

Uncle Sam Wants Me. Chapter Eight. Getting Out Of The Draft Again.

My Canadian friends assumed that I would write something scurrilous on it and send it back since I was outside of the jurisdiction of the selective service. They were wrong. I had no intention of giving up my right to live and travel in the country of my birth, just as I had no intention of fighting in that wretched war. I had come to this position through a long and tortuous process of weighing various options and odds and seeing many of my close friends come out of the conflict fundamentally changed. And those were the ones who were “lucky” enough to make it back at all.

My plan was to march right into to the draft board office, back in Cedar Rapids, and inform them that I believed the people of Viet Nam had the right to determine their own course without the heavy hand of the U.S military propping up one of the sides. I intended to inform them that in fact I thought that the Viet Cong were much like our own revolutionary forces who had forged our country’s independence from England. In the late 60s this approach would not have stood a chance, but by 1972 the military had begun to realize that drafting radicals and anti-war activists was much more trouble than they were worth. So, it might have actually worked.

I set out for Iowa with only my right thumb for transport. In order to finance the journey, I had purchased an ounce of

black Nepalese hashish with my last paycheck from the Mr. Browns' Esso station. I had then weighed the hash into one-gram tin foil wrapped packets for retail distribution to my friends back in C.R. At the time hashish was about 50% cheaper in Canada do to less stringent border control. Those packets were cavalierly stuffed into the top front pocket of my bib overalls which were adorned with colorful patches including a Canadian flag, front and center. My outfit matched my long hair and beard and was sure to catch the eye of the U.S customs officer as I strolled into the border crossing on foot. The last ride had dropped me about a ¼ mile from the U.S.A.

I had crossed the border back and forth many times after I had moved to Canada six months previous. The routine seemed very predictable. They would do a fairly thorough search of my bag but leave my person unmolested. So even though I had a pocket full of hash, I jauntily swung my bag up onto the bench for examination and gave the officer a big smile. Maybe a bit too jauntily and a bit too big of smile. He did a cursory search of my bag then told me to "Empty out your pockets". I was stunned by his lack of adherence to what I had come to believe was the proper protocol. I took out everything except the contraband as the color quickly drained from my face. He then pointed at the bulge just to the right of the Canadian flag and said "That too". With my voice cracking I said "I need to go to the bathroom". Being the seasoned veteran that he was, he did not fall for this subterfuge.

A couple of hours later I was sitting in the Sheriff's office in Pembina County, North Dakota looking at the little mound of hash packets sitting on his desk. The feds at the border had decided I was too small of fish for them and turned me over to authorities to face state charges.

The Sheriff entered the room. He was a tall rawboned man of middle age, with severe haircut, and looked to all the world to be a class-A redneck. He said "Will you answer a couple of questions for me?" I replied "It depends what they are." I had no intention of ratting anyone out. His only question took me by complete surprise. He pointed at the pile of individually wrapped tin foil packets and said "How many joints is that?" I considered the possibility that this was a trick question but I couldn't fathom how it could be used against me. It seemed that he genuinely did not know that hash was not commonly smoked in "joints" and that he was trying to determine if this was a case of simple possession or possession with intent. So, I rolled out a bold face lie and stated "Three". I figured that if he challenged me on it, I would call for papers and spin up some big fat hash joints.

I was in fact booked for the lesser possession charge. Unfortunately, at the time, North Dakota law made possession of marijuana a misdemeanor and possession of hash a felony punishable by one to five in the mean old state prison in Bismark. I was processed into the jail by one of the deputies. It was a very poor county and inmates wore their own clothes and shoes minus belts and shoe laces. There

were six other guys sharing the cell block with me. They were all locals, all young, all French-Indians, and all in on alcohol related charges. Quick historical/cultural tutorial: The French colonized in a very different way from the English. Instead of obliterating the indigenous culture, the French combined and entwined their culture and intermarried with the natives. This resulted in a unique and separate culture that was actually fairly sustainable to the both parties. But when the French pulled out of North America, the French-Indians became pariahs. Considered by the Euro Americans to be Indians and considered by the Natives to be ethnically polluted, they did not even possess tribal rights. As a result, they were some of the poorest and most powerless people on the continent.

