

Leaves  
In The  
Wind

Kit Cain

# Leaves In The Wind

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# CHAPTER 1.

A few years ago I had decided to write stories about interesting characters I'd met in my travels around the world, but unfortunately the stories turned out to be too short and I wasn't sure how to go about finding more characters who had a longer story to tell. I had put the project on hold indefinitely when whatever's in charge of my universe solved the problem for me—not without a price, however.

As I pulled my older motor home into its accustomed spot in the RV park just outside Las Vegas, I noticed a well-worn travel trailer parked in the adjoining space. Since I only spent the winter months here in this warm desert air, it must have arrived while I was back home in Washington. I hadn't been settled for more than a day than its owner strolled over while I was out covering the motor home wheel-wells and introduced herself as Gertrude Steinhart. She was short, in her late 40's, had graying hair, and wore clothes that were far too tight because she was built ... well ... sort of like a stump with two headlights.

Within a span of what I would guess was 20 minutes or so I had a complete history of her life including her native Indian and Jewish ancestry, her ex-husband (the S.O.B), her daughter's problems, car problems, trailer problems, personal injuries, love of—and problems with—horses, internet problems, and finally, questions about my life, which, up to that point, had been mostly problem free.

Being a neighborly sort of person I agreed to take a look at her kitchen drawer which had to be completely removed each time she wanted something out of it. And, after fixing that, there was the bathroom fan which had never worked. Judging from the various odors from the cat litter boxes, the bathroom drains, and the trailer's occupant the shower probably didn't work any better than the vent fan.

In all fairness, however, there was a certain amount of reciprocal energy interchange, as she had a telephone and internet connection I could use while waiting the two weeks for my own to be hooked up. The use thereof, however, turned out to be less and less. After I had repaired the leaky roof, the swamp cooler, the leaking sewage tank, and several cupboard doors—and also cleaning up a very sluggish computer—I started checking first to make sure she wasn't around before I stepped out of my motor home.

I had tried to make it clear that I was not retired with nothing to do. But interestingly enough, over the period of time all this went on, I was slowly becoming more than a

little impressed by the fact that she was at least trying to get her life together; she just didn't know how to start where the mechanical world was concerned. With a little encouragement and guidance she would do the work she could do herself and didn't mind working up a sweat in the desert sun to make her little trailer a more beautiful place. She had also learned to mobilize other male help around the park without also arousing too much animosity ... spreading the work load around, so to speak.

With this perspective, it's easy to understand how I felt when she knocked on my motor home door one morning as I was working on a screenplay. As I opened the door, I said,

"Gert, I'm real busy. Come back later."

"But I just need a little advice," she said.

"Uh-Oh," I thought to myself, "a master of male manipulation."

"What is it?" I asked.

"I've been given a nice little storage shed by Bill Connors and I need to figure out how to get it over here next to my trailer," she said.

"I'll meet you at 4:30 and we'll look at it," I said.

So, that afternoon we looked at the storage shed. Made of sheet metal and sitting on a plywood and 2X4 base, it had given the better part of its life to the sun and the desert's sandblasting winds. By the number of vacant holes, sagging plywood, and edges that didn't quite fit together, the building had been moved more than once and put back together by someone less than a handyman.

"Gert", I said, "this thing's too flimsy to lift with a backhoe or crane, and it looks like it might have to be disassembled and reassembled next to your travel trailer. I don't really want to tackle that job."

Undaunted by my unwillingness, Gert dropped in on several of her "friends" for further opinions. An hour later she was back.

"Dave thinks we can move it by putting a log under each side and then we can drag it to my place. I've got four people to help him tomorrow afternoon. Can you be there?"

I agreed to help and by the time I arrived at the shed the next afternoon, there were four men of varying sizes and abilities, none under 60 years of age, plus a number of even older "sidewalk superintendents." We all agreed that the best way to handle moving the shed was to raise it, one corner at a time, onto two, 6-inch Tamarisk logs that we found stacked nearby. Once done, it could then be hauled around the block. I was beginning to wonder how the hauling was going to happen when one of the men said:

"Monty should be here in a minute with a chain and his four-wheel-drive Jeep."

Sure enough, within two minutes, around the corner came a 15-year-old jeep that had seen better days and seemed to run more on three cylinders than its normal four. What stepped out of the vehicle was definitely one for the books ... not something you'd expect to find in a retirement park!

He was about 55, and had never cut—or trimmed—a hair on his face or head. A partly brown, partly gray, ponytail hung down his back to his waist, and his beard of soft gray hair seemed to stick close to his face, neck, and chin rather than hang loosely.

This was "Montana" LeFandra dressed perpetually in jeans and a large, loose-fitting shirt to cover up an extended and undisciplined belly. He looked more like a member of a motorcycle club than a member of retirement community, and this, I discovered later, was true to form. But looks can be deceiving—or can they?

Once a person spent some time around Montana—or "Monty" for short—you overlooked the outward appearances because he was always clean—except when he came out from under someone's car he been helping them fix—and he was always soft-spoken, cheerful, joking, and quick to laugh at himself. He was also a fixer of all manner of mechanical things, a trait which I quickly recognized as similar to my own, but he was even better at it than I, having spent most of his life working and playing with mechanical things ... particularly motorcycles.

He flipped the better half of his ever-present Camel cigarette onto the desert sand, opened the Jeep's back door, and out rattled a long piece of 3/8-inch chain.

"Hook it over the trailer ball," he said quietly, which we did, and off the whole contraption rattled with surprising ease down the paved road, around the block, and onto Gert's space in mere minutes. A few heaves and grunts later and we had the logs out and the shed sat in place right where Gert had dreamed it to be ... and where she'd find it when she came home from work that evening.

The next day, as I wandered up to the bathhouse, I passed Montana's old but well-maintained motor home, and there he sat in the morning sun, cigarette in hand, his faithful little friend Pierre, the black and white Terrier, pacing restlessly back and forth at the end of his leash.

"Have a seat," Monty said, making room for me in another chair on a concrete pad between the motor home and the jeep. We had a laugh or two about Gert as she'd already discovered Montana's handiness before she'd been in the park for more than a month.

"You want to watch out for Gert," I said, "she'll crank up your mechanical mule in a New York minute!"

"Ain't enough Viagra in Creation!" Monty quickly retorted with a chuckle.

"Don't be too sure," I said, "she got both of us and four more to boot just to move her shed!"

"Well," he chuckled, "Some things work; some things don't!"

"It seems to me you have a problem with your exhaust manifold," he added a few seconds later, having heard my motor home go by his place, "like it don't fit proper or somethin'." I agreed and told him about how the dealer I'd bought the vehicle from had agreed to fix the broken-off manifold bolt, but had put one of the world's worst mechanics on the job. The mechanic—if you could call him that—drilled out the broken-off stud with a hand drill and put a hole in the water jacket. I almost lost the engine.

It wasn't two days after Monty mentioned the noisy exhaust manifold that the manifold cracked in two entirely and the noise increased to deafening proportions. When Monty heard me drive by, he came over. I told him I'd called the dealer and there were five different manifolds for that year of engine ... and they were not cheap to buy or install. The parts manager said I was looking at over \$700.00 just for parts.

"That's bullshit," said Monty, "I can change that manifold in less than an hour and you don't need a new one. Chevrolet engines are very common, and we can get another used manifold for about 50 bucks. There's a big junkyard not far from here. Let's go see if they've got one."

So saying, we drove down the road to the "End-of-the-Road" junkyard. Monty and the junkyard owner seemed to know each other well, and after a few exchanged words, we ended up in a warehouse looking at a stack of used engines three tiers high. Monty picked out a couple of engines he recognized right away as my type of engine, and, pointing to one particular engine, said that particular one would fit without any difficulty.

In less than an hour's time we were back in the RV Park and had the old broken manifold removed from my engine. However, as with almost all mechanical things being rebuilt, there were unseen problems. That \$10.00 an hour mechanic working for the \$80.00 an hour dealer had also stripped the bolt threads inside the block. Fortunately, I had a machinist's tap that cleaned up the threads, and, after a trip to town to acquire a new bolt, the manifold fit into place as good as new. The actual time working on the engine amounted to 55 minutes, and the total cost for the parts came to \$51.00. Montana's credibility now stood at an 'A' rating, especially since he wouldn't take a nickel for his share of the work. I was both happy and impressed because I'd been saved about \$1,500.00 worth of repair bills.

Several days after moving the shed and fixing the truck, I was up at the bathhouse in the early dawn hours talking to Roger, the park owner, as he cleaned the swimming pool. He had a very long face on this particular day.

"What's bothering you, Roger?" I asked him.

"Didn't you see the water running down the middle of the road near your space?" he asked.

Actually I hadn't noticed it because such a small trickle could well have come from an over-irrigated tree or broken sprinkler.

"The water starts in the middle of the road," Roger said. "It means I've got to dig up and repair a leaky water main."

Later that day I saw Montana walking toward the leaky water main, pickax in one hand and shovel in the other.

"You aren't going to dig up that water main by hand, are you?" I asked him. "The last time Roger had a leaky water line he had a backhoe dig it up and the hole was 10 ft. deep!"

"Nah," Monty said, "Roger says it's only two feet down and that's why the traffic passing over them tends to make them break."

"Well ..." I said, "I'll give you a hand."

And so together we pick-axed through the macadam and shoveled into the wet sand, following the trickle of water to its source a few feet down. It took most of the day to saw the pipe off at its break, fit on compression seals, and fill the hole back in. It saved Roger at least \$500.00, but both Monty and I declined any compensation.

"I like to have a balance on the credit side of the ledger," said he, and I thought to myself: "There's a man after my own heart."

## CHAPTER 2.

It was interesting for me to note the varying responses and reactions other people in the RV park had to Montana's presence. Though he was always friendly, cheerful, and willing to stop whatever he was doing to help others, there was always this aura of mistrust which he propagated through his dress, personal appearance, promiscuous behavior, and stories of his past. It was almost as though he understood full well what he was doing—the role he was acting with perfection—to test the perspective and the reactive mechanisms of those with whom he came into daily contact.

By his presence alone in the RV park, he was telling the world that he preferred the company of those who were at least transitory for a small part of their lives ... for most of the park residents were seasonal residents who chose the desert for their winter sojourns instead of the cold, wintry north. This particular park was also not one of the "High-end" RV parks, but rather somewhere near the middle. It was small by comparison, having barely 100 spaces compared to those larger ones with 500 or 1000 spaces.

As I spent more and more time with Montana, I found others warning me to "watch out". They had no justifiable explanation for their fears, but I fully understood where they were coming from, having myself grown up and gone to private schools with the children of the wealthier East Coast and New England families where fraternization with those of an apparently lower class was frowned upon or blocked. There is an instinctive mistrust of all unknown things bred into those raised in a carefully controlled social background which, though it produces a predictable consistency, works very well for those who only move horizontally within their class structure. For those who move as much vertically as horizontally, life is neither predictable nor consistent ... not at all like it is at the Golf and Country Club anyway.

Curiosity is one of those characteristics of the soul which social programming tends to quash as dangerous, frivolous, and irresponsible. Though I myself was a product of this carefully programmed training, my other life secretly and silently blew wind under the fires of my curiosity. Montana was an enigma to me ... and my curiosity begged to explore the experience. I did not, however, throw caution to the wind!

I had spent every summer of my life from birth in 1936 until 1954 in my Father's and Grandfather's Summer wilderness camp for boys in the back woods of rural Nova Scotia. From the time I was 10 years old, I had to work hard physically in order to carry my share

of the heavy annual maintenance load of sanding and painting canoes and boats, fixing roofs, putting out and taking in docks and rafts, shoveling out cesspools, cleaning sink drains clogged with cooking fats, hand-picking weeds from clay tennis courts, and a thousand similar tasks ... none of which I really enjoyed.

What I did enjoy was the hours spent in canoes on wilderness lakes and streams, the tenting, the campfires at night with stories of adventure, and the freedom to wander alone through miles of forest and logging roads. I often wondered later in my life why I was so attracted to places of great natural beauty and what it was about the "Explorer" in me that made exploration irresistible.

I realize now that curiosity is an inseparable and unquenchable characteristic of the soul. In the spontaneous exercising of curiosity we just naturally blow wind under its fires and we are either warmed by our experiences or burned by them until we learn what level of participation we are permitted. Like all the subtle characteristics of the soul, they are easily overwhelmed by their environment and social programming. In my canoeings up miles of silent, tree-lined riverways, or my wanderings through miles of changing forest and mountain scenery, it was inevitably my curiosity about what unique natural phenomenon or event lay around the corner that drew me incessantly onward and fired my curiosity for all the unusual things of life.

Since Dad was a teacher and headmaster of private schools in the Baltimore, Maryland, area throughout the rest of the year, I attended the schools where he was employed and was given the best of elementary education. He then sent me off to preparatory school and to my first year of college, telling me that my first year of college was on him but future years I would have to provide for myself.

Dad's Boston training had instilled in him the concept that it was as much who you knew as what you knew that increased your chances of survival and success in the world at large, and so I was also taught to dance, excel in sports, and be socially amenable amongst the well-to-do. I can't say that it didn't help. I probably owe more than I know to my early training. I can say this, however: I never felt that I belonged anywhere. I had a foot in each camp with no desire to land in either one. What it produced in me was an enigma which somehow had to be resolved.

Montana was obviously also one of those enigmatic individuals, and I was curious to see how he had resolved the inconsistencies in his own life. He had surely not taken the path I had, but I wanted to know where he was coming from in his journey, and wither his journey was leading him ... if he knew at all.

In the final analysis, I knew it didn't matter at all—that we're all headed to the same destination—but I also knew that no two journeys are ever the same. Montana's journey was not one that many would choose to take, would be equipped to take, or would survive if taken. Whether it was a journey in fact—or a journey in words—I will never know. If you ever wonder yourself, try making up a story like this one in your head!

Over the following weeks Montana and I would occasionally go out for breakfast together. On one of those occasions, Monty started talking about his early life—not all at once—just a little at a time.

"I had a terrible time with my sister," he said, "she was bad ... always doing stuff and then swear up and down it was me that done it. Like, Dad had a jar of change on his dresser and she was always taking a quarter or fifty cents for candy or cigarettes. One day Dad confronted us both with his missing change and Gracie, she swore it was me did it. That was about all I could take from her so I started to put a beating on her. Well, Dad he hauled us apart and said if he ever saw me lay a hand on my sister again, he'd go upstairs and get his shotgun and that would be the end of me. I was 16 and figured there was no justice in that household so I went upstairs, put a few things together, and quietly walked out the door for good. I knew where I was going, and it wasn't to any friend's house for sure ... at least not the kind of friends welcome in my parents' household."

"Now, you have to realize Dad loved motorcycles. He was a contractor, and when he wasn't doing construction work he was on a Harley or a Honda or a Kawasaki somewhere out on the desert kicking up sand, making bikes do things they weren't designed to do. When I was barely big enough to walk, I had my own bike and I guess there was enough of my father in me that I soon got to doing motocrosses and other crazy stuff—stuff like teasing the Las Vegas cops.

When I was 12 or 13, I'd go roaring through town at about ninety or a hundred miles an hour—no muffler on the bike—looking for patrol cars to buzz late at night. I knew where they hung out—at hamburger stops and the like—so I'd roar around the block, they'd jump in the patrol car, turn on the gumball machine light, and the chase was on. I'd make sure they didn't lose me, but far enough away so they couldn't see who I was. No license plates on the bike, you know. Soon there was two—sometimes three—patrol cars, but I always stuck to the same part of town where I knew I could slip in past the gated community guards and squeeze out through the back gate or down the golf course. I even had a jump at one point where I could roar up the side of a golf course sandpit at 40 m.p.h. sharp and get enough lift off the sand pit to jump the five-foot high adobe wall around the development. I'd land headed downhill on the bank on the other side that sloped down into the main drainage canal. Then, lights off, I'd come roaring back to a

block or two from my parents' house, slow to an idle, turn my lights on at the driveway, punch the remote garage door opener, and slip quietly into the garage before the door was halfway up. With another punch of the remote button, the garage door reversed itself and closed. I'd walk into the house calm like I was just coming home from the store, open the fridge, and pull out a can of pop. All the time I could hear police sirens screaming a few blocks away."

"It got to be a lot of fun ... for me anyway. They did a real study on me—even set me up one night so I had to take the wall jump. They'd blocked off all the other roads, and there was a police jeep waiting for me at the bottom of the drainage canal. The minute I came over the wall, the jeep headlights went on and I could hear shotgun blasts. Boy, that got my adrenaline going! I went straight for the jeep and flipped my headlight on bright. I had to get past them so I could get to my escape route, an entrance to one of the main storm drains just big enough for me and the bike."

"I'd been through all the storm drains and sewers on my dirt bike and knew which ones were shallow, deep, or had nothing in them at all. Anyway, I was a real mess. As I was coming out of the tunnel I saw the reflections of rotating red lights above me, so I shut the bike down and out-waited them. Then I pushed the bike two blocks to home and washed myself and the bike down with a garden hose. I put my clothes in the washer myself, but Mom still wondered what stank in the laundry room. She said it smelled like the sewer had backed up. She was almost right ... except it walked through her door!"

"Like I said, I love bikes and I was always going down to the local motorcycle shop to watch the guys build their own bikes. I got to know the guys real good and I kinda liked them. They weren't exactly the crowd Mom and Dad ran with, you know, like the bridge, golf, country club set that I thought were all brain dead and just waiting around to die. These guys were alive! Most of them had spent time in prison for one thing or another, but they knew how much freedom really meant and how to walk that thin line between the law and prison. What I'm sayin' is that they'd figured out how to not get caught—and that's something I wanted to learn a lot more about."

"So when I left home, I threw in with them. They had a clubhouse—if you could call it that—nobody knew who owned the place. It was a dump, but the desert wind and cold couldn't get in and that became my new home."

"The club members were all "old" guys to me—me being 16 and all—but I was kinda like a mascot to them. They always had some whiskey for me, and some kind of woman. I don't know where either came from, but there in the dark it didn't much matter. And I never went back to my old home. I just plain didn't belong there."

"Like I said, I loved bikes, and I soon got to love building them. Somehow we always had a good supply of parts. I was never really quite sure where all the parts came from—at first anyway—but anyone in the club could build up any kinda bike he wanted and sell it and get good money for it. The only real problem we had was with serial numbers on engine crankcases and bike frames. For some reason or other—mostly the other—we couldn't use the old serial numbers when we registered our new-built bike. It stands to reason, you know, if you got a new bike you got to have a new serial number for it and we had one guy in the club who was a real crackerjack at grinding off old serial numbers. He'd build up a new serial number pad with a welder, file it down so it looked like new, and then he'd strike in new numbers. Man, he was good! We was good too. If your bike turned up missing, you'd never recognize what it turned into: wild paint colors; artistic designs; chopped frames; extended forks; and all kinds of crazy handlebars."

"We sorta kept the insurance companies in business, you know ... and a lotta guys on the streets got to buy new bikes with their insurance money. You gotta keep things in balance, you know! We always figured a bike was meant to be rode, not parked, and if it was parked the guy that owned it didn't really care much if it disappeared. Now you know why we travel in packs and never go far from our bikes!" and he laughed with a twinkle in his eye.

At this point in Montana's story the waitress brought our breakfast check and, since it was my turn, I paid it this particular morning. As we moved outside the restaurant, Monty lit up a cigarette and casually asked me:

"Wasn't you lookin' for a Sony laptop computer?"

The question took me somewhat by surprise because a week or so before, when Monty was in my motor home, I was explaining to him what I did with my sound and video editing computers, and had casually remarked that I was going to buy a laptop, like a Sony, with a firewire connector built-in. That, however, was my only mention of a laptop to him.

"Yes," I replied. "You remember that?"

"I don't miss much," he said, and I later learned how true that statement was!

"I put it out to some of my friends and got a call on it last night. A fellow needs some money for food for his kids and he has an almost new Sony he'll sell for \$600.00. Interested?"

I thought for a minute. It sounded more like a deal I couldn't refuse..... but maybe one I'd better refuse!

"Monty," I said, "I don't want to mess with any stolen stuff at all. I have a healthy respect for the law, and though I'm adventurous with my life in other ways, that's not one of the ways!"

"No, no," Monty replied. "I know that about you. This guy has a 'legit' receipt and you can talk to him yourself."

"Okay," I said, still hesitant. "We can look into it further then."

Later that morning, Monty and I climbed into his jeep and drove a few miles out of town to a mobile home subdivision. Every now and then he looked at a piece of paper in his hand and then at street signs until we pulled up in front of a mobile home that looked vacant. All window curtains were shut and the grass had not been mown for a while. Monty knocked on the sliding glass door several times. Finally a male voice from inside said:

"Who is it?"

"Mary sent me," Monty said. "We come to look at the computer."

"Just a minute."

The mobile home started coming to life. An infant started to cry ... and then a second started crying. A woman's voice tried to soothe them. A young man clad only in a pair of shorts and tattoos slid the glass door ajar and invited us in. He introduced himself and his wife, who was still in the fold-out bed there in the living room. Two very young children crawled on the floor; a third slept in the bed with its young mother.

"Can you show me the computer?" I asked.

The young man had to ask his wife where it was. After examining it, plugging it in, and making sure it worked, I asked:

"Would you mind telling me where it came from and showing me some sort of evidence that it's yours?"

