

Life Without Regrets. Have Fun While You Can! Vol.2

Another Collection of Short Stories from Jason Clement, an ALS Patient



Acknowledgment

First and foremost, I would like to thank my wife, Deborah. You are my rock that I lean on every day, both literally and figuratively, for strength. I would also like to thank my family and friends. You have all been amazing! Deborah and I could never make it through without your continuous outpouring of love, support and encouragement. Last, but not least, thank you to Team Gleason. Without your generous gift of the Tobii Eye Gaze device and Microsoft Surface Pro, this book would not have been possible. Thank you all for your continued love and support!



Introduction

In the fall of 2014, I was happy and healthy without a care in the world. Sure, maybe I was carrying an extra 30lbs in belly fat, and I probably drank more than I should have, but I felt 'healthy'. I was active, playing volleyball, golf and squash as much as possible. I had no idea that a year later, I would have played my last match of each.

In the spring of 2015, I started noticing occasional slurred words and some right hand weakness. That July, on my 44th birthday, I was diagnosed with ALS. After the initial denial, and a second round of tests and consultation at the VCU Neuromuscular and ALS Clinic, it was official, I was dealing with ALS.

After short periods of anger, denial and grief, I decided that instead of being depressed and angry, I would be thankful for the time I have left and the great times I've had. I have been blessed to have been surrounded by great people my entire life that have helped me enjoy a great life. I have been lucky to have traveled this great country of ours and have some awesome memories that ALS can never take away.

I have lived life to the fullest. I have no regrets. When my time is up, I will gladly meet my maker with no hesitation. I hope this book serves two purposes. First, I hope sharing some of my favorite stories keeps my memory alive and smiles on my friends' faces long after I am gone. Second, I hope I inspire folks to live their lives. Tomorrow is not guaranteed. Cease putting off that trip. Stop obsessing over retirement savings. Go make some memories!

This book is intended for mature audiences (21+). I don't condone trying some of the things you will read about. I grew up in a different era, and likely wouldn't get away with some of this stuff today. But, I lived through it, mostly unscathed, and I don't regret anything at all. Cheers!

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Chapter One – Why I Can’t Drink Red Wine

In December 1989, I had just finished my first semester at the University of Rhode Island. I was enjoying my independence, and decided that I wanted to do something fun for New Year’s Eve. I met up with close friend from home, Mike, and we decided to go skiing in New Hampshire. I made reservations at the Gorham Motor Inn, not far from Wildcat Mountain. I was familiar with both from a ski club trip during my Senior year of high school.

On New Year’s Eve, Mike and I left Fall River by 5:00 AM. We arrived at Wildcat Mountain by 9:00 AM, and were on the slopes shortly thereafter. We enjoyed a great day of skiing, despite it being pretty cold. By 3:30 PM, our legs were exhausted and we decided to call it quits. We made the twenty-minute drive north to Gorham, NH, and checked in to the Motor Inn. We rested for a bit, then both got showered and ready for dinner. Gorham, NH, is not exactly a booming metropolis, so our dinner options were limited. We decided on a local Italian restaurant that turned out to be pretty good.

Here is where our planning hit a snag. It was barely 7:30 PM, on New Year’s Eve. We wanted to party to celebrate the occasion, but we were both underage and the only alcohol we had was a bottle of Port wine that someone had given to Mike as a Christmas gift. We pulled my car into the parking lot of the local liquor store and tried to come up with a plan. Besides being underage, we were both very baby faced, so we had no chance of getting served ourselves. This meant that we would need to ask a stranger to buy us beer, something neither of us was comfortable with. I bet we sat in the car for an hour debating on which of us should ask, and whether we should ask a young person or an old guy. Mike finally got out of the car and asked an older gentleman to buy us a case of Budweiser. He agreed, took Mike’s twenty and quickly returned with the suitcase of Bud. We didn’t get any change, but we weren’t about to ask. After a couple of high fives, we returned to the hotel.

We didn’t waste any time breaking into the beers. We started throwing them back like we were afraid someone was going to take them away. I remember watching Dick Clark’s Rockin’ Eve (back when it was good), and we decided that we would open the Port wine to toast in the New Year. We stayed up well into the new year, drinking the beer and wine.

This is where some of the details begin to get a bit hazy. Somehow, a wooden chair in our room broke. I think initially, it was accidental. But, since it was already broken, we decided to completely destroy the chair. That is when we thought we would share pieces of our chair with everyone else at the motel. We left a piece or two, like a gift, on each room's doorstep. We were so happy with ourselves for sharing. I think it's safe to say that we were both very drunk.

Once we were back in the room from our adventure, we both started feeling a bit nauseous. Mike went to the bathroom first and I could hear him getting sick. This didn't help my situation. I went into the bathroom and found him working on the toilet, because it wouldn't flush. I had to get sick and chose the next logical place, the bathtub. Let's just say that the combination of pasta, beer and red wine makes a mess.

Having rid ourselves of our issues, we both decided to crash for the night. Letting things marinate in the bathroom overnight probably wasn't the best decision. I cannot begin to describe the smell of that bathroom. It was downright repulsive. But, we couldn't leave it like that, we had to do our best to clean it up. We used all the towels we had to get the bathroom looking passable.

After laying down to rest for a while, we both thought showering would make us feel better. But, we would need more towels to do so. I took the short walk to the manager's office to request more towels. As soon as I walked in, I spotted a trash can that was overflowing with pieces of a wooden chair. I had honestly forgotten all about that incident. The manager pointed at the remnants of the chair and asked "Do we have you guys to thank for that?" I had no defense ready and sheepishly replied "Yes. Sorry, we will pay for that. May I please have more towels?" The manager obliged, but I could tell by the look in his eyes that he was worried about what else may have gone on in our rented room during our stay.

After showering, we packed the car for the long, hungover, ride home. Despite temperatures in the twenties, we opened the windows, before returning the key to the office to check out. While the room didn't look bad, with all the gross towels in the corner, it still smelled like vomit and red wine. Every time I smell red wine, I am reminded of that disgusting bathroom, and that is why I can't drink red wine.

Chapter Two – Fast Forward

After avoiding Gorham, NH, more specifically the Gorham Motor Inn, for nearly ten years (see Chapter One), My friends Gaspar, Rich and I returned to the area in the late 1990's to do some hiking. It was the Fall, and the colors of the trees made for a beautiful backdrop to a great hike in the White Mountains.

After the hike, we all got cleaned up for dinner. We found a local restaurant and grabbed some pizza and beers. We asked our server for a recommendation regarding any nearby nightlife. She excitedly recommended a 'good band' playing right down the street at the Town and Country Inn (T&C for short). Before we left, Gaspar and I decided that we wanted to steal our pint glasses. I only remember that they had some sort of funny cartoon animal on them, and we had to have them. So, as soon as we paid the tab, we put the pint glasses under our coats and hurried out the door. I guess we weren't exactly cut out to be master thieves. As soon as we got to Rich's Jeep, we realized that we had left the keys on the table in the pub. Gaspar went back in to grab the keys, hoping no one noticed the missing glasses. They hadn't bussed the table yet, so we were safe.

We made the mile drive down Route 2 and saw the marquee outside the T&C advertising the band, 'Fast Forward'. We were surprised by the \$5, cover charge, but happily paid it to support the local band. For some reason we were given wristbands after being carded, which seemed odd for the small venue (75 people max). The other thing that was odd is that some of the women were dressed up as if they were going to a Hollywood premier. We just tried to blend in, despite some unwelcoming looks from the locals. We each grabbed a drink and waited for the band to take the 'stage' (a 12' x 8' platform about a foot high).

When the 'band' took the stage, all we could do was laugh. They were simply two dudes with guitars, backed by a pre-programmed synthesizer. That being said, they were playing some good songs and they sounded decent. Plus, it beat sitting in the hotel room watching TV. For me, the highlight of the show was when, in the middle of a song, one of the two dudes stopped playing guitar, bent over and tied his shoe. The music continued the whole time, meaning he was basically playing air guitar on stage! Whenever I hear people complain about seeing a lip synched show, I think about Fast Forward and their faux show.

Chapter Three – Canada Held Us Hostage

In the Fall of 2003, I mentioned to my boss that Deb and I were looking for a place to get away for a ski vacation. He mentioned that a friend had a timeshare at Whistler Blackcomb Ski Resort that he might be able to get for me. I hadn't been, but my boss told me how nice the condo was, with two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a hot tub and full kitchen. Once he confirmed that we could have it for a week in January 2004, we happily accepted the gracious offer.

Once we had the condo booked, I started reaching out to all my ski buddies from New England. I was hoping that we could get three or four friends to join us for the week and have a great time. I heard every excuse imaginable; "It's too close to Christmas", "I don't like to fly", "I can't afford it", "I have a cold sore", etc. Only my college buddy Sturgeon agreed to join us.

Whistler Blackcomb is located about seventy miles north of Vancouver, in British Columbia. Our flight options out of Richmond, VA were very expensive and included multiple connections. Instead, we opted for a flight from Dulles airport with just one layover in Salt Lake City, before arriving in Vancouver, where we would meet up with Sturgeon.

On the morning of our flight, we packed Deb's SUV and headed north on I-95 towards Northern, VA. We expected about a ninety-minute drive, but thankfully allowed some extra time for traffic. I assumed that since Deb had lived her entire life in Virginia, except for two years in Maryland (even closer to Dulles), that she knew how to get to the Dulles airport. I was wrong! Instead, she drove us to Ronald Reagan International airport. As we got close to the wrong airport and realized our dire situation, Deb spotted a police cruiser on the side of the highway, and decided to stop and ask for directions. The female officer started out by saying "You are nowhere near Dulles!", but was nice enough to give us directions. She estimated that we were nearly an hour away.

As soon as Deb got back in the car, I could see a laser focus like I had never seen before. We headed north on I-395 toward Route 66. As soon as we got on Route 66 West, I knew Deb was going fast, but when I finally dared to look at the speedometer, it showed we were going 110 MPH. We made it to the correct airport in under thirty minutes from the time we asked for directions.

This was not exactly the stress-free start to our vacation that we had hoped for. Thankfully, we were able to quickly get through security and actually had time for a beer before we boarded our flight. This was the first time that we talked in over an hour. But, the beers helped relieve the stress and we were actually able to laugh about our ordeal. We still had a long travel day ahead.

The air travel was long, but thankfully we didn't encounter any issues. We arrived in Vancouver on schedule, as did my friend Sturgeon. We gathered our bags and took a shuttle to the car rental location. That all went as smoothly as it could, but of course everything takes time. We had probably left our house fifteen hours ago, so we were all tired and looking forward to getting to the condo.

Knowing the condo was about seventy miles away, we were expecting a drive just over an hour. Unfortunately, the road was a winding two lane road, with a mountain on one side and a several hundred foot drop into the Pacific Ocean on the other. With a steady mix of rain and snow falling, it was a treacherous drive. It took us nearly three hours to cover the seventy miles. After struggling a bit to find the rental office, we finally had the key to the condo. It was nearly midnight PT when we unlocked the door and walked in to our home for the next week. We were completely underwhelmed. We had access to just half the two-bedroom suite. It was a good thing that Sturgeon was the only friend to accompany us. He slept on the couch for the week, while Deb and I took the bedroom. After a long, stressful, travel day, we all crashed immediately.

The next morning, we were excited to check out the area and get some skiing in. We hit a local coffee shop for breakfast before heading to the ski area. We got Deb her rental equipment, and were finally skiing by 11:00 AM. Sturgeon went off on his own, while I stayed in the beginner's area to help Deb. She had never skied before, but being athletic, I thought that she would pick it up quickly. It quickly became apparent that I was not the right person to teach her. In just a couple of hours, Deb decided to sign up for lessons from a proper teacher. She fell less times during the rest of the week, than she did in a couple of hours with me.

That afternoon, we all met for lunch at an Irish Pub at the base of the Mountain. It was perfectly located at the end of a ski run, just a short distance to a ski lift, with a diverse menu. Unfortunately, this is where we learned that apparently Canada has

something against Miller Lite. We ended up drinking a lot of Coors Light and Kokanee, a local beer at that pub at lunchtime for the rest of the week.

After skiing, we hit the market to pick up supplies for the week. We confirmed that Canada doesn't appreciate Miller Lite. After a brief cry, we got on with our shopping and eventually made it back to our condo. After dinner and a few drinks apiece, we decided that a soak in the hot tub would feel nice on our sore muscles. This is when we discovered that access to the hot tub was available via the sliding doors in the half of the condo that we didn't have access to. This left us with two options. We could walk out our front door, around a few units, through the snow, to the hot tub directly behind our unit. Given that the temperature was in the low twenties, that option was not very inviting. We opted for the second option, which involved crawling out of our bedroom window, over an air conditioning unit, which gave us direct access to the hot tub. We took a bunch of beers with us and put them in the snow beside the hot tub. As we crawled in and out, we had to be careful not to break the AC unit, or cut ourselves on it. With the exception of a couple of nights out in the Village, this was our nightly routine.

Yes, we had a few annoyances, but overall, the rest of the week went fairly well. Canadian money is a pain to deal with, particularly the 'loonies' and 'toonies'. The lack of good beer, i.e. Miller Lite, was disappointing. The influx of Australian wait staff saying 'no worries' (sorry, I brought that back with me), was tiresome. And, the unseasonably warm temperatures made the bottom third of the mountain pretty slushy. And it was pretty cool to ski on some trails that had signs that read "This trail will be used for the Giant Slalom in the 2010 Olympic Games." Overall I would say that the Whistler Blackcomb Resort was a fun time.

We had an early flight out of Vancouver on Saturday morning. We had initially planned on just getting up super early and doing the drive Saturday morning. But, after experiencing the treachery of the drive on the way in, we decided to grab a hotel in Vancouver, and do the drive Friday night. It was snowing, and the drive back to Vancouver may have been worse than the drive up. We made a wise decision by not starting off our long travel day back with that drive. By the time we got to the hotel, it was late and we were all pretty tired. With an early morning ahead, we all crashed right away.

Saturday morning, we were up and out of the hotel before sunrise. We refueled the rental car and pulled up to Enterprise Rent-A-Car about 6:00 AM. The problem was

that they didn't open until 8:00 AM, about the time of our departure. We made the decision to go to the airport and leave the car, with the keys locked inside, in the short term parking garage. I called the Enterprise office and left them a pretty explicit message about how I felt about their business hours, and where they could find their car. I would have paid to see the face of the person listening to that message when they finally arrived to the office.

Thanks to our close parking spot, we were at the airport in plenty of time. We checked in quickly, and on the way to the usual security line, we encountered an additional checkpoint. We were told that in order to proceed to our flight, we each had to pay a \$10 'Airport Improvement Fee'. At first, I thought it was a scam, or a joke, but quickly we realized that they were serious. There was construction everywhere, including the airport, in preparation for the 2010 Olympic Games. I think it is ridiculous that it was funded by basically holding travelers hostage, with little choice but to pay the fee or be stranded. We begrudgingly paid our fees, but I am clearly still bitter about it as I write this, thirteen years later.

We all made it home safely that Saturday, after a long day of travel. But, the story doesn't end there. The following Monday, I received a cellphone call from an unfamiliar area code. It was the Manager from the Enterprise Rent-A-Car office in Vancouver. He was calling to tell me that he was charging my credit card \$75, for the locksmith that they had to call to retrieve the keys from my rental car. I bet that guy still regrets making that call. After I ripped him up and down about their ridiculous practices and lack of communication about their office hours, I told him that if I saw any additional charges on my credit card, I would not only dispute that charge, but also the charge for the week long rental. I proceeded to hang up on him, never heard from him, and never saw any additional charges.

In my opinion, the story ends there. But, Deb doesn't agree. The Wednesday after we returned from Whistler, we were back playing volleyball with our team at the Richmond Volleyball Club. With no contact at all, Deb went down like she was hit by a sniper. As she grabbed her left ankle, I immediately realized that she had ruptured her Achilles tendon. Five days later she had surgery to repair the 100% tear. Deb swears it was the skiing and walking in ski boots that lead to the injury. I disagree, not that it matters. Needless to say, Deb has not been skiing since.

Chapter Four – The Beloved Snot Box

In the Spring of 2001, my good friend Pam decided that she needed a change of scenery. She decided to move from Rhode Island to Arizona, to live with our mutual friend Gaspar. Being the chivalrous guy that I am, I offered to accompany Pam on the cross country trip, so that she wouldn't be alone on the road. We spent the next few weeks planning the details and the route. By June, we had all of our ducks lined up. We were ready for an epic road trip.

The night before we were set to leave, Pam came to pick me up in her rented Ford Explorer. She mentioned that she felt she was coming down with a cold, but we didn't dwell on it. After a quick stop at the Celtic Pub (see Chapter Five for more on this unique establishment), we spent the night at Pam's mom's house, so we could hop right on Interstate 95 South early the next morning. When we woke up the next morning, Pam's cold was in full effect. We were fully committed, there was no delaying the trip. Pam would have to fight through it.

We packed the Explorer to the brim with all of Pam's stuff, as well as some snacks and drinks, and hit the road headed south. Our first destination was Blacksburg, VA to spend the night with my college buddy Mike. Along the way down Interstate 81, I surprised Pam by recommending a lunch spot in Strasburg, VA. It was a biker bar named Bad Water Bill's BBQ Barn. It is one of the darkest, dirtiest bars I have ever been in, but they serve Busch in a can for \$1.00. After a bad lunch and a couple of cans of Busch each, we continued on to Blacksburg. To get rid of the taste of the awful frozen hamburger taste, we broke into our snack supply, specifically a box of Harvest Crisp crackers.

As soon as we pulled up to Mike's place, he greeted us with a couple of ice cold beers. I have to give Pam credit, she tried hard to battle through her cold and hang out, but eventually it won out and she had to get some sleep. She took her place on the couch, while Mike and I continued to drink, catch up and play darts in the garage. A few hours later, we called it a night and I crawled into my sleeping bag on the living room floor, not far from Pam on the couch.

The next morning, I woke up feeling a bit rough after a few too many beverages the night before. I couldn't figure out why all of my socks were out of my backpack and all around my head. Apparently, Pam was not accustomed to my snoring, and kept

reaching into my backpack and throwing them at my head throughout the night. According to Pam, her attempts to quiet me were unsuccessful.



With Pam still feeling crappy, and me nursing a hangover, we got on the road a little later than we had hoped. Our plan was to crash in Memphis with a work friend of mine. But, since we would be arriving much later than we anticipated, we decided to grab a cheap hotel room outside the city. We made a quick stop at Walgreens for ear plugs and more tissues for Pam. During the drive to Memphis, her nose had started running like a faucet. Thankfully, we had kept the empty Harvest Crisp box to discard all of her used tissues. We immediately referred to it as the 'snot box'.

After a better night's rest for us both, we were up and on the road the next morning, headed West on Interstate 40 towards Oklahoma City, OK. We had skipped breakfast, so as we approached North Little Rock, AR, we were on the lookout for a lunch spot. We both spotted an advertisement for a restaurant named 'Cock of the Walk'. It was immediately decided that we would have to check this place out.

As soon as we walked in, I spotted an autographed photo of Scottie Pippen on the wall. I thought it was a bit odd, but figured it was a positive sign. The restaurant

didn't look like anything special, but it did have a cool view, overlooking a lake. We took a look at the menus, which looked like they were fifty years old. We ordered and enjoyed the view of the lake as we waited for lunch. Our server delivered our food in tin pans, which also looked to be fifty years old. The food was absolutely delicious. I completely understand how they won acclaim from People magazine and the New York Times for having the best catfish and hushpuppies in the nation. With our bellies full, and Pam's snot box at the ready, we continued on our way to Oklahoma.

As soon as we pulled into Oklahoma City, we went directly to the Oklahoma City National Memorial. I am definitely glad that we went, but it is one of the most solemn places that I have ever visited. The Memorial includes 168 empty chairs for each of the victims killed in the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. While seeing all of the chairs, symbolizing those killed, was difficult enough, seeing the 19 smaller chairs representing the children killed, was gut wrenching. That being said, if you are ever in the area, definitely make a visit. The reflecting pool was very impressive. After the visit to the Memorial, we were definitely in need of a drink, or five. We found our way to a local pub and had some dinner with our drinks. With a long drive scheduled for the next day, we checked in to our hotel and called it a night, pretty early.



We were up and on the road early, heading to Southern Colorado. The drive across the Texas panhandle was the flattest and most boring part of the trip, with nothing to see but the occasional oil rig. Once we got into New Mexico, the drive got a lot prettier. But, we encountered a bit of a situation. Pam had been going through so many tissues that the snot box was damp, and exploding at the seams. We needed to find some tape to make an emergency repair to the beloved snot box. There was no way that we were finishing the trip without that box. At our dinner stop, somewhere in the northeast corner of New Mexico, we were able to locate a Walgreens drug store to buy some tape and make the necessary repair. With our crisis averted, we were able to finish our drive to Great Sand Dunes National Park. We arrived at the campground after dark, set up camp, and promptly headed to sleep.

The next morning, the campers near us were up early, which meant that we were too. Having arrived at the campground after dark, we had no idea what to expect when we awoke as far as a view goes. We were amazed by the beauty of the morning light against the mountains of sand. The only thing I can compare it to is a ski resort, before it opens, after an overnight snowfall. The especially cool thing is that because the wind moves the sand constantly, passing clouds cast a shadow on the dunes, every day presents a slightly different view for visitors. We spent the morning checking out the Park before continuing West.



