

The Book Whisperer - Prologue

It had been nearly 25 years. Sometimes the words just flowed as if the carafe was bottomless. But then, as if IHOP had a massive change of corporate mind, the top was irrevocably tightened, and it all changed. There was no ebb and flow. It had all become ebb.

Soon, even the carafe was gone. And then the mugs. Only the carcasses of the spent little creamers were now left as a reminder of the grandeur that once was. I'm not a very literate person, and I certainly don't know much about great literature, but I swore that I wouldn't end up like Shelley's self-aggrandizing and delusional Ozymandias. Then again, denial was always my strong suit. I'll admit to that.

But deep down, I knew that the odds were against me, because most of the time, getting the words to be magical again, was like pulling teeth. Like most adults, I stopped believing in magic a long, long time ago. There are lots of things that I'll never know, but one thing that I do know, is that once the magic is gone, it's not coming back.

Ever.

I suppose it's ironic that I should use such metaphors. Over the years, due to this block, damn that block, I needed another vocation. I couldn't get by on the grace of flowing words any longer. And as I found out, there's not much of a market for ebbing words. Even though silence is said to be golden, good luck trying to get someone to actually pay you for your words of silence. Even the times that I thought that I would pay to have my kids stop talking were really nothing more than empty gestures.

I wouldn't have really paid.

Although that one time I was stuck on a flight sitting next to the two Mary Kay representatives en route to their annual sales convention, I would have gladly paid anything for just a brief taste of silence.

And so it came to be. A practicing dentist, no less. That's what I chose to help me keep my head above water. During the drought, the piles of pulled teeth in the abscess of my mind was like a scene from the Shah of Iran's Killing Room. No skulls, just teeth. Images of teeth piled higher and higher, during a drought like none ever experienced before. The figurative teeth were equally matched, maybe even dwarfed by the literal mounds of teeth that I had created.

Why me? At least it paid the bills. But why could I not have chosen a better metaphor? The alcohol containing mouthwashes had probably dulled my senses. Who knew that the warning to "rinse, don't swallow" had some validity? The more it flowed, the fewer became the flow of words. Now that's a much better attempt at metaphor use. Still hackneyed, but better. Definitely better than treading water in a drought.

And the other sterilizing agents? Don't ask. Every bit as bad. Don't ever rinse with any of those. Don't ever get to that deep level of desperation.

Believe me when I tell you that the old public service ad, "This is your brain. This is your brain on sterilizing agents", knew what it was talking about.

And Nancy Reagan's campaign, "Just Stay Dirty"? Let's just say the woman was in touch.

But now, it was coming back to me. The words, they had meaning again. First, just a word at a time, but soon I could see a string of words, a sentence, if you will, coming together.

And then a paragraph.

I wasn't fool enough to hope for more. I knew that I had to work for it.

And I did.

So with some trepidation, I began what I had delayed for more than half of my adult life. Everything was just perfect for this moment. The desk was neatly arranged, the cell phone silenced, coffee was piping in the pot and I scoured the morning paper for fresh ideas. Maybe I could return to my true professional calling. Today would be that day.

With a deep breath, I was ready to start.

To start reading my first book in 25 years. And not just reading. Reading aloud.

Years ago, I was the best. I was the voice of most of the Books on 8 Track series, available to the English speaking world, including large swathes of Central Wales. I read everything. I had inflection, I had pacing, I had dramatic pause. I even had ambition.

Someday, I hoped that I would become the voice of Books on Tape. I had even been perfecting my New Zealand accent to complement the already perfectly mastered "Down Under" sound.

Everything. I had everything.

And then, it was all gone. I had what all the great ones feared, but I had it bad, really bad.

The best therapists, and I tried them all, were worthless. Mine was a reader's block like none any had seen before. I couldn't even find the right words to read a "STOP" sign, with even the slightest bit of believability. And without that undefineable

“believability”, you won’t last a minute in that dog eat dog world of books on tape readers.

And even when I could find the words, they came out as nothing more than a faint whisper. Who wants to be driving in their car hunched over trying in vain to hear their book being read to them by The Book Whisperer?

Trust me, after a few minutes, whispering gets pretty annoying.

But now it’s back. Baby, it’s back. The words are coming to me. I can’t stop the giddy laughter, even though my first effort is the “Unauthorized Autobiography of Rod Blagojavich”. Definitely not a humor laced piece of literature. But was it really important to comprehend what I had read? No. Just the act of reading aloud is my reward. I was ready to go on and to put my own signature interpretation on this piece. Blagojavich.

The first of many.

I had the gift and I was ready to turn it loose again.

But, oh, how the world had changed. As I was treading, when it wasn’t engulfing my head, it was moving forward. Books on Tape? Forget about it. Ever heard of CD’s? It really was a new and strange world out there.

The “Shah’s Killing Room”? There has to be something more topical than that over the past 25 years. I was much too busy toiling away at my consolation craft to be paying much attention. Although, I do recall hearing something about this guy in Iraq, but for all I know, it may just have been a typo. Iran? Iraq? Whatever, you get the idea. You don’t have to be Stevie Wonder to see what I’m talking about. Anyone would be confused.

It’s been a long and circular path. From the top, to the abyss, and back to the top.

Let me tell you the story of a Book Reader who re-discovered his long lost voice
and put the Book Whisperer away forever..

CHAPTER 1

Mullets Over Miami

“I don’t like you when you’re sober”.

Those aren’t exactly encouraging words coming from the inside of the confessional window. I hadn’t been back to our Lady of Perpetual Motion in nearly 25 years. That was not what I had expected to hear. But this was truly the bottom. How much lower could it all go?

I wasn’t going through a crisis of faith. It was long past that, but maybe the comforting words of one of God’s representatives on earth could get me back on the right path.

Too bad Father Jimmy suddenly left those many years ago. He and I had been so close. He would have understood. And the backrubs? Father Jimmy’s were sent straight from heaven. He had the fingers of an angel and the torso of a Greek God. Funny how they don’t really have a word to describe front rubs, but he was great at those, too.

And funny how the boarded up doorway to the basement could remind me of those fun times so many years ago.

And, how come there’s no sauna anymore? Apparently they removed it to make room for the second confessional. I guess that business was good.

“Too good”, I could hear the choir in the background chant.

But seriously, what’s a confession without a little communal “schvitz”?

But now, he was gone, and the knots in my back were returning. I suppose I could blame my convulsive confessional spasms on the thoughts of having to confess to the new guy. What credentials did he have, anyway? And it certainly didn’t help when he expressed extreme reluctance to massage those knots away. Something about “three

strikes”, but I never really understood the reference, unless it had something to do with the strategy of avoiding premature ejaculation by thinking of Willie Mays at the moment of truth. The “Say Hey Kid” had powers that transcended the baseball diamond.

The same can’t be said for Billy Mays, the ubiquitous infomercial guy. Thinking about him invariably results in spontaneous ejaculation.

Those three strikes didn’t stop Father Tim, though, from patting me down for wires. And of course, I did have to explain to Father Tim that what he thought was a hand held mike in my pocket, was not.