The wife spoke up first:

"It's actually mine," she said. "Carl worked at a computer store several months ago and I bought it through him. I can show you the receipt. I hate to part with it, but it's the only way we can buy food for the kids.

After checking that the receipt serial number matched the computer serial number, I paid them, and Monty and I left.

"Anything else you want?" Monty asked as we drove away.

"No ... that's quite enough," I replied. "Thanks very much."

He nodded with a smile of satisfaction.

Montana's credibility had risen another couple of notches in my estimation and I was becoming intrigued with this enigma of a man whose word had proven to be accurate and without any apparent selfish interest despite his personal appearance. My curiosity became even further elevated when we arrived back at Montana's motor home. Parked in front of his space stood a brand new, white Cadillac.

"Hah! ..." exclaimed Monty with surprise. "Mom's here! Come on in and meet my parents."

I was quite surprised to meet a couple slightly older than myself who both were affable and friendly like Monty. And though Monte's father wore jeans and a shirt with a collar, his mother was impeccably dressed in expensive clothes which matched the Cadillac image. She was dressed as she had for years as a real-estate sales person in Las Vegas during its early years of growth. Montana's father had been a land sub-divider and Contractor, and his demeanor seemed slower than I had imagined from Monty's descriptions of him as a motorcycle rider. I mentioned the fact to him and he laughed:  
"It's amazing how much a heart bypass and a pacemaker changes you," he said.

Later, after his parents had left, I looked at Monty and said:

"Monty ... are you an adopted child?"

He had a good laugh at that!

"Nope," he said. "That's Mom and Dad!"

It was a week or so before Montana and I had breakfast together again. After eating, we took a drive out into the desert foothills outside Las Vegas.

"See that old dilapidated warehouse over there?" Monty said. I nodded.

"On any weekend, there'd be over 800 bikes out there and a party like you what wouldn't want to be at! I rented the place after I started my own motorcycle club and we had a bar that never closed."

"You started a motorcycle club?" I asked.

"Yeah ... started here in Vegas and then move down to L.A. By the time we got to L.A. we were a big club ... about two thousand members ... and these were not a bunch of pussies either. Keeping that bunch under control was one for the books."

"How did you manage it?" I asked.

"We had rules," Monty said, "And they was strict! Alcohol and pot was allowed; no hard drugs or chemicals ... and even then if somebody got out of hand with alcohol, like pull a knife on one of the brothers, he was out. They all wanted to be in, so whenever someone looked like they was gettin' a little out of hand, I'd get called and have to step into the middle of it ... and I've got more than a few knife wounds to show you what bein' in the middle of two knives and two guys bigger than you looks like."

"I took courses in psychology—and I'm not talkin' college courses in psychology either. I'm talkin' mind control, and psychic energy training, body language, how to start rumors about your power, and so on ... things like you only find in a place like L.A.."

"First thing I did was hand pick two of the biggest, smartest, fastest, quietest guys in the club for my right-hand men. I can barely read or write, you know, but I wasn't tellin' them that. In fact, I made sure they never got to know me too well ... sort of kept a distance between us ... and even more distance with the club members. But I had informers

everywhere, and I never let on. Whenever I found out someone was startin' their own brand of trouble or doin' somethin' bad for the club, I'd sort of take them by surprise and put a stop to it. Then I'd start a rumor that I knew psychic-like what everybody was up to."

"The time that really settled all the issues of power was the time one of the brothers run up to me in a big sweat sayin' two of the brothers was high on crack or something and had broke into an apartment. It was the early hours of morning and they had two young girls with them. The girls were screamin' ... sounded real serious."

"We had a sort of a secret compartment in the saddlebag of my No. 2 guy's bike where I kept a sawed-off shotgun. I never carried a weapon of any kind ... not even a knife ... not until much later when the gang wars got out of hand. I couldn't afford to get sent away for correction; I was too valuable and too happy doin' what I was doin'."

"Anyway, two of us went down to the apartment and I told my partner to stay away unless he saw a police car pull up. I went up to the apartment door and I could hear someone moaning inside. I tried the door, but it was locked so I kicked it in and what I saw would've made you vomit. Both girls were naked and covered with blood. One was dead. The other should've been she was so badly mutilated."

"Next thing I knew, one of the guys come around the corner after me and I blew a hole in his chest big enough to throw a softball through. The next shot drifted the other guy's head off his shoulders. I got the hell out of there and sort of vanished in the dark, then had one of the guys call an ambulance. We pulled outa' there in a hurry."

"Good God, Monty," I said. "How did you deal with the police investigation? Couldn't the police identify the club members?"

"We didn't have no club insignias or tattoos or anything we could be identified by. That was one of the rules. But the word did get around the club about what happened—sort of like wildfire—and that's when I become more like a legend than a leader."

"Jesus," I said, "Where you go from there? Didn't that kind of weigh heavily on your mind?"

"If you'd seen what I saw, you'd never think twice about it. I never lost a moment's sleep over it. You're an ex U.S. Marine ... what's it like to have to kill someone?"

"I was spared that travesty, Montana," I said. "Pilot's don't get to see the hell they create on the ground. What happened after that?"

"There never was any kind of investigation into those killings. The police must've figured it was just another gang murder ... which it was ... and they pretty much let the underworld take care of itself. But that was the beginning of the times when the club got to be too

serious and less and less fun. More and more guys were messing with drugs, and soon there were wars between biker clubs for territories and drug sales."

"Not much fun in that kind of life," I remarked.

"Nope!...But we still had some fun along the way ... like the Saturday night poker games. We called it "poke-her", and it was a kind of special way to spend Saturday night. Bein' from Vegas and all, we knew all the showgirls on the strip. We knew what kinda "dancers" they was, and whether they liked to earn money on the side, so to speak. Some did; some didn't; some were too expensive; and some just liked bikers. We always treated 'em good."

"Every now and then, when there was no club activity, I'd call four or five of the guys who'd been with me the longest and arrange a game of poker at the 'Garage'. The garage was a rented storage shed where we kept things we didn't want nobody to find. We always rented it in the name of some guy we didn't like, and paid cash for it. Had a big fancy motor home stored in there, a bunch of bike parts ... and a bunch of bikes up for 'renovation'. The Garage was in an industrial park so there wasn't nobody around at night and we could play music loud ... and I mean it was LOUD! Had a big round card table and chairs in the corner with a light overhead ... pool table not far away."

"We'd get there about nine o'clock at night, have a few drinks, listen to music, and play pool. Ten o'clock rolled around and the girls arrived. There was always at least as many girls as there was guys; whichever one of us arranged for the girls always arranged for that. If we come up short, too bad for the last game loser! Sometimes the girls would bring a friend or two. But the catch was this: the winner and the winner's whole pot always went to the girl the winner chose. Then it was the girl's turn. If she didn't like the guy, or the pot, she could pass. That was her game. At the very least, the girls all got free drinks for the night. Then the next game started while the first winner disappeared with his winnings. Mostly the girls were dancers because they was strong and in good shape—better shape than we was, too. Lotta times we'd ask them to dance for us so we could kinda get some idea what the winners was going to get for the money ...heh,heh,heh!"

"Didn't they work in the shows on Saturday night?" I asked naively.

"They wasn't just one show on Saturday night. In Vegas they's a show day and night, seven days a week, and two or three lineups for each different show," Montana replied.

"How much was your poker pot?" I asked.

"You had to come to the table with \$500.00. Sometimes the pot was a hundred bucks, sometimes it was a thousand. Of course, if the girl you picked passed on you because

of the pot, you could always raise the ante. It always amazed me how good lookin' some guy's got when the price went up!"

"Speak for yourself, Monty," I laughed, having seen a steady stream of women aged 18 to 40 arrive at or leave his motor home at all hours of the night. None of them appeared very attractive to me, but then I'm so particular I've spent a large part of my life alone.

"You just don't have no fun, man!"

"Too right, Monty," I said, "Too right!"

Right then I was dying to know how Montana had lived through the biker wars he was talking about, so I asked him:

"Tell me about the biker wars," I said.

"30 years ago, drinkin' and sex and ridin' up the coast highway through Big Sur and the Mendocino Coast with a couple of hundred bikes was just plain fun. But as the club got bigger it sort of took on a personality of its own, and that personality wasn't always under my control. One weekend a bunch of us decided to go up to Big Bear and have a party. The 'bunch' turned out to be a thousand bikers who took over the town, blocked off the roads, and terrorized everyone in town. I was real nervous till that weekend was over ... and it was only over because there wasn't a drop of alcohol left in town."

"When a club gets big like that, you don't know who's who and a lot of the club members was also members of other clubs. It started getting to the point where alcohol wasn't enough and drugs and money became more important than fun. Also, the guys who ran the most famous bikers club of all—and you know who that is—were far more ruthless than I was. You either did what they wanted and paid them what was due or you just disappeared. Do you realize there's some 20,000 people a year who just vanish from the L.A. basin never to be heard from again?"

"I soon learned there was a price on my own head and my two right-hand men. It wasn't just hearsay either; I could hear the nails being pounded in my coffin. One night at about 3AM I was in bed asleep when all hell broke loose. Machine-gun bullets smashed into my walls, shotgun blast blew out every window in the place, and in the morning I counted 700 bullet holes in the House. That was the end of the fun for me; those boys were a little too serious about their game and I wasn't about to die or nail myself to a cross just yet."

"That day I called a meeting of the club and told everyone what most of them already knew: it was time to move to newer places that were fun and not all so serious as life-and-death. I had a plan, mostly to save my own ass, and I asked the club members to round up as many bikes as they could because something big was going down early Monday morning."

"Come Monday morning I sent the word around to surround the L.A. police station with as many bikes as possible at 9:00 a.m. sharp. Over a thousand showed up. As they was movin' in to block off all the roads and access to the building, I pulled up on the police department's steps with a four-wheel drive pickup — backed right up to the front door— got out and pulled the tarpaulin off 17 cases of dynamite stacked in the pickup bed. The bikers all started racing their engines and blowing their horns. Some guy came out of the station, looked at me, looked at the dynamite, and his face went white with shock."

"Jesus Christ, LeFandra," he said, "what the hell d'you think you're doing?"

"I want to talk to the Chief of the LAPD," I said quietly.

"You're talking to him," the chief said with restored composure.

"I want to make a deal," I said. "Right now my life, your life, and the life of everyone in this building ain't worth any more than that stack of dynamite right there and you have exactly five minutes to get this deal closed. The deal is this: safe asylum and protection for me and two of my men. We agree to leave California and never come back for 10 years, and we agree to never ride a motorcycle or join or form a bike club in California again. I'll disband this club and we'll move to parts unknown outside of California. Deal?"

The Chief looked hard at me for a few seconds.

"Sounds reasonable, in fact that would just be a big headache off my shoulders," he replied, "but there's one problem: I don't have the authority to grant you asylum. Only the Federal Government can do that."

"The Feds started work three hours ago in Washington, D.C., and you got five minutes to get that authority," I said.

"Look, I'll do the best I can," the chief said with a flustered voice. "You don't have to fear retaliation from here; I'll be some damned relieved to see you gone." and with those parting words the Chief disappeared inside the building.

"Five minutes went by ... then 10 minutes went by and I was beginning to sweat. Bikes were starting up. Horns started to blow, and I was beginning to think the club members was realizin' that gettin' blown up was not in their game plan. I nodded my head to them and motioned for them to leave. Most of them did, but a few of 'em stayed. I climbed in the truck and started the engine, and just then a police officer came out of the door, walked over to me and said:

"The Chief's on the phone to the Governor and the Governor's calling the FBI in Washington. It shouldn't be but a few more minutes."

The guy was pretty white when he looked at all that dynamite. He sure as hell didn't want to go back in that building ... but he did! Four minutes later, the Chief came out of

the building and over to where I was sitting behind the wheel of the truck with what was actually an old TV remote in my hand.

"Your deal is accepted. I can only give you my word as I heard it from the Governor. Is that good enough?" he asked.

"Good enough for now," I replied. "I'll be out of the state permanently by tonight. I'll call you when I'm settled somewhere. If things don't work out, this dynamite'll be back."

I put the truck in gear and slowly made my way down the steps, headed for our Garage with about 10 guys riding their bikes a good safe distance behind. Once inside the Garage, I close the doors, climbed up on the boxes of dynamite and untied them. The guys were all standing around watching when I picked up one of the cases and threw it off the truck.

"Here ... catch this!" I said.

Well, you should've seen the looks as that wooden case crashed on the concrete floor, broke open, and nothing but a few desert rocks spilled out. I just smiled. I always was a good poker player!

## CHAPTER 3.

A few days after Montana finished that part of the story, he stopped by my travel trailer one morning.

"Can you make a business card with your computer?" he asked.

"Oh yes ... sure." I replied. "I have some blank sheets of them for my inkjet printer. What do you want them to say?"

"Something like ... well ... I'm not exactly sure. But I want them to have my name and the name of my boat."

"Your boat?" I said rather incredulously. "You have a boat? Is it a rowboat, or a speedboat, or what?"

"No, no," Montana replied with a slight smile. "Its a 70-foot trimaran—one of the few super trimarans ever built, as a matter of fact. There's only a couple of builders who know how to make them so they can withstand the constant twisting and wave action of the ocean."

"Montana ... come on now," I said. "You live in this crummy old motor home, drive a beat-up old jeep that runs on three cylinders, look more like a biker or a trucker, and you expect me to believe that one?"

Montana just chuckled quietly, looked me right in the eye and said:

"You don't have to believe me," and after a brief pause added, "Just make me up a few business cards with my name, my phone number, and the name of the boat on it. The boat's name is the Wicked Mistress, and you know my name and phone number."

"Ok," I said, "What's the card for?"

"All these women you see coming and going from my motor home?" he said as a kind of question.

"Yes!" I replied emphatically.

"They're applying for jobs on my boat!"

I looked at Montana incredulously. It took awhile for that one to sink in.

"Jobs?" I said. "What kind of jobs ... and how many jobs are there on this boat of yours?"

"There's just three jobs: cook, clean, and screw. They're full-time jobs with me, so we change the crew every month or so. The same crew comes back on duty every other month. I pay their air-fare to and from their home to wherever the boat's located in the world, and I'm leaving for a five-year cruise around the world in three months. Each girl gets hundred thousand dollars a year and she's paid \$5,000.00 cash in advance so she can go home anytime she gets tired of the game."

I sat there taking all this in ... and though I've been down a good many primrose paths, I'd never been down one quite like this before. I thought to myself:

"This guy is unreal ... literally! But what's he stand to gain from me? I'm retired, don't have any money except enough to live on! At the very least I've got to hear the end of this story.

Montana continued:

"The last two girls I had on the boat were smart. They were with me for over a year and they used the money they earned from me to start or buy their own businesses. One owns a car-wash business in Henderson that'll support her for the rest of her life. The other owns a beauty shop with three trained beauticians and she doesn't have to work at all. They both want to come back on the boat, but I told 'em they can't play forever ... and besides I needed a little change, if you know what I mean."

I nodded and smiled, wondering what was next, when Montana got up to leave.

"See what you can do." he said. "I need cards to give to 'perspective' crew members."

"Perspective" may be a more appropriate word in this case than prospective, I thought to myself ... but a hundred thousand dollars a year! I'm sure there's plenty of women in this town who'll take a yacht, free travel around the world, and a grizzled old biker for that amount of money for a year of their lives—especially if neither one of them seems very particular about personal appearances. So I went to work making up some impressive business cards for Capt. Montana LeFandra of the yacht Wicked Mistress. They looked pretty good so I took 50 over to his motor home.

"Fantastic ... perfect!" he said, reaching for his wallet. "Can I pay you for them?"

"Nope," I said. "The story's worth it ... and then some!" and we both had a good laugh.

"One more thing, Montana," I said. "And you might as well blow me away completely. Where the hell are you getting all this money anyway?"

"Well, I suppose I can tell you ... if you can keep your mouth shut," he said.

"Go ahead," I said.

"You remember I was telling you I left California for good when the club folded up. I sold most of my stuff, but kept four bikes—one of them the big Norton I used in Steve McQueen's movie—and some furniture. I loaded it all in a big U-Haul, towed my pickup truck, and vanished without tellin' no-one where I was goin'. Actually, I said I was goin to Phoenix, but instead I went to Laughlin, Nevada, where I could play at the casinos. I can always eke out a living at the casinos with Black Jack and the Crap tables, and it's a good thing because it took the damn government two months to process my papers and find a safe place to put me."

"Montana," I interrupted, "wasn't working the casinos a little risky considering that Vegas and L.A. are only a few hours away and bikers like casinos as well as you?"

"Well, I wasn't exactly advertising my presence," Montana replied. "I dressed like a cowboy ... tied my pony tail on top of my head under a big black Stetson hat. Wore some ridic'lous high-collar shirt, fancy cowboy boots and dress pants ... and I only went in the casinos in the morning when most bikers'r sound asleep. Still there was more than a few times I had to duck behind the slot machines or just get the hell out of the club."

"I drove a hundred miles or so over into Arizona every time I wanted to make phone calls, and finally had to quietly threaten the L.A. Police Chief again, but the FBI finally came through with the new ID ... which I can't tell you too much about because they'll use it again. Anyways, they moved me twice and we finally agreed that a small farm in the mountains of Montana close to the Idaho and Canadian border would be my new home."

"It wasn't much of a farm ... rundown old house with a few hundred acres and an old apple orchard. I set to work fixing up the old farm house. I mean I got water running inside and a wood stove working so I could have heat. It was beautiful country, but something was missing and I figured out right away what it was: women! Man ... that one was tough on me. There wasn't no women up there like in L.A. and Vegas. Them country women'd take one look at me and run the other way. I was thinkin': Do I have some kind of disease or somethin'? That was the hardest part of living out in the country."

"Plus I had a helluva time figuring out what to do with myself. I ain't no farmer! Nothing comes up out of the ground fast enough for me—except maybe oil—and there wasn't none of that for a thousand miles. I sure couldn't go back into the bike 'renovations' business; wasn't any big cities for miles and it seemed everybody in small towns knew exactly who was doin' what with who and how many times, so I didn't think I'd get away with much for long. Besides, I had to stay out of sight and out of mind. In the bike world you're a big hero if you knock off one of the big guys and live to tell about it ... and I can tell you from personal experience there's more than a few buried out on the desert that tried and didn't make their bet good."

"Anyways I took the Norton into Sand Point one Saturday and was sittin' in a bar tryin' to drown my loneliness when an old guy—that would'a been anyone over 50, and I was 35—came in and sat down at the bar next to me. He was the only one in there looked scruffier than me ..... had a beat-up old rancher's hat on his head, muddy cowboy boots on his feet ... and smell! He smelled like he'd been rolling in horseshit! I looked at him kind of wide-eyed and sideways and said:

"Smells like you climbed up a horse's ass lookin' for a nickel!" I said.

"He took a quick look at me and when he saw I was smiling, he started to laugh, and that was the beginning of the longest friendship I've ever had. He's how I come to be called Montana."

"It's funny, you know, how things just happen in ways you'd never think of. Here I was trying to figure out how to turn a penny into a nickel a thousand ways ... but don't you know it just sits down beside me and his answer fits like a glove custom-made for my own hand. He was a horse wrangler and hunting guide in northern Idaho and his nickname was Idaho ..... after the Idaho potato dishes he served up on his hunting trips back into the Kootenai and Kaniksu high country. He can cook anything from potato pancakes to potato bread, Elk steak stew, and Cajun Rappie pie from a handful of potatoes ... all that on a sheepherder's stove in an 8 by 10 wall tent, and you never had the same dish twice. We had about ten beers together and he says to me:

"Can you ride a horse?"

"Never tried," I said, "But I can jump a Kawasaki dirt bike over a five-foot-high brick wall, and run a Harley into a parked car at forty miles an hour and walk away with only a few bruises."

"You do that for fun?" he asked, looking at me with wide eyes.

"I did some stunt work for Hollywood movies a few years ago," I said.

"At forty miles an hour I'd look more like grasshopper meat on a windshield! How the hell do you avoid that?" he asked.

"You leap for the sky just before you hit the car and you land on an air bag or in a pool of water that the camera can't see," I said.

"Oh! ... It's a wonder you haven't decided to be a rodeo cowboy," he added.

"Them bulls don't snort loud enough, and there's no air bags underneath 'em" I said.

"And besides, if I'm gonna bust my ass I want to get well paid for it."

"I guess if you can ride an iron horse you won't have any trouble with my old plugs. If you want to help me for free for a season or two, I'll teach you everything I know and you can set up your own business on the Montana side ... and I'll call you Montana so you don't forget which side of the state line you belong on. There's more game in the Purcell and Cabinet Mountains in Montana than you'll be able to hunt."

I spent a full season with Idaho and learned real quick how to stalk wild game, load a pack saddle, hobble horses, feed hungry hunters, and kill game for a hunter too drunk or scared to kill a bear for himself. We had more damned fun together that season; I've never laughed so often or so hard in my life. Idaho had this real dry sense of humor and a lot of times you couldn't tell if he was kidding or serious—until you got to know that

he was never serious about anything. He seemed to me to be too streetwise and well-spoken to be a back-country horse wrangler and I told him that one day.