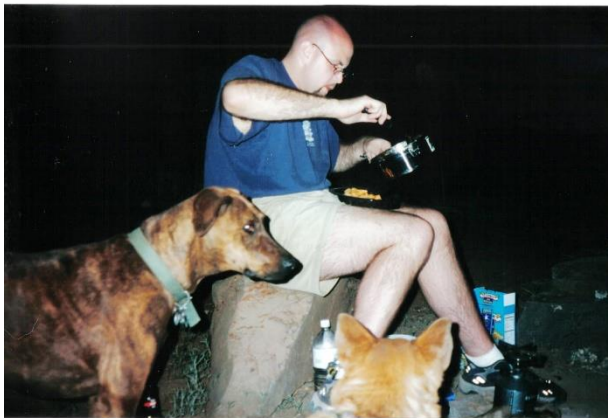
We made the short drive to the town of Durango, CO. We walked around the quaint downtown area and grabbed lunch before continuing on to a KOA campground, just outside of Mesa Verde National Park, with Pam continuing to pack the snot box all along the way. At one point, it was so jam packed full, I swear it had to have weighed five pounds. Once we checked in to the campground, we were able to empty the box and do some more seam reinforcement for the final leg of our journey.

After a good rest, we showered up and headed in to Mesa Verde National Park pretty early. We spent a couple of hours there before hitting the road Four Corners National Monument. There is a large, really cool, brass plaque commemorating where the borders of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah meet. Trying to get a cool photo, I had the brilliant idea of getting down into a pushup position, with one limb in each State. That is when I learned a valuable lesson, a brass plaque, sitting in the hot Southwest sun, gets scalding hot. We were ultimately able to get that photo, but instead of me in the pushup position, we used my rubber traveling companion, Marvin the Martian.



After that short, but painful visit to Four Corners National Monument, we were finally headed towards our ultimate destination, Gaspar's house in Pinetop-Lakeside, AZ. It was on this last leg of journey that Pam's nose finally stopped running. We pulled into Gaspar's house right at dusk, and were finally able to retire the beloved snot box. When we tossed it in the trash, we observed a moment of silence. OK, maybe that's not true, but we should have.

The next day, Gaspar showed us around Pinetop-Lakeside, which has a real New England feel to it, because of the elevation. We then headed to Sedona, AZ, to hike and camp for a couple of days before we headed down to Phoenix, AZ. We had a bit of a scare along way. A wild fire had spread along our route. Not only was the fire raging on each side of the road, but the grass in the median was also on fire. Thankfully, we made it safely through the fire and in to Phoenix. Gaspar and Pam dropped me at a hotel by the airport, so that I could get cleaned up and fly home the following day. Of course I had picked up Pam's cold, and my nose ran for the next week. I sure wish I had taken that snot box!



Chapter Five – The Celtic Pub & Nearby Shady Motel

The Celtic Pub is a neighborhood bar in Pawtucket, RI, about a hundred yards from the border of Attleboro, MA. It is also just a stone's throw from where my close friend Pam lived for a bit. Pam had a few friends that bartended there, which is how I was introduced to the Pub. In fact, the first time I hung out at the Pub, I ended up crashing on the couch of Pam's friends Mike and Leigh Ann, who had been bartending that night. They couldn't be nicer people.

This Pub is like no other place I have ever been in. It is a place where folks from the local blue collar neighborhood come to drink, smoke, cuss like sailors, and don't worry about impressing anyone. In that way, it is spectacular. Plus, it is the only bar that I have been in that has Narragansett on tap.



Even though I had only been there a handful of times before I moved to Virginia in 2002, I almost always stop in for at least a beer or two when I back visiting family. In fact, because it is within walking distance to Pam's mom's house, we would arrange to meet up at the Pub every year when we were both home for the holidays. I would carve out a night either before or after my family visit for a night of catching up with Pam. Our friend Scott lived close-by in Attleboro, MA, he would also join us if he could escape family obligations. I would book a room at the Days Inn, which is about a hundred-yard stumble away.

The first time that I stayed at that Days Inn, there was a domestic disturbance in the middle of the night where the police had to be called. I assumed that it was an isolated incident. I was wrong, the next time I stayed there, something very similar happened, except this time it sounded like it involved a prostitute and her John. I wish I could tell you that this deterred me from staying there, but it is just too conveniently located to the Pub.

One of my favorite memories at the Pub begins with me meeting my buddy Scott at the Pub. It was a busy night around the holidays, so all the seats at the bar were taken. We were standing behind the patrons at the bar when all of a sudden, one of the regulars fell off his stool and landed flat on his back on the floor. Mike, the bartender, jumped over the bar to check on the guy. Somehow, he was fine, just a bit startled. He sat back on his barstool and reached for his beer. Mike grabbed it, and let him know that he had had enough, and it was time to head home. Mike explained that he lived across the street. One of the other locals walked him home. Apparently, this wasn't the first time that he had passed out and fallen off his seat. But, I have seen him back at the Pub, nearly every time I have visited since then.

Deb had heard all about the Pub, but hadn't been with me on any of my trips north until we were in the area for my college roommate's wedding. I booked a room at shady Days Inn, so that Deb could get the full experience. We checked in to the motel, made the three-minute walk to the Pub, and promptly bellied up to the bar. I introduced Deb to the bartender Mike, and we proceeded to throw back some Miller Lite drafts. After a few beers, Deb asked to see a menu. Mike's reply was awesome, he said "Oh, you don't want to eat our food. Let me get you some delivery menus." After a good laugh, Mike ordered us some pizza to be delivered to the bar. I swear that every time Deb or I was close to finishing our beer, Mike had a fresh beer waiting. We were finally able to convince Mike that we couldn't drink another beer, and he begrudgingly allowed us to leave and stumble back to the Days Inn.

We made it back to the motel pretty quickly, and based on my prior experience, locked every available lock on the door. As soon as our heads hit our pillows we were out cold. Not surprisingly, about 2:00 AM, we were awakened by shouting and pounding on the adjacent motel room's door. From what we could hear, it sounded as if an angry husband was confronting a potentially cheating wife. The disturbance went on at least an hour, until finally the police were able to get the husband to leave. Sadly, this was still not the last time I stayed there. I am a gluten for punishment!

Chapter Six – The Real March Madness

For a number of years my good buddy Steve tried to get me to come up to New England for the opening weekend of the NCAA basketball tournament. His good friend Grant hosted a yearly party for the kickoff of March Madness that Steve raved about so much that in 2010, I finally relented and booked my trip northward. As soon as I booked my flight, Steve emailed me the drinking rules for the event. It was a multi-page document, with close to a hundred rules. One of the first rules is that if you miss a ‘required’ drink, you will be penalized, usually with more required drinks, but some infractions that the person roll a pair of dice to determine their punishment. This was some serious stuff that I committed to. I would need to do some studying.

Here are some examples of things that triggered a required drink by everyone participating;

- An alley-oop dunk
- Failure to immediately chant “Airball, Airball”, following an airball
- Any cussing, regardless if Grant’s sons are within earshot
- The airing of specified commercials
- A buzzer beater to end the first half
- A buzzer beater to end the game (everyone rushes to the basement fridge to pound a fresh beer)
- A bevy of other ridiculous rules that I was way too drunk to keep track of within an hour of getting there

I refused to burn two vacation days, so I skipped day one and caught the first direct flight into Boston on Friday morning. By the time I picked up my rental car and drove to Grant’s house in Framingham, MA, I arrived just in time for the first tip. Based on Steve’s stories, I expected a dozen or more guys there. Instead, I was greeted by only Steve, Grant and his college aged-cousin. They claimed that they had a larger group on Thursday, I am not sure that I believe them.

After some brief introductions, we all grabbed a beer, enjoyed a group ‘cheers’, and claimed a seat for the impending marathon of basketball and drinking. Anyone that knows me, knows that I can hold my own with anyone as far as beer consumption goes. The next twelve hours was a true test of my abilities. It seemed that every few minutes I was getting up to get a new beer.

At one point, as if I was on the PGA tour, I penalized myself for an infraction that no one else caught. I forget the exact rule that I violated, but it resulted in my rolling the dice to determine my exact penalty. My penalty, based upon the results of my dice roll, was having to take three shots of mustard. While that might not seem horrible, I assure you that simply doing one is enough to activate your gag reflex. My mouth watered excessively for nearly an hour, until I finally got past that nauseous feeling.

I had tentatively agreed to another full day of this torture on Saturday, which was seeming more and more like a bad idea. I had lined up one potential way out. The NCAA tournament had two games scheduled at the Dunkin Donuts Center in Providence, RI. My buddy Jim was working a connection to try and secure two tickets. The later it got on Friday, the more I was hoping that Jim would come through.

Somehow, we all survived through the completion of Friday's schedule. About midnight, we finished our last beers and started getting ready for bed. Steve and Grant's nameless cousin had each claimed a couch, which left me with a bunk bed. In the interest of safety, I chose the bottom bunk. I decided that whacking my head was a better option than falling from the top bunk. I was asleep before my head hit the pillow.

Despite my hangover, and of course whacking my head on the bunk above, I was psyched for the 8:00 AM wakeup call from Jim. It meant that he had secured tickets to games in Providence, providing me an out from another day of insanity at Grant's house. Don't get me wrong, he and his family could not have been more hospitable. His wife made us great food, his kids gave up their bedroom, and they all put up with our drunk asses. But my body didn't have another twelve hour drinking day in me.

After breakfast, coffee and a shower, I was finally feeling human again. By 9:30 AM, I was on the road toward Providence. Having learned previously that the NCAA does not permit alcohol during tournament games, Jim and I agreed to meet up at a bar beforehand. We were not alone in this thinking. In fact, several bars teamed up and created an outdoor beer garden, right down the street from the Dunkin Donuts Center. We sucked back as many beers as we could in the hour or so that we had before tip-off.

We were both feeling pretty good as we walked into the arena. When we got to our seats, we realized we had a slight problem. I am not a small guy, but Jim dwarfs me

in every aspect, height, weight, and width. While our seats were on the aisle, we quickly realized that we would have to take turns sitting. The first game featured the Tennessee Volunteers vs the Ohio Bobcats. Apparently, the Volunteers travel with their pep band, I know this because I heard them play *'Rocky Top'* about a billion times in the first half alone. The Bobcats are the polar opposite. They travel with a handful of sad cheerleaders, who cheer with almost no enthusiasm, as if they are just working off community service hours. They had one cheer, "O-H-I-O", Ohio". It was pathetic, as was their basketball team.

By halftime, the beers were wearing off, and we were regretting not bringing in airplane bottles. Thankfully, as the arena name would imply, they sold Dunkin Donuts coffee. We each had an iced coffee that sustained us through another bad half of basketball and another billion renditions of Rocky Top. Some Bailey's sure would have been great in that iced coffee. And yes, I realize I am complaining about too much alcohol on Friday, and not enough on Saturday. But, it's my story, and you're still reading it.

The second game looked like a complete mismatch on paper, with the 2nd seeded Villanova Wildcats taking on the 10th seeded St. Mary's Gaels. This actually ended up being the more entertaining of the two games. The Gaels pulled off the win, punching their ticket to the Sweet Sixteen. Despite my second iced coffee of the day, I could barely keep my eyes open. I said goodbye to Jim, and drove to, where else but, the shady Days Inn, by the Celtic Pub.

After a two-hour nap, and some bad Chinese food, I wandered over to the Celtic Pub. Before I had even taken my seat at the bar, there was a Miller Lite draft waiting for me. I don't know how Mike saw me coming through the smoke and filthy windows, but somehow he did. As I watched some March Madness at the bar, I couldn't stop thinking about how lucky I was to escape the real March Madness at Grant's house. I was able to relax and drink at my own pace, with no penalties.

Unpredictability, there was no chaos at the bar, and no incidents involving the Police at the motel that night. The next morning, I drove to the airport, checked in for my flight, and saddled up to the Sam Adams bar. As I sipped on my Gin & Juice, I called Steve to see how Saturday went. He sounded like hell, and said he felt worse than that. I definitely made the right decision by escaping another day of that madness.

Chapter Seven – A Blizzard Won't Stop Us

As President's Day weekend approached in 1997, one of my housemates, Kander, and I were looking to head north to do some skiing. Kander also invited his high school friend, Buck, who was at Plymouth State College. As the weekend approached, we were keeping a close eye on the weather, because there was potential for a severe snowstorm to develop on Friday evening.

The storm did indeed develop as expected, but Kander and I had our hearts set on skiing, so we decided to roll the dice and proceed with the trip. When we left from Rhode Island on Friday afternoon, there was some light snow falling. The further north that we drove, the heavier the snow fell. By the time that we reached Buck at Plymouth State College, the storm had officially reached blizzard status. As we readied to leave Buck's Fraternity house, the New Hampshire Governor officially declared a State of Emergency, meaning only emergency vehicles should be on the roadways. Buck's girlfriend, now wife, begged us not to leave. But, we were young and dumb and did not heed her sensible advice.

We figured that with less cars on the road, the drive to our hotel in Gorham, NH, should take no more than ninety minutes. But, because of the near white out conditions, it took us nearly three hours. Thankfully, I had packed some of my home brewed beer to keep us company for the drive. I had brewed my own version of a Samuel Adams Boston Lager, which turned out very well, in my opinion.

When we finally reached the Town & Country Inn (see Chapter 2), the parking lot was nearly empty. The parking lot had been plowed, but the result was a sheer sheet of ice. Just getting my car stopped was a nearly impossible feat. Then we all had to navigate across the ridiculously slick parking lot, each carrying our gear. We must have looked like newborn giraffes learning to ice skate. When we walked into the office to check in, the night manager couldn't believe that we had driven up from Rhode Island, through the blizzard.

Once we settled in to our room for the night, we toasted to making it safely, with more of my home brew. What I failed to mention to Kander and Buck was that while my brew tasted great, it had one nasty side effect. It gives horrible gas to everyone that has tried it. As we all retired for the night, the silence of the night was continually interrupted by the sound of passing gas.

When we awoke the next morning, we could barely breathe, because of the noxious odor in the room. We hurriedly got ready and headed to the Sunday River ski area. The storm had apparently scared a lot of people away, because the Lodge was not very crowded in the morning. We enjoyed a good breakfast and hit the slopes pretty early. We got in plenty of runs in the fresh powder before everyone else started to roll in. By lunchtime, it was pretty crowded. But, thanks to our early start, we got more than our share of runs in before calling it quits for the day.

On the way back to the T&C, we picked up some beer so that we didn't have to continue drinking from my toxic batch. When we pulled into the motel, we noticed that the parking lot was quite full, in contrast to the previous night. We walked up to our room, and as soon as I opened up the door, it hit us. Our deadly gas fumes had been trapped in our hotel room all day, and instead of dissipating, seemed to intensify somehow. Despite temperatures in the twenties, we opened the windows and left the door open until the smell was tolerable. I don't remember much else from that weekend, but I can still recall that smell as if it were yesterday. That was the last batch of beer that I ever brewed.

Chapter Eight – Who’s Your Daddy?

Most folks that know me, know that I grew up in a single parent household. Not only was my father not around, but he moved to Colorado to avoid paying child support. When my mom was able to track him down and get his wages garnished, he would change jobs from one strip club to another to escape the garnishment. I guess you could say that he is a real dirt bag. But, in my opinion, my mom did a great job raising my sister and I on her own. So, the next time you hear about some criminal blaming his behavior on his growing up without a father figure, please know that it’s a bullshit excuse. OK, that serious stuff was just to set up the funny part of this story.

In the Fall of 1994, I was flipping through *The Providence Phoenix*, a local arts focused weekly publication. I perused it regularly, to search for band schedules. As I was looking for any interesting upcoming shows in Providence, a large ad for a gentleman’s club caught my eye. The ad read something like ‘The Best Arrives from the West. Paul Clement Presents: Cherries’. Super classy! I told my buddies, who all got a good laugh. I filed this information away, even though I had no specific plans.

A couple of weeks later, a few of us decided to head to Providence, to see a Providence Bruins game. Our crew for that night definitely included my friends Mike, Dan, Jeff and myself. There is some debate about whether Shitty was with us, but since we can’t confirm that he was there, let’s assume it was just the four of us. As you might imagine, we’re not 100% sure of who drove, but I am pretty sure it was Jeff.

I am certain that Mike, Dan and I had several beers on the way up to Providence. We parked in my favorite lot, a few blocks away from the Providence Civic Center, in a seedy neighborhood, but that was free of charge. We made it to the arena, just as it started to rain. We all grabbed some beers and enjoyed the game. By the middle of the third period, I had enough beers to consider crashing my father’s strip club before we left Providence.

As we left the arena after the game, we realized that it was absolutely pouring out. We would all be soaked by the time we got to our car, so I floated the idea of walking a few more blocks and checking out Cherries. Somehow, my idiot friends agreed to go along with this idea.

It turned out that the walk was much longer than we anticipated. By the time the four, or possibly five, of us arrived at the shadiest of strip joints, we looked like a bunch of drowned rats. As soon as we walked in, I asked to speak to Paul, not really knowing what to expect. While we waited for him, someone brought us towels to dry off with. In retrospect, using some sketchy ass towels from a shady strip club was probably not the wisest idea. But, I think we all avoided catching anything serious.

When my father showed up, I introduced myself and my cronies. He immediately offered to buy me a beer. I accepted, but also asked for drinks for my friends, which he said he was unable to do. That was strike one. My buddies each grabbed an overpriced beer, and joined me on the 'tour' of the club, led by my father. This is when I noticed that despite his thinning hair, he was sporting a rat tail. Strike two.

After the tour, which included an 'S&M' room, and several equally sketchy private dance rooms, I bought another round of drinks for my friends and I and we sat down at a table. We sat through a couple of dancers, probably named Destiny, Sahara or Chastity. When a dancer came on to the stage that made us ask ourselves whether she could possibly be pregnant, that was officially strike three, making it time to leave. We found my dirt bag father and got him to agree to drive us back to our car. We walked out back and all piled into his big ass Lincoln or Cadillac, or whatever it was. It was perfectly fitting that he drove a pimpmobile. After he dropped us off at our car, we all got a good laugh on the ride back to South County. I am pretty sure we all showered as soon as we got home.

Gentlemen, if you are considering visiting a strip club, let me offer you some advice. Take the money you would spend on the strippers, and instead take your wife, your girlfriend, or both out to a nice dinner. Unless you are in Las Vegas, if that is the case, head to the Crazy Horse II. And, please tell Destiny that I say hello!

Chapter Nine – The Music City Bowl

In 2006, I was working in Nashville, TN nearly exclusively. I would occasionally skip the weekend commute home to Richmond, VA. As New Year's Day approached, I started looking at possibly staying in Nashville, if I could get Deb to join me. Once she agreed, we decided to ask some friends to join us. Once I analyzed the sports calendar, I knew that I could entice some friends to make the commitment to come to Nashville.

The schedule lined up like this; Friday, December 29th, The Music City Bowl. Saturday, December 30th, Boston Bruins vs Nashville Predators. Sunday, December 31st, New England Patriots vs Tennessee Titans. As I suspected, my two close friends, Steve and Gaspar, committed to the trip. While Deb couldn't fly in until Saturday morning, Steve and Gaspar arranged to fly in on Thursday night. That meant that only the fellas and I would be going to the Music City Bowl on Friday afternoon.

We had a pretty tame Thursday night, with just a few beers at the hotel. We grabbed breakfast Friday morning, then prepped for the game. Assuming that no alcohol would be served at an NCAA, based on previous experience, we hit the liquor store and stocked up on airplane bottles. We filled our pockets with liquor and headed out to scalp some tickets.

One of the great things about Nashville is that everything fun is concentrated in just a few block area, making it very walkable. Even LP Field, the football stadium, is within a mile of the downtown hotels. As we walked toward the stadium, we quickly found scalpers selling tickets. We did some negotiating and ended up getting decent seats for about \$40 apiece. With tickets in hand, we continued toward the stadium, where we encountered something I had never seen before. I have seen plenty of panhandler. Most of the time they are holding a cup, a bag, a box, or even a hat. But, this poor guy was panhandling, using a visor. I am not sure if that was part of his shtick, but it worked, we all gave him some spare change.

After our short walk, we were all in a good mood as we approached the security line at the stadium. We were even happier when all of our airplane bottles went undetected by security, setting us up for a fun afternoon of Captain and Cokes. I made a pit stop at the Men's room and saw something that completely changed the

day. The guy standing at the urinal next to me had a draft beer. I was so eager to share the news; I am not even sure that I finished peeing and I doubt I washed my hands. But, as soon as I saw the smiles on the faces of my buddies, I knew that they had discovered the good news themselves. We immediately grabbed ourselves some beers and toasted to our good fortune.

We made our way up to our seats and were pleasantly surprised. They were located on a club type level, with limited access, which meant no lines for beer or bathrooms. The game itself was entertaining, despite us not having a rooting interest in either Clemson nor Kentucky. One of the more entertaining things was watching some of the hard-core fans going nuts for their team during this meaningless Bowl game. One guy in our section caught our attention over the rest. He was definitely a Kentucky fan, and was on his feet yelling, angrily, from the first play. His face and head was bright red. In fact, at one point we had legitimate concerns about his well-being. His blood pressure had to have been off the charts. Instead of trying to help him, which would have been a fruitless effort, we nicknamed him 'Drunky McAngry', and made fun of him for the whole game. It was quite entertaining.

