



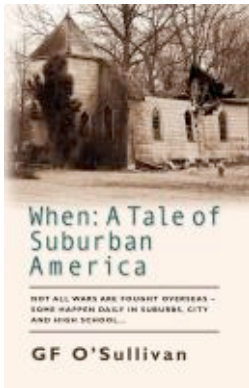
# When: A Tale of Suburban America

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NOT ALL WARS ARE FOUGHT OVERSEAS –  
SOME HAPPEN DAILY IN SUBURBS, CITY  
AND HIGH SCHOOL...

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**GF O'Sullivan**



*Selling weed. It's only weed. Or is it? Best friends and high school seniors JT Gardner and Sean O'Donnell discover in this dark, heart-breaking yet hopeful novel that when weed is called a gateway drug... not everyone who goes in can get back out. While friends and family try and steer them back towards the gate, addiction and dealers block the path...and sometimes even love cannot conquer all...*

# **WHEN**

## **A Tale of Suburban America**

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**WHEN: A TALE OF SUBURBAN AMERICA**

**GF O'Sullivan**

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The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

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First Edition

WHEN Adv At what time: *When will we leave?* – conj. 1. At the time that. 2. As soon as: *I'll call when I arrive.* 3. Whenever: *When the wind blows, the doors rattle.* 4. During the time at which, while: *When I was young, I was happy.* 5. Whereas; although: *She stopped when she should have continued.* 6. Considering that; if; *How can he get paid when he won't work?* What or which time: *How long has this been going on?* The time or date: *have they decided where or when?*

## WHEN: A TALE OF SUBURBAN AMERICA

"When?"

The detective leaned forward in his chair and kept his hands on the table as if they were resting on a piano keyboard. I sat across from him. Another detective, scowling and pissed, leaned on the wall near the corner. The uniformed cop who was here a few minutes earlier had left, shutting the heavy metal door behind him with a mechanical swoosh; it closed like one of those air-lock doors in a sci-fi movie like "Alien" or "Star Trek." Nothing as it seems: the door should have closed with a hard metal click, fast and solid, a hard-sounding metallic click. Yet it swooshed shut. And the uniformed cop -- the only friendly face here -- was gone. Just like that. With a space-door swoosh and a click-less shut. Pop... gone. Two detectives and a punk left behind thank you. Like my uncle's bumper sticker said, *beam me up Scotty.*

I glanced at the poster hanging on the cement block wall behind Detective Hicks and briefly wondered how it hung on the cement.

*Balled up tape?* The posters looked flat though. The one directly behind Hicks showed a sour-faced man peering out from behind bars and underneath it read: *If you lived here...you'd be home now.*

I pulled my eyes from the wall and wondered where Dezzie was and wondered what he was saying.

Brief silence brought my head up and soft blue eyes regarded my face. Detective Hicks pulled his piano hands from the table and shrugged, "Well?"

My turn to shrug.

Would Dezzie rat me out? I wondered, before correcting myself: *would the Dezman say anything?* Was Drawsey here too? Perhaps locked away in another room, being asked the same questions? Listening to the same psuedo-threats? Maybe the friendly uniformed cop was with him, or with the Dezman.

Detective Hicks rapped the edge of the table with his knuckles and let a hand fall into his lap.

"When," he started slowly, deliberately, "when is this happening? Do you want to get slammed for this? From what we hear, there's going to be real trouble here. If Sean is a friend of yours John, I mean a real friend, someone you'd go to bat for, someone you'd take a hit for, you better speak up, before it's too late. These people are serious John. They ain't gonna give him a wedgie, steal his lunch money, or shoot frozen paintballs at his front door at three in the morning. These guys will hurt him. Hurt him bad. Maybe worse. Then maybe they'll get your friend Desmond. Or the Drawley kid, or *you*. The Boston detectives said these kids were involved in a home invasion in Brighton last month. Tied up some kid's mother and stepfather and beat the crap out of the kid -- their kid -- in their own house. *Their own house. In front of them.* One of the punks gave the stepfather a couple of smacks with a crowbar -- the one they used to rip open the back door -- and the poor guy lost a tooth and needed a few stitches to close a gash on his head. He didn't do a thing -- poor bastard -- the kid just fell in with a bad group. The kid was in the hospital for two weeks. He was a mess. Is that what you want? To have these animals after you? Your parents? In your house? You have a little brother don't you? Come on, John. Is that what you want? You gotta deal with us, John, for everyone's sake. Do you want your family involved with these animals?"