For the most part my new roommates were docile and depressed as they contemplated their futures in prison. One guy however was very large and very angry and scared the living shit out of me with his frequent outbursts that included screaming and beating the wall with his shoe. I figured that when he tired of smacking inanimate objects, I might be next.

Shortly after I entered the cell block, I realized that one of the packets of hash had been overlooked and was still in my pocket. Most of our meals were TV dinners. That was back when those came on compartmentalized aluminum serving trays. Seeing as I had lots of free time, I fashioned a piece of one of the trays into a very serviceable little pipe in the privacy of my cell. I kept this all under wraps for several days while I got to know my fellow prisoners. They knew what I

was in for and their attitudes ranged from tolerant to token solidarity. The Sheriff lived right up above the jail. But after the evening meal was served, we would not see him until breakfast. Also, we were never locked into our individual cells and always had the option of ranging around the cellblock twenty-four hours a day.

One evening as we were sitting around fantasizing about what we would be doing if we were free, they drinking, me smoking, they did concede that they would smoke dope if alcohol was not available. That was my cue. I walked to my cell and returned, displaying the pipe and smoking material. Five of the six got big eyes, jumped up, and almost ran to their cells. I guess they were afraid of being caught and *incarcerated*. That left the big bad angry dude and myself. He said "I'll smoke that shit with ya". We ventured around to the back of the cell block, under the window, and got high right there in state custody.

After nine days we all went to court at the same time. They all had the same unbelievably shitty lawyer and thanks to white privilege, I had some young, energetic, idealistic, guy that turned out to be very effective. They all got shipped off to serve disproportionately long prison sentences and I got a year on probation with the possibility of having the charges dropped if I could keep my nose clean for the year. Fat chance. The kicker was that I could not return to my home in Canada. I had to go back to Cedar Rapids to serve my year of probation . And since I was now completely broke, I would be

depending on the tender mercies of my parents for food and lodging. Crap.

My folks and I had been sharply divided on issues of politics, pot, and lifestyle for a long time. I didn't normally ask for or take anything from them and we maintained a strained but what had evolved into a generally civil relationship. My friends in Canada had thrown my bail and the lawyer was court appointed so mom and dad didn't know what was going on until I showed up at their doorstep with my tale of woe. My arrest and assignment to state supervision had caused my draft notice to be put on hold until my probation was over. But I needed a place to stay and a job. Despite our differences my folks came through big time. They let me stay with them with only a minimum of "we told you so" and got me a job working on the production line at the same company they both worked at in administrative positions. Still, I chafed at being under their roof. I moved into a rooming house as soon I got my first paycheck. It was appropriately dismal but at least I was once again my own man.

When I had arrived in Cedar Rapids I had immediately gone to the offices of probation and parole to report in and let them know where I was staying with my folks. I gave this information to the receptionist who asked me who my probation officer was. I told her that I had not been assigned one yet as this was my first visit there. By the time I moved to the rooming house it had been a couple of months and I had

not heard from them. So, I figured that there was no blinding hurry to give them my new address.

A week later as I lay on my bed contemplating my improving fortunes there was a knock on the door. It was two probation officers. As they stormed into my shabby little room, they accused me of evading them and being a major drug trafficker in town. I had about five bucks' cash, a pinch or two of pot, and I had in fact previously reported my original residence at my folk's house. I laughed all the way down to the county jail until I realized I was being held without bond, awaiting pick-up by the Sheriff from North Dakota. After being returned to North Dakota, I would begin my one to five in the only state prison at Bismark. My hopes for the future where abruptly cancelled. And I had deeply embarrassed and hurt my folks. They had the unfortunate task of informing people they had worked with for decades, that their son Richard would not be coming back to work as he was in the slammer and would be for a long, long time.

I ended up spending fourteen days in the Linn County jail knowing that the sheriff from North Dakota could be picking me up at any time. At one point the jailers cleared out the cellblock that I was in and jammed all of the inmates into other cellblocks that were already pretty full. I was lodged with a young man named Aaron D. who was facing trial for fatally shooting a probation officer. He seemed like a nice guy to me and I was not a big fan of probation officers at that point.