The other memorable moment from the game came during the halftime show. It started out with your typical college football halftime, with each team's band taking a turn on the field. The Clemson marching band was fine, but nothing special. As the Kentucky marching band took the field, the Clemson kickers emerged from the tunnel to begin warming up for the second half. It is pretty common practice to see the place kicker attempt a few field goals, but in this case, the punter took the field as well. We watched carefully, as we could foresee the potential for disaster here. We were not disappointed. While the punter's first kick landed harmlessly in the end zone, the second punt hit a Kentucky trombonist square in the head, knocking him to the ground. We nearly fell over laughing. Thankfully, Drunky McAngry did not witness the event, or he may have rushed the field to defend his band.

The rest of the weekend was definitely fun, but no stories really stand out. We saw some cool ice sculptures at the Opryland Hotel. The Bruins got crushed by the Predators. The Patriots trounced the Titans. The Titans fans booed when Bill Belichick put in Vinny Testaverde late in the game to throw a Touchdown pass for a record 20th consecutive season. None of that stopped us from celebrating a fun New Year's Eve in the Music City.

Chapter Ten – My Richmond Scouting Trip

In the Fall of 2001, I accepted a job in Richmond, VA. As part of their relocation package, they offered to fly me and a companion down to Richmond for the weekend to scout the area and secure housing. Since I didn't have a significant other at the time, I asked my pal Dan if he wanted to join me. He quickly accepted the invitation, and my new employer didn't question anything.

We were scheduled to leave mid-day on Friday, connect through Philadelphia and be in Richmond by dinner time. We met up at the airport in plenty of time to have a beer or two before we headed to the gate. That is when we were alerted that we had been selected for additional security screening. Having flown together for a softball trip just after 9/11, we knew how stringent security could be, so we had put absolutely everything in our checked baggage. The extra screening took about a minute since all we had with us were our wallets and airline tickets. We quickly boarded and departed, on time.

Things didn't exactly go as smoothly in Philadelphia. As soon as we arrived in Philadelphia, we could see that our flight was delayed. We took a couple of seats at the Jet Rock bar, directly across from our departure gate. We were initially delayed only an hour, just enough time for a couple of tall beers. We settled our check and arrived at our gate just in time to learn that we were delayed another hour. This happened two more times, before we eventually left Philadelphia, feeling pretty good.

We finally arrived in Richmond after 9:00 PM. In retrospect, I probably shouldn't have been driving, but I picked up the rental car and we headed West toward our hotel. Not being familiar with Richmond, I ended up taking an exit much sooner than I should have. This meant that we were on W. Broad St. for about ten miles. I remember thinking that Richmonders must love Arby's, since we seemed to pass five of them before we finally found our hotel.

Thankfully, there was a bar right next door to the Hilton Garden Inn that we were staying at. We walked to Damon's Grill to grab a beer, and a well overdue dinner. Of course, one beer turned into many, and the next thing we knew was that it was last call. We were set to meet a realtor at 9:00 AM to check out some apartments, so we probably should have called it a night a few hours earlier. Oh well.

We were up and showered by 8:00 AM Saturday morning. We enjoyed a good breakfast at the hotel, and finished up just in time for our 9:00 AM appointment. We grabbed coffees to go, and walked outside to wait for my realtor. We waited, and waited, then waited some more. Just before 10:00 AM, my contact finally arrived. She explained how her dog had been sick and she had been at the emergency veterinarian for most of the night. I wasn't sure that I believed her story, but I pretended that I did.

We sat down for a bit and went over my requirements. I wanted a two-bedroom apartment, with in-unit laundry, close to my office and close to bars. She had a few apartment complexes in mind, so we headed to the first one. We took a tour of the complex and confirmed availability for January 2002. We then proceeded to the second complex, about three miles from the first one. After a brief tour, I realized that it was exactly like the first one. I asked the realtor if the other complexes were any different. When she admitted that they were all pretty similar, I decided to end the search right then. I signed a one-year lease on the spot. I would be living at Sundance Station, for at least the next year.

On the way back to our hotel, the realtor leaked the fact that it was her 27th birthday. Dan and I told her to divert to Damon's Grill and we would buy her a birthday beer. Again, one beer turned into many. While drinking with us, she admitted that the reason why she was late that morning was because of celebrating her birthday with her girlfriends the night before. She ended up getting drunk enough that she had to call her boyfriend to come pick her up. To say that he wasn't very pleased to be picking up his drunk girlfriend from a bar at 3:00 PM on her birthday, is a major understatement.

I don't recall much else from that weekend, likely because of how much time we spent at Damon's Grill. I would definitely say that it was a successful scouting trip. Not only did I find a place to live, but I also discovered the neighborhood bar that I would claim as my home away from home for the next few years. Thanks Dan, and the nameless realtor girl, I couldn't have done it without you!

Chapter Eleven – The Best Bar in Houston

In 2015, Gaspar and I decided to continue our tradition of meeting in a city to see a sporting event and explore the city. We have been lucky enough to catch games in great cities like; Phoenix, San Diego, Nashville, Baltimore, Blacksburg, Indianapolis and Boston, among others. When the NFL released its schedule for the 2015 season, Gaspar and I immediately zeroed in on the New England Patriots game in Houston, against the Texans in December.

As we shared our plans with others throughout the year, many of our friends expressed interest in joining us. We finally got commitments from our friends Scott and his wife Kristen as well as Jim and his wife Sarah. Unfortunately, Deb was not able to join us, because of a friend's wedding that she wanted to attend. Between the time that we planned this trip, and when the event was scheduled, I received my ALS diagnosis. But, I was determined to proceed with the trip as planned. And, I am sure glad that I did!

The plan was for all of us to meet at our hotel by dinner time on Friday. Thanks to the disastrous merger of US Airways and American Airlines, I was delayed, and delayed in Dallas. On the bright side, this delay allowed my travel companions to hit the store and stock up on refreshments before my arrival. As soon as I walked into the lobby, not only was I greeted with hugs, but I was handed an ice cold Miller Lite. We all hung out in the lobby, drinking beer, and catching up until late into the night.

On Saturday, after an overpriced breakfast at the hotel, we all got cleaned up and headed to the Museum of Natural History. I would love to claim that we are classy and cultured, but it was the Dinosaur exhibit that sucked us in. But, I must admit that the Mummy exhibit was pretty cool too.



After a few hours in the museum, we were all ready for a drink. Conveniently, there was a Cantina just a couple of blocks away. Over lunch, and a few beverages, Jim expressed interest in going to see the UFC fights that night. The fight card was headlined by a matchup between Conor McGregor and Jose Aldo. While this hadn't been on anyone else's radar, we had no other specific plans, so we decided that we would go out to a bar to watch the fights. Kristen took the lead on finding a bar for us. We knew that Buffalo Wild Wings always shows the UFC, but we preferred to find a local place to watch. Kristen found several options, and ultimately chose PJ's Sports Bar.



After some down time at the hotel, following our museum visit and lunch, we all met in the lobby and arranged for an Uber XL to take the six of us to the bar. When we saw a Nissan XTerra pull up, we thought there was no way that the six of us, and the driver would actually fit. With some creative seating on laps, we all made it in. Google showed that the trip should take fifteen minutes or so. As we neared the supposed location of this Sports Bar, we couldn't help but notice that we appeared to be in a residential neighborhood. When our driver stopped in front of a house to let us out, we were all skeptical. But we did see a neon sign in the window that said PJ's Sports Bar. We decided to give it a shot, and all piled out of the car like clowns at a circus.

As we walked through the door, it seemed like everything was in slow-motion as everyone at the bar (about ten people) turned to look at us. The looks on the faces of the regulars were as if they were seeing aliens walk into their bar. The awkwardness was alleviated when the owner, PJ, greeted us. He asked for \$10 from each of us, to cover the cost of the fight. We gladly obliged, and he welcomed us to grab a seat anywhere. Since it was formerly a house that was converted to a 'Sports Bar', the layout was a bit quirky. Jim scouted the upstairs, which he quickly advised against, which left us with a handful of tables to choose from. We set up camp right near the bar, with a good view of the TV. We also posted our location on social media, in the event that we went 'missing'.



The bartender came over to greet us and let us know that she would be our server. We ordered a bucket of beers to get started. That is when Scott noticed a huge potato on our table, which the bartender attempted to explain away as being related to steak night, which was the previous night. After a couple of buckets, we asked to see a menu. The menu would have made Deb proud. It consisted of three things; cheese pizza, pepperoni pizza, and meat pizza. It turned out that their kitchen had not been changed during the 'conversion' to the bar, it had just a typical home stove, limiting their offerings. Over the course of the night, PJ cooked us a handful of frozen pizzas.

Somehow, our story about being in town for the Patriots-Texans game started circulating around the bar. That is when the locals started coming by our table to confirm that we had come 'all the way' from the East Coast. Many of these folks had never been out of Houston, let alone Texas. One couple that heard we were from Rhode Island, thought that it was part of New York. Sadly, this wasn't the first time that any of us had heard that misconception. But, I must admit that everyone seemed to warm up to us after the initial cold shoulder.

As soon as the UFC undercard started, Gaspar and I started to gamble on the action to keep our interest. If I recall correctly, Scott and Jim did the same, while Kristen and Sarah were entertained by people watching. Jim also entertained us by locking Scott in the bathroom and then trying to hide and scare him. Believe it or not, we are all in our forties, even if we don't always act it.



Once all the undercard fights were finished, the excitement really began to build for the headline bout, Aldo versus McGregor. We ordered a fresh bucket of beer and settled in for the fight. We had barely taken our first sips of beer before the fight was over. McGregor knocked out Aldo in 13 seconds. Don't get me wrong, it was explosive and exciting, but a bit anticlimactic, after all the buildup. Gaspar kindly picked up our whole tab, including a generous tip for the bartender, who had taken good care of us all night. We finished off our beers, while waiting for our Uber XL to take us back to the hotel. Before we left, PJ stopped by to thank us, and gave us about a dozen bottle and can coozies. When we walked outside, we were delighted to find a pimped out Yukon Denali. This was perfect for us to ride home in style. About a mile down the road, Jim revealed that he had smuggled the giant potato out of the bar. I am still not sure why, but it now resides in my freezer.

On Sunday, we all slept in a little later. When we planned this trip, the Patriots-Texans game was scheduled for a noon CT kickoff. But, because it had some playoff implications, NBC exercised their right to flex the game into the Sunday night slot. This presented a concern for our group, specifically we would need to moderate our day drinking to still be able to enjoy the night game. Thankfully, we are a bunch of experienced drinkers, so we were able to come up with a solid game plan.

After we all had a filling breakfast, we retreated to our respective rooms for showers and relaxation. After watching the first half of the early games in our rooms, we met up in the lobby, with some beers, for the conclusion of the early games. Then we trekked down the road to What-a-Burger, so that we could all get a solid base for continued drinking. After filling our bellies, we headed back to the hotel to get changed and head to the stadium. NRG stadium was a little over a mile walk from our hotel. We planned to do some tailgating, so we packed a bag of beer and started on our way to the game, about two hours before kickoff.

When we arrived at the stadium, we encountered a very bizarre scenario. The security screening, and ticket confirmation was set up outside of the parking lot, and the will call window, where we needed to pick up our tickets. Since the tickets were in my name, I was the only one permitted in to gather our tickets, leaving my crew to 'tailgate' by the side of the road. Once I returned with the tickets, we were all permitted through security, but our beer was not. We gifted it to some others, making their day.

Once we got through this first security gate, we were still not in the stadium. We were in this weird courtyard area, with a band playing, and more importantly, huts that sold beer at reasonable prices! We decided that this would serve as our de facto tailgate, since our first attempt was lame. We enjoyed a few reasonably priced beers, before going through a second security gate to officially enter the stadium. We then ascended about a dozen escalators, leading to our seats in the 600 level. We then asked some nice Texans fans to take our pre-game photo.



The game itself was uneventful, with the Patriots winning pretty easily. The stadium was nice and the hometown fans were very welcoming. But, for me, the most memorable experience of that trip was Saturday night at PJ's. If you are ever in Houston, stop in for a few beers. But, I would definitely recommend eating before you go!

Chapter Twelve – On the Golf Course

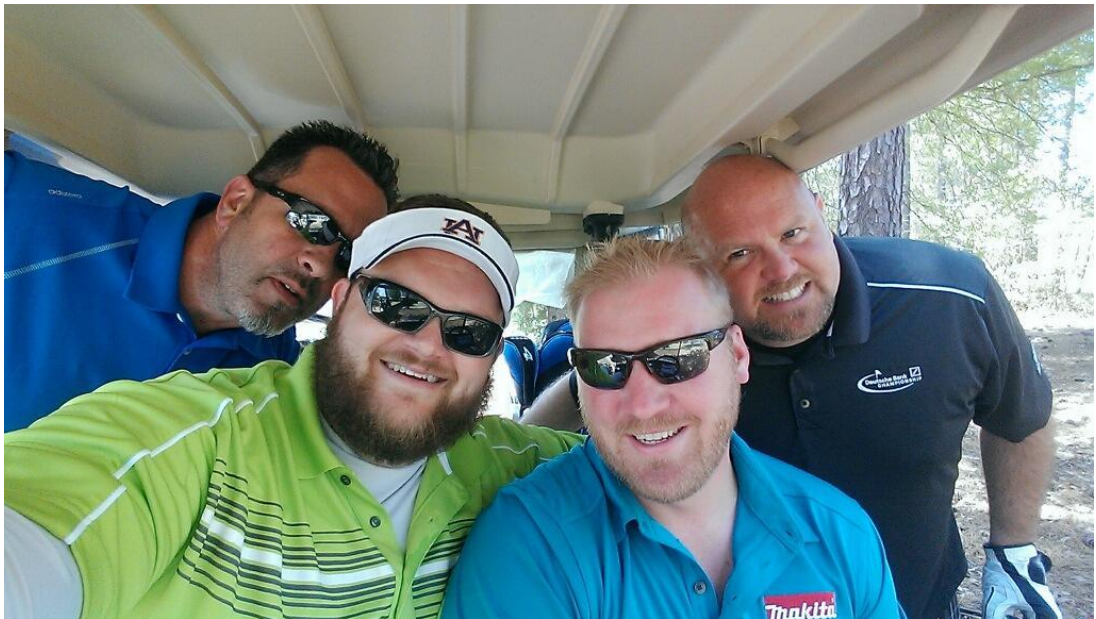
As I grew older, I officially retired from softball and spent less time at the Richmond Volleyball Club, I found myself spending more and more of my free time on the golf course. For me, it wasn't for the love of the game, it was more about the camaraderie with my friends on the course. Spending time outside and drinking a few beers along the way didn't hurt either. Eventually, I was able to shoot some rounds in the 80's, but the fun for me was all about the good natured ribbing with my cronies. Five of us from our volleyball team, Kevin, Greg, K-Sex, Lavan (not pictured) and I, ended up becoming members at the Hollows Golf Club.



Here are some of the more memorable moments from our time on the course;

- Every time that we went to the Hollows Golf course to play a round, we would see the same guy on the range, working on his swing. In the three years that we were members, we never once saw him on the actual course. This earned him the nickname 'Ranger Rick'.
- The best name for a beer on the course is 'Swing Lube', because a few beers definitely loosens you up a bit.

- Just because a few beers are good for your game, doesn't mean more is better. I once saw my pal Scott swing and miss at least five times in a row after more than a dozen beers during a tournament.
- I did witness the exception that proves this rule. I played in a tournament, with several kegs strategically located throughout the course. Paul, in the green shirt below, easily drank more than a case of beer. He repeatedly apologized for playing poorly all day. Somehow, despite all of the beers that he drank, on the 17th hole, a 175-yard par 3, he hit his tee shot within four feet. He promptly apologized for not getting it closer.



- Trying to chip out of the woods, after a wayward tee shot, I hit my shot, it hit a tree, and the ball landed back in my own divot. I bet Tiger couldn't do that.
- I witnessed my buddy Kevin chip his ball into an open pocket on his playing partner's golf bag, accidentally of course. He could never do that if he tried!
- I once hit a tee shot so poorly that the iron slipped under the ball, which rose up an inch or two before settling back down on the tee. If my friend Dan hadn't witnessed it, I wouldn't believe it was possible.
- I learned to never stand to the right of my friend K-Sex, as he has proven that he can defy the laws of physics and hit the ball exactly ninety degrees from the direction he is aiming.
- My friend Kevin was struggling so badly during a round that I suggested that he shotgun a beer. I didn't think it could hurt. But, I was wrong!
- In Las Vegas, Steve, Greg and I learned that bringing a large bottle of Jägermeister onto the golf course is not a good idea.

- Despite temperatures hovering at, or below 40 degrees, Kevin and I decided to get out and play nine holes one afternoon in March. As expected, the parking lot was nearly empty. I believe there were only two other groups on the 27-hole course. That is why it seemed so foolish that we had a twosome playing directly behind us. On the seventh hole, they hit a ball over our heads without the courtesy of yelling 'Fore!' This pissed us off enough to take the ball with us. We wrote the word 'Fore' on it and left it in the cup on the ninth hole to send a message. As we walked to our cart, these assholes hit into us again, nailing our cart this time. I turned the cart around and drove back to them so that Kevin and I could give them an ass chewing. I will spare you the vulgarity, but the more important point was how stupid these guys were for continually hitting into us when there was an entire nine hole course available with no one on it. After we were done telling them how dumb they were, we got back in the cart. I spun the cart around and headed toward Kevin's truck. I think I still had steam coming out of my ears as I continued to rant. After I got approximately 100 yards away, I realized that Kevin hadn't said one word. That's when I looked to my right and realized that Kevin wasn't in the cart with me. Apparently, when I spun the cart around, he saw one of the guys make a gesture and hopped out, unbeknownst to me. I had to turn back around and make what I call 'The drive of shame', to go back and pick him up. It was awful at the time, but we have gotten a lot of laughs out of it since!
- Some of the funnier moments came from a side game that we played called three putt poker. The basic premise of the game is pretty simple, do something positive (birdie, sand save, one putt, etc.) and you earn a playing card toward a poker hand following the match. If you do something negative (three putt, triple bogie, etc.) or dumb, you contribute a dollar to the pot for the poker game. While earning cards, to have the best poker hand, was the primary goal, the greater joy was telling someone that they owed a dollar for doing something dumb. Some examples from the years;
 - Tripping over the flag (Kevin)
 - Not hitting past the Ladies' tees (various, but mostly K-Sex)
 - Swing and miss (mainly Greg)
 - The ball ending up further from the hole than it started (mainly K-Sex)
 - Walking into a tree (Me)
 - Attempting to get into the wrong golf cart (Kevin)
 - Double tapping a chip shot (mostly Greg)

Chapter Thirteen – VA Beach Bachelor Party Number One

Normally, I would never consider writing about a bachelor party. But, when no one misbehaves, and some funny stuff happens, I have no choice but to share with everyone. It was the fall of 2011, and with my future brother in law set to be married in the spring, I worked with John's brothers and good friends to pull together a bachelor party in Virginia Beach.

Respecting John's wishes, the plan didn't involve any strip clubs or elaborate celebrations. We simply booked a few hotel rooms at the Days Inn, and planned for a day of golf, followed by dinner and drinks. The Days Inn is conveniently located across the street from the Taphouse, one of our favorite watering holes down at the beach. We had a total of seven guys for the outing; John, his brothers Chris and Dutch, his good friend Hurst, along with volleyball friends Greg and K-Sex, and myself. We all checked into the hotel and headed straight to Hell's Point golf course.

We had a good time on the golf course, but nothing very memorable happened, until we got to dinner. We arrived at the Taphouse for a late dinner. Apparently, they had a band setting up to play, and the only available table was located directly in front of the band. It wasn't optimal, but we had all been drinking all day, and were in need of some food to soak up the booze. The band promoter stepped up and told us that she would keep an eye out for an open table and get us moved as soon as something else opened up. I thought that was very nice of her.

We were able to get our dinner and drinks ordered before the band began. Once they started, it was worse than we anticipated. The side of the table with their backs to the band was no more than a foot from the band members, which made any conversation virtually impossible. The worst part was the band was awful. When K-Sex decided to share his opinion about how bad the band sucked, he didn't realize how close he was to the lead singer's microphone. The whole bar got to hear the something like this "Wow, this band is terrible!" Coincidentally, a table opened up and we were moved almost immediately.

As the band promoter helped us move, someone leaked the fact that we were there celebrating a bachelor party. That's when the forty-something band promoter shared with us that she was a former stripper, and had a surprise in store for us later in the night. None of us knew what she had in mind, but we all knew that it probably

wasn't going to be good. A few minutes later, she came by our new table and told us that she planned to dance on our table as soon as the owner of the bar left. I could see the looks on everyone's face, and could tell that we were all hoping that the owner would stick around a while. But, we were not that lucky. About an hour later, she kept her promise, despite our collective urging not to get on our table. She 'danced' on our table for a couple of minutes, thankfully without removing any clothing. I think I speak for the whole group when I say that I was happy when it was over.

Unfortunately, this woman was not done with us just yet. A few minutes later, she came back to our table. This time, she wasn't alone. She had her twenty-two -year-old daughter with her. They were not at all hesitant to share that the daughter had followed in her mom's footsteps, becoming a stripper as well. She must have thought that she lucked into a night of work, with her mom finding a bachelor party to work. She sat right down and tried to get all chummy with us by ordering a round of Fireball shots. John's brother Chris was smart and put his shot under the table, instead of taking it. After I took my shot, I wished I had done the same. We were cordial to this young lady for a bit, but we had all had a long day, and we all started settling our tabs. The stripper chick cornered one of the guys at the bar, trying to convince him that she should come back to the hotel with us. When she heard that I was the decision maker, she called me to the bar to try and convince me that she should come dance for the group. When I said "Absolutely not", she responded by flashing her boobs to me. While that was certainly unexpected, it definitely wasn't changing my response. On that note, we all left the bar for the short walk back to the hotel, without either stripper, mom or daughter. I think I was asleep before my head hit the pillow.

