

The Writing Corner

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COYOTES

By Peter De Lorenzi

yip yip yip aaaahhhheeeeeiiiiioooooo! The cry of the coyote carried down from the rocky bluff across the desert floor. Night had fallen, clear and crisp as the temperature dropped quickly, leaving only the bright stars and just a thin crescent of yellow moon overhead.

yip yip yip aaaaahhhheeeeeee! The cry pierced the night again. Jesse sat alone in front of the campfire, quietly stirring the beans simmering over the fire. A cup of whiskey was in one hand, which he sipped. He savored the taste and warmth it provided. This was what he loved most. The quiet and solitude of the desert. He listened to the coyotes. He could sense where they were.

He knew they were watching him. Thoughts had crossed his mind that this would be his funeral someday. He would lay down to die and the coyotes would come down and pick his bones clean, leaving only scant traces scattered around his last campfire. The sun would bleach his bones white. This would be his resting place. This desert which he loved. No marker, no ceremony except the scenario of the coyotes.

yip yip yip aaaahhhheeeeeee! Another shrill cry of the coyote echoed across the desert. He stirred the beans and tasted them with the wooden spoon. He added a dash of tabasco and picked the pan from the fire. He settled back against the big rock behind him, stretched out his legs, placed

his cup of whiskey down and started to eat. He watched the stars as he ate. The desert sky was always so clear that there seemed to be ten times the stars as anywhere else in the world. He should know. He had traveled all around the country and many parts of the world. It was because of the skies that he settled on the desert.

"You can see everything in the skies out there," he once told a good friend. "The past is just now becoming visible, and the future is already out there, far away, but coming nonetheless, inevitably." Somehow forcing himself to think in terms of light years and billions washed away the relatively inconsequential troubles of the day. The hustle and bustle, makes no sense sometimes world; and the loves. Mostly the loves.

That was why Jesse came here, whenever he could get away. He came to watch the future come closer and closer. He came to watch the past slip further and further away. The desert was the best place for watching, and the best place for burying the hurt of old loves; but then there were the coyotes.

The desert was filled with countless tiny creatures: spiders, lizards, snakes, birds and insects. In contrast the coyote was large. He was also the most threatening of the desert critters, except for the rattlers.

He wiped the empty pan clean with a single paper towel, which he threw in the campfire. He poured another three fingers of whiskey into his cup, and watched the stars, all the while listening to the silence of the desert, broken only by the occasional yip of the coyote.

His eyes closed, but his mind was still open as he listened. The coyote's cry came closer over the next hour. Closer and closer, until soon there was no more cry. The hair stood up on his neck. He did not move. He knew the coyote was close. How close? How many? No weapon except a knife. But not much worth living for anyways. Should he fight? Should he settle back and await death's warm calling? He felt the eyes upon him, watching intently. He could hear the barely audible breath. He kept his eyes closed, but not too tight. He felt his body tense. The coyote was very near.

Suddenly the coyote leaped and let out a loud yip. Instinctively, Jesse jumped to his feet. Then he heard the snake. The coyote was trying hard to escape the rattler which had just bitten him: once, twice and trying for three times now. The coyote was hurt. That much Jesse could see, even in the dim light of the dying campfire. He picked a burning stick from the fire and thrashed at the snake which crawled off under the rocks in the darkness. The coyote lay down, panting, watching Jesse watch him.

Each time Jesse tried to approach the coyote, the coyote would curl his lip and snarl. He coaxed and coaxed, while the coyote snarled and snarled. He could see, though, that the coyote was weakening. Partly from the coaxing. Partly from the poison. Finally, the coyote lay down. Jesse went to the critter slowly, and stroked its' head gently, speaking softly and reassuringly.

The coyote seemed complacent to this, and Jesse started his examination in the dim moonlight. He found both puncture wounds from the snake. With his knife he carefully slit them and sucked the poisoned blood from the coyote, spitting the bitter liquid out with vehemence. He wrapped

the wounds and carried the coyote to the fireside. The critter's eyes were open but he did not resist.

Dawn came to the desert. The coyote still lay by the dying embers of the campfire. His breathing was shallow, but steady. His eyes were still open. He was watching Jesse, who was laying against the rock, eyes half-open watching the coyote. The poison he had sucked from the coyote's wounds had made him sick. Nearly paralyzed himself, and now beginning to hallucinate, he began to talk with the coyote.

"Will you live my brother?" he asked the coyote.

"Yes, thanks to you" the animal answered. "But you, will you live through the sickness of the snake?"

"If I do not, please eat my flesh and scatter my bones across the desert floor. Promise me that much. I never meant you any harm. I only love this desert, and you are a part of it."

"I meant no harm by coming to your camp. I have watched you come here many times. You were never a threat. You were a curiosity, though. That was why I came to your camp," said the coyote spirit.

"You are always welcome in my camp, my coyote friend. You are always welcome. "And with those words Jesse dropped off into unconsciousness. The coyote lay beside him, and stood watch even though he was still drowsy from the poison.

Jesse awoke the next morning. The coyote was gone. His mind was still clouded from the remnants of the poison, but he figured he'd make it out just fine. Weakly he started a small fire and placed the coffee pot over it. He pondered the actions he had taken. He felt satisfied with himself for saving the coyote, even at risk to himself. He poured a cup of coffee and drank it slowly.