Honest mistake. At least the first four times.

Willie Mays, Willie Mays.

But it wasn’t wires that I still needed to get off my chest. The past was haunting me. The deeds were unforgivable. But after just a few moments, I thought I would also have to atone for my raging desire to invade the inner sanctum of the confessional.

Is strangulation still a sin, or have we evolved our thinking in these many years, since Vatican II. I probably would have been better off asking Mel Gibson, my go to guy for all things spiritual, but my hindsight was usually even more flawed than my foresight.

Unfortunately, that made my fully functioning time machine essentially worthless to me. Yet another invention that ended up having no practical purpose. Well, at least I’ll always have the “spork”. Form and function. That’s the real recurring theme, here.

Alright, maybe I expected a “you disgust me” or a “how do you live with yourself”. Those would be deserved. Even I knew that. But I thought that maybe if I had sought out a pair of pious, but dispassionate ears, the judgement would be less harsh. I

wanted to hear a tone of forgiveness, but I knew that was as unlikely as finding a “compassionate conservative”.

Luckily for George Bush, we got 9/11, the war in Iraq and economic disaster to help us forget his pledge to be a compassionate conservative. But to his credit, other than the kids washed away by hurricane waters, there really weren't too many children left behind.

But if it was compassion that I was looking for, I was definitely in the wrong place and with the wrong person in control of my fate.

But why was Father Tim resolved not to absolve?

Did Father Tim even know who I was? Did he know that I had no clothes on below the waist? Although that was an honest mistake, since I had come directly from the TV station, where I was now a newscaster. Sitting behind the desk made my semi-nudism much more acceptable than when I was the station's Weatherman.

You live. You learn.

But what was his excuse?

And then it all came out. The pent up anger let forth in a volcanic eruption, although not enough for him to let go of his “mike” and deal with its own eruption.

Say Hey.

“You invented the Mullet! What force of evil breathed life into you to warrant your degradation of the American male and lesbians worldwide?”, demanded Father Tim, as the whites of his eyes turned bright red.

“If I didn't have this collar on and some outstanding warrants, I would seek heavenly and earthly justice for the crime you have committed against all humanity.”

For a second, though, I almost questioned his credentials when he asked me if I validated parking, before calmly sitting down.

Although I was moved by the poetic and graphic nature of his words, once again, though, these were not exactly the words of comfort that I longed for.

“Ending a sentence with a preposition? Have you learned nothing from me?”

Dear God, could Father Tim be reading my mind? How else would he have known about the last paragraph’s dangling preposition? If so, he would have known that I recognized him from his long ago days as an upstate New York hairdresser. He clearly recognized me. Even I could understand that, now.

I wanted to storm out, but strangely, I felt salvation was at hand. As Father Tim continued his rant, this time having bolted out of the booth, I had another flashback. They were getting more and more frequent. It had been years ago, in the air, when the words were unbridled and the air was thin, somewhere over Miami, it came to me. A hairdo. Long in the front, over the forehead and short in the back. Functional, esthetic and capable of comb over. Giuliani loved it. Had he the confidence to sport it outside of his own apartment, I have no doubt that he would have been more than a mere federal prosecutor. But even without him, it became the toast of the Manhattan Bohemians.

But who could see the inevitable? Like everything pure, it became perverted by the masses. I had no role in that, none whatsoever. Long in the back? Short in the front? What are we? Animals? But that’s what happened. Across the country, the bastardized Backward Mullet, the BM, was the rage. And to make matters worse, I got the credit.. I hated the notoriety, but I enjoyed the royalties. Twelve cents on every haircut. Alabama

alone, in March 1983, helped to purchase my first stately home, back when 90210 was only a zip code.

Maybe it was the altitude, maybe the locale, but that was an inspiring flight. No sooner had the original Mullet come to me, that another phenomenon to be, struck. Sex on the Beach, later to become a wildly popular drink was first concocted at 37,000 feet, with a little help from my flight attendant friends. We were so giddy with the results, they even allowed me to call them stewardesses. Anyway, it was so simple, almost intuitive. We assembled the necessary ingredients: water, salt, sand, coarse hair and a squirt of aloe. As we later discovered, any lotion resembling semen would do quite nicely. Thank you nameless and uninformed stranger in 14B. Your taste testing skills and fluid donation were much appreciated. Of course, over the years the formula has been fine tuned, always remaining true to its origins. But it was Flight 622 that secured my financial freedom.

Oh yes, Father Tim. An unceasing spray of spit spewing from his mouth as his rants became almost lyrical, harkening back to his days as an understudy in "Oklahoma". Show tunes were his life, back then, before the incident. "I am the God of Hell Fire...Oh, no, I'm not", said the padre, "but you get my point".

How did it all come to this? How did I get here? Although it was somewhat ironical that Father Tim never spilled a drop of his favorite mid-day libation, the Original Sex on the Beach, now renamed in his honor to Pooper on the Pew, ever so slightly modified by replacing the cutesy umbrella with a more appropriate religious symbol, sort of a swizzle stick with handles. "Functionality and symbolism. Does it get any better than this", Father Tim would say, as he wiped the last remnants off his crucifix.

He never once let on that he remembered me.

And I him.

For it was in the vast void of Upstate New York, that the avant-garde, and renegade Mr. Tim fashioned the first ever Mullet.

Was it subconscious intellectual theft on my part? Certainly “intellectual” and “mullet” are oxymoronic. But had I driven Mr. Tim to his confessional confined life as Father Tim?

Little did I know that plane ride would be the starting point of a wide circle that would lead me to understand the history of The Mullet and why its secret was so faithfully protected by the members of the clandestine Societe du Mullet.

Father Tim’s behavior, now as I look back, should have come as no surprise. As one of the anointed protectors, his rage reflected centuries of keeping the truth from the populace.

And it was he, during a moment of weakness in his Salon, revealed the centuries hidden majesty of The Mullet, never thinking what power was soon be unleashed on the world. A world not yet ready for the consequences of the truth.

And I was the one who, through a series of innocent actions, bought The Mullet to the very people that Father Tim and the Societe du Mullet so disparaged. Once you mix the sacred with the banal, the sacred is no more. This was the threat that Father Tim had to respond to. He started the fire and he was determined to extinguish the flames. He had no choice. It was his destiny to keep the secret of The Mullet.

And so he left his flaming lifestyle in Upstate New York, to take up quarters in Father Jimmy’s place, having quite efficiently disposed on Father Jimmy, knowing full well that someday I would return to Our Lady of Perpetual Motion.

I was the enemy. But I had to know more. What in my past uniquely prepared me for this confrontation between the dark force of elitists and the spirit of transcendent mankind?

CHAPTER 2 How Could We Have Missed It?

By every logical process, my investigation should have begun somewhere in Upstate New York, or at least somewhere along the trek to Utah, but this was no time for logic. Besides, my logic told me that a trip to Italy would be far more enjoyable than a wagon train through St. Louis. Although, even I will admit that the thought of an unending supply of room temperature beef jerky across a continent was certainly far more appealing than even a perfectly prepared Florentine steak. But nonetheless, Italy beckoned.