The next morning, as we were all eating a horrible Days Inn breakfast, we learned of one more story from the previous night. When John's brother Dutch got back to his room, he realized that he was out of cigarettes. As he prepared to walk to the 7-Eleven, he realized that he had lost his wallet. Dutch stumbled back to the bar to see if anyone had turned in a wallet. When the bartender reported that no one had turned one in yet, he handed Dutch a pen and paper to write down his name and number in case the wallet turned up. After a few failed attempts, Dutch realized that he was too drunk to write. He had to ask the bartender to write his name and number down for him. He then walked back to his room and promptly passed out. When he awoke Sunday morning, he spotted his wallet on top of the television, right where he had left it.

Chapter Fourteen – VA Beach Bachelor Party Number Two

My good friend Kevin was set to be married in June of 2012. I was honored to have been asked to serve as Kevin's best man. Of course, I was responsible for their meeting. For that story, read *The Baltimore Mystery* (Volume 1, Chapter 13). Since John's bachelor party in Virginia Beach went well, I decided that we would do something similar for Kevin. So, in April 2012, we were set to return to try and replicate the fun that we had just a few months prior.

Again, respecting Kevin's wishes, the plan didn't involve any strip clubs or crazy celebrations. We simply booked a few hotel rooms at the Days Inn, and planned for a day of golf, followed by dinner and drinks. Most of us headed down to the beach on Friday night, to be ready for Saturday's festivities. The Days Inn is always good for a story or two by itself. It is conveniently located on Atlantic Avenue, across from the beach, close to a number of good bars. And, because it isn't oceanfront, it is cheap, so it attracts some interesting characters. On Friday night, the Days Inn provided us our first entertainment of the weekend. Waiting for the elevator, we ran into a midget wedding party, something you don't see every day. They were just the first of many unusual people that we would encounter at the hotel that weekend.

We also encountered a young lady from Ohio, who was also staying at the hotel. She had met a Navy guy from Virginia Beach online. He bought her a bus ticket to come visit, and paid for seven nights at the hotel. But, he kept coming up with excuses for why he was delayed, and then just stopped replying to her at all. We surmised that he was a married man who had planned to cheat on his wife, and either he got a guilty conscience, or his wife caught him. Either way, this poor girl was stuck in this crappy hotel by herself, bored out of her mind and still holding out hope that this guy would call. We were skeptical of her story for a while, but she showed us enough evidence to convince us that she was genuine. It was pretty sad really.

The Days Inn was not quite done providing us with characters for this chapter. We also met two women that we would come to refer to as 'Terrible Moms'. Through a number of interactions over the course of the weekend, we learned that the Terrible Moms came to Virginia Beach for the weekend to party, but brought their thirteen-year-old daughters with them. The teenagers were left to entertain themselves. We saw them on second floor, overlooking Atlantic Avenue, whistling to guys that they thought were cute. We also saw them walking up and down the strip by themselves.

All of this stuff occurred before the actual bachelor party on Saturday morning. After a crappy breakfast at the hotel, we headed out to Hell's Point golf course. Because of the number of beverages consumed that weekend, and the two similar bachelor parties within a few months, there is no consensus on who played with whom. I know that we had two groups, and we played back to back. And I know that Patrick served as the bartender for both groups, keeping everyone well supplied with mixed drinks, while wearing a ridiculous outfit. The other memorable moment from the golf outing came on holes 17 and 18. The tee boxes were probably only 180 yards apart. Somebody decided it would be wise to start firing golf balls at each other. Thankfully, none of us are very accurate, so no one was hit.

Things get a kinda foggy after golf, but I am pretty sure that we spent some time continuing to drink at the hotel, and that we had dinner at the Taphouse, across the street from the hotel. I know for sure that we were not joined by any strippers for dinner. And I know that the majority of the group was fine with heading back to the hotel after dinner, but Patrick tried to convince us that we should go to a dance club. While he didn't convince anyone else to go, it didn't stop him from heading to one by himself. He continued to try and persuade us to join him, via text message. He decided that including photos of the girls at the club would bolster his argument. The issue was that he was taking photos of girls on the posters in the club, which didn't really help his case.

By this time, John and his brother Chris had gone home, and K-Sex had also left because he had to leave for a cruise the following morning. This left only Greg, Kevin, his friend Amy and myself. While we were hanging out drinking beers on the balcony, laughing at Patrick's text messages, we could see a carnival ride in the distance. It looked like two people were strapped into a seat and shot up very high into the air. Kevin and Greg wanted no part of that ride, while Amy and I said we would do it. Kevin didn't believe us, and said he would pay for us to ride the ride. We poured a couple of to-go drinks and headed for the carnival. The Ohio girl tagged along with us, since she had nothing better to do. We arrived at the 'Sling-Slot', which definitely was more intimidating up close. But, we were committed. Kevin paid the fee, then Amy and I were strapped in. Once we were shot up in the air, over 100 feet, I remember two things vividly; the view of the area from that height was very cool, and looking up us, Greg looked like he was going to puke. Patrick was finally done with the club, and was trying to catch up with us. When we told him that we were at the Sling-Slot, he thought that was a bar, and couldn't find us.

While we were at the carnival, we decided to play some of the typical games, like; ring toss, milk bottle, ball toss, etc. I am not sure who won, or on what game, but we were all winners when Kevin walked around holding his 'Princess' inflatable hammer. He got quite a few odd looks on the way back to the hotel.



I think it was about midnight when we were still hanging out and drinking on the balcony when we looked down and saw the young girls hanging around the parking lot. Apparently, the Terrible Moms had brought two men back to the room, and kicked the girls out. That cemented the fact that these two women are indeed Terrible Moms. But, they contributed to the a very memorable bachelor party weekend, so I thank them wherever they are, which is likely to be a trailer park or County jail.

Chapter Fifteen – The Immaculate Recovery

When the 2017 Red Sox schedule was released, Deb and I immediately realized that the Red Sox were scheduled to play in Baltimore on the weekend of April 21st, which just happened to be our tenth anniversary. This set the wheels in motion for a gathering of friends to celebrate our anniversary with us, by joining us in Baltimore for the weekend. We decided to reserve a suite for the game on Saturday night, leaving Friday as a travel day, and a day for everyone to catch up with each other.

We had friends coming in from different places (Virginia, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Arizona, etc.), via various means (car, train, plane) and at all different times. While we were all staying at the Marriott hotel by Camden Yards, we had no set plans for meeting up. When the first group of us arrived, we were hungry and thirsty, so we decided that we would head to a favorite bar/restaurants in Federal Hill, called Mother's. It turned out to be a fantastic decision. We started with a group of six, and seemingly every thirty minutes our party grew, until we maxed out at fifteen. We all enjoyed delicious food, many beverages and terrific company, as we took over the majority of the bar area. We were there from 1:00 PM until 5:00 PM.



We might have stayed longer, but the Men's room was an absolute death trap. At that point in my progression, I was still able to get out of my chair to use the restroom, but I was a little unsteady (Listen to the lyrics of *Unsteady*, by the X Ambassadors). In every previous restroom, I was safely able to navigate it with one companion. For some reason, Mother's decided that polished concrete was a suitable choice for a bathroom floor. I assume that polished concrete can be a bit slippery when dry. But I know for sure that when it gets some moisture on it, like in a bar restroom, it becomes slick as ice. It took three of my friends to get me back to my chair after using the bathroom. Everyone was slipping, sliding, swearing and sweating. We all agreed that we were lucky to survive that once, and had no desire to tempt fate with a second attempt. So, after one more cider, Deb and I decided to make the mile or so trek back to the hotel, joined by about half of our crew. The roll back, over the brick sidewalks, was less painful than the roll to the bar, thanks to the pints of cider numbing the pain from the extreme bumpy ride.

After making it back to the hotel, and safely using the restroom without incident, I decided that I needed a nap. The combination of the drive up from Richmond, socializing with friends, the bathroom disaster, and the bumpy ride to and from the bar had wiped me out. I settled in for a refreshing two-hour nap. Feeling refreshed, I joined the rest of our posse in the hotel bar. It wasn't a big space, but we were able to get garner just enough space to fit our group and watch the Red Sox game.

After some food, and a couple of Gin & Tonics, I decided to call it a night and rest up for the next day. Ashley and John accompanied Deb and I upstairs to help get me settled down for the night. That is when things went south. While I was smart about limiting my alcohol consumption throughout the day (3 ciders, 2 G&Ts), I was not smart about drinking enough water. As I tried to transfer into bed, my legs locked up, a sure sign that I was dehydrated. Despite trying to get some water in me, I was crashing hard, necessitating a call to EMS.

Thankfully, EMS arrived quickly and I was able to talk them into starting an IV for me. We then made the three block drive to the University of Maryland Emergency Room. I have to say that this was my first experience in an inner city ER, and it was quite interesting to say the least. Apparently, Friday nights are the busiest, so we were warned that we may be there a while.

While the staff couldn't have been nicer, it was a bit unsettling to overhear the following as the medical team discussed my case just outside my ER space "I had

never heard of that drug, so I Googled it.” As soon as they walked in, I asked them to stop so that I could educate them a bit. I saw a lot of note taking, which is never comforting. Fortunately, they were open to my suggestions for treatment, which was simply IV fluids and muscle relaxants. Unfortunately, they were concerned with my inability to urinate in a urinal while lying on my back. So, I had the displeasure of my first catheterization, which is awful, in case you are wondering. I also got to use a bed pan for the first time, also not very fun.

But, the visit wasn’t completely without some funny moments. At some point in the night, one of the ER frequent flyers made an appearance. All of the staff greeted her by name, “Hello Doris.” When the doctor asked her what was wrong, her reply was simply “Everything.” Then, we had a guy in scrubs pop in to check on me. It turns out, he wasn’t on staff, he was just another patient wandering around the ER. I was there long enough that I heard Doris get discharged and then reappear a few hours later. Apparently, the University of Maryland Hospital provides light rail tokens upon discharge, which occasionally attracts repeat visitors.

I will spare you any more of the procedures that I endured during my stay. After nearly 14 hours in the ER, the staff were finally willing to release me. We decided that with the hospital only being three blocks away from our hotel, it may be quicker and easier to simply roll back to the hotel, instead of waiting for medical transport. My brother in law John volunteered to drive my chair to the hospital for me. Once we had the chair in the room, we still had one big hurdle to overcome, getting me from the bed to the chair. I had not slept all night and had no leg strength at all. Thankfully, one of the male nurses was built like an NFL linebacker. What he lacked in form, he made up for with brute strength. He bear-hugged me and moved me like a rag doll into my wheelchair.

Now that I was in my chair, the only thing between myself and my hotel room was a cold, drizzly, bumpy three block roll. As I stopped at the first intersection, I looked down and saw a piece of plastic that looked strikingly similar to the finish on my wheelchair. We decided to grab it on the off chance that it had fallen off on during John’s journey to the hospital. Once we made it back to the hotel room, sure enough, we found where it had fallen off from. It was now after noon, and if there was any hope that we would make it to the 7:00 PM game, Deb and I needed to get some sleep. She crawled into bed and I reclined in my chair. We were both asleep almost immediately.

When we awoke about 5:00 PM, I still wasn't feeling very good. We got some food and some Gatorade in me, and I started to regain a bit of strength. Finally, about 6:00 PM, I made the decision to go to the game, with the expectation that I would probably only last an hour or two, at best.



Being around such great friends and family re-energized me. We all had a great time at the game, despite the chilly temperatures. It is the first time that I have ever seen anyone drink gin & hot chocolate. I was not willing to try that combination, I stuck with my old faithful, gin & tonic. Somehow, I managed to stick around for the whole game.

I am not crazy enough to claim that this was the best comeback of all time. But, I feel like it's in the top four. Clearly, Jesus Christ's resurrection from his crucifixion has first place nailed down, pun intended. The Patriots comeback over the Falcons after being down 28-3 in Super Bowl LI is secure in the number two spot. The Red Sox comeback over the Yankees in the 2004 ALCS after being down three games to none secures the third spot. I am proud to slot this night into the fourth best comeback of all time. After feeling like curling up in a hole and giving up even an hour before game time, being lifted up, both literally and figuratively, by my friends and family, to make it to the game and enjoy the full game, makes me comfortable calling this the 'Immaculate Recovery!'

Chapter Sixteen – The Full Pizza Delivery Driver Beat Down Story

In Volume 1, Chapter 34, I eluded to this story. But I decided that it warranted a full dedicated chapter. It started out as a typical weeknight during my third year at the University of Rhode Island. A few of us were hanging out, playing cards and drinking beer. As it was getting later, we were all starting to get hungry. With no food in the room, the next logical choice was ordering pizza. The issue was that none of us had any money.

This is when I came up with my beer fueled master plan. We would call in an order to the dorm room next door, and while the driver left his car unattended, I would swipe whatever orders were in his car. Somehow, none of my idiot friends talked me out of this plan. I placed the order, and probably had another Stroh's Light or two before heading outside to lay in wait. It wasn't long before the driver pulled up, and left his car running as he walked away to make the fake delivery. As I approached the car to grab the goods, my brilliant plan hit a major snag. The driver had brought along a companion, presumably his girlfriend, who was sitting in the car, foiling my plan.

As I returned to my room to share the disappointing news, I was surprised to see my friends eating some pizza. They explained to me that the driver pounded on my neighbor's door, waking him up, and demanded payment for the pizza that he had not ordered. Ian, knowing nothing of the plan, and just wanting to go back to bed, paid the rude delivery driver, offered the pizza to the guys in my room, and promptly returned to bed.

In hindsight, I should have just had a slice of pizza, and eventually fessed up to Ian and repaid him for the pizza. But, if I did that, this chapter wouldn't exist. Instead, my beer muscles took over and I decided to get Ian's money back for him. I walked out the back door of the dorm, toward the next logical stop for delivery. I found his car running outside, and made the fateful decision to wait and confront the guy as he walked out of the dorm to his car. I don't remember the specifics of the discussion, but I know that it got heated. The next thing that I remember is being partially embedded in a bush, and being tied up like a pretzel. The pizza delivery guy had definitely gotten the better of me. In my defense, I was pretty drunk, and I am guessing that he was completely sober.

As I walked dejectedly, back to my dorm, I was trying to think about how I would describe the outcome of my confrontation. Would I pretend I couldn't find him? Would I pretend I kicked his ass? Could I say that the guy apologized for being rude? It turns out, I would have no choice in how the story was relayed back to my friends. Unbeknownst to me, my friend Bart just happened to be walking by the spot of the confrontation, at the exact time everything went down. It wasn't until after I climbed out of the bush that Bart realized it was me. Instead of checking on me, he had walked back to my dorm to tell the fellas what he had just witnessed. By the time I walked in my room, everyone was sharing a good laugh, at my expense. I learned a tough lesson that night. I always tip the pizza delivery guy well, because some customers can be real jerks!

Chapter Seventeen –The Fun and Danger of Growing Up in the 70s/80s

I won't be one of those crotchety old guys who talks about how great things used to be and how everything has gone to hell because of the youth of this generation. But, I will share some funny stories that highlight how different things were, for better or worse. Regardless of how things differed, I survived, mostly unscathed, but certainly not without some bumps and bruises along the way.

I just laugh when I see kids today riding their tricycles, they look like they are geared up to go to war, with knee pads, elbow pads and a helmet. I rode my bike every day, particularly in the summer, but I didn't own a bike helmet until I was in my mid-twenties. Of course, there were some injuries along the way.

- My friends and I loved to find the biggest hills, to generate the most speed. Our favorite was America Street, just a few blocks away. The issue was that the bottom of the hill collected a lot of sand, which made stopping a challenge. That one street was responsible for so much road rash, I bet that you could still find some of my skin at the bottom of that hill.
- One day, my best friend, Mike, and I, decided that we would carry our bikes to the top of the slide and ride down. Mike went first. Unfortunately, he only made it a short distance before he fell off. Since he broke his leg during the fall, I decided against following his lead.
- My friends and I built a homemade ramp in our backyard. It is important to know that since I grew up in a housing project, the backyard was made of cement and shared by eight houses, consisting of four apartments in each, for a total of thirty-two apartments. The first few kids made it over the jump safely. I lined up for my turn, got a good head of steam going, and hit the ramp. Unfortunately, the ramp failed and I flew over the handle bars, landing on the concrete, square on my head. After a few minutes, I was able to make it to my feet, with some help. As I walked into my apartment, I asked my mom for an ice pack. When she turned, she saw what looked like a softball growing out of my forehead, all the blood drained from her face, and she looked like she might faint. As far as I recall, that was the last stunt that I ever attempted on my bike.

Because I grew up before video games were good, I spent the majority of my time playing with the neighborhood kids, outside. The activity was pretty much dictated by the time of the year. For most of the summer, it was speedball or stickball. It was mainly one on one or two on two baseball, with a broomstick or bat, a tennis ball and

imaginary runners. But once the fall came, it was a ton of street hockey. The concrete backyard made a good surface to play on.

- When we started playing (about 10 years old) our equipment was pretty minimalistic. The goalie had pads below the knees, a baseball glove, blocker, goalie mask and stick. While the rest of us had nothing but a stick, and a hockey sweater of our favorite player.
- That worked for a couple of years, until we started filling out our bodies a bit. There is nothing that stings quite like a slap shot to the legs, particularly in the cold weather. I can't count the number of perfectly round bruises that we all had after a weekend of playing. We all had to eventually invest in some equipment to keep playing, without ending up battered and bloodied.
- As we continued to age, we graduated from playing amongst ourselves in the backyard, to playing teenagers from other areas of the city. This presented one big logistical issue. How do we get a full-size, wooden framed hockey net, to a school or park a few miles away? Our solution was to get in my best friend's car, and have our friends lift the heavy net (probably 40 lbs) on to the roof of his compact car. We rolled down the windows. He held on with his left hand, while I held on with my right. To further complicate things, his car had a manual transmission. In order to shift, Mike would press the clutch, say "shift", and I would shift gears, left-handed. I am amazed that we never wrecked, or were pulled over.

Times were just different. There are just things that happened back then that would never be allowed now. Here are some examples;

- I began walking to the corner store to buy cigarettes for my mom by the time that I was eight years old.
- I started buying lottery scratch tickets as soon as I had a few dollars in my pocket, probably about sixteen years old.
- At age seventeen, after going to a WWF event in Providence, my friend Mike and I wandered into a strip club. When I ordered a Diet Coke, the waitress told that it was the same price as beer. I got the hint and immediately changed my order to a Budweiser. That was not the last time we visited that place.
- Somehow, Mike and I, aged nineteen and eighteen, respectively, found a bar in Warren, RI that would serve us. One of the first times that we were in there, the bartender told us that if cops walked in, we should sneak out the back door, and not worry about our tab.

Chapter Eighteen – The Allman Brothers Show Detour

I had seen the Allman Brothers Band with my good friends Dan and Mike a few times in New England, and always enjoyed the show. In 1999, I was still living in Rhode Island, Dan was in Connecticut and Mike was in Virginia. When the Allman Brothers Band released their schedule, we immediately targeted the July 3rd show in Charlotte, NC, for a fun road trip. By the Spring, we had committed to the trip and purchased our tickets.

After work on Thursday July 1st, I headed down to Dan's house in Connecticut. On Friday morning, we loaded up my 1993 Ford Escort wagon and headed south towards Mike's place in Blacksburg, VA. It was an uneventful trip, as we arrived in Blacksburg by dinner time. We spent the night drinking a few beverages, and catching up with Mike, and his wife Deb.

On Saturday morning, we iced down the coolers, packed up the car and hit the road for the three-hour trip to Charlotte, NC. About ninety minutes into our trip, on an isolated section of Route 77 South, my engine simply lost power. We were able to safely get to the breakdown lane. We got out of the car, lifted the hood and pretended to know what we were looking for. Not surprisingly, we were unable to figure out what was wrong with my car.

I had AAA, but since none of us had a cell phone, we had no way to call them. Our first instinct was to wait for a State Trooper, or a good samaritan to stop and assist us. But, after a short time, we grew impatient with this plan. There was a tractor trailer broken down about a quarter mile ahead. I decided to walk to his truck, and see if he could help. He was very nice, and lent me his cell phone so that I could call AAA. I returned to the car and let the fellas know that a tow truck was on its way.

After waiting, seemingly forever, the tow truck finally arrived. The driver was straight out of a central casting for a redneck tow truck driver. He had on filthy overalls, a greasy hat, chewing on an oversized toothpick and wearing a shirt with a name patch, reading "Bubba", "Jim Bob", or something similar. After we described what happened, Bubba removed the toothpick from his mouth, used it to pry back some plastic piece under the hood, and very slowly, with a big southern drawl said "here's your problem. There should be a belt on this pulley right here. You lost your timing belt." I am certainly no expert, but that didn't sound good.

As Bubba slowly hooked up my car to be towed, he asked me where I would like to be towed. When I replied that I would like to go to whatever service station was close, he informed me that the next exit was nearly thirty miles down the road in the town of Jonesville, NC. We had no other options, so I am not really sure why he asked. Bubba also informed us that the law prohibits passengers from riding in vehicles under tow, so the three of us would be joining him in the cab of his rig. It definitely helped that Dan weighs only 130 lbs, with half of that in his huge forearms. But still, the four of us squished on one bench seat for a thirty-mile drive, wasn't exactly comfortable. At one point, I asked Bubba what he thought the repair might cost. We sat in uncomfortable silence for about five minutes, wondering if he had heard my question. Finally, he replied "I would guess around \$250, but remember that it's July 4th weekend, so I doubt if you can get it fixed before Tuesday." That was not very comforting to hear.