"The desert", he said softly to himself, "how I do love this place. With those words Jesse packed up his meager camping gear and started heading for his truck. He stopped midway and looked back upon the campfire to where the coyote had slept next to him. He smiled with the satisfaction of having helped the animal, who would have surely died, taking with it just a small but important part of this desert with him in passing. Then he looked down, and with remarkable calm he watched as the snake bit him again, and again, and again.

THE END

THE SENTENCE IS LIFE

by Peter DeLorenzi 10/2/96

The year was 2225....

In his cell the convict lay on his bunk, dressed in his jump suit, and petted the rat which lay calmly on his chest. He talks to the rat, his only living companion for many years. At the back of the cell a small chute discharges a 4 inch round wafer into a tray. Automatically, a pitcher next to it is filled with water. The convict looks at it, just as he had done for the past 225 years. Long ago he had figured out that the wafer gave him some strange power over aging. He had had no idea what the outcome of the experiment would be when he volunteered for it (in a way, as it was really due to his violent behavior that he was volunteered for the experiment). Such was life when you were incarcerated for the rest of your natural life. But this isn't really natural, he thought.

His conception of time had been distorted. He recalled the changes in the prison system. The old bars on the cell doors, and times when jailers walked the tiers, with large rings of keys dangling from their belts. Then came the electronic doors the year after he was convicted, and guards were rarely seen. The laser beams came next, just a few years later. No bars at all, just a criss cross pattern of disintegrating lasers. Nothing came through or went out in one piece. That was the last straw for him. He had lost it during the guards' demonstration of the beams after the installation when he tossed a live chicken at the pattern. With a smirk on his face he taunted the convict, who went out of control and attacked the guards. They beat him and placed him in a special solitary confinement cell. That was when he was volunteered for the experiment.

How long ago was that, he could not remember exactly. He did remember the doctor, though, explaining the procedure of eating the wafers, and how they would be timed to be released into his cell. He was instructed to eat the wafers as soon as they came down. They kept him alive. He had figured that out long ago.

He looked down at the rat and picked him up. No, not today old friend, he said, no more. He lay down, and made no move towards the wafer. The next day he awoke

the rat lay next to him, already dead. The skin of the rat had withered, and his whiskers were grey. A decent burial would be a cremation, he thought, and he tossed the body of the rat at the laser beams. The rat landed on the floor of the catwalk outside of the cell. The convicts eyes widened....

Outside the large, abandoned, concrete building a small crowd is gathered. An attractive woman is briefing the crowd, comprised of contractors who were to bid on the salvage operation for demolishing the building and constructing a new government complex on the site. She is about to take the group on a tour of the interior of the building, a former maximum security prison which had been abandoned some hundred years before. She turns and asks the maintenance man at the door if he has cut the power to the entire building in case any of the old laser beams were still turned on. He assures her that he has.

She takes the group inside the building, explaining what assets they may consider of value and salvageable during demolition, hoping to extract a lower bid in the process. The group is lagging a little behind her when she brings them down the catwalk. She stops suddenly when she sees the convict sitting on his bunk.

Security is called, and just before he is taken from the cell the convict looks at the wafer, walks over to the dispenser and quickly puts it into his pocket. He is taken to a confinement room to be questioned. The woman comes to visit him frequently over the next couple days. The confinement room is a much better setting than the old prison, and the government is taking extra measures to insure his comfort while they ponder the situation.

The convict and woman befriend one another, as she is enthralled in his predicament. She explains to him the way the world works now. How there were no more prisons, as convicted criminals wore electronic devices which prevented them from committing criminal acts, or in the extreme cases, simply executed. The world was run by one government, with no more wars.

He explains why he was imprisoned. A gang had raped and killed his daughter and he had hunted each one of them down and killed them, earning him his life in prison. He explains about war, having been involved in covert government operations during the

Persian Gulf War back in the eighties, that's 1980's. She did not understand the need for war over oil, as it was extremely inefficient and had not been used for over 200 years. They are physically attracted, with good cause after 230 years of solitude, and she pauses in the moment to explain the use of "the pill" which the male must take to prevent pregnancy and disease. The pill had also cured and prevented the deadly 'AIDS' disease of the 21st century. It also heightened the senses during intercourse.

Now comes the convict before a world magistrate, who, under the supervision of the woman, places him on probation after reviewing the case file. But first he must submit to certain testing and examinations. His reasoning was that he had been imprisoned for the "rest of his natural life", which had obviously been tampered with. The magistrate stressed the longevity of his life as very unusual, to say the least, and in the best interest of mankind they could not let him go completely until they examined him completely.

Demolition of the old prison was getting closer and closer, and the effects of not taking the wafers were starting to be noticeable. For the first time a gray hair here and there could be seen, as well as a wrinkle. He explained about the wafers to the woman one night in bed. He had already eaten the last one to prevent them from finding it on his person. Faced with the dilemma of quick aging and death, complicated by the now obvious situation in which the government had no intention whatsoever in releasing him, they embark on a mission to escape and return to the prison and find the source of the wafers.

Meanwhile, he is constantly exposed to modern (futuristic) customs, appliances, furnishings and foods, which makes him yearn to open a good old pizza parlor.

The government had helped in the escape, in the hopes of finding the secret of his longevity. They had assigned a very special agent (a real bad guy) to follow them.

Together they research the doctors history and experiments, found in an old medical archive, and find the doctor had been barred due to malpractice and illegal experimentation, before he became a prison doctor. The files said the doctor had been killed in a fire at his home. They find his lab in the prison, which contains a hidden room and secret entrance to the outside world. They find the wafer dispensing machine and a limited supply of the wafers.

