

Hooter Gets Crazier. Chapter One. Brilliant Idea

1981 did turn out to be an exciting year, but not exactly what we were expecting. Hooter had taken a long break from the winter cold to go visit his peeps in So Cal and refresh his relationship with friend, fuck-buddy, and dealer of high- quality methamphetamine, Ada. He had accumulated a significant stash of money from working most of the year at the orchard and conserving his money with no real expenses beyond his share of the electric and phone bills.

When he returned in the spring to resume work at the orchard, he had a fat bag of pure crystal meth and an accompanying habit. Unlike previous years, he was starting to get high for days on end which resulted in him showing up to work at the orchard in less-than-ideal condition.

In our little slice of America, the sexual revolution was still going strong. Especially in Hooter's universe. And Hooter's universe had a strong magnetic pull on mine. When Teri and I had become husband and wife I was truly committed to monogamy but the feeling behind that promise was starting to erode on my part. I came up with what I thought was a "brilliant idea".

I was aware of several single men in our circle of friends who found Teri very attractive. My plan was to encourage her to get a taste of the non-monogamous fruit which in turn would hopefully lead us back to the open relationship we had before Autumn was born. My strongly preferred candidate was Rex W. who I had met my first day of picking apples back in 78. Rex was a great guy with blond hair and sparkling blue eyes. Smart, funny, respectful and very handsome. He was also a confirmed bachelor who liked kids but did want any of his own. I made a point of “running into him” and, after buying him a few beers (I had just started out on seven years of alcohol-free living), pitched my plan. He and Teri could date with my blessing and me taking care of our kids while they were out. He was immediately interested. I outlined how I did not want their dating/sexual relationship to interfere with Teri and I’s being married, living, and raising our kids together. He agreed whole heartedly. Then I just had to pitch it to Teri.

It was a very sensitive topic for her so I approached it with extreme caution.

“I ran into Rex the other day and I bought him a few beers.” “Oh yeah?”

“Yep. Your name came up.” “Really?”

“Yeah. I don’t know if you realize it but Rex thinks that you are very attractive.”

Teri blushing with excitement. “No, I had no idea.”

“I told him that before Autumn was born you and I had an open relationship, but that you had never exercised your right to date other guys, while I was still seeing Cindy. So, I figured that you had one coming.”

Teri was no longer blushing with excitement. A look of anger and suspicion had taken over her face.

“No, absolutely not. I am not going back to an open relationship.”

“Listen Teri, that is not what I am proposing. Just go ahead and get together with Rex, enjoy yourself and see how you feel. Meanwhile I will continue to stay monogamous.”

“OK, let me think about it”.

It wasn’t that Teri and I no longer had romantic feelings for each other. We did. They were just overshadowed by our overwhelming workload including taking care of our kids without the benefit of running water, building a cabin without much previous experience or electricity, keeping our fifty- dollar vehicles running, putting up wood for the winter,

tending, harvesting and preserving the food from our enormous garden. Much of the time we felt like a couple of horses, in harness, pulling a plow uphill. Not much energy left at the end of the day for romance.

Hooter Gets Crazier. Chapter Two. Things Take A Turn.

Teri and Rex hit it off immediately and my plan seemed to be off to a great start. It was all very copacetic. I had never been the jealous type in any of my previous relationships and was not bothered one bit by seeing Teri and Rex head off for an overnight while I stayed home with the kids. OK, maybe *one* bit.

Rex, being the great guy that he was, even proposed a “whole family” outing on his sailboat on the mighty Mississippi. I jumped at the chance to go on my first sailing trip. Teri wasn’t as thrilled as she had to share Rex with me and the kids. It was a small boat so we were a bit crowded. But it was an excellent example of how Rex was the ideal guy for his part.

After they had been dating pretty regularly for a couple of months, I was ready for phase two of my “brilliant” plan. I had met a young woman who seemed interested in me and gotten her phone number. I called her and set up a date. The day before

we were to go out, I explained to Teri that since she seemed to be thoroughly enjoying her end of the “open relationship”, it seemed only fair that I should be able to partake as well. She was not happy, but wanted to continue to see Rex, so she reluctantly agreed.

The next day as my evening date approached her mood became increasingly morose. By the time I was ready to depart she was on the floor of our bedroom crying her eyes out. I called the young woman and cancelled our date. The next day when she was feeling better, I told Teri that since I was not going to be allowed to date then she should not be able to either. She assented. She had probably intended to break it off with Rex but when push came to shove, she could not do it. At that point we were both supposed to be re-committed to monogamy. In fact, neither of us really was.

Even though I had pledged to Teri that I would remain monogamous, I now felt like “/ had one coming”. Even though Teri had pledged to break it off with Rex she continued to see him. She had not told me she was, nor had she told me she wasn’t. But it was pretty easy to piece together when she often had “things to go to” in the evening and left in her most fetching clothes with a big smile on her face. I did not appreciate the

lack of honesty, but thought it might work in my favor in the long run. Hooter's increasing meth use was beginning to worry some of the other partners including me. By the time the 81 Gulch party came around, storm clouds were on the metaphorical horizon.

Not long after the Gulch party I went out with one of the neighbor ladies, on the sly, thinking that I was going to cash in on that one that I had *now* had coming". When word got back to her, I tried to explain but Teri did not buy into my logic which effectively blew up our marriage. It was the biggest mistake of my life which ended up with our three kids never again living in a household with both of their biological parents for the rest of their childhoods. I take complete responsibility for us splitting up. It is the only true regret that I have. I have made hundreds if not thousands of mistakes, for which I have endeavored to apologize for, make amends for, and learn from, but only this one rises to the level of a true regret.

It would soon also have dire consequences on The Gulch community, and Hooter's behavior as well, which had all been functioning *fairly* well up to that point.

Upon starting an affair with the neighbor, I immediately moved out of the cabin and bought a small 8 X 32 foot mobile home which I parked in the valley about one hundred yards west of the original site where Teri, Autumn, and I had started out in the tiny travel trailer. The electric power pole was right there, so it was easy to just run an extension cord over. I installed a quick and dirty outhouse, and continued to bring water over from the spring for drinking and bathing. We

shared our time with the kids on a 50/50 basis. Three days with me then three days with her.

My catastrophic affair soon ended as the woman in question had moved on to another married man. It seemed that breaking up other folk's marriages was a sort of a hobby of hers. Teri quickly found a new man, Jim R. who immediately moved in to the cabin. He was personable, smart, talented in both musical and carpenter skills, and seemed to really care about the kids. It relieved a portion of my guilt knowing that she did not have to carry the entire burden of all of the chores that she and I had previously done together. He and I seemed to hit it off right away as well.

My marijuana crop was the best ever. When I moved out, I had turned complete ownership of the cabin

over to Teri so that the kids would have that for their home base growing up. I had been using the open space high above the dining area to dry pot in previous years. I asked her if I could use it one more time in exchange for one pound of the dried and manicured product. She agreed.

There was so much herb that I was only able to hang half of it in the open space. Once the portion that hung there was dry, I manicured that and gave Teri her “ready to sell” pound. I had

trimmed that first dried bunch in my trailer on the days that the kids were not with me. I then decided that I wanted to winter in Cali where pot prices were much higher as were the temps. Teri and I had been sharing time with the kids, but since I was planning on being gone for the winter, we needed a different arrangement. She proposed that I take Casey with me for the three months that I was going to be gone as he was already a “handful” and the most challenging for Teri. I readily agreed. I hung the remainder of the pot in my trailer to dry while I was away. Then I quickly got ready to take the half that was dried and manicured to Huntington Beach where Jeff and Rikki were then living. I packed up our belongings in my 73 Mercury sedan, that my dad had generously given me, along with some of Jeff’s sound equipment, and about ten

pounds of the primo ganga. Casey and I then headed for the Sunshine State.

Hooter Gets Crazier. Chapter Three. Me And Casey To The Sunshine Coast.

To jump in your car in the Midwest with a couple of feet of snow on the ground and the temp below zero then get out three days later in the land of sun, sand, and seventy degrees is truly exhilarating. We arrived at the small house Jeff and Rikki had moved to in Huntington Beach on a Sunday afternoon in January. A festive occasion quickly broke out. They had a small fenced in yard so it was easy to position myself by the open front door so that I could watch Casey as he moved back and forth between playing in the enclosed yard and the participating in the party in the living room. When he finally went down for a nap, Jeff and I unloaded the PA and the homegrown which we immediately sampled. Casey and I slept on the floor that night.

The next morning, Rikki went to work, and the three amigos walked down to the beach until we were standing at the entrance to the Huntington Beach pier. As I took in the sun, the waves, the surfers, and the laid-back vibe, I thought; “I would love to move here”.

But I knew that it could not be, as I needed to be near all of my kids and they needed to grow up together with their mother as part of their life. I had also gotten pretty good at growing herb and was poised to finally start making some serious money. Plus, I loved the wide-open

spaces at the Gulch, the growing Gulch community, the great music scene, and all of the wonderful friends that I had made in the area in the past couple of years.

I was keeping in frequent contact with Hooter. Partly to monitor his meth use and partly because I trusted him to give me the straight unfiltered news on how Teri, Jim, and the kids were doing. According to him, he was keeping a handle on the meth and reported that Teri and the other two kids were doing fine. He had been a little suspect of Jim from the moment he had met him and that had not changed.

