

Being pushed to the edge, pursuing yet being pursued, insecure of purpose while testing his resolve; no future for the faint of heart. Jake may have truly believed he understood the paths which he had traveled, but one can deceive himself. What he once believed, trusted, the very path he now found himself following, was it right, was it real?

Jake, Disguised Memories

By Douglas Hoy

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JAKE

Disguised Memories

CHASING HIS PAST, PURSUED BY HIS FUTURE

Douglas M Hoy

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CHAPTER 3

I eased my truck alongside the travel trailer. When I purchased this unit a couple years ago it seemed like a very good idea. It was one of those “just in case” thoughts, plus I practically stole it. I suppose at the time it was a great idea, but then there are the other days. Today seems like one of those days when I believed it may have been wiser to have done something else.

It has become apparent to me now, whenever I work on my vagabond home, even the smallest of items just becomes a task rather than a labor of love. I have thought many times of selling it along the way as I rationalized the need for it versus the freedom from it. But it does contain a lot of things I use, such as my computer with all of the old work files, investigation information, old notes, scraps of this and that, addresses, and other items that for some reason I believe I cannot live without. It has become just a large, mobile, closet.

The sun was up strong which felt wonderful on my face. Angel took off to seek whatever it is dogs seek out with their noses to the ground and tails in the air. In the distance I could hear approaching steps that probably belonged to the lot manager. I had met him only the one time with a couple of additional ‘howdys’ as I left or entered his domain. I had learned *howdy* was about as long of a conversation I wanted to have with Billy.

As I stopped my entrance into my home on wheels I heard, “Going to be a great day. Everything all right with your unit?” was the question coming from Billy. A rotund man, about the same age as I,

liked to talk, which is fine on some days, but I can't see what day that would be. Just never know what mood I am going to be in on any given day.

As he approached the very recent incident was still on my mind. I was trying to sort out if what I thought I had just gone through was real. As I am not prone to delusional thoughts or such activities I felt confident what I experienced was real. The overwhelming two questions were why, and why. Rarely am I ever satisfied with the first answer to why, as there are always deeper, more compelling answers; there is always another "why."

"Good morning, Billy, isn't it?"

"You got it. Have a big day planned, do you need anything?" Billy asked as he walked to me and stuck out his hand.

"Thanks, got everything I need I think. I am just doing some minor repairs, going to limit it to the tools that I have with me," which I regretted saying the moment the words left my mouth.

"Repairs, huh, you know I am rather handy at that kind of thing. I have helped rebuild many units while sitting here in this yard. I used to work for Winnebago in Iowa for fifteen years. They had me repairing everything from the smallest of travel trailers, ones just a bit smaller than yours, up to the big fifth wheelers and motor homes. I was not excited about working on the motor homes though. I can rebuild any trailer but I am not an auto mechanic, nor diesel. Damn fools. Most people who buy them should be shot. Don't know what they are buying, don't think that they are going to break down, have no idea on how to properly fix anything. Yet they lay out over a couple hundred thousand dollars for a house on wheels when they just should have bought a condo in Florida. That would have been safer for all concerned, especially for those on the highways. Damn fools can barely drive a go cart, so what do they do next, buy a forty five foot house on wheels---jackasses!"

I finally saw an opening as Billy came up for a breath of air.

“I understand what you are saying and thanks for offering to help, but I have some experience in this travel trailer; bought it as a shell and basically built it back to better than original.” This of course was all a grand lie but I thought this would keep Billy and his tools at bay.

Before I could get much else out Billy started in again, "That is great, you must be one of the rare ones who actually know what they are doing." Without skipping a beat he forged ahead. "Going to be staying here long? I might need some part time help if you would be interested. This place can get real busy as the year moves into summer. A lot of tourists pass this way and they like this little campground because it is close to the bigger cities. Plus this campground has me chasing my own butt most of the time and you just can't get my experience anywhere else," Billy pause only to bust out in a large, and I must admit, contagious laugh.

“Well thanks Billy but don't need a job, I will be here only a short time, a few days, then have places to be.”

“If you need anything let me know. If you need to know anything about the area I am the man to come to. In my almost sixty years of living here, even when I wasn't here but in Iowa, I have either seen it all or done it all and those things that have been done to others, well, let's just say I hear about it before the local paper does. As you can tell I am a good listener, I find that people like to talk to me because I listen.”

“Thanks again Billy, I will remember that. Got to get at it now, thanks again,” this, if I was lucky, was going to be my last word to him. I found it hard to see how people liked talking to him, as mostly they were forced into much more listening than talking.

“Well move out of that hotel and get your stuff over here. Lot rent isn't any more if you are or are not in your unit.”

With that I opened the door to crawl away from my newest exasperation. I then realized Angel was still running around in the campground, someplace. However reviewing my options I knew the

dog would be fine as she was just running around being a dog within a fenced in property from which she would not escape. But that is just what I had to do, escape, and now was my chance.

A final thought of Angel and I entered my sanctuary. Even if it was only twenty two foot long, constructed of thin sheet metal and had minimum insulation, it closed me out from the world and left Billy behind. I decided I would find the dog in a few minutes; she would be fine until then.

The travel trailer was small and barely large enough for Angel and me, at least on a temporary basis. It has one bed, which is all I needed as I rarely slept in the unit, your basic kitchen area, a place for a couple TVs, a large overstuffed chair filled with memories, and an exposed area for my office.

Wondrous technology we now experience and have at our disposal. I can communicate with about anyone at any time by phone or computer. Communication is so much different than fifteen or twenty years ago when it could have been very important to my personal life. We are on the cusp of a new age in many marvelous ways to make life easier, to save us all time. The big question is what we are going to do with all of this time we have saved, or are saving, with all of these new and wonderful widgets. We all seem busier; so what happened to all of the extra time we have just saved?

I sit and gaze upon all of this wonderful technology and think about how much the world has changed, how it was going to change, and how I am being left behind. I sink into a small funk as I think of how much my life had changed from those years ago when happiness was every day in every place I went.