The government agent was not just a little sinister, and definitely had developed a greedy streak throughout his body. The agent had smelled a fortune in the making, even though it was his superiors who ordered him to follow the ex-con and find out how he had attained such an age. Chase follows chase as the couple tries to elude him, while searching for a chemist who they could trust to break the formula for the wafers. He must take a wafer a day and the supply was dwindling. Several times they are caught by the agent, and the ensuing fights are well fought, but they escape each time.

With only one wafer left they enter the lab of a chemist, reputed to be the best involved with aging processes. They find the agent awaiting them, along with the chemist. The agent is holding a weapon on the chemist. The agent then reveals that the chemist is the doctor. His prints matched up with those found long ago. The doctor reveals that he had not replenished the wafers at the prison because of the impending demolition, which had progressed ahead of schedule, unlike many other government projects. He had wrestled with the ideas of having to let his best subject die, but he had no other alternatives. He told him how he had phoned his death secretly, just before the prison was abandoned by changing the hue on his jump suit after he drugged him through a modified wafer. The jump suits changed color with body temperature. He had hidden him for several days until everyone had left, then returned him to his cell and kept the lasers on all these years. No one ventured out in the wasteland where the prison was located until civilization outgrew its boundaries and stretched out and now needed the extra space where the buildings stood.

Now, he felt tired and unwilling to make more of the wafers. He too, felt the absence of incentive. The sheer excitement of the discovery had paled to a mundane existence, with the convict as his sole purpose in staying alive. The formula was not written down, as it perished in his house fire, along with one of his “mistakes”, but remained in his head after all these years. He had, in all respect, tried to produce fresh wafers whenever possible, much as a good mother cooked dinner for her child.

The agent tried to pressure the doctor even more, who resisted, and the ex-convict finally got an opportunity to subdue and kill the agent.

How long, is the question now, for both the ex-convict and the doctor to wither and die without the wafer, if they decide to not eat them anymore. The threesome head

out to explore the modern world while they deliberate and continue their escape from the government.

The End...for now

Squashed Zucchini

Peter delorenzi.....1980

My childhood abounded with great food. My Uncle Dante, Great Uncle Victor and Grandfather Louis had been chefs at the Hotel Buffalo before it had burned down to the ground. The only salvageable materials were the big, heavy, cast iron stoves from the basement of the hotel that were transplanted to the basement of our Buffalo home, just a few short blocks from City Hall, and just one block away from Our Lady of the Trinity Church. My parents, sister and I lived in the third floor flat of the house. We had no kitchen so we always had to go downstairs to eat with my Grandparents. Tough duty!



Together with my Great Uncle Victor the three men catered Italian sheet goods, which was their specialty. Manicotti, Lasagna and Canneloni were the everyday menu. Other

dishes and events created a sense of excitement around the house, which always smelled so wondrous, even from a block away you would never have a problem finding home in the dark. Women were not allowed to toil in the basement kitchen, which also served to warm the entire, narrow, four story house.



In the family kitchen on the first floor, my Grand Mother would light the stove under the coffee pot each morning. My Uncle Dante would have prepared the pot before going to bed the evening previous. When the pot would whistle and spit everyone would get up. No alarm clock.

My Grandmother's job/position in this venture was her garden. With the dome of City Hall as her backdrop, she took full advantage of the empty lot they had purchased for a few hundred dollars, directly behind their house on Trinity Place. She grew prized tomatoes, egg plant, onions and naturally, zucchinis. They were her pride and joy. I hated zucchini.



This hatred started one fine summer day while I was playing with our Cocker Spaniel puppy, whose name I cannot recall. He was playful and floppy eared. As soon as I unchained the pup from his tether one day, he ran off barking, wagging his tail, and daring me to enjoin him in a game of 'Catch the Pup'. This is definitely NOT a game to play in someone's vegetable garden, which we soon found ourselves in, especially when a significant part of that garden was relied upon to fuel the family business. I was several minutes into the game when I noticed the presence of a third player: my Grand Mother.

I could not understand the precise meanings of the Italian words she was yelling, but the meaning was universal, even to a five year old. I stopped, looking back at the path of destruction we had left through the garden. I learned at an early age to respect a woman's love for the garden. I have also tried hard to train my dogs to respect those gardens as well. Half of us are doing better, most of the time. I have also grown to enjoy dining on zucchini; on occasion, and smiling.

I remember my Grandmother greeting me when I drowned in Lake Ontario in 1965. She was holding the Cocker Spaniel puppy.

Life on Boulder Creek

.....peter delorenzi 1998

The leathery textured hands of the old man deftly worked the fly rod across the creek. Each flick of the wrist sent the colorfully tied fly out over the flowing water of the creek. Intently, his eyes narrowed beneath his bushy, grey brows. With just a slight hint of determination on his lips he let the fly touch down gently upon the water, thirty yards upstream from where he stood, thigh deep in the cold mountain water.



Relaxing only slightly, he let the fly drift back downstream before reeling in the line and setting the hook into the keeping ring. That had been his seventh cast into that 'hole'. No fish today here, he thought to himself. Seven casts were all that he would venture in any one spot on the creek. His father had taught him that habit some seventy five years previous, when he had been a boy of just five years. He learned quickly and never forgot the lessons of his father. He moved slowly upstream.

He didn't watch his step as he walked. After fishing the same creek for the past three quarters of a century, each path, tree, boulder, sandy spot and riffles were of a second nature to his step. Often he had boasted of being able to fish the creek blind. Good thing, too, he thought, as his eyes had been getting progressively worse these past dozen years

or so. His wife was buried next to the creek. She had died during the birth of their only son. He paused as he passed the spot, sacred to him. His son had died of heart failure just two days ago. Today they were bringing his body home to rest.