As we took the exit off of I-77, and pulled into the Shell station, we realized that Jonesville wasn't exactly a booming metropolis. It consisted of two gas stations, surrounded by tobacco fields. This is when I learned that standard AAA coverage only covers tows up to two miles. Since we had been towed over thirty miles, I owed Bubba a bunch of money. We checked in with the folks at the gas station, we confirmed that their mechanic was off until Monday the 5th. We decided that we would try and catch a ride to Charlotte, and still proceed with our plans to get to the Allman Brothers show that night. For the next hour, we took turns approaching vehicles getting gas, asking for a ride to Charlotte. Unfortunately, most people were heading north, or didn't have any desire to drive the three of us to Charlotte.

Once we abandoned the plan of getting to the show, we needed to find a way back to Blacksburg. Keeping in mind that this was before the cellphone era, we were trying to reach Mike's wife, unfortunately she was not at home. We were just hanging out in my car in the Shell parking lot, as Mike tried to call his wife about every thirty minutes. Since we had coolers full of ice cold beer, and nothing to do, it didn't take long before we started throwing back some beers. That resulted in us having to use the gas station bathroom quite often. But the folks there could not have been more pleasant. The weird thing was that every time we went into the gas station to pee, the same State Trooper was sitting on a bar stool, playing the Centipede video game. No wonder we never saw a Trooper while we were broken down on the highway.

About four hours of drinking in the car, listening to some Allman Brothers cassette tapes, with occasional walks into the tobacco fields behind the Shell station, Mike was finally able to reach his wife and fill her in on our plight. She agreed to come rescue us, but it would be another couple of hours before she would be able to get down to Jonesville to pick us up. We continued drinking and going for walks to pass the time. It was during one of these walks that one of us spotted a tick on the other. After thoroughly, and awkwardly, checking each other for ticks, we rid ourselves of a handful. We probably got them while standing by the tall grass on the side of the highway.

After six hours in Jonesville, Mike's wife Deb arrived to take us back to their apartment in Blacksburg. Her folks had come in town from Connecticut for a visit, expecting us to be in Charlotte. Deb was not happy with having to bring back three drunk idiots to visit with her parents. It didn't help things that her Dad was a police officer, and a pretty serious guy. But, her folks had seen us all drunk before, and since none of us was driving, they didn't seem to mind.

On Sunday the 4th, we mainly tried to stay out of sight, since we were still in Deb's doghouse. I don't remember much of what we did that day, until that evening. Conveniently, there was a hill right outside their apartment that gave us clear view of the Blacksburg fireworks. We took a few beers outside and enjoyed the show.

On Monday morning, we enjoyed a good breakfast and piled into Mike's truck to head back down to Jonesville. The goal was to be there early, so that Dan and I could get on the road back to New England as soon as my car was ready. The guys at the Shell station were great, and had my car ready by noon. Being a bit further south, we had a long drive ahead of us. We said goodbye to Mike, and headed north. Thankfully, our return trip was uneventful, but it was after midnight when I pulled into my driveway back in Rhode Island. It was certainly a memorable trip, but not one that I would like to repeat, ever!

Chapter Nineteen – One Fun Night in Blacksburg, VA

After our disappointing, albeit amusing, trip to visit Mike in the summer of 1999, Dan and I decided to make another visit to see Mike in Blacksburg, VA in the fall of 2000. This time, not trusting my Escort wagon, we decided to take Dan's truck. A lot of the details of the weekend are a bit hazy, but the events that I do remember warrant sharing.

Mike and Deb had moved from their apartment to a very small one-bedroom house, that was attached to a University research facility. At this facility, bears that were captured because of problematic behavior, or those recovering from injury, were kept until they could be safely reintroduced to the wild. The property was often referred to as the 'bear pens'. That same weekend, Deb's college friend, Sue, was in town visiting. We would all be staying at the tiny house, but we all knew each other well and knew that we would have a fun weekend together.

On Saturday night, friends of Mike and Deb's were having a party, so the five of us headed to the party together. The homeowners were doing some work on the property, which included the painting of a recreation room. After several beers, and possibly some shots, Dan made the suggestion that the women should take advantage of the primed room and create some art by painting their boobs and pressing them against the wall. Surprisingly, some of the ladies jumped right in, while others took some time to warm up to the idea. Eventually, we ended up with about eight sets of boob-prints that we then tried to match to their owners. It was pretty funny. I just wish that we had a picture of the wall to include here.

When we left the party, none of us was in any shape to drive. We had planned accordingly, and dressed for the long, chilly walk across campus, to the bear pens. I vaguely remember attempting, and failing, on some random obstacles that we encountered. But, I have one vivid memory of the walk back that is etched in my mind forever. Sue spotted a tire swing in someone's front yard, and immediately took off running for it. I can only assume that her plan was to jump on it and swing. Instead, as she jumped, her legs went directly beneath the tire, wedging herself tightly between the tire and the ground. As we all ran to check if she was injured, all we could hear was her hysterical laughter. Clearly, she was uninjured, but she really was wedged in there pretty tightly. It took all of us a few minutes to get her free.

When we finally made it back to the bear dens, we all had some more beers, not that they were necessary. Eventually, we decided it was time for some sleep. Dan and I moved the coffee table to make room for our sleeping bags on the living room floor. As we prepared to crawl into our sleeping bags, Sue emerged from the bathroom wearing some unique pajamas. Maybe it was just the alcohol, but she was wearing matching white flannel pajama pants and shirt with red strawberries all over them. After we had a good laugh at her pajamas, Sue took her place on the couch, Dan and I crawled into our sleeping bags and Mike and Deb retired to their bedroom. I am guessing that we were all asleep in a matter of minutes.

The next morning, we awoke to the smell of brewing coffee, something that we all desperately needed. About halfway through my first cup of coffee, I was coherent enough to notice that while Sue was still wearing her strawberry pajama top, she was wearing gray sweatpants in place of her matching strawberry bottoms. When I questioned it, Sue appeared to be as surprised as I was, looking utterly puzzled. Deb invited her into the bedroom, presumably to fill her in on what happened overnight. With Mike staying in the living room with Dan and I, we assumed that he would fill us in. With a wry smile, all Mike would say was that he had been sworn to secrecy. When Sue emerged from the bedroom, her face was bright red with embarrassment. When she learned that Mike had not spilled the beans, she felt better.

Dan, Mike and I decided to head to a diner for some breakfast. We thought for sure that we would be able to coax the story out of Mike over some waffles, but Mike was not budging at all. We finally gave up hope, for now. After breakfast, we were all relaxing back at the bear pens when Sue decided that it was time to let Dan and I in on what had transpired while the two of us were passed out the previous night. But, since Sue had no recollection of it, she agreed to let Mike tell the story from his perspective.

Apparently, in the middle of the night Sue got up, needing to use the bathroom. But, not being fully awake, she made her way into the bedroom, instead of the bathroom. Mike awoke from some rustling on the floor, slipped on his glasses only to see Sue on all fours with her pants around her ankles. He immediately rolled over, woke Deb up and said "Sue needs your help." Deb got her to the bathroom, got her into a clean pair of sweatpants, and got her back tucked in on the couch, all without waking up Dan nor I. I am not sure if that is more impressive on Deb's part, or more sad on behalf of Dan and I. But, I do know that was one fun night in Blacksburg!

Chapter Twenty – Don't Judge a Book by its Cover

In 2010, Deb and I decided to celebrate our three-year anniversary with a trip to Savannah, GA. Deb's mom and Aunt asked if they could join us. We welcomed the company, so Lena and Martha Rae joined us for the road trip. It's about a seven-hour drive from Richmond, VA. Deb drove most of the way, only giving up the wheel for the final hour drive into the city.

Coincidentally, our friend Aimee, from volleyball who was also planning to be in Savannah that weekend to visit her brother Scott, who lives there. She also brought another mutual friend of ours, Lynsi with her for the trip. Another Aimee's brother Brent also decided to come in from Florida to join the fun. I have always considered myself someone who can handle his alcohol and rarely appear drunk. Deb can also hold her own with the best of my friends, who can also throw back some drinks. I am hard pressed to think of anyone who has impressed me with their drinking ability more than Aimee's brother Brent did on that trip.

On Friday night, all of us, minus Lena and Martha Rae, went out bar hopping. By the third or fourth bar, I had lost track of the numbers of pints and shots that we had consumed. I could tell by the way that I felt, and the look in Deb's eyes that more drinks were not going to make us any more drunk, they would just make the morning a little rougher. I made the decision to do something that I have probably only done a handful of times, dip out without saying a word. We quietly settled our tab and snuck out while the others were not looking. We stumbled back to the hotel, leaning on each other to remain upright.



Saturday was much tamer in comparison, but still fun. Deb and I, along with her mom and Aunt did a trolley tour, visiting the historic sites around Savannah, including many of the sites used in a variety of famous films. We also visited a Cathedral, with some of the most beautiful stained glass that I have ever seen. The thing that visually distinguishes Savannah from other charming Southern cities is the presence of Spanish Moss on nearly all of the old growth trees that line the streets and fill the many parks, including Forsyth Park, which is deemed a National Historic Landmark. It's simply one of the most picturesque cities that I have had the good fortune to visit.

The majority of Savannah is very compact and easily walkable, with one exception. The Savannah River sits well below the rest of the city. To access the riverfront requires a descent down one of two very long, steep and old stone stairways. The four of us navigated the stairs down to East River Street, lined with shops, restaurants and bars. After a bit of shopping and lunch, Lena and Martha Rae decided to take an afternoon cruise on the *River Queen*. We had some time to kill before their cruise departed, so while they opted to get some ice cream, Deb and I popped into a bar named Wet Willies. Wet Willies is no ordinary bar, it serves only frozen drink, in a dozen or so flavors. We were allowed to sample a few, before ordering one. None of them lack for alcohol content, but the one that stuck out as particularly potent, it was named 'Call a Cab'. We decided against that particular drink, both enjoying a different tasty beverage as Lena and Martha Rae enjoyed their ice cream.



Once Deb's mom and her aunt boarded the *River Queen*, Deb and I decided to head back up the stairs toward the City Market area and continue drinking. We stumbled upon a couple of musicians setting up to do an outdoor show. We grabbed a couple of beers and took our seats at a table just as the show started. These guys were really entertaining, taking requests and playing to the crowd. A few songs into their set, a homeless man walked up with his guitar case and took a seat off to the side of the musicians. He pulled out his guitar, which had no strings. He 'played along' for a few songs, before the musicians acknowledged him and asked the crowd to welcome him. The crowd obliged and gave him a warm welcome. The two men continued on with their show until they announced that they would finish their show with the homeless man singing the final song. Seemingly everyone looked around nervously, not knowing what to expect. What we were all treated to was a spectacular rendition of 'Sitting on the Dock of the Bay'. Perhaps the circumstances made the performance all the more special, but there is no doubt that this was the most memorable moment of this already great trip. It was the perfect example of why you should never judge a book by its cover!



Chapter Twenty-one – Hawaii Off-Road Adventure

We were planning to visit Hawaii for our ten-year anniversary, in 2017. But after receiving my diagnosis in 2015, we decided not to wait and booked a trip for May of 2016. This was a great decision, as it allowed me to still be involved in some fun adventures.

We had done an off-road excursion with Deb's sister Beth and her husband Keith in Aruba, and loved it. So, when we were planning our time in Kauai and saw that they offered something similar, we were immediately interested. This time, not only would Beth and Keith be joining us, friends of theirs, and ours, Paula and Kevin joined us too. And of course no adventure in Hawaii would not be complete without Deb's sister Ashley and her husband John.

On the morning of our excursion, the eight of us piled into our dueling minivans and headed to the check in location. After a brief safety demonstration, and signing the obligatory waivers, we were fitted with our helmets and ready to go. The sisters took the time to get a pre-adventure photo, which I was able to sneak into.



As we climbed into our vehicles and prepared to get belted in, my brother in law Keith had the quote of the week (Keep in mind that ALS had affected my right hand strength and dexterity at this point). He said to one of the young ladies assisting everyone “Can you help Jason, he’s a little slow.” Thanks Keith, I love you too. After we all had a good laugh, we were ready to hit the trails.



Of course, Deb was driving our off-road vehicle, with me riding shotgun. If you have ever ridden in a vehicle with Deb, you will understand when I describe her driving style as “aggressive”. We were the lead vehicle, following our guide through some pretty rough terrain. About an hour into the tour, we hit a hole in the trail at full speed. We heard a loud noise and suddenly, our vehicle was tilted pretty severely to the passenger side. It turns out, Deb had broken our rear axle.



Deb will deny it was her fault, but we all know the truth. Our guide did an amazing job, hanging off one side of the vehicle so that we could drive it to a clearing up ahead. There we were given the photographer's mud bug so that we could all continue while he waited for a replacement to be brought out to him. We continued on to a nice lunch spot where some folks took advantage of a small water hole to wash off some mud. And some idiots, John included, jumped off some rocks into the water. We had been told that we were lucky that it had rained that morning, since it keeps the trails from being dusty. The downside, is that we were all pretty much covered in mud. Somehow, Deb was a cleaner than I was. The photographer rejoined our group, bringing us a replacement vehicle so he could take his back. I felt like we were being punished for Deb breaking the first one. We were given the only four-seater off-road vehicle in the group. It was like the minivan of the mud buggies.

The ride back from lunch was very scenic, as we meandered through a lot of lush landscape. We road through a lot of the area where the Jurassic Park movies were filmed. We had another scary incident when we encountered one of the dinosaurs apparently left behind after filming. And he looked hangry. Thankfully, he was no match for Deb and her superior driving. We managed to escape, unscathed.



But that wasn't the end of the 'fun'. As we neared the end of the day, we were near the end of the line of vehicles. We could see that there was a very large puddle in the trail ahead. About half of the group was avoiding it, and half were splashing through it. Deb asked what I wanted to do. I said "Don't do it!" I either slurred my words, or Deb heard what she wanted to hear. She swears I said "Do it!" As we splashed through the huge mud puddle, I was yelling "Nooooooo", which was a big mistake. Not only did I get a mud shower, but I also got a mouthful of mud. If you are wondering what that tastes like, I assure you that it doesn't taste like chicken!

All in all, it was a fantastic time! If you're ever in Kauai, I would definitely recommend checking it out. It makes for a great half day adventure. I would suggest wearing clothes that you don't mind throwing out afterwards, that mud simply doesn't wash out. I leave you with a photo of fun mud bug family.



Chapter Twenty-two – The Infamous Tapestry

To get the full perspective of this gag set-up, we have to travel back in time over forty-seven years. My father was stationed in Spain in the early 1970s, where I was born. During that time, my mother acquired a unique tapestry. We moved back to the states in 1973, and at various times I have vague memories of it hanging in our apartment growing up. When I told my family that I was moving to Richmond in late 2001, my mother insisted that I take that tapestry, like it was some kind of treasure. It sat in a trunk in Virginia until I was invited to my friend Mike's sister's wedding in Charleston, SC in 2006. This is when I decided this was a perfect time to get rid of it as a gag wedding gift. We wrapped it up nicely and snuck it into the pile of gifts at the reception, with no card of course.

The day after the wedding, Lori and Robbie (bride and groom), are at their rental house, surrounded by family, opening gifts. They come across the gift with no card, and proceed to open it. Mike describes the looks on everyone's faces as priceless, as they didn't know exactly what they were looking at. Of course, I had let him in on the gag, so he is just crying from laughing so hard. So he had to give me up as the culprit.



Twelve years later, and Mike found the tapestry under his spare bed, having acquired it back from Lori at some point. We were about to hold the 'Third Annual Chip in for the Clements' golf event, which includes a raffle with some tremendous prizes. Mike decided to donate a raffle prize, loosely based on the old game show 'Let's Make a Deal', for the sole purpose of getting someone with the gag prize. He did not let me in on the joke, so I had no idea what was coming. When my friend Chris opened the box that he had chosen, and pulled out the tapestry, only Mike and I understood the full back story of the prize, but everyone got a good laugh!



Chris has pledged to continue the tradition. He will wait for the perfect invite to a wedding, baby shower, birthday party, bar mitzvah, etc. It is vital to make sure it is someone that will appreciate the gag, and pay it forward.

Chapter Twenty-three – Some One-Way Signs Are Just Plain Dumb

In the Fall of 1996, I moved in to a rental house in Narragansett, RI with three roommates. Tyson, who I had known for a few years, along with Kevin A and Kevin W. I hadn't met either of the Kevins before, but we quickly became good friends. My friend Gaspar spent so much time at the house that he became an honorary Kevin, known affectionately as Kev G.

The house was located on Desano Drive, just a few minute walk from Scarborough Beach. The only issue was that the street was deemed a one-way, and our house was the second house from the end of the street. I completely understand the need for one-way streets when the street isn't wide enough for two-way traffic, but Desano Drive was plenty wide. To follow the law and access our house correctly, meant doing about a mile loop to adhere to the one-way restriction. Needless to say, since our house was about a hundred feet from the end of the street, all of us went the wrong way every time we went home.

One Friday night, after a few beers of course, a few of us decided that the one-way sign had to go. After contemplating a few options, my friend Marty came up with, what we all determined, was the best plan. He would slowly drive his truck onto the sidewalk until his bumper was resting against the pole holding the one-way sign, then give the truck some gas and gently bend the pole until it snapped. He hopped in his truck and executed the plan perfectly, but it wasn't as gentle as we imagined, causing a loud bang as the sign fell. He headed home right afterwards, to get his truck out of the area, just in case anyone had witnessed it and called the police.

The next few weeks went by and everyone seemed happy to have the sign gone. Other folks from the street seemed to be getting used to Desano Drive now being a 'two-way' street. I'm not sure if someone called the Narragansett Public Works Department, or if they noticed the downed sign on their own, but less than a month later, they were out there erecting a replacement one-way sign, ending our period of freedom to come and go without worry. This, of course would not be the end of the story.

Following a couple of month 'cooling off' period, we decided once again to plot our revenge against the pesky sign. This time, we would take a different approach.

Instead of taking down the entire pole, we planned on simply removing the one way sign from atop the pole, perhaps drawing less attention from the Authorities.

One night, again after a few beers, under the cover of darkness, Gaspar (aka Kev G) and I launched our plan. I backed my car up to the unsuspecting sign. Gaspar climbed onto the trunk of my car, armed with a softball bat. After a few healthy cuts, Gaspar was able to dislodge the sign from its perch atop the pole, sending it flying into our neighbor's yard. He quickly retrieved it, as I parked my car. We were both back in the house within five minutes of starting our covert mission.

We celebrated our victory, by having a few more beers and watching some Boston Bruins hockey on NESN. After the hockey game, we were just chilling out watching SportsCenter when we were startled by a loud knock on the front door. Gaspar peaked out the front window and could see a Narragansett Police cruiser parked out front. I whispered to Gaspar "Let's go upstairs quietly." As we were sneaking up the stairs, we could hear one officer loudly and clearly say "We can hear you and see you going up the stairs." What we had forgotten was that much earlier in the night, our friend Megan's brother had been over. He was drunk and acting belligerent, so we asked him to leave. On his way out, he punched out one of the panes of glass from the front door, which made it very easy for the cops to hear Gaspar and I.

We had no choice but to answer the door and talk to the police. They asked to come in, which I politely declined. I asked them why they were visiting us, to which they replied "I think you both know exactly why." Gaspar and I kept playing dumb, and let them lay their cards on the table. They went on to explain in detail what had happened with the one-way sign, including the exact number of swings, three, that Gaspar had taken from the trunk of my car. Apparently, we were not as discreet as we thought and our neighbors watched the whole thing.

While we had apparently been busted, thankfully this happened well before the cell phone camera era. So, it was just our word versus my neighbors. We continued to deny any involvement in the sign removal. The police questioned why we tried to sneak away if we weren't guilty. Thinking quickly, I replied that we had fallen asleep and were startled by the pounding on the door. We were headed upstairs to call the police, thinking our friend's brother had returned. The cops were furious, knowing that we were guilty, but not being able to do anything about it. We enjoyed a few more weeks of freedom before the sign was replaced once again. This time, we weren't going to press our luck by taking it down a third time. Fun times!

Chapter Twenty-four – Spring Break in Colorado

As Spring Break approached in March of 1995, a lot of fellow students were making plans for trips to Florida or Cancun. I have never been a fan of the beach, so I decided to head to visit my good friend Casey in Denver to get some skiing in. Unfortunately, before my trip, Casey tore her ACL skiing, so she would be unable to join me on the slopes. But that wasn't going to deter me from heading out west for the first time.

I flew direct from Boston to Denver. The only trouble I encountered was getting stuck in a rotary door at Logan airport. My skis were long and got wedged between the floor and ceiling. I escaped, but still avoid rotary doors after that incident. Casey picked me up at the airport, despite her full ankle to hip cast. In fact, she had bought an older model Mercury Monarch that was roomy enough to allow her to drive, despite the cast. We went back to the apartment that she shared with her boyfriend Rick, and longtime friend Khym. I hadn't met them before, but after a few beers together, we became fast friends and started making plans for the week ahead.

Casey and Rick both worked at a local ski shop, so they were able to hook me up with free ski passes for several days that week. Rick wouldn't be able to take more than a day or two off. So one day Khym lent me her car and I skied at local mountain. Another day, Khym and I skied Loveland Ski Area together. It was definitely a lot different, and better than skiing in New England.

