

## **Uncle Sam Wants Me Chapter Seven: Mick and Dick Go to Canada**

**It was a dark and cold winter night when I left Sue. I had nowhere to go and no plans to speak of. But when I had resisted the urge to off myself that night at her parent's house I had pledged to "Do something that I had always wanted to do and to hell with the consequences". Assassinate Richard Nixon?, move to the country?, travel the world?, have sex with Raquel Welch? I just needed to figure out what combination of those or a thousand other fantasizes I might want to pursue.**

**My good buddy John B., had an antique shop on the first floor of an old rooming house, that included use of the basement, near the downtown area of Cedar Rapids. He set me up with a couch to sleep on in that chilly and damp unfinished basement and provided access to the bathroom in the shop upstairs. I helped him out with his business in return and we combined our resources to move some pot and LSD. The shop was great cover. People were coming and going all the time as was to be expected in a retail store, so our customers blended right in with the flow.**

As spring approached an idea began to germinate in my mind. Nixon was the President and I hated his guts. His poll numbers were strong and it looked like he was going to get re-elected come fall. I began to feel like I no longer wanted to live in a country that would choose an unhinged crook to lead the nation. Canada started to seem like a desirable alternative. Plus, I had long wanted to move to the country and possibly build my own cabin in the woods. Canada had plenty of wilderness.

I shared my thoughts with my best friend Mick K. to see if he would be interested in going along. He was. So, on a sunny spring day in 1972 we loaded up my 1959 Volvo to the brim and headed north to the border. I planned on continuing to sell pot and hopefully grow some once I arrived in Canada. When we got to the border crossing south of Thunder Bay, Ontario I had a half pound of good Mexican weed, some excellent seeds, and various paraphernalia strapped around my mid-section under my clothes. Winter had not yet ended in that neck of the woods and it was snowing heavily when we pulled into the border crossing after dark.

When we naively told the custom's officer that we were planning on living in Canada, he told us to park our car and come inside. He then pointed out that we would have to speak to an immigration officer since we planned on

**“immigrating”. The nearest one was in Thunder Bay and it would take him about two hours to get to the border crossing. We quickly realized that we had screwed up and I was getting a little nervous about the contraband under my clothing. After about ten minutes of the border patrol guy laying out what we had unleashed by saying we were going to “live” in Canada, he very sweetly gave us a do over. “Oh, what I meant to say was that we are just visiting Canada temporarily and maybe at some point in the future we might want to consider moving there.”**

**“OK, in that case you may proceed. Enjoy your *visit* to Canada.” He kindly responded. And we were in.**

**We quickly realized that there were no jobs and almost no housing options in Thunder Bay. We were directed to a Unitarian minister who was known to help US citizens trying to immigrate to Canada. He told us that we would be better served by going to Winnipeg where jobs and housing were much more readily available. His daughter’s boyfriend Justin, was getting ready to hitchhike back there the next day, as that was where he was from. He further stated that Justin would know some folks who might be willing to take us in on a temporary basis. We carefully and skillfully repacked the stuff in the car to create a small space for Justin to sit.**

The next evening, we pulled into Winnipeg with more snow coming down. It was Easter Sunday which fell on April second that year. Justin directed us to a large old house which he said housed a socialist political commune. He further stated that they were known to help folks like us out. When we arrived, we walked into the living room/dining room which were connected by pocket doors that had been opened up. Several tables had been placed end to end in order to accommodate the sixteen to eighteen folks who were just sitting down to Easter dinner. Justin introduced us and immediately everyone scooped over and two more chairs and two more plates were placed at the table. Justin thanked us for the ride and left. We began to dine with this large group of friendly strangers.

There was one American in the group. His name was Carl Trotter. Carl had enlisted in the Marines and was seriously injured in Viet Nam during a combat mission. He was shipped to Hawaii for medical treatment and recuperation. He was assured that he would never have to return to a Viet Nam again. When he got well enough to leave the hospital for periodic outings he got busted for possession of pot. The Marines told him that he would not be prosecuted for the possession charge but that he *would* be going back to the

**jungles of Viet Nam. Carl quickly deserted and ended up in Winnipeg and had his own room at the commune.**

**After dinner and some congenial talk around the table, Carl invited us up to his room on the third floor. We went up there, got stoned, and Carl serenaded us with some original songs on his guitar. He also said we could sleep on the floor in his small room as long as we liked. We liked. Carl also knew some folks that would be interested in buying some of the pot that I had smuggled across the border. Great first four hours in Winnipeg. We had a free place to stay, plenty of marijuana to smoke, and a few bucks coming in from sales to Carl's friends. What more could we ask?**