He thought about the last time his son had driven up from the city, some few years ago. The boy had offered to take him back to the city, away from the creek, so he could ‘retire comfortably’. It had been the first time the boy came to visit him since moving away for college and the big business life. Boy, ha, man of nearly forty five now, he thought, letting his mind wander back to that day before stopping at another hole in the creek.

He had been surprised at the offer, and had scoured his son for even considering such a fate. I was fishing on this creek the day you were born and I’ll be fishing on it the day you or I die.

Watching for the movement in the water that would signal him to quickly set the hook, the old man let his mind wander back again to that moment, to the day his son had been born.

His wife had known the day was at hand. She had given birth twice before, but both had been still – borns. The doctor had warned them both that there was little hope to have a successful birth. Knowing the risks, they still kept trying.

The morning of the birthing he had left the house, fly pole in his hand, and walked the mile down the country lane to his aunt's house. She knew what to do. She would clean up the aftermath. She would bury the infant, just as she had the previous two. She would comfort the mother of the dead child. He would fish back upstream.



It was his favorite hole, and the old log crossing the creek was home to a large old trout. He had hooked the old trout several times previous, and released him each time. He had also lost several flies to him through the years. The two of them had an understanding and mutual respect. This day was uncanny as the prospective father-to-be caught a glimpse of the large fish alongside the log. The light was behind him and the fish could not see him. He cast, and without hesitation the trout took the fly. He set the hook and played the fish to his net. Looking respectfully at the defiant eyes of the fish, he removed the hook and held the fish gently to the water, held him for a moment of wonderment, and then released him back, once again, into the creek. He started back to the house, happy in the day, but fearing what he may find when he returned home.

His Aunt was on the porch, a healthy baby boy wrapped in a blue blanket in her arms. He approached with delight, and asked, "...and her?" The aunt shook her head slowly, a tear in her eyes. He solemnly went inside. After a long while he came out, took up his shovel from aside the barn, and walked to the creek. He dug the hole this time, next to the two small graves of the previous, unsuccessful child births. She would rest with their children.

The boy was raised by the Aunt, mostly, closer to town and schools. He watched from a distance, and he could see that the boy took many of his traits from his mother. He was

born with the same dogged determination with which his wife would scrub the last speck of stain out of his shirt before church each Sunday. Hard set determination, details and hard work were his forte.

Uncommon boy, some friends would remark. Selling newspapers after school, shoveling snow off roofs during the harsh winters, and helping each spring and fall with the tilling and harvesting of the neighboring farms. He had gone fishing only once; after then he was always too busy. He recalled a conversation years ago when he told the boy that even though he, too, worked hard, he still found an hour or two each day to close up his small shop and go fishing, sometimes just to simply sit on the water's edge, waiting while watching the cold, clear mountain runoff play on the boulders and logs in the creek.



Life moves along too fast, he thought aloud. You must take some time off, slow down and place all those items life throws at you in their proper perspective. Each day has a meaning. Time does not slow down, rewind nor replay. It will always win.

Through the years the old man remained stalwart in his arguments with the boy. *Stubborn old man*, his son would call him. Stubborn, yes, he would agree. With good cause, too.

The boy took no heed of his advice. He continued to play the game of corporate ladder climbing seriously, on the way to the obscure pinnacle. Each cast that he tried landed the fly in the precise spot envisioned in his mind. Even without the excitement of the 'catch' each cast was a small success to him.



His aged hand flicked the fly rod once more, his sixth cast towards the old log on the opposite side of the creek. His mind still wandering, he reeled in his line and inwardly debated whether to try another cast into the creek.

Some memories were as clear as the mountain water itself. Others were confused, clouded through the years of love and hate. In his heart he was sad, but the tears would not come. They had been shed years before when his wife had died. Slowly he made his way upstream from the old log, towards the small waterfall with the deep hole beneath. With the sun once again at his back, he cast downstream towards the log, the fly drifting in the current. His seventh cast. He remembered his wife, ever young in her prime and beauty. He remembered the years of fishing with his own father, here on the same creek. The same old log that hid the old brown trout was one he had sat on with his own father, taking lunch. Several times through the years he had envisioned the old brown trout as his own father, came back to life to continue teaching him to fish. He walked to the log, sat, and took an slightly over ripe, juicy peach from his creel and began to eat. Watching the water cascade down over the rocks, he ate the peach, juice dripping from his lips, and continued his remembrance.

The boys aunt would come over each week and read him the letters the boy had written her from college. After college, the letters came more and more infrequent as the boy worked in a large New York Financial firm and then married. They had been married in Las Vegas. The old man did not attend. Nor did he attend the birth of their first son, nor the second, a girl. Finally, for several years, the “letter” became simply a Christmas card

signed by the son's wife on behalf of their family. The current school pictures were always included.

He had often told the boy *Be your own man, answer only to God and yourself. If there is still a conflict, listen to your own heart.* But the young man would not listen, to himself nor God. He obsessed with the fast paced world and attaining the invisible. He had visited the old man just once, about a dozen years ago. His family accompanied him on the overnight trip. His wife showed openly her disgust for the life style of the old man. Begrudgingly she had agreed to stay the night in the creek side cabin.