When it comes to saving the world, you have to learn to make sacrifices.

It was with a sense of urgency that I boarded yet another flight. How I hated flying. How strange that my greatest moments of inspiration, as well as my deepest and darkest moments of despair would both occur high above ground.

But this was one flight that I had to take despite not knowing whether even darker despair lay ahead. I just knew that this destination would yield the answers that I needed. The Vatican was calling to me, almost daring me to uncover its secrets. I thought back to that flight so many years ago, when in my naivete, I thought I alone, had the creativity to conjure up The Mullet. And now, here I was back aboard a plane hoping to get to the undyed root of the Holy Mullet.

What I had aboard that flight over Miami years earlier was not alcohol induced creativity. It was nothing more than my ancestors, tortured in body and soul, reaching back to me over the centuries and implanting a seed that would finally take me to where the darkness began. They wanted justice and to have their souls released from their falsely sentenced existence in purgatory.

I now knew that I was anointed to restore light to the world.

What I hadn't expected was to be faced with more questions and more imponderables and a deepening sense of darkness.

As they used to say in really badly written novels, "the plot thickens".

Luckily, though, there was no danger, because I really didn't want to deal with that sort of thing. And to make it really clear, my definition of "danger" is very broad. I'd have to have a death wish to even use a mechanical can opener.

No one ever mistakenly called me "Indiana", although back in my promiscuous youth I did often refer to myself as "Idaho".

The only danger facing me at the moment was the very real possibility of not getting to the Vatican before closing time. With passport control proceeding in typically efficient manner, precious moments were forever lost as was my only suitcase. There was no time to check into my hotel. I hadn't expected this to be a long trip, so I left my only bag at the airport or wherever it would turn up, and then rudely pushed my way through the line for taxi cabs.

But I wasn't like the typical tourist heading for the Vatican. My mission wasn't to save my soul or to see the grandeur of the ages. It was to discover the dark secrets that place held. I knew they would excuse my rudeness if only I could tell them of the mission. But that wasn't going to happen. I could trust no one.

As luck would have it, my driver Aldo was up to the task. In all likelihood, he was an undiagnosed, or at least untreated psychotic. His driving, however, made him indistinguishable from the others sharing the road, or occasionally the sidewalks. Why he insisted on slamming on the brakes at precise 18 second intervals was probably not a safe

thing to inquire about. I certainly didn't understand what connection Mussolini could possibly have had with this habit, but if anyone was likely to carry through on the threat "if I tell you, I'll have to kill you", it was likely to be Aldo.

However, the cappuccino machine in the back seat was a nice touch, showing a little of Aldo's sensitive side and attention to detail.

Before I could even fully steam the milk, we were nearing our destination.

Although at first I thought it was just a quaint Italian custom that taxis never come to a full stop when discharging passengers, I now understand that it was just Aldo being Aldo.

Once I finished scraping the asphalt from my gums I saw the Vatican basilica from a distance. As I drew closer to Ground Zero, I found myself returning to the faith of my fathers, as I stood in front of some of the greatest symbols of all mankind. Armani, Versace, Gucci and McDonalds. All assembled in one straight line. I imagined walking the streets with a large wooden cross chained to my back, its resistance trifling compared to the resistance necessary to pass up some of the great end of season bargains. As I looked at the endless stream of beautiful and appropriately fashionable people, it was obvious that I was the only one who would even consider wearing a white ensemble after Labor Day.

Why had I traveled with only one bag? I should have come with an empty second one. I could always check the cross at the ticket counter, even though they now charge for even the first full body cross.

How could you travel to Italy and not leave room in your bags for your whims?

As I entered the courtyard of The Vatican, the city-state that billions owed their allegiance to, I was ready to uncover the hidden secrets, regardless of their impact. I tried to blend in, but I felt as if all eyes were trained on me. It couldn't have been the cross. It must have been the white suit. Maybe I should have left the orangutan in the taxi. After all, he and Aldo did seem to hit it off quite well. The fact that the Orangutan agreed with Aldo's demand that their future children, if any, had to be raised in the one true church, helped to break down any remaining barriers between the two.

But this wasn't the time for second guessing. This was the time for action and results. It made no difference to me that they stared and ogled.

In hindsight, though, I now know that bringing the orangutan along as a diversion was a mistake, particularly one that would so easily cave on the religion issue.

As I entered the inner sanctum I breathed the breath of the emboldened. I knew that I had met my destiny. Inherently, I knew that Da Vinci's "Last Supper" held the answer.

I slowly stroked my rosary beads, in rhythm with the scores of pilgrims who were doing the same, but for their own superficial and selfish motives.

I was working my beads for the sake of humanity.

"WWBD?"

"What Would Brown Do?"

And then in a flash of inspiration it came to me. I knew exactly what Brown would do. He would go to Milan if he wanted to see "The Last Supper". Luckily that epiphany came to me before I purchased my tickets to enter the Vatican Museum.

It wasn't as if I was on an expense account. Besides, I could get those same snow globes on eBay at 150% of the price at the museum store.

I should probably also give some credit to the tour guide, although who knew what he really meant when he said "No. No Last Supper here". I'm not accustomed to trying to read between the lines. Spare me your gibberish and double entendres.

It was an epiphany. Thank you Brown.

I did an immediate about face, unintentionally, but to great comedic effect, pushing the Swiss Guards down like a series of well placed dominoes. I wish there had been more of them and I had the time to arrange them in a more spectacular pattern.

Maybe next time. Actually, I should say "definitely next time", as the Commander of the Swiss Guard bestowed upon me the designation of the Order of PNG. From that day forward I was to be referred to as "Personna non grata" within a 50 mile radius of the Holy See.

But I couldn't stay for the festivities. Too much depended on a swift uncovering of this mystery. Knowing that I could neither rely on, nor trust taxi drivers for the next part of my search, I rented a car and headed north.

Not knowing how to drive a stick shift caused me to turn my head upward and plead for divine intervention. The grinding of the gears, the bucking of the chassis must have been like heavenly music. But somehow, heaven saw no need to intervene.

In hindsight, I realize that if you don't mind sacrificing your only son, you're probably not that concerned about stripping some transmission gears.

There are more from where those came from.

Only sons? Not so much.

And so I noisily and slowly made my way to Santa Maria della Grazie, the home of Da Vinci's masterpiece. Along the way lots of friendly Italian motorists waved to me. Funny, but in the United States, their particular hand gestures carried a negative meaning, often one expressing anger. Here, everything is so happy. I always made certain to wave back.

The one pleasant surprise was that I had no trouble getting used to driving on what we Americans so smugly refer to as "the wrong side of the road". Now that I had conquered European driving, I felt ready to do the same in South Jersey.

God Willing.

Driving through alleys, hills and winding roads through the dead of night bought me face to face with what I had been seeking. There it was, in all of its splendor. The Last Supper. And it was as clear as day, even in the subdued light of the chapel.

There it was. The hidden message contained in The Last Supper.

Jesus himself sporting the very same Mullet whose existence the secretive Societe du Mullet had sought to suppress.

But why?