**We soon found ourselves with no clean clothes so we went to the neighborhood laundromat. There just happened to be two very cute young women who were also doing their laundry. We hit it off immediately. I made a connection with Jude and Mick with Michelle. My good luck, as Michelle had a boyfriend and Jude did not. Jude was smart, funny, and good looking with long strawberry blonde hair and green eyes. The four of us were soon hanging out on a regular basis. Mick and Michelle platonically, Jude and I not.**

Turned out that Jude was about to begin the process of moving into an old farmhouse outside of Winnipeg, at the end of a dead-end street in the tiny burg of Headingly, Manitoba. The front yard ended right at the bank of the Assiniboine River which was wide at that point and flowed east into Winnipeg. A couple of weeks later we volunteered to help her move the last of her stuff in, and met her roommates Penny and Harvey. The house was Penny's childhood home and her mother had recently moved into Winnipeg with her new boyfriend Morris. Harvey was Penny's best friend who had grown up next door. Mick and I were bowled over by how sweet the place was. The farmland had been sold off but there was still a big spot for gardening, several outbuildings, the river, plus an unoccupied bedroom.

As the day progressed and much pot was smoked, Penny could intuitively read the glint in our eyes. "I suppose you guys would like to move in too?" Before we could answer I asked Jude to go for a walk. We had only been a couple for a few weeks and I didn't know if she would be up for having a live-in boyfriend. Fortunately, she was. I also conferred with Mick who was all in as well. When I reported our strong interest back to Penny, she said "I will ask my mom and if it is OK with her, you guys can move in. But you will have to help with household chores, upkeep on the place, and chip in on

the groceries.” We assured her that we would be glad to oblige.

About one week later, Jude invited us to come out and meet with Penny. We figured it must be good news as she could have said “no” over the phone. We were “in”, but with just one condition. It was a great condition. “Mom says that if you two agree to work for her boyfriend Morris in his construction business, you can live here rent free”. I had hit the tri-fecta. Beautiful live-in girlfriend, amazing home in the country, and a job. Mick had hit the bi-fecta. I would move into Jude’s room with her and Mick would take the unoccupied one.

We quickly moved out of Carl’s room, thanking him profusely for his generous hospitality, and moved into the farmhouse on the outskirts of Headingly. The next day we drove into Winnipeg and met with Morris. He was a short, squat, balding guy that was older than us but younger than our parents. He had us get in his car and he drove us to a house that he had a contract to paint. He gave us the details of how he wanted it done and asked us if we could do it. “Yes, we would be glad to have the job” we replied.

**There were fits and starts and bumps in the road. First of all, Mick preferred to sleep until about mid-day. Initially I tried to gently cajole him to rise earlier so we could maybe start painting by ten am. That produce mixed results, so I told him that I would be leaving at nine am whether he was ready or not. That usually worked. We would knock off around four, so we were still only getting in about six or so hours a day. Plus, we were not experienced painters resulting in the job taking longer than expected. Morris was getting antsy as he wanted the job finished so he could get paid and assign us to his next project.**

**Mick had developed about half a dozen nasty looking warts on his hands that were slowing down his already slow pace of work. After talking it over we came to the conclusion that he should have them removed in order to get back to normal. Since Canada had socialized health care, the procedure was free, even for us “illegal immigrants”, what a concept. In the process of removing the warts they dug deep holes into Mick’s hand to make sure that they had gotten all of the “roots”.**

**By that point Jude was working a clerical job on the west side of Winnipeg while our painting gig was on the east side. It worked out well as we would time our departure from the painting gig so as to arrive at her place of employment just as she was getting off work.**



**On the day that Mick had the surgery we knocked off extra early for him to get the warts removed. After that, we planned to hook up with two local chaps that we had befriended, Zoltan B. and Laurie S. They wanted us to pick them up so they could do some acid and hang out at the farmhouse that evening. And they also had some doses for sale. We picked them up at Zoltan's mom's house. She was at work so we did a little business before we took off to pick up Jude. I bought two hits of crumbly orange acid wrapped in tin foil that was called Orange Owsley. One for me and one for Mick. As we left Zoltan's place, Laurie asked if we could stop at Mc Donald's as he did not want to do the acid on an empty stomach. We still had some time till Jude got off work and it was hardly out of the way, so I said "Sure".**

**When we got to Mickey D's, Zoltan and Laurie both did their hits before we went in to order food. Mick said he was going to pass because of the huge divots on his hands. He thought they might freak him out while he was tripping. I decided to wait until we picked up Jude so that I would not get off until we were back to the farmhouse. About five minutes later I changed my mind. While we were standing in line waiting to order our Mc Food, I started to feel like I was missing out. So, I went back out to the parking lot and opened the passenger door to the car. I then opened the glove compartment and**