The old man had even offered up his own bed, which had not occupied a woman since the day his son had been born, and his wife had died. *Of course it is not the same mattress, he had assured her. Nor sheets. But the logs for the posts of the bed I cut myself when my father had me clear some trees for a new woodshed. Each year I've oiled those posts so that they will last. She still professed that she never closed her eyes that night. The old man had slept in the shop, where he kept a cot for senior naps.*

Their kids at the time were just six and eight. They delighted in following him along the creek when he went fishing in the early evening light. Their mother expressed her deep concern while they were gone. They had never visited together again. But the son still came. Every couple of years or so. He placed flowers on the grave of his mother on each trip. At least he did not forget, even if he did not remember.

Until that last time, when the old man refused the offer of care three years before. *Where does the time go, he wondered. As long as I can fish.....*



It was at that moment that the fly he had just cast was an instant from landing on the water when the big brown trout jumped, fly in mouth, already set in his cheek from his own thrashing. The fight was on, but the old man would prevail in this battle. As before, he looked, near lovingly, at the trout, breathing dry air, staring at the old man. Mutual respect showed in each other.

Then, as the moments dragged on and the hook was not removed, the look on the trout's face turned to that confusion and defiance, panic and finally, despair. All the while the old man watched the fish, until humanely, he clubbed the trout in a single blow. The fish lay limply in the net.



With his pliers he removed the hook from the mouth of the fish, strung him on his line, and placed the fish and rod over his shoulder for the walk home.



The daughter-in-law and grand children were coming, with the hearse, and would be there in the morning.

For all of his hate of the remote country life of his father, the son had wished to be buried next to his mother, near the creek. He paused at the spot, placing the fish on a large boulder near the grave site. Gently picking up some of the small branches fallen from the fir trees, he spoke softly to his wife as he stroked the ground. He apologized for the disturbance of her sleep, but he needed to dig another grave. He told her of the company she will soon have.



He picked up his rod and the fish and walked back to the woodshed, next to the cabin. He wrapped the dead fish in newspaper and placed it in the pile of sawdust just inside the door. He split some kindling and went into the house to await the arrival. The fire crackled nicely in the old river rock fireplace, taking the chill off. He sat, tired, before the fire, and slept.

The procession arrived shortly before noon. A dozen vehicles followed the hearse up the country lane. The simple black coffin, another detail of the deceased, was carried the several hundreds of yards towards the creekside. The path, worn well from the old man's steps, silently welcomed the gathering. Uncharacteristically, also according to the plan of the deceased, all that attended wore old blue jeans and workshirts.

The coffin was opened for viewing, and the group of friends that came marched slowly by. The old man was last, as he had slipped back to the wood shed. The old man gently tucked the wrapped fish under the folded arm of his son. His hand then gently touched the cheek of his son before gently closing the lid of the casket.

He stood back and watched as several of the men lowered the casket into the ground. He looked to his either side and noticed the looks on the grandchildren's faces. They both looked at him and gripped his arms tightly. Leading him away they asked him, *Grandpa, would you teach me to fish?* He gazed out at the casually clad gathering of his son's friends and nodded his head slowly. The old man wiped away the last invisible tear. *Yes, I'll teach you to fish.*

Time had won this time, but it is still early in the game, he conceded to himself.



There's hope for those corporate wonders yet!

THE END

An excerpt from a work entitled “Baseball and Mister Lincoln”.....

By peter delorenzi (an ongoing work)

The train rolled along with a rhythmic bouncing through the Virginia countryside. Passing through small towns and farmlands, winding its way towards our nation’s capitol. Sitting in the open doorway of an empty boxcar was a black man, his sole possessions in a small leather satchel next to him, and an old baseball glove which he wore on his left hand and a well worn hardball which he worked into the glove with his right. He sat in his own silence while watching the country roll past his view. He didn't need to watch the baseball, nor the glove into which he worked it with the accumulated deftness only a lifetime of repetition brings.

In the distance the view changed to one of smog, and the congestion of the city. He looked squinted his eyes and could barely make out the tall, needle-like monument. He felt the bump of the slack of the train coming together as the engineer applied a light pressure to the air brakes. Slowing down, he thought to himself, here we are. Washington, DC. Finally came here again. Haven’t been here since shaking hands with Mr. Nixon after coming home from the war. Been meaning to see the Wall, mostly, and Mr. Lincoln. I never did get the chance last time, as the protestors had taken over the monument. Wonder what else is here for me? Looks like the yard comin' up. Thanks for the ride ol' train.

The black man waved casually at some of the railway workers inspecting the train as it passed. Times have sure changed, he thought to himself, since the heavy handed ways of the old conductors and railroad police. The railway

workers just sort of ignore you now, and most of the workers are a pretty easy touch for enough money to buy a meal and coffee.

He waited for the train to slow down before leaping lightly to the gravel covered ground between the tracks. His bouncy step still showed the form and grace of an athlete. His smile was as comfortable on his face as the old Levis he wore.

(You must excuse me now, as I still need to get this old black ballplayer to the appropriate place in space and time, but, seeings as you're on the ferry, or sitting in the sunshine, maybe, we'll just take it fer granted that the old rascal is now walking up the stairs at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C. Several tourista types are now milling around the old rock.)

He stood in awe, at the bottom of the stairway to the memorial. He stared up at the huge, sitting figure as he walked up the stairs. He couldn't help but marvel and speak to himself.

“Man, oh man, that's some big hunk of rock there. This Lincoln feller must've been pretty important for the people to build this place. Look at all them words up there. Sure wish I could read 'em. Just look at those people over there. The way they're reading 'em makes you just know them words is important. Sure wish I knew what they said.