Being self-diagnosed, and it has been confirmed by time and my life, I suffer from wanderlust. Nothing fatal mind you, but left unchecked it has caused a few tribulations along the way. Thank goodness I have found myself very good at getting in and out of situations or have at least escaped them unharmed. If I have done

nothing else with my life I have learned to extricate myself, at the blink of an eye, from almost any situation I feel will be not to my liking.

I have discovered many of my deepest feelings, some brilliant ideas, and just plain irrational thoughts, come from my view out of the windshield of my truck or sitting in front of the computer, searching. What I am probing for I can never say, just looking for answers, but to *what*? A popular topic, always, is the contemplation of time and its ramifications, primarily to me.

Pulling myself out and up from the malaise with which I had encumbered my functioning mental process, I pushed on to the chores at hand. After a quick review of my belongings and thinking about the small tasks yet to be accomplished concerning repairs, I felt the first order of business was to locate the dog. Obviously I was not all that into the tasks at hand and which were yet to be determined. I hope she had not fallen under the spell of Billy as neither of them would win. Of course, Angel could always turn away and leave not having to give a polite, if not totally false, reason for her departure. Sometimes I think dogs just have the better of it all.

So with some apprehension I ventured outside my sanctuary to look for the dog. "Man, I would give a thousand dollars right now if I knew how to whistle," was my longing thought.

Fortune was smiling on me as I saw her off about forty yards, nose in the air, just searching. A quick call of her name and she headed rapidly towards me. I gave a quick look around to see if Billy was either coming or going. He was nowhere in sight, so much the better.

"Get in here puppy, crazy people out there; you just need to stay close." Why I, or any of us, speak to pets in such a manner has always puzzled me. I suppose it makes up for something truly lacking in our life or we somehow believe it makes the pet's life better. No matter, we all do it.

I turned on the stereo for noise and I started the computer. Angel slopped around in her water bowl, water dripping from her jet black snout showing hints of aged white fur, and settled down in her favorite area which is always underfoot. Always emails to answers and things to review. I had not been on my site for a couple of days and there were the customary forty five or so emails of which only three or four were of any interest. The one that jumped out was one from Chuck, my old partner in Reno. I had not heard from him in a few months. A connection to my past life is just what I needed at this moment. He was the one person who knew all about me, my life, before and during the time with my wife.

I had served in the military for a total of about twelve years and which, towards the end of my military career, is when I met Chuck. From the military's view I am sure my career was not all that noteworthy. I would have to agree with them. I was stationed at a base near San Francisco in a branch of military police/intelligence. One of my first assignments was debriefing, or counseling I guess would be a better term, men and women returning from intense intelligent overseas assignments or various skirmishes our country had become involved.

I thought this kind of duty would be a piece of cake. I was only in my early twenties; what did I really know about anything? I learned, I learned quickly and probably matured ten years in a little over a year of this duty.

At first I could not really believe the stories and what I was hearing. The eyes and faces I had to look upon I shall never forget. I personally knew none of the horrors. Yet I knew that my view of the world, life, and how I would feel about people could never be the same. I could only try to empathize.

I was fortunate to be transferred to the criminal division after about eighteen months of the duty. Honestly, I asked for the change. Not because of the effect the prior duty had upon me, which was significant - well maybe a small part - but because I had a background

in criminal psychology and for some reason the military thought I had a higher calling.

It was during the last two years of my twelve year hitch with the military when I met Chuck who later turned out to be my partner in the private investigating firm in the Reno, Nevada area. Well actually I joined him, it was his firm, but down the road a few years it became ours. He was a decade, plus or minus, my senior. Chuck was like an older brother if you can imagine your older brother being Robert Duval. I accused him repeatedly of being the one they discarded from the family. One of the best things he, or really anyone, ever did for me was introduce me to Becky.

Chuck and I had been working together for about five or six years. He came into my office one snowy afternoon and told me I had to attend a holiday party with him. This was out of the ordinary as Chuck knew a holiday party was nothing I enjoyed. But with a great amount of arm twisting and threats from Chuck, calling into play old debts and paybacks I owed him, and with a great amount of guilt, I relented and agreed to go, which also canceled most of the old pay backs. Later, I was told, it was all done so he could introduce me to Becky. This turned out to be one favor I could never repay.

The party was given by the law firm of Chapman and Harker at one of the hotel casinos at Lake Tahoe. I had recently moved to the valley from the lake area mainly due to the vast amounts of snow that fell every year in the mountains, and was just tired of fighting that losing battle. Plus, living in Reno was so much closer to the office.

The event would be held in the Grand Teton Ball room and having lived in the general area of Lake Tahoe, I knew the casino well. It was a beautiful room. The complete structure was adorned with thick rich carpeting that brought on exhaustion just walking across it. Rooms illuminated by chandeliers everywhere; well-lit in the correct places and darkened for more delicate gatherings in more isolated spots. Large paintings depicting the lake in nonfigurative forms, some famous colorful abstracts and replicas I assume, with the originals

hung elsewhere on their rich mahogany walls. Massive fake, or maybe real, open beams appearing to hold up the entire spectacle thirty feet overhead. Orchestras off in the corner someplace playing some familiar standards from the thirties and forties which we all knew but probably not by name. None of this mattered as all in attendance were more involved with one another if not enamored with themselves.

The men looked elegant in their tuxes and women looked lovely in whatever combination they chose to beautify themselves. It was all truly just beautiful, perfect. With gorgeous Lake Tahoe in the background how could it be any better? Almost made me feel guilty that I have become such a recluse, that I chose to hide away from such times. Maybe I could change; what would it hurt?

After Chuck had introduced me to some of the “right” people who could possibly help us in our non-ending search for new business, I found myself with potential new clients discussing particular philosophies concerning certain investigative techniques and legalities.

“Hey Jake, buddy, someone I need you to meet,” came the familiar voice of my partner with a tug on my elbow.

“Damn, not another partner of another law firm, Chuck, I am up to my balls in their business cards now. How about a break? This is supposed to be a party celebrating the holidays so let’s lay off the business aspect for a bit, huh?”