The next day, I left Jeffro with a half a pound of pot to start selling while Casey and I took off for Pomona to see Steve and Donna, ownership partners in the Gulch, who were eager to see us and to start selling the Wisconsin green to their friends. And they had a lot of friends. I was always very discreet about who I did business with and also totally honest about my product. Steve on the other hand was more of

a “wheeler/dealer”. As we were staying at his place, folks would come over to buy some green bud. Steve thought that it was better for marketing purposes to say that it was grown in northern Cali. That was OK with me as I didn’t want anyone but he and Donna to know that I was the source. I would sit quietly by as friends came, sampled, smiled and bought. I had many an inward chuckle when his customers, with whom we

had just finished smoking a joint of the pot I had grown, would exclaim “How do you like this good California pot?” And I would reply, “That is indeed some excellent pot”.

After a few days, I left a couple of pounds with Steve and headed back to HB. Jeff and Rikki’s house was on the back of the lot of the main house which fronted on the street. The end of their front yard was the side of the garage of the front house. On the back of that was an add-on shed that was for use by J&R.

I asked them if it would be OK for me to fix it up so that Casey and I could sleep there. They replied in the affirmative. It so happened that a local “happy ending” massage parlor had just gone out of business in the small historic downtown area of HB. I scored a dresser, a heavy-duty table mounted on a steel frame, and a small padded love seat that had all been put to the

curb for pick-up. I cleaned everything thoroughly with strong disinfectant. I purchased some plywood and two by fours and built an elevated bed. Then I bought a foam mattress that was a little smaller than a double bed. I also created a small bed for Casey that fit in next to the love seat under my bed. I scored a small black and white TV, and a few decorations at a second-hand store and we had our own comfy little pad.

I loved being able to walk to the beach with Casey every morning. We spent the majority of our time in our shed-

away-from-home. When Steve would call for a re-load, Casey and I would head up there for a couple of days and exchange more ganja for more cash. I suddenly had more money that I had ever had before in my life. I got in touch with my inner drunken sailor and bought a cherry 72 Buick Skylark convertible, perfect for cruising up and down the Pacific Coast Hi-way, but not worth a shit for driving in the winter in Wisconsin.

One day Jeff had been visiting a friend in Long Beach. He spied a couple with toddler who were hanging out at a local park, seemingly on the loose end. Inevitably, my charismatic and outgoing buddy started chatting with this couple of road warriors who were spending

the day there with their young son. One thing led to another and when they asked if they could come to his place and take showers, Jeff was all for it. Later that afternoon, I walked into his house and saw this young woman, that I had yet to meet, carrying on an animated conversation with Jeff and Rikki while her boyfriend, Jessie, was taking the first shower.

Of all of the women I had encountered and ogled, none had ever had quite the same instant effect on me as this one. Jeff briefly introduced me to Julie, who informed me that their son's name was Beau, and explained how they were "on the road", living in their truck and travel trailer. Then they all

resumed the conversation. I was unable to join in or even utter a single syllable after "Good to meet you Julie". I could not take my eyes off of her. She was very good looking for sure, even with the road dirt and oily brown hair. But there was something about the way she carried herself and talked intensely. Her warm green flecked brown eyes exuded intelligence and awareness. After a few minutes she took a break from the conversation and turned to me for the first time since we had met. "Stop looking at me like that" she exclaimed. "I can't" I honestly replied.

Long story short. Two weeks later Jessie pulled out in the truck pulling the travel trailer and Julie moved into the shed with Casey and I. She and Jessie had worked out a child custody schedule of two weeks with dad, then two weeks with mom. This made more sense than a shorter cycle as Jessie had indicated his plan to land in Arizona where there was supposed to be a large encampment of like-minded folks, no space rental required.

Everything was great for the first two-weeks. They had a regular time every couple of days for Jessie to call Jeff and Rikki's phone then Julie would get to talk to him and her son Beau. As the two-week mark approached Julie asked Jessie when and where she should meet him to pick up Beau for her two weeks. Jessie replied: "If you don't come back to me for good you will never see Beau again". She told him that she was not going to get back together with him ever again and that he damn well better not try to keep Beau from her. He hung up on her and she started to cry. I started to get very pissed off.

I put my arms around her and Casey crawled up in her lap as we both tried to comfort her. After a while she said "What am I going to do?" I replied, "We are going to track the bastard down and get Beau back". "But

how?" she questioned. I responded, "He is a very distinctive looking guy with a toddler son, traveling in an ancient blue pick-up truck pulling a beat-up travel trailer. People will remember him. Last time he told you where he was, it was right on I-10 near Phoenix. We will start there."

The next day Julie, Casey, and I drove up to Pomona to stock Steve up with more product and borrow a shotgun from him. Then we jumped on the I-10 and headed east toward Phoenix. We had printed up about a hundred flyers with pictures of Beau, Jessie, and the truck & trailer. They included a brief description of the child abduction and Jeff's number to call if anyone had information.

I asked what kind of places Jessie used to stop at when she was traveling with him. "Spots where other itinerant travelers gathered and big truck stops", she replied. Once we got near Jessie and Beau's last known location, we started to pull in to the kind of places that Jessie favored. Within a few hours we started to get some "hits". A couple of different waitresses remembered the solo long-haired dad with toddler in tow. We were on the right track.

We spent a couple of days getting closer and closer judging by how long ago our informants had seen

them. Once we got to Las Cruces, New Mexico, we talked to a server that had waited on Jessie and Beau the day before. But then the trail went cold. We tried the three main routes out of town but got no hits on any of them. And I was running out of time. I had promised Teri that Casey and I would be back by April 1 and I needed to get my pot plants started indoors for spring planting. Plus, I still had to go back to Cali and finish my business there before returning to Wisconsin. Julie insisted that I leave her and that she could take it from there as she now understood the basics of “tracking the bastard down”. She tried to refuse the five hundred bucks that I put in her hand, but I was adamant. “I need to know that you have enough to get motels and bus tickets. I couldn’t bear to think of you hitching and sleeping outside. And if you need more, call my number in Wisconsin and I will wire more via Western

Union.” We had a tearful good-bye and went our separate ways.

I made it back to So Cal and picked up the outstanding money and fronted the remainder of the bud to Jeff and Steve respectively. Casey and I made it back to the Gulch by April 1st. Teri and I went back to the three-day kids with her then three days kids with me cycle.

Many months went by while I did not hear from Julie. I had no way to contact her or anyone that might know where she was. Was she hurt? Still alive? Back with Jessie? Had she successfully gotten Beau back? This woman who had affected me like no other. This woman who I was madly in love with and was planning on figuring out how we could be together forever, had gone silent.

Before I left Cali, I had sold both the convertible and the Mercury and bought a ticket so we could fly back with Casey sitting on my lap for no extra charge. When I returned to the Gulch, Hooter graciously loaned me his Rambler until I could get a car of my own and while he used his Harley for his main source of transport. He had managed to stay out of any significant trouble while I was away and we seemed poised for another good year. I loved driving the kids around in his

classic Rambler with the “Onward Through The Fog” bumper sticker and the rear bumper.

Another great Gulch party was had by all. Hooter was staying between the lines of being gainfully employed, doing enough speed to “stay happy”, and having sexual congress with as many willing women as he could lure into his home.

Jim and Teri were getting along great. Jim was finishing up work on the cabin, and I was finding a few ladies to spend time with myself although I had still not heard a word from the one, I really wanted to be with, Julie.

My crop was once again outstanding, but I was not happy about the fact that both Mick and Hooter, who were growing small patches adjacent to mine, were bringing way too many friends up to show off their gardens. Bringing up one friend was too many as far as I was concerned and they were greatly surpassing that. I was extremely concerned about getting ripped off or busted as word was spreading far and wide about The Gulch Pot Farm.

As soon as I could start harvesting the 81 crop, I went full speed in order to get it dried, manicured, packaged and off

the land ASAP. When I had the first ten pounds ready, I put the rest of the crop in my trailer to dry while I returned to California. I figured that I would have roughly a two week turn around so I arranged with Teri to change to a two-week schedule with the kids. She was very amenable and even said that if I didn't make it back in exactly two weeks that I could have them for any extra time that I missed by being late.

I packed the ready to sell portion up in my newly purchased vehicle, a late model four-wheel drive, cab and a half, Ford pick-up, that I had bought with the proceeds from the previous year. Then I again headed out to So Cal. Steve and Jeff had both developed a loyal customer base that were eager for the new bud to arrive. As soon as I got there, the product “flew off the shelves”, and in no time, I had another stack of cash, had left a couple of pounds for Steve and a couple for Jeff, and was ready to drive back to The Gulch and get the rest of the weed manicured so that I could make the next round and pick up more dough.

I was about half way back to Wisco when I called Jeffro to find out how things were going. He had an urgent message: Call our dear mutual friend, Jimmy G., immediately. I did, and this is what he said:

“Hey man. I feel really bad about telling you something that Teri told me in confidence, but I would feel worse if I did not.”