I shook my head.

He sighed and continued.

"These kids don't smoke weed and drink beer out behind garages or in the woods; or out on the trails; or out by the bogs -- back at the pump house beyond Elephant Rock. Yeah -- we know all the spots. These people play for keeps. You and your friends are in way over

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your heads. Jesus, John, you better wake-up before it's too late. We know that a meeting has been planned. We need to know when. We need to know how much time we have to help settle this thing before the shit hits the fan. We think we know what's going to happen at that meeting John. It ain't gonna be a drug deal, John, not by a long shot. These people are pissed off and they're gonna sweet talk you right into their hands and then throw you into the fire. How much time do we have to straighten this mess out John? That's what we need to know."

"I don't know," I said, half truthfully.

The detective standing by the corner snorted and shook his walrus head. He was a big redhead, fleshy and square shaped, carrying a big gut that looked to be on the verge of busting through a straining yellow shirt; his hard eyes held no wisdom, and looked to possess no patience.

Detective Hicks caught my eye.

"When?" he whispered. He raised his hands from his lap and put them back on the table. From the pressure of his grasp, small-whitened crescents capped off each finger beneath neatly manicured nails.

"When?" he repeated, his voice suddenly sharper. His clutch tighter. His fingertip crescents larger. Almost desperate.

"I don't know," I repeated. And I looked across the table into his eyes and a ripple of fear lightly shivered through my body.

I quickly looked down.

Because from that one look I knew.

*He was scared.*

## THE FIRST TIME

when Sean did OCs all the pain went away. Well, not really. Pull back, point of view, from the heart... focus now focus.

Difficulty here says I...because there was no pain except for mild waves of adolescent suburban boredom. Tree lined middle income Avenue void. Peer pressure? No pressure. Pill pressure...pop pressure. Pressure? Compressure...compraction, density and gravity...flipping compulsion. Shaking tongue-swallowing Convulsion. Screw it, Screw this, screw them, and screw you all. Screw myself ten times over. No pressure Moms; it's just a burning vise. The junior high Internet chats recede and evolve into concrete high school cliques: jocks and freaks, goths and skaters, preps and grunge, and all the sorry like. Tough to fit in? Clear the lens with some meds: roll a blunt, blaze a tree, get baked, be stoned and blend.

So if there was no pain, only a dull void, a suburban emotional yearning, a blunt and constant toothache, long term dull pain hunger, combine that moms with the suburban peer vise...teen gauntlet. A lotta kids would as soon poke your sister or slice your nuts off rather than say "hello." So, Moms, hows do we fill the void? Boy Scouts?

Right.

Hold hands with the green and brown-shirted creeps who roam hill and valley with tents...and their special poles...fondling and fundling, showing you how its done by the fire or in the brush, with dark loafers and a woodsman's leering grin. Thank you no Moms.

Maybe volunteer at a hospital and watch people who probably have never lived die. Wet their forehead with a washcloth and smile and stick an occasional Popsicle in their cracked, chapped, drying and dying old liphole? Or shovel a gooey gob of Jell-O in their toothless hole, then watch them gulp and swallow the shit and smile, smile that stupid toothless smile old people do before they gasp, fart, drool and



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die? And don't tell me there's no bitterness in that smile, I've seen the seething hatred for the living, and the hatred for the young, those who can still feel, fool, and frolic beneath the squinting of summer stars.

