Chronicles of The Mexican Horse Thief II

By : WayneBisset

Coming back from the war zone in Angola the Mexican Horse Thief finds a cunning enemy waiting for him. This is about how he fought that enemy - alcoholism

Published on
Booksie

booksie.com/WayneBisset

Copyright © WayneBisset, 2015
Publish your writing on Booksie.com.

Chronicles of The Mexican Horse Thief II

Chronicles of a Mexican Horse Thief

II

Renaissance

From Pubs to Coffee Shops

It would seem that I had not yet seen enough. I had changed location and circumstances, but had ended up in a much darker, more dangerous place.

I was financially independent, living with Charmaine and her two kids rent-free. Her ex-husband was paying for the house. My reputation in the area was well-established and I could always find someone willing to go drinking with me. Two of the local pubs became my secondary places of residence. One I kept as a quiet place to relax, and I used the other to perpetuate the image I had created of myself over the last 15 years.

The quiet place was called Harvesters; it had been around for a long time. Many years back when I was still married there was an incident that had led to my arrest in this pub. My wife and I had had one of our inevitable fights and, in a foul mood, I went drinking and looking for a fight. My language and disposition caused the owner of the pub to attempt to remove me from the premises. This caused a fight and he and his brother who had tried to assist him got badly beaten. Someone phoned the police and an even bigger fight ensued; the first two policemen that arrived were taken care of promptly, but somehow managed to call for backup. Two more police officers arrived to help; the older of the two was very efficient and managed to get a pair of handcuffs on me. After that, it was a one-way battle. They beat my head in with their pistols. Apart from the front sights cutting holes in my head, they hit me so hard that the swelling caused water to collect between my skull and my brain. The doctors at the hospital told my wife they were not very hopeful about my survival. Because of this, when I eventually recovered, no charges were pressed against me. I stayed away from that pub for a good few years! I was about 25 years old.

The other pub was Froggoâ s; over the past few years, Michael and I had established a reputation as two very hard men. We managed to do this so effectively that six years later when we visited the area people were still talking about us. To some of the younger patrons we are still a legend. This is good for that macho ego all males seem to have, even the skinniest of computer nerds.

For the first few months, all I did was enjoy the luxury of flushing toilets, running hot water and decent food. I would take Charmaine to work so I could have the use of her car during the day, go back home and have a

few drinks for breakfast, maybe sleep a bit, and then hit Froggoâ s at about 11 oâ clock. There were always some other chaps drinking, and now and then a couple of pretty women to chat to. Although I had ample resources and actually preferred Whisky, I drank neat vodka, no ice. Because of my reputation not matching my diminutive physical size, every once in a while someone would start a fight with me. This caused trouble with the authorities at times. Damn civilians had been watching too many cowboy movies, and at this stage I had so many crazy friends that most of the time the troublemaker got beaten up without my even laying a finger on him â I never got a chance.

My life of leisure continued in this way for quite some time. The main problem was that I didnâ t really like Charmaine in a romantic way. She noticed that I was looking at other women, and we began to fight about that and my drinking. It all came to a head one day because of the following incident.

I had been in The Harvesters all day. As I arrived home and opened the door, Charmaine punched me in the face. It was a good shot and she managed to split my eyebrow open. I had been hit in the face more times than I cared to remember, and by some very large gentlemen, but this was the first time that my eyebrow had been split. In her hand, she had a letter from Irene, the cute little Greek hippie. I had kept it in my Angolan bag. This letter was all about how Irene was missing me and how her body was aching for mine, etc.etc. as only a 19-year-old teenage girl could write. I had lost contact with Irene, not because I am a good guy and thought it was wrong, but because while I was in Angola she had moved and I was not able to find her.

My reaction to Charmaineâ s attack was to push her into the bedroom and ask her if she liked blood. My eyebrow was bleeding badly. I then proceeded to smear my blood all over her face and neck, shouting at her: â Are you happy, do you like it?â the whole time. Things eventually calmed down, but Charmaine became even more possessive.