**pulled out the tin foil packet that contained the two hits. It had started gently raining on the drive from Zoltan's place and the pavement had some growing puddles. As I carefully tried to open the tin foil, one of the tabs of crumbly orange acid sproinged out and landed in a shallow puddle and immediately began to dissolve. It only took me took a second to realize what I needed to do and I sprang into action. I dropped to my knees and licked the melting LSD off of the wet pavement.**

**As I stood up, I happened to look to my right. There was a stereotypically nice, middle class, Canadian family sitting in their car with their burgers stuck half way to their mouths. The sight of a long-haired hippie lapping feverishly from the pavement had frozen both their hands and their startled expressions with eyes wide, into place. I watched them for a few seconds but they did not move. I decided not to stick around until they regained their ability to move and possibly take some sort of action. I went in and hurried the guys back to the car and we took off to go get Jude. We were laughing and joking about the incident as I signaled for a left turn and was waiting at a dead stop for the light to turn green.**

**All of a sudden it felt like a nuclear bomb had detonated as there was a powerful explosion causing the car and passengers to careen one way then another. A few seconds**

after we came to rest, I realized that we had been rear-ended by the car behind us. As we waited for the cops to arrive, I was starting to get off. It did not take long for the cops to complete their report as the other guy was obviously in the wrong. The Volvo was in bad shape but it still ran. We quickly proceeded to pick up Jude and fled to the sanctuary of the farmhouse.

As usual being inside while tripping made me feel claustrophobic. It had started to rain profusely by that point. The mosquitos were usually pretty bad in the yard after dark. But I figured that the hard rain would ground them. So, I stripped off my clothes and went out to cavort naked in the rain. The mosquitos were not fazed by the rain and they were big suckers. After about five minutes I was driven back inside with about twenty good sized welts all over my body.

A few days later we finished up with the painting job. Morris requested that I meet with him privately. He had good news and bad news. The good news was that next week he was starting a project to build a lake house, from the ground up, in a secluded wooded area about seventy-five miles east of Winnipeg and he wanted me to be on the crew. The bad news was that he did not want Mick. I felt bad about Mick but saw it as a golden opportunity for me. My goal was to build a cabin in the woods and I would be able to learn how to do it,

hands on, while also earning more much needed cash as we had been smoking more of the pot than selling it.

I shared the news with Mick and he seemed to take it in stride. The next Monday morning I showed up at Morris's place at the appointed early hour, got into a van with the rest of the crew, who I was meeting for the first time, and off we went. The head carpenter was a gentle long-haired Mennonite man named Amos. Morris's son Tom was the second carpenter and I was the designated gofer. Morris was driving the van but was not going to be doing any "hands on" work. When we got to the site Morris showed us the existing house where we would be bunking. It was close to the road and about one-eighth of a mile from the lake and the site of the cabin we would be erecting. After moving our gear and foodstuffs into the house and getting a tour of the sight, Morris rolled out the plans and drove a few stakes into the ground to indicate where and how the cabin was to be orientated. He then left us to it and headed back to Winnipeg.

Thank goodness Amos knew what he was doing because Tom and I sure did not. We started digging the holes for the concrete footers which we poured the next day. By the time Morris came to pick us up on Friday afternoon the floor joists

were all in place on top of the new footers and the materials for the walls had been moved to the site.

By the second week we started putting up the walls and had settled into a groove that seemed to be working smoothly. Amos read the blueprints, assigned tasks, and did the essential carpentry. Tom did minor carpentry while I wrangled materials and cleaned up scraps created by the other two. Once we had reached this comfortable pace, and I could perform my chores without such a high level of concentration, I characteristically started running my mouth off. I had quickly realized that Tom was an avid fan of unregulated, unfettered capitalism like his dad, so I started baiting and debating him. “After the revolution this will be a socialist commune” I taunted. He and I had daily arguments about economic models while Amos just shook his head and smiled patiently.

By the third week my radical socialist perspective had gotten back to Morris via his son. When I showed up to ride to the jobsite in Morris’s van on Monday, he took me aside and told me I was no longer needed because he was trying to reduce labor costs. While that was going on Tom must have informed Amos because he came right over and interceded.