"You're right," he said. "I grew up in the city just like you. I got into trouble in the city, and I left, and that's all I'll say about it. 'Idaho' is all the name you need to know."

"So we never talked about our past, but both of us knew a lot of time would have to pass before we could go back to our old world—if either of us even wanted to. It's funny how both of us coming from the city made such good hunters and game trackers. I've never known country people who ever adapted as well to the city."

"After spending a long season with Idaho, I took the few dollars I had left from my L.A. days and bought a string of pack horses and some secondhand outfitter's gear and took myself off into the mountains to learn the country, the horses, and the game. I figured I wouldn't wait for no advertising to bring the customers, so I went down to Boise, Coeur d'Alene, and into Kalispell and Missoula and Great Falls, and called every doctor's and lawyer's office I could call. I asked the secretary or whoever answered the phone if the doctor or lawyer was a hunter. If they was, I told the secretary I was the best hunting guide in the West and had pictures to prove it and was just traveling through and would like to take 10 or 15 minutes of their time so they could meet me. I must of called a hundred doctors, lawyers, contractors, or anyone else who owned a big business. I ended up with more business than I could handle, and even sent some over to Idaho."

"When you're on a hunting trip with a man you shut up and let your customer do the talking or you get him talking about his self. I learned that trick in my L.A. night courses as a way to make people like you. But that didn't work all the time! There was one particular attorney talked me around in circles. He sort-of-like crept up on me or stalked me like I'd sneak up on an Elk. I'd try to get him talking about himself and he would drop a line or two and then the conversation ended up a question for me to answer or just a comment and silence ... like he knew exactly what I was doing. After a few days he knew more about me than I knew about me, and I knew nothing—and I mean nothing—about him, except where he lived ... and he wasn't the one told me that! He never touched a drop of alcohol either, except a beer before dinner.

Anyway, just before he went home with his trophy bear—that he shot himself with one shot—he said to me:

"Montana, if you want to have money, you aren't going to get it being a hunting guide. But there's a business for sale in Coeur d'Alene that would make you a wealthy man, and I think you have a mind for it."

"What kind of business is that?" I asked.

"A pawnshop," the attorney said.

"Man ... I don't know nothin' about buyin' and sellin' junk," I said.

"That's not what pawnbrokers do," he said. "Pawn brokers are money lenders—and they're ruthless—and they have to be because the people who borrow money from a pawnbroker are usually very stubborn people who don't want to change what they're doing or not doing."

"But I don't have a pot to piss in, if you wanta know the truth," I said.

"You own a farm, don't you?" he asked.

"Well ... it ain't exactly mine," I said.

"If you're a farmer, you could qualify for a government loan of up to two hundred thousand dollars for seed and equipment ... and that will make the down payment on the pawn shop and give you money to loan. It's not exactly legal, but I think you could pull it off. What you would have to do is start making payments within a year and gradually increase them so they don't want to audit you. You should have the government paid back within five years at the latest. This pawnshop makes money! I know! The owner is one of my clients and an old friend. The risk is yours initially, but if you can make it work I may just want be a silent partner later on so you have more money to lend."

"But how do I get that government loan? I don't know nothin' about borrowing money legally through banks and stuff?" I asked.

"That's one of the things I do," he said, "...for a fee that you don't have to pay me until the loan comes through. We can make a paper farmer out of you in a New York minute!"

## CHAPTER 4.

Meanwhile, back in the old Las Vegas RV park, things were beginning to feel very boring and very slow. Montana's life story made my own life story seem like that of a dairy farmer whose had one weekend off in 40 years—and that for a funeral! I asked myself how it is that some people's lives seem so interesting, and most others so boring ..... and my philosophical bent got the best of me.

There seems to be a point in the progression and development of the human soul when it revels in its newfound capacity to manipulate life to its own ends ... like Montana was doing. It's as though in the soul's first experiences with Planet Earth life it's like a child in infancy, totally dependent upon others for its sustenance and affirmation. Then, about midway through one lifetime—or a hundred lives in male and female form—it feels and focuses its accumulated power on those things which amplify its uniqueness and separation from its source. It feels its physical body moving under control; tries at every turn to satiate its unquenchable sensual thirst; loves to baffle, entertain, and impress with its mental prowess; and moves on life like a steam roller that flattens whatever is unfortunate enough to be before it.

Such is the soul in midstream—such is a whole nation in mid stream—building itself and destroying itself in the same action. Maturity is not for this soul ... not yet! It's too busy, too lost in the multitudinous diversions that the Planet is placed here for soul to experience. And so it is with Montana LeFandra: The world is simply fodder for his power and imagination. There's no way I could've made up a story like the one I was hearing, but if I moved, as had Montana, as a sort of minor participant or observer in a subculture world, I'd certainly hear enough stories to make at least one good story out of them. Up to this point in Montana's story I was a sort of observer, but that was to change slightly when he asked me to join forces with him. That really made me nervous, but the picture was more than inviting.

Next morning over breakfast, Montana's story continued:

“It wasn't easy to get that loan. Actually it took over a year and the money got doled out in smaller amounts over a year or two. But as Markham, the attorney, said: 'Once the money starts coming, it'll keep coming.' “

“During the winter and spring I'd leave my farm and guide business and go to Coeur d'Alene to work in the pawnshop with the old guy ... who was selling out and retiring. I picked up on it pretty quick and the old guy was missing quite a bit of business just

because he was getting tired and didn't want to bother with stuff that took some looking into or that wasn't right there local-like. So I asked him to just pass on to me what he didn't want to mess with ... and he did. I had about five good deals just waiting for me to be the new owner of the pawnshop."

"The first one was a farm in Wyoming where the farmer had a few bad years, had big loans on his equipment and land, and was getting too old and sick to farm any more. He didn't like his neighbors--and they didn't like him--so he wouldn't sell to them. Besides that, he wanted too much for the farm, and that's the kind of stubbornness Markham was talking about."

"Somehow he'd read an ad in a farm magazine about borrowing money through the pawnbroker company and called. By the time I owned the pawnshop this farmer was about to lose everything to the bank, so I went down there to look things over. I told him I'd lend him fifty-thousand bucks on a blanket second mortgage that held the farm and equipment as security, and he took it, hoping the place would sell before my mortgage came due in a year. Of course I didn't care whether it sold or not because I was making 18% interest on my money, and if he folded there was still enough equity to pay off all the mortgages and make a hundred thousand bucks as well."

"Also ..... and here's the smart thing about paying money to a good attorney ..... Markham had a little clause in my mortgage that said if any one of the equipment or farm mortgages went into default, it would be considered a default on the blanket mortgage, which would then become immediately due and payable in full with interest. Failing payment of the blanket mortgage, of course, the Farmer would lose the farm to a foreclosure sale."

"To make a long story short, that's exactly what happened. I had to make four trips down there and come up with a couple thousand bucks to reinstate the delinquent mortgages, but I sold the farm and equipment to one of the neighbors he didn't like and went home with a little less than a hundred thousand clear profit. It was deals like that where there was more risk or time and effort than a bank wanted to take that meant I could pay off my farm loan before I had my last check from them. I can tell you the Farm Home Loan Board had never seen that happen before, and when they asked how I'd been able to do that when no one else could, I just said: 'You don't want to know!'"

"Now ...," Montana said to me, while we sat there in the restaurant. "You beginning to see where the money for the boat is coming from?"

"Who's running your pawnshop business now?" I asked him.

"One of Markham's kids who dropped out of college ... with Markham looking over his shoulder," Monty replied. "And that's not the only business I own up there. There's a

construction business that sells and builds custom steel buildings, and a well-drilling company with several million dollars' worth of equipment."

"Drilling oil wells?" I asked.

"Water wells!" Montana replied. "Big business in that country! Farms all over Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Oregon irrigate their crops by pumping from the underground water aquifers into these huge walking irrigators."

"I got this well drilling company the same way I got the construction company. They wasn't big companies; they was one-man companies with five or ten employees, but in both cases the owner of the company didn't know how to manage people. With the well drilling company, the guy had three drilling rigs going at the same time, and he should've stayed in the office and run the business from there, but he couldn't stand office work so he was out on a drill all day and let his wife answer the phone and sort of run the office which was in his home. That was fine for a couple of years, but things crept up on him. The drill rigs got older and needed a lot of maintenance which they wasn't getting. His best men left him because they couldn't get the kind of equipment and support they needed."

"He come to me to borrow some money for new rigs, said the banks didn't want to lend him that much money. So I went to look at his operation ... and it was no wonder the banks wouldn't lend him money. Two of the rigs were old, outdated, and barely worked. The third was not so old, but it was big enough and re-buildable for the job I had in mind. I said to him:

'You haven't maintained or upgraded your equipment. It's just a matter of time before you're out of business! D'you know that?'

'Well ... yes ... I guess that's about right,' he said.

'How much you owe on these rigs,' I asked.

'Sixty thousand,' he said.

'On all three?'

'Yes,' he replied.

'You couldn't sell them for that!' I said.

'Yes, I know,' he said.

"His business obviously wasn't worth much. The secret ingredient, however, was the guy ... the one that owned the company. He couldn't run the company any better'n he could fly, but he knew more about well drilling than most. He'd worked on oil rigs since he was a young man down in Texas and up in Prudhoe Bay whip-drilling out under the Arctic ice pack. The other thing he knew about was how to drill in lava rock because Eastern Oregon, Southern Idaho, and parts of Montana are covered with old volcanic lava beds. He was one of the few guys who knew that reverse-drilling in lava rock worked better than any other method.

Now, the rest of the story is this. I'd heard about how in Hawaii they had a serious problem providing water for Honolulu because it was growing so fast. Their geologists had somehow discovered an underground aquifer and storage areas where there was millions of gallons of water reserves. The only thing was, they had to drill down through a thousand feet of lava rock to get to it. The specifications called for an 18-inch hole, and there wasn't a big enough rig in the islands to handle an 18-inch diamond drill bit. The City and County had a continuing offer of two and half million dollars to the first company that would bring in a big enough rig and complete the well.

I love deals like that! You have the need and you have the money. And it wasn't no crapshoot neither! They'd done seismograph studies and core drilling so they was 80% sure the water was there. But they wasn't so sure they could risk City and County funds if there was a dry hole. I had made a phone call or two to find out how valid this deal was, and what the true facts were and who made the big decisions. I had also found out that they hadn't used a "Dowser". You know what a Dowser is, don't you? A Dowser is a particular kind of person who can locate water below ground by holding a sapling crotch made of Apple wood—or even a bent coat hanger—in front of him and walking over the ground until that sapling wants to point straight down and the guy who's the Dowser can't hold it out straight any longer. Not everyone can do this, and I knew we could find a couple of good Dowsers in Idaho who'd worked the lava beds of Idaho which're just like the lava rock of Hawaii.

So you can see now why I even bothered to talk to this guy about his worthless well-drilling company. I needed his name and his experience, but I wasn't telling him that just yet! He also had one drilling rig that would handle an 18-inch diamond drill bit, but I didn't know that until I seen his equipment and asked him what kinda bits he used for Lava rock and how big they was.

I was looking for the "Signs" ... you know what I mean? I mean where things kind of fall into place and you don't have to push too hard on 'em get 'em there. They's enough shit around from just wakin' up in the mornin' without goin' out lookin' for it! I told him I'd buy his company from him for ten thousand dollars ... that was a good price back then ... and take over the company loans on the drill rigs. Any other loans he'd have to cover hisself, and he said there wasn't any.

Second part of the deal was: he had to go to work for me right away for \$35,000 a year, plus expenses that I approved, and that was about double what he was taking home from his company each year after paying his men, his fuel, his repairs, taxes, and so-on, and so he was happy with that. They was a few other minor parts to the deal ... like he had to go where I sent him and stay there till the job was finished, but that didn't bother him.

I had Markham write up the deal and as soon as it was signed, this fella — George Williamson was his name — and I took a trip to Honolulu to see what kind of equipment we could get there and what we'd have to ship over from Seattle. We needed at least three big air compressors and hose and pipe to clean out the hole as we drilled. Lava rock is not very hard and it grinds up into dust and small pieces no bigger'n a baseball with that eighteen-inch drill bit chewin' at it, so you have to get it out of the drill's way or it'll blind up on you. Then you had to have a couple of big damn pumps in case you hit water on the way down. That meant sealing the well head, pressurizing the hole, and pumping out the rock tailings at the same time.

We rented whatever we could get in the islands and brought the rest with us on a barge towed from Seattle to Honolulu. None of that was cheap, I can tell you, and I had my ass right out there in the wind betting there was water where there was supposed to be.

Next, I hired two dowsers to go to Honolulu and douse the area we were supposed to drill—about a square mile of area altogether. The trouble with dowsing is that once you find a water indication you can't tell whether its ten feet down or a couple of hundred feet down, and what we were lookin' for could be eight hundred feet down. As it turned out there was one hell-of-a big underground aquifer moving down through the drill target area and we could map that flow down to about a hundred meters wide. I picked a spot that was easy to get to by road. The terrain in Lava country is damn near impossible to travel through with a vehicle. There's thousands of sheer cliffs and hills of black rock everywhere.

Back in Idaho, it took about two weeks to rebuild George's biggest drill rig. We rebuilt the engine and put new cable on the winches, new hose on all hydraulic fittin's, and replaced the hydraulic pumps with new ones. We also had to beef up the mast so it could take the punishment of the drill bit reversin' itself frequently. Finally we took it to Seattle and loaded it on a barge full of road-buildin' and construction equipment headed for the islands, towed by an oceangoin' tug. Two weeks later, the drill rig landed on Oahu and we started drillin'.

I want to tell you, that was an experience! We had these three air compressors ganged together and set up as high as they'd go—that was about 500 lbs. of pressure—but the pressure tanks wasn't designed for volume. They was designed to operate jackhammers and air drills and dynamite drills, but we needed volume and pressure so we set up ball valves on each line and released each tank into the line separately. When one tank drained down to two hundred fifty pounds or so, we'd open the next valve, and finally the third, and it worked better'n we expected. In fact it worked so good that dust come

outa that hole in clouds, and rock flew outa there at a hundred miles an hour. We had a deflector built over the well head, but it blew all to pieces the first few days of drillin'. We finally had to make a curved deflector out of quarter-inch plate steel, and make it so we could turn it to where the dust was always coming out headed downwind. What a racket it made! It sounded like a war zone with them rocks clangin' off the steel plate. After a week or so there was Lava dust everywhere and in everything and we had to wear goggles and breathing masks just to be there.

The thing that was fun, though, about bein' in Hawaii was them Polynesian women! Wow!... Ain't nothin' in Vegas or L.A. can wiggle their ass like them girls. I went to a big hotel show with Hawaiian music and dancers wearing those snarky grass skirts and by the time that show was over I just had to try a few of 'em on for size. I was feelin' more than a little like a bull Elk lookin' at a new harem! I went up to a couple of the girls after the show and asked them if I could buy 'em a drink or take 'em out for dinner and they just smiled at me real polite-like and giggled a lot. Finally one of the said:

"Here's a Lei for you," and she threw a ring of orchid flowers around my neck.

I smiled and said thanks, but that wasn't exactly the kind of Lei I was looking for. They giggled some more and then this big Kahuna came out and stood between me and the girls and tried to stare me down. I thought to myself:

"You fat piece of shit! I can let the air outa' your tires before you get your arms unfolded," but that wouldn't of got me what I was after, so I just nodded to him and left. I was in the wrong territory; that's what it was.

It didn't take me long to find out where the Bikers hung out in town, and after a few beers and a game of poker wherein I dropped 500 bucks as a kind of initiation fee—I didn't tell 'em who I was—I got introduced to a couple of dancers and my life ain't never been the same since! There ain't an electric paint can mixer in Creation can compare to the wiggle in a Polynesian grass skirt! It's one of the few times my imagination ever fell short of its mark. If American women'd take a few lessons in hip routines from those Polynesian women, the divorce rate would drop to zero. I guarantee it!

"Montana!" I said. "Spare me the lucid details! What ever happened with the well-drilling operation?"

"Oh! ... that!" he remembered. "We got down to water right where the seismograph charts said it'd be, sold the drill rig there in Oahu, and I took my two and a half million dollars to Saigon and opened up a secret company bank account. When I got back to Idaho, I bought two brand-new modern drill rigs for the well drillin' company and now George makes better money than he ever did ... with fewer problems .....and we even have a full-time professional manager; probably buy another rig next year.

But I gotta tell you about Vietnam! It was almost as much fun as Hawaii. You can buy anything you want on the streets of Saigon: any age; any size; any gender. Actually I thought I might like to bring several young ones back to Idaho as wives. I could marry one, keep the other for a housekeeper, then divorce the one and marry the other until I got both in the country legally. So I asked around and got sent to a house on the edge of town in the rice paddies. Had to walk almost a quarter mile on dirt paths from where the taxi dropped me off, got my feet wet where the rice paddies overflowed, and went over a few board bridges that I didn't think would hold me. When I got to the house I'd been told about, I seen it was a big spread hidden back in some trees by itself. The Mama of the place was waitin' outside for me like she knew I was comin'... I can't figure out how because they had no phones or no power, at least none I could see. She talked to me in English—even knew my name—and invited me in for tea ... no sign of any women yet. She asked me point blank what kinda woman I was looking for and how I intended to support her ... as if either one made any difference to her. Next came the rules: The price was \$5,000.00 U.S. per girl; I could look at them and talk to them only in Mama's presence; sex not permitted until they were paid for in cash, marital agreements signed, and outa' there.

I complained about that last rule; I wasn't buyin' nothin' I hadn't tried on for size.....and especially with no guarantees! But Mama says:

"You no touch! These girls virgin."

"Yeah!..." I thought to myself, "Tell me another myth ... the Virgin Mary one's bad enough."

"These girls do what you want, when you want, how much you want," she added. "Otherwise they sent back home and live on the street. They know this."

So the girls came in. There was five of 'em and I couldn't decide which one I wanted more. I was thinking \$25,000.00 maybe! They all had to be between 16 and 18 and the best-looking Asian women I'd ever seen ... probably handpicked from thousands. The fat ugly ones must of got sent off to brothels, or arranged marriages and I don't want to know what else. Life ain't worth much over there—especially if you're a woman.

Mama says let's go out to the bathhouse. When we got there the girls undressed me, then took all their own clothes off, and we all got in the hot tub ... Mama standing there with a big club in her hand ... steam risin' everywhere, and I was getting' pretty steamed up myself! These girls bathed me like I've never been bathed before ... giggling all the time ... and when I come out of that tub my old rocket launcher was reaching for the Milky Way! We put on robes and went back towards the main house. Just then this water buffalo come by pulling a plow and I was thinkin' that water buffalo would do just fine right about then!

Mama hurried me out of there when she found out I hadn't brought the cash with me. These kind of arrangements was a little too quick and too responsible-like for the way I was living just then, so I walked back the way I'd come and there was that damned taxi driver still waiting for me five hours later. He only wanted five bucks for the round trip and the wait! I gave him ten. I was feeling very relieved to not have to share my lunch with five women. What was I thinking anyway? Everybody's born with a divided brain, but I think most of mine is below the belt; then there's a big hunk of it in my chest; and not very much above the shoulders.

"Jesus, Montana," I said. "Do you have some kind of a weird psychological disease or something? Sex is the most oversold, under-rated phenomenon in the universe. The price you have to pay for ten or fifteen seconds of nerve spasm is hardly worth it, wouldn't you say?"

"Well ... maybe," he replied. "But that ten or fifteen seconds is only the frosting on the cake! You eat the whole cake ... not just the frosting! Climbing a mountain is the challenge; standing on the top is just a relief. Every woman is built different and I just want to see how she's built and how she moves. And I'm just as curious about her mind and her heart, too. I want to know what makes her tick or what her problems are that I can help her with. That's what takes from 6 o'clock at night until 6 in the morning... and you got to have a little sexercise every now and then in between as entertainment. You can't be too serious about this thing called life."

"But don't you think you're using women, Monty?" I asked.

"Look," he replies. "Is your boss using you? Is your husband or wife using you? There ain't nothin' of value in life where we ain't bein' used for somethin'! The question is: what's the reward for bein' used? To most men it's sex or a housekeeper; to most women it's security or money ... so which one's using the other? It's a rare man who really cares about a woman as much as he cares about himself. And the women I play with ain't the beautiful ones. The beautiful ones are the real prostitutes ... the ones who think money brings happiness. They get to live in a half-million dollar house, drive their fancy little SUV, shop 'till they drop, and look at them by the time they're 45. They're soft and fat and they all have that disappointed/disillusioned look that they try to cover up with makeup and a poodle hairdo or a face-lift. They have no self respect. The child inside died long ago. They've lost that twinkle in the eye that comes from life being an adventure! You have to take chances with your life to feel alive! You have to believe in somethin' besides money."

"So, do you try to get close to the women you're with?" I asked.

"That's always the first thing I do. And I can tell in 20 minutes of talk whether there's anything there to get close to. If there ain't, we choose option #2: the trade! Is it sex for a fee; sex for attention ... or just a whole night of talk with nothing physical at all. That happens too, you know!"

"Women are my hobby. I love women. Men are too damned undependable and selfish. They just want to own a beautiful woman like they own a purebred horse or a dog. They want to take her home to their fancy Museum House, hang her on a wall with their expensive paintings, and take her down for a screw... or to show off at a party."