“OK, what’s up”

“Teri and Jim are plotting to get you sent to prison for the pot that is drying in your trailer. Once you are in prison, Teri is going to go to court to get you parental rights revoked so that her and Jim can get married and he can then adopt them. She has contacted an

attorney and is in the process of filing for divorce. As soon as you get back, she is going to pay to have a sheriff's deputy come to your trailer to deliver the summons for you to appear in court to respond to the divorce petition. They figure that the deputy who comes to your door to serve you will see and/or smell the herb and bust you on the spot.”

A small nuclear explosion erupted in my Id. As I drove onward toward Wisconsin a series of very dark scenarios played out in my adrenaline-fueled brain. The worst of which would have probably resulted in my kid's becoming orphans. I grudgingly eliminated those. I was left with one that my relatively *rational* brain considered “actionable”.

It was sunset on a frigid Sunday when I arrived at The Gulch, I met with Teri and acted like everything was fine. She was thrilled that she would soon have two weeks of kid-free time so that she and Jim could head up to Minnesota as they had previously been spending their “kid time” at The Gulch and their “free time” partying hard up there. We agreed that my next time with my kids for a two-week period would start the next day. I was even chummy with that rat-bastard Jim in order to maintain cover.

Then I then went straight up to Hooter's place and gave him a full account of what had happened and what I was planning on doing in response. He got almost as angry as I had been upon hearing that Teri and Jim were plotting to get me incarcerated. He wanted to go down to the cabin, drag Jim out into the yard and beat him senseless. I talked him out of it and told him that I was depending on his help to execute my get away. He soon completely understood and agreed to remain totally silent about my plan before and after it unfolded. He said that he would be my eyes and ears at The Gulch and I could call for updates whenever I needed to. I knew that his support would be crucial to however my plan played out and I greatly appreciated him having my back.

I then spent the entire night manicuring the rest of the dried pot, weighing it, packaging it, then thoroughly cleaning and

airing out the trailer. By mid-morning the pot was temporarily stashed in Hoot's trailer and there was nothing illegal remaining in my tiny home. I then drove into town and went directly to the Sheriff's department. I informed the officer on duty that I was expecting a summons regarding a divorce petition that had recently been filed by my estranged wife. He quickly located it and served it on me and I signed the

acceptance of summons. He was happy that he no longer had to dispatch a deputy to locate me somewhere out in the hinterlands to deliver the summons.

Later that day, Teri dropped the kids off at my place and immediately took off for Minnesota with Jim, unaware that no deputy would be coming with summons in hand. If she stuck to the usual schedule, she would not be back to pick up the kids for two full weeks or when she got news of my arrest. Whichever came first. My plan was to take the kids and flee and never ever return. By the time Teri came home and realized what I had done, I would be thousands of miles away in a place that she would never suspect.

Fortuitously, I finally received a call from Julie that very same day. She had found Jessie and Beau and had worked out an open-ended custody agreement with Jessie, meaning that she had her son for as long as she wanted at that point. I told her of my plan to take the kids and disappear for good starting

with a run to the Pacific northwest. She said she was in Colorado and would like to join the kids and I for the trip to Seattle and possibly beyond. I let her know that we would swing through and pick up her and Beau.

The first day the kids were with me we stuck to the usual schedule of play, read, eat, then watch TV. I put them to bed for the night at their usual time then packed all of their and my gear that we would need for the foreseeable future into the truck. When they woke up the next morning, I informed them that we were going on a long trip and I did not know when we would return. I told them to each pick out a few toys, books, puzzles, and stuffed animals to take along. They were excited about the idea of traveling to a new and faraway place and were not concerned with the timeline or details of when they would see their mom again.

Hooter came down and we all said our goodbyes. He and I stepped outside and I laid out the bare bones of my itinerary and informed him that I would call on a regular basis to check in and let him know how we were doing. He stated that he would do whatever I needed him to in order to carry out my plan. Standup guy. Other than Hoot and Julie, no one in the world knew what I had in mind.

We rolled out of The Gulch that morning right into the teeth of a winter storm. Temperatures below zero, heavy snow, and high winds. I was thankful that we were safely ensconced in my first four-wheel drive late model truck with plenty of room and a great heater. All

of the worldly belongings that I ever planned on needing again were under a tarp in the back of the truck along with ten pounds of pot ready to sell, and fifteen thousand bucks in literally cold cash. Autumn and Oakley set up shop in the back seat of the cab and a half with plenty of books, puzzles, snacks, and blankets. Casey sat up front to avoid getting into it with his siblings and served as my wing-man as he attentively kept a keen eye on the passing scenery.

After driving straight to Denver, we picked up Julie and Beau the next day. Then up to I-94 and over the Rockies through another blizzard. We were a bit crowded with four kids and two adults but we made it work and everyone was in a jolly mood most of the time.

When we hit Seattle Julie contacted some old friends. We spent time with them and did some tourist shit that was also fun for the kids. Then on to Redwood City, CA to stay with Julie's brother. During our time together, I had informed Julie of my long-range plan of obtaining actual passports with fake names then leaving the USA. It was not that hard to do back

then. By the time I had the documents in hand I would've sold all of the green bud and have about thirty-five thousand dollars to start our new lives in

New Zealand. Julie decided that she could not do to Jessie what he had done to her and we soon parted company once again.

Hooter Gets Crazier. Chapter Four. On The Run With The Kids.

During my frequent calls to Hooter, I gleaned the following information:

When Teri and Jim returned from Minnesota after two weeks, she quickly realized that the kids and I had been gone almost the entire period. When she asked Hooter about it, he replied that he had seen me packing up the truck the day after she left but had no idea where I went or how long I would be gone.

She went to her divorce attorney and upon his recommendation swore out a felony warrant for interference of child custody making me an interstate fugitive from the law.

She then called Jeff as she figured I would have headed straight there. He truthfully swore that I was not there and that he had not heard from me and had no idea where the kids and I were. She swore at him and told him that she did not believe him. But he was

telling the truth. In fact, we were just across town in Huntington Beach staying with friends that Teri had never met or heard of. I had not told him, my folks, or any friends that Teri *did* know to keep them from getting in

the middle. That way they did not have to choose between lying to Teri or getting me arrested.

As time went on, Hooter informed me that Teri had come to realize that Jim's plan to get me busted then get custody of the kids had become known to me and was the catalyst of my taking them and disappearing. She figured that the source must have been Jimmie G. She called him and he admitted that he had found her plan to be vile and inexcusable leading to his decision to inform me before I got arrested. She inexplicably did not get mad at Jimmie but instead turned her ire toward the originator of the foul plot, Jim. This led to some very acrimonious interactions between her and Jim which finally resulted in her kicking him out. He went straight back to his ex-wife in Minnesota with his tail between his legs. Teri also found out that he had been lying compulsively to her about a myriad of consequential and inconsequential aspects of his life.

As Hooter related the ongoing events during our regular calls, he asked me if I wanted him to do

anything back there. I told him to just keep me informed of what Teri was up to which was easy because she had taken to using him for a sounding board for the regrets she had about her letting Jim talk her into her trying to get me imprisoned, then having my parental

rights terminated. From her lips to Hooter's ear then right on to my ear.

After we had been gone a few weeks, I showed up unannounced at Jeff and Rikki's. Teri had not contacted them since she had accused Jeff of lying about me being there, so I was confident that she would not be calling back. Plus, no law enforcement types had shown up, at their door, looking for me and the kids. I was moving through the stages of obtaining new passports in assumed names while re-establishing some contacts that I had made in New Zealand a couple of years previous when I had visited there. Everything was on schedule and I hoped to be in NZ in a month or two to start our new lives.

Hooter's reports of how Teri had come to believe that she would never see her kids again and how hard she was taking it did not move me a bit. She and Jim had put a plan in motion to do the exact same thing to me with the addition of getting me put away and losing

my parental rights. So what if it was his idea. She had gone along with it 100%. She was getting just what she deserved.

Even though I was totally fine with her never seeing our kids again, a parallel emotion had started to emerge in my

consciousness. Did I want to be responsible for my kids never getting to see their mother ever again?

Hooter Gets crazier. Chapter Five. No More Running.

So, after one full month, I left Casey and Oakley with a friend while Autumn and I went for a walk. We found a pay phone and I called the cabin. Teri answered on the first ring.

“I’ve been sitting by the phone hoping that you would call. I knew that you were smart enough to take the kids somewhere that I would never be able to find them. I also knew that you would take very good care of them.”

“That is nice to hear Teri”.

“I am also very sorry that I acquiesced to Jim’s plan to get you put in jail so he could adopt the kids. I promise I will never do anything like that again”

“OK, Teri. Would you like to have a short chat with Autumn. She is here with me.”

“Yes, yes. Thank you”

I had told Autumn that I was calling her mom and that she could talk to her but not reveal where we were, where we had been, or what we were planning on doing. They talked for a few minutes then I signaled Autumn to give me back the phone.

After a few more calls a reunion was arranged and the plan to move my kids to New Zealand cancelled. We were soon all back together at The Gulch and the charges against me had been dropped. Teri and I went back to one week on and one week off with the kids. Because of Mick and Hooter’s lack of discretion about bringing folks up to tour the pot patch, the following spring I had started to grow my herb a mile away from our land, surreptitiously planting my seedlings on the neighbor’s property. This resulted in many more hours of hard work as I had to carry everything uphill through thick woods and underbrush while only getting a fraction of the harvest I had been earning in recent years.