Just to make things interesting, her daughter and I were playing these sexual games as well. They started while she was still in college and I had just moved in with her mother. Like a lot of dangerous things it started off quietly enough. I took semi-nude photos of her in provocative poses â for the sake of art, you understand â and she would still climb into bed with me wearing only panties and a T-shirt whenever her mother was not around, sometimes sitting next to me and rubbing my back. Sometimes we would wrestle and pretend to be tickling each other. Occasionally, even when her mom was around, she would climb into the bed and squeeze in between us and her hand or leg would â accidentallyâ lie across my groin. This would produce a predictable result and I would be stuck under the blanket. She would be perfectly aware of this and chat sweetly with her mother all the while. As I have said before, the most dangerous thing I have ever come across is a pretty woman! This was one of the reasons I went to Angola in the first place.

On one memorable occasion, after one of our suggestive photo shoots, she climbed into bed with me and started massaging my back; she was wearing tiny little panties and a thin T-shirt. While rubbing my shoulders, her long blonde hair was hanging around my face. Things got very hectic and she suddenly got up and left the room. She had a quick shower and went out for the rest of the day. I stayed in bed for a while drinking vodka out the bottle then went to the bar to try and get into a fight. I was highly frustrated and feeling guilty and stupid all at once. That night she was her normal self in front of her mother, but from that day on did not climb into bed with me unless her mother was around. Still, her arm or leg would find a strategic place to rest. When we went out, which was mainly to Froggoâ s, as soon as a slow song was playing we would be onto the dance floor and dancing as no man should with his girlfriendâ s daughter. This game started some months before I went to Angola, continued every time I came home on pass, and reached a climax â no pun intended â when Samantha and I ran a bar together.

Charmaine sold her house to her brother Mike. With the proceeds she decided to by a licensed coffee shop and a marmoset. At this stage I had no real interest in anything and said that would be nice. Her plan was that Samantha and I would run the place, which Samantha was very enthusiastic about. I left it to the two women,

which was an incredibly dense thing to do. The coffee shop was duly bought with little or no input from me. It was a small place that served light meals, with a few tables inside and a couple more outside in the walkway. I believe Charmaine bought it solely because of the name; I say this because my ex-wife once bought a car on the sole basis that it had her initials on it. No matter how many people told her that that particular car was a piece of rubbish, she insisted. The car spent two years rusting in my back garden.

Never mind, back to this shop. The name was The Bohemian Café. I hated every minute of working at that place; I had no life apart from that bloody shop. I could not go away to the bush; Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays I had to be there, dealing with the lesser mortals. Mondays were the only days we had off. Charmaine had, intentionally or not, I will never know, totally killed my flamboyant lifestyle.

Apart from that, there were not enough customers to really make any money. Samantha and I were together in that shop from eight in the morning until we closed at around midnight. This led to some interesting situations, with my drinking starting as I woke up and ending when I finally got home to pass out. Some memories are gone and others are vague. My parrots and the marmoset, all of which tended to bite the customers, moved into the shop with us. We also moved house at this stage, into a tiny semi-detached in Malvern.

Intimidation

This was where my life really started falling apart, slowly at first and then escalating at the speed of light. Markâ s cute little song: â We all gonna die, we all gonna die,â nearly came true for me so many times itâ s hard to remember them all.

The first sure indication that things were going wrong was my fight with the management of Burma Lake, the shopping- and restaurant complex where the coffee shop was located.

Jonty, the son of the centreâ s owners, ran the show. His type and mine will never get on: spoilt, unable to accomplish anything without Daddyâ s help, they nevertheless have a superior attitude that really pushes my buttons. His cousin owned the security company that looked after the complex: Stallion Security.

The final conflict was over the fact that my .357 was always where it belonged, tucked in my pants. He came alone to complain about this; apparently it was bad for the complexâ s image or some such shit. I told him in no uncertain terms that he should push off. He returned a few nights later with two huge guys from Stallion. They attempted to intimidate me into seeing things Jontyâ s way. This approach has never worked with me and I told them to push off too. Jonty, not a stupid man, avoided a fight, which would have involved guns as all of us were armed. My .357 was on my hip and I had a .38 Special under the bar. Even if it had not come to that, he did not want a public scene either.