Not showing any signs indicating Chuck was fazed or was going to concede, “Just one more, I promise, after this one I will leave you alone. I have been talking you up to this firm and the junior partner will not leave me alone until I bring you over. This could mean a lot to you so quit being an ass, put forth some of that hidden charm you keep telling me about, and let’s go.”

Knowing I had no way out of this one I told Chuck, “This had damn well be the last one. I have met all of the partners I need to. There seems to be a good number of very attractive women hanging around who think they need to know me. I would like to get started on

meeting and ruining their opinions of me, and generally just pissing off as many of them as I can this evening.”

Chuck gave me a look and a halfhearted smile, grabbed my elbow, and pulled me along. We weaved our way around and through important and want-to-be beautiful people, all doing their very best to out-impress one another. That is except for those who really have “made it,” and they know who they are.

As I am not what you would call hard to look at, svelte, my tawny brown hair worn at the proper flowing collar length of the style of the times, standing at a shade over 6’3” I could see over many of the participants. I noticed a good number of pleasing, come hither glances from a few of the seemingly more approachable, and non-approachable women who were in attendance. I thought just one more partner to meet and then I will be free to see if indeed there was any charm remaining within me. Hell I knew there was, in a group such as this there is always a woman or two who will find me some place between repulsive and irresistible.

We walked up to a small group of five who were discussing some situation of grand importance. At least by the tone and the look upon their faces this seemed to be the case. The crowd parted and seemed to disappear.

Chuck, showing no shame at all, said, “Well here he is, I had to tear him away, but he could not wait to meet you!”

She gave a half turn, her green Sophia Loren eyes sparkling as she looked into, and past, my eyes into my heart which, at this moment, had just stopped. As if on cue she extended her elegant hand, accented by her elongated and delicate fingers, nails done to perfection, and with a voice full of sensual joy and seduction said lightly, “Hello, my name is Rebecca McCaully, please call me Becky.”

I am sure the expression which came over me would give anyone pause to question if I had anywhere with-all within me. I could not believe this vision, this divine entity, to whom I was just introduced. I

immediately lost any thoughts of anyone else I could meet tonight. There would not be any other. I knew I had just met the last woman I was ever going to need to meet.

I reached out to take her hand with my now seemingly almost incontrollable, shaking hand. I could feel myself internally shaking down to my socks. But it was not gyrations of nervousness or apprehension. I am not sure what caused this new phenomenon I was experiencing. It was not a bad thing, just different but not worrisome.

I held her hand in mine, looking into her intoxicating eyes thinking, *Damn!* “Rebecca, to say that I am very flattered to meet you would only dishonor the thought and action of flattery. I am Sebastian Alfred Jacobs! But please call me Jake, Chucks partner,” was the cleverest line I could come up with at the moment.

“He has told me just enough about you to make me want to know more, and please become used to calling me Becky,” Rebecca mercifully whispered as if she understood where I was at and was letting me off the hook.

“Was this on a professional basis or personal?” again a poor effort by me at being smooth.

“It is hard to mix business with pleasure, my work load is rather full right now, so let us just say personal,” came Rebecca’s remark, only this time with a wry smile and a seductively wholesome look about her.

“You could not have told me anything that would have made me any happier and anxious at the same time. I believe this is what they say is the mark of an incredibly thoughtful person,” I remarked with growing confidence.

But it was not a confidence exactly. It was much more, so much more. She, at the moment of introduction, had become my best friend whom I have known all my life and was delighted to find again. It was that moment that may come to a person’s life, my life, only once;

when upon meeting a woman I knew that as long as I am with her I shall always be elated and enchanted with each and every day given to me. For each day with her would be like no other, just better than the day before. That is how I felt at that moment. I was never proven wrong.

“Is that why you are still holding onto my hand?”

“No, am I?” I whispered in her direction. “It seemed so natural, so exceptional, so right, I did not realize I was still holding onto it. I guess I was hoping not have to return it.”

With that smile never leaving her face Becky’s angelic voice whispered to me, “I am not sure I want you to give it back.”

I did not give it back then; ever. As I held onto her hand, her to my shoulder, we discussed business, life, and futures all the while under Chuck’s careful Cheshire cat smile. I could never repay him, neither could Becky. We were together always after that night, we just had to be. I could not see me ever experiencing a moment in life without having Becky to share and savor the event.

Becky moved in with me a short time afterward while maintaining her condo at the lake. She was still part owner in two delis in the lake area that her family had started many years ago. However, due to the demands on her time, even before me, she relegated herself to just general overseer. So it was a good idea to keep the condo just for convenience sake. My home in the valley was actually rather close to her office in Reno, so it all just seemed to work. Chuck was so proud of himself! And for the longest time would not let me forget.

Chuck and I had a rather good and profitable business. We took on a lot of work not only for attorneys but large corporations as well, and in some cases for wealthy individuals. However, there were times when some clients could not, in the end, pay for a various array of reasons. But there is always a way. We found ourselves, in lieu of dollars, accepting payment in the form of raw land, not houses. And the closer the land was to the lake so much the better. Over the years

of our partnership we accumulated nine building lots very near the lake. With inflation and the growing popularity of the area we knew we would always be money ahead. All of this would become most important to me and Becky later in life.

As I said, Becky, with her background, took only a casual but business-like interest in the family delis. She discovered early on she really had no interest in preparing food every day and for the foreseeable future. The family hired the help and took care of the day to day running of the business, and Becky took care of legal items and balancing the books. Well, she hired an accountant for that, but it was her accountant.

Becky and I kept no secrets. She could go back and retrace my childhood almost as good as I. In our many discussions I did leave out a few details, but not too many. When it came to my health she was most protective and not too understanding when I tired of any conversation concerning my wellbeing.

It seems somewhere along the way I had been diagnosed a benign form of cancer. After some test, consultations with various doctors in San Francisco, specialist in Reno per Becky's insistence, a course of action was planned, and the routine was strictly enforced and followed. It was at her command I have blood work done every ninety days, a complete checkup once a year, no matter where I was. All results of the test were to be sent directly to the hospital in Nevada where they would control everything. If at any time, if anything abnormal showed up, I was to be notified by courier with a letter of notification as well as a time table for action. There was much more to her demands of the doctors, however these highlights were demanding enough.