With the dwindling marijuana profits and my reluctance to go back to full time manual labor in my mid-thirties, I decided to return to school and finish the Bachelor's degree I had floundered around at from fall of 1967 to summer of 1970. I was accepted at UW-Lacrosse, forty-five miles north of The

Gulch and soon moved there in January of 1983 to start school full time. Meanwhile, Teri, having similar feelings, moved down to Madison and enrolled in a course to become a credentialed court reporter taking the kids with her. This resulted in me being an "every other weekend dad" which I deeply resented. A previous court hearing had awarded her primary custody though I had hired the best divorce attorney in the area to contest it. I lost. But it wasn't due to my having previously violated the custody agreement it was because prior to the start of the hearing, the clueless county court commissioner ruled: "Kids should be with their mom".

With us both living away from The Gulch, Hooter had no moderating influences. Mick and Jane were either unable or unwilling to assume that role.

There was one amusing interlude however. Kit from Northern Comfort was due to get married and his brother Hans and bandmate from NC was in charge of

the bachelor party. Hans pulled me in as a consultant due to my strong resume as the party-meister. Since the three of us and most of Kit's friends were living in the La Crosse area, Hans and I quickly agreed to having the bash at Sidekicks Tavern on open mic night. Free space and free music were ideal as Hans was operating on a very modest budget. Plus, the owner was good friends with both of the brothers. I suggested to Hans that hiring at least

one stripper should be considered mandatory for his brother's last outing as a single guy. He agreed but stated that he was too broke.

Soon an extremely unconventional plan popped into my mind and I immediately shared it with Hans who agreed unequivocally. I went ahead and made the arrangements as the "entertainer" was available for that particular evening. Hans and I arrived at the bar early while the hosting band was setting up on the stage. Kit soon joined us and we were well into our second round of beverages when a commotion occurred at the front door which we could clearly view from our barstools.

Hooter, outfitted in his sexiest dress was engaged in a heated conversation with the bouncer who was refusing to let him in. "You have to let me in, I'm the

stripper for Kit's bachelor party" Hoot implored. The bouncer turned and gave us a bewildered look at which point we were laughing our asses off and motioned for him to let Hooter on in.

Hooter then marched straight up to Kit, held his face firmly between his two hands, and proceeded to give him a long and tongue heavy French kiss. After Kit managed to pry Hooter off

of him, he stated in no uncertain terms; "don't ever do that again".

There was no taking off of the clothing, but Hoot did occupy the center of the dance floor for the better part of the evening, dancing, drinking, laughing, and on occasion raising his dress far enough to reveal his hairy thighs.

Hooter Gets crazier. Chapter Six. Decay, Dissolution, De- Construction

Hooter went from doing speed as his mission in life and crossed over to being obsessively addicted, habituated, and coming to believe that the only time

he could be happy was when he was completely fucked up on meth.

My view on addiction is not in congruence with the latest Diagnostic Service Manual's definition. I believe that addiction is the physical dependence on a substance or a behavior that will cause an addicted individual to go into physical withdrawal when they can no longer partake in that substance or behavior. Any addicted person can be placed in involuntary lock-up for thirty days and by that point they will no longer be experiencing physical withdrawal symptoms. The far stronger and often lifelong condition is what I call *habituation* which I describe as the obsessive belief that indulging in the substance or behavior will cure one's depression or anxiety and/or make one instantly happy. My dad had quit smoking tobacco in his early forties and reported that at age eighty he still woke up every morning with the urge to smoke a ciggie.

I believe that somewhere in or around 1982 or 83 Hooter no longer felt that he could be happy without being high on speed and that in order to get through the times without speed he would just consume as much alcohol and downers as he could get his hands out until he passed out. He was both frequently

addicted and constantly horribly habituated by his belief that he could only be happy when high.

Every minute that Hooter could not afford or locate speed to stay high on he would endeavor to get totally intoxicated on cheap wine and/or downers to the point where he would puke and always eventually pass out. He stated that if he fell asleep normally, he would experience horribly violent and terrifying dreams. Apparently, our moms had been right about horror movies resulting in bad dreams.

Since I had felt forced to start growing at a spot off of our land because I believed that Mick and Hooter's indiscriminate advertising of their pot patches was going to lead to the cops busting our place, my ganga harvest was a tiny fraction of what it had been. So, I started to buy product from local friends/growers on credit to take out to Cali and sell it through my friends out there including Gulch co-owners Steve and Donna at a small profit margin after expenses such as cross-country travel. At one point I fronted them ten thousand dollars' worth of a friend's product which they ripped me off

for when I could least afford it. It took me a while but I completely paid off the friend/grower out of my own pocket.

Mick and Jane had a second kid and bought a 14 X 70 mobile home which they placed at the bottom of the hill in the same spot where Teri and I had originally lived in our tiny travel trailer.

Ra-Man Craig took off in his 61 VW micro bus for parts unknown.

Hooter sold his Harley in order to buy drugs and alcohol and also purchased another small travel trailer which he placed at the bottom about two hundred feet east of Mick and Jane's home. Getting up and down the hill in his constant states of inebriation was no longer working for him

Being constantly fucked up on one thing or another was also bringing him into frequent contact with the local police, including DUI's and car crashes. He was then subject to court ordered supervision by a social worker and mental health counselor. They took pity on him and set him up with a small monthly stipend (as he was no longer in any condition to seek employment) but insisted that he have a guardian of his

finances to control his money and dole it out only for "appropriate and legal" expenses. He called me and requested that I serve as such a guardian. "No way in hell. You would be calling me at 3 am, waking me up,

and begging for money to buy speed. Never going to happen”, I replied.

When he ran out of money and intoxicants he would stagger over to Mick and Jane’s place, often in the middle of the night while they slept, walk into their place and clean out their beer supply from the fridge. When they started locking the door to stop him, he would bang on it and scream threats at them until they opened it up and gave him all the beer. They soon moved away and rented out the mobile home to a single mom with three kids and a boyfriend. This effectively re-affirmed that Hooter was the alpha dog of the Gulch, which was not a good thing. Hooter had always listened to my advice which certainly does not mean that he always took it. I think it is fair to say that my counsel often had a moderating effect on his behavior. Without me around he was gyrating wildly out of control.

Teri was letting whoever was in need stay in the cabin in her absence. Needless to say, they had little or no interest in doing any repairs and/or maintenance. And when they moved on, they each left a sizable quantity of stuff they no longer wanted. Finally, Hooter ended up there. He took that

opportunity to invite his long-time fuck buddy and meth dealer Ada out for a visit. Only, things had changed dramatically. Ada had managed to burn the biker cook that she was getting her unadulterated methamphetamine from and she had picked up a loser and jealous boyfriend.

When they showed up at the Gulch three factors immediately came into play. 1) They had both lived their entire lives in So Cal and were unprepared for below zero temps. 2) The new beau was deeply suspicious and jealous of Hooter. 3) With the loss of the unparalleled meth connection they were looking to start cooking their own product.

On the first full day after they arrived in Wisco, Hoot took them to La Crosse and got them fully outfitted in warm clothes at the Salvation Army second hand store. From there they made the rounds buying all they needed to manufacture their own meth. When they returned to the cabin, they started to set up a meth lab in the upstairs room of the cabin.

To review: All of the ownership partners except Hoot had departed and/or fled the Gulch leaving an out-of-control Mr. Hooter in charge. Ada, Hooter, and her boyfriend were setting up a meth lab at the cabin

while the boyfriend was having murderous fantasies about taking out who he believed was his

romantic rival for Ada's affections. Truth be told Hooter would have liked to resume sex with Ada but was more interested in getting the lab up and running so he could have unfettered access to high quality product again.

None of them had ever actually manufactured meth before so things were not going well on that front. Hooter was able to score some heavily stepped on product locally. Since Ada was diabetic, she had a huge supply of "one time" use syringes which they re-used many times.

The once happy healthy vibrant Gulch community that had boasted huge legal and illegal gardens, great parties, and many visitors from far and wide was now a dark and dangerous place. The only visitors were down and out speed freaks looking to score and who were privy to the meth lab that had yet to yield anything of value. A woman named Susan, her three kids, and boyfriend Stanley had rented Mick and Jane's mobile home at the bottom of the hill and had their own issues. They generally avoided any interaction with Hooter as they considered him and his guests "crazy". But Stanley did obtain an old

pistol just in case he might ever have to fend off Hooter.

After the frustration of many failed attempts to produce any significant quantity or quality of meth, the rigors of a Wisconsin winter, and the ongoing animosity between her boyfriend and Hooter, Ada decided to head back to California. That left Hooter living alone in the cabin with many garbage bags littering the front yard full of meth manufacturing waste and used hypodermic needles. At one point, Hooter passed out on the couch smoking a cigarette and almost burned the cabin down. Teri had let the homeowner's insurance lapse, so that would have been a total and irrevocable loss.

Hooter Gets Crazier. Chapter Seven. Deadly Consequences.