For the next week different guys from Stallion watched my movements every night when I packed up. They were doing a recce of how to ambush me without any witnesses. I phoned a few of my mates from Executive Outcomes and explained my predicament. It was decided that they would all pop in for a drink at the same time the following day.

It was amusing to watch the reaction of Stallionâ s so-called hard men. They had all bought their muscles at the local Health and Racquet Club, and the bulk they carried was gained by artificial means. They all had cute little semi-automatic pistols of expensive manufacture. My mates, who are truly hard men, and a little psychotic to boot, trickled in. One of the first to arrive was very tall. I have a photo of myself standing under his arm, and although he has not got much bulk, his muscle structure is well-defined. He sat outside and, just for effect, took off his jacket. What got the Stallion boys worried was not his size as much as the massive .44 Magnum strapped to his chest! As more and more truly dangerous-looking men arrived, I noticed that Jonty and his cousin had arrived and were nervously watching my café. Adding to the general effect, one of the other guys, standing just inside the doorway, had taken off his messed-up old army trench coat, underneath which he had two sawn-off, pump-action shotguns suspended from leather thongs over his shoulders. I have only seen that twice before in my life; the other time was on a Nigerian drug dealerâ s bodyguard.

I did not ask the other guys what they had, stashed under their coats and jackets, but I think Jonty and his crew got the idea. Graham was also present, and keen to just demolish the whole complex. We managed to convince him this was not a good idea. The only reason the police were not called is that for Stallion it was a matter of saving what little credit they had left. I love psychology, and this was played 100% right. Sometimes, when I get it wrong, I end up in big trouble, but this time it was beautiful!

The guys stayed until we closed and escorted Samantha and me to the car, as Stallion was still watching from a safe distance. The guys said loudly that they would be keeping an eye on us for a while. Loud enough for the message to be heard and passed on to Jonty and his cousin. They added that although we may not see them, they would see us. For a couple of months after that one or two would pop in for a drink, and the result was that all of Stallionâ s staff were extremely polite to me from then on. Civilians!

The Demise of the Coffee Shop

After a couple of months of working like this, Samantha and I became like a married couple, except that she would sleep in her room when we got home and I would sleep with her mother. We were together at least 18 hours a day. Often people, clients is what I suppose youâ d call them, would refer to Samantha as my girlfriend; when Charmaine was not around neither of us did or said anything to dispel this misconception.

Then one night something happened that changed things drastically.

I have suffered from alcoholic blackouts since I was about 15 years old. Some of you may believe that this â blackoutâ concept is just used as an excuse to hide from the situation, so let me explain what any good alcoholic knows: these things are absolutely terrible. The more â mischiefâ you get up to, the more traumatic the blackout is. For instance, every day you have to go and inspect your car for damage or blood, because the memory loss is so complete that even something as shocking as knocking someone over while driving is wiped out. Think of the consequences of living like this: if youâ re a bit of a troublemaker who tends to get up to no good even when you still *can* remember, you tend to believe anything you get blamed for.

Believe me, people that understand this condition often use it shamelessly to their own advantage. There are many books available on what is known as co-dependent relationships, and alcoholics form these out of

necessity. Even in my marriage I was often dependent on my wife to tell me how Iâ d acted the night before; at that stage it was so bad I needed a report *every morning*! The power the person you have to rely on wields over you is enormous. Perhaps that is the reason that the sober partner puts up with so much shit. In all my varied adventures I have never come across anything as frightening as the totally dependent position this condition can put me in.

What I *can* remember is: Samantha and I were sick of â all work and no playâ . We had seen nothing but that bloody café for weeks. It had been a quiet day and the early evening was dead. As usual, Charmaine, with the view that her 8-hour job was far more tiring than our 16-hour one, had gone home to sleep. Sam and I were pretty pissed off with her because all she did when she *was* around was act like the lady of the manor and boss us around. This had the effect of drawing us together on yet another level, as if our relationship was not complicated enough already.