And there was certainly no denying it. The outline of Jesus and the Apostle John, who for some strange reason is depicted in a rather effeminate fashion, make an obvious letter "M".

"M" for Mullet.

CHAPTER 3

Confronting the Past

All during the plane ride home I knew that I had stumbled onto something extraordinary. But why me? Why was I the chosen one? I needed to know that answer before I could be of any use to anyone.

It was controversial, as far as psychiatric techniques go. But it was something that I just had to do. How else would I come up with the truth? I don't recall who first said that "the truth will set you free", but that seems like a good thought for the moment. It's certainly more germane than the phrase originally used in the first draft of this chapter; "Once you go black, you don't go back".

Most of those that could have helped me to untangle the deeply rooted and shrouded secrets were surely long dead, having either just simply disappeared or rotted away in clandestine offshore prisons.

Making that decision to proceed was hard enough, but I had to go deep beneath the underbelly of the community of respectable psychotherapists to find someone willing to risk it all, just to help some poor wretched soul discover it all.

And there he was. For most people, an unexpected appearance on "Dateline" is usually a career killer. Maybe it was my desperation, maybe it was Stone Phillips' soothing voice, maybe it was the neon tattoo on his forehead, but they all spoke to me in a way that I had never been spoken to before.

I was that wretched soul and Dr. Doom was to be my muse.

And best of all, he really wasn't a predator, just a part-time Hollywood producer looking for an extra catcher for his all boy soprano softball team. And if you didn't believe him, all you had to do was to look at his professional business card:

Dr. Doom, M.D., Ph.D, NAP (not a predator)

I must admit that I thought it somewhat unnerving that his name was Dr. “Doom”, but for professional reasons he had to change it from Dr. “Mood”, which apparently cast a negative impression in the world of psychotherapists and their patients. “Too diagnostic”, “too undefined”, “too non-specific”; the professional community was quick to castigate him, but hasn’t that always been the lot for geniuses before their time?

Of course, I understood, having once been quite friendly with the renowned Neurosurgeon, Dr. Frank Shit.

Oh, you don’t recognize that name? That’s because he had to change it for professional reasons to the name that nearly the entire civilized world now knows him by; “Dr. Joe Shit”. Had he not made that change, even in the face of his loving mother’s tears, it is likely that he never would have been appointed to the Surgeon General’s office.

Dr. Joe Shit, Surgeon General of the United States of America.

It really is laughable to think that a Dr. Frank Shit could ever hold that lofty position. But not laughable in the same way as Bill Clinton’s initial reaction when he heard that there was going to be a Bush in the White House.

That, actually, was sad. Very sad. Not laughable, at all.

But Shit really was the ultimate authority on the nation’s health. They all came to him like flies seeking his opinions and insights. That was nothing to laugh about. Shit, in fact, was the very definition of a Renaissance Man. For example, during the energy crisis in the early part of the 21st century, when the rest of the nation was enamored with corn

based ethanol, Shit was quick to point out that corn could never make a car run smoothly, as it is so difficult to break down into its component parts.

“I know my Shit”, became a catchphrase to imply that someone was able to have a broad minded approach to complex problems, regardless of the discipline of study, in a manner consistent with the systematic intellectual approach of Dr. Joe Shit.

But Doom, for all of his expertise, was no Shit.

“They laughed at Freud” he was continually saying. Every now and then, it was probably an appropriate remark, but not when the waitress asks you, “Do you want milk or cream with your coffee, Hon?”

However, Dr. Doom made the commitment that the others could not or would not. So it was easy to overlook some of his unique qualities. And I must admit, that in hindsight, many of his actions and recommendations do make sense. Abundant sense. In fact, I now find myself singing a speed version of “God Save the Queen” whenever a traffic light turns yellow.

Can you honestly say that you don't?

Despite all of his peculiarities, no one else was so uniquely qualified to transform the hypothetical into the realm of reality. That, actually, was on the opposite side of Doom's business card. I wish I could wax as poetically as he.

On so on that fateful day Dr. Doom administered the drugs with cool dispatch, only after I assured him that my affairs were in order and that I was incapable of having regrets, or affairs.

Admittedly, his technique of administering an IV bag as a suppository, is a bit unorthodox, but you can't really argue with his results. Maybe because of the duct tape.

Alright, you can argue, but not with a deep, husky baritone.

Anyway, it's the results that count, not the intestinal tears.

And does he ever get results.

In re-reading that previous sentence, I can't recall if I originally intended a "question mark".

We'll never know.

Immediately following his patented drug delivery, Dr. Doom proceeded to repeatedly shoot himself with a stun gun, while clenching on animal tranquilizers and chanting, "Mommy doesn't like bad boys, Mommy doesn't like Bad boys. I'm a bad boy. I'm a very bad boy".

Did I tell you? The man is a genius. I don't think the others have even tried to understand his revolutionary techniques. I, for one, certainly understand professional jealousy. His technique may have been subtle, but the subtlety wasn't lost on me.

As the drug cocktail was fermenting, my lucidity was breaking down, only to devolve into a whole new form of lucidity, one marked by incredible understanding, insight and occasional yelps.

Unfortunately, it all spew forth in a long ago forgotten Estonian dialect which according to the world's last remaining archeo-linguist, prior to his untimely death, for which Dr. Doom was ultimately acquitted on appeal, was tangentially related to a "Pig Latin" version of the heavenly inspired language of the Golden Tablets that were discovered by Joseph Smith.

Coincidentally, Joseph Smith discovered those tablets in Upstate New York. The very same Upstate New York of my faux confessor. The well-groomed part of Upstate

New York, that nonetheless gave birth to a blasphemic hairstyle, the knowledge of whose very existence threatened the Protectors.

You get the idea.

Was that a mullet buried underneath that hat Joseph Smith always seemed to be wearing? Did the mullet predate us all? Did the Son of God sport one?

I'm onto you, Tim. Somehow, my friend, you hold the key. The link between the prophets who bought God's word to the Americas and the stylists who bought unkempt shag to the masses.

As I swirled deeper and deeper into the truth, I was afraid of what dark secrets and conspiracies would be uncovered. I wasn't entirely prepared for any innocent bodies that might be found littering my neural pathways.

But the journey had to proceed. I had to learn more about the secret society that protected the truth about The Mullet, at all costs.

CHAPTER 4

Growing Up Different

Doom's elixir took me in a non-linear path through my life, with episodes being punctuated by his screams and the smell of his roasting and tased flesh. Occasionally, there would also be a Domino's delivery, as well. The odors were sometimes indistinguishable from one another.

As Doom was fond of saying, "Hey, it's not all about the healing. A guy's got to eat". Who knew that years later, that would replace the inscription at the Lincoln Memorial, following the disgraced departure of President Obama, Jr. our nation's second Moslem president.

But there I was, with a sensation so real that it was all like experiencing it for the very first time, except that I had something to compare it to.

Damn those prepositions. And I know that Tim knows it, too. I know that he's out there. Somewhere.

The only saving grace is that no self-respecting editor would touch this manuscript, so the prepositions and all of the dangling participles stay.