For the first time in my life, I was excelling in school. I had gone from barely graduating high school to a couple of sub- mediocre years at the U of Iowa, where I had majored in smoking pot and protesting the Viet Nam war, to being an honor roll student in my

mid-thirties. Teri was doing similarly well on her course work in Madison.

I would still visit the Gulch on the odd weekend when I did not have the kids. My little trailer had fallen into disrepair and was unacceptably grungy to take my kids there. Matter of fact, it seemed like the whole Gulch had fallen on hard times. Susan and her family who were still renting Mick and Jane's trailer were very slovenly, using their front yard as a handy dump to chuck out anything they no longer needed. Hooter was either sleeping one off or extremely fucked up on speed. Or when he could get that, alcohol and/or downers. The one bright spot was that they all seemed to be getting along. During one of his few functioning moments after Hoot had moved down to down to the valley he even installed a small above ground pool by his trailer. He often invited Susan's kids over for a swim. I had plenty on my plate up in La Crosse and was in no position, nor did I have any inclination to, try and regulate anyone's behavior at the Gulch.

Susan's boyfriend, Stanley had been a hard and off-the-rails drinker since his early teens but had been sober for many years. Then one night that all changed. A couple of long-time friends of his showed up with some twelve packs of beer and he decided to

join in the fun. Apparently, Susan wasn't the type to tell him what to do so Stanley was soon stupid drunk. At some point after that the conversation turned to "what a crazy dude that Hooter is", Stanley boasted that he had just what he needed to "handle" Hooter should the occasion ever arise. To prove his point, he went into he and Susan's bedroom and came back with his pistol.

Susan had put the kids to bed earlier and crawled in with them as she did not want to watch Stanley acting the fool with his dumbass buddies. She was woken up by the sound of a single gunshot. When she ran into the kitchen where the three men had been drinking, she noticed the front door swinging closed, Stanley with his head in his hands, the pistol lying on the table, and the remaining man dead with a gunshot to his head.

Stanley soon got up, staggered to the phone, and called 911.

"This is Stanley and I just killed my best friend. You better send the cops down."

Stanley was arrested and spent the night in jail. When Susan visited him the next day, he professed to having absolutely no memory of what had transpired. On the advice of his court appointed attorney, Stanley

plead guilty and threw himself on the mercy of the court. He was sentenced to seven years for involuntary manslaughter.

Hooter never believed that Stanley would kill his best friend and had ferreted out some of the third guy's running buddies who reported that he had been bragging about shooting "the retard" and letting Stanley take the fall. When I talked to Hoot about it, he was very upset and vowing to "get justice". I strongly advised him to stay out of it since Stanley had no memory of the event and that there were no other direct witnesses other than the asshole who was boasting about killing the guy. Besides, he needed to work on diminishing *not* increasing his contact with local law enforcement. He grudgingly agreed and accepted my advice.

Susan soon moved away as living in the country without a partner to help out was proving to be unmanageable. Plus it creeped her out every time she was in the kitchen to think of

the man who was also her friend being violently killed right at her family's dining table.

Apparently, Hooter did not enjoy the solitude of being the only full time Gulch resident and roamed the countryside drinking and drugging with the only folks

who would have him, low life skills. That meant that he was often driving while insanely fucked up in a dilapidated, jerry-rigged vehicle that just invited the attention of the cops. Which in turn meant that he was frequently getting pulled over, arrested, and/or ending up either in jail or the local psych unit. After he had been before one of the local judges for the umpteenth time, said judge awarded him a “golden ticket”.

The judge not only ordered Hoot to have weekly sessions with a psychiatrist but hooked him up with the pre-eminent head shrinker in the whole damn state, Dr. Pauline J. She was in her second or third term as head of the Wisconsin Psychiatric Association. Being the top dog in her profession allowed the esteemed Doctor much latitude in her diagnostic and treatment options. Since Hooter was always jarringly honest with everyone except the cops, over the course of the initial sessions he laid out his entire history of substance abuse, bad choices, and personal demons going back to his childhood.

Hooter Gets Crazier. Chapter Eight. Good Times, Bad Times.

As previously mentioned, Hooter had, through his own behavior, been reduced to hanging out with less than desirable “friends” since anyone who had their shit together gave him a wide berth. He was keeping company with the kind of folks that would be very excited about the prospect of getting their mitts on some of those Dexies and a chunk of that disability cash that he received monthly.

On the first of every month Hoot would get his check and his pills then the vultures would show up at his little trailer in the valley like clockwork. He could easily burn through ninety Black Beauty’s within a couple of weeks by himself. With the help of his *friends* the money and the speed barely lasted a week. Then they fled, leaving him broke, alone, and without his precious speed for the rest of the month. He would chug cheap wine and swallow any downers he could get his hands on in order to pass out every night for the rest of the month without those damn violent dreams. The harsh reality had started to set in.

He called his guardian angel Dr. J. “I’m out of my prescription pills. I had some friends over and I think one of them stole them.” She was not pleased. “I find this highly suspicious. I

will write you a new prescription this time and only this time. If you ever call me again with *any* excuse as to why you are out, I will cut you off and you will never ever get another pill from me. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Doctor."

Hooter tried to discourage his so-called friends from showing up on the first of the month to deplete his supply of cash and quality pills. But his natural generosity and his loneliness from being all by himself in that long beautiful valley was hard for him to overcome. There was a backwoods bar just a few miles away that was just over the county line so the sheriff's deputies only showed up when someone called 911. It was gravel road almost all the way and he rarely saw another car coming or going, so the chance of another getting another DUI seemed minimal. Hoot figured that he would move his first of the month parties over to the bar in order to maintain more control over his monthly money and pills. The owner was a partier himself and lived up above the bar. So, it was a pretty wide-open scene.

At the beginning of every month Hooter would stash the majority of his cash and pills in his trailer and drive over to the bar with what he figured was enough to get his hangers on

lubricated and wired. This worked pretty well for the first couple of months. By that point winter had set in. And it was a hard one.

His iconic Rambler had died and been sent to the bone yard long ago so at that point he was driving a crappy old van that was on its last legs with well-worn tires, and not ideal for traction on snow and ice. But it was the first and Hoot set out for his start of the *new month* celebration at the local pub. By the time he arrived it was snowing hard but that had not deterred the folks that were there in force to share his largess. He kept his pills and cash in a fanny pack which he wore facing forward. Easy for him to access and hard to anyone else to pilfer. Soon after he arrived and spread joy to all who wanted to partake, the joint was jumpin. He was trying to tread that fine line of making sure everyone was high and having a great time without going through his nightly stash too quickly. But when Hoot partied, he hated having to be on guard. And eventually he let that guard down. He left his butt pack on the bar and went to the bathroom. When he returned the butt pack was gone along with a few of the most ardent consumers of his generosity.

He ran out to his van. The fresh layer of snow on the untraveled road made it easy to track the thieves. He jumped in and fired it up then whipped a Uey. He took off at a

blinding rate of speed. Way too fast for the horrible road conditions on the winding road. But within minutes he could see their taillights up a head. He was going to kick their collective asses, get his cash and pills back, and never share with those evil bastards again.

Just as he was bearing down on them, he came into a particularly tight curve. The ass end of the van started to come around. Hoot steered into the drift but the road was too slick and his tires too bald. The van left the road at a high rate of speed and rolled over and over as it plunged down the steep embankment.

When Hooter regained consciousness, he was in the crumpled van at the bottom of the embankment and had several significant facial lacerations, a broken forearm, and a broken leg. Never a big fan of “dressing for the cold weather”, he soon started to shiver. He crawled to the back of the smashed-up van and located a tarp which he wrapped around himself in order to hunker down until daylight when hopefully someone would spot him. But his mind was racing from the speed and from his outrage at being ripped off by folks that he had been unfailingly generous to. He soon found a broken window that was just big enough for him to squeeze through.

Crawling up the embankment with a severely broken leg and arm was extremely painful but, Hoot was an extremely tough guy. Plus, it was still snowing pretty hard. He made it back up to the shoulder of the road, laid there, and waited for a car to come along. And waited. Then waited some more. After what seemed like at least an hour, Hoot figured that the bar had closed and no one would be driving by until daylight. Plus, he was covered in wet snow and was freezing his ass off. So back down to the van he crawled. Got back in through the same broken window. Now he was cold *and* wet. He wrapped himself in the tarp once again hoping he would not freeze to death before daylight.

The road maintenance guys get a lot of overtime during winter clearing off the frequent snow and ice. One of those guys happened to be driving the snow plow just after the sun was coming up the next morning. As he rounded the curve he happened to glance over at the shoulder and thought he saw a faint something as he passed by. He continued down the road until he found a spot to turn the big truck around and made his way back to the curve. Sure enough. Through the freshly accumulated snow he spotted some barely visible tire tracks heading right over the embankment. He put on his emergency flashers and

got out. When he walked out past the shoulder to where the steep incline began, he spotted a van. A van that he was very familiar with. Hooter's van. The county road guys

knew everyone. And everyone knew Hooter. The guy made his way down the embankment expecting to find Hoot dead inside of the wreck. But no. There he was, shivering like a dog left out in the rain, cuts all over his face, and sporting a leg that bent in the wrong direction and cradling one arm with the other. But Hoot still beamed a big smile up at his rescuer.