The best ski day was the day that Rick was able to take off work. He and I picked up his friend Miles and headed West to a Ski Resort named Winter Park/Mary Jane. I would consider myself a decent skier, but I knew that Rick and Miles would be far better. But they kicked it up a notch when they met up with a mutual friend on the Mountain. Their friend Russell had been a member of the 1968 US Olympic Ski Team. When we met up with Russ, he had just finished giving a private lesson to a blind skier. This is when it clicked that I was way over my head skiing with this trio.

The day started off okay, with those guys amusing me with a few single black diamond runs. When I survived these, they decided to step it up a notch. I know what you are thinking, "They must have moved onto double black diamond." Nope, we skipped that altogether and jumped right into 'tree skiing', which is where you enter the woods between trails and carve your own path, and in my case, hope not to

die. At one point I lost sight of the fellas in front of me, but heard them all yelling for me to stop. I managed to stop just feet from a huge drop-off, which would have led to catastrophic injuries, or worse. We all decided that tree skiing is not for me. We made our way back to the nearest trail, which just happened to be a double black diamond mogul run. I have never been a fan of moguls, period. But, these were bigger than I had ever seen. Each mogul looked like it could have a Volkswagen Beetle buried below it. With the combination of moguls and the ridiculously steep slope, I knew I was in trouble. I summoned all of my courage and attempted the decent. I am estimating that I made it about thirty feet before I completely lost control, crashing hard and losing a ski in the process. Because of the steep slope, I kept sliding on my back until I finally came to rest at the bottom of the mogul run. I feel bad for Rick. He was the guy who volunteered to retrieve my ski and navigate the extreme run while carrying my ski down to me. It really had to be difficult.

It was at this point that I would try to finish this run with the guys, then go out on my own, leaving the crazy skiing to them. Shortly after this realization, as we made our way toward the bottom of the mountain, Rick spotted a jump that he wanted to try. I had a camera with me, so I headed down to the side and slightly below the jump, in hopes of getting some epic photos. Rick hit the jump, quickly lost control, and landed on his side with an extremely loud thud. He laid motionless for a minute or two, just groaning. When we got to him and asked what hurt, he replied "Everything!" It took him a bit to get to his feet. And he was slow to shake the cobwebs out. When we made it down, I was happy to cruise the intermediate slopes by myself for the rest of the da. Of course we all met up in the lodge for some apres ski beers.

The following day, Rick headed back to work. I was happy to take a day off from skiing and hang out with Casey. I love to check out zoos when I am visiting new cities. Casey was more than happy to spend the day at the zoo with me, despite walking with crutches. It was the first zoo that I visited where the enclosures were spacious and designed to emulate the animals' natural habitats. There wasn't one foot of chain link fence in the entire zoo, which was awesome. The San Diego Zoo gets a lot of well-deserved publicity, but while not nearly as big, Denver is still one of my favorite zoos. Also worth checking out are the Phoenix Zoo, and the Columbus (OH) Zoo and Aquarium. Don't waste your time with a visit to the National Zoo in DC, it will make you sad to see all of the animals on concrete, behind chain link fence.

While Casey and I were enjoying the zoo, Rick was working at the ski shop. A local politician walked in and introduced himself, trying to drum up support for an upcoming City Council election. He invited Rick to a meet and greet and tickets to a minor league hockey game that evening, in exchange for a campaign contribution. Rick jotted down the information. After work, he floated the idea by Casey, Khym, and I. We unanimously agreed that it sounded like a good time. We loaded up the Mercury Monarch and headed downtown to McNicholls Arena, excited to see the Denver Grizzlies (this was just a few months before the Avalanche came to Colorado.) Thanks to Casey's handicap placard, we had premium parking, just steps from the arena entrance.

We made our way to the politician's meet and greet, mingled for a bit, and took full advantage of the food spread and open bar. We had all chipped in some cash so that Rick could write a check as a contribution to this guy's campaign. Once Rick deposited the check into the fish bowl, we were given our tickets, and were free to head to the hockey game.

We were happy to escape from the stuffy crowd, grab some beers and get to our seats. The four of us arrived at our seats just in time for the performance of our National Anthem. As soon as it was over, Rick leaned over and said quietly "It would only cost me fifteen bucks to cancel that check." We both had a good laugh, then settled in to watch the hockey game. After the first period, Rick mentioned it again saying "If I canceled that check, we could have one kick ass St. Patrick's Day party this weekend." Once again, we had a good laugh and went back about our business. The hockey game itself was not very memorable. At some point, we left the game, returned to their apartment, had a few more beers and called it a night.



The next morning, I was sleeping on the futon in the living room when I was woken up by the sound of Rick on the telephone. I heard him clearly say “I would like to talk to someone about placing a stop payment on a check.” I had never laughed within seconds of being dead asleep before, nor have I since. We went on to explain to the bank “It was a political contribution to a candidate that I have just learned some negative things about.” I couldn’t believe he was actually going through with it.

A couple of hours later, after a good breakfast, we were at the Cub supermarket shopping for the party that night. We had a terrific traditional Irish feast, complete with a brisket of corned beef, cabbage, potatoes, carrots, horseradish and a loaf of freshly baked bread. Casey, Rick and Khym invited a few friends over and we all enjoyed the feast along with a few cans of Guinness. Apologies to Mr. Bugby, but we definitely toasted to you as we enjoyed the party at your expense!

I had such a great Spring Break that I returned the following Spring. I had learned my lesson and avoided skiing with Rick and his adventurous friends. Instead, I skied with Casey and her friend Joan. While both were much better skiers than I was, with Casey coming off of an ACL tear, they were happy to ski the more moderate terrain with me. We also enjoyed a few meals at a local hole in the wall called the Edgewater Inn. If you are ever in the Lakewood, Colorado area, I recommend stopping in for a pizza and a beer. The beers are served in ice-cold chalices, which make them particularly delicious!



Chapter Twenty-five –14 Greene Lane

After three fun filled years in the URI dorms, specifically Gorham Hall, it was time to move off campus for the 1992-1993 school year. We had five of us that wanted to live together; Steve, Bart, Jeffe, Lil Jay and myself. We found a perfect house in an area called New Eastward Look. It was a six-bedroom, two-bathroom home with over 2,000 square feet of living space. It also included a large side deck and spacious backyard. At \$1,400 per month, split five ways, it was actually cheaper than living in the dorms.



We moved in on Labor Day, and the fun began almost immediately. On the first Friday of the school year, we picked up a keg at the local package store and invited a few friends over. We didn't realize it at the time, but that became the weekend tradition for the next eight months. Each Friday night we had a fresh keg and hosted friends. Saturdays were lower key, with just the fellas playing cards and finishing off the keg. While Dan and Paco didn't officially live with us, we could count on seeing them almost every weekend day/night. Sunday mornings we would combine any leftover hard alcohol and cut up fruit to marinate in it until football kicked off. You'd be surprised how drunk you can get simply eating fruit soaked in booze.

The house came fully furnished, albeit a bit dated. For instance, the stereo in the living room included an 8-track player. Since my sister had one growing up, I knew she had some tapes I could borrow. One of the 8-track tapes was the Village People. Nearly every Friday night from that point on, the Y.M.C.A. was played, complete with our drunk friends dancing along. I think we are at least partially responsible for bringing back the popularity of this song.

One night, I decided that I was sick of drinking beer. So I picked up a liter of Captain Morgan and some Diet Coke, something I still enjoy today. The issue with this particular night was that I was chugging the liquor drinks like they were beer. After nearly drinking the entire liter of Captain, I turned into a complete a\$\$hole. We were playing cards with the usual crew, when I inexplicably started trying to cheat. And I was doing a poor job of it. I decided that I had had enough and stormed off to bed. My guys were not going to let me off the hook that easily. They found my camera and took some less than flattering photos of me. We all got a good laugh when they shared them with me weeks later. Needless to say, they are not included in this book.

When we moved in, we were told not to use the oven in the ground floor kitchen. Which wasn't a big deal, since we spent nearly all of our time upstairs. One Sunday afternoon, we were making tacos on the stove top upstairs when it was time to put the taco shells in the oven for a few minutes. Someone, probably Jeffe, had run the cleaning cycle on the oven and since it wasn't done yet, we couldn't use it. We figured that we could use the downstairs oven to heat up the taco shells for ten minutes. After five minutes, we began smelling smoke. When we looked in the oven, the taco shells had burst into flames. I immediately ran to a neighbor's house to borrow a fire extinguisher. By the time I returned, my roommates had tossed a bowl of cold water into the oven, putting out the fire, but also shattering the oven glass. We later learned that the oven had a faulty thermostat, that was the reason that the oven overheated, despite us setting it on 350 degrees. Lesson learned.

One of the only other times I remember hanging out downstairs, we had another 'incident'. Bart's former neighbor from the dorm, Pee Wee, came to visit. After many drinks, Bart and Pee Wee began to wrestle. Things escalated quickly. The wrestling ended when Bart picked up a wooden recliner and broke it over Pee Wee's back. It broke into a few dozen pieces, clearly beyond repair. We disposed of the remains in the overgrown field across the street. That incident, along with the fire, ended all hope of us getting our deposit back.

We had some friends that we knew from the dorms that lived a few streets over. They were five girls renting a house together that we affectionately called 'The Gaggle.' They hosted a Halloween party, which we planned to attend. I used to work on Saturdays from 9AM-2PM. When I got home, I expected my friends to have figured out costumes for the party that night. Instead, I found everyone asleep, nursing hangovers from our Friday night party. Almost immediately, I came up with my one of my favorite Halloween costumes of all time. My five friends and I dressed

as the Fallopian Swim Team. Effectively, we were dressed as sperm. We went to the local store and bought long john pants, white t-shirts and used a Sharpie to write 'Fallopian Swim Team' across our chests. For some reason, we all decided to forgo shoes, and simply walked the couple of blocks to the party wearing socks. That was fine for the walk to the party, but when we left, well after midnight, the temperature had dropped significantly. This caused us to jog home, taking a short cut through several yards. Unfortunately, this didn't end well for Dan. While in a full sprint, he kicked a large rock. Twenty-six years later, I can still hear the loud thud, followed by the louder expletive. Needless to say, we always wore shoes to all future parties. Thanks for the lesson Dan, I remember you limping pretty badly for a few days.

A few of us were drinking and playing cards over Christmas break. We were getting hungry and had little food in the house. I came up with the brilliant plan of breaking into the Gaggles' house to 'borrow' some food, assuming they were all away for break. We may or may not have done this before. My mission was a success. I snuck in, grabbed some food, and got out without being noticed. Or, so I thought. When I returned to our house, one of my roommates was on the phone with one of the one of the Gaggles, specifically Lynn. Apparently, she was home and called us because she thought she heard someone breaking in. We all got into the car and raced over. We checked out the whole house and didn't find an intruder, wink, wink. After we comforted Lynn for a few minutes and convinced her that no one had broken in, we were back at our house drinking and enjoying snacks, compliments of the Gaggles.

Some of the other random memories from a very fun year include the following;

- Jeffe getting so pissed off during a marathon game of Axis & Allies that he spiked the dice so hard that one die kicked up and broke the dining room light.
- Bart sneaking up behind any of us when we were on the phone with our parents and giving us a double nipple twister, usually resulting in an expletive being shouted.
- For a while, we had a monitor lizard as a pet. We eventually had to get rid of him because when he went to the bathroom, the entire house reeked!
- One rainy afternoon Dan and Paco stopped by and asked me to run to the package store before I headed to work. In a rush, I slipped off the bottom step and landed directly in a mud puddle. I popped back up and ran back inside to change. When I came out ten minutes later, Dan and Paco were still laughing hysterically.
- One night an unnamed roommate decided he wanted to leave our party, but was blocked in the driveway. So, he decided that driving through the fence was wise. Then two of us decided to chase him. We were all lucky to survive that night.

One Saturday night, we were all drinking and playing cards and Bart decided to be a wuss and go to bed early. We gave him considerable grief, but he headed downstairs to his bedroom anyway. A short time later, we heard a knock on the door. It was Bart's high school buddies Rick, Gary and Bondo. They were looking to party and were not going to let Bart get away with sleeping. I can still see Steve at the bottom of the stairs wind milling his arms to direct everyone to Bart's room. A pig pile ensued on top of Bart. The cheap metal bedframe could not handle the weight of everyone, all the feet collapsed, and the box spring came crashing down. But, all the commotion reinvigorated Bart. We all stayed up until the wee hours of the morning, mostly listening to Bart's friends tell stories from their high school days and beyond. Rick could write a NY times best seller, but his wife would immediately leave him, castrate him, or worse.

Friday May 14, 1993 is a day that will live in infamy. It was the last day of finals, and the last Friday for us to throw a kick ass party, and that we did. We started about midday with a friendly game of volleyball in the backyard. Dan and Paco joined in, and since they were drinking Gatorade and Everclear, we could have predicted that this would end badly. The game came to a screeching halt when Dan's competitive spirit got the best of him. He elevated and absolutely crushed a spike, directly into the nose of one of our friends, Nicole. That was the end of volleyball.

It was an absolutely gorgeous day, so many of our friends were hanging out on the second floor deck. As the day progressed, more and more folks began joining the party on the deck, some we knew, some we didn't. At some point a guy was sitting on the rail of the deck and fell off, landing in the grass about twenty feet below. Somehow, he was miraculously unharmed. At that point, we encouraged folks to come inside. Inevitably, the Village People ended up on the stereo, with dozens of party goers dancing to Y.M.C.A.

Since it was the end of the school year, and many people had a lot to drink, I would say that many folks let their inhibitions down. The later the party got, the more questionable decisions were being made. I will not name names in order to protect the not so innocent. There was hooking up going on seemingly everywhere, including on the back stoop. As the last friends left for the night, my good buddy Mike fell down the front stairs. Fittingly, he was spared major injury when the flask in his jacket pocket absorbed the majority of the impact.

In my opinion, one of the best parts of the party was Saturday morning. We all sat around nursing our hangovers, drinking coffee and telling stories of what we remembered from the night before. Everyone had different recollections from the party, which is what let me piece the day back together. We spent the rest of the day cleaning up the house and packing up. We had to be out by noon on Sunday. That whole year was a blast, and a fitting farewell to Steve and Bart, who both graduated that spring.

Chapter Twenty-six – 29 Calef Avenue

When the 1994-1995 school year began, my friends Mike and Dan moved into a house at 29 Calef Avenue. They lived with friends nicknamed TW and Moondog. TW earned his nickname years earlier by getting drunk at a party and falling asleep holding the tire of his car, so that his friends would not leave without him. The nickname Tire Worshiper was quickly shortened to TW. I am not sure who gave Moondog his nickname, but by the end of this chapter, you will understand how fitting the name is. While I didn't officially live at the house, I spent a ton of time there, including nearly every Friday and Saturday night, sleeping on their burnt orange couch.

Their house was located across the street from the ocean, and more importantly, within walking distance of our favorite bar, The Bon Vue Inn. Because all of these guys were Wildlife Biology students, they were obsessed with birdwatching. They had a spotting scope set up in their living room. It was pretty handy to check out seals and dolphins across the street too. But, most importantly, we used it to keep an eye on the Bon Vue Inn. We would monitor the bar to see when it started to get busy, so we could walk over and take our usual seats behind the tap. See *The Guys Behind the Tap* (Volume 1, Chapter 26).

One Friday night, Dan's friends Lance and Packard came up to visit. We were throwing back beers at the house before heading to the Bon Vue to check out a local band. Just as we are getting ready to leave, we hear Lance say "Cleanup aisle one." He had vomited on himself and the floor. We weren't going to let that deter us from our plans for the night. Lance brushed his teeth, borrowed a sweatshirt from Dan and we headed out for the fifteen-minute walk to the Bon Vue. When we arrived, we were warmly greeted by 'Mama Bon Vue', as she collected the \$5 cover charge from everyone. When she got to Lance, she said "I'm sorry, but I can't let this guy in. He is already too messed up." What we had all failed to notice was that he had put on Dan's hooded sweatshirt backwards, meaning the hood was in the front. Lance did not put up a fight. He quickly agreed and decided to walk back to the house. I don't recall if anyone went with him, but I do know that he made it back safely. Side note, this was my favorite Bon Vue story, until a few years later. A few of us were drinking at the Bon Vue when my buddy Gaspar fell asleep on the bar. We had the bartender wake him up by serving him a Shirley Temple that we ordered for him. He flipped us off and promptly fell back to sleep.

We spent hours upon hours playing pool on a cheap, tilted pool table and playing video game golf on Sega, listening to music by The Allman Brothers Band, 311, Perfect Thyroid and Pskidelic Oven Mit. The latter was a New Jersey based band that our friend Shitty introduced us to. They were a band ahead of their time. Click below to listen to one of my favorite songs of theirs, titled X-Ray Gun. The audio quality isn't the best, but listen to the lyrics and keep in mind that this song was released in 1994, "Janie Jones is all skin and bones, since she has been talking on her cellular phone" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9izoEOsDW_M

I promised you some insight into Moondog, here are just a few examples of how he lived up to his nickname;

- One Saturday afternoon Moondog invited a lady friend over to the house. After she agreed to visit, he decided that he was tired and would take a nap. We were left entertaining this young lady for a couple of hours while he slept.
- Dan had a pet boa constrictor, named Captain Morgan. Moondog would frequently ask if he could take him out of his tank. Dan's answer was always the same "As long as you keep an eye on him." Moondog had a history of laying Captain Morgan on the pool table and getting distracted. We would come back from the bar and find a note on the pool table reading something like this "Don't play pool. Snake in table." After a handful of these instances, Moondog was banned from touching the snake.
- One night, Moondog walked in the house carrying several grocery bags, and announced that he was planning to cook a turkey, despite it already being close to 8PM. He wasn't going to be talked out of it. Predictably, he fell asleep, and the whole house was awoken by the smoke detectors going off in the middle of the night.
- Dan also had a pet Rottweiler named Zeus. One afternoon Moondog asked Dan if he could take Zeus for a walk. Dan quickly agreed. A few minutes later, we heard some commotion coming from outside. We looked out the window to see Zeus chasing a squirrel at full speed, with Moondog trailing behind, wearing Rollerblades, hanging on to Zeus' leash for dear life. We didn't see him for a couple of hours. When he finally came back to the house, he was battered and bruised. He never asked to take Zeus for a walk again.

One Spring weekend night, Dan and Mike's friend Andy came up to visit. After getting back from the Bon Vue, someone suggested that it was a beautiful night for a swim. I couldn't have disagreed more. I thought that drunk swimming in the ocean,

in the dark was a recipe for disaster. I stood nervously on the front deck, with the house phone in my hand the entire time the three fools were in the water. After a few minutes, Andy began to struggle and they all decided to get out of the water. I am very thankful that we didn't lose any of those dumbasses that night.

By the Spring of 1995, I had made the decision that I was tired of my hair and was going to shave it off at some point soon. In preparation for my new look, I started to grow a goatee. I thought that would offset the lack of hair on my head when I eventually shaved it. On Saturday night May 13th, our usual crew headed out for a typical night of drinking. It was also a farewell of sorts, as Mike had accepted a summer position in Utah, and would be hitting the road in a few days. Somehow, the topic of my hair came up, and I made the mistake of divulging my plan. Mike immediately decided that they were going to shave my head that night. With Mother's Day the following day, I was completely against the idea of surprising my mom with a shaved head. After many more drinks, we ended up back at their house, and I finally relented and agreed to move forward. We were completely unprepared for the task at hand. We had no clippers, nor a decent razor. We ended up using some scissors, and about ten disposable Schick razors. It took forever, at least it felt that way. In the end, I liked my new look, and my mom didn't hate it. About three years later, I tried to grow my hair back, to no avail. Twenty-three years later, I am still rocking the bald look, although it is much more common now.

Chapter Twenty-seven – Jackson Hole, Grand Tetons and Yellowstone

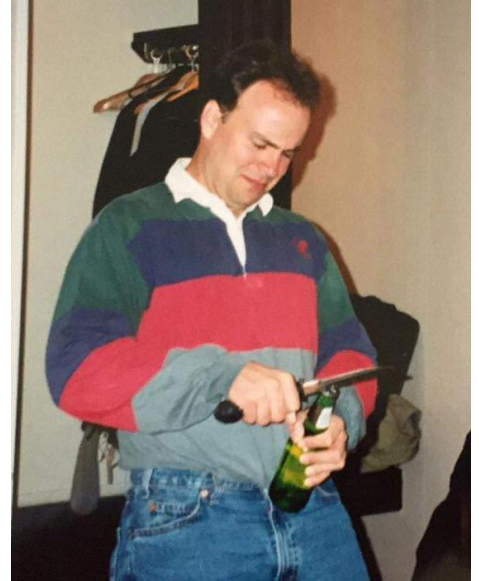
When my close friend Mike asked me to be in his wedding in 1998, I couldn't say no. It didn't hurt that the wedding was to be held in Grand Teton National Park, an area that I always wanted to visit. I booked a round-trip flight to Salt Lake City, along with my friends Dan and Cheryl. That left us with a five-hour drive to our hotel in Jackson Hole, but it was about half the cost of flying in and out of Jackson Hole. That was an easy decision. We met up with Dan and Mike's friend Andy, who had flown into Jackson Hole. He was my roommate at the historic 49'er Inn. Altogether, we had a group of seventeen staying at the Inn for the wedding.