The key to understanding how the once unending flow of words came to its end was beginning to unfold and crystallize in front of my drug induced and stuporific eyes.

My first glimpse of myself was in introspection mode. How I hated that mode, or at least the process. Although in the end, isn't it wonderful that careful introspection always confirms your life's choices and actions? As you can imagine, introspection isn't terribly exciting, so the process just deepened the sopor.

But then it came as a flash. I can still remember the very moment. As an 18 year old, I was thinking about the next phase of my life. Vietnam was a popular war, although

I think it went by some other name, and I found myself standing in front of an Army recruiting poster. Uncle Sam was pointing his finger at me and saying "I Want you. No not you, but the guy slightly to your left. No, not my left, your left".

And so the introspection was on. Oh, it was on.

I was in love. Or at least I thought I was. I enjoyed sex, although I never had the pleasure. It was still the "70's, but had the sexual revolution passed me by? Was it possible to enlist, or might I be lucky and get drafted? Not if Uncle Sam had anything to do with it. He was more interested in the guy slightly to my left, but that was before the "don't ask, don't tell" era, so I can only speculate on that outcome.

Was I a has-been by eighteen? What had started out so promisingly twelve years earlier, when I was but a mere lad of six, had now come to a screeching halt. There is nothing so pitiable as a once lothario, who has been forcibly retired before his prime. But this was not my problem, Mine was whether this lothario had already passed his prime, before it even arrived. This phenomenon had immediately put me into an awkward position, My fall was greeted by the sudden rise of my male counterparts. Their newfound joys helped balance, that delicate equilibrium that my fall had disrupted,

I had been different all my life. When I was satisfied with my lot in life, people pointed at me and said, "he's not all there"; What pleased me then was outrageous to the average yokel, playing baseball and collecting his favorite star's card. I had no use for children's whims, absolutely none at all. While they were occupied with Hide-N-Seek, I was contemplating wine, women and song. But don't get me wrong - I was normal - I had never collected cards, but I had planned to, once a series of the world's greatest make-out

artists would be released. A series with Wilt Chamberlain and Darryl Strawberry? Surely, they would substitute a condom for the stale chewing gum in each pack.

But my dream was never realized and I had to do without any helpful hints that may have appeared on the back of Bogey's card. I never joined in on the heated arguments of the day - "Mantle is too better than Mays", because I found myself qualified only to speak of the merits of the European lass, as opposed to the homegrown one. "Hey, didja read the story on Cruncher Broderczewski in this month's Sports Illustrated?" "No, I didn't, but perhaps you read Philip Exeter's expose in the July Playboy." Despite these and other series of events, I could not understand just what it was that set me apart from the others, nor could my mistress be of any assistance in enlightening me of these differences. But I was already enlightened, I had already seen the light and salvation was mine. The latter just being hopeless whimsy - who had ever heard of a six year old gigolo gaining salvation - who had ever heard of a six year old gigolo?

It is very difficult in this world to be gifted, as I was. Not that it's difficult to be gifted, that is, I'm sure that there are at least ten to fifteen other blessed people in our domain, however, the general populace will not accept these gifted few. Growing up in a world hostile to the genius that I was, it became increasingly necessary to evolve my own universe, to keep from going sane. My own dreams, aspirations, troubles, hopes and created situations, helped form my world, which I am proud to say, has been prospering in the past fiscal year and franchises are springing up all over the nation. To live in such a dream world, though, it is necessary to sat up some very high and exacting standards

and goals. I, as a fine plebeian, did not shirk my duty – I was not one to start small. My first aim in life was to seduce the entire female population of Boise, Idaho, in one day. My peers generally laughed at this goal, saying that not even I could accomplish this lofty goal in one day, in two - yes, but in one, never, was it really worth the trouble, they naively inquired after all it was only a mere, 45,000 women to be involved and most of them would probably still be out in the potato fields - and what of those who were away at out-of-town colleges, would there a stipulation for write-in seductions? But this made me even more determined than ever to carry out my goal. I realized that at seven, I still had a good ten years to achieve this feat. To put this into perspective, Gene Simmons would be 540 years old before he'd be able to accomplish this feat.

Fortunately, in a spirit of compromise, we did decide to eliminate all skinhead females in Boise. Call it a support of tolerance, or call it a breath of reality, it did make the goal much more attainable.

I lived a structured life and my world was to be the same. Allowing approximately three-tenths of a second for each female inhabitant of Boise, my goal could be accomplished, with forty-five minutes left over for lunch and a quick breather.

I'm pretty sure that I'll take the breather. Lunch I can do without.

I soon dedicated myself to the completion of fifty achievements which would both epitomize and symbolize myself and my vernal equinox.

1. Seduce the entire female population of Boise, Idaho, in one working day, taking out a maximum of one hour for lunch, a progress report to my followers and anything else I may find necessary.

2. Dating Pope Marvins daughter from a previous marriage, Candy.
3. Establishing the Holy Land in Glenn Falls, Iowa.
4. Opening a nudist colony for Bulgarian eunuchs.
5. Receive lessons from an orthodox Jewish Polo instructor, at a 75% discount.
6. Tell a joke in which the minister gets the punch line.
7. Hijack the Pan Am building, or its successor, to Communist East Brooklyn, in return for the release of all Luxemborgian political prisoners from the war of 1812.
8. Cross breed a giraffe with a firefly and selling the offspring to municipal governments as street lamps, with four legs.
9. Debating the late William F. Buckley Jr. as to the merits of television as a medium as compared to the town crier.
10. Opening a sperm bank for chicken sexers, with compounded interest, checking privileges and transferable assets.
11. Hold an H. Rap Brown look-alike contest with the winner receiving m extended stay in Dollyland, U.S.A.
12. Seduce one-half the female population of Boise, Idaho, in one working day. (After close inspection, I discovered that my previous demands were too pressing on the other one-half of the population.).
13. Make the Pansy the national flower and the ostrich the national bird, replacing the bald-headed eagle.
14. Passing a congressional appropriation bill to provide the funds necessary for a hair transplant for the bald-headed eagle, to give him some dignity, after goal #13 is carried out.

15. Really get into John Malkovich's head. I mean, really. Not just like in the movies.

After reading through the first fifteen goals, I've decided that the average person could not live through the thrill of reading all fifty of these in one sitting. As a true patriot and in order to show my great concern for the national health scene, the next thirty-five have been temporarily put aside.

My own values and beliefs may be put into proper perspective once those of my idol, the man after whom I've tried to fashion my own life, have been analyzed. After a painstaking search, I have procured the one document which is most suitable for this purpose.

"All rise! And now presenting his State of Confusion message, Parson Piffulberry."

"Damnation, Damnation Are we all misbegotten knaves in the image of our fearless leader, the Great Ichabod? If so, it is a far better thing to do, than I have ever done. The time has come to repent, and to remember, the coward dies a thousand deaths, the brave, but one. - but in spite of all, we are able to overcome our disabilities, fall flat on our face and wholeheartedly say, "You're a better man than I. Gunga Din".