"FOUR SCORE AND SEVEN YEARS AGO, OUR FOREFATHERS BROUGHT FORTH UNTO THIS CONTINENT....." the words came to him loud and clear from the monument walls.

"What's that Abe? How long has it been? Four score and, hey! Wait a minute! How long is a score, anyways? Must be something like a hundred game season or something like that, huh. And just whose fathers are these? Didn't even know my father. Must've been some kind of strong dudes to bring forth a nation, though, huh, and not just some fool who loves baseball."

"ONE NATION, UNDER GOD. CONCEIVED IN LIBERTY.....EQUALITY....."

"Hey, conceived in liberty! Hey, how'd you know? Mama never even told me the story till just a couple years ago, just before she died. How her and my real dad met. They parked out in the woods late at night just outside of Liberty, Kansas. So I guess that makes me sorta conceived in Liberty, too, or just outside it, anyways.

Equality, man now that's some word that don't mean diddly squat. Ain't nobody equal in this country or this world. Only have those squeaky wheels out there. You squeak loud enough an' you get greased. Politicians these days must've all

come from Detroit, cause they're always greasing somebody. You'd think they'd run out of money the way they just give it away. Big business, government.

Trouble with it, though, is that it's gotten so big the damn head of the government couldn't tell you, or even care, what the hell the asshole is thinking. Just think of that, Abe; not quite the same as when you headed up the business, huh? You believed in something real, huh Abe? No longer Stoneface. Why, I bet you didn't have to pay insurance back in your days. You oughtta be glad, no, wait a minute! Why, I bet the government pays a pretty hefty premium for this here hunk of rock. They must be scared someone's gonna come along and steal it or something. Can't burn this old rock, and a flood or rain ain't gonna do you no harm. But, I suppose I could trip on these here stairs and then sue you, Abe. Or the government, yeah, that would be best. Probably couldn't squeeze a penny outta you, huh. Yeah, trip and sue the government cause they're no warning signs on these here stairs. "STAIRS COULD BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH" claims the Surgeon General. So tell me, Abe, why did you stop the revolution? Oh, it wasn't really a revolt, huh? Uprising, insurrection, we got some good words now for those things, too. Here's a good one for you Stoney, let's see if you can guess this one: TOA. Nope, didn't think you could figure that out. "Theater of Operations". Means a battlefield, can ya believe that? Almost makes you want to go buy tickets for it or something, like it's a social event. All means the same, though, but it gives 'em great pleasure to think up new terms for old stuff. And, Abe, you wouldn't

believe the number of people who believe it all. Not me, though, I ain't got an education so I don't believe in nothin'. Couldn't have an education because of the squeakers. Spent my whole childhood being bussed around. That's probably why I enjoy traveling so much now. Sorta grew up with it, if you know what I mean. So the squeakers wanted me to go to a better school and so they picked a school they thought was better for me and bussed me over there. Trouble was the better school was three hours away so I spent most of my learnin' time on the bus. Too bored to stay awake mostly. I did learn one thing, though. Baseball.

Baseball never mattered that you didn't know the lesson for the day. Or whether your homework was done. Yeah, you would've liked the game, Abe. Strategy in baseball, lots of strategy. And sacrifices. You know about sacrifices, now, don't you Abe? Yeah, you know. And then the big payoff, Abe, is when you finally slide into home. Going home, that's the goal of the game. Trouble with being safe at home for most people now, tho, is that once they're safe they don't want to get up to bat again and risk it all anymore. So they retire and then just watch the rest of the game from the stands, Abe. From the damn stands, man. Scared of striking out, flying out, getting squeezed out, forced out, picked off or just plain put out. Not me, Abe. Stuck with it for eighteen years. Just refuse to sit in the stands now, though, so I don't even go back to the ball park. It hurts, Abe, honest, man, it really hurts.

So now we have this here "New World Order" I keep hearing about. Well, the order's about the same as always, Abe, and we're getting shat upon once more as the saying goes. All of us. Trouble now is that we're all shatting on ourselves now. Each other. No way to stop it neither. It's got what Lombardi would call "momentum". We're rolling now. But one thing'll be for sure, Abe, and being the idiots we are we'll think we're better off for it, at least most of 'em will play along with the program. They know it ain't right, though, and that's the real tragedy here, Rocky. We did it years ago. Have we changed so much?

The WE is still the same, it's just that WE got cars now, at least most of us. Wouldn't that be something if old George could step out now? Oh, shit, he'd probably give up after trying to get a dental card from the VA. How'd that one start, anyways? It still happens in other countries. Heck, our own government must keep in practice by starting them revolutions in other countries. Must be some sort of sport for 'em. "Sport Revolutions". Yeah, sorta like "Sport Fishing", "Sport Hunting", or "Sport Fuckin'". I guess we got it better than most though, so just let it be, I guess that's what its' all about, now.

What's that 'bout a civil war, Abe? Ya mean it was goin' on way back then? Goin' on a long time, this little misunderstanding, huh? And I thought that little business in 'Nam drug on for way too long. Doesn't surprise me

though, as our nation was conceived in war. Why stop a good ol' tradition, huh. Dedicated to a proposition, huh, is that what we're supposed to be? Why, just the other day I got propositioned. No money though, damn, even that's been a long time a comin'. She was a might site better lookin' than them politicians, though. Them politicians, now, are always propositioning. An resolutin'. Lots a resolutin'. An bills! Guess they must really be a backwards lot, those politicians. Haven't got the handle on the definition of a bill yet, cause they think it must be something good and great and haven't realized that all those bills gotta be paid; but they don't pay 'em, we gotta pay 'em. And they 'cummulate these here bills and think they did great so they give themselves a raise anyways, cause it costs too much to live here in Washington cause the prices of everythings gone up way too high to cover the costs of all them bills we got to pay. Guess we're just a humanitarian type of society to give 'em jobs and such and keep them out of the way of progress.

