

## **Buster (the man)**

**It was 73 or 74 and I had paid a visit to a new friend that lived deep in NW Wisconsin. North West Wisconsin is pretty flat with a lot of lakes, ponds, and swamps. It certainly isn't prime farm land but a few hard-core folks had still managed to eak out a paltry living doing so (in the good years). It was pretty nice for some sustainable homesteading, with an additional off the farm job or two. That's what my friend Zach was doing. He and a few friends had bought 160 acres with a nice pond in the middle. The land was covered with poplar trees with some hard woods mixed in. They had bought the place cheap a few years previous and already had it paid off. Zach was living in a teepee and let me stay in his guest house, a rusty old twenty-foot travel trailer. While I was there, I helped Zach build a root cellar for his partners Don and Katy. Zach knew what he was doing and I was the gofer. I loved hanging out with Zach. He was smart, funny, and was doing what I aspired to do. Buy some land and live on it.**

**I don't recall how I got up there that time but I do remember how I got back to my home in Iowa. I hitched. But first I had to hike. It was about two miles from Zach's place to the nearest paved county road. It was Sunday morning and I got a fairly early start. It just so happened that the spot where I**

joined the paved road was right across the street from a country church. There were no other buildings in sight, just the church, with a parking lot full of cars. Since there was hardly any traffic on the road, I was hoping that one of the good church going folks, filled with the spirit of the lord, would help out a long-haired hippie brother in need. All I had to do was wait until church let out.

Thirty minutes later church let out. About half of the cars were going my way but not a one slowed down, stopped, or even made eye contact. So much for the righteous. I resumed walking down the road figuring I might have to walk the five miles until that road intersected with the more well-traveled state hi-way. I did not.

I was soon picked up by a young man on leave from the army before his deployment to Viet Nam. He barely had the car back up to hi-way speed when he inquired "you want to smoke a joint? I did and we did. About forty-five minutes later he dropped me off outside of Rice Lake where the road was four lanes divided and the traffic was intense. As I stood, stoned to the bone, at the side of the hi-way and watched my new friend disappear I missed the solitude of the back roads.

**But then I shook it off, realizing that this was where the rides were.**

**I stood there ascending to a higher plane and unattached to getting the next ride for about five minutes. Then I spied this character driving a station wagon and wearing a WWII aviator hat (ala Snoopy) over long brown hair and beard, accompanied by two attractive hippie looking young women. He blew by me at full speed but then hit the brakes and pulled over a few hundred yards down the road. He was far enough past that I was not positive that he had stopped for me. But I thought it was worth checking out so I ran my ass ragged and got to his car. He *had* stopped for me. The gal in the back seat opened up the door and invited me in. Now this was the ride I had been dreaming of.**

**As I settled into the back seat, introductions were made. Oddly I do not recall the names of the women but the guy driving called himself Buster. As he pulled back onto the roadway and accelerated to highway speed, a joint was passed and a cold beer was offered. I accepted both. Now, it really *was* the dream ride.**

Soon I was totally relaxed and working on my second beer. I happen to notice that Buster was going about seventy mph. I suggested that he slow down to the current speed limit of fifty-five since we were engaging in illegal behavior and didn't want to attract the attention of the cops. He got a big grin on his fully bearded face, as he looked at me in the rear-view mirror. Then he intoned, in a southern accent, (until then I didn't realize that folks in southern Illinois were, for all intents and purposes, part of the south) "Didn't you hear? They changed the speed limit back to seventy. My girlfriend's dad just told me this morning". I hadn't heard that, but then again there was no TV or newspaper at Zach's place and I had no idea what might have been happening, in the news, the past few days. I returned to my cocoon of intoxication.

About ten minutes later the cocoon was shattered by a blast of fear induced adrenaline when Buster exclaimed "There's a cop coming up fast with his flashers on". Then "Take this" as he handed the joint to his girlfriend, "and this" as he handed off his beer. He then dug deep into his left pocket and pulled out a baggie of pills, "and these". He was starting to slow and move to the shoulder as he looked at me over his shoulder and said "cover up that rifle on the floor". I don't know how I hadn't noticed it before, but sure enough there was a rifle

right by me feet. My back seat companion and I managed to get it covered without bending over and garnering the suspicion of the cop who was now right on our ass.

I had a small pack of pot tucked into my sock and I was having visions of us all being frisked alongside of the road. So, I started surveying the landscape on the right for escape routes. By this point Buster was beseeching his girlfriend. "I hope they don't find out about that warrant that's out for me. If they take me to jail, don't leave me here alone." She promised that she wouldn't. As soon as we were at a full stop Buster jumped out of the car to meet the cop half way (a big no-no, in the shoot first, ask questions later climate of today). After he was back talking to the cop his girlfriend asked "Do you think that it will be a problem that he lost his license?" I said "Do you mean misplaced or suspended?" She replied "Suspended". "Yeah, that could be a problem" I informed her. Now I was picking my escape route and calculating exactly when to make a break for it.

A few minutes later Buster returned to the car and started the engine. "He wants me to follow him to the cop shop and pay the speeding ticket." Turned out the speed limit had *not* been raised to seventy. As we drove to the station, we all chipped

**in the money needed to pay the ticket. Buster was still highly agitated thinking that they were really just luring him to the station in order to bust him for the warrant and driving with a suspended license. But this was before the blessing/curse of the computer age and fifteen minutes later Buster came strutting out with the grandest of shit-eating grins on his face. As we pulled away from the police station Buster instructed his girlfriend to fire up another joint and pass out another round of beers. I returned home safe and sound. Buster gave me his contact information in case I was ever in southern Illinois.**