After a heated discussion the road guy insisted that Hooter stay in the van until the ambulance arrived even though Hoot informed him that he had already crawled out the broken window and made his way up to the road on his own. The road guy prevailed and Hooter shivered some more until the ambulance arrive a half an hour later. Then *they* insisted on him waiting some more until the fire truck could be summoned in order to "rescue" him from the wreck. Again, his pleading that he could get out of the van on his own fell on deaf ears. The county had a new tool they were apparently eager to use. The "jaws of life".

Another painful, wet, and cold hour passed before the fire department could arrive and use their new toy to

pry open the window a few more inches and extricate Hooter. At that point his gratitude had slipped considerably.

He was in the hospital quite a few days while they straightened out his broken limbs, applied a couple of casts, and cleaned and stitched his facial lacerations. He called me from the hospital hoping I would come down and help him transition back to the Gulch. My patience with, and goodwill toward him, had run out. I told him I was busy with life and he was on his own.

By that point I had graduated college with highest honors and procured a job in La Crosse working with adults with cognitive disabilities. Teri had successfully earned her degree in court reporting and moved herself and the kids to La Crosse so that I was able to have more time with them and be readily available to participate in the many parental duties that would arise. I was and still am eternally grateful for the decision she made. Her folks and siblings were lobbying hard for her to move back to Chicago after she graduated. They would have helped her find a job and a place to live as well as provide much additional support for her and our kids. But she believed “the kids need their dad in their lives” and bestowed upon me the best gift I have ever received beyond their respective births.

When spring rolled around, I did visit the Gulch in order to get back to the beauty and solitude of our remote land in order to clear my head and reduce stress. Hoot was still sporting casts

on his arm and leg. He was very glad to see me and my enmity toward him soon melted away. As always, he was making due, overcoming his physical limitations without anger or complaint. Getting ripped off and not being able to drive had kept him at home and immune to the vultures who tried to come around at the first of the month. As a result, his pills were lasting a little over two weeks and his check was enough to get him through the month. I marveled once again at the man's resilience.

Hooter Gets Crazier. Chapter Nine. Ripped Off.

Over the next few years Hooter and I did not have much interaction. He did show up at my place in La Crosse one night at 3 am to beg me to front him some dough for drugs and/or alcohol. I was extremely pissed at being woken up on a work night and slammed the door in his face so hard that I had to replace it.

I was no longer throwing parties at the Gulch. The cabin was decaying and the land looked like a dump. Mick had brought many truckloads of salvaged materials that he claimed he would use at some point (he never did). He also had a few junk cars rusting away at the bottom of the hill. His mobile home was slowly being reclaimed by mother nature as no one was interested in renting it given its notorious history and its notorious next-door neighbor. There were also several uninhabited small trailers littering the landscape. I would have been embarrassed to have family and friends show up for a party and see the place in such a sad state. Not Hooter though.

He decided he would revive the Gulch Party tradition with one significant twist. He would charge a cover and make it a profit deal with him reaping the profit. Never in the previous history

of the Gulch parties had I ever charged a cover. Plus, the beer was always gratis, although anyone who wanted to make a free will donation could. And the donations always covered the entire cost of the kegs. None of the local bands that had formerly been happy to donate their talents wanted anything to do with Hooter. He was able to line up a band from Minnesota that were friends of Teri's. When they learned that Hoot would be charging a cover, they were not willing

to play for free. They insisted on being paid if Hoot was going to get paid. He agreed.

Hooter went ahead and put it together even posting fliers that read “Hooter’s Gulch Party” with the date and the cover charge. Hooter invited me and generously said he would waive the cover charge in my case. I gave him a hard pass. Hardly anyone showed up. Hoot got so drunk he went down the hill, locked himself in the trailer, and passed out while the band was still playing. When they finished, they went to his trailer and banged on the door to get paid, but he didn’t answer. So, they kicked in the door, grabbed the few bucks he had taken in on cover charges and confiscated anything of value to make up for the short fall.

Over the next few years, we saw very little of each other. He got married, I got married, he got divorced, I got separated, he got married again. After working for seven years with some of

the most behaviorally challenging clients served by our agency, I needed a break from the stress and took a job as a cashier at the local food coop. My pot business was doing great as I was making regular trips to So Cal where my connection was able to hook me up with the best Mexican herb available.

Then one day I came home from work, unlocked the door to my room and soon noticed that fifteen hundred in cash and a few other items were missing. The second worst thing about getting ripped off after the loss of the purloined items is that one then has to then mentally go through the list of friends and family who might have been in position and sufficiently unethical in order to rob you. I immediately took my three kids off of that list.

I always kept a keyed entry lock on my bedroom door as I had guns, product, and cash in there. Thank goodness none of the guns were missing. After a week of agonizing over who could have done such a dastardly deed, I got a call from Teri. She had been cleaning our youngest son's (age fourteen at the time) room and discovered some very expensive electronic devices such as a Game Boy hidden under his bed. He who spent every dime he got as soon as he obtained it. After initially not considering him or my other two kids, he went right to suspect #1. I summoned him to my house and we sat

down in my bedroom. I was not fucking around. I thoroughly outlined not only the material losses but how getting robbed had also led me to question the integrity of my many friends. I told him he had one chance and one chance only to come clean or I would

treat him like any other common street criminal who came into my home and robbed me i.e. beat the shit out of him. Between my threat and the fact that he had been caught red-handed with expensive brand-new goods that he could not possibly have afforded on his own, he confessed. I asked him how he had gotten in when the door was locked. He told me that he had shimmied his skinny frame in through the heating duct that connected my room with the guest bedroom. He also admitted that a buddy was with him and had witnessed the robbery. I then got out my taser and fired a test blast so he could witness the 50,000-volt arc between the contact points and told him if he ever ripped me off again, he would be the recipient of a “hot shot”. *He never did.*

Hooter Gets Crazier. Chapter Ten. Back To The Gulch.

That had not been the first time I had ever been robbed. And I knew from experience that thieves tended to come back again if the original pickings had been easy. Sure enough, Oakley’s friend and confederate made another run on his own. But he was

not skinny enough to slide through the heating duct like Oak had.

Returning home after a trip to the grocery store, I approached the door to my room one morning. I immediately noticed that it had been kicked in. It only took a few seconds to realize that five thousand dollars' worth of pot was missing. I had only been out of the house for only a few minutes, so I figured the thief could not have gotten far. Again, I was thankful that none of my firearms were missing, so I grabbed my fully loaded, trusty .357 magnum revolver and jumped in my van. I drove up and down the surrounding streets hoping to spot anyone looking suspicious and carrying a bag. I did spot a car with three dubious looking young men and followed it. They soon realized I was tailing them and flipped me the bird. I was not ready to pull a gun on someone just for giving me the finger. I noted their license plate number and ended the pursuit.

I once again questioned Oakley and he stated that the same buddy who had witnessed him robbing me had recently come into a quantity of cash and marijuana. Oak also stated that the little weasel had fronted most of the pot to some dealer who had in turn ripped *him* off. That created a significant quandary for me. Do I grab the little bastard off of the street and stick a gun

in his face. That would have involved many felonies that could easily have resulted in me serving decades in prison. Plus, the little shit probably had no means of getting the cash or goods back from the disreputable dealer he had fronted the weed to. Did I want to chase the dealer down that rabbit hole then stick a gun in *his* face based on third hand information? I decided that I did not.

I had no idea who else he may have bragged to about ripping off Oakley's dad while telling them exactly where I lived. I no longer felt safe in my own damn home. I rented a couple of storage units and moved the bulk of my stuff, including the guns and pot into them. I then rented a safe deposit box to store the cash which had been hidden well enough that the "weasel" had not found it. I put the house up for sale and begun to contemplate my next move.

Every time I had visited the Gulch over the past few years, I had been heartsick at how shabby it was. The cabin, which I had considered to be my life's only "work of art" was rotting

along the front edge where the stage was attached. As the repurposed wood which had been used to build the stage decayed, the moisture had wicked to the

siding then down to the supporting beam. In a few years it would be past the point of no return.

My two oldest kids were in high school and very independent. My youngest, Oakley was the wild card. I made a hard but decisive call. I would move back to the Gulch. But only on one condition. If I was going to put in a butt load of work and money in order to restore it to its previous glory, I would need to buy everyone out so that I was once again the sole owner and decision maker. Fortunately, I had a large quantity of cash in the safety deposit box so I started to contact the other owners and offer to buy them out. Hooter's outrageous behavior worked in my favor at that point. No one else wanted to live there again as long as he was around. Teri agreed to sell me her share of the land plus the cabin for five thou even though most people would have considered the cabin to be a tear down and figured it to be a net liability. But I wanted to restore it and live in it again. I paid her in cash and she and her new husband Chuck, both signed the quick claim deed. Since Wisconsin is a community property state, both spouses must sign even if only one of their names appear on the original deed. Ra Man was willing to sell for the exact same amount of money that he had bought his share for

twenty years previous. Since he had never wanted his name on the deed no paperwork was required. Hooter contacted Steve and Donna who had ripped me off for \$9,000 worth of product but were not willing to give me their share in partial payment of the debt. Instead, they gave half of their share to Mick and half to Hooter and signed the requisite paperwork. What generous folks, *or* thieving assholes, depending on your point of view.