Cornucopia, the land of the mystic and a mystic of a land, not once, but possibly hundreds of times has the Great Almighty Elbert performed his awesome deeds. Beware, his deeds have not gone unnoticed, for his name has been inscribed on every stereo in the world in the form of 'treble'

Yet, still you wish to remain a skeptic. Remembering the wise, worldly, wishful, wangling words of Sabu, "No Master, please, Yes, you are the superior race", we can now re-evaluate our values and begin to rob, cheat and scheme in the true Albanian tradition.

Ah yes. Ga-reetings Gates, utter you all. unaware of impending doom and the threat of Eastern Daylight time attacking us, yet again.

You try to escape the reality by recalling the old joke concerning the two chickens and the Armenian rocket scientist. Ask yourself, friend. does it work? Damn straight it works All seriousness aside. follow the example of the great Chicolini, who, while at a restaurant was overheard to have said to a waiter. 'have you got change for a ten?' - whereas the waiter said 'Yes'. he replied, "Good, then you won't need the dime tip I was going to give you'

Now and only now can one break out of the shell that holds you and your kind and begin to ask the recurring question that has plagued mankind for millennium after millennium; 'Which came first, the chicken or the beltless sanitary 1ad7'

Analyze yourself. When you enter an area, does the glory of your mankind fill the room, or do people just point and say. "God, here comes that little twit, again.' Either way you've got troubles, sister. Do you only have one and only dream for a series of weeks? Is

it your goal in life to seduce the entire line of Rockettes at one sitting? Well lift your head up high and take a walk in the sunshine, you'll never give up - unless things get tough.

Once again, all good things must come to an end, but I will keep right on philosophizing about life and the sex habits of crustaceans.

To conclude my short, but unmovable talk; The Final Jeopardy answer is....."

Is it really any wonder now that my own life has been as successful as it is? I was five years old when I first heard this most prolific man and his speech and he has affected me throughout my life. He has made me today. into what I am.

I'll always be grateful – thank you. Parson Piffulberry.

CHAPTER 5

Isn't Education Wonderful?

Well then, just what was I? In my first five years of existence, I still could not answer this seemingly simple question. I was on the verge of entering kindergarten, and still, I had yet to be fulfilled. Was I to be one of those poor individuals who never really discover themselves. Here I was, almost on the eve of my sixth birthday, the peak of maturity and I was still in the dark about my true self. But not for long. This was to be my first day of school - and I had a lot of learning to do.

"Alright, children. Say goodbye to your mothers", said a rather young, statuesque blonde, who immediately caught my eye. While everyone else was crying and kissing their mothers goodbye, I merely shook my mother's hand and said "Goodbye, old bean", and gave her a phone number, where she might be able to reach me, should she have any trouble without my watchful eye over her. "I think," said a voice, "that you're finally on your way". Independence at last and it was I who had to make the best of it.

I had come carefully prepared for my first day at school. Miss Seedoyl was her name, Carolyn to her intimates and Lynn, to me. Lynn Seedoyl - I knew there was something special about her. The radiant glow from her eyes set her apart from all others. But even at that tender age, I realized that one-way love affairs just don't make it. But I was wrong.

True, one-way love affairs don't make it, but who would have thought that a blossoming relationship would follow. I casually remarked to one of my new classmates, "you know, I think she'll make this whole school business worthwhile.

Although I had initially thought that this classmate showed the most promise of the entire motley lot, his response was nothing more than a slowly drawn-out yawn and

an invitation to join him and the others in the sandbox, for "some real fun". I soon realized that I was to go it alone. Sure, I'd heard stories, but I never realized just how easy it was. After only three hours, she was soon to be mine - and it was well worth it. She knew everything about love and I, only what I had read in Humpty-Dumpty. On that first day, she said, "Class dismissed", ordinarily, one would assume that this was quite normal, only she dismissed class after our mid-morning nap. As she steadily cast her adventure seeking eye upon me, I knew that my time had come. I coolly joined the back of the line with the others, but just as I was to leave the room, she flung her body across the door and said, "If you leave me now, we'll both regret it - stay with me and I'll chase the boy within you away". I accepted. The year was 1959, the new morality was just a scant decade away, but would we ever be accepted in our own time? We enjoyed life together, as if there were no tomorrow the time "was now, we had to live it, today. I can still vividly recall our first night together, and the way we were, back in 1959.

I picked her up at eight and we hopped into my bright red dream machine. I'd spent all morning working on that baby and it was well worth it. She was impressed with the beautiful paint job I had done, particularly with the exquisite lettering on the doors - "LOVE BANDIT". As we cruised down Main St., I couldn't help but think, that as impressed as she was with the car, she hadn't seen anything yet. Our schedule was cramped, I had to be in bed while the night was still young, but for now, the night was still ours. We'd been grooving on Buddy Holly and the Crickets, the Big Bopper and Richie Valens, while looking for a little action. We both had our Hell Raisins leather jackets (the printer had made a small mistake, but he gave them to us at a really good price) and we were a sight to be seen. We were, to the local cats, what the Doublemint

Twins were to the squares and we loved every minute of it. Off Main St., we'd stop at Mel's Burger Emporium and meet the gang. All my buddies were there for the same expressed purpose. As Rocco, the spokesman for the Hell Raisins so aptly put it, "Man, all I want is a piece of ass". (The word "snatch" had not yet come into common parlance). Everybody was there Tweeko, Sonny, Gino, Fabian, Desi, Moshe, the Boom Boom sisters - and it was our night to howl. These were the innocent fifties, but we were out to change all of that. This was a special occasion and no expense was too great. A quick call to Mr. Tire of Albany and the back seat of my Dodge was soon fit for a Queen. I'll remember that night for the rest of my life. I was five, she was twenty-three, but for that one night, the world was ours.

I don't know what happened that night, but I felt so cheap. How could I face myself in the morning and look myself in the eye. After much soul searching, I accepted my actions. The dawn of a new age had been ushered in and I was the center of its universe.

It was a jungle out there and only the fit were to survive, but I wasn't going to go down without a fight. There were obstacles, sure, but soon, most teenagers accepted me as being a legitimate competitor for the affections of their heartthrobs. But Lynn posed a special problem. Student-teacher relationships have always been thought to be unethical. The stigma attached, the social pressures, all seemed to bear down on her - all at once. She had fished me from the sea of childhood, now it was my turn to rescue her. I started this with the realization that it would be the end for us, but what does that mean if the sacrifice is for the only one you've ever loved? I had to be gentle with her, it had come to the point where she had become so dependent upon me, that any sudden shock would be

disastrous to her. I was tactful. "Lynn, I want you out of my life...NOW! Yes, there's another woman, she's older in years, but young in mind. I think I know how you feel, what with losing me like this, but its best for both of us, this way. Tell me you won't cry or take it too hard, its been a trying time for me, too - by the way, can I have my milk and cookies now, before my nap?"

Our fling was a necessary evil, but it spoiled me for a long time to come. I worked fast. As soon as there was a girl on the scene, I'd be there, too, It never took long to get to know the new ones, but so many of them just didn't understand me, My intentions ware always perfectly clear, what was there not to be understood? Perhaps it was my approach, my somewhat unusual tastes and a reversion back to the care-free days of Lynn and the Fifties.