"And you know what's even worse? The women put up with that shit because they got no courage! ... and I'll tell you something else: those women are the world's worst screw! They don't know how to work for nothin'—not even a good orgasm!"

"Sex is just plain fun for me, and it's fun to get to know a woman's mind as well as her body. Sex ain't fun to most women or men. To women it's a tool ... a price they pay for what they want. To men it's an ego trip or a personal pleasure trip; they don't care how much pleasure they give; they just want to get pleasure."

"Me, I give comfort and I give pleasure. If I can turn some girl on with my own little bag of tricks—mechanical and otherwise—then I've done a good deed. If her conscience bothers her later, I can't help that. She's not takin' a deep look at life or herself. See what I mean?"

"Yes, I see where you're coming from, Montana," I said.

"Now ..." he says to me, "Where are you comin' from?"

## CHAPTER 5.

That was a surprise question. I had to think it through for almost a minute while Montana lit up a camel and took little Pierre some water. Finally I said:

"Where I'm coming from changes according to circumstances, Monty. I come from a time in my youthful life when there were only undependable contraceptives. The consequences of producing a child were always a deterrent to my sexual involvement. The price I'd have to pay to be a responsible parent was something I instinctively felt I had not come here to do. I've always been a gypsy at heart, never satisfied with myself or my many occupations. Once I'd conquered a task, I was ready for another. I never was concerned about accumulating money or wealth, or saving for the future or old age. I didn't want to have to sacrifice for children; I was too selfish. Some part of me always kept screaming at me: Live! Live! Experience everything you can as though this was the last time you'll ever be on Planet Earth again."

"And then I had this problem of discernment. Only a small category of women were at all attractive to me. They had to look like me ... blond hair, blue eyes ... with a strong, well-proportioned, well-coordinated body that would produce beautiful children. And they also had to be sweet and kind and gentle along with all their personal power. Those kind were always taken by the time they were 18, or they weren't interested in exploring life and living marginally and spontaneously like myself. You can't be free to explore life if you live in fear of starvation or have high expectations socially, economically, or personally."

"There was no question of pride keeping me from doing manual labor or working as a tradesman; I'd been doing hard physical labor since I was 10 years old and this was a kind of freedom for me. Sex was always dangerous to my freedom because I knew that having children would be totally consuming to me—if I allowed it to happen in the first place—because of my conscientiousness."

"On top of that, quality has always been more important to me in my relationships with women than quantity, and a good relationship takes a lot of effort and consideration. It's like everything of value on this Planet.....like, for example, building a boat. If you slap it together, it comes apart at the seams, leaks, looks like hell, and falls apart completely in any storm. To me, building a good relationship is like creating a work of art. It has to be skillfully prepared and painstakingly finished."

“Seeing the world, experiencing life, and playing with mechanical things were more important to me than building a beautiful relationship or family. I love women, and everything they stand for, but my focus of attention lay elsewhere.”

"I'm also a very thin-skinned person ... very sensitive physically and emotionally. Using a condom during sex made sex about as interesting to me as sucking on a lollipop with cellophane over it! The result was that I stayed away from women, and the ones that really appealed to me stayed away from me. So I had to find other things to focus my attention on ..... and I did."

"Like what kinda' things?" Montana ask me.

"After college, I had to serve my time in the military because of the draft, so I joined the U.S. Marines and eventually became a pilot. And when I wasn't flying airplanes I was surfing on the California beaches or in Mexico in my little VW camper. After that I worked as a helicopter bush pilot in the Yukon Territory and spent most of the year living in a tent in the wilderness and the tundra of the Arctic. You can't take a woman with you there! Then I became a ski instructor and Executive Pilot at Lake Tahoe, California, and later became very successful at resort real estate development and sales in northern California and in Aspen, Colorado. At age 35, I dropped out—gave up my career as VP of marketing and development for Rocky Mountain ski area development companies—and became a free-lance photographer and cinematographer. I made a living at it, but just barely. It was at this point that I started looking into spiritual things."

"A year of meditation exercises produced a profound change in my perspective. I suddenly had to know who the hell I am, why I'm here on this planet, and where I go from here. In the process of self discovery, I lived for a short while in a Catholic monastery and did a photographic picture story of monastic life, took Zen training, later joined a Christian Church, graduated from the Church, became a Naturopathic Physician, wrote a book called Natural Practices For Body Balance, traveled around the U.S. for two years lecturing and teaching for a major herb company; trained specialists in natural healing techniques in a Florida Health Center, and then that the age of 45, went back to my parents' home in Nova Scotia to build a 50-foot motor sailboat with no money and barely a working knowledge of how to do so. It was to be my personal test of the Laws of Manifestation."

"So you can see, Montana, I'm not what the world would classify as a stable, responsible individual any more than you are. It would take a woman with a helluva lot of personal power, resourcefulness, and adventurous spirit to stick with me for long, but the Laws of Manifestation manifested one about half way through building the boat. I was her fourth husband and we've been together off and on for 20 years — happily divorced,

living together at times, apart at times, and friends forever. As for sex, it's not a habit or a preoccupation with me. It happens when the conditions are right—which is seldom—and doesn't occupy my mind the rest of the time."

"Ha!" Montana said. "Now I know why you turned down my offer to share my women! What the hell do you do for fun, anyway?"

"You know, Montana, I think you're teaching me something I may not have wanted to look at," I said. "I've been very serious for too long in this search for the true meaning of life. However, I now have answers to all the questions I ever asked. I've been 'Brought to Naught' as the saying goes in mystical/esoteric circles. But what I hear through the Cloud Of Unknowing is laughter... and it's time I started learning more about laughter because, to me, it's a basic ingredient to the Sound Of Freedom ..... and freedom includes fun."

"So what're you gonna to do first," he asked?

"I think I'll write about it," I said, "And I think I'll write your story first since you're the one who's jolted me out of my spiritual tower."

Montana laughed:

"Guess I better get on with the story then," he said. "Where was I?"

"The well drilling company ... the construction company ... the money that bought the boat." I said.

"Oh, yeah, I hadn't told you about the construction company yet! This guy called me one day, wanted to borrow some money against some unpaid bills he'd accumulated. He had a small construction company that built steel storage sheds, warehouses, quonset Huts, horse barns, and so-on all over the northwest. He'd subcontract with a local contractor to build the concrete floor, footings, and foundation, then he'd land on the job site with four or five men and a truck loaded with the steel and materials for the building..... with a crane on board to unload 'em and put 'em in place. He'd be in and out of a job site in 2 days to a week... 10 days at most. Real clean operation, but he had to do the office work, sales work, and construction supervision himself. The business was at the point where it had to take a jump from small to medium-sized business and he didn't know how to go about that. He either had to hire a competent office manager who could keep his books, give a good interim sales pitch, expedite deliveries, answer the phone and follow up on bills, or he had to hire a competent job supervisor and stay in the office himself. Either way he'd take a big cut in what he was makin' with the company. On top of that, he was a nice guy—too nice—not hard-nosed enough on himself or his men.

Come to find out he had never got paid on a number of small jobs. They were farmers who'd had a tough year, individuals who for one reason or another couldn't pay, and he couldn't bring himself to take 'em to court. He'd used up his line of credit at the bank and he was in a bind ... which is why he called me.

Anyway, I went down to Missoula to visit with him and look his operation over. He had a nice Kenworth diesel tractor and a couple of flatbed trailers—one with a boom crane on it, a forklift, and a few power tools that weren't worth much. He still owed a bunch of money on the Kenworth, but the receivables covered his credit line and the truck and other company loans. It looked like the company just needed some proper management to move it that next rung up to medium-sized business, so I said to him:

'I'll lend you \$20,000.00 on your business at 18% for six months. The security is a personally-guaranteed mortgage on your property, plus a contract of sale on your business. At the end of six months, if the loan's in default, I get to choose whether I want your property or your business..... and I'll tell you right now, what I want is your business!

I don't want your whole business; I want 55 percent of your company stock so I control the business and make the financial decisions. I decide who works for who for how much, and who has what titles. At the end of the year, you and I and whoever else owns the company's stock get to split the profits or plow it back into the company... but it's always my decision as to how the company gets run. However, as the company grows, so does your net worth.

The reason for the mortgage on your property is to keep your nose to the grindstone for the next six months so I don't end up with a business and assets that're over-mortgaged and worthless. If your receivables come in, you can pay me off; if they don't, it's my problem and believe me I'll handle the problem. I have a big Indian who's tougher and ornerier than a junkyard dog, and behind him there's an attorney who's so sneaky, quiet, and lethal, he's terrifying!

So I told this guy—Bart Perry's the guy's name—to think about it for a while, and then I left. It's all a poker game, you know. You take a calculated risk that you think has a good chance of workin', put yourself in control, and then walk away as though you didn't care one way or the other whether it worked or not.

Bart called a few days later and said he was unsure whether he 'trusted' me or not. "Bart," I said, "..... ain't no trust involved here. It's all in black and white. You do your part and you don't have to have nothing to do with me. On the other hand, you should be so lucky as to have me as your business partner. Over the past five years my rinky-dink little pawnshop has become one of the biggest mortgage and loan companies in the intermountain area. That only happens if you know how to manage money and people."

He tried to get me to change the deal a little, but I said no. Take it or leave it the way it is, and he took it. I think he knew damn well he wasn't going to be able to pay back the \$20,000.00 in 6 months, and sure enough, he wasn't. I gave him an extra month or two and then went down to Missoula to work out details of the company stock transfer.

Once the transfer had taken place I spent a lot of time going back and forth between Coeur d'Alene and Missoula. I worked in the office and had an accountant set up a new bookkeeping system. His secretary was a sharp young gal who told me more about the company's problems than Bart knew about or was willing to change. I developed a healthy respect for her, especially when she told me right up front at the beginning she had no desire to play with me ... even if it cost her her job! Three months later I made her the President of the company and she's been running it ever since. Some things you play with... some things you work with.

Then I started working with the men on each job site, with Bart teaching me what he knew about how to put these buildings together. I figured out pretty quick which were the workers and which men were the dead weight. I gave the workers a slight raise in pay and fired the dead weight. I hired a couple of new men, and then went after the receivables. That was the fun part because I just love to intimidate people who don't meet their obligations, or who know full well before they create the obligations they can't meet 'em.

The first thing I did was take a list of the long overdue receivables to Markham and even though the time within which the contractor had to file mechanic's liens had long since passed, somehow they became a matter of public record within the proper time frame. I don't want to know how he did that, and neither do you. I hoped I'd never have to fall back on those mechanic's liens; I just wanted them there for pressure. The next thing I did was sent my big Indian to visit each one with a very unfriendly message.

Now... when you run a pawnshop and a loan business you deal with a lot of second and third-rate people who figure what's yours is theirs if they can get it away from you. I don't consider these people very friendly and so I have a very unfriendly fellow who takes care of them. He's about 6 foot, 4 inches tall, weighs in at about 280 pounds, and he's part Indian and part Black ... name's Tarquin. He spent a number of years, and learned his trade, working for collection agencies in Seattle. I don't know all the things he does, but what I do know ain't for publication. I'll just say that the more difficult the bill is to collect, the more difficult he becomes short of having to go to jail ... and even that isn't too much of a problem since the bail bond business is part of the pawn shop.

I collected 80% of the receivables within six months and the rest is now in court. Markham's fees are not cheap, but he's worth every penny of what I pay him. And now this construction business chugs along with a good profit and very happy employees. Bart is a Vice President of the company and he spends his time where he's happiest doin' what he's best at: supervisin' the men and the construction right on the job site.

That's where the money come from for the boat. And now I have a proposition for you. You know how to build computers, how to maintain 'em, and how to use 'em. I don't even know how to turn one on and I don't really want to learn. I've also gotten to know you pretty well over the past few months and I think we could get along pretty good in the close quarters of a boat. The boat has all the most modern electronics and computerized systems you can imagine, and since you already know how to sail a big boat and navigate at sea, you'd be a natural for the job. I could give you room and board and travel expenses back and forth from your home to wherever the boat is lyin' up for a long stay, plus \$1,500.00US a month. Interested?"

"I haven't seen this boat yet," I said, "and don't really know anything about it. Maybe you better show me some pictures of her or take me down to see her so I have a little more information to base my decision on."

Montana rummaged around in his motor home for a few minutes and then came out with a scrapbook in his hand.

"I guess I don't have much for pictures," he said. "I've been handin' 'em out to these girls applyin' for work, but I've got a few pictures of the interior before I did the major renovations. This here's the galley ... and here's the main salon. Here's a look out through the vinyl windscreen around the flying bridge."

He handed me several pictures, none of which were views of the whole boat. The picture looking out from the flying bridge showed no mast at all and I asked him where the mast was.

"That picture was took during renovations," he said. "We had the masts out of her, and all the rigging too. I had a video that Bill made of the boat sailing down the coast of Mexico and that shows the boat best of all, but that's gone too."

"Who's Bill?" I asked.

"He's my captain. You'd like him ... he's a quiet kind of guy, and one of the most competent sailors I've ever met. When he brings the Wicked Mistress in to a dock, he won't use no engine at all ... says a good sailor don't need an engine. He roller furls all the sales but the jib when he gets close to the dock, then backs the jib when he's right next to the dock—if the wind's right—or just drifts in and jumps off with a couple of lines. It takes forever, but I let him run the ship the way he likes."

"You have roller furling on all sails?" I asked.

"Hood mast with internal roller furling and the same for the jib and staysail. They're all electrically controlled from a panel in the outside or inside cockpits. Winches are electric as well."

"What do you have for electronics?" I asked.

"There's two Furuno radars, two SATNAV systems tied in to the autopilot, and two big 21-inch LCD screens that shows the computerized charts of anywhere in the world. You can put your mouse cursor on the location you want to go to and the autopilot takes you there."

"There's also a depth sounder, speed log, and a forward-looking sonar/depth-sounder. I don't really understand it, but Bill says he can spot objects in the water or underwater far enough ahead to take evasive action. With a 70 ft. boat, running into a whale or a floating container that's fallen off a container ship can ruin your whole day. We got three steering stations: one aft; one on the flying bridge; and one at the consoles in the salon."

"You have radio equipment?" I asked.

"Everything you can imagine," he said. "Bill's even a Ham radio operator so we have a Ham radio that gives us telephone contact with anywhere in the world when we're at sea. We use the cell phones when we're close to land or a port. There's two VHF radios, a CB, and a short-wave radio. There's EPIRB's on both life rafts and hand-held EPIRB's for the foul-weather gear. We even have a sky phone and sky pager, but don't use it too much; only when the Ham set don't get close to where we want to talk."

"Bill don't use the navigational equipment much, though. He uses a sextant when we're at sea, and he's dead on with Dead Reckoning navigation. He can tell the weather pretty good from the wind shifts, cloud formations, and sea state. We can put a satellite weather map on the LCD screens, but Bill only uses it if there's been a typhoon or hurricane forecast."

"It's kind of funny how I ended up with all this fancy electronics. The stuff was about five years old when I bought the boat and it was fine for the sailing we did, but one day we were coming in to San Diego harbor where the U.S. Navy has a big shipyard when a destroyer went steaming by us—we were still about 5 mi. out of San Diego. After that destroyer got close, all the electronic equipment started going haywire. Some of it burned right out, but nothing worked right after that. I don't know what happened, but it must've been awful powerful to pull off what it did."

"When I got back to the dock in Chula Vista, I called the Navy base commander's office and told him what had happened. He sent out some Lieutenant Commander and a couple of enlisted radio technicians to check out the gear. They never said much, just nodded

their heads to the officer and left. A day or so later I get a call from that Lt. Commander and he tells me to replace the equipment that was burned out and bring him the bill."

"Well, pretty quick-like I get three electronics companies to give me bids on the best that money can buy. It comes to about \$25,000.00 and when I sent it to the Lt. Commander, he was more than a little upset—which is what I expected. So I said:

'Yes, I did go a little overboard. How much are you willing to pay?'

He said: 'I'll pay \$12,000.00 ... no more!'

I said: 'Thank you very much!'... and he mailed me a check two weeks later. My actual cost was \$15,000.00!"

"What do you have on board for an engine and generator?" I asked.

"They're both experimental Kubotas," he said. "They've got special Teflon cylinder linings and triangular pistons. They can run 24/7 for 20 years or more without overhaul."

Triangular cylinders! Teflon cylinder linings! Those were new ones on me, but I didn't question it because he seemed to know what he was talking about.

"Engine and prop in the main hull?" I asked.

"Nope," he replied. "The main engine runs a big hydraulic pump and there's a 25-inch Max Prop on each stabilizer hull that runs off a hydraulic motor in each hull. I can turn that boat around in her own radius ... and the props feather automatically when we're sailing, so there's no drag from the propellers. Max Props are made in Italy and they're beautiful pieces of brass machinery, very strong and very dependable."

Montana and I talked on for hours about how the boat was constructed: galvanic corrosion protection, antenna grounding, anchor types, windlasses, tenders, fuel tanks, fuel filters, electrical systems, fuse and breaker panels, refrigeration, and so on. He even went into great detail about how the reverse-osmosis water purification filters were pressurized, how often the filters needed to be changed, and what the daily water production and requirements were for the boat.

Having designed and built my own 50-foot motor sailboat single-handedly from a pile of lumber and assorted hardware, I was astonished at this man's knowledge of how boats worked and were put together. This guy who looked like a Biker, talked like an uneducated piece of sub-culture low-life, and had already proven his knowledge of automobile and stock car mechanics to me, had a mind bordering on genius at the very least! Not in the six months I spent around him did one piece of his story ever change from its original presentation ... and I went back over things to double-check his story more than once. I could not for the life of me resolve this ambivalent, enigmatic person. Was this story true? Was it his direct experience? Was he putting together stories and facts he had read about, seen on TV, or heard from those who had actually lived the experience? I could

not tell where his story stopped being a personal experience or became an imagined fabrication, it was so skillfully woven together—no detail ever forgotten.

I certainly could never pull off such a skillful story fabrication myself over a period of six months. I had confronted him with these issues more than once, though largely in fun. His reply was always something like this:

"Look! Why would I lie to you? I got nothing to gain. There's nothing you have that I want and no wealth you have that I don't have more of myself!"

I questioned the last part of his statement in my own mind because, though I didn't have much more than he had, it certainly appeared that I did from what I had seen so far. So I relegated the experience to that of a story, but not completely. I liked Montana as a person. We could talk boats, airplanes, cars, and mechanical things for hours on end. Was I prepared to believe enough in this unseen boat to hope I could spend some time on it?... to alter my own life in a way that obligated me to the experience? I had a few more questions:

"Montana," I said. "How come you have all this money and all these material possessions that you talk about and you live in this crummy old motor home and drive a 15 year-old jeep that's a wreck? Are you traveling incognito or something?"

"That's exactly what I'm doing," he replied, "But there's a lot more to it than just that."

"Would you mind explaining?" I asked.

"Sure," he said. "The biggest thing is the Internal Revenue Service. They're a lot bigger and more powerful than me and I don't really want to feel pressure from there like has happened before. It ain't that I don't pay my taxes, because I do. My companies paid over two hundred thousand dollars in income tax last year ... and that was a bad year. The amount of personal tax I pay is very low and I like to keep it that way. I get to play with company assets all over the place. Some of the things I do are not clear-cut black and white—and those gray areas you often have to fight out in courts and I don't want to spend my time or money doing that."

"There's another thing. I like what I am and the way I look. I keep myself clean and neat on purpose. I don't want to change myself just to accommodate some Nouveau-Rich yokel who's afraid of things he don't know nothin' about, or some self-righteous Christian who thinks everybody who's anybody should all dress the same way. I—what's the word you used—intimidate 'em. I'll give you an example."

"The pawnshop took this expensive motor home in trade for an expensive farm tractor a couple of years ago. I thought I'd try the motor home out, so I loaded up my sweet little wife —yes, I had a wife, and I'll tell you about her later—and we went to Palm Springs

one winter for a short vacation. I pulled in to a very fancy RV park where my fancy motor home would feel right at home and parked in a large space between two motor homes that were the half-million-dollar variety, even nicer than mine. We was there about a week when the park superintendent knocked on my door one evening, came in and sat down ... very apologetic he was ... and said:

"Mr. LeFandra, I really don't know how to say this more tactfully, but the fact is that several of my best long-term customers are threatening to move to another park if you stay. I'll be happy to refund your money, but I have to ask you to leave."

I was surprised for a second or two, but not totally surprised because I'd seen the look on the guy's face that owned that big Prevost bus when he first saw me. Christ Almighty, you'd think he'd seen a ghost! I thought at first it might have been my dog, but I clean up after Pierre every time he shits..... and he don't say more'n a word or two unless he wants somethin' or gets super excited. But then I seen the guy's wife... and the way he was lookin' at my wife... and I knew he was wantin' somethin' he couldn't have ..... or his wife had caught him lookin'! Either way it wasn't no good.