When I offered to buy him out, Hooter was very excited about the prospect of having a fistful of cash to party on and me being back. But he was reluctant to sell me his share as he wanted to always have a place to live. So, I told him that I would buy him out and he could still live the rest of his life at the Gulch under two conditions. 1) He had to refrain from behaviors that would attract the attention of the cops because I intended to get back into growing ganga big time. And 2) He had to refrain from harassing the next-door neighbors. They were a kindly elderly couple who had been very sweet to Hooter until he started showing up at their place in the middle of the night banging on the door to beg for beer or cash (after Mick and Jane had fled under similar conditions). The Mrs. had become so terrified of him that she no longer felt safe accompanying her

husband on the visits to their cabin which her father had built about the same time I was starting work on our cabin.

That left my life-long friend Mick. Mick had never seemed to care much about money or gainful employment so I had often paid his way. When he wanted to buy a share of the Gulch, I gave him the bargain basement price for a smaller share than anyone else had been required to purchase. But now the shoe was on the other foot. Mick wanted market value for his share of the land plus the half of Steve and Donna's share that they had gifted him. In addition, he figured that the mobile home which was in piss poor condition and might have garnered five hundred as a pull away, was worth another five grand. He insisted on being paid eleven thousand on his original investment of twelve hundred. I was not pleased but knew that me moving back there hinged on getting him and his wife to sign another quit claim deed. So, I sucked it up and put 11K into his hot little hand. My resentment lasted a couple of years but we eventually got past it and renewed our life-long friendship. I became the sole owner of the Gulch with a lifelong tenant and literally tons of crap to dispose of.

Meanwhile back in La Crosse I had put in my two-week notice at the Food Coop. A young guy Pete, who also worked there, and I had become friends and he was looking to get out of town and move to the country. I took him on a tour of the ravaged Gulch and he was not deterred. I made it clear that he would have to help with the clean-up but that did not seem

to discourage him either. Even though Oakley was no longer giving me any problems (the sight of the taser firing off had apparently been very inspiring), he was getting in lots of trouble in school, some minor scrapes with the law, and driving his mother to distraction. She gave me a call and stated “Oakley needs to live with you for a while. He will not listen to me and is getting Ds and Fs in school. I know that you can straighten him out.” I immediately assented. He would move in as soon as he finished his freshman year at La Crosse Central.

The three of us agreed to move in as soon as we got the cabin and the yard cleaned up and Oakley finished his spring semester of high school.

The clean-up was a bear. I ordered the largest dumpster available. Due to the incline around the cabin, the closest it could be placed was the bottom of the hill. That meant that everything that would not

burn had to be loaded in my pick-up and transferred down there.

The cabin was so packed with everyone who Teri had let live there's left behind shit that we burned a lot of crap that was definitely not environmentally friendly. But that still left enough non-burnable shit to fill the dumpster and two more

just like it. The remnants of the failed meth lab were particularly icky and I gloved up and bagged those myself. The front yard of the cabin was filled with garbage bags from when Hooter, Ada, and her homicidal boyfriend had lived there. As we started to load those in the pick-up to take down to the dumpster, hypodermic needles started to poke through. What a nightmare. After many days work on the part of the three of us the cabin was completely empty, swept, and mopped with powerful cleanser. Only one piece of furniture survived. An antique buffet. The yard was similarly spotless. Pete moved in immediately, I scheduled my move for a couple of weeks in the future and Oak still had a month left of school in La Crosse before he could inhabit the cabin with Pete and I.

As the end of the school year approached, the seniors at La Crosse Central high school were looking for a

place in the country to hold the traditional senior skip day party. Even though he was a junior Casey offered to host at his dad's place. The Gulch. He did this of course without my permission or knowledge.

One day Pete was bringing another load of his stuff down to the cabin and was stunned to see several county sheriff's deputies squad cars parked at the bottom of the hill with Casey in the back seat of one. They immediately accused Pete of hosting the party and buying the beer. He explained he had

absolutely no knowledge of anything and Casey backed him up.

The cops had been trying to get Casey to give them permission to go up and search the cabin and surrounding area. He wisely told them "It's my dad's place and only he can give you permission".

Meanwhile the partiers who were not intoxicated came down the hill, passed the Breathalyzer sobriety test, and were allowed to get in their cars and leave. They drove down the lane, took a left, and picked up their intoxicated friends who had made their way through the woods on foot and come out on the road.

By the time the cops had tired of waiting for permission and come up the hill to search, they were very disappointed to only find a half full keg of beer, a

completely empty, but clean, cabin and no kids. Casey got a ticket for underage possession of beer and that was it. Pete was a little freaked out but not deterred from completing his move. The next incident did rattle him.

I had gotten moved in and Oakley was soon to join us. I was back in La Crosse picking up the last of my belongings. Pete had been out and about and was returning home. As he drove by Hooter's trailer, he saw a considerable amount of smoke

pouring out of his open trailer door. He immediately pulled in and called out Hooter's name. He heard sounds reminiscent of a wounded animal coming from inside the trailer. Using the welcome mat to fan away some of the smoke he stuck his head in and observed that Hoot's mattress was burning fiercely and Hooter was backed up to the wall as the fire came nearer and nearer. Pete then used the welcome mat to beat the fire down enough so that he could grab Hoot and drag him out of the trailer. Hooter survived with minor burns and smoke inhalation. He had passed out smoking a ciggie and if Pete had not shown up when he did, probably would have died. The Hoot with nine lives. Or was it ninety-nine lives?

Hooter Gets Crazier. Chapter Eleven. Gulch Makeover.

Spring was blossoming and that emerging energy propelled my motivation toward my huge project. Even before I sold my house in La Crosse and started cleaning up the Gulch, I made some trips down there in order to formulate a plan and prioritize. One weekend that I was slated to go down, Autumn asked if she could come down for a campfire and bring her friend Andrea. I loved that my wonderful daughter wanted to share some time with her dad at the place she had spent her earliest years.

We built a fire in the pit in the front yard of the cabin, opened up some adult beverages and settled in. Within an hour I heard the sound of Hooter's current junker laboring up the drive. As he parked, got out, and stumbled over to the fire I quickly assessed that his state of intoxication was not caused by speed, but by alcohol and/or downers. He was weaving and slurring his words. He soon sat by the fire and started talking and talking and talking. As mentioned before, Hoot was used to, and loved being, the center of attention. So, the quiet thoughtful conversation that Autumn, Andrea, and I had been having about special times past and present was over. Now it was all about Hooter and his ups and downs trying to score drugs, getting high on drugs, and coming down from drugs.

The tenor of the gathering had changed completely and

I was not pleased. I repeatedly tried to interject subject matter that would be of more interest to Autumn and her friend, but Hoot kept bringing it back to him and his favorite topic. Getting royally fucked up.

After what seemed like about an hour, I detected an unpleasant odor that seemed to be coming from Uncle Hoot. I quickly figured out that he had shit his pants. It didn't seem to bother him but that and the fact that he had totally disrupted my special time with Autumn and Andrea was now starting to really piss me off. I took him off to one side and pointed out what should have been obvious. I told him that he needed to go back to his trailer, clean himself up, change pants, and go to bed. He grudgingly agreed. I found a large chunk of cardboard and placed it on the passenger side then got him situated on it so he would not soil his seat. Since I did not trust him to successfully drive to the bottom of the hill (resulting in much more work on my part), I proceeded to figure out how to drive the damn car that had been "Hooterized". The gas pedal had apparently quit working and there was a cord to pull in order to speed up and let out to slow down. The three-hundred-yard trip down the hill and over to his

trailer was slow and arduous. Once we arrived, I had him strip down in the yard. I then dipped buckets of water out of his swimming pool and splashed them on his butt and legs until most of the foul mess was gone. I went in his

trailer and found a reasonably clean towel and pants. I watched while he dried himself off and put on the pants, then instructed him to go to bed and to not come back up the hill again that night. He complied. By the time I got back to the campfire Autumn and Andrea were ready to call it a night and headed back to La Crosse. I really couldn't blame them.

Once we had the cabin and yard cleaned and the three of us moved in, I called the dumpster folks and had them haul away the last of the three dumpsters. These units were so large that one end was a hinged door that could be swung all the way open providing walk-in access. That made it a lot easier to load stuff in efficiently thus getting a lot more crap in each one. We ended up completely filling all three.

All of the shit Mick had salvaged and promised to use one day. All of the stuff left behind from folks that Teri had kindly let stay in the cabin, and the shit-ton of crap left by Susan and her family. But finally, the place was free of all of the extraneous garbage. Then I

started work on restoring the cabin. I had to tear off the front porch, jack up the front of the house, replace the supporting beam then tear off and replace the lower three feet of the siding. I also had to do some other significant structural support underneath the cabin involving steel I- beams. But the rot had been stopped and the floor no longer swayed and squeaked when we walked through the cabin.

I had started some primo seeds in small beds inside under a standard light bulb and they were sprouting in high numbers.

I was not going to share the profits of my pot garden so I did all of the prep work myself which was considerable. On about May 20th, I figured that the chance of a late frost had passed so I transplanted the seedlings in into the secluded patch about one hundred yards above the cabin. I had about eighty healthy plants. Half of them would eventually show their male sexual characteristics and have to be pulled out and burned. But forty females would yield a profitable harvest.