The day before the wedding, we all took a light hike to see a waterfall, which was a fun way to get everyone together. That night the guys decided to take Mike out to an impromptu bachelor party. And the ladies took the bride out for a bachelorette party. After an hour or two playing foosball at the first bar, we decided to head to the Million Dollar Cowboy Bar. We immediately spotted the ladies dancing and having a good time. We sent them a round of shots, but told the waitress to say that they were from some guys at the bar. We promptly snuck out, not wanting to cramp their style. This is when the night got interesting for us.

It was a beautiful night out, and we had plenty of beer at the hotel. So, we decided to make the two-minute walk back to the hotel to grab some beer, and planned to return to the Town Square, to drink under the stars. On the way back to the hotel, we were walking past a number of shops when we spotted a set of keys, apparently left in the door by mistake. Being the good citizens that we are, we were contemplating how to get the keys back to the owner when this young guy came out of the store, with his hands filled with snacks. I am not sure who was more startled, him or us. He was super stoned, and must have gotten the munchies and realized that he had food at work. We all had a good laugh and continued on our way back to the hotel.

Once we were at the hotel, we quickly packed a cooler for our return trip to the Town Square. We had one minor issue, the only bottle opener that we had between us was on the back of my twelve-inch survival knife that I had bought from an advertisement in the TV Guide when I was thirteen. We didn't like the idea of carrying this around town. But, since we didn't have any other options, we took it

with us to the Town Square. We found a couple of benches, made ourselves at home, drinking beers, after opening them with the ridiculously oversized knife. Eventually, we ran out of beer. But, not before we were sufficiently drunk. As we started the short walk back to the hotel, we spotted something in the distance that was worth exploring. We made our way to the Mangy Moose Saloon to check out the large moose statue outside. As we were figuring out how to get Andy up on top of the moose for a photo, a very nice Jackson Hole Police officer stopped by. He didn't even get out of his car, he rolled down his window and simply said "Don't even think about it!" We heeded his warning and headed back to the hotel for the night.



The wedding was the next day, but not until the late afternoon. That morning, about ten of us, including all of Mike's family, had reservations to go whitewater rafting on the Snake river. The most surprising participant was Mike's mom Gail, who is ordinarily terrified of everything, including her own shadow. I have been lucky enough to whitewater raft the Kennebec and Penobscot rivers in Maine, but this experience blew those away. My favorite part may have been trying to figure out if Mike's little sister Lori was being repeatedly tossed to the center of the boat by the waves, or if she was purposely diving for cover. I'm not sure I will never know the truth regarding this, but it was funny whatever the reason. All in all, it was a spectacular adventure.



Mike and his best man, Dan, decided to skip the rafting trip and relax in town. They went out to a local restaurant to grab some lunch. After they finished eating, Mike waited outside while Dan used the restroom. Mike couldn't believe who he saw walking towards him, it was none other than the infamous Moondog. No one had seen nor heard from him since they moved out of the Calef Avenue house four years earlier. Mike explained that he was getting married in a few hours, and Moondog should come to the wedding. In typical Moondog fashion, he said he was headed out of town and didn't even have time to wait to say hello to Dan. As quickly as he had appeared, he was gone, never to be seen or heard from again.

That afternoon, we all headed up to Grand Teton National Park. We parked at a trailhead, and made our way down to the banks of the Snake river. The ceremony was beautiful. In fact, two hikers stumbled upon the ceremony, stayed to watch, and ended up tearing up a bit. Immediately following the wedding, a rain shower popped up out of nowhere. When Dan gave his jacket to Cheryl to cover her linen dress, it revealed that he was wearing a short sleeve shirt. It looked pretty goofy with his tie, but considering it was 90 degrees with 100% humidity, Dan had the last laugh.

After the wedding, we all made our way back to the hotel, then walked to a nearby restaurant. We had a private room reserved on the second floor of the restaurant. The food was delicious, the drinks were flowing, and the service was incredible. Everything was awesome, with one caveat. The restrooms were downstairs, and to get to them, we had to descend a very steep set of stairs. With every cocktail consumed, the journey to the restroom became more treacherous. By the end of night, there were at least two falls, but no serious injuries. We all had a fantastic time. If I recall correctly, a few of us made our way to the Million Dollar Cowboy Bar for some completely unnecessary night caps, before finally retiring for the night.

The next morning, despite many of us nursing hangovers, we had an early wake up call. We had a group trip planned to Yellowstone National Park. Thirteen of us piled into a big van, and we were followed by Mike's family in their rental car. Before we left Jackson, we asked the bride's father, our driver, to make a detour to the drive thru liquor store. We picked up some ice, a few cases of beer, and a proper bottle opener, for later that afternoon. Several of us even remarked that the thought of a beer right then made our collective stomachs turn. After the brief detour, we were on the road headed north towards the southern entrance of the park.

The first half of the two-hour drive was pretty quiet, as everyone was recovering from the previous late night. About an hour into the drive, the silence was broken by the unmistakable sound of a beer bottle being cracked open. I looked to the back of the van and saw a wry smile on Aaron's face as he took his first sip of beer. I immediately motioned for him to pass me one. Before long, about four or five of us had beers in our hands, despite the fact that it was not yet 10:00 AM local time. None of us considered that our driver was a police officer back in Connecticut, but to his credit, he didn't complain once. I think we surprised Mike's parents when several of us got out of the van with beers to take a group photo at the 'Welcome to Yellowstone National Park' sign. From that point on, my camera bag became my trusty beer holder, draped across my chest with a Miller Lite bottle in it for the rest of the day.



We saw a ton of wildlife, mostly Bison, my personal favorite. But my favorite story from that day is from our time at Old Faithful. If you are not familiar, it is a highly predictable geyser that erupts every 65-95 minutes, depending on the length of the previous eruption. The Park Rangers are pretty accurate about predicting and posting eruption times, so folks start gathering around in anticipation of the next eruption. I happened to be sitting next to Cheryl, as we readied our cameras to catch the natural phenomenon. Just as the eruption started, we both raised our cameras to

take a photo. Cheryl inadvertently hit the trigger and took a beautiful picture of her knee, that was followed by the unmistakable sound of the camera rewinding the roll of film. Her knee photo was the last picture on that roll of film. She tried to hurriedly load another roll, only to miss out on the full two and half minutes of the eruption. I laughed for a solid five minutes afterward. Cheryl did not find the incident nearly as funny as I did. The rest of the day is just a blur. I blame the fact that we tried to see so much of Yellowstone in one day, and not on the vast number of beers consumed.

The next day, everyone packed up and headed home, except Dan, Andy and I. We had reservations at a campground in Yellowstone for a few days, so that we could take in the scenery at a more leisurely pace. The first day we hiked a beautiful trail in Hayden Valley. The 'trail' was nothing more than white posts about every tenth of a mile to use as a guide. When we spotted a Bison lounging directly on our route, we took a wide birth around him, as to not upset him. I kept thinking that I don't need to outrun the Bison, I just need to outrun one of my fellow hikers. Dan runs like a cheetah, but I liked my chances against Andy, which may be why he was so nervous all day long. Ultimately, the Bison didn't bother with us, we all enjoyed the hike, and made it back to the car safely.

After we checked in at campground and set up camp, we grabbed a couple of beers and decided to take a walk around. We stumbled across a middle aged guy who seemed nice and invited us to come back after dark. He said he had some great eagles' footage that he wanted to show to anyone interested. Since we had seen a few bald eagles along the Snake river, we were looking forward to seeing what he had captured on video. We ate some dinner, had a few more beers, and headed back to this guy's campsite as darkness neared. He had a screen set up, with about a dozen fellow campers gathered around. We got quite a surprise when he hit play. It wasn't footage of eagles, but a bootleg video of an Eagles concert that he had been to recently. We stuck around for a few songs, then excused ourselves, so we could laugh out loud at the misunderstanding. We retired for the night, as we had more exploring to do the next day.

For the next couple of days, we continued to explore various sections of the park. We were very lucky to see an abundance of wildlife, including; Elk, Grizzly Bear

(thankfully from afar), Moose, Bighorn Sheep, and a ton more Bison. I laughed every time that Andy whipped out one of his disposable cameras, particularly when he needed to 'zoom in', which simply meant that he would shuffle forward a few steps.



One afternoon we decided to venture up to a small town in Montana to grab some lunch, since none of us had ever been to Montana before. The town was so sleepy, it almost looked abandoned. In fact, I saw my first tumbleweed cruising down the street, it was like something straight out of an old Western movie. We eventually found a sub shop that was open, and

enjoyed lunch with a couple Olympia beers. We definitely enjoyed our days exploring the park before we eventually dropped Andy off at the Jackson Hole airport to catch his flight home.

Dan and I camped one more night in Yellowstone, before we headed out via the Northwest exit of the park. Instead of making the long drive back to Salt Lake City, we had made arrangements to stay with an acquaintance of mine in Pocatello, ID. His name is Hachey (pronounced hash-ee), and he graduated from Pharmacy School with my close friends Gaspar and Kristen. In the Spring, when I reached out looking for a place for Dan and I to crash for a night, he seemed happy to have visitors.

We started meandering our way south, enjoying the beautiful scenery along the way. At one point, we stopped at a rest area for what we thought would be a quick bathroom break. It turned out that the rest area backed up to an old lava flow, that included a self-guided tour. It is still the most unique rest area I have ever visited. Even after killing forty-five minutes at that rest area, we were still on target to get to Pocatello well before Hachey was scheduled to get out of work. When we spotted a billboard promoting the 'Exit 80 Casino' (it has since been renamed something more original), we decided to stop and kill some time. I have probably been to over a hundred casinos in my lifetime, this is by far the worst one I have ever visited. It was a rectangular, corrugated, metal building, about the size of a football field. As soon as we walked in, we drew the attention of security, probably because we had all of our teeth, and we were not smoking. Two security guards followed us for the entire twenty minutes that we stayed in one of the most depressing places I've ever been. When Dan and I were done making a few donations to their slot machines, and

second hand smoking a couple of packs of cigarettes, we virtually sprinted out of there. If you are ever traveling on I-15 in Idaho, and you are tempted to visit the casino, do yourself a favor, open your wallet, take out \$40, roll down your window, toss the money out, and keep driving. Trust me, you will be much better off!

When we finally made it to Pocatello, we were impressed with its quintessential college town feel. But, we immediately noticed the lack of stop signs. As soon as we met up with Hachey, we asked him about the stop signs. While many cities have moved toward four way stops, Pocatello went in the opposite direction, four-way no stops. Hachey informed us that the locals simply yield to the bigger vehicle. So if you're driving a Ford F-150, you don't worry about stopping, but if you're driving a Toyota Corolla, plan on adding some time to your commute to work.

After learning the local driving etiquette, we made our way, carefully, to a local bar that Hachey suggested. It was really a neat bar, located in a former bank building. I remember the food being delicious, and the draft beers going down quickly. A unique feature of the bar was that the restrooms were located in the basement, down a long set of marble stairs. None of us fell that night, but each visit required more and more focus to remain safe. Just a friendly note to bar owners everywhere, don't make your drunk patrons navigate dangerous steps to access the restrooms. This is a lawsuit just waiting to happen, avoid it. Your welcome.

I don't exactly remember leaving the bar that night. I do remember getting back to Hachey's apartment around midnight and asking him how long it would take us to drive to Salt Lake City in the morning, to which he replied "I have no idea!" In retrospect, Dan and I should have researched this at some point before then, since our flight was scheduled to depart in about nine hours. We broke out our maps and figured out that the drive should take about 2 ½ hours. Leaving some buffer time for rental car return and check in, we figured we could get about five hours of sleep.

The next morning, we were up and on the road by 5:00 AM. I drove the first leg, and saw a sign advertising a gas station as we approached the city of Ogden. We decided to take the exit to gas up and get some desperately needed coffee. After driving ten miles off the exit, we never did find the gas station. We turned around and headed back to the highway, but that cost us about thirty minutes against our already tight time line. When we reached the outskirts of Salt Lake City and started hitting rush hour traffic, making our flight was looking less and less likely. That is when Dan asked to take the wheel. Since we were at a dead stop, I was happy to give up the

wheel. Dan did his best Mario Andretti impersonation, weaving through spaces barely larger than our car, speeding by cars in the breakdown lane, and generally breaking each and every traffic law that you can think of. Thanks to his heroics, we raced into the rental agency on fumes. We ran through the terminal, boarding our flight with just minutes to spare. What a crazy way to wrap up a phenomenal week of memorable adventures.

Chapter Twenty-eight – More Quick Hits

I have been lucky enough to experience a lot my lifetime. Some may not warrant an entire dedicated chapter, but they certainly are worthy of sharing.

For a long time, I thought my friend Cheryl was the worst driver that I knew, based on her repeatedly driving over her mailbox on the way out of her driveway. That opinion changed when my buddy Gaspar, riding with me in the back seat in Blacksburg, VA, offered dried mangos to my friend Shannon, who completely turned her attention to the dried mangos. Only the quick reaction of her husband Mike saved us from swerving into the path of oncoming tractor trailer.

For someone who has been to Las Vegas 25+ times, you might expect to see more Vegas stories included here. And it's not for lack of stories, it is from lack of memory. For example, I once said to Gaspar, "I would really like to stay at the Monte Carlo some time." He responded with "We have stayed there.... Twice!"

I believe it was the same trip when I mentioned that I wanted to check out the Venetian, because I hadn't checked it out yet. Almost immediately, Gaspar pulled up a photo on his phone. The photo was of he and I, in the Venetian from a previous trip. I guess it wasn't that memorable!

One vivid memory I do have from Vegas is Deb falling up the escalator at the Bellagio. I plucked the beer from her hand to save it from spilling on her. But, Erik, standing behind her, dumped his entire Bud Light pitcher on her as he tried "save" her. I wrote to Bellagio security in a failed attempt to get a copy of the footage. Understandably, they were unwilling to send me a copy.

By the Spring of 2006, Deb and I had made the decision to get married in Las Vegas. But we had no idea where, so we decided that a scouting trip was in order. In early June we flew out to Vegas for a long weekend. The first few places that we checked out were either too pricey, or too cheesy. We were getting discouraged, but decided to head to the courthouse to get our marriage license, which is valid for one year. Deb suggested just getting married while we were there. But, given the fact that it was June 6, 2006, I quickly shut down the idea of having an anniversary of 6/6/6. Thankfully, the next tour was at the Flamingo. We immediately agreed that this was the right fit. We had an awesome wedding there the following April.

Deb and I were at Fenway Park when one of my favorite scenes from the movie *Fever Pitch* was shot. Next time you watch the scene where Drew Barrymore jumps on to the field and evades security behind Johnny Damon in the Red Sox outfield, look closely at the bleachers. You won't see us, but know that we were there!

I have been lucky enough to see baseball games at over twenty Major League ballparks. Tropicana Field in Tampa is by far, the worst. The area is unsafe, the seats are tiny, the fans are rude, and they inexplicably ring cowbells during the whole game. There is simply nothing remotely appealing about it. Steer clear.

The antithesis of Tropicana Field is PNC Park in Pittsburgh. The area around the park is great, safe, and filled with bars and restaurants for pre and post-game festivities. There are plenty of hotels within walking distance. The people at the ballpark could not be nicer. And the layout of food and beverage vendors was smartly thought out, to avoid long lines. I would suggest checking out a game there for sure.

When approached by dorm security while holding a beer while underage, my friend Dan thought quickly and spit into his beer can, as if he was chewing tobacco. The idiot security guard bought the spit can decoy and somehow didn't question the dozens of empties in the trash.

On a rainy Saturday in Virginia Beach, a bunch of us found ourselves at a bar for lunch. We were at Mahi Mah's, which has an extensive specialty drink menu. Someone (possibly me) decided that we should decide our drink orders by closing our eyes and pointing to a drink. After a couple of rounds of that, we decided to let the guy sitting across the table order each other's drinks. While we had fun doing it, the end result was six drunk guys with upset stomachs and an expensive bar tab!

On a separate Virginia Beach trip, our Sunday volleyball tournament was rained out. A bunch of us decided to go to Waterman's for brunch. While we were eating, we could see a lot of staff scurrying around. We asked what was going on. They were apparently setting up for the first annual 'Crushfest'. Waterman's is known for making the best Orange Crushes on the beach. With no volleyball tournament to play, we had no plans, so we decided to stick around. We ended up being at the bar from 10:00 AM until sometime after dark. This annual event has now exploded with multiple music stages, and several bars participating. Check it out sometime!

If you ever consider buying 'Upper Bleacher' seats at Fenway Park, DON'T DO IT! I made that mistake one time, and one time only. I needed seats for a Labor Day trip several years ago, and the only available seats were Upper Bleachers. I bought six tickets, and smartly only invited three guys to join me. Having two extra seats helped us out since none of us is exactly petite. We sat in the second to last row in centerfield. We were literally behind the scoreboard. Every trip down to get a beer or hit the rest room got more and more difficult. Returning to the seats was like ascending Mount Everest without supplemental oxygen. Never again!



While in Columbus, OH for work, my friend and coworker Kristin and I decided to catch a minor league baseball game. Prior to the Columbus Clippers game, we stumbled upon a nearby pub by the name of 'Sports and Spuds'. That is where I had the following bizarre exchange with the bartender.

Me: May I have a Miller Lite draft please?

Bartender: You mean like, from the tap?

Me: Yes.

Bartender: Are you sure? Because, no one ever orders that.

Me: I guess I will take a Miller Lite bottle.

Bartender: Good idea. Help yourself to the free happy hour appetizers.

Kristin: I don't think we should eat anything in here.

Me: Agreed!

Gaspar and I got so drunk one night in Reno, NV that when we returned to our hotel, we had to ask the staff at the front desk what room we were staying in.

When my sister in law Ashley's baby shower was planned for Halloween weekend in 2014, Deb and I decided to carve a unique pumpkin as a decoration. Yes, that is a mommy pumpkin having a baby pumpkin.



Las Vegas sportsbooks used to provide free drinks as long as you had a betting slip for an ongoing event. Unfortunately, I think my good friends Steve, Gaspar and myself may have contributed to the demise of that policy, at least at the New York, New York sportsbook. We all made bets on a Red Sox game, and proceeded to order Mai Tai after Mai Tai for the next three hours. At one point, we had a stack of empty plastic cups that was several feet high. We even booed the relief cocktail waitress when she removed the tower. Sportsbooks now hand out single drink vouchers with each bet over a certain dollar threshold. Sorry if we ruined it for everyone!

Twice I have been with Gaspar where he drank so much that he could no longer see. On both occasions, I had to order him food because he could not read the menu. Once was after tailgating for a URI Homecoming game, and the other was in Las Vegas (see previous story)

When our close friends from volleyball, Nicki and Mark, decided to get married on a friend's farm, they probably didn't even notice that there was a seesaw in the backyard. But when they opened the bar before the ceremony, and add in the fact that my friend Kevin and I had a designated driver (thanks Deb), the two of us getting on the seesaw was virtually unavoidable. Thankfully, someone was sober enough to catch the disaster on camera. (Note the youngster laughing at us.)



When my friends Mike and Shannon were planning their wedding, they registered for gifts at a couple of stores. When they were creating their registry at Target, Mike was having fun with the process and registered for a fly swatter. As soon as I spotted this on the registry, I reached out to everyone that I knew that would be at the wedding. I am not certain of the final count, but I am sure that they received over fifty fly swatters. They arranged them in a nice vase for display.

I am embarrassed to admit that I wore an earring for a couple of years in my twenties. In fact, I think I wore two in my left ear for a brief period.

Soon after I started using my power wheelchair to attend sporting events, I realized that security paid little attention to what I was bringing into the stadium. Since then, I have taken advantage and enter nearly every game with a mug full of gin & tonic, with a refill in my backpack. Always look for the silver lining.

I was playing in a softball tournament in Connecticut, with my buddy Dan when I decided to crash at his house. It would save me an hour drive on Saturday night and another hour on Sunday morning. Plus, it let me hang out with Dan and drink some beers. We didn't get trashed by any means, because we had to be back at the softball field early the next morning. Dan showed me to the spare bedroom and I went straight to sleep. When Dan came in to wake me up, he was confused about why the dresser was moved into the middle of the room. I explained to him that I had woken up in the middle of the night, needing to pee. Being in a dark, unfamiliar room, I could not find the door to exit to the hallway. But, I could see some light coming in the window, from behind the dresser. So, I did the logical thing. I moved the dresser, opened the window, removed the screen, climbed out the window on to the back deck, and peed off the deck. I climbed back in, shut the window, and went back to bed. Dan thanked me for not peeing in his spare bedroom. I think that this is more proof that I was not the culprit in *The Baltimore Mystery* (Volume 1, Chapter 13).

As a kid, I was able to entice the Polar Bears at the Roger Williams Zoo to stand on their hind legs by flinging Ritz crackers to them. I am certain that if I tried this today, I would be tossed from the zoo, and have representatives from PETA picketing in front of my house. But, it sure was fun at the time!

I once rolled my ankle while playing air hockey. In my defense, it was at Gillian's, across from Fenway, after drinking at the Red Sox game all day.

In October 2016, a group of us were having breakfast at Jimmy Buffet's restaurant in Las Vegas. My buddy Steve was holding my orange juice up for me to take a sip when he realized that he had to sneeze. Somehow, he sneezed without moving a muscle. But there were consequences. One of his eyes nearly popped out of his head, and he may have sprained his neck. As Deb and I laughed at him hysterically, he exclaimed "You try and sneeze without moving and let me know how it feels!"

Through the years, I have had a lot of friends or acquaintances with some unique nicknames. Some of my favorites include; Deuce, Squeak, Paco, Shitty, Comet, Turtle, Stilts, Moondog, Guapo, Bingo, Stale, Hack, Bake, and Stoney. But my all-time favorite nickname goes to an acquaintance that I played volleyball against for a number of years. Everyone calls him 'YPG', stemming from his constant wearing of yellow pants to play volleyball. People started referring to him as yellow pants guy, which was quickly shortened to 'YPG'. The nickname continues to stick, even though his yellow pants fell apart several years ago.