The one thing I never fully understood, nor did not delve into as I could sense it was a touchy area, was her adopted, yet seemingly semi displaced, brother. Al, at the age of seven, had been adopted into Becky's family when she was becoming a teenager. I never was exactly sure why Becky's parents decided on adoption as, best I could tell, they should have been perfectly capable of conceiving more

children if that is what they wanted to do. No, there was always a haze surrounding the entire episode.

Maybe Becky did not know the full answer herself; hard to believe but I just did not know. But it was easy to see on her lovely face when the topic was brought up she cared nothing for discussing anything remotely connected to the entire situation. This includes the two times Al ran away in his mid-teen years. Later on, when he subsequently left the family for good in his late teens, Becky decided that this would be the end of any emotional attachment she might want to lend to the situation.

Over the upcoming years Becky would sparingly hear from Al. A phone call now and again, maybe a short note, but this was the extent of it all. It has burned in my soul the last call she received from him. It was shortly before her death. It appeared not to have been a pleasant call, rather a heated one between the two of them, which left me puzzled and Becky distraught. I never tried to force her to share the gist of the conversation with me. In her time I knew she would naturally do so. She always did. This I knew. What I did not see coming, what I did not know would happen, was she would be taken from me in that car accident before we could have such a conversation. In reality a life of many wonderful conversations were stolen from us.

Becky's death was due to an auto accident that I never fully believed in the final analysis. My personal instincts just told me things did not add up. As one would expect during the time immediately after the wreck, I was in no condition to do any investigation of my own. I left this searching task to Chuck. As much as it pained him Chuck did all of the right things in his investigation. But in the end there were still a few problems with the final report.

It was said on a warm early-spring day, early morning, Becky was driving her two-seater convertible down the side of the mountain on the road that followed the path of the river. She was on her way to San Francisco, traveling a road she had been on many times prior. She

would be gone for a couple of days. I did not expect to hear from her until the next afternoon.

Then a patch of black ice in a shaded corner, Becky traveling too fast, losing control, skidding off the side of the road, down the embankment, and colliding and bouncing off a few of the large boulders, which are numerous along the river. Normally the river would be at three feet in depth. However, with the spring melt of snow from the mountain, the river was at seventeen feet, swollen and angry. It would have taken an experienced kayaker to traverse the rapids. Becky's car turned over and she must have been thrown out and then washed down the river. She was never found, only her personal belongings.

Because I did not expect to hear from Becky for thirty six hours it took a couple of days for me to really start worrying. It was a total of three days from the morning of the accident until the day they found her wrecked car. But she was never found.

The reasons I was given for not finding her were vague or gruesome. I know those in charge were trying to protect me from the latter. Spring time, many bears in the area just coming out of hibernation, the chances were very good that something very bad happened to her that would cause a person never to be found. I just did not want to think about it. But still, there is a major lingering doubt. Becky's parents had died in an auto accident years before and it just seemed to be just too connected, just too much of a coincidence.

It was a short time after I came out of the beat down of Becky's death that I informed Chuck that I would be leaving the firm. The life of it had just been taken away from me and I wanted to do something different, something which did not drag every emotion out of me. I was tired; worn down and tired, and wanted to change it all. Truth is I just wanted to escape from my memories to almost anywhere, to do almost anything.

Chuck, of course, understood. Even if he did not agree, which he did not, he would not have done anything else other than encourage me and lend any kind of helping hand he could to make my transition to my new career easier. His only caveat was for me to find something different to do in the area. Don't leave just yet. Let some time go by before making a move to another area. I had always been interested in building, and had done a bit of it on the side, so I decided to get my contractor's license and build homes near the lake.

I had a friend who was a contractor and, along with his help, we had previously built Becky's and my home at the lake. She and I completely enjoyed building a home, the one project which is said to tear couples apart. With that as a base to jump off from, how could I go wrong?

So with an acknowledgment from Chuck of keeping in touch, which I honestly did, I took my cardboard box full of personal stuff from my office and started my new career.

Getting my contractor's license, which took about six months, and building homes in a challenging but one of the most beautiful places in America, was just what I needed. Building true custom homes does present its own unique challenges but they were so different from the challenges and memories I left behind I welcomed them with open arms.

Times were good, not great, but good. Something was missing however and I knew what it was. The one part of my existence I believed I would never replace in the end was a constant unfulfilled hole in the middle of my daily passage through life. No matter how, or with whom, I tried to create a new vision of a future I always knew it would pale and be a miserable substitute for what was once mine. I was living in a gorgeous part of the country, doing a good job, having a prosperous building business, but always knew I was not happy nor would I ever be that happy again, at least not here.

Winter comes earlier in the Sierras, and stays late. It had come early for me for a few years. Work, outside construction work, comes to a halt as you have so much snow on the ground you cannot find the ground. So I tried to have everything dried in so we could work on the inside of the houses and at least stay busy waiting for spring, which is always six months away.

The past winter was particularly harsh, just nasty. More snow than before, colder than I had ever been or cared to be again, and traveling was almost impossible. I had a reduced crew during this time of year. It was pretty much the same group as years past. But we must have gotten to that point of “familiarity breeds contempt” because I could tell we were getting on one another's nerves. And I was tired as well. I needed new horizons.

In February of the following year I prepared the crew, I prepared the documents, and made them an offer to buy out the company at a reduced price. They could form their own company and continue on with as much support and assistance as I could lend. After some back and forth, some fine tuning and restructuring, the deal was set, the ink on the contract was dry.

I know I was headed for the southeast, someplace with no snow, probably Florida, with Angel, Becky's dog, and hopefully to another life. I was not sure at the time if I just chasing my old life, my old demon, and will I be able to survive what lay ahead for me.