Hooter had managed to fuck up his golden ticket by trying to hit Dr. Pauline up one time too many for extra dexies. He still received his disability check but no more pharmaceutical speed. So, he was back to roaming the tri-county area ferreting out the sleaziest

of the sleazy to score meth that had been stepped on many times. Which all meant that he was spending less time cranking and more time doing booze and downers. For the most part he stayed out of my space and I stayed out of his even though we were living a mere three hundred yards apart. Then things started to go further downhill at the bottom of the hill.

Hooter Gets Crazier. Chapter Twelve. Hooter Spins Out.

By the end of the summer Pete, Oakley, and I had established a pretty good rhythm in regard to co-habiting and the sharing of the chores. Once the repairs had been made on the cabin and Oakley had started his junior year at Viroqua High, the local public school, we were well into putting up firewood for the winter. But the encroaching fall cool down inspired us to shift that into higher gear. The pot crop was looking very good and nearing harvest. I was feeling confident about pretty much everything. Except Hooter. He had already violated both of the tenets I had put in place for him to be able to “live out his life at the Gulch” after having sold me back his share of the land.

Just when the Mrs. next door had felt safe to resume accompanying her husband Red to visits at their cabin adjacent to the Gulch, Hooter had resumed showing up banging on their door in the middle of the night looking for beer or money. Red had opened the door with his nine- millimeter semi-automatic pistol in hand and waved Hooter away. But the damage had been done and his wife would no longer join him on his trips to their cabin. Red was pissed and so was I.

Then the cops showed up looking for Hooter regarding some minor violation. Since he had not been home at the time they left a note on his trailer door instructing him to contact them immediately. Instead of driving to the sheriff's office as I had strongly recommended, Hooter went to a pay phone and called to find out what they wanted. When they offered to drive down to the Gulch to meet with him, Hooter responded: "Don't come down here. Rick doesn't want any cops coming around. I will come to your office." When he reported that to me, I saw red. The same color as the red flag he had likely created in the minds of the cops. "Rick doesn't want cops around. Why doesn't Rick want cops around? Rick must be doing something illegal. Rick is probably growing pot." At least that was the way I imagined it.

I had half a mind to kick his ass off the land right then and there. But the poor bastard was broke, unable to get his next fix, and had no real friends to help him out. So, after giving him a loud and large piece of my mind I put the eviction option on hold.

With me keeping very close track of Oakley's comings and goings and having frequent contact with all of his teachers he was doing great in school. At the end of the first quarter, he had all A s and B s and had made the honor roll. Every Sunday morning the three of us would take the pick-up into the

woods, cut, load, then drive back to the cabin and unload the firewood in time for the noon kick-off of the Packer game. I was beginning to harvest the bumper pot crop and Hooter seemed to have taken my message to heart. But he could only go so long without doing speed and that time had expired.

Without informing me of his plan (because I would have vetoed it in the strongest possible terms) Hooter entered the emergency room one morning at the local hospital and asked to speak to the head nurse. When she approached him, he told her: "I have a loaded gun in my pocket but I am not going to hurt you or anyone else. But if you do not give me some speed, I am going to blow my brains out right here." The nurse

was cool calm and collected. She knew that he had previously made numerous forays into the emergency room in unrequited attempts to procure various prescription drugs. She told him that she had something pressing to attend to and that he should wait in the conference room until she could fulfill his request. So, wait he did.

In about ten minutes his wait was over. Enough cops to completely fill the room came pouring in, threw Hooter to the ground, cuffed him and took him to the county jail. From there he was soon transferred to the psych unit at Gunderson hospital in La Crosse where he was under the care of their head psychiatrist Dr. G. He and Dr. G had a long history of

animosity and it quickly got even uglier during that visit.

Upon entering the ward, strapped to a gurney, Hooter yelled at him insisting “I can only be treated with addictive drugs because if you shoot me up with non-addictive drugs, I will get a permanent boner that will hurt like a fuck. Then you will have to cut a hole in my dick to let the blood out so my it will go down. If you give me non-addictive drugs and I get a boner, I am going to sue your ass”. His logic was ridiculous but somehow turned out prophetic.

It is never a good idea to get sideways with the tending shrink who is the head of the locked ward where you will be residing until he decides what to do with you. And threatening a law suit is the absolute quickest way to “get sideways”. It was especially true with Dr. G who was known far and wide as a cruel and vindictive son of a bitch who had a horrible impact on the lives of the most vulnerable folks in the county, the exact population that he lorded his authority over. Besides being the head of that particular hospital’s psych ward, he was also the head of the county’s psychiatric outpatient treatment center and the head of the county home’s long-term locked psychiatric unit.

He did have Hooter injected with the “non-addictive drugs” which inexplicably did give him an erection that could only be alleviated by cutting and draining blood from his penis.

Hooter yelled and threatened every time they had contact. Dr. G put him on very strong anti-psychotic drugs then transferred him to the long-term facility at the county home where he spent the next six months, where I visited him several times. Due to the massive doses of anti-psychotic drug he was on, he was barely responsive. After that Dr. G sent him to the state mental institution in Mendota (a maximum security

locked facility) where he spent the next three and a half years. I visited him occasionally but he was so drugged out he could barely speak. One time when I went to see him, he said “Rick, if I can’t even talk to you, who can I talk to.” It broke my heart but did not weaken my resolve. I told him that if he ever got out, he could not move back to the Gulch.

When they finally decided to release him after he had been locked up for four years, the court appointed a guardian to oversee his person *and* property. Some local guy that was doing it to fulfill his Christian duty. The guy contacted me and asked what he should do with what remained of Hooter’s property at the Gulch. The trailer had been leaking, molding, and falling apart. The pool had long since collapsed and was a pile of garbage. There was absolutely nothing left of value and I asked the guy to haul it all away and clean the site which he did.

Upon his release, Hooter was placed in a medium security rural half-way house far out in the country but still in the same county as the Gulch. He could venture outside but could only leave the property on closely monitored group outings. I wasn’t keen on resuming a relationship with him and apparently, he wasn’t either so we had no contact during the time he lived there. After about six months they moved him

into a “supervised apartment” on the busy main street in Viroqua. Staff stopped by two or three times a week to make sure that he was staying sober which he was. All he had left was his cigmos.

For four years he had been in locked facilities where smoking was forbidden so he was far past the addiction, but not the habituation. As soon as he got out, he once again took up the nasty habit immediately. His life in his new welfare funded apartment consisted of smoking and watching the tube. I finally stopped by to see how he was doing. Never having been a complainer he did not start then. Sure, he missed doing speed but was glad to be out of lock up and did not want to risk going back.

By that point I was working for an agency in Viroqua that served adults with cognitive disabilities so I drove past his place twice a day on my way to and on the way home from the job. On several occasions I had witnessed Hooter darting

into traffic, seemingly without looking, to cross the street and buy cigarettes at the convenience store on the other side. Several other friends had observed the same behavior and we all agreed that it was just a matter of time until he got run over.

A few months later that was exactly what happened. Hoot was hit hard by a passing car that he had stepped right in front of without looking. The lady driving the car stopped and approached Hooter who was writhing on the road struggling to get to his feet.

“Stay right there, young man, I am calling for an ambulance on my cell phone.

“No, I’m alright.” Replied Hoot. “Just help me get up.”

She did and he immediately continued his journey across the street to buy ciggies. He made it back to his apartment and hunkered down. Word spread quickly of the accident and I left work to go check on him. He told me he felt a little “busted up” but was OK. He didn’t look too bad so I just told him to go to the hospital if he started to feel worse. Which he did later that night.

When he arrived at the hospital feeling very sick, he was not welcomed with open arms. His many attempts to finagle drugs from them through various scams culminating in the “I will blow my brains out if you don’t give me speed” ruse had made him persona-non-grata. And except for a few minor abrasions and bruises he didn’t look that bad. They gave him a cursory exam and said “Go home Hooter, you’re fine and we’re not giving you any drugs” which

was their final message as they ushered him out the door. But this time he was not fine. He returned home and soon died of internal bleeding alone in his dingy apartment.

It was an ignominious ending to a hell-bent life of extremely risky behavior that could easily have killed or crippled several dozen men. But he had survived all of those escapades only to be mowed down trying to score cigarettes.

Hooter had instructed his third wife Mary, who he was still close to post-divorce, to have his remains cremated immediately upon his death and to not have any kind of memorial. We went ahead anyway and had a small ceremony in his memory in my cabin at the Gulch. About a dozen folks showed up including a couple of guys from the Northern Comfort band. We played and sang his favorite songs

including the one he always sang with them at the Gulch parties, "Give Me Three Steps". We told Hooter stories and his first ex, Jane brought pictures from when they had started dating in high school. It was a sweet and fitting remembrance focusing only on the "fun" Hoot. The guy who would give you the shirt off his back or his second to last hit of speed. The guy who you would jump into a junker car with and drive

two thousand miles to the Pacific coast on four bald tires. The guy who you watched go from having no time for kids to becoming the loving godfather to one of your own. Uncle Hooter.