Mona—she was my wife at that time—was a very attractive young girl. She was old enough to be my daughter, and I met her first on a pack trip back into the Purcells. She was barefoot—like she was most of her life—had on a pair of cut-off jeans and a plaid shirt, long brown ponytail down her back, and she was standin' in a stream fishin'. She and her father and mother were about as close to bein' a hermit as you can get without bein' one, and this girl was as timid as a fawn and just as beautiful. She was a different kind of simple, natural beauty you don't see very often. I didn't blame the guy for lookin' at her in her cut-off jeans and t-shirt. Hell, I could hardly keep my eyes and hands off her myself. Anyway, we pulled out of that park and went to another nice park where I was careful to choose a space next to two motor homes more like mine or cheaper. We stayed there for a day or two and damned if a state police car didn't stop in front of my motor home. The cop got out, introduced himself and asked if I'd mind having a short conversation with him. I said sure, and invited him in the motor home. When we got in the motor home and sat down, he said:

"I'm not here assuming you've broken the law or anything, but there's someone in this park has some connections somewhere up the ladder above me and asked me to check you out. They said you looked like a drug supplier and were driving a mighty expensive motor home for your station in life ... whatever that means! All the same, could I ask to see your driver's license and vehicle registration please? You have no obligation to show them to me at this point, but I'm afraid they may ask me to watch you until you leave or dream up some other reason for stopping you. My computer says the motor home is owned by an Idaho pawnbroker ... would you mind telling me your end of the story?"

Now, this guy was more polite than any State Trooper I've ever met. He must've been a pinch-hitter that day or somethin'.

"Sure," I said. "I don't have anything to hide. Here ... take a look at this. " and I handed him my driver's license.

"That's a federal number on your license, isn't it?" he asked.

"You got it," I said. "Take that number and called the FBI and they'll tell you as much as they want you to know about me. As for the pawnshop: I own it; and as for bein' a drug supplier: the closest I come to that is buyin' aspirin for the homeless in my shelter in Coeur d'Alene."

He apologized for the inconvenience and left. We left too, 20-minutes later, and never went back to Palm Springs again. I sold the motor home after that and never bought another until this one.

So you see, I travel with the crowd I look like and feel comfortable with. With the boat it's a little different matter because I have Bill as a front man. I can pose as his chartered crew with my girls and get away with a lot more. Also, we don't spend much time in public marinas when I'm on board. We usually take the boat to my place in Mexico and tie it up to the wharf in front of the house."

"The house in Mexico!" I thought to myself. "This is getting better all the time. "

"Where's your house in Mexico," I asked him.

"It's on a point of land about 30 miles north of Puerto Vallarta on the west coast of Mexico. The point of land is a little fishing village with couple dozen houses, and my place was built by an American doctor on land leased from the Mexican government about 20 years ago. It ain't a fancy place: four bedrooms, three baths, big kitchen, a nice open living room with lots of windows, big veranda all around the house, and a small pool. There's a little servants' quarters attached to the rear of the house. I have a couple that lives there permanent all the time and takes care of the place. There's power in the village, but it's so undependable I have my own generator."

"It's unbelievably beautiful there. The jungle comes right down to the ocean ..... bananas and plantain planted here and there ..... a few coconut trees too. The coast at that point is only about a half-mile wide, then it climbs up very sharp to a high plateau about 300 or 400 feet above the ocean. "

"How do you get there?" I asked.

"You can take a fishing boat from Puerto Vallarta—it's about a two- and-a-half hour ride. There's a dirt road from Puerto Vallarta, but its only passable certain times of the year—even then it's just a cart track. It's a pretty remote place; you wouldn't want to take anything less than a Hummer up there." "I suppose you have a Hummer, too?" I said.

"I had one for a while," Monty said. "Bought it for a song from the dealer after it had an

electrical fire that burned out the wiring harness and some of the engine compartment. I rebuilt it, got offered a price I couldn't refuse, and sold it. I've got off-road vehicles in Montana that're more fun than that."

"How long do you stay at your place in Mexico?" I asked.

"Until everybody wants to leave ... that's usually about a month or two!"

"How do you get re-supplied there?" I asked.

"Oh Hell, we got two 20-cubic-foot freezers on the boat, plus the local fisherman love it when I come around 'cause I buy their fish and lobster and abalone for cash .....same with the fresh fruit and coconut."

"Pierre loves it down there," Monty continued. "He has a Monkey friend comes out on the wharf to visit him and they play together for hours. I got the monkey one day when I was walking through the village and saw a guy with a monkey on a leash. I stopped the guy and asked him if he wanted to sell the Monkey and he says to me something like: 'No hablo ingles, Senor' so I took this \$50.00 bill out of my pocket, point to the Monkey, and he understands my language perfectly. Two seconds later the Monkey's mine. I took him to the boat ... bad move! I picked him up to put him on the deck and felt this instant pain in my right hand. The little bastard had clamped onto my thumb with his teeth and wouldn't let go! Jesus..... he almost took my thumb clean off! I slammed him up against the boat so hard it knocked him silly and he let go. He was still shakin' his head for five minutes after that little demonstration, but we had a healthy respect for each other after that. Still I could never get him house-broke; he had to stay out on the deck. In the meantime, he and Pierre had become friends and you can't imagine how funny they was together."

"Pierre would be asleep on the cockpit floor and that crazy Monkey would sneak up on the cabin roof, look down at Pierre, then at me, then leap down on top of Pierre. Pierre'd leap up terrified, yelping like he was bein' killed—monkey on his back—and go tearin' down the deck and around the cabin trying to shake the monkey off. I almost died laughin'."

"Other times the monkey and Pierre'd play tag for hours. Pierre must've made five thousand trips down the deck at full speed, around the cabin, back up the deck, then leap over the cockpit and down the deck again ..... the monkey hot on his heels. The monkey'd jump up on the boom or cabin when he got tired and wait for Pierre to pass by at high speed. Then he'd leap down on him. Sometimes he missed, sometimes he'd grab Pierre and they'd roll down the deck together. After a while Pierre'd be totally exhausted, tongue hangin' out of his mouth, pantin' like a steam engine, and I'd see the two of 'em sound asleep in the sun, the monkey curled up beside Pierre."

"Other times the monkey'd be standing at the guard rail looking down at somethin' in the water and Pierre'd trot down the deck to see what was goin' on. Next thing you know, Pierre's flyin' through the air and ... SPLASH! The monkey'd pushed him overboard! Poor Pierre'd have to swim until Bill or Holly—Oh! I didn't tell you about Holly—fished him out of the ocean with this big hoop-net we use to bring fish aboard"

"You fish from the boat?" I asked.

"Oh yeah, we have fresh fish all the time when we're at sea." Monty replied.

"Is the monkey still on the boat?" I asked.

"No," Monty said. "I leave the monkey there. He goes up into the jungle at night and when we aren't there. Sometimes we don't see him for days. He used to shit on the deck and I'd get pretty damned mad at him! He finally figured out he had to go up into the jungle to shit. Training him with the other end was a little easier. One day when we was parked at the wharf I was standing at the outside rail draining my bladder over the side and the monkey seen what was goin' on. He ambled up, looked up at what I was doing, and the next thing I know he was peeing over the side too. Monkey see, monkey do, you know. After that if he had to pee, he just up and let fly over the side of the boat, all the time hanging onto the guard rail with one hand and his pecker with the other."

"You mentioned the name Holly," I said. "Who is Holly?"

"She's ... well ... I'm still not sure of that one myself, but she's as close to a daughter as I've ever had. She's 18 now, been with me since she was 12 years old. Now she's a full-blown young lady and I just don't know if I can keep myself under control or not. I don't really want to marry her, but I'm probably gonna have her for the rest of her life. But you gotta understand, if you come on the boat, you gotta treat her like your own daughter. No monkey business!"

"Did the monkey do that, too?" I asked.

Monty laughed.

"Not's I know of!" he replied.

"How did you come to acquire Holly on the boat?" I asked.

"I was tied up at a marina wharf in San Diego with the trimaran I had before this one—been tied up for several months—and this family, mother, father, and daughter, would walk down the pier and sit on the bollards near the boat for an hour or so each evening, talking and looking at the sunset. We'd say hello, and I noticed they'd go back to this beat-up old van parked under the trees off in a corner of the marina parking lot. It took me awhile to realize they were all three sleepin' in that van. Every now and then the van would be gone for a few days, then come back. Sometimes this young girl, all of 14 years old, would come down on the wharf after school by herself and talk to me. She'd come

on the boat more and more and I could tell after a while that she was either retarded, awfully slow, or very simple. She told me her parents were alcoholics and they'd been evicted from their apartment and had to live in the van. She said her mother was sick with cancer and might not live long ... and then one day she came down on the boat in tears and said her mother had died in the hospital and she didn't know what to do. She asked me if she could stay with me on the boat, and I told her that was OK, but only if it was okay with her father."

"Well, she went back and had a talk with her father that night, and they both came down to the boat the next morning. Her Father, by the looks of him, was not in much better shape than her mother. He was coherent enough to carry on an intelligent conversation though. If ever there was a lost soul it was that one. He said his daughter Holly loved the boat and thought a lot of me. Said he'd just lost his wife and didn't know what he was gonna do. He was sure he couldn't take care of Holly, and he couldn't bring himself to put her in an unknown foster home. Did I think I could take care of her?"

"I told him he'd have to make me her Ward, and it would have to be in writing. So he said all right, give me a piece of paper and a pen and tell me what to write. I told him what to write and he signed it. He asked me a few questions about myself and the boat and was gone. He come back once about a week later for a visit with Holly—seemed very happy that she was happy—and that's the last either of us ever saw him again. I often think how hard it must've been for him to put his child in the hands of a stranger like me, but I don't think she could have had better care than Bill and I give her. I think the whole process of living was just too much for him to handle."

"Anyway, Bill and I became Holly's parents and it ain't always been easy. She has terrible periods of depression where she won't even come out of her room. Bill has to go down and coax her out and talk her out of her depression. He's taught her how to swim and she's a real good swimmer, but the stories Bill tells me about how that child lived would tear your heart apart. Her parents would lock her in a dark closet for hours at time whenever someone came to their apartment door so that no one would know they had a child. They were afraid Welfare would have taken the child to a foster home ... and I'm not sure that wouldn't have been better for her. Who knows?"

"You wouldn't believe how much Bill has helped her over the past four years. He had two kids of his own. He was a professor of marine biology at Berkeley for a number of years. Then one day his older son tried to commit suicide by jumping off the Bay Bridge, but only succeeded in making himself totally incapacitated. He was picked up unconscious by a nearby fisherman. The kid should've become a ward of the state, but his mother wanted to take care of him. Bill couldn't handle that—and a number of other things—so

he left home and started working on boats and that's how I met him. He did some work on the new boat just after I bought it and I hired him on permanently."

"Tell me something more about Bill," I asked.

"Well, he's made several video films of marine life so I know he's good with a video camera. Like I said, he's the one made the video film of Wicked Mistress. Boy, I wish I had another copy of that video."

"Why don't you call him and get one?" I asked.

"Can't!" Monty said. "Bill and the boat are at the house in Mexico. Cheaper to keep it there than in Chula Vista, and it's safer for me. I don't want nobody to know I even have a boat."

"Jesus," I said. "There's only a few thousand women who know about the boat!"

"I'm talkin' about the Federal authorities. The boat ain't registered in the U.S. so it can't stay here for long after it comes in. Bill likes it down south there; water's cleaner; no vandals; no theft; and no lawsuits. The boat's not insured, but I do have health coverage for anyone employed on board. We bring her up to San Diego during hurricane season. I don't want another hurricane like the one I went through 10 years ago."

## CHAPTER 6.

I was remembering myself being on a sailboat during a hurricane—more specifically, the 51-foot boat I'd spent four and a half years building. She'd been in the water for 10 days and I hardly knew how she'd handle in a wild sea, let alone how she'd handle in a hurricane. But when your boat is your home, and what little you own is on board with you, you're committed to the elements and the sea.

Naturally I had picked the wrong time of the year to launch the boat, right at the end of hurricane season—November 15th—and in the North Atlantic ocean which is long renowned for its ferocious, bitter cold winds, high tides and hard-to-predict weather. Many times I wished I had just left her in Mom's back yard where I had built her, cut a hole in her hull for a set of steps, and kept her as a beautiful, hand-crafted guest house.

Such, however, was not the way of Kit Cain, the invincible fool. Well that I have Gods and Angels being entertained by my follies, or I would never have lived to have more. I did have help though, in the form of a powerful, resilient French Acadian lady named Anne— a year later to become my second wife, and I her fourth husband. She and her two children, a boy named Daylian, aged 13, and a girl named Kelly, age 5, none of them ever having been at sea before..... or ever even sailed in a sailboat before!

But they must have believed in me or they would never have boarded the boat in the first place. As for me, I believed in myself and the great benevolent and formative hand of the Captain of all Captains. We were indeed a ship of fools, but we were in good hands—not entirely my own either. I had named the boat Wind Rider, not only because that was her intended design and function, but more because in attempting to manifest this folly of my imagination, I was casting my soul to the Spirit Of The Winds, and had no choice but to ride those winds wherever they took me.

Anne and I climbed aboard Wind Rider two hours before midnight on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1985; the kids would come across the Bay of Fundy the next day on the Yarmouth to Bar Harbor ferry, the Bluenose. On coming aboard, I immediately set to work learning how to use the Loran navigation system. This was not entirely a fine time to learn, but electronic navigation was not a new thing to me either, having spent thousands of hours in the air as a U.S. Marine pilot, bush pilot in the Yukon Territory, and commercial pilot in the Sierra Mountains of California where my life constantly depended upon my ability to use electronic navigation equipment properly.

It was a pitch black night and there were high winds forecast for that night, but they were forecast to be tailwinds which would blow us on our way across the Bay of Fundy. We cast off the lines at midnight—the course and waypoints to Bar Harbor duly plotted, all navigation lights and interior lights working, and the binnacle compass light glowing red in the open aft cockpit in a totally dark and pitch black night.

Wind Rider had no mast as yet. She would rely entirely on her big Perkins, 6-cylinder diesel engine, and large 25-inch Max Prop propeller. We cast off the lines and started to move away from the wharf. We had been tied up on the inside of the wharf closest the shore, not the outside facing the harbor channel. There were no lights on the Yarmouth wharf by which to verify movement in the dark, and after about a minute of idling the engine at 10% power, we didn't seem to be moving very rapidly. I broke out the portable searchlight, and, sure as Hell, we were fast aground in the soft black harbor mud! We were off to a sterling start! Fortunately, the tide was rising, and in 15 minutes we were on our way, locating the channel markers with the searchlight as we moved out of the harbor into the open sea.

The only chart I had been able to obtain of Bar Harbor was a Xerox copy of a chart given to me by the Captain of the Bluenose Ferry, Hubert Hall. Nowhere in this seafaring town of Yarmouth could I find a proper marine chart of the coast of Maine! Not only that, but the only store that carried marine charts was out of the chart of Yarmouth harbor and its approaches, and there were some serious dog-leg turns—to say nothing of the Lurcher Shoals rocks and shallows between Yarmouth harbor and the Bay of Fundy proper. Thanks again to the Captain of the Bluenose Ferry, I had been given verbally what bell buoys, lighted buoys, and markers to watch for on the way out into the Bay of Fundy.

Once out into the Bay of Fundy, the seas began to rise with the strong easterly winds to heights of perhaps 10 or 12 feet. Being without mast or sails to stabilize her sleek, rounded, and quite fast hull, Wind Rider rolled and yawed from wave to wave constantly. Such movement required constant attention to the helm and a constant checking of the compass, glowing with its barely visible red light, to make sure we were on course.

When we seemed to be staying on course according to the Loran, I asked Anne if she wouldn't mind steering for a while as I was totally exhausted from the previous weeks of launching and final details required to make the boat ready for its journey southward away from the winters of the North.

Anne took the helm, and in no time at all developed the knack of swinging the big steel steering wheel to match the ships roll. This being the first time she had ever steered

any kind of a boat, or been on any kind of boat that rolled as this one did, I was more than a little impressed. I went below into the main cabin and, feeling that the ship was in competent hands, fell soundly asleep despite the wild gyrations of the hull.

When I came back on deck at roughly 5:00 a.m., there was only enough dawn light to be able to barely make out the coast of Maine. I had no idea where on the coast we were until I checked the Loran coordinates. I was amazed to find that we had never strayed more than a few feet off course all way across the Bay of Fundy, and, when I took out the binoculars, found the buoys we were looking for about two miles away straight off the bow. I congratulated Anne on a job well done!

Instead of proceeding in to Bar Harbor, we decided to depend on the Xeroxed chart and follow the buoys around to Northeast Harbor where we would find the Hinckley Yacht facilities and the second-hand mast and rigging that would soon be installed on Wind Rider.

As it was beginning to turn quite cold that third week in November, we wanted to head South as fast as we could. The kids came to Bar harbor on the Bluenose ferry; we picked them up by taxi, loaded them on board, and set off down the Maine coast after The Hinckley yard workers and I had installed the mast and rigging.

After paying for the mast, rigging, and installation, I was down to my last thousand dollars. I had somehow managed to convince the Bank of Nova Scotia to lend me \$25,000 to finish the boat, but the major portion of that had been used to purchase the engine, generator, batteries, transmission, propeller, and drive shaft. Nevertheless, I spent \$150.00 for the charts of the East Coast from Maine to Florida as I would have been unable to proceed without them. We had \$850 left with which to purchase food and fuel.....no credit cards and no more credit. We agreed to continue southward until we ran out of fuel and money, tie up wherever that might be, and go to work earning more money.

I had a good VHF radio on board which gave us hourly weather forecasts, and so we knew there was a hurricane headed northward from the Caribbean, but it seemed to be well out to sea and diminishing in force. By now having had some experience with Wind Rider's speed through the water, I had estimated we could arrive at Monhegan Island about six hours before the hurricane was due to pass by offshore, but I had no idea what sort of shelter Monhegan Island offered, or whether or not the bottom would hold my big 65-pound Danforth anchor. Nor did I have any idea how Wind Rider's high freeboard—which would act like a sail in any high wind—would handle the extreme winds of a hurricane.

I had, however, over-built her rudder, had double the horsepower engine required to drive her at hull speed through the water, and had a very large and efficient 25-inch propeller to compensate for the windage of the hull.

As we drew closer to Monhegan Island, the wind began to pick up, and when I finally found my way into the small harbor, I could see there wasn't much room for error or mistakes in judgment. One mistake or accidental parting of the anchor line and I'd be ashore or tangled up in the lines and rigging of another boat before I could get the engine started.

There was a small wharf, more like an abutment made of railroad ties, jutting out from the steep bank of the harbor's edge which I tied to so we could go ashore for supplies and information. The local Islanders were very helpful, and one in particular seem to know that there was a vacant mooring in the center of the harbor with a substantial-enough concrete block on the bottom to hold Wind Rider through a storm. As to whether or not the fastenings and chains on the mooring were sound or nearly rusted through, I had no way of knowing. I decided, however, to take a chance on its soundness.

The summer resident who owned the mooring had returned to the mainland by this late in the Fall, but he had kept a 50-foot boat moored there each year and I figured if he had enough money to own a 50-foot boat and a summer place on Monhegan Island, he probably also had enough money and sense to keep his mooring in good condition. That proved to be a safe assumption on my part, though not an assumption I would have made had the circumstances been any different. For my part, I tied a double mooring line from each of hawseholes of Wind Rider's bow to the sturdy mooring chain, and wrapped each line with old towels to prevent them from chafing through.

Monhegan Island is just a large rock sticking up in the Atlantic ocean about 20 miles off the coast of Maine with enough topsoil to grow trees and grass and make it a lovely, but very remote place to live. The harbor is protected slightly by a rocky arm on one side... upon which sits the lighthouse... but since the rock is only slightly higher above the water than the tip of Wind Rider's mast—61 feet to be exact—there isn't a great deal of wind protection. I may be somewhat incorrect in my description of the island as this event occurred in 1985 —18 years ago—and at a time when my focus of attention was riveted on the boat and not exactly on my surroundings!

Darkness had begun to fall as I finished tying things down, and the wind began to increase to Gale Force strength, and thence to Storm Force strength shortly thereafter. About 10PM, Wind Rider began her incessant pacing back and forth, back and forth, like an

over-anxious dog at the end of a too-short leash. First the wind would catch her tall bow and send her rampaging in one direction to the limit of the mooring line and chain, swing the bow into the wind, only to be caught by the wind on the opposite side of the bow and blown back across the mooring to the other extremity of the line and chain. Each time she swung from one direction to the next the howling of the wind in the stainless steel rigging and mast changed tune. Try as I might to tie off the mast's sail halyards, it was to no avail. They continuously flapped and slammed against the tall aluminum mast with a vengeance. There were several other sailboats in the harbor at the time ... all of our riggings and halyards complaining mightily of the force of the wind.

Around midnight the rain began to fall in deluges, driven by the wind with a horizontal force not easily imaginable to one who has not been through it. The main force of the hurricane was still 50 miles further out to sea as it passed by, but 80 to 90 knots of wind on my masthead wind indicator told me when the worst had arrived ... that was about 1:00AM in the early hours of the morning. Everyone else slept—if not soundly, then fitfully—while I slept not at all, constantly checking the mooring lines and my location to be sure we weren't dragging the mooring along the bottom closer and closer to shore or another boat.

It was a very long, very anxious night for me, but by the time the dawn light began to lighten the eastern horizon, I could see that Wind Rider had not moved from her original position. The anchor lines were still sound. Not a drop of rain had penetrated through my carefully-designed, water-tight skylights, air vents, hatches, and cabin windows.