CHAPTER 4

Now that I had finished deleting all of the important emails sent by one hack or another I had only five or six to review. The very first email to read was from Chuck. I am always most anxious to read his familiar long lost friend words. Maybe because it had been a while or maybe because he was like that old familiar warm comforter that can be found draped across the back of your sofa. Whatever the motivation for my feelings, his email was to be first.

I read through most of the first part of the message, taking pleasure in each word. It was filled with light-hearted information and insults which I expected. This was truly a letter from home containing words, thoughts, and feelings only a true friend can gift. Just reading his words put my heart and thoughts at rest. I read and enjoyed his thoughts about the business: its ups and downs, how the winters seem to be getting harder... or could it be it was just his age? My old construction company had finally folded as my former employees just could not hold it together. Chuck did compliment me intimating how I was the true driving force. But then a short note, an alarming short note, about how he thought his health was beginning to fail. This information was blunt and most disturbing.

Chuck is my longest and truest friend. I knew he was shading the truth, I knew there was more; I just did not know how much, I am not positive I honestly wanted to know. I had to let this settle in for a bit. Sullen darkness was beginning to fill my heart for him; I just could not let it continue. I would contact Chuck but I needed a bit of space and

time from what I just read, what I felt within, and what I knew. We were both still too young to entertain any thoughts of finality.

I know I was reading more into Chuck's health situation than what he had written, however, that was not the most puzzling part. He mentioned that a few weeks previously someone was looking for me. Chuck said this person was checking in backdoors and locked windows which meant he was searching for me but was trying to be very secretive. Chuck said he came about it third hand but verified it to be true. He never got the man's name nor had he ever seen him. He did not know exactly what it was all about but he knew, as he had taught me, in a situation like this a person needs to be very wary of the intentions. Whatever the pursuer was saying was the farthest thing from the truth.

For the moment I gave it an inquisitive bit of a fret, thought of what could this be all about, and then this concern was taken over with my anxiety for Chuck. Later this new information would become just one more part of the puzzle.

There were a few more personal emails. One of the emails came from a woman in Florida whom I had befriended upon my arrival in the panhandle area upon leaving Reno. At the time I was looking for a complete change. I guessed going from the arid mountains to the humid and wet Florida coastline was as different a location I could find in the continental U.S. The dog never liked it.

I lived in Florida for only a few years continuing my trade in the construction business. Becoming a contractor in Florida was much tougher than almost anywhere else in the country. The reason for this difficulty had to do primarily with the hurricanes and other local disasters such as politicians. But I persisted. I obtained a general contractor's license and opened my own small construction office.

I planned to stay small, leaving myself open to fewer and fewer situations. In the end, this did not work out because the economy became so good and business was booming. There was no way for me

or any other decent contractor to stay small and with all this very high end, high profile, and high-profit business in front of me, I certainly was not going to walk away from such a lucrative opportunity.

The pattern, in the end, was about the same as Nevada. I became reasonably successful. I built many custom homes, all over thirty-five hundred square feet, which many were on a golf course or open water. I made a good income and a good future retirement. After a few years my old friend and nemesis, wanderlust, found me weak and wanting. This desire to travel was also brought on by the same uneasiness of something lost within me. I knew it was time to go.

I had a loyal crew and office staff all deserving of much more than I was going to be able to give them in the future. But I just no longer cared to have such responsibilities of running and growing a company. I knew at the time my leaving would allow them to open their own business, a fact that would give them the opportunity to achieve much more than I was willing to allow. In short, I had lost interest. I knew there was a voice calling to me which I alone could hear. My life and work had to be done elsewhere.

Now that I have arrived in my home town there seemed to be something more. Not only was there this pull of the old but also now someone out there was looking for me. At least for the time being that is what it appeared to be. I do not know who it could be or why. Yet I had been warned in Chuck's email and the call from my friend in Florida a couple of days prior, there is someone out there feeling they need to find me, but why?

Additionally, no one had ever come along to neither ease the emptiness of my life without Becky nor explain the circumstances of her accident. Trying to pull all of this together - Becky's death, someone following me - and this darkness surrounding my youth was beginning to weigh very heavy upon me.

I reviewed the remainder of my e-mails. Nothing truly all that important: reminders of bills to pay, short notes from past business

acquaintances, and a couple of ads for upgrades. This was the best of the lot. I flipped through them rapidly without any interest. I scanned some headlines of activities around the world which served only to darken my already depressed mood.

"I got to get out of here," I thought to myself.

"Hey Angel, want to go out for a walk?" feeling at this point running into Billy would be a positive.

Angel sat up from her overstuffed pillow with her eyes widened, ears perked, and ever on the alert, her mouth just slightly open, which I had come to learn was her happy look. Angel was ready to go. If nothing else was constant at least Angel's enthusiasm for getting out was always very high.

I had surveyed the trailer and its small problems and determined I would find what I needed at the local hardware store. Picking up and cleaning was always an issue. I was confident Billy would have some of the required items in his little sideline business of necessary parts for people such as me who were just passing through and felt the need to tinker with their unit. I was no different; I was trying to change, but for the moment I was no different. However, I was building a strong dislike for any such repair work.

"Hey Billy, do you mind if I leave my dog here for a bit?" words I yelled out to Billy regretting them as soon as they escaped my mouth.

"Well, no, I guess that will be all right. I do have to leave the gate open for anyone wanting to come in. Will she stay inside or do you think she may want to wander off?" was the reply as if, in a nice way, he was telling me he was not thrilled about the idea of dog sitting.

Ah, a reprieve, I thought. "No, you are right, she will want to wander, and you know how labs are. She will be better off with me. She is used to waiting for me in the truck. It is cool out so there is no worry of her overheating in the cab. Thanks anyway," were my parting

remarks as I began a rapid retreat. I am sure, if she could, Angel was just smiling and happy on the inside.

She would rather go places with me and hang out in the truck rather than stay in the trailer.

"Angel, you want to go for a ride?" She knew what I meant as she began bounding about and heading for the truck. She understands.

As I turned to say good-bye to Billy, I noticed him glaring off across the open field.