Of all the restaurants, bars, pubs, taverns, etc. that I have gotten drunk in over the years, the only place that I have ever been cut off at is the local Chili's. Deb and I met a few friends for happy hour and dinner. While eating dinner, I ordered another beer and the waiter informed me that he could not serve me another one. It had nothing to do with me acting inappropriately, but apparently I had consumed five twelve-ounce Miller Lite drafts, and that was some kind of ridiculous hard limit. I talked the manager into serving me one more beer as I finished my dinner. We all settled up and went to a real bar and I probably had ten more Miller Lites.

To take advantage of corporate rates at various Marriott properties, I created fake ID badges for various companies. To make them look more authentic, I found matching lanyards on eBay. They worked, allowing me to save a lot of money over the years, and even get reservations at hotels that were otherwise sold out!



On Labor Day 2015, I attended an afternoon Red Sox game with my good friends Steve, Mike, Pam and Erik. We had pretty good seats in the grandstands behind home plate. The issue was that it was a hot and humid day, and there was absolutely no air movement at all. We were all dripping with sweat. After a few beers each, I did something unprecedented at a sporting event, I bought a round of waters. I don't remember what it cost me, but I assure you that it was worth every penny!



I remember skiing at Jay Peak, on the Vermont–Canada border, when the wind chill was twenty degrees below zero. It makes me shiver thinking about it.

I am not sure why, but we used to do shots of tequila and Tabasco sauce in college. I would not recommend it. And definitely not with Montezuma tequila.

I hope you enjoyed my stories. Remember, if you enjoyed my work, please leave a comment, and share the link with a friend. Now go out and make some memories for yourself. Thank you for reading!

Chapter Twenty-nine – Bonus Chapter – 2008 Camden Yards Adventure

I was putting the finishing touches on this book, when my sister forwarded me a story that I wrote in 2008. I remember the story vividly, but didn't remember writing it. I've decided to include it here, unedited. I hope you enjoy.

When the Red Sox regular season schedule was formally announced in January of this year, it took just a quick scan to realize that the Red Sox were playing only one weekend series in Baltimore this season. Within hours we booked our hotel room in the Inner Harbor for Friday May 30th and Saturday May 31st.

A few weeks later, in early February, tickets went on sale for games at Camden Yard. As expected, the Sox tickets went quickly. We were able to secure four upper reserve tickets for Friday night in section 316. We weren't as successful hunting for Saturday tickets, so we'd have to rely on e-bay for that game. Surprisingly, e-bay was kind, we were able to grab tickets in the lower reserve section (19 to be exact) barely above face value, which turned out to be great seats.

For the next few months we followed spring training, and the regular season without much thought of our annual trip to Baltimore. We even snuck in an April trip to see the Sox play a series in Tampa. After being swept by the Rays, many of our friends (you know who you are) suggested we abandon any future plans for attending Sox games in 2008. While I must admit that crossed our minds, we held strong and kept our plans for the May series in Baltimore. For the record, the Tampa "fans" talked way too much trash for a team that has ten straight 90 loss seasons. And, I'm not 100% sure we've recovered our hearing after the Rays handed out cow bells for the Sox series. If someone can explain why cow bells make sense as a giveaway for a Rays game, I'm anxious to hear it. Please call me and SPEAK LOUDLY. I'd share photos from the Rays series, but after a 45-minute roundtrip walk to get film, I discovered my battery was dead (don't ask, I really do have an old school film camera, more on this later....)

As April turned to May, and we continued to follow the Sox, including late nights watching the west coast games, it dawned on me that if things fell right, we could see history at Camden. This became even more intriguing once Manny hit #499 in Seattle on Tuesday the 27th. I watched the remainder of that game, and

Wednesday's game quietly rooting for Manny to hit doubles and hold off on number 500.

All the time while I am staying up watching west coast games, Deb is practically hacking up a lung and scratching her eyes out. On Tuesday she was diagnosed with an upper respiratory infection, and in case that wasn't fun enough, she had pink eye to boot. As the week went on, and Deb continued her two courses of antibiotic therapy, there were definite thoughts to calling off the weekend trip, and laying low to rest up for our Las Vegas trip scheduled for the following week. I figured we could save \$700-\$800 at minimum by skipping the trip, and also make sure we both were healthy for Vegas. Ultimately, we decided on Thursday afternoon that we'd head up early on Friday, as I was able to secure tickets for a Friday afternoon tour of Camden Yards, which we had always wanted to do.

Earlier in the week, as we contemplated the Baltimore trip, we discussed taking my car, which we had never done before (possible foreshadowing here), in order to save money on gas. In preparation, I took my fine 2001 Ford Escort ZX2 to the local Firestone for my State inspection sticker, and a once over. Keep in mind that I have only a ½ mile commute when I am in Richmond, and the rest of the time it sits in the garage at the airport, so it only has 52,000 miles on it, despite being 7+ years old. As I expected, Firestone found some reasons to gouge me for some "maintenance", which I agreed to in order to be sure we'd have an uneventful trip to Baltimore (more possible foreshadowing???). So I agreed to the transmission fluid flush, among other made up maintenance. When Gary, Fred, or whomever, called me back on Thursday to let me know that my car was ready to go, he also suggested that the next time I come in, I should consider replacing the transmission fluid lines, as they were beginning to rust. He said there was no imminent problem, and it would take it a few days to order the lines from the dealer, so I should just call him back next time I was going to bring the car in. I picked up the car, paid my \$200 tab, and brought my car home to get it packed up and ready for Baltimore.

Friday morning, we were on our way north, leaving by 9:15AM, in hopes of getting to Baltimore by noon. The first two hours of the trip were great, Deborah slept, I listened to the radio, and we encountered no traffic. But, in the last 30 miles as we approached Baltimore, I notice my car struggling with the hills. It seemed that the transmission wasn't shifting between gears going up and down the hills, causing the RPMS to run high (for non-car people, "engine to rev loud"). It wasn't terrible, but I also knew it wasn't quite right. The issue became more evident when I took the exit

to the Inner Harbor. Thankfully we had only a couple of blocks to go, but my car wouldn't shift above second gear, which was really annoying. We pulled into the hotel, valet parked and decided to grab lunch while we figured things out. We headed to our usual spot down at the Inner Harbor, Pizzeria Uno. After a beer each, we called the Firestone back in Richmond. After describing the symptoms, including the fluid I discovered on my trunk when unloading at the hotel, Ed asked me to find a local Firestone and get it there to figure out what may have happened. We would have done that immediately, but we had tickets for the 2PM Camden tour, so we decided to deal with the car after the tour. I must tell you that the tour is awesome. I would recommend that to anyone coming to Camden. One lesson learned, take the earlier tours and you get to sit in the dugout.

By the time we walked back to the hotel, it was nearly 4PM. I was a little concerned trying to make the 5 block trip to the Firestone during rush hour traffic on Friday afternoon, with a car under 100%. So we decided to postpone that trip until Saturday morning, and just enjoy Friday night's game with some of Deb's friends from Baltimore.

Deb's friends, Amy and Wade, met us outside our hotel and we headed to the park. We made our usual first stop at the Miller Lite stand on the way to our seats in the upper deck. As we made our way up the steps, it was soon obvious that we were sitting in the last row of the stadium, while it was nice not to have anyone sitting behind us, it was also clear that no beer-man would be making the trek up to us throughout the night.

The Sox got off to a quick start scoring two runs in the first. With Josh Becket and Daniel Cabrera both pitching well, we had to be on our game taking turns heading carefully down approximately 1 million stairs to get Miller Lite refills. The Orioles tied up the game with runs in the 3rd and 4th, then there wasn't much offense. With the game quickly heading toward the seventh (i.e. beer sales cutoff), we were stockpiling MLs. We encountered one significant problem (beside my lack of fitness that was killing me on the stairs), apparently all the Red Sox fans had run the Orioles out of cold beer. The last 4-5 beers we picked up were all "cool", and that's being generous. Of course the vendors tried to make it up by giving us cups of ice to try and cool the beer further. Let me tell you that all that does it get the outside of the bottle wet, the "coolness" of the ice does not penetrate the plastic by simply placing the bottle in the cup as they advised. Regardless, we went on without complaining too loudly. The "cool" beer was going down slowly, mainly because everyone refused to

drink it, except for me. Apparently the Sox and Orioles knew I was struggling to finish our stockpile of now completely warm beer, because neither team could push across another run. They completed the ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth, still nothing!

Thankfully, in the thirteenth as we were discussing how long we would actually stick around, the Orioles clearly had had enough. They made three errors in the inning, allowing the Sox to go ahead 5-2. Jonathan Papelbon came in for the save, as we moved down to seats where we could actually see jersey names/numbers. Pap retired the O's in order and we were headed back to the hotel. Anyone that knows Deb, and her addiction, knows that pizza was ordered within minutes of returning to the hotel. A couple of beers and slices later, and it was off to bed, preparing to deal with the car situation on Saturday morning.

Saturday morning, we awoke, moving a little slowly (nice term for slightly hungover). We had had some leftover pizza for breakfast before showering and heading down to the valet. We explained to him that we had some issues with the car, and wanted to accompany him to retrieve the car. In hindsight, if we knew it was on the fifth floor of the parking deck, we may have simply let him bring it down to us on street level. So after huffing and puffing up to the car, I checked underneath and indeed found evidence of a transmission fluid leak. I started the car, and headed down the ramp, and the car seemed to be running well enough to make the five block trip to the local Firestone. As we exited the garage, I put the car in park to let the valet driver out, and tip him. As Deb got in front seat and we readied to turn on to the busy downtown street, the car refused to cooperate. It simply would not go into gear. I was stuck at the exit/entrance of a parking garage, with nowhere to go. After a minute of "discussing" the issue with Deb, she agreed to get in and steer as I pushed the car out of the way, onto the only safe spot I could find, the sidewalk. I know that may sound odd and I wish I had a picture, but I really had no other place to put it. I wasn't going to have it sitting in the street, and pushing it back in to the parking garage didn't make much sense, on the sidewalk it was. I called AAA, and they said they'd be out in about 45 minutes. Of course it had to start raining, but what else should we expect. Just about 45 minutes later, the tow-truck pulled up, clearly identifying us as the ones needing help, and asked a simple question "Does it move at all?" to which I simply responded "When you push it!" He got a good laugh out of that.

After he got the tow-truck in position, he and I pushed as Deborah steered and we were able to get the car on the flatbed pretty quickly. Deb and I rode with Otis in the cab of his truck, giving me flashbacks of Mike, Dan and I squishing into the cab of a tow-truck for a thirty-mile tow in Jonesville, NC. That's another whole hilarious adventure that includes the three of us sitting in my broken car for 5+ hours getting hammered as we awaited a ride back to Blacksburg, VA. OK, back to this adventure. After handing the car and keys over to Cameron at the local Firestone, we started walking back toward the Inner Harbor. It was just about noon, and we had time to kill, with no real plans until my car was fixed and we could pick it up (at least that was the plan). On the walk back, we ran across the science center, which was showing a couple of cool sounding IMAX films. We settled upon Sea Monsters 3D. It was a good show, with the only negative being the annoying family behind us that simply wouldn't shut-up. I really thought I was going to have to restrain Deb at one point after a couple of loud attempts of "shush" didn't remedy the problem. But we enjoyed the movie regardless, and then wandered around the science center, trying to keep our distance from the large masses of children. About 3PM the pizza had worn off, and we decided to grab some lunch, walking back toward Federal Hill, which wasn't far from where my car was being worked on. We hadn't yet heard back from Cameron, but we were still confident he was getting the car fixed so we could pick it up before they closed at 5PM. As we walked back to Federal Hill, the skies opened, dropping about an inch of rain a minute it seemed. While we did have an umbrella, it didn't stop our feet from being instantly soaked. My sneakers should be dry by mid-summer. After wandering around aimlessly in the rain for about 30 minutes, we found a little whole in the wall called Ryleigh's Oyster House. The food was good, and the beer was cold. If nothing else, dealing with this car issue allowed me to see a new side of Baltimore I hadn't experienced before. Federal Hill is a neat area, and it's far enough away from the Inner Harbor to be untouched by the throngs of Red Sox fans that take over that area when the Sox are in town. After lunch, as we were enjoying dessert (OK, another Miller Lite), I received the phone call I was expecting from Cameron, at Firestone. Unfortunately, the news he shared wasn't what we were expecting. He told me that my transmission lines had rusted through, and he couldn't get the parts to fix it until Monday. I called my buddy Ed from the Richmond Firestone, explaining to him that it was important that we get home on Sunday, as I was scheduled to fly to Nashville on Monday. He agreed to pay for a one-way rental from Baltimore to Richmond so we could get home on Sunday, as we had planned. While we still didn't have a clue how we'd eventually get my car back from Baltimore to Richmond, we were happy that we'd at least be able to get home on Sunday, with Firestone picking up the tab. We pretty much put that out of

minds, left the pub, and made the thirty-minute walk back to the hotel to get ready for the Sox game that night.

Following our normal schedule, we left the hotel about 6PM for the fifteen-minute walk to Camden Yards, aka Fenway Mid-Atlantic. As we approached, it was clear that tonight's game was going to be much more crowded than Friday night's affair. After picking up a program and scorecard, we were still in the park fairly early, and made our first pit stop at the Miller Lite station. The walkways were so packed, that it took us probably 15 minutes to make it to our seats, despite being in the lower section. For this game, our e-bay found tickets would serve us well. We were between home plate and first base, fairly close to the field. The only detraction was that the upper deck hung over our seats, and we didn't have a view of the centerfield scoreboard. But these were still a steal compared to any seat I could get at Fenway. We were in our seats by 6:45, and yet still managed to miss the first pitch due to the late arriving fans without the courtesy to wait between batters to take their seats. This would be a trend that continued throughout the evening. Despite Deborah's impressive "sit down" chants, people were ridiculously discourteous about that all night. As much as I disliked the Blue Jays stadium (Rogers Centre), I loved the fact that their ushers held people at the top of the section until a break in the action. As the crew filed in behind us, it was clear that none of them could spell the word sober. There were ten of them, most in brand new Red Sox gear, possibly purchased on the way into the stadium. Throughout the night, these are just some of the quotes I heard from the "Red Sox fans" behind us;

- "How many strikes do they get?"
- "Who is the guy that is going for that record?" (Please note: the girl asking this question was wearing a Manny Ramirez t-shirt)
- As David Ortiz comes to the plate "Who is this guy?" reply "He's the Designated Hitter", and "What is that?"
- "Dude, do they serve shots up here?" (I wish I were making this up)
- After a foul ball, and the runners returning to their bases "Why do they have to go back?" reply, "Because they didn't touch the bag before he hit the ball" and "Oh, so if they tagged the next bag they could stay?" reply "Yeh."

I don't want to completely single out the folks in the row behind us, because there were so many more idiots in the stadium that night. At one point, I looked down and the guy directly in front of me was on his blackberry, checking his hits on www.catholicmatch.com. Oddly, we met a couple in the row in front of us (not the

blackberry fool) that is from Richmond, and literally lives within 2 miles of us. While they seemed nice enough, I have mixed emotions because when I asked how they became Red Sox fans, they had a lame story. They claimed that just a few years ago they started watching baseball, and liked some of the characters on the Red Sox. They might as well have told me, we used to be Yankee fans and then they stopped winning. The guy sitting in front of him was even freakier. This 250+ lb bald dude was absolutely hammered when he arrived halfway through the first inning. He was followed by 8 of his drunk “buddies”, who for some reason refused to sit in the seat next to him all night. I didn’t count, but I’m pretty sure he went down for a drink between 15-20 times during the game, each time returning with two drinks. They looked like cranberry and vodka, but it was tough to tell as he drank each of them in approximately 1 second.

OK, enough of the drunk and recent “Red Sox” fans. The game was a good battle between starters Jon Lester and Garrett Olson, each allowing a couple of runs. The excitement began in the top of the seventh. The inning started tied at 3-3. With one out, and Ellsbury on third, Ortiz hit a shallow fly ball to left field with Ellsbury tagging. Former Red Sox clubhouse cancer Jay Payton made the throw of his life to the plate, looking to nail Ellsbury. Fortunately, Ramon Hernandez couldn’t handle the throw and Ellsbury slid in safely to take the lead 4-3, and keeping the inning alive for Manny Ramirez.

The Orioles changed pitchers, bringing in former Red Sox submariner Chad Bradford. As Manny walked to the plate, the park erupted into a very loud chant of “Manny, Manny, Manny, Manny!” It didn’t take long, on the first pitch of the at-bat Manny drove the ball deep, immediately reacting with a drop of the bat, knowing the ball was gone to right center.



Manny circled the bases quickly, high fiving first base coach Luis Alicea and third base coach Demarlo Hale. The Camden Yards video crew was gracious enough to briefly put up a congratulations note to Manny on the large video board, unfortunately it was indeed very brief, and I did not get a shot of it. Remember how I mentioned my old school crappy camera? It's also the reason some of the photos I included here are stolen from the internet because it took forever for my camera to "warm-up". The less clean photos are mine, I'm sure you can figure that out. I did get a shot of the scoreboard paying tribute to the three players that hit number 500 in a Red Sox uniform, Jimmy Fox, Ted Williams and of course Manny Ramirez. I also got a shot of Manny as he acknowledged the crowd.



With the Sox now up 5-3, after Mike Lowell flied out to end the seventh, we were simply hoping for a shot to see Manny hit 501. Oh, and we were also hoping to avoid extra innings for the second night in a row. In the eighth, the Sox tacked on another run to go ahead 6-3. But the big story of the inning was Deb's proclamation, "oh shit, we're screwed" (and that's the cleaned up version). I looked at her confused, thinking somehow she had a vision that Papelbon was going to blow a save, or her family would hate us for witnessing Manny's 500th. Nope, it was nothing like that. She realized that when we left my car with Cameron at the Firestone in Baltimore, we left my keys, which included the only house-key we had with us. When we left the car, we assumed (yep, dangerous) that we would get it back on Saturday, but now that it was stuck there for a few days, and they were closed on Sundays, we had no way to get our house-key back before heading back to Richmond on Sunday. Why neither of us thought of this at 4PM, I don't know, but we certainly wish we had. We tried to put that behind us and enjoy the rest of the game, Manny did make it back to

the plate in the ninth for a shot at #501, and while he was definitely going for it, he got under the pitch and hit one of the highest fly balls I've ever seen, to first base. Papelbon came in for the ninth, and didn't have the cleanest inning, but we did get to see a great line-out double-play to end the game. As we exited the ballpark, it was elbow to elbow, packed in like sardines and it took forever to get out of the park. Deborah asked me where all these Red Sox fans came from, and I couldn't really answer. All I could say was that dozens of times between 1990 and 2001, I drove to Fenway and had no problem getting a ticket for face value and walked into a half empty stadium. I miss those days. We headed back to the hotel to rest up for what we expected to be a long day on Sunday, trying to get home to Richmond and finding a way to get into our house.

Sunday morning, we awoke, feeling a bit more refreshed than we had on Saturday. We made some phone calls, and arranged for a one-way rental from Hertz. We packed our bags, and called for a cab to take us to the airport to pick up our rental. Despite the cabbie being a little confused, we made it to the rental pick-up, and we were on our way south by 10:45AM. I drove, and Deborah worked on finding us a spare key to get us in the house. She knew her sister Ashley had one in Newport News, but she was boarding a cruise ship in Norfolk, so she would be of no help. She called her sister Beth who thought she may have one. She called us back and said she did indeed have a key. Beth and her husband Keith live about 45 minutes to the east of us, so we would need to take a minor detour on the way home. Beth called back and offered to meet us a bit closer to Richmond, to cut down on our detour, which was very kind of her. Once we picked up the key, which we weren't convinced was the right one, we had two choices. We could a) make the drive the 40-minute home, hope the key worked, pick up Deb's car, drive both cars back to the airport, drop off the rental, then drive the 30 minutes back home OR b) drive the 15 minutes to the airport, drop off the rental, and suck it up and pay the \$50 for the 30-minute cab ride home. Because the Red Sox game had already started, we chose plan B so we could get home and not leave again the rest of the day. The cabbie dropped us off about 2:30PM, and as we approached the front door, all we could do was pray. If the key didn't work, we would be stuck sitting in front of our house with our suitcase, a cooler (thankfully with a few beers), no car, and no way into the house. Thankfully, the key worked and we were psyched! I set the TV up on the deck outside, and the rest of the afternoon I sat with my feet up, and a cold beer in hand on the deck watching the Sox beat the Orioles for the third straight day, and I got to see Manny hit #501. And if you can imagine this, the pizza man was summonsed for dinner.

As I write this story from my hotel room in Nashville, my car still sits in Baltimore. I still don't have a clue as to how or when I will get back there to pick it up and drive it home. But, the reason I don't care, we got to see history in person with Manny being only the 24th major leaguer to hit 500 home runs! Oh, and I'm heading to Vegas on Saturday, so I don't need my car for a while. And while I would love to end this story on that positive note, sometimes things don't work that way. With Deb being the very giving person she is, she was nice enough to share her pink-eye and upper respiratory infections with me, so I spent Monday morning at the doctor picking up two prescriptions before catching my flight to Nashville. Let's hope the rest of this week goes better than the last week has gone, so that I get home on Thursday and make it to Vegas, healthy, on Saturday. Go Red Sox!