As the wind died more and more and everyone else awoke, I finally relaxed enough to sleep for a few hours before proceeding down the coast of Maine to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and more adventures of an inexperienced, invincible fool ... but more of that at another time.

Suffice it to say that what Montana described to me as his experiences in a hurricane meant he was either accessing that information by some means unknown to me from my own experience—I had told him nothing about my own seagoing adventures—or else he had been in a hurricane himself. Either way, I was more than a little captivated by what I was hearing from him.

“You were caught in the hurricane that wiped out everything along the Mexican coast?” I asked.

“You bet I was ... and what a nightmare that was!... millions of dollars worth of damage! Bill wasn't with me then. I was down in La Paz when word came through of the hurricane.

It wasn't supposed to come too close to shore so no one seemed terribly worried. But the damned thing veered in to the coast and no- one had time to get their boats clear"

"I was on mine, and headed out to sea using the motor. I had everything tied down, but I wasn't ready for the incredible force of the wind and horizontal spray. The hurricane moved through slow and lasted almost 36 hours! I had the big parachute sea anchor out over the bow to slow the backward drift, and that's one of the things that kept me from being blown back ashore. I was alone and I couldn't leave the helm for a minute. I had to keep her headed into the wind and add power as we climbed up each wave, then slack off on power on the way down. I couldn't use too much power or I'd run up over the sea anchor line, but at the same time I didn't want the hurricane force winds to put too much pressure on the sea anchor rope as we climbed the waves. The concentration wears you down, but you have no idea how much standing upright on a violently moving boat tires you. I was exhausted by the time the major winds subsided, but what a mess I found when I arrived back at La Paz Harbor! There was boats everywhere but where boats ought to be ... on top of the docks, up on the shore, a hundred yards from the water on land, and piled on top of each other. Only one or two boats had strong hurricane anchor systems or a heavy concrete mooring ... or hadn't chafed through their mooring lines.

"So you didn't suffer any damage to your boat because of the hurricane, then?" I said. "Well, I wouldn't exactly say that," Montana said. "These trimarans are very difficult to brace against the force of the sea and you have all these tremendous forces hitting the boat at different times in different places, so you get this twisting moment that breaks them up after they've been beaten around severely. When I bought the Wicked Mistress, she was one of the first of these big trimarans built and nobody knew how seaworthy they'd be."

"I guess the guy I bought the boat from had found out that the boat wasn't built properly and had some problems with the outrigger hulls where they join the main hull. That's why the price was so cheap—\$50,000—and of course he never told me the problems he had with it, so how could I know until I got into a good blow. That hurricane was the blow that told the tale!"

"It was bad enough with the wind howlin' by with gusts at over ninety knots, sea black as coal, huge waves as tall as a house, and to hear the boat startin' to creak and groan—and the creakin' and groanin' gettin' louder and louder and more often all the time. Pretty soon I heard this loud CRACK!... and Holy Shit, man ... I was sure that boat was comin' apart right there in the open ocean and me with only a life jacket and an uninflated Avon dinghy."

"This happened two or three times—once in the middle of the night in the pitch dark! The worst part was that I couldn't really tell where the damage was except for some big cracks where the main outrigger beam goes through the main hull."

"Now that the outriggers had broken loose a little, they had more movement and they put more pressure on the masts and rigging. I could watch the stays tighten up—sounded like tightening a bass guitar string—and then, on the next wave, the whole damned thing would go slack ... mast hammering back and forth like a ball wrecker. I couldn't do nothin' about it neither."

"There's so much much power in the wind, you can't stand up out on deck, and you can't see for the driving horizontal spray the wind kicks up off each wave. You just sort of have to stand there and watch your boat come apart."

"The mast finally went over the side, and I couldn't let the steel cable stays foul the propeller or the rudder, so I had to put the transmission in neutral and let the engine idle."

"You didn't have hydraulic propeller drives then?" I asked.

"No, no! This was the original Wicked Mistress—the first one. This one was registered in Mexico, made in the U.S., and built by a retired Navy Petty Officer. She had a small Yanmar diesel engine and a single prop out of the main hull ... only one mast. She's on the bottom of the ocean now, but nobody knows that. The new Wicked Mistress has the old registration number from the first Wicked Mistress carved into her main beam, but it ain't the same ship—not by a long shot!"

"So she sank on you in the hurricane?" I asked, fascinated by the story.

"No..... but I was kind of thinkin' she might! When that big aluminum mast went over the side I had to leave the boat to the sea anchor and get out on the deck with a set of bolt cutters to cut away the rigging and get free of all that mess danglin' overboard. It took me almost an hour. I had to tie myself on board with a safety line—which brought me up short of going overboard more than once! When I finally come back in the main cabin, I was soaked to the bone and shakin' like a vibrator sander from the cold. That's when I really started to get nervous! The only people knows how nervous I really was is me and the lady down at the local laundry!"

"Anyway, I think losin' the mast and rigging is the only thing that saved me. Without all that 50-foot of heavy aluminum mast takin' the wind—and the stays blockin' the natural movement of the outrigger hulls—she started takin' the wind like a different ship. I'd

still taken a helluva lot of water aboard through the cracks around the main beam, but the bilge pumps handled it as long as I could keep that little diesel engine chargin' the batteries."

"When the wind slacked off to Storm Force winds and then down to Gale Force winds, I went down into the cabin and collapsed—wet clothes and all—onto a bunk and slept for 10 hours. When I got back to La Paz and saw all the wreckage of boats, wharves and buildings, I completely forgot about Wicked Mistress. All I could see was dollar signs wherever I looked ... insurance dollars that is!"

"The first thing I did was call a couple of old biker buddies from the club who were divers. One was in Seattle and the other in Portland and I told 'em to come down to La Paz... quick! I told 'em to bring all the diving gear they could lay their hands on, air pressure pumps and all, and load it on Wicked Mistress anchored out in the harbor until I got back from San Diego."

"I flew up to San Diego and turned the harbor upside down looking for a barge and a small tug for charter. I finally found a tug and barge in separate places ..... had to put up \$5,000 in advance for the tug. The crusty old bastard of a tug captain didn't like me at all first time he seen me. But after he seen the pictures on TV of the damage in Mexico, he kinda warmed up 'cause he wasn't too old to see dollar signs! He wasn't too busy in San Diego with that small tug. We got to be best of friends as time went by."

"By the time I got back to La Paz I realized I'd forgotten somethin' real important. Nothin' happens in Mexico without political connections, and the main political connection I needed in La Paz was the Police Chief. I went lookin' for him and found him after siesta time wanderin' around lookin' at all the damage. He could speak pretty good English — which was sort of a requirement for the job since at certain times of the year Americans outnumbered Mexicans in the town. He and I sort of knew each other from my having spent a lot time there before, so we worked out a deal to impound everything I salvaged that wasn't under contract by an insurance company. I also had to work out a deal with him where he let me work in La Paz under a sort of Emergency Act wherein I hired several Mexican helpers—including him!—and they worked along with American equipment and divers. Otherwise that was illegal. Only Mexicans work in Mexico unless somebody gets paid off ... and Mexicans don't work very hard even under the best of conditions."

"We worked steady for a month and a half. The owners of American boats would come down, and since I was one of the first ones there with the most equipment, I got a huge chunk of the marine business. By the time I got through bickering with insurance

companies—including my own—I grossed about \$300,000 U.S. and my costs came to around \$100,000 U.S. ... not bad for a month and a half of work back in the sixties."

"My own insurance company settled for \$25,000 in damages to Wicked Mistress, and what I did with what was left on the hulls was stripped anything of value off 'em, sent the hardware and parts up to San Diego on the barge, and sold it. Then I filled up the three hulls with enough stone and rock to hold her on the bottom. We towed her out to sea and stove in the hulls at the waterline with a fire-axe, opened up the sea cocks, and down she went."

"Why didn't you repair the hull damage?" I asked.

"I found out she wasn't properly built. There's a guy in the San Diego area who's been buildin' these super trimarans for years and he knows how to build 'em better than anyone in the world. He had one in his yard he'd been buildin' for three years. He wanted \$250,000 for it... and we settled for \$210,000. All I had to do was carve the old Wicked Mistress registration numbers into the main support beam of the new ship and she magically became the new Wicked Mistress under Mexican registry. That avoided all the charges involved with registration. The gross tonnage and weight are slightly different, but nobody's picked up on that yet! I'll change the paperwork in Mexico some day. You can get things done down there for a small fee ... doesn't matter what it is!"

"What kind of boats did you salvage at La Paz?" I asked.

"The first job we did was a sort of practice run we did for a fisherman who was pretty close with the Chief of Police—in fact he was the police chief's brother. It wasn't much of a fishing boat—about 25 ft. long, with this big damned outboard motor on the stern—and there was no way we could float it off the bottom of the harbor without going to a lot of trouble using 55-gallon oil drums. We couldn't winch it up because you need a second barge to do that. It was sitting on the bottom in fifteen feet of water, so we realized we had to have some kind of a crane on the barge. The only thing we could find in La Paz that wasn't busy repairing hurricane damage was an older backhoe that hardly ran. It ran enough, however, for me to check out that the torque converter was in good shape. That's a real critical and expensive item on a backhoe. The body and buckets was rusty from not being used ..... and it needed a couple of rubber hydraulic lines and some work on the engine, but that was stuff I could fix myself. I asked the police chief to see if the guy would sell it."

The chief comes back a few hours later and says the guy'll sell it for \$1,000 U.S. so I sent back for some money and we went to work on it right away. I hauled the fuel pump and the injectors off and sent them and the alternator to San Diego by air—that's a single-engine Cessna that lands in La Paz twice a day on the way through from Mazatlan to San Diego and back. I ordered a fuel filter replacement, a couple of new hydraulic lines,

and a few other things by phone and then we went to work on the barge while we waited for the parts to arrive. Three days later we had our parts and had the backhoe running like it hadn't run for years. Then we drove it down to load it on the barge.

The only problem we had was that the damned barge was almost four feet higher than the wharf we had to use for loading. It turns out this guy who owned the backhoe used to work for a construction company in San Diego and he could do things with a backhoe that backhoes wasn't designed to do. He could also speak a little English, so when I went and asked him if he had any portable loading ramps or something he might've used for loading the tractor onto a truck, he asked me what I wanted them for. I told him, and he says:

"PHAH! You no need nothing for load on your barge, Senior. I do that for you."

Well, don't you know the son-of-a-bitch took that backhoe and did something with it I've never seen done before. The barge was tied in tight against the wharf, but there was still three feet of water between the dock and the side of the barge, what with the old tires hung along the side for rub rails.

He drove the backhoe's front wheels right up to the very edge of the dock, straight on, lowered the front bucket onto the steel deck of the barge, then raised the front of the hoe as far as it would go until the nose and front wheels of the damned thing was sticking way the hell up in the air. Then he pushes the hoe along with the rear bucket until the rear wheels get to the edge of the wharf ... the front bucket's squeakin' and squealin' as it slides along the steel barge deck. I knew from lookin' at what was goin' on what he had to do next, but I sure as hell was glad it wasn't me drivin' the backhoe. He turned his seat around and raised the whole back end of the tractor with the rear bucket arm until it was level with the barge deck... him and the backhoe a good five feet off the wharf! Then he pushed the whole thing across the gap onto the barge using the bucket and arm. It seemed to me the whole thing was awful unstable that far up in the air, but it didn't seem to bother him at all. He just looked at me and smiled. The whole operation didn't take five minutes, and now we had a makeshift crane on the barge that would reach down into the water 14 feet and up into the air 14 feet.

So we anchored the barge next to where this fishing boat was sunk, reached over the side and down underwater with the rear bucket so we could fasten a couple of heavy nylon hawsers around the boat and onto the bucket. The backhoe lifted the whole thing to the surface. It was too heavy, bein' full of water and all, to pick it right up on the deck. We had two good-sized gasoline-powered fire pumps I had picked up at a war surplus yard in San Diego, which I cranked up and they pumped out the hull in less than half an hour. We didn't charge the fisherman nothin', so we was off to a good start with the police chief ... and it stayed that way 'cause I kept givin' him a little money here and there as we worked.

On the second job we did, it was a pretty good-sized Trawler yacht sittin' on the bottom with only the radar and flag mast above the surface. The hull had been stoved in—probably from slammin' up against a dock pile—so we couldn't just pump her out. She was too heavy to raise with the backhoe. I had a whole slew of these old surplus rubber fuel bladders I'd bought in San Diego and loaded on the barge with the pumps and gas-powered compressor, and I'd rigged a way to hook an air-pressure hose to the filler cap of these fuel cells so that it turned 'em into air bags.

The divers took these deflated air bags down into the hull, inflated them, and floated the hull to the surface where we could seal it with plywood and underwater epoxy and then pump it out. Then the tug hauled it over to the wharf where a bigger crane could take it right out of the water. We was takin' pictures of each job with a cheap little Kodak camera... and it's a good thing we did. The insurance companies wanted more than just a bill for work done!

"You have any of those pictures?" I asked.

"I used to," Montana said, "But that was years ago and I don't think there's a one left. If there was, they'd be back in my house in Montana."

"You have a house in Montana, too?" I said.

"Oh, yeah," he said, "...got that three years ago and that's what got me in trouble with the IRS, but I'll tell you about that later. While we was doing all this salvage work, we had to find a little entertainment for the evenings. Liquor's cheap and there's plenty of it. And wherever you find yachts, you find money ... and wherever you find money, you find women. They wasn't just Mexican women either!"

We'd all come off the barge about 8:00 o'clock one night after we'd been in La Paz about a week and we was havin' dinner in a little sort of pub restaurant when I seen this nice-lookin' girl havin' dinner by herself. You could tell she was American ... about 35. I got up and went over to her and told her we was new in town and would she mind bringin' her dinner over to our table so we could ask her about this town and what the people do here ... as if I didn't know already! She agreed and we had a nice dinner conversation. Her name was Amanda and she was from San Diego. I bought her a couple of Margaritas after the guys had left and asked her what she was doing here in La Paz by herself. She says:

"I'm a nightclub singer, and I just finished a national tour with the rock group Dark Night Rising. I came down to La Paz to have a rest and get away from a relationship that was really killing me. I'm also an artist and I love to paint the ocean and the desert."

"Where are you staying in town?" I asked her.

"I've rented a little cottage near the water and I'll be there for as long as I have the money to stay."

"Have you done any painting since you've been here?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," she says. "I've done about 10 canvases. In fact, I'm running low on paint and I can't get any here for sure."

"I can solve that problem for you," I says. "Just tell me what you want, and how many, and I'll bring it down with our next shipment from San Diego."

"That would be wonderful! Thank you very much," she said.

"I'd kind of like to take a look at your art," I said. "I collect art for my place in Montana, but they're mostly mountain and river scenes. I might like to have some desert or ocean scenes as well."

So we had another Margarita and went to her little cottage and looked at her art work. Well ... I figured it would prob'ly look okay next to my furnace in the basement, or maybe better in a closet, but that wasn't really the 'art work' I came to see because she had one helluva nice body and it was lookin' better to me with each Margarita! So I said:

"How much you want for that one there?"

I was pointing to somethin' that looked like rock and water which I figured was an ocean scene, but I could've been wrong.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "I've never sold any of my art work before. Do you like that one?"

"I love that one," I lied. "I'll pay you \$500 for it!" ... and I was thinkin' maybe next week, or so.

"Do you really like my art work?" she asked, getting pretty excited.

"Your art work is beautiful," I said. "But its your technique that interests me mostly!"

Of course we weren't talking about the same art work or technique at all, but everybody needs a little encouragement—including me!

"I might want all of your art work," I said, "But I can't pay for it all at once. Will you give me a little time to pay for it?"

"Well, certainly!" she said.

"Great!" says I. "Lets talk about this old relationship you wanta get away from. Maybe I can help you with that, too."

So we talked for a few hours and by the time we got around to demonstrating technique, she says:

"Well, I guess you better spend the night."

"You sure you haven't had too many margaritas?" I said.

"They help a lot!" she says, and I was thinkin' to myself:

"Who's the real fool here?" But by then it didn't much matter!

## CHAPTER 7.

At about this time in Montana's story, we had a couple of other little adventures ourselves back at the RV Park.

"Want to go for a ride?" he asked me.

"Sure," I said. "What's up?"

"I've got to go buy some parts for one of the guys here in the park. He's got an old Harley and wants some fancy handlebars for it."

We drove about ten miles further out into the desert foothills on the main highway, then turned off onto an unmarked sand track and went several dusty miles further on until we were back behind a rocky butte. We turned down a long driveway that was barely a cart track and headed towards a house and large Quonset Hut barn ... all of which were shaded by a growth of mature Tamarisk trees. A huge American flag floated in the breeze on a rusty steel flagpole. The entire place was surrounded by a five-foot high Anchor Fence. There was an open gate on the driveway with a sign that said: NO TRESPASSING. As we passed through the gate in Montana's jeep, three dogs: a German Shepherd, a Rottweiler, and a Doberman, came roaring out from behind the house, barking frantically and angrily—the hair on their backs raised in warning.

"Jesus, Montana," I said. "Where the hell are you taking me?"

"This ain't no friendly place, I can tell you that," he replied, "but you got no worries with me. Just stay in the jeep. Don't get out. The dogs'll quiet down in a minute."

We pulled up in front of the Quonset Hut storage shed and there was a biker-type young guy out front welding on a piece of water tank. He glanced at Montana's jeep and then went back to work, paying no further attention to us. I looked over at the house. All the window blinds had been pulled down. I could see one of the blinds move as a hand pulled it aside to check us out. There were four cars outside the house... all of them older with faded paint from the desert sun and just a few steps removed from the junkyard—or so I thought.

"If you see any kind of trouble coming, " Monty said, "just start the jeep and leave."

"What do you want me to do about you?" I asked.

"I can take care of myself," he said, and walked over to the welder. He asked the welder a question and the guy raised his helmet and pointed toward the inside of the Quonset. Montana disappeared inside.

The five minutes I waited seemed like an hour, but soon enough Montana emerged carrying a beautifully chromed set of handlebars. He threw them onto the back seat, climbed in, and started the jeep. As he sat there lighting a Camel cigarette, he said in a low voice without looking:

"See that backhoe over there? Looks like it don't work—and they'll tell you it don't work—but if you have 500 bucks and you want to make a box with a body in it disappear some dark night, it'll run just fine ...after you're good and far down the road."

Montana put the jeep in gear, and as we were turning around, continued in a low voice without seeming to be noticing anything.

"We're bein' watched now, so don't look too hard at nothin'..... but take a quick look at the rims and wheels on those four cars. Ain't a one of those cars can't outrun a police interceptor. They've got big Stock Car engines in 'em and special beefed-up suspension systems so they can ride out on the desert at a hundred miles an hour without losin' it or bustin' an axle."

The dogs took up their angry growling and barking and ran alongside the jeep as it moved out toward the gate. They stopped at the gate as we passed through, and silence once again settled on that corner of the desert.

"What you didn't see," Montana continued, "is that there's ten people in those buildings making Krack and packaging Coke. What you didn't see is the shed on the back part of the Quonset Hut with about half a million dollars worth of bike parts in it. What you didn't see, and wouldn't find, is four 50-foot-long steel containers buried underground with hidden skylights..... and that windmill over there turning in the breeze pumps water into a thousand-gallon underground cistern. And just so's you don't seem stupid askin' what all those things are for, they're for growin' pot!"

"So the drug dealers come out here to buy their stuff?" I asked naively.

"Nobody comes out here!" he replied. "They don't even like me comin' out here, but they put up with me because they know I'll keep my mouth shut—and because I ain't afraid of 'em. You don't last long in this part of society if you have fear—or show it in any way. It's sort of like a fraternity of no fear."

"Sounds more to me like a fraternity of no sense," I said.

"Same thing," Montana replied. "These guys are the manufacturers and importers. They deliver to the dealers in those cars you saw. No fancy cars around here! Fancy cars are the sign of a fool! You see a piece of low-life around the city here driving a BMW convertible, you know what he does to make the lease payments!"

When we got back to his motor home, Montana said:

"Come on in. I want to show you somethin'."

I went inside and sat down. Montana handed me a Guitar Center flyer with all kinds of musical equipment specials advertised in it. He pointed to a \$2,500 hard-disk music recorder.

"How much would you pay for one of those?" he asked me.

"I've already got one, Montana," I said. "This is a newer version by two years, but I guess it's worth maybe five or six hundred dollars to me. I'm telling you again, though, I don't want stolen property or anything where someone else is hurt financially or any other way."

"If you wanted to pay eight or nine hundred I can get you a brand new one still in the box."

"Would you mind telling me," I asked, "how the hell you propose to do that without some dealer or insurance company coming up short—which is part of what I mean about somebody being hurt?"

Montana laughed.

"You ain't gonna believe this one," he said, "But its the God's truth. One of my girlfriends has a child by a man who's been married for years to another woman. The guy has three teen-age kids by his wife, and he's a very successful Music Rights Agent and Attorney in Hollywood. He wants to keep this other relationship quiet, so he gives my girlfriend his credit card once in awhile to buy clothes for the kid and stuff, but she has to be careful the charges don't look too strange just in case the wrong person gets ahold of his credit card statement. She buys what she needs for herself and the kid to the tune of a couple of thousand a month, and she'll buy this recorder for me if I give her enough to make it worthwhile. So what do you think?"