The result was, we decided to go AWOL and on a jol of our own. I had already spent the day drinking and now we went pub crawling. The last clear memory I have is of sitting in some place drinking shooters, which were not called that in those days, but the effect was the same. The next hazy picture I have is of Samantha driving the car and crying. She did not have a licence or even really know how to drive, so I remember thinking: â This is bad.â

The next day I was in trouble. Both women had been crying and did not want to talk about it.

From then on until we got rid of the café, Samantha and I were merely civil to one another, nothing more. The only information I ever got from Charmaine about that particular incident is that I had said some terrible things to Samantha that night. All this did not change Charmaineâ s attitude to Samantha and my working conditions; we were still together all day, every day. Similar to any married couple that have a fallout, whatever it was seemed to have been forgotten to a large degree.

Well, like all good things, all bad thing have to end too, only I did not know at the time that the bad things can be replaced with even worse things. Considering that Samantha and I were never paid, except once, during all this time, and that the egotistical boss was irritating us as much as the long hours were, we jointly stated that we had had enough. This caused some serious problems for Charmaine, as money was still owed to the previous owner of the establishment. As I had no interest in such matters and was paranoid about signing my name to anything, I am not sure what the hell actually happened.

I saw the results though. Charmaineâ s plan of just returning the café backfired. She had to go to court where she declared bankruptcy and was blacklisted. Too busy enjoying my newfound freedom, I avoided the whole issue. Samantha found a proper job and moved out, this too was a relief. Charmaine continued working and I purchased a baby Anaconda. We had time to go to the bush and I caught a few other snakes and started a scorpion collection. In order to feed the snakes I started a rat-breeding program outside next to the maidâ s quarters. As we had no maid, this became my sanctuary. I always like to have a quiet place of my own and the house was so small, if the TV was on there was no peace anywhere.

Somehow during one of my blackout periods I had won a bet, for God knows what, and a large fish tank came into my possession. As my money was now almost gone I collected rocks and sand in the bush and started my first attempt at keeping fish. I moved into Samanthaâ s old room, my excuse being that Charmaineâ s snoring kept me awake.

During the next couple of years my life really fell apart. It got to points so low I almost didnâ t make it, but somehow I would crawl out of the hole, only to begin digging a new one.

The Demon Drink

The hole that I was in at this time was not a pretty one for anybody involved, me included. My morning would start with me reaching for the little bit of vodka I always saved for the occasion. I would have to hold the bottle in both hands in order not to knock my teeth out, I was shaking so badly.

The first sip caused me to gag violently but I would manage to keep it down for a whole two minutes. I would then have to rush to the bathroom to vomit it up. As I ate almost nothing during this time, raw alcohol was all that came out at first. After dry heaving for a while, bitter, green, bile would be next. On occasion, and with increasing frequency, blood would follow the bile. This unpleasant ritual completed, I would stumble, or literally crawl, back to my bed and lie there until the shaking calmed down. As soon as I was able I would take another small sip of vodka. This usually caused more gagging and violent shaking of my whole body. Nine times out of ten it stayed down. A few more small sips and I would feel much better and could then start my day.

This may sound like a terrible ordeal, but it was a thousand times worse if I had drunk my entire supply the night before. All the gross carryings-on in the bathroom would be the same, but if I did not get those second or third sips I would shake and be in absolute agony until I could get my hands on some alcohol. At this stage of the disease you are damned if you do and damned if you donâ t. I now joke about the fact that hell holds no fear for me as I have already been there and survived. Death at this stage would have been a liberation. I did not know it, but on trying to get sober I would see even worse!

If no alcohol was available I would have to wait until 10 oâ clock before I could get some at the bottle store two blocks from my house. I would have to walk, as there was no way Charmaine could or would leave her car with me, and I donâ t blame her. On what I at this time considered to be a normal day, having got through all that and feeling strong, my next move would be to the hotel bar. Malvern is divided by a long main road called Jules Street. The top end gets better the further one lives from the road. We lived three blocks up, making it an all right spot. The hotel was over the road, down two blocks and next to the railway line. Need I say more? I spent countless hours in this dive.