I had decided that my best bet to avoid doing one to five years in North Dakota state prison was to escape custody of the county jail in Cedar Rapids. I formulated a plan to make myself very sick in hopes of being transported to the hospital. I figured it would be much easier to get out of there than the jail. I had already been fasting for a few days. Once I moved in with Aaron, I started asking for two aspirin every night “for headaches”. I told Aaron my plan and he also asked for two aspirins every night every night.

Between he and I, we had amassed twenty-four aspirin and I had not eaten in seven days, I downed them all. The first part of the plan worked like a charm. I became violently ill. I experienced extreme dizziness and started dry heaving continually. The jailers refused to get me medical care and were willing to let me expire right then and there. When it was time for all the inmates to be locked in their cells, Aaron tried to help me out by refusing to go in the cell with me. He said to the guards, “You are already trying to frame me for one murder, if this guy dies, you’ll try to frame me for that too.”

It worked. They led me out of the cell as I could not walk by myself. But instead of taking me to the hospital they put me back into the empty cellblock they had cleared out a few days previous. I lay in my bunk all night and realized that they would let me expire before they would send me to the hospital. It pissed me off and hardened my determination to

survive no matter what. Sometime during the night, they threw a drunk guy in the far end of the cellblock. He spent the rest of the night howling for a blanket. When morning came, he walked down to my cell and asked me if I was alright. I weakly mumbled "I am very sick, can't get up, and need to eat. Could get up you please bring my breakfast tray over from where the guards left it." He went and fetched it and set it on my chest as I requested. It took me several hours to eat it all, taking a few well chewed bites at a time and washing it down with a lot of water. Within twenty-four hours I was feeling much better and could get up and move around. During that time, a third inmate had joined the cellblock. When I found out that his name was Bobby M., I knew by reputation that he was a major heroin dealer, an addict and one of the most dangerous guys in town.

He also turned out to be intelligent and charming. We talked about our experiences in jail and books we had read. He had only read one; Manchild in the Promise Land. We played a lot of checkers to pass the time. At one point he said "Dick, you and I are friends in here but if you ever see me outside, cross the street and get the hell away from me. Because my only true love is heroin and I will demand that you give me everything you have so I can buy it. If you don't, I will beat you bloody cause I gotta have my heroin." I took his word for it. And a few years later, I did see him walking down the street and I did get the hell out of there.

As it turned out there was a judge in town who did not believe that a probation violation canceled a person's right to bail. After two weeks of thinking I was about to be shipped off to Bismark for an extended proctology exam, one day a guard told me that I was being released on bond thanks to my dad procuring adequate counsel and posting my bail of one hundred U.S. dollars.

My lawyer had also filed to have the charge of probation violation dropped as I *had* reported when I arrived in the area. This caused the supervisor of the probation and parole office to re-evaluate my case. Meanwhile, I sat shell shocked back at my folk's house. My room at the Hotel Desperation had been cleaned out when it didn't seem like I was getting out of jail any time soon. One day I received an unexpected call. It was the head guy at the Probation & Parole office wondering if my father and I would like to come down and discuss possible options for me. Normally I would have had no truck with these bastards and would have looked forward to fighting it out in court. But two weeks in jail waiting to be sent to sodomy camp in North Dakota had had a profound effect on me. I was no longer the fiery rebel ready to take on all comers. I just wanted to crawl under a rock and hide.

The next day dad and I reported to the supervisor's office. He laid it out in simple terms. He could send my file back to North Dakota and tell them he was not accepting me as a client with no mention of the unpleasantness. He explained that that might result in North Dakota letting me go

unsupervised for the year or they might decide to bring me back up there to serve hard time. Or we could start fresh and I would be assigned a new officer from his office. If I made it through the remainder of the year with no further problems, I would get the original deal and the possession of hashish charges would be dropped. Between the nine days in North Dakota jail, the fourteen in Cedar Rapids jail, and the specter of a large swarthy cell mate in Bismark, I was not in a gambling mood.