"Hi Lisa, you doing anything Friday night?"

"No."

"Good, then I hope you don't mind staying home while your mother and I go out and get bombed."

CHAPTER 6 THE FORMATIVE YEARS - SIX THROUGH TWELVE -

Yes, the formative years - for others, that is. For me, they were the ripening years. One woman after another was the story of my life. No single woman could satisfy me or the animal within. People were already beginning to notice me and dubbing me the eighth wonder of the world. I was proud of my accomplishments, yet also somewhat annoyed by my newly found fame. The word had gotten out about me and my unusual prowess. This proved to be my greatest handicap, but as always, I was able to overcome. It must be remembered, that many eligible young ladies would be quite unwilling to enter into a relationship with me, due to their well-founded fears of degenerating into a mere pittance of their former selves. True, they would enjoy the process, but there is a limit as to how far the average woman can be taken. Fortunately, there were some hardy, perhaps fool-hardy, souls to be found.

And then there was Fern, short and to the point. And there she was, just asking to be taken. She was sweet and innocent, with a slender frame and flowing blonde hair (much of it, unfortunately, under her armpits), probably the focal point of many an erotic dream. She was purity visualized and could there be anything more lovely than that? She was the girl next door, that had over the winter flowered into womanhood. The mere fact that she had been repeatedly pollinated that past winter, made the least bit of difference to me. But, I must admit, all that talk of cross-pollination, intrigued me to the point of throwing myself at her feet, which I could scarcely have missed -she was, after all the starting center of the Jersey Animals semi-professional basketball team. Isn't any wonder

why this is the girl you would want to take home to mother - and know exactly what mother would say - both beforehand after sticking her head into the oven.

Yes, Fern was purity, but all that would change and self-righteousness was to become a thing of the past, found only within the deep abscesses of the human mind and Walt Disney flicks. Was I to blame, or was I to be thanked, and then congratulated? Fern had a profound effect on me. For the first time in my life, I had serious thoughts of settling down and mending my old ways - I even vowed to keep my eyes and hands relatively to myself. (For the lechers among you, this is not a heavy-handed reference to a sexual deviation, but instead one of devotion.) Was I happy? Yes, extremely so, but this indicated failure. Is man truly to be happy in his work? Ideally -yes, but in reality - what was the question, again.? Nevertheless, we stayed with it. My own self-centeredness was beginning to disappear and I was beginning to think in terms of we and us - and now I was really in trouble. Sure, schizophrenia runs in my family - well actually, it sort of shuffles - but I was much too young. Was I in the process of being hopelessly and eternally "hooked"? What had I done to deserve such treatment and mental anguish? I was six, Fern was sixteen, but was mature for her years. Although I had to come down a bit to her level, I never complained and I did my best to cover for her. Love, an oft used word, was in the air - or at least whatever it was that was in the air, caused Fern to break out in boils. Perhaps it was her wide range of talents that caught my eye, or even her cool, calm demeanor or perhaps it was her fantastic roller-skating ability that did it - but I was so infatuated with her, that I never even noticed her dead Siamese twin, Gloria.

That first night we met was almost disastrous. Lynn and I were at our usual parking spot at Mel's, when this new girl skated up (Gloria, however, just dragged along) to take our order. I started to drool and Lynn knew it wasn't because of the food. "Two labinols.... er, I mean, burgers, please." My eyes followed her every graceful roll back into the kitchen - and in retrospect, Gloria, too, was graceful, in her own way. As I turned around, there was Lynn staring at me, with that strange look in her eyes, that I had by now grown accustomed to. There were many questions to be answered that night and many more that couldn't even be asked.

I wouldn't see her again for a week and how time dragged - no pun intended, Gloria. I decided that that the time had come for positive action. I was all slicked up and ready to tear the town down. I had a bottle of Old Rotgut with me in the front seat, and the rest was up to Mother Nature, fickle as she might be. I pulled up and she came out and rolled toward the car. "What'11 it be, stud?" I could only marvel at that quick and sophisticated sense of humor and preceded to point to the car seat and said, "Won't you lie down?". At this point in time, I guess that I regret having asked her in* To this day, the roller-skate strap burns still remain as an everlasting reminder. Come the morn and she was gone, with only a right roller-skate left, to go on. The story line seemed somewhat familiar, but I was slow to catch on.

Now, I don't want people to think that all my early interests were in womanizing. Its just not true. Despite what people have said, I did enjoy being Prime Minister of Great Britain for those two years - but how time dragged - And those rumors about the rivalry

and feud between Prince Philip and myself, were just that - rumors. Certainly, he resented some of the liberties I had taken with the Queen, at the time - but he was quick to thank me later - And I certainly never made that comment, so widely ascribed to me, "That if loose lips could sink ships, then the Queen Mother could engulf a whole fleet of aircraft carriers, sideways - before it would tear an inch¹

The innuendo had been carried too far - And as Philip was about to say during one of his more boisterous moments, after having tied Liz down and on her side, "Okay, bloke, you go innuendo and I'll go innuendo". The Prince never was one much for subtle puns - and was Liz ever livid with rage I Although, off the record, she did later request a command performance. Admittedly, the two years in England were difficult, but to this day, I am haunted by those narrow-minded people who took my press conference statement

- "What the Queen needs is to be raped by an ugly Puerto Rican with acne", out of context.

While in England, I couldn't help but partake in some of my old vices* Of course, the stature that came along with being Prime Minister was of great help in easing the burden of consciously seeking to impress the British lasses - and it helped to ease the culture shock I was experiencing early on during my tour of office -but I was quick to adapt. Though some would have considered Twyla to be beneath my social station, she stirred the fires within me. Twyla was the illegitimate child of the neighborhood charwoman. Of mixed parentage, her mother being British and her father, a German Shepherd - she was constantly looked down upon by the class and species conscious

British. Mind you, Twyla was not perfect and I must admit that early on in the relationship, I was somewhat bothered by her overpowering need to chase after each passing car - and although I was mildly amused at her frequent stops at hydrants, meters and trees, I was embarrassed by her lack of discretion whenever nature beckoned. But I overlooked these seemingly negative qualities, because Twyla was.....well, Twyla was Twyla! - and that meant that she was loyal obedient, eager to please and above all, a man's best friend. Although she violently disputed the fact, I was convinced that Twyla owed her magnificent mane of curly hair to a dash of French Poodle, somewhere along in her ancestry.

But, oh, how that bitch turned on me I It was early on during the Velasco scandal that rocked my tenure as Prime Minister. When I initially appointed him to my cabinet I had no way of knowing that he was not a British subject and was in fact a Paraguayan spy. His swarthy appearance, oily jet black hair, piercing brown eyes, pencil thin mustache and thick Spanish accent, all seemed so perfectly placed - he seemed so typically British, almost to the point of being Teutonic, that not even my closest and most trusted aides, Martinez and de Jesus, could spot him as a fraud. Where Martinez and de Jesus eventually disappeared to, I never did find out, but if they couldn't spot Velasco as a phony, then how in the name of everything that is decent and proper, could I have been expected to? Twyla evidently was unnerved by all this, to the point that she wouldn't even participate in those little lover's games of ours, of which she was so fond. She repeatedly refused to run after the stick I'd hurled, only to end up retrieving them myself.

