would be none. But there was. Back and forth he went.

Not wanting to interrupt his rituals, I read the handbills. The news.

Maybe I ought to stay and go to the potluck supper and dance with the all-native "Sons of the Desert" band from Flagstaff. It was at the community center in some damn place next weekend. Next weekend if today was about the day I figured.

Or maybe if I was tricky, I could qualify for the Native Job Training and Placement Program. Go to school in a trailer and learn to be a roofer. That or a witch doctor.

Wrestling was coming soon. A special no disqualification, Indian (sic) strap match between Mr. Wrestling and the mighty Lumberjack. And an Easter egg hunt for

the kids. I peeled the tape off the window, trying to be quiet, after looking around to make sure Mr. Wrestling (or Mr. Handbill for that matter) weren't going to reprimand me for thieving their poster. That's the last thing I needed.

My brother and I used to laugh about Indians who would get all stinky, liquored up and go to wrestling. They would sit in the cheap seats, make lots of noise and think it's real. Well hell, it was real. So the legends go. My other brother would really dig it too. He's way into wrestling.

So I went into the museum. I saw their ancient, proud culture pressed, dried and displayed. The signs talked about all the clever and curious things they used to do, but avoided the topics of how it all seemed to drift away. When that day was, or about pick-up trucks and firewater. It about got me all confused and embarrassed just thinking about it, all those stories about cowboys, prospectors, preachers, marshals, governors, trains. Blood. My moralizing lasted for about six minutes.

I figured I would've made a good Indian way, way back. Making pottery, smoking peace pipes, praying to rain gods. Little Wiener Pig would be my name. Yeah. Some Indians are still like that. It's a nice notion for a PBS special. Most aren't. Some are real dumb – I think that applies to any tribe, community, or club right down to the Elks.

Two came hauling around a corner at about mach 12 in Department of Transportation truck loaded down with gear. They gyrated donuts across dusty, gravel parking lot. Spinning and whirling. Laughing and drinking. Then they were gone leaving silence and dust. No one dead, no one injured, no one even noticed. Or moved anyway.

The dust cleared a little bit, although it never does completely, and the garbage man peeled away the glass doors and unlocked the iron prison bars into the trading post and dining emporium. He walked in and sat down on stool and just sat there. Waiting for something to happen.

## Three Days & Eleven Dollars, Nov. 1991

*Bonus: This is an "instructional" paper written at the behest of brother Dan*

Darin's doing the thumbing, Dave's smiling and holding the sign; "Take us to the White House," it says. It's morning in So. Carolina, always the chance of seeing alligators, the smell of sea water and two shaggy-haired fellows on the side of the dusty highway. To know exactly what time it is violates my brother Dave's rules of hitching; "Never wear a watch," he said. This is rule one.

The sign changed when a curious passerby asked if they are going to the topless bar up the road in Myrtle Beach. The sign changes with the help on a piece of wrapping paper and a handy crayon. The sign now says "Rhode Island" despite fears of Confederate hostility. "Signs," says Dave, "Are rule number two. That way you aren't a vagabond, you're a traveller."

Dave says he likes to hitchhike. "You meet new people," he says, "Some are friendly and invite you for a meal and bed, others shoot at you, but it all works out."

Hitchhikes are always different, sometimes you have no particular place to go and it's fine spending a week going to the next town. Sometimes it's a manic dash for a distant point as in this situation.

A shiny Mercedes with a busy man on a cellular phone waves the bleary-eyed travellers in. An early morning hassle from an unfriendly State Park ranger got the day off to a foggy start. Something about five dollars for sleeping there. This isn't a rule but instead a rule of thumb; Expect hassles from anyone with a badge.

The Mercedes guy works as a tax lawyer and is anxious to buy a round of meals from a fast-food chain drive-thru. Next rule says to offer something in return for kindness shown or else give a good deed to someone else. There is something Karmic here. "Good energy and positive vibrations are important," says Dave. I'm not sure if it's a rule but something beautifully nebulous and probably very true.

Next ride's name is Matt and he's skipping second period from high school to smoke a joint. "Y'all been at the Jerry Garcia show in Charoloote?" he asks.

A college fratboy going grocery shopping drops them off at the supermarket where they hop into a car with three Denny's waitresses who invite them to party that night.

An eloping couple with a bottle of Early Times 110 proof take them up to a shady gas-station to try to get to at least North Carolina for the day.

The dealer around the corner makes sure they aren't cutting on his business and everyone eyes the sign squinty-eyed. A construction foreman says he'll be off in an hour and if they were still there, then he'd haul them up the road. After an offer to go to Alabama or to a Nuclear reactor site, the pick-up returned. They headed up dark backroads and twisting roads with no signs while the driver asked what would happen if they disappeared. "I told him that I had just talked to someone at the last stop," says Dave. They hopped out late at night at an intersection of two highways. They hopped a few fences and ditches and threw their sleeping bags in the grass for an annoying sleep with the drone of downshifting diesels.

Next morning, as they walked back to the freeway, they see the entrance sign, Sewage Treatment Plant and Police Firing Range. I imagine when you are on a bee-line, econo-class trek northward in early winter, you can't be choosy.