"If it works for everyone, fine, but it's only worth 600 bucks to me," I said.

"I'll ask her," he said.

I let the matter go, but a few weeks later Montana made a comment about the matter as we were talking one day.

"Can't do the recorder deal; not enough in it for her!" he said.

"Okay with me," I said ... nevertheless slightly disappointed.

It was interesting for me to examine my response mechanism closely. Was there still a bit of larceny left in my soul ... or was it the residue of lifetimes of desire for something-for-nothing? Perhaps it was the desire for the bargainer's delight—the "deal"—getting the best of some small portion of an otherwise ironclad world. Whatever it was, I had to keep it in check. I found myself walking in areas where the Earth was not quite so firm as I wanted it to be.

But I liked Montana despite his preoccupation with women... a preoccupation which never seemed to end. He'd taken in a girl for several weeks; she was certainly one

of the better looking ones I'd seen him with. She had told him she wanted to get off cocaine and get away from the men who had moved into her rented house with her. How Montana had run into her I don't know, but she behaved herself reasonably well for the first two weeks.

Then one evening when Monty and I came back to our motor homes from having spent a half-hour in the hot tub, I noticed a light switch in a position I never leave it in, and one or two other little things slightly out of place. I checked my wallet and there was a hundred dollar bill missing—the only one I had in the wallet. Since there were no other motor homes around, and since the girl had been by herself in Montana's motor home while we were gone, I told Montana about it and he confronted her with the issue.

I quickly learned that longtime cocaine addicts are masterful liars and actors! This one sobbed for fifteen minutes, swore she'd never been near my motor home, and would never do such a thing to me! She said she'd seen somebody near my motor in the increasing dark of dusk, but didn't think anything of it. After that I locked my motor home whenever it was out of sight.

The following week, Montana took this girl—she must have been in her mid-30s—down to the local Medical Clinic for a shot of methadone. Methadone is a legal drug used in the medical world to ease cocaine withdrawal symptoms. Montana dropped her off at the Clinic saying he'd be back in half an hour, but he had no intention of letting her get out of sight. He parked his Jeep and stood in the trees watching the Clinic. As he watched, she went to the pay phone and made a call. It must have been to her supplier because 15 minutes later a man arrived and walked over to her as she stood outside the clinic. She took something from the man and gave him a single bill ... probably my hundred dollar bill.

Montana climbed back in his Jeep and left... never returning to pick her up. When she had somehow found her way back to Montana's motor home that evening, she found him gone and her clothes in a garbage bag outside the door with a short note pinned to it. The note said: "You need more help than I can give you, sister."

Judging from the continuous loud music all hours of the night, and the way his CB antenna never stopped wagging in the still night air, Montana had extracted a price for his kindness in the form of physical stimulation. I'm sure his motivations under the best of conditions are not pure philanthropy..... nor is he by any means what I would call a social worker. It was certainly an expensive lesson for me. I hope it was at least a fair trade for him. The warning was there for me to watch out for the company I keep ... and I heard it.

There were other warnings, and it was as if they came from some unknown/unseen source which had my best interests at heart. Sometimes the attention-getting hammer was more than a little painful. Having spent the previous 35 years of my life on a very serious, all-consuming journey to discover what life is all about and how and where I personally fit into the puzzle, it is of no small import that I discovered early-on the value of relying heavily on what I call "Outside Help".

I think all of us, either knowingly or unknowingly, have experienced something similar to this "helping hand". It has certainly always been available to me when I've come to a total impasse ... when I have done my best and could still not fathom the proper direction to take or solution to the problem confronting me.

Experience after experience has proven to me that something beyond my conscious, sub-conscious, or any other control mechanism within me, could manipulate the events of life in such a way that they were sometimes immediately obvious, but most times cleverly and carefully masked by time and myriad other factors which our language contains casual, unthinking words to describe. The words "coincidence", "fate", and "luck" are several of those words which mask the miracle of the events hidden beneath their surface connotation. To me, those words belie a bottomless depth ... and belie a source of solace and help never to be overlooked.

There was a time when I would have labeled this help as coming from "God", but my present expanded perspective of the meaning of the word "God" leads me to understand that there are lesser beings than Gods who, though hidden from our sensory mechanisms, still hold powers that would make them appear as though they were Gods to our lesser human limitations and capabilities. This source of "outside help" seems, in fact, to be impartial to what I call it ..... or whether I call it anything at all. The fact that I ask, even if silently, seems to imply that my thoughts, when coupled with emotional empowerment, reach out to the seven corners of the universe—which is to say everywhere—instantly! By this time I was becoming more than a little nervous about spending time in the close quarters, such as those required on a boat, with Montana. So, one day I asked my unseen friends in realms unknown for help.

"Look," I said "I need some help here. I'm uncertain about the future that lies before me. Is this venture with Montana on the boat actually liable to happen? Is it something that will be as enjoyable as it appears it might be? ... or is it better that I continue on my journey westward to Vancouver and start a new segment of my life there?"

That having been stated to the universe, I dropped the matter and went about my daily business. From that point on, however, I was vigilant in watching for some event that would either lead me on or discourage me further. I did not have long to wait.

Several days later Montana was talking to one of the men in the RV park whose car had failed quite some distance away. Montana offered to go hitch a tow rope onto it, tow it back to the RV park, and either fix it himself or leave it at a garage. I went with him to help.

Everything moved along smoothly until we began towing the other vehicle up some of the rather steep grades we encountered returning to the RV park. It was a very warm day on the desert and the jeep began to overheat. We stopped, raised the hood on the jeep, and waited for the engine to cool.

In most automobiles, the reservoir for the radiator coolant is vented so fluid can move in and out freely as the radiator fluid expands with heat and contracts with cooling. Knowing this, I released the cap of the reservoir preparatory to adding some fresh water. What I didn't realize was that somehow the reservoir vent had become blocked. There was a sudden explosion of super-heated steam from the reservoir onto my bare wrist and forearm causing a severe burn and more than a few hours of excruciating pain. Since physical pain is not something I'm frequently confronted with, I took this as a very strong signal not to be forgotten ... a major warning, if you will, of future portent because it happened under the circumstances of my association with Montana. I took it as a warning, however, ... not as an indicator of direct action. It said in its own way: "Expect the unexpected!"

An "accident" such as this could have happened under entirely different circumstances than those of my accompanying Montana, but that is not what occurred, and to me the details of any occurrence are as important as the main event itself. After considerable experience I have come to realize that in dealing with the unknown I am dealing with an intelligence or intelligences far, far superior to my own. That was omen #1. There was another, but that occurred later and erased all doubt in my mind as to what my future course of action must be.

Several times since Montana's suggestion about my helping him on the boat, I had asked him if I could see the boat before I made any firm decisions. Each time I asked, there was always a very logical reason why I could not do so. Either the boat had been hauled out on a marine railway in Puerto Vallarta for a bottom cleaning and paint job, or Bill and Holly were visiting Bill's home in San Francisco, or the boat could not stay in the US any longer than to load us aboard and head back to Mexico. These same stories continued on for three or four months until I began to have serious doubts as to whether there was a boat after all.

I asked Montana to draw me some pictures of the boat's layout, which he did without hesitation. He drew out the long Main hull with a slightly shorter outrigger hull on each side. Then he drew in the stateroom layout, the engine-room layout, galley, and the pilot cabin layout right down to the electronics positions, chart table and circuit breaker panels. We talked on for hours about the freezer/refrigerator systems, the generator sets, main engine filters and maintenance schedules, water and fuel tank locations, and safety equipment. I was amazed at his knowledge of boats and marine systems, and though I'm far from an expert on those subjects, I'm also far from being a neophyte, having designed and built my own 50-foot cruising motor-sailboat single-handedly from a pile of lumber. One particular facet of his safety equipment intrigued me and I asked him about it.

"Do you carry any guns on board for protection?" I asked.

"Can't carry guns into any international port," Montana replied. "If you get caught with them you could lose your boat and everything in it, no questions asked. In a country like Mexico, you might be able to get your boat back, but you can't imagine how much money it would cost you."

"What the hell do you do to protect yourself, then?" I asked.

"I'll show you," he said, and he ducked into his motor home. A minute later he came out with a pistol known in marine parlance as a "VERY" pistol. This is a single shot, flare-launching pistol with a barrel about the size of a double C-cell battery flashlight handle. Usually they're made of plastic, but this one was an older variety made of solid brass.

Montana broke open the gun barrel before handing it to me—an action which surprised me more than a little because that was an action that would only be performed by a trained handgun expert. He also handed me what looked like an oversized aluminum shotgun shell.

"This is a magnesium flare," he said. "Do you know how magnesium burns?"

"Not really," I replied, though I was thoroughly familiar with magnesium grenades used for military purposes to melt metal in places like a cannon breech in order to render the gun useless and unrepairable.

"When you fire a magnesium flare into a boat's cockpit or hull," he said, "the magnesium doesn't stop burning; it burns down through the decks lighting everything along the way that'll burn. It don't stop for any fiberglass, aluminum, or steel hull neither! It burns through and keeps burning all the way to the bottom of the ocean until the magnesium's burned out. You can throw all the water you want on it and there's no way you can put it out. That'll put the fear into any Pirate .....from a good safe distance, too. I keep two of these in handy places on the boat behind breakable glass, and with a small picture snapped over them so no-one can see 'em. They're perfectly legal in any country as an emergency device."

"You ever think of just giving the damned Pirate some money?" I asked. "What if there's a boatload of Uzzi's or Kalashnikovs staring you in the face?"

"This thing's more accurate and lethal at 100 yds than an Uzzi..... especially on a boat that's rollin' with the waves."

I couldn't have disagreed more, and for several reasons, but I was silent on the matter, it seeming to me that discretion was the better part of valor. The world has seen lots of dead would-be heroes; but there's more than a few people who managed, with a little discretion, to live to tell about being robbed at sea. And furthermore, it also seemed to me, having been rated as an Expert Marksman with a handgun, that I'd be hard-pressed to hit the broad side of a very large barn with a Very Pistol at a hundred yards!

"One more thing, Montana," I said. "What can we do with this motorhome of mine if I'm traveling around the world on your boat?"

"That's easy," he says. "We can store it in my maintenance shed in Montana."

"What the hell kind of spread do you have in Montana, anyway?" I asked.

"It's all pretty new," he said. "I bought the place about five years ago, actually traded it, and I've been spending money on it ever since."

"Tell me about it," I said.

## CHAPTER 8.

"The place in Montana used to be an old sheep farm. The original log farm house is still standing at the edge of a high meadow with a small pond in it just above my new place, but I built the new place down a little lower and just off the main road. You turn off the main road onto what looks like a logging road—no mailboxes, signs, numbers or nothin'. It's actually an old fire road. It used to ford the Creek that runs between the House and the highway until I put a bridge in. Now there's a steel gate at the bridge."

"It's on 500 acres of incredibly beautiful land just off Route 56 in the Cabinet Mountains of Montana right next to the Idaho border. The Cabinet Mountains Wilderness Area is almost in my back yard, in fact my property line runs along the wilderness area boundary for about a quarter of a mile. Just up the road is Ross Creek where there's all kinds of giant cedar trees."

"What do you do while you're away?" I asked "...lock the gate?"

"Yes, but I've also got a caretaker lives in the old log farmhouse and he maintains the place while I'm away. The main house is 4000 square feet, five bedrooms and five bathrooms, all of them off a balcony that looks down on the living area. There's twenty-five feet of glass windows looking out at the mountains ... and there's a full basement and a sound system that'd knock your socks off. The Elk come down and graze in my pasture out behind the house, and every morning there's a half-a-dozen or so deer grazing on my lawn—which is more of a field than a lawn. It only gets mowed by the tractor and bush-hog when the grass gets about two feet high."

"There's this crazy cow moose comes down into my unfenced area, sometimes comes right up next to the house, and she drives my horses nuts. I'm sure they think that moose is the strangest looking horse they ever saw. Moose are nearsighted and they can be real mean—especially during rutting season—but I haven't had any trouble with her yet."

"Down near the river and set back into the hillside is my workshop... and it's big: sixty feet long and thirty feet wide, and two stories high. You can drive up the hill and go around to the rear of the building where there's six garage doors and parking bays. On the lower floor—what you'd call the basement—is where my welding and metal-working shop is. The ceilings are fourteen feet high and your motorhome will go in there with ease."

"You planning to put yours in there, too?" I asked.

"Nope! I leave this old heap right here in the desert sand and sun. That's what the insulation in the windows is for. This is my sort of incognito home on the desert."

"Do you keep horses?" I asked.

"Yep, there's a six-stall steel and wood barn next to the caretaker's house," he said.

"What's the house made of?" I asked.

"All cedar shingles and stone down low ... and a dark green aluminum roof, like on all my buildings so's to slide off the snow in winter."

"You have any women living with you there?" I asked.

"No. My second wife and I separated before I built this place," he said.

"Any particular reason?" I asked.

"We still get along great, but she didn't like to travel. I took her to all the great national parks in the West—including Canada—in that beautiful motorhome we had, but she always wanted to go back home. She loved the mountains and the outdoors. You remember I told you I met her when she was standin' up to her knees in a river fishin'? She had a very difficult time to communicate with people, including me. It was like there was a few wires in her brain that never got soldered somewhere. The rest of the radio worked fine, but I never could get her to talk about things ... about herself or the things she liked. And she couldn't stand bein' in any town or city or around where there was people she didn't know. Bein' in a Dance Hall would just send her out to the car."

"Finally, I built her a little house out in the back country next to her parents' place and that's where she lives by herself with her dog ... wishin' I'd come live there with her. But I could never do that any more than she could travel or be social-like with me."

From the wistful look in Montana's eye, I could tell he had very deep feelings for that woman.

"It wasn't because of your affairs with other women?" I asked.

"I swear to God I never looked at another woman the whole time I was with Nora. She enjoyed sex as much as I did, and that was all I needed."

"So you live there by yourself now?"

"Sometimes," Montana said, smiling like the rascal he really was. "I had a housekeeper for a while, but I want to tell you man... housekeepers can be dangerous!"

"How so?" I asked.

"One in particular lied about her age. But she looked old enough for me ... and she had a body to die for! I was a real good boy for a while, just teased her a lot. Then one night I went in my bedroom to go to bed and she was in it, gigglin' like a schoolgirl. That was all the invitation I needed, and she must've enjoyed herself because she never slept anywhere else. The only trouble was she had a boyfriend in town that she wasn't tellin' me about and he turned out to be almost as much trouble as I am," and Montana chuckled to himself with the memory.

"One day," he continued, "She left me a note sayin' she was leavin'... and she never came back. About two weeks later, around ten o'clock at night, I get this knock on my front door. I get up, turn on the outside light and turn off the hall light so whoever's there can't see inside too good."

"Who is it?" I ask loud-like through the closed door.

"I found one of your horses in the road," comes this young man's voice. "I got him tied down by the bridge."

"I thought that was kind of strange, so I opened the door a bit. There was two kids standing outside, one of them standin' off to one side with a .45 caliber automatic pistol pointed at me! The one at the door starts to speak, but before he can open his mouth I ducked so he was between me and the gun, slammed the door in his face, and locked it. The kids took off, but I knew they had to have a car not far away and there wasn't too many alternatives, so I called the Sheriff. I told him what happened and asked him to come out and get me before I did somethin' that would put me in jail for life. We knew each other pretty good... me being the only bail bondsman in town. It took him about ten minutes to get there and I was thinkin' they'd had time to get away by then, but I climbed in his car and said:

"Let's check out the gravel pit!"

We headed for the gravel pit about half a mile down the highway. As we turned into the pit, these two kids was just climbing in their car. The Sheriff turned on the gumball machine, turned on his spotlights, slid to a stop on the gravel, and jumped out with his shotgun. One of the kids was headed for the side of the gravel pit; the other was standin' beside his car looking at us as if he didn't know what was goin' on. The Sheriff put a round of buckshot over the kid's head that was runnin' away and that brought him right up short! The Sheriff handcuffed 'em and took 'em back to jail after droppin' me off at the house. I never said nothin' to 'em except when I was gettin' out'a the car. I looked at 'em and said:

"If you're lookin' for bail, you can forget it!"

One of the kids was an ornery little bastard and he looked me right in the eye and said: "You're gonna be sorry, LeFandra! We're gonna fix your ass but good!"

I just smiled, but two days later I wasn't smilin'! When the Sheriff pulled in the driveway late in the afternoon and come in the house, he had a very long face.

"Montana," he said, "I hate to tell you this, but you've been screwed seven ways to Sunday. One of those kids is the boyfriend of that little girl who says she was your housekeeper, and she's filed charges against you for rape.....claims she was only 15 at the time. Tell me I'm wrong!"

"I wish I could," I said. "I never checked her age. It don't come stamped on the forehead, and I prob'ly didn't want to know anyhow. Ain't there some way I can claim she raped me?... willful consent?... or sexual enticement or something like that? She could never get enough of it!"

"Unfortunately, the law doesn't care whether she couldn't help doing it ... or couldn't help *not* doing it! She was under 16 when you started—or so she says—and I have to file the charges," said the Sheriff.

I told the Sheriff I'd have Markham call him in the mornin' and do whatever I had to do, so he left. Right away I called Markham and told him the story. He asked a hundred questions and when we were through there was a long pause.

"It's going to cost you 20,000 bucks... cash," he said. "...and I hope it was the best piece of ass you ever had!"

"Jesus, Markham," I said. "Who's the blackmailer here?"

"What goes around comes around, Montana!" he replied. "This thing is not a private matter anymore. Lots of people will have their hands in that pot, and you don't need to know who they are. It's already in the courts of law and due process has to be observed. Bring the cash with you. We need to get this settled before the local gossip-works gets it."

That was a hard lesson! I'll get even with that little bastard of a kid one of these days. I don't get mad ... but I always get even!

"It seems to me," I said, "You would have learned to mess with certain things with more caution!"

"We all have our preferences," he replied. "Some people it's in the mind; some its in the heart; and some it's below the belt!"

We both had a good laugh at that one.

"What finally happened?" I asked.

"We both had to drop charges. The girl had to say she was lying ... in writing! That was Markham's doing."

"I guess that would slow down your desire to have a woman in the house with you, wouldn't it?" I asked.

"Yep ... that and the fact that another crisis came hot on the heels of that one." Montana said.

"Another housekeeper?" I asked, chidingly.

"No, no," Montana said. "Nora found out she had cancer of the lymph glands and there wasn't no doctors in my area wanted to do the kind of operation she needed. She needed a first-class surgeon and a first-class hospital and she needed it like right away. I knew

just the doctor. I'd met him when I was doing pack trips and guiding. Did I tell you about the kid who was the doctor's son that got into drugs and got completely out of hand?"

"No," I said, trying to recall the incident. "I don't remember anything at all about that. "

"I'll tell you that story first then," Montana went on. "I had this real nice surgeon doctor from Palm Springs used to come up to Montana to hunt with me each Fall for a week or ten days. I got to know him pretty good and he started tellin' me about the problems he was havin' with his 17-year-old son. Said he'd given this kid everything he could, but it didn't seem to be enough. Recently he got hooked on heroin and was in trouble with the law, and the doctor—Don Buckman was his name—had no idea where to go with the problem because wherever he tried to put the kid, the kid just ran away. He was headed for jail and he damn sure wasn't gonna run away from there! I said to Don:

"Why don't you turn him over to me for a few months? I'll straighten him out!"

Don looked at me and told me if I could straighten that kid out he'd be indebted to me for life. So we worked out a plan where Don would bring the kid up for a hunting trip in the Fall and he'd leave the kid with me. That gave me time to get a few people together I knew could help me nail this kid to his own cross and put the fear of death into him after we'd dried him out.

When he and his father arrived at the camp in the Fall, I knew we were in for a time. This kid was about 5 foot 10 inches tall, weighed in at about 165 lbs., and wiry and tough... hatred just pourin' out his eyes. I got his attention when I told him his father had hired me to teach him how to handle and shoot guns. I handed him a real nice old Enfield army rifle and told him to strip it, clean it, oil it, and we'd go out and practice putting holes in a target. What I really wanted was to know how much he knew about guns. He messed around with it for a while, but he couldn't even get it apart. So I started with step one, step two, and so forth and showed him how to clean it, load it, and carry it.

When we got up to go out in the canyon for a few shots, that was the signal for Don to head back to my farm by himself with his horse. He was to take the kid's backpack with him and leave his own...which he'd packed with clothes, but no drugs or cigarettes or knives or anything else.

The kid and I shot up a box of shells between us. I let him have a turn with my Winchester 30-30, and then gave him back his gun and we headed back to camp. When we got there, he knew somethin' was wrong right away. His father was gone and so was his pack with all his goodies in it. He looked at me like he wanted to kill, and said:

"What the hell's going on here?"

"Your father told me he's tried everythin' he knows to straighten you out and nothin' works. Your choice is me ... or jail! As soon as you shake your drug habit and a few other habits that don't quite fit with livin' a proper life, you can go your way. Until then you belong to me."

About that time he went right over the edge, grabbed his gun—just like I figured he would—and pointed it at me while I sat there on the log in front of the fire. He called me every four-letter word in the Redneck Dictionary and told me we were goin' back to the farm or he was goin' back alone and leave me there dead as hell!