I digress. But they do hate us. They despise our youthfulness.

It was easier to pop or crack OCs. They don't make you feel better, they fill a void and spruce things up as old Aunt bitchy-pants used to say. Boredom and voids get a new freaking lease on life when viewed through OC hazed eyes. But the next day sucks hard.

The void gets bigger Moms. So what are we to do? Boy Scouts and volunteer shit is out.

Hmmmmmmn.

I know. Let's get some more OCs. If we can't scratch or steal the money, we'll land some H. Smack-out. Both won't make things better, but they'll soften the boredom and soft-line the voids the OCs made. Even making the call, or crushing the pill, you know you're floating in a cesspool but you can't help it. You gotta soften things, shape smooth the hard jagged edges. Like the soft satin lining in a casket. Yeah...a box to store a rotting corpse. No more, no less. But we're talking about living, right? Not dying. And you can't stop.

*You can't stop. You can't.*

Crush, bend, and snort. The car consoles clean, the coffee table's clean, the counter's clean, the mirror's mirroring again. Whoooosh. Nasal blood vacuum. Snap and snort Moms. A habit is born. Smile Moms.

And I won't hesitate to smash a window and break into Aunt bitchy-pant's apartment to rip her shit off. To make money. Surround sound gone pawned in Brockton. Video games Plymouth pawn long gone. You never even noticed your jewelry Moms.

I won't hesitate to do *anything* to gets what I needs Moms.

O freaking Cs. OC.

That's the ticket Moms. Fill the void. Relieve the gigantic titanic boredom. Go from bad to worse. Your house is on fire. Pour some gasoline on it and we'll call it a sweet day. Bilges are working overtime steaming hissing and pissing dirty murderous water back in the hold.

*GF O'Sullivan*

Sometimes, laying in bed at night, when I hear you kissing Hayley goodnight, and then I hear your quiet footfalls receding on the hall carpet until I hear your subdued knock on my door and your soft "Good night, Sean, I love you." I tremble and turn so I can stifle a cry into my pillow.

And sometimes, on those nights, I look at the reflection of moonlight on the bronze arms of my basketball and baseball trophies on my dresser and I look at the moon shadow pictures on my bed stand of me and little Hays swimming in that clear cold river on our vacation way back when in New Hampshire, and I wonder. I wonder. I wonder. And I wonder some more until I fall into a fitful sleep.

Will the door be kicked open tonight? My eyes open and I sit bolt upright.

I look at the clock. 3:23AM.

*Is that dull rumbling sound a car out front?*

*Was that a car door shutting?*

Breathless, I get up and peek out the window ashen hued and trembling. Nothing. I sigh and climb into bed for more mind-whirring agitation.

And then I still wonder, and sometimes even say it aloud, in a whisper, to the silent moonlight falling across the pictures and bronze sculpted arms of the my speechless trophies frozen in time.

*How did I get so messed up?*

I shut my eyes to the sound of my mother's gentle footsteps receding down the stairs. To the living room she goes where she'll smoke too much and worry too much. Hours later, I hear her climb into bed.

And I am still asking myself.

Still.

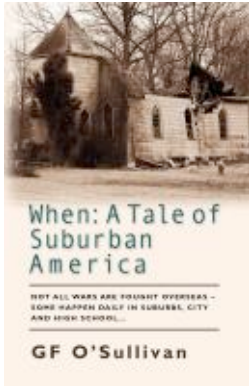
*How did I get so messed up?*

And sometimes, fearing fear, darkness, or Beeper in the night, or my own messed up, screwed up self, and I can't fall into a grunting light slumber, I hear you Moms, I hear your long subdued sobs punctuated with sniffles through the wall. Sniffles like pops from a handgun. Bang. Bang.

*And I hate myself. Bang.*

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And in the morning when you wake up I will be gone. Because I can't look into your eyes anymore. And I'm scared.



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