You realize the next rule of thumb when you watch dozens of empty pick-up trucks with out-of-state plates drive-by, for some confusing reason, they don't pick you up. "There is no excuse," says Dave, I'm not sure if he's right but I think I understand his frustration.

Making use of a broke down car as a decoy, they score a sympathy ride into town where a beautiful northbound girl with Florida plates who gets talked into taking some cargo in the back. After a 99 cent plate of grits and biscuits and styrofoam coffee, they nestle in the chilly back to watch the sunshine down. Dave says a lot of great rides come from asking around at restaurants, gas stations, rest areas, etc. You can feel better about the safety of a ride too. Dave says that hitchhikers are just as nervous about being picked up as the drivers are.

Reality being what it is, there are certainly inherent dangers in hitchhiking and anyone who has done much would concur but life like that sometimes. Feeling comfortable with your own personal judgement as well as not being afraid to turn down a ride help keep your lucky good vibe charms working.

After two McDonald's strawberry shakes in front of Andrews air force base, a salesman in a BWM takes them up to another exit where even a "Go Redskins" sign doesn't get response from the harried, congested commuter traffic. Finally a wide-eyed school teacher picks-up to tell the tale of his 4th grade students going on strike against he and the state school board that day. Next comes an oil refinery worker who has hitchhiked foreign lands galore. Like many other people, he's tells of the ease, safety, convenience of thumbing in different countries. Even travel writers mention in their

books that hitching rides doesn't share the same sketchy, dirty, transient preconceptions as in U.S.A. Dave says that when travelling in his bus this summer, he met a wide variety of thumbing Europeans who couldn't believe the hassles of America.

Washington leads quickly into Baltimore where the driver, who's favorite place to hitch is New Zealand, drops Dave and Darin off in the middle of a freeway construction project so they walk along some abandoned overpasses and score a free coleslaw and mashed potatoes from K.F.C. A free cab ride later across town and they end up in a leery bus station. A freeway entrance next to a cereal factory is close and finally out of the dark comes a loud Camaro. He's going to Delaware. His car is crowded, beer and whiskey bottles fall out when the door opens. He says he keeps a loaded .357 under the seat so they understand one another well. He buys them a twelve pack and drops them off at some biker friends of his. They could've slept in the back yard except for the domestic squabble which the misses seemed to be winning so they headed over to do some late night thumbing by the first tollbooths to the New Jersey turnpike. A badge sends them packing and they end up half under bushes in a war veterans memorial park. The cigar-chomping groundsman wakes them up and they score a quick ride before the officials can make it across the road to nab them. One of the toll booth workers cheered for them which Dave said made his day.

The ride was from a friendly, androgenous nuclear physicist in a Volvo station wagon. Since getting through cities, especially big masses of continuous cities such as the Northeast, is probably why Dave says to hitch smaller State highways instead of teeming Interstates. "Besides the scenery is better," he says.

I think they would've rather been on a summertime, country road than in the rain at the Vince Lombardi service area with New York City looming in the distance. They needed a ride across into Connecticut to avoid that hedonistic mess. When a handsome yuppie couple en route to a wedding volunteered to at least get them into the city, they hopped in. Going into N.Y.C. from Jersey is probably one of America ugliest drives. Alternating projects, dumps and industrial waste surround and the only redeeming quality is knowing that you don't live here. Across the George Washington bridge the driver takes a left into deepest Harlem. After two days, packs feel heavier and tolerance is lower so they head into the subway tunnels to make some distance. A few street-vended knishes with hot mustard later, a few tricks are played and two tickets across the state line into Connecticut are in hand leaving Grand Central Station in forty-five minutes. Just enough time for two snapshots and a visit to a free museum. The train is filled with suits and briefcases and they ride it till they get booted off. "It easier to beg forgiveness than ask permission," says Dave. Perhaps not the best legal advice but it does have its functional points. Dave also says that you'd be surprised how helpful some people are when you're friendly to them. Things like a shower or a roadmap somewhere neat can be a beautiful thing.

A rollicking van of born-again Presbyterian Puerto-Ricans screeched to a halt narrowly averting a collision which might violate another rule which says to make sure people can see you from a ways away and have plenty of room to pull over. A sensible rule although the Department of Transportation doesn't take this into account apparently.

In Connecticut, there is a Mc Donald's every 11.5 miles left over from when it was a tollroad with service areas. They got dropped off at one in the middle of the state and waited in the dark for their last stretch to homefree. After giving a lame excuse to turn down some sniffing coke-heads, they talked a cute art student on her way to New Hampshire to detour to Providence, R.I. where she dropped them off in front of a local grocery store with a pay phone and a quarter. Door to door service or close enough.

Hitchhiking in spite of it's obvious inherent dangers, poses a raggedly romantic way to travel or to get from one point to another. There is definite tradition, history and folklore involved. Everyone probably has their own rules of following their heart, the same way everyone has their own sort of adventure. My brother Dave smiles when he hitchhikes and people pick up and he doesn't even smell very good. Smiles are probably the important part.

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P.O. Box 7612

Olympia, WA 98507

[www.uncleweed.net](http://www.uncleweed.net)