**“Dick is doing a really good job and if you let him go you will have to pay Tom or me more money to do the same work that he is now doing for less money”. As much as Morris hated my ideology the idea of spending more money was even more repugnant. I was back in, but by the end of the week of me continuing to shoot my mouth off I was fired for good. Well, even though my pot and most of my money was gone, at least I had Jude and Mick and my beautiful farmhouse on the river.**

**When I arrived back at the place to share the news of being fired there was some news awaiting *me* as well. Jude had decided to hitchhike out to Vancouver, British Columbia to hang out with her best girlfriend and Mick had decided to go along. My car was in bad shape, I was almost broke, and the idea of hitching two thousand miles to a place I had never been was not appealing. Then Penny chimed in and told me that since I was no longer working for Morris, I would have to move out of the farmhouse. Quadruple gut punch. Lost my job, my girlfriend, my best buddy, and my home. Crappola.**

**Fortunately, Zoltan had moved out of his mom’s house and he and Laurie had rented a very nice older house near downtown Winnipeg. I used most of my remaining money to chip in on the first month’s rent. Since Morris had been paying me in cash, I had not needed any documentation in order to work for him. But I was going to need some to obtain my next job.**

**I was able to score a stolen Social Insurance Card which is the Canadian equivalent to a Social Security Card. The name on the card was Gene Walker so that was the name I used applying for jobs. If there had been any doubt before, it was now erased. I was officially a law-breaking illegal immigrant. I quickly got a job at the local Esso gas station working for Mr. Brown, the most bigoted individual that I have ever met. He basically disparaged every one that was not a white, male, heterosexual, protestant, and/or lacked English ancestry.**

**There was a large Ukrainian population in Winnipeg. They were smart, kind, extremely hard working, and went out of their way to get along with their neighbors. But to Mr. Brown they were “Stupid fucking Ukes”. One day after a long tirade to me and the station mechanic on the subject, he finally ran out of steam and left for the day. As he was pulling away the mechanic said “My wife is Ukrainian”. I said “Don’t listen to that asshole, he hates everyone and he’s full of shit”.**

**Like all new living situations, it took Zoltan, Laurie, and I a little while to get comfortable sharing the space together. Zoltan and his mom had escaped Yugoslavia during the Soviet crackdown when their Premier Tito tried to distance himself from the USSR. Laurie and I were pretty similar guy’s type of**

guys. Zoltan spoke with an accent and was quieter and more withdrawn and studious in addition to being one of the top chess players in Winnipeg.

One hot Saturday morning when I did not have to work, Laurie and I did some acid and went to a huge park in Winnipeg. As the acid was coming on strong, we wandered over to where a lively game of cricket was being played. The players were all immigrants from the West Indies. They looked especially black in their crisp white uniforms. I was genuinely interested in how the game worked and tried hard to concentrate on learning the rules. But between the acid roaring through my brain and Laurie's goofy impressions of some old Englishman's accent, mannerisms, and ludicrous comments regarding the game, I dissolved into uncontrolled laughter. This drew many disapproving looks and raised eyebrows from the serious onlookers around us.

We finally went back to the house and put on some music. One of Zoltan's friends, Ron, who I had met before and who seemed like a smart friendly guy, came over to pick him up for some activity. Tripping on acid and watching them briefly interact before they took off triggered an unassailable revelation. "They're gay" I realized. I wondered why it had never occurred to me before. I never spent much time thinking about "gayness" as it was not a big deal to me one



way or the other, but obviously the acid had sharpened my receptors. And it turned out to be absolutely true, although I never did figure out if they were in a romantic relationship or not. And it had zero impact on the way I felt about either one of them.

A couple of weeks later Ron brought his sharp little green MGT into Mr. Brown's garage to have it repaired. It was back-firing whenever he stepped on the gas. I had to do some hand-signaling from behind the old bigot, to Ron, so he would not address me as Dick. Ron was quick on the uptake and followed my lead. After Ron left, Mr. Brown had the mechanic put the MGT up on the hoist. Then the bastard went around and made a list of all the items he could pressure Ron into thinking were about to wear out and disable the vehicle. He had correctly figured that Ron knew nothing about cars and would be an easy mark for his con. I listened in as Mr. Brown called Ron and insisted that he needed new tires, brakes, shocks, and a couple other items that would cost him a total of over seven-hundred bucks in 1972 Canadian dollars. When I got off shift, I called Ron to tell him that it was all bullshit and he should take his car somewhere else. He did not heed my advice. The next afternoon while I was working, he picked up his car and paid for all of the un-needed parts and labor. As he pulled out of the drive, his car back-fired twice.

**Shortly after that Penny called and said that there was an important looking letter from the United States Selective Service with my name on it. I drove right out to Headingly. Standing there in the beautiful yard that had recently seemed like heaven on earth before it had all come crashing down, I opened the envelope. The paperwork inside informed me that I was to report for induction into the armed forces back in Cedar Rapids, in about four weeks. The local draft board back in Cedar Rapids had found out that Sue and I were no longer living together. My second draft notice.**