Can't think of any of the big three in Detroit that'd give 'em work. Probably best to keep 'em out of the way up there in Washington, all together, sort of, so's we can keep 'em from doin' any more harm to the 'conomy. Yeah, can ya imagine 'troit hiring someone what spends more than the company makes? Nah, not in these times. Don't take a genius to figure out how soon you'll be livin' in the toilet. They might make out in LA, now, but not in 'troit, no sir. Speakin' of great battlefields there, Abe, ya ever been to LA? Nah, don't

supposed ya ever made it much further west than the big Muddy back in your days.

Without airlines ya can't get to LA, or at least as far as LAX. Freeways are jammed a hundred miles around the city, maybe further, so's gettin' in at the airport is about the best you can do. Never flown, huh, Abe? Well, sir, that's a real treat. Gettin' herded into a big ol' steel beast that flies up in the sky. Feed ya these little miniature meals, got these little miniature pillows for your head, and miniature leg room for your feet. Strap ya into your seat. No one talks with ya, or talks too much. Must be quite a trip from LA back to DC. Like ya never left town, too.

Can't drive much 'round DC, neither. Bet the city was a bunch more quiet back then, huh Abe? No more, Stoney. Fer being the nation's capitol this darn place sure don't set any precedents in the right directions. Course, now, they do set some presidents out in stone. An' fire, too. Got the ol' everlasting flame a burnin' good across the river there for 'ol John. He got himself shot down in Dallas. So maybe they oughtta burn a torch everlastingly for every poor soul who got himself shot down there in Texas. Leastwise we'd have enough flames a going to keep us poor folk warm. That'd be a mighty big dedication, huh. Maybe just a bit more than you had in mind for the dedicatin', huh.

But I guess what ya did was fitting an' proper, though, even though I couldn't quite see as its' done any good at all, but yer intentions was in the right place, I'll grant ya that. Say what, Abe? What was that 'bout haller ground? Why, half the country's haller ground now, Abe. Nothin' left neath the surface, just like the people. Why, we got mines and wells all over the place. Gotta go deep fer water now cause the rain'll take the rust off the bumpers of old Studebakers. Underground caverns, too, to test the big nukes, and tunnels and sewers. We're tryin' hard to build it back to solid by burying our trash though. That stuff'll stay around for awhile. An' sure 'nough, nobody's gonna wanna take that stuff outta the ground.

Yeah, even I had some hallered ground once. Called it a home, though. Well, it wasn't much, but it was home. Bank took it away. Government gauranteed my loan, too. That didn't mean diddly. Helped 'em out in they're little business in the 'Nam, just so's I could get me some of that hallered ground. Fooled 'em, though, and made it back alive. Should of known better from the start. They didn't keep many promises to the Indians, either. Who should think anythings changed, anyways. Now the governments out of money and can't pay their bills. Shoes on the other foot, now. How's 'bout if I repo their property? Can't pay your bills, ya gotta give up the farm ol' boy. How's this fer a start: try turning some of them old military bases into subdivisions. Prime waterfront, some of them. Nice views, lots of acreage. Let the poor and homeless build

'em up. Heck, they could live in some of them old barracks while they built their homes.

Shit, probably enough pallets hanging around for some real nice places. And lots of room for ball fields. Darn country don't have enough ball fields. Bet we'd turn a tidy profit on some of that real estate, too. Trim the fat, pay them bills; don't keep makin' 'em. Just look at these ol' bones. No fat here, Abe, no sir. I never got the chance to get fat. Yep, lawyers again made sure of that.

Guess I couldn't expect to make any money playin' ball. Playin', that's not work, so why expect to make money at it. But them lawyers are just practicin', same as the doctors. Damn, it's a good thing they're just a practicin' cause if they ever do it for real ain't no one gonna be able to afford them, and then they'll be unemployed and us poor people'll have to support 'em still. Yeah, us poor folks oughtta run the government. We know how to stay outta debt. Ain't got no money, but at least that's a far sight better than havin' no money an' a lot of debt. Yep, free an' clear, Stoneface, that's where it's at. Ol' free an' clear, that's me, that's me. Ol' free an' clear Abraham Erastus Lincoln!"

BIKER BOB AND THE ANGELS.....

to my friend Bob Rosen who should question nothing in his quest for fitness.

Peter DeLorenzi 10/3/96

“Damn” said Biker Bob when he came outta the house and opened the garage door at ten past noon after a great Friday night party down at the club house of the local Hell’s Angels. “My old Knucklehead is gone!” True, his best friend and partner, a 1946 Harley Davidson Knucklehead was flat gone. Nothing but a fair sized oil mark in the garage.

He went inside and called a couple of his riding partners. They swore to keep an eye out for the old scooter. Bob was frantic all day. He knew better than to call the police. They never cared much anyway for ‘biker trash’. He would try to handle it himself.

Unfortunately, Biker Bob was aptly named, as he did not possess a regular vehicle. He never did have any use for more than 2 wheels to make it down the road. He also didn’t have much use for city life and lived quite a ways outta town, up on the top of a mountain. He scratched his head and thought for awhile, and then remembered the bicycle that was left over from one or the other of his ol’ lady’s kids a few years back.