When I demanded an explanation, she simply barked something incoherently at me and ran away, with that cute characteristic gait of hers, that I had learned to love.

Of course, I was as shocked as anyone, when I was implicated of having been in charge of a vast South American spy ring, centered in Britain. Although my defense was based on the claim that I could not possibly have been the head of such a counter-espionage ring for the past ten years, since at that time, I was only eight. My defense pleas, however, were to go unheeded and in a landmark, precedent setting decision, it was announced that I was judged as guilty, since British Common Law made no provisions for the protection of the rights of zygotes. Therefore, the two years that I had headed the spy bureau before my birth and indeed, even before my zygote stage, simply made the obvious finding of "guilty", all the more concrete.

CHAPTER 7

Welcome to the Farm

"Welcome to the farm", said the delightful, young tour guide.

She hadn't always been a tour guide, of course, but she'd seen her fair share of tragedy. Knowing the role that her fabled family had played in protecting the Order of Hair and the terrible consequences they helped to promote, was enough for Ingrid. She had finally had enough and welcomed the thought of the truth being revealed.

She was on our side, even though she had every reason to hate us. After all, we were after the secret, the truth. There were plenty of people that would use all of their power and privilege to stop us, before the truth would be known. All of those people were her family, her loved ones. So you may be able to understand our situation. Trust her, as we did, I would be less than truthful if I didn't admit occasionally entertaining the thought that Ingrid would be just as happy to lead us to our painful deaths.

I'm sure I wasn't the only one with those thoughts.

As we first set foot onto The Farm, little did we know at that time exactly what was to be in store for us. Of course, we had some faint expectations and hopes for a successful mission, and even intrigue - but never this. What was to transpire over the next two weeks was certainly beyond any of our expectations - except for Beulah - she knew all along what was to be coming our way.

She never let on, though.

On the surface, Beulah appeared to be the least adventurous of the group. Of royal bovine ancestry, Beulah was at times aloof, probably reflecting her discomfort with beef eating commoners. But hers had always been a life of leisure, non-stop pregnancy and dining on the finest grass and straw. Quite different from the rest of our group. We tried

our best to get Beulah to open up and eventually she was generous with her methane production, but we all paid the price, particularly with all of the windows sealed for our protection and security.

How we had been assembled as a group was quite a story in itself, however, its details pale in comparison to the tale that was to unfold before us. The survivors were a hardy bunch. The trek that we all agreed to make seemed to be a fairly innocuous one - otherwise, why would a sedentary group of insurance agents and carnival geeks risk the security of the lives and the comfort of their offices, homes and tents. We all thought the potential risk to be small. Some of us, particularly those not trained in the actuarial sciences or as insurance agents, hadn't even entertained thoughts of failure or risk. We were a cautious group, but even then, an air of optimism and eventual victory had its hold over all of us - except for Beulah. God ! If we only knew then what we all know too well now.

I'm not even certain where to begin. The details are interminably etched into my mind, but as the events of that fateful day loom ever stronger in my consciousness, the details seem to take on less and less importance. How could she have done this to us? Although none of us really knew her well, she seemed to be so unassuming that none of us would suspect until it was well to late that it was Beulah who betrayed us.

"The Farm," said Ingrid, our tour guide, "beholds many mysteries." This was to prove to be an understatement that cost most of our colleagues their lives or their minds. The lucky ones lost their lives. Perhaps that any of us survived the ordeals at all is testament to Ingrid, but why didn't she warn us - we deserved at least that much. It's unfair to suggest that Ingrid was in any way responsible for our tragedy - oh no, that was

Beulah's doing - but Ingrid could have stopped her - at least stopped her sooner!

Sometimes I wonder how we could all have been so blind to the obvious. The tattoo on Beulah's left hindfoot told us the entire story. We really had no right to act surprised at the sudden turn of events. But why didn't we see it? The tattoo - two clowns eating from opposite ends of a hot-dog was a universally feared symbol in the hinterlands of Liechtenstein. The message conveyed was clear and frightening to those who were intelligent enough to let fear get the best of them - We weren't. And we certainly paid the price.

The underground in Liechtenstein had warned us of the treachery that we were ultimately to encounter. There was no question that the taking of The Farm would represent a tactical and psychological victory that would put the Loyalists at a great disadvantage. With their hair down, as was their legacy, this was the perfect time to launch an assault. The capture of the region's largest and strategically most important natural manure farm would certainly bring about an early end to this bloody conflict, that by all rights should have ended long ago - without the need for us to now go in and sacrifice our lives.

But I loved Beulah. We all did. With a love that only an actuarial table or a chicken head could elicit. And strangely enough, I love her even more now, knowing what I do. I often wonder if some of the others would think the same way - if they were only alive now. Damn that manure! For the love and want of manure a wedge was driven between Beulah and I that can never be extricated. Through all of this I still feel that Ingrid has relished the outcome. The wedge, the carnage and the rest may have all been part of her inexplicable plan to satisfy her selfish needs. I scream at nights, vowing to

find the answer - its been 25 years, but I'll never rest. I owe it to Liechtenstein, I owe it to my fallen comrades and most of all I owe it to those brave cows who shit their hearts out for a great and noble cause. I'll never let them down -NEVER! Their memory will never fade - In the name of all that is good and decent.

CHAPTER 8

Irony is a Cruel Mistress

The plastic surgery helped me to escape from another tight situation. With each mission the pieces of the puzzle were beginning to become a coherent picture, giving us the kind of proof that was needed to bring an end to this tyranny of coifdom.

It was no coincidence that I was seated next to the Secretary General of the Societe du Mullet. I knew where he was traveling, who he was scheduled to meet and what further evil they sought to unleash upon the world.

The key issue that we had to grapple with was whether to eliminate the Secretary General at our first opportunity, or allow him to lead us to the other conspirators and protectors of The Mullet.

It was to be my call. A heavy responsibility. Certainly my actions would be second guessed regardless of the choice I made. But I was ready for whatever action was called for.

As we sat on our flight, occasionally glancing and nodding to one another, I was considering the options, my escape paths and what the feature film was going to be.

How I hoped that it wouldn't be anything with Julia Roberts. The last time we were in a similar situation and they showed a Julia Roberts film, I abandoned the plan and leapt from the plane, with barely enough time to fasten my parachute.

I wasn't entirely convinced that this time would be any different.

The peanut flew forward, right into the drink of the passenger three rows ahead.

Unsuspectedly and unknowingly, he downed that drink, peanut and all. And so, it was no surprise that within seconds he was gasping for air, as his exquisitely sensitive peanut allergy took control of his very existence.

CHAPTER Conclusion What if Andy Warhol was Wrong?

And so the words flow once again. CD's, DVD's, even media that the most futuristic of us can't even begin to visualize, I'm ready, and at the top of my game.

Botox

Peanuts on the airplane – allergy, aspiration and spit out