I told him that I would accept his offer of a “fresh start” with a new probation officer. He was visibly pleased with this development and his demeanor became like that of a kindly uncle. He stated, “I can see that you and your father have a very close relationship and that it will be key to being successful in making it through the remainder of probation.” As he warmed to his new role as my friend and mentor he turned to my dad and asked him “If you come home from work and see evidence that Richard is using marijuana would you be willing to call and inform us?” My dad, who is as straight as they come, and usually deferential to authority, had also been affected by recent events. In a low growl he said “No, I wouldn’t”. The supervisor was momentarily taken aback, as was I, but quickly returned to his spiel. He thought that it was very important that I enter an outpatient drug rehab program. Back then there were no rehab programs for cannabis and the one he wanted me to enter was for heroin addicts. I knew some junkies who had gone through it and they would have laughed and laughed if I showed up saying I

was there to “get off the pot”. I declined but he continued to press the point. I had to tell him “no thanks” three times before he finally backed off and sent us on our way.

Jesus H. Christ. Maybe I wasn't going to prison after all. But I had learned how fragile freedom was. I was seriously spooked. I sat in my parent's house afraid to venture outside. When a car went by, I peeked around the curtain to see if a cop car might be pulling in. My folks, God bless them, were trying to get me my job back and generally being very easy on me after I had made all of their worst fears come true. Some of my friends knew what I had been going through and tried to get me to leave the house in order to do things with them. But the thought of being in public terrified me. And most of my friends were fellow pot heads which could put me right back in the shit. So, I was alone all day in my parent's house suffering from severe paranoia. “Just cause your paranoid doesn't mean they aren't out to get you.”

After about two weeks of nerve shattering anxiety, my buddy Robin showed up unannounced and said “Get in the car. We're going for a ride in the country.” And he wasn't taking no for an answer, so I eventually complied. As we headed out of town his joking and teasing started to relax me. After about twenty minutes, circling the outskirts of the city, we pulled down a wooded lane to a beautiful little secluded cabin. Robin explained that the cabin was home to two old friends of his and that they were very cool. He had been doing right by me so far, so I decided to trust him and meet

these guys. As we entered the cabin introductions were made and I had a stunning realization. These two guys were recovering junkies who ran the vaunted heroin rehab program that the Probation & Parole boss was so enamored of, and had wanted me to sign up for. All of a sudden, I felt like I was tripping on some bad acid. It was far too surreal. When one of the guys whipped out a joint and fired it up, I may have left my body for a minute. When it was passed to me, I numbly took a hit expecting storm troopers to emerge from the back room and haul me away. But no troopers appeared and I got righteously ripped. I ended up relaxing and thoroughly enjoying myself and the breathtaking irony of the situation.

My parents were able to get me re-instated at work, I got a nice little house, with my buddy Greg, in the Czech part of the city for \$85 a month. We grew a big garden, and I completed my year of probation successfully, meaning I did not get *caught* in any of my daily illicit behavior. This resulted in me being able to withdraw my guilty plea and the district attorney of Pembina County dropping the hash charge. Shortly after the end of that, I received my third notice from the draft board to report for induction and to apprise them of my legal status. I sent in the paper work showing that the charges of felony possession had been dropped and my record was technically clean. I figured this would put me back in the front of the line. But, according to their jaw dropping logic, I was no longer eligible to be drafted due to *moral turpitude* evidenced by my having plead guilty to felony hashish possession even though the charges had ultimately been

expunged. I was in effect declared morally unfit to kill people because I had been caught with a pocket full of cannabis.

All charges, including the probation violation, dropped *and* I was free from the draft. Hot damn. If I would have realized that this was possible, I would have walked into the local police station the day I turned eighteen and fired up a fatty.

Rewind back to “Introduction. The Tarot Reading:” The entire un-redacted summation of what Bruce L. stated at the conclusion of the reading of the cards, that day, was “The draft came up three times, but you will not have to serve”. The reading turned out to be spot on but did not relieve me from going through all of the requisite painful twists and turns.

The End.

Post Script. About a year or so after I had been found “Unfit To Serve Due To Moral Turpitude” and that thousand pound millstone had been lifted from my neck, I happened to run into my old high school history teacher, Steve Mueller, at a local bar. When he spotted me, he immediately drunkenly stumbled over. “You were right Dick!”, he shouted into my face, from a few inches away, while clutching my shoulder. “After they cancelled teacher deferments, I was immediately drafted and sent to Nam. Since I had a degree, I was assigned administrative work and was saved from combat, but it was

still a bitch. What happened to you? Did you get drafted by those fuckers?"