He pulled the bike outta the weeds alongside the garage and looked it over carefully. Amazingly there was still air in the tires. The chrome was a bit rusty, but a little oil here and there, and a shot of grease into the brakes and pedals and she was ready to go to town and find the hombre who stole his putt.

He was a little unsteady at first with the pedal coordination, but in no time at all he was heading down the mountain. Now this ain’t no ordinary hill, mind you, it’s a real mountain. Faster and faster went Biker Bob, and he was traveling along at a pretty good clip when the thought came over him. “Shit, I didn’t test the brakes! Better do that now!” He hit the binders cautiously at first, then a little harder, and finding himself still gaining considerable speed, he felt the old

sphincter muscle in his ass tighten up to a pretty fair knot as the series of hairpin turns were coming upon him.

Knowing that he was a damn fair rider didn't shed much hope in this situation, as the road was a mixture of sand and mud. He glanced sideways and caught a glimpse of the drop off and started thinking of some other way to lay this mini sled down and minimize the damage. He thought he could make an effort and hit the high side of the road, so he picked his spot, closed his eyes and turned the handlebars sharply to try to slide to a stop. No such luck, as the steering clamp had vibrated loose and was really useless.

He hit the shoulder of the road first, glanced off a big rock and careened back onto the road with no loss of speed, but a healthy change of direction. He was headed for the drop-off on the other side of the road. "Not much to do now but abandon ship" he said aloud as he tried to loose the bike from underneath him as it became airborne. He landed on his ass thinking that leathers and a helmet on any two wheeled machine would be a must from here on out.

"Shit, shit, shit" he yelled as each bump and roll took its' toll on his body. Finally he came to a stop and started surveying the damage. His ribs were definitely toast and his leg wasn't worth a shit, as were his arms and, oh, don't touch the head again. What a damn mess. Thirty feet of steep embankment were in between himself and the road, and he only had two neighbors on the mountain. Neither of them, he thought, would ever hear him scream for help as they were window bound in their 4 wheel drive Land Rovers. He had to try and get to the road himself. The pain, however was excruciating.

He started little by little, inch by inch, trying hard to block the pain. In the distance he heard the rumble of an old, noisy pickup truck coming up the hill. He started yelling at the top of his voice, hoping like hell that they didn't have the windows rolled up. It hurt like crazy but he kept yelling, and in relief he heard the truck stop.

"Yo, there, who's down there" sounded a burly voice.

"It's me, Biker Bob" he yelled back up and he heard footsteps sliding down the rocky slope towards him until he thankfully saw Panhead Pete, one of the

biggest and baddest of the Hell's Angels he had partied with the night before. Behind him was Fearless Fred who had one of the prettiest Shovelheads in town. "Damn good to see you guys. Do you think you can haul my sorry ass back up the hill?"

"No shit, Bob, we were just coming up to see yer ass and bring your scooter back up for you. Figgerred though, that you'd still be sleeping it off after last night. We didn't let you drive home. We got a policy now down at the club house about riding and drinking heavy after a couple of the Bros bought the farm over the past year. Well, let's see if we can yard ya up the hill. First though, let's do a little checking around. Fred here was a medic in Nam."

"Bad news dude, ya got a lotta damage here" Fearless drawled. "At least a few broken ribs and I gotta feeling the hip is shot. No riding for you for a while Bob." Then the pair of leather clad bikers tied their heavy jackets together to form a litter and carried Bob up the hill to the road, where Bob had this vision of an angel watching over him as he looked at his old Knucklehead shining brightly in the back of the old Ford pickup.

"I think we can slide him in right next to scooter Fred," said Pete, and then they lowered the tailgate and carefully slid the busted up biker right next to the scoot. The road down the bumpy mountain road was hell, but worth every wince as they took him to town and the hospital.

"Sure glad ya'll came by. Damn if I was trying to get to the club house 'cause the Knuck was gone and I figgered some asshole stole it. That's the only reason I dug that confounded bicycle outta the weeds, honest guys."

"Nah," said Pete, "the truth is that you were practicing on how to be a real yuppie. You must be a real closet case, dude" but the smile on his face let Biker Bob know that he was just kidding around. Two nurses came to the gurney and asked if Bob was in pain.

"Bet that pretty ass of yours" he said "Or do you think I look this bad all the time?" The nurses laughed and one came back in a few minutes with a shot of pain killer. A few minutes later another nurse came by to tell Bob that the Doctor would be there to take a look at him very soon, and inquired if he was in pain.

“Sure am” he said sorrowfully, and the nurse left only to return a few minutes later with another shot of painkiller. Pete and Fred just laughed as they stood by. Shortly after the Doctor came and looked Bob over.

“Now Bob, are you in a lot of pain?” he inquired as he examined him.

“You bet, Doc” slurred the biker.

“Nurse” said the Doctor “take him up to X-Ray and give him a shot of painkiller when you get there.”

The orderlies came to wheel the gurney outta the emergency room and Panhead Pete told the nurse “You do real good by that hombre or the whole bunch of us’ll ride right in here to straighten out the medical practice, ya hear sister?” They swore that they would take real good care of ol Biker Bob who was already sniveling as they wheeled him down the corridor, asking drunkenly “Hey, don’t they make any of these carts with two wheels?” He raised his hand in a salute to his friends and they gave him a thumbs up and left.

a new beginning, not quite an end...