"Lose something out there Billy?" I yelled at him as I started my departure and wishing I could get the words back.

"No, just saw a fella out there in the field; never seen him before. That is the Percival farm. I know most of the family and can recognize any of them a half a mile away, but never seen that man before though."

I gazed out to the field and other than some stubs from a soon to be disked field of last year's corn there was nothing.

"Where, I don't see a soul around in that field," was my reply.

"Well, that is the peculiar part. I waved at him, turned around to pick up this mallet hammer someone left laying here. Damn fools always leaving and losing tools. That is why I don't lend them out you know. I always have a hard time getting them back and sometimes not at all.

Learned my lesson with that when I was working at Winnebago. Learned a lot about trailers and people at that place, funny how you can make those kinds of connections. People are odd, huh, Jake?"

"Yes, I guess that is true. "Give it a rest won't you Billy,"

I thought, come up for some air. "So what was so odd about you waving at him?" I knew better but just had to ask.

"The strange part was not me waving but in the fifteen seconds it took me to pick up this hammer and look for some kind of I.D. on it, in that small amount of time, I turned around and he was gone. This is kind of flat country, where could he have gotten off to so quickly?"

"Well, maybe it was just a reflection with the rise of the early morning sun, or maybe it was just someone you have seen many times and just thought you saw him again."

"No, not likely, never seen him before. I would know too because no one that I have seen around here would be wearing a yellow vest. Now why a man would be wearing a yellow vest out in an open field during this time of the year? It is not hunting season. People, they are damn peculiar, just odd."

"I suppose he was wearing a green John Deer hat too."

"So you saw him too?"

Not wanting to get any deeper into a discussion that was already bothering me, I informed Billy it was just a wild and lucky guess, as John Deere is a very popular brand in this area.

With that I offered, "Not to worry Billy, either your friend will be back or you will forget all about him," as I headed for the truck with Angel leading the way.

"Not likely, most peculiar," were the final words I heard as I left him staring at the Percival Farmland with that hammer in his hand, and headed for the truck.

"Move over dog, until you grow thumbs I still have to drive." With that we pulled out of the park and headed back to town which was no more than three minutes away. A short three minutes as the thoughts of what had just transpired rambled about in my mind.

No, it couldn't be the same man I had seen, could it? It is just too odd to believe in. I am sure it was Billy just making up stuff or being confused. But why would he do either? I have learned he likes to talk

and talk, but in my short time of knowing him I did not think he was prone to making up things. Seeing things or maybe something else but certainly not making up things. But that hat and the vest, very strange I thought.

Instead of heading straight into the small town of ten thousand, I decided to make a short drive around the edges of the city to visit some of the old places and note changes made in my small hometown. In some locations it was hard to see where the edges of town ended and farming areas began as they blended in with one another so gently. Angel did not mind, as the wind was in her nose and ears as she hung out the window.

As wandering is not an exact science, the truck, with a sense of its own, meandered more places than I had planned. How I enjoyed driving to nowhere! I smugly had the pleasure of viewing a couple completely different lives in my rearview mirror. Now I could just sit back and observe the countryside roll by. This was as relaxing as anything I had found since the early days with Becky sharing our home in the Sierras.

I sit here, driving in the morning, quiet, alone with my thoughts. My future life is spread before me. I look through the windshield and re-examine all that has passed by me throughout my life. I examined which of those memories were the main contributors that led me at the point I find myself today? I wish I knew, but I just don't. My estranged friend Time is leaving me, moving on, throwing its unsure shadow upon me, which only serves to add weight to the quest I now find myself perusing. How much time is left, will there be enough? Again, I just don't know.

Town blocks with its makeup of a hodge-podge collection of homes gave way to some farmland with fencing and some cattle. Minutes gave way and the miles with them. When this town was being laid out and formed back in the late 1800s, there was not much of a building code. Yet, like so many other small towns of like size and era,

this is what gives it much of its charm. I became lost in just being lost. Maybe I will not come back.

I glanced over at Angel. She had settled down and was lying balled up next to the door. Had she settled down that quickly? A glance at the clock and it became apparent. My short excursion had turned into more than an hour and I was a good fifteen miles away from my original destination.

"Sorry Angel, did not realize the time and distance. Let's head for that hardware store and maybe some lunch. Want to go by and see Mandy again? I am sure she would like to see you and I don't mind talking with her."

With that, I turned south at the next crossroad and headed back to town. Just about every road in this area is laid out north, south, east, west and it is almost impossible to get lost. Plus having run these roads from my earliest days of driving I always knew where I was even if I was not fully conscious of it at the time.

A quick trip at the hardware store, picked up a few widgets for this project and an odd collection of small things for some other trailer needs, and I was done. What I wanted was someone to do the work for me. I even went so far as to ask the helpful hardware man in his red vest. "Excuse me sir, have you lived here a long time?"

"Probably so, over twenty years I guess. My name is Michael. My son graduated high school here, we moved to this town when he was in the fifth grade. After that, so many friends, a nice area, no crime, just decided to call it home. We may end up retiring in a few years and moving to Florida."

Damn, I thought, is that a law? Does everyone retire in Florida?

"Well, I have a travel trailer outside of town and need some small repairs. Do you know of anyone around who might want to make a few bucks and can do such work?"

"I might know a couple of fellas and one gal, actually. Let me think on it a bit. But you know who would be great at it would be Billy, the caretaker of the place. He worked at Winnebago for a good long time. Said he can fix anything when it comes to a trailer or motor home. He doesn't like motor homes much, or the people who drive them. Surprised he hasn't told you about it. The man loves to talk so be careful in starting up a conversation with him. He will lay out his whole life story for you if you give him that inch. But why don't you come back by here in a bit and I will see who I can scare up. Why don't you give me your phone number that way I can just call you if I have something? You do have a cell phone don't you? Traveling as you must, I would think you do have a phone. A person cannot run into anyone anymore without one."

Again, take a breath. I do not recall people in this town being so blabby.

I took a shot and jumped in, "Well thank you, I will just stop back in a while to see if you have come up with anything. On second thought I think I will just ask Billy. Thanks, going to get some lunch."