"I don't think so," I said, lookin' at him with a chuckle.

Then I got up and walked toward him lookin' him right in the eye. He had that Enfield pointed right at my chest... and damned if he didn't pull the fuckin' trigger! That was the beginning of the little bastard's first lesson which I doubt he'll ever forget as long as he lives.

The gun never went off, of course, because I'd taken out the firin' pin while he was shootin' my rifle at the target. Anyways, before he knew what was comin' down, he had a size ten huntin' boot in his crotch that lifted him about two feet off the ground. By the time he came down he had a couple of kicks in the thigh and the kidney and the stomach. I worked him over good with a thick piece of hardwood branch and by the time I got through there wasn't a square inch of skin on his body that wasn't black and blue and screamin' with pain. I didn't break no bones, though, but I could've real easy. I just wanted to put him so deep in pain he'd pass out, and that's exactly what he did when I finally grabbed a handful of his face, squeezed all the blood out of it, and slammed him up against a tree.

When he woke up, his both arms was wrapped around a big oak tree and handcuffed and chained there real permanent-like. He moaned and groaned like he was dyin' and I lit up a fire and started cookin' me some supper. I made sure it smelled real good... baked some bread, cooked up some bacon and beans, and ate it right there in front of him.

"When you gonna feed me, you ass-hole?" he says like he owns me.

"You ain't worth feedin'," I says. "You're a killer, and in my book killers die slowly and painfully... so starve!"

Well, he went into a rage, and all he did was make his wrists raw and bloody. He cursed and swore at me on into the night until I got tired of hearin' it, got up from my bed roll, and went to the creek with a steel bucket. I filled it up with ice-cold water, dumped it on him, and went back for more until his teeth was chatterin' so bad he couldn't speak.

Durin' the night, the wolves started howlin' at the moon and I could tell he was scared shitless. I told him if he kept hollerin', they'd come see what the problem was and he'd be just another piece of road pizza by mornin'. That shut him up.

Next day I cooked myself some bacon and eggs while he cursed me up and down, then I saddled up my horses and started to leave.

"Where you going?" he says.

"Down to the farm," I says. "I'll be back in a couple days to see if the wolves or bears have left anything to bury."

"But I have to have a shit," he says.

"Shit in your pants," I says, and leaves.

I actually didn't go far away ... just far enough so the horses could graze down in the lower meadow. Then I walked quietly back up the mountain and stayed in the trees out of sight to keep an eye on him. When I saw he was going to be there by himself okay, I went on down to the farm just to kill time and came back after dark.

I did the same thing for the next few days while he suffered through his withdrawal symptoms from heroin. I didn't give him no food, only water, and finally gave him a blanket to sleep under at night. He got real sick about the fourth day and thought he was gonna die, but I just made him drink more water. I had to chain him by one hand and one ankle to the tree so he had a hand free. I never said a word to him, just let him suffer through the tough part of comin' back to life.

Then he started to cry. He cried real tears for hours and I could see we was gettin' down below the surface to the real stuff. That's when he begin to talk. He was feelin' real sorry for hisself, and I just sat there and listened and finally give him a cup of soup. He talked for hours.

I didn't realize he was adopted, his mother never cared much for him bein' around, and he never did find out who his father was. I could've felt real sorry for the kid except that wasn't what he needed. He needed someone he could lean on... depend on... someone who really cared about him for at least a while in his life. I knew that had to happen very slow ... and under an iron hand.

After a week or so I cut him loose from the tree and fed him some proper food. He was feelin' pretty weak and still a little sick. His nerves was shot from his drug addiction screamin' at him. I knew that would take months to get better. I'd seen it happen too many times before. I also knew he'd have to try to get away to get more drugs before

too long, so I was ready for him to make his break. I had both firin' pins of both rifles in my pocket so he couldn't get dangerous that way again, and the only camp knife was the hunting knife on my belt. At night I put his bedroll off by himself and handcuffed both ankles to a chain around the tree so I could sleep without worrying about what he was doing. Besides that, I didn't feel like chasin' him in the dark.

He took off one day when I'd gone off to have a shit. I half expected he'd leave before he did, but I went after him on horseback anyway. He'd taken off on foot figurin' I couldn't track him that way, but, as usual, he was wrong. I caught up with him about two miles down the canyon, and chased him 'til he dropped from exhaustion. I put the handcuffs back on him, put a rope around his neck, and told him not to trip or fall or I'd drag him back to camp by the neck. There was less and less fight in him every day, so I stopped two or three times on the way back to camp to let him catch his breath. When we got to the camp I says to him:

"Do I have to chain you up for another week, or are you going to stick with me?"

After a minute he nods his head and says:

"I'll stick with you ... but when can I go home?"

I looked him straight in the eye and said to him:

"You are home! There's no place else for you to go except to jail! Get used to it!"

So he stayed with me for the winter on the farm and I taught him all kinds of things like building stock car engines, welding, how to use a metal lathe, and cooking for guiding people. I kept him busy ... bought an old stock car for him and he painted it up and practiced with it. He got to be right good with it. After a time he came to know I wasn't going to abandon him... I was helping him to be free in whatever way I could... and we became quite close friends.

One night we had a few beers and was sitting in front of the fire at the farm and I started telling him about my own family—how Mom was always too busy with her real estate to have time for us kids and Dad was always giving me some kind of advice I didn't want to hear ... and how he was very critical of everything I did. Nothing was ever good enough for him. I was always fighting with my sister; she was as bad as I was. I was always in some kind of trouble with my motorcycles. Not once did I ever hear my parents tell me they loved me or that I was doing good ... and I guess maybe I wasn't really a lovable kid either. I just didn't know who I was or where I belonged.

As I was talking this way about myself and my past and my parents to this kid, there came a steady stream of tears rollin' down my face like as though I was talking to the kid I'd never had. That hadn't never happened to me before. I looked over at the kid and the

same thing was happening to him. Our eyes met for just a second and in that second there was a bond formed that's never been broke. And though he goes his way now, and I go mine, it's like now he has a big brother... or maybe a real father. We only see each other a couple of times a year, but that's enough.

Don, his adoptive father—the doctor—was real happy with the results, but I said to him: "Don ... this boy is not like you. He don't have your genes, and if the two of you ever get close, it's likely to be much later in your life. You're gonna have to let go of him completely and let him live his own life down where he belongs. As the old saying goes: "Ain't no use to try to make a pig sing. It's a waste of time ... and it just irritates the pig."

Don's been good to the kid all the same, but when I needed help with Nora, you can't believe the doors he opened for me that no amount of money would ever have opened. I sent Nora down to Palm Springs on the plane and Don picked her up at the airport. He put her right in that beautiful Palm Springs hospital and called in four of the best surgeons in the L.A. basin area for consultations ... this for a little girl who walks barefoot through the woods and has no education ... and talks like it ... but she is sweet.

She was also terrified! She'd never been on a plane before and wouldn't let go of me when it came time to board the plane. I told her I'd be in Palm Springs the next mornin', but I wanted to have my bike there. I gave one of the stewardesses a hundred dollar bill and asked her to please take care of Nora and take her off the plane and find Dr. Don ... and she did, because I was talkin' to Don on his cell phone as the plane arrived.

Next thing I did, I climbed on this big Honda 2800 of mine, threw some clothes in the saddlebag, and headed for Palm Springs. You probably wouldn't of heard of a Honda 2800 because they was soon outlawed in the U.S. The bike was far too powerful for most Bikers to handle. You could flip it over on top of you in half a second if you rolled the throttle too far open too fast.

If you measure the mileage from Coeur d'Alene to Palm Springs, you'll see it's over 1,200 miles. I left Coeur d'Alene at 7:00 at night and I was standing in the hospital lobby at 7:30 the next morning. I went through small towns at over a hundred miles an hour, and stayed on Highway 95 except where there was freeways. The only big city was Vegas and I blasted through there on Interstate 15 at over 120 miles an hour. A lot of the time I turned my lights right off. That big four-cylinder bike is almost as quiet as a BMW. With Harley's you make lots of noise ..... with this bike it's the power ..... and the speed!

Speed with me is like ... like no other high I can tell you about. You get used to that hundred, hundred and fifty miles an hour and you don't ever want to slow down. You come on things so fast other drivers don't have time to panic and mess both of you up. Running stoplights in small towns early in the morning is no danger—though a couple of times I came close to testing out my racing crash gear!

Anyway, the doctors started operating on Nora that morning—three surgeons—and they wasn't done until 8 that night. Took out all the cancerous lymph nodes and whatever, and that's the only reason she's alive today. And you know what? ... Don wouldn't take a penny for his work! I paid the hospital and the other surgeons—which he was also going to pay, but I said no. I could afford it and he'd done enough. I paid out \$22,000, but what's Nora's life worth? I love that girl more'n anything on this earth ... except ... except maybe myself.

## CHAPTER 9.

About the middle of April I was beginning to feel the need to head for the Northwest and get out of the desert before the temperatures started to climb.

"Montana," I finally said, "If we're going to do this boat thing, we'd better get on with it ... and if we're going to get on with it, I've got to see the boat or head back home for the summer."

"Bill just called last night," Montana said, "And he's on the way up the coast to pick us up in San Diego. He should be there next week."

Now it was my turn to decide if I really wanted to be on that boat for any length of time at all. I spent several days anguishing over the issue. I'd also had a short conversation with Montana's father. I'd asked him if Montana had a spread in Montana. His father was very vague in his answer.....said he "used to", but wasn't sure if he still did.

Meanwhile, Montana told me more stories about how he'd hired a couple of girl tour guides in Mexico City and how they'd toured some ancient Aztec ruins with incredible water slides and he wanted to go back there again with me, thinking I would enjoy the experience. But there was just too much of some things, and not enough of other things to make me feel comfortable with that choice.

So I asked my Helpers on the "Other Side Of Wherever" for further light and knowledge on the matter. What I said to the "Great Beyond" went something like this:

"Do what's best for all concerned in this matter ... and whatever is most synergistic for me at this point in my life."

The answer came very shortly, but not in any way I personally could have imagined ..... not in any way I could quickly recognize as "Help From Beyond"..... and definitely not in any way that was pleasant at all! It was only when I looked back on the situation from the perspective of six months or year later that I realized how synergistic it was, not only for myself, but for others — perhaps even to the far corners of the globe, but that part has yet to unfold, if it ever does.

Shortly after asking for this clearer picture of what lay in the future for me, I awoke early one morning with a terrible pain in my right abdominal area. It went away after a few hours, then came back again in the late afternoon. I tried taking an Ibuprofen, but that didn't do much for my pain. It worsened and so I suffered with it through the night. Early the next morning I went over to Montana's motor home.

"Montana..." I said. "I need a little help."

"What's goin' on," he asked. "Man, do you ever look pale!"

"I don't really know," I said, "But its either an appendix that's about to burst, or it's a kidney stone."

Having spent 15 years in the health field as a Nutrition Consultant and Naturopathic Physician, I had a lot of second-hand information on both conditions ... but never any first-hand experience!

My face was white as a sheet and I was shaking with the pain ... my system is very sensitive to any kind of pain ... and so I said:

"Would you mind taking me down to the V.A. hospital? I think I need more help than I can give myself."

"Sure!" he said, dropping what he was doing, throwing Pierre into his own motorhome, and driving me in mine to the V.A. hospital.

We arrived there about 10:00 in the morning to find a four-hour waiting line ... and no consideration given to pain, life-threatening situations, or vociferous demands! If I could walk in, I could wait! Too late I discovered I should have arrived in an ambulance! It's said that a person has two chances to give their life for their country: one on the battlefield, the other in the V.A. hospital! I turned to Montana and said:

"Let's go to the other hospital."

And so off we went, arriving there later in the afternoon. As it turned out, I should have been patient and stayed with the V.A. hospital! Not having had to use a hospital for 40 or 50 years, I had no idea of the unpleasant surprises waiting for me.

The waiting room was already packed with people, and the first question I was asked upon arriving at the emergency window was this less-than-naive question:

"What type of health insurance plan do you have?"

"Medicare," I replied.

"No private insurance?"

"No," I replied, not realizing that I had automatically placed myself at the bottom of the waiting list—which would have been normal, except for the fact that I stayed at the bottom of the list for eight and a half hours while the private insurance carriers went ahead of me. I can't really fault the hospital for that procedure because Medicare takes forever to pay, and limits payment to certain average numbers. Plus, people who have Medicare don't usually have a lot of money ... and hospitals cost a lot of money!

So I waited and waited. Finally, after a few hours, the pain started to subside a bit ... not, however, enough for me to want to leave the waiting room. By that time Montana's sister Gracie had arrived and they both kept me company during my trial by pain.

Each time I went to the window to ask where I was in line, I was told I was next ... or that a helicopter load of drug overdoses had just taken up the last Emergency Room beds ... or that some beautiful young girl had taken an overdose of drugs and had to be treated immediately as a life or death situation. I knew the receptionist was not kidding because I saw the helicopter approach and land on the hospital roof; and watched as this young lady was wheeled in on a gurney with an entourage of long-faced friends and solemn-looking mother.

Around midnight, an ambulance arrived with two Mexicans who couldn't speak a word of English, but who were obviously high on something far more powerful than alcohol because it took four police officers to subdue them and put them into a special room where their yelling wouldn't disturb the entire hospital.

It was interesting also for me to be talking with Montana and have him suddenly stop in the middle of a sentence and whisper to me:

"See this lady coming through the door now?"

I would look to see a harried, tormented face with staring eyes walk in dressed in very expensive clothes... after just having climbed out of a shiny Mercedes.

"That one's been on heroin," Montana would say. "I know that look anywhere! She's comin' in for her methadone shot!"

There seemed no end to his experienced observations, and they went on and on for all eight and a half hours..... and this was a Sunday night! I thought perhaps I'd taken a wrong turn somewhere and ended up in the Star Wars Bar! It was becoming more and more apparent to me why the Los Angeles Police Department seemed more and more like the U.S. Marines every day. I had no idea what hospitals and police agencies had to put up with in the southwestern part of the world's wealthiest nation, but it sure didn't look very healthy to me.

Finally, at 2AM and with great apologies, I was ushered into the only vacant bed in the E.R. and given cheerful, competent help. From the sounds coming from beds all around me, separated only by cloth curtains, the world lost a few people that night.

Within five hours, I had been given a CAT scan and numerous blood and urine tests, shown a kidney stone emerging from my right kidney, and told to go home with some too-powerful, very constipating painkillers!

"Aren't you going to remove the kidney stone?" I asked naively.

"That comes under 'Out-Patient' responsibility," I was told. "You'll have to contact a Urologist who will treat you from here."

"So you don't fix the problem ... you just find out what the problem is?" I asked.

"In this case, yes," came the reply.

I thought to myself it's a damn good thing my automobile mechanic doesn't think that way or he'd spend a lot of time looking out the window wondering where his business is supposed to come from. Having no further recourse, I went back to the RV park and called several Urologists. There were exactly four within a hundred mile radius ... and not one could even see me for three weeks.

"Montana," I said, "What the hell am I going to do?"

"Just a minute," he said, and went over to his motor home. He returned in a minute with a Coeur d'Alene, Idaho telephone book, opened it to the Physicians section of the Yellow Pages, and handed it to me.

"This clinic right here," he said, pointing to the only Urologist Clinic in the city, "is good. Call them and see if they can take you. Then you can go up there and leave your motorhome at my place."

So I called the Urology Clinic and they could see me the next day ... a little too soon, so I made the appointment for two days hence. That done, I sat down with Montana and we decided I would leave at 7:00 that night and he would leave shortly thereafter as soon as he had his radiator repaired and things loaded. We agreed to meet in Winnemucca, Nevada, the next morning.

I left at 7:00 p.m. and drove all night, but had one of my dual-wheel tires blow out around midnight in the middle of nowhere on the desert. I replaced it with a spare, using the special jack and mechanic's tools I always carry, and arrived very tired in Winnemucca about 3:00 a.m.

I pulled in to a back corner of the Wal-Mart parking lot, climbed into bed in my travel trailer and went to sleep until 8:00 a.m. ... still no sign of Montana yet. I called on his cell phone; no answer there. But then I realized that would be normal because there was no cell phone coverage in most desert areas.

I ate a small breakfast and then went to the Big O tire dealer's garage to have them rotate my tires and install a replacement for the blowout. Then I thought I'd better find out for sure what was going on so I could climb on my proverbial horse and start making some things happen instead of waiting around for them to unfold.

By mid afternoon, I couldn't raise Montana in the RV park or on his cell phone, so I called his sister who, after our eight hours together in the hospital waiting room, I had come to know reasonably well.

"Gracie," I said to her, "tell me something about your brother ... and don't mince any words with me."

And then I told her about the boat, and the place in Montana, and about my own doubts about what was really true and what wasn't. I told her that I really liked Montana, but that—as she could tell—we were really quite different people.

Then there was a considerable silence on the line when I finished.

"You still there, Gracie?" I asked.

"Yes ..." she replied. "I'm still here, but I sure wish I wasn't!"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Montana's bipolar," she said. "He lives on a full psychological disability pension of \$750 a month. He used to work in Idaho—in fact the whole family did for a while—but he seems to have a falling out with everything he touches. And that wouldn't be so bad except it always ends up complicating my life and Mom and Dad's."

"Until Mom bought him that motorhome three years ago, he lived with me and my husband ... and within six months my husband left and never came back."

"I don't want to tell you I don't love my brother, because I do. But I do want to tell you that I don't want him around for more than a short visit ... and the less often the better. Now ... does that help you out at all?"

"That's sort of what I half expected, Gracie," I said, "But I really did want to believe in him and believe his story because the guy is an absolute genius, you know? There's not one part of his thousand stories he doesn't remember as clearly as though they'd been dead real. He never changes his stories one bit."

"I know," said Gracie. "You can't ever tell what's real with him and what isn't."

"I think he missed his calling," I said. "He should have been a story teller—a writer. Despite it all, I really enjoyed his company—and thanks for all your help. Do just one more thing for me ... and for him, will you?"

"What's that?" she asked.

"Tell him something he says no-one has ever told him before," I said. "Tell him I love him ... and thanks for the great stories."

*The End*

## **If you enjoyed this story....**

There are others by Kit Cain at your local bookstore

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The first three chapters of each book can be read for free on the above website and they are available as Paperback Books or E-Books in Adobe .pdf format.

**Master Of The Welded Bead**: a fictitious short story comparing the lifestyles and attitudes of two men: one who chooses to live a whimsical and humorous life on the “road less traveled”; the other who chooses to live a life of selfish interest on the road too-often traveled. It is an entirely personal idea of how I imagine a disinterested Master Of The Universe might lead an unusual yet entertaining life in a predominantly negative and otherwise boring world.

**An Arrow To The Heart**: a fictitious short story placing the hero of Master Of The Welded Bead in a close-encounter family situation with the “Mother from Heaven” and the beautiful, desirable, precocious “Daughter from Hell”.

**The Chasm Crossed**: an autobiographical story about the unusual experiences and events of my 70 years of spiritual journey from youth to present.

**Ride the Wind Laughing**: An Illustrated autobiographical story describing the mystical events and experiences which contributed in major ways to my building a 51-foot sailboat in my mother’s back yard in rural Nova Scotia— an event which began with no money in an effort to test the Laws of Manifestation and prove to myself the efficacy and practical value of my years of spiritual training.

**Soul And Man**: is a major work attempting to define and describe the parameters of the word “Soul”— particularly as it applies to the human soul. The very nature of its perspective brings together the various schools of Religious, Scientific, Philosophical, Spiritual, and Mystical thought suggestive of a unified frame of reference and vocabulary for all. This book is not easy reading. It can be discomfoting and thought-provoking for those new to the Spiritual Journey. I wrote it primarily to further define and synergize my own thinking ... and for the benefit of those compelled—as am I—to journey into areas of the unknown, uncertain, and impossible to define.

**On Pegasus' Wings**: is a collection of personal poems and song lyrics begun in 1962 solely as a means of inner expression and never intended for the eyes of the world. Only in later years have I realized that in their number and variety there might be at least a single poem among the many for each person. The knowledge of such would give me great satisfaction.

**The Tears Of Power**: is a fable for all ages from ten to eternity about a mouse named Victor who lives in Edgeville—which is at the edge of everything: the river, the fields, the forest, the mountains, and the sky. Edgeville quickly becomes too small for his adventurous soul so he ventures out into the world of the great unknown, learning to pilot tugboats, fly helicopters, and meet some unusual friends like Oddie the Otter, Mo the musical Mole, and Minkie, his flight instructor. It is Eagle, though, who finally tells him what the tears of power really are. 24 great illustrations by illustrator Scott Peck.

**Flying The Yukon's Bush**: is the recounting of my adventures as a helicopter bush pilot in the Yukon Territory in 1962. Part 1 is the story in writing, and Part 2 is a slightly different story in pictures. Both parts can be downloaded from my website for free.

**Perfect Health For Dogs And Cats**: First wife Ann loved animals and so we always lived on a farm surrounded by dogs, cats, chickens, goats, and horses. Her dedication leaned toward the health and healing of animals by natural means, while mine leaned in a similar direction with humans. Contained in this small booklet are the simplest principles of health and healing for dogs and cats supported by our own experience and that of a major research foundation.