Having already paid I turned and got out of there while helpful hardware was taking a pause to get some oxygen.

"Well, you could try the diner just across the street and down a few stores. Good food and a good looking young lady working there. Always good to have someone pretty around."

With a wave and one more "thank you," I cleared the door and shut it behind me. The temporary heavy truck traffic going up and down the main street, blowing the dust from the miles left behind from previous trucks, was a welcome relief to the hardware store.

I had decided to leave Angel in the truck as I was not sure what stores I would be going in and out of, and I did not think I would be gone that long. Honestly, I had already been gone longer than I had anticipated so she was very happy to see me coming down the street.

Nose against the windshield, tail wagging, she considered me a welcome sight.

"Hi girl, anyone been bothering you? Going to see Mandy, I hear she is working today. Going to take the back way though, don't think you will mind, new smells for you. Here have a treat."

With that, I gave her a small dog biscuit I usually have stashed away when I know we will be in the truck. Leash firmly attached, out the cab she bounded and we were off to see Angel's new best friend and find something to eat.

The walk down the open alley between the stores and parking lots was a trip down memory lane. This was an easy bit of elation when you had been away as long as I. One could see all of those past times, events, the good and the embarrassing moments, along with the sounds and laughter. For me, the air was thick, heavy laden with memories and experiences of a life long ago forgotten, lost in the annals of decades slipping by. The few people whom I passed by could not know what I knew, would never sense these things I felt.

Occasionally on some ear numbing quiet nights, I would find myself sitting in the tranquil evening air alongside the trailer on my trips from a place I had left to a new and exciting destination yet to be determined. I thought of past events. I also questioned these reminiscences of my memory. Just how could any of this lead me to a new purpose? My visit to this hometown takes on a grand sense of importance to extinguish these questions.

Stains upon my impressionable youth so long ago never ease; never go away through the decades of my rapidly depleting life. How did these things affect me, how could my life had been different, would it have been better? So many good questions. Tragically no honest way to have any true answers. No help to bring all of this to a conclusion, to relieve the constant drumbeat of degradation, which is my only lifelong companion.

Angel sensed none of this. The walk was short and precise and we were soon walking up to the back patio the owners, somewhere over the past decades, had added.

The sun was now high, late morning in mid-week, plus it being rather cool still not many people wanting to be outside to eat. This was just perfect, as this meant no problem for Angel being there.

"Hey pretty lady; can a dog and I get some food here if we both promise to be good?" I yelled at Mandy as she walked through the door.

With a smile she brought forth a comfortable feeling. Maybe it was for Angel. "How are you two, I was thinking of you and worried I might not see you again. I have wanted to give you something," she was saying as she approached me looking dead set into my eyes.

Upon arriving within a foot of me she reached into her apron, bent over, and tied a red bandana around Angel's neck.

"I hope you don't mind, she looks so good with it don't you think?" was her observation.

With a somewhat crestfallen heart, as I was hoping for something much different, I gathered up my where-with-all and acknowledged it did give her a different look although I did not like it much. Call it personal turf kind of mindset. But I tried to get through it.

"It does give her a different look, may interfere with her collar and leash but we will see if she likes it."

With a twinkle in her eye she gazed my way, "Bet you thought I had something for you, didn't you?"

"Honestly I was not sure, but I have learned never to anticipate anything from a woman as I am usually wrong."

With an effort to remove some of the uneasy air I just created Mandy said, "Well as I told you before do not give up on your dreams, you never know."

After that bit of verbal exchange Angel and I found our way to one of the eight empty tables arranged on the outdoor patio.

"Say, Mandy, do you expect a big crowd this afternoon or will we be dining by ourselves?"

"It will probably be a bit slow especially out here. A bit cool for our normal crowds. Are you waiting for some old friend, some old love interest, or will it be just us three again?"

"Unless you told someone I am in town I will probably be alone with Angel. She probably wants you to hang around but I have told her of your desire to work instead."

"Well maybe I can come out and hang around a bit more if we do not get busy, I do not want Angel to be disappointed. Until then let me bring you some coffee and maybe something extra for her."

With that, Mandy turned and walked back into the restaurant. Watching her walk away, this seemed to be a good thing, an escape if you are a normal man who has been alone on the road a great deal.

Angel was her normal self, all excited at first but quickly settling down and resting quietly next to me with the leash tied tightly to my chair. She is an obedient dog but she is still a dog.

On our walk to the restaurant I had stopped to pick up their local paper. As you might expect in a town this size not a lot of worldly, groundbreaking news would be found. No, it is all local items with local advertisers, which is about as personal as you can do advertising. The main contents were area sports, news items, sales, meetings, activities at the one high school, local awards, deaths, and weddings. I scanned the entire paper looking for nothing in particular but reading it as if I had never left. Maybe I was looking for names I would

recognize, maybe some answers to questions that brought me here in the first place. Not really sure.

"Excuse me, Jake, you seem to be lost again," came the interruption from Mandy. This was truly a welcome intrusion on my reading and thought process. This also made Angel perk up.

"I have a small snack for Angel, coffee for you, and a question."

"Well, you have given the dog her treat, me my coffee, so I am ready for your question."

"A man came in just a moment ago, came directly to this back window, looked out at you, and asked me if your name was Jake. I have no idea who he is or what he wants other than he wants to come and see if it is you. I told him I did not know and it would be better if I came out and asked you first. He looks harmless enough, a bit spooky and dressed a bit creepy, but harmless. What do you want me to tell him?"

I turned and looked over my right shoulder. I could not see through the dark tinted windows so I had no idea.

"Did he give a name or say what he wanted?" was my question with the immediate thought of the phone calls warning me someone was looking for me.

"No, he did not give me a name; I did not ask, but said he knew you if your name was Jake."

Now I am sitting in small-town mid-America, home town, early springtime, midday. This did not feel like a basis for a novel of a crazed killer coming to town.

"Sure, tell him my name is Jake and show him out. After all I have Angel to protect me."

"I am not so sure she would lick warm honey off toast, but I will tell him."

"Thanks for the heads up Mandy, you are a treasure." And she was correct in her assessment of Angel."

With a smile, and as she was leaving, she said, "You should stop by and discover all of it." This was a statement to certainly take some of the edge off the unplanned meeting.

Out of the door came this man with a queried look on his face. It was a familiar face, a wonderful face, from long ago. Mandy was right, he was dressed a bit askew, but then he should; it was Carl, a long-ago friend of mine from the days we shared high school, sports, and cheap wine. Yes a bit older, as we all are, but still the stout young man that I remembered. He looked great. Joy instantly filled every fiber of my body.

Carl, back in our teen years and early twenties, was the best, the most naturally gifted athlete I had ever seen or been around. He was strong, always in shape. While not a work out nut, Carl was always trying things to improve himself physically. Fantastic football player and one of the most natural basketball players and playmakers, before that term came into use, that ever came out of our state. I always thought I was so lucky to be playing with him and not against him.

We were friends; we each had closer best buddies, but we were friends none the less. Back then we shared many stories and times with one another along with a good amount of cheap wine. That is the only kind there was then, cheap. Drunk, and then sick, from a night of drinking together with other friends, was not common but still it was not foreign to our group of close friends.

One of the last conversations I had with Carl before he left this town, before I chose to move on, was what he and I were going to do. We felt it simply did not matter if no one else understood. We both had a love for the West and the mountains. A couple of movies popular then showed the harsh, but exciting, life of the early pioneering mountain men of the mid-eighteen hundreds. We would live off what was provided at altitudes which most people could not

comprehend, come down to the valley with the small towns to be found there only when we had the need, enjoy life as it was intended to be enjoyed. Total freedom was what we were anticipating. I never did make it. I was to find out Carl did.

"I'll be damn if it isn't Carl!" I yelled.

"I will have to let the Lord decided on you being damned, but it is I, you lost mountain partner," came the voice that had not changed one octave in all those years along with his unmistakable grin.

With that we unashamedly grabbed one another hugged, laughed, slapped each other's back, and damn near cried. How often I had wondered where he had gone. In the few conversations I had with old friends no one seemed to know. Carl always had his own way. A person might not always understand his ways, or agreed with his ways, but there was never been a truer friend or a more caring person. Carl was the kind of person who was always locked into you and your situation. He always knew as if he had just gone through the same situation. Carl was unique.

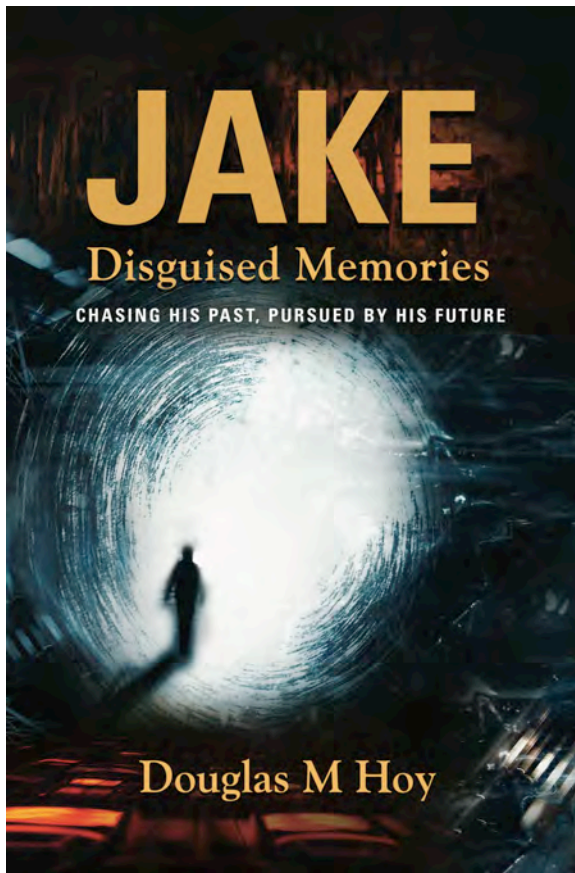
Time passed quickly filled first with reminiscing, which is the normal pattern, then moving on to cover the years on both our parts, explaining the ups and downs. It was not a poor little old me conversation. No, it was a celebration of life, what has happened, focusing on mainly the happy and good things, and life's experiences. It was hours of pure joy and relaxation.

Mandy came out many times to check on us, to bring us food, to pet the dog, and try her best to make sure we had what we needed. For that moment Carl and I had all we needed; good friend, good conversation, the basis and reward for being lifelong friends. During the time, only one other small group chose to sit outside. They stayed for a while. I do not think our laughter drove them off. I am not sure what Angel thought of it as she just stayed nearby and kept a respectful distance from Carl. At the moment I did not think much of it.

Good feelings, warm memories, were recalled and recanted with an old and very much missed friend. Maybe this is why I was summoned back to my home town by some force I could not see, only feel, and certainly did not understand. It just seemed trite and too simple, just had to be more.

Carl abruptly cast an eye skyward and, as if on cue, a cloud, the only white puffy band of moisture in a beautiful, early spring, blue sky drifted in front of the sun. He focused and stared at the cloud, then shut his eyes and soon it moved away, clearing the sun. Then he stared at me with a cold steel glare, damn near looking right through me. In our brief encounter on this day I had not seen such a strange, foreboding, look on his now transforming face. I stared at him with a mixture of fear and concern.

Heart deadening tones came from his voice, sounds you would expect to hear escaping from the bowels of the most hidden location of a darkened soul, "You are caught in a trap. You can conquer this fear which will lead you on a path to which you seek. But be clear, in your mind you know who you are searching for and understand the price you possibly may have to pay!"



Being pushed to the edge, pursuing yet being pursued, insecure of purpose while testing his resolve; no future for the faint of heart. Jake may have truly believed he understood the paths which he had traveled, but one can deceive himself. What he once believed, trusted, the very path he now found himself following, was it right, was it real?

Jake, Disguised Memories

By Douglas Hoy

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