We had a cat from the house behind us that used to come and hassle the marmoset, and this bugged me for some time. One day a couple of my friends and I were sitting in the lounge, drinking. The marmoset was on the patio, just outside the French doors. We had a small courtyard with a white wall around it; you could see the path the cat always took by the mud smears on that wall and on the back wall where it jumped back into its own house. I must have been thinking about this subconsciously, because that day, with no real thought, I stood up, swaying slightly as we had been drinking all day, and shouted at the cat on the patio. I had also taken out my .357. The cat took its normal route home and as it jumped the second wall, I fired one shot. This caused my drunken mates to jump, the women to complain and cry and my girlfriend to throw a fit.

Once everything had settled down, and we could continue drinking like â normal, civilised human *beansâ* , my mates all started saying I had missed. To this I had only one comment: â One shot, one kill.â

A few days, or perhaps a week later, the gardener from the catâ s house was on the garage roof, just above and behind the second wallâ s cat marks, with a hosepipe and a yard broom. The smell was very bad. Charmaine asked him what was up there and he replied, â *Nee Missus, â n dooie kat.â* *(No Madam, a*

dead cat.) What can I say ... that .357 was accurate and threw a mean punch.

At some level I knew I was in terrible trouble. With Christianity being an anathema to me, I tried to get help elsewhere. On one occasion I went to the â witch-doctorâ who had a practice next door to the hotel. He threw the bones and decided I had terrible things in my life and some evil spirit that would kill me if I did not do something soon. No shit! Donâ t know about the celestial spirit but vodka is a spirit too. Then he said that one of the causes of my problems was women, and gave me some *muti* to help fix my sad state of affairs. All these African *mutiâ s* seem to have one thing in common: one has to drink the vile stuff and then vomit it all up. This is supposed to vomit the sickness out of oneâ s body.

What the hell, I followed the instructions. Being no stranger to the vomiting thing, I just had to fit it in somewhere in my normal vomiting schedule. I found an open spot in the early evening and did this for around a week. Considering that I am where I am now, perhaps it helped!

Yet another incident pushed me further down the path to hell. Coming back from the hotel early one evening I was jumped by three youths. It was rather well done. One small chap asked me for a light; as I gave him the light, one of his cronies, appearing from nowhere, ran up and kicked my knee in. As I went down another little shit appeared and assisted brother number one to grab my firearm. Next thing I was looking down the barrel of my own .357. They backed off and I hobbled home.

Some small bone in my knee was not doing so well. I got Charmaine to take me to the local police station and caused such a fuss there that I was escorted none too gently back to my car. A lot of racist remarks were made and this being a New South Africa police station, in a shit part of town, all but one of the policemen happened to be black. My Guardian Angel was earning danger pay as usual.

For the next week I hobbled all the way up and down Jules Street looking for my gun. On one memorable occasion I burst into a *shebeen* with my spare gun (which was licensed in Charmaineâ s name) and the Anaconda, causing chaos. I think that the black culture has a similar view of mad people to the Red Indians, that they are touched by God and one should therefore leave them alone. That is the only reasonable explanation I can think of for why I survived that particular mission.

Eventually I went onto an out-patient program with SANCA. Some law enforcement types *suggested* this because of my continual brushes with the law. For the uninitiated, let me explain. In order to enforce discipline on a condition which they believe is caused by lack of discipline in alcoholics, my learned brethren have invented something they call â Antabusâ . This delightful substance causes anyone who is on it to have major repercussions should they be *undisciplined* enough to consume alcohol. As you will see, I have some first-hand experience with the effects, which are not pretty.

The program that I was put on worked something like this: I was to report every morning to the offices of SANCA. I had signed, under duress I might add, that I willingly would do this. If I failed to comply I would be locked up in a government-run rehabilitation centre. The admin people explained how everything worked, mainly to Charmaine, as most people assume that if you are a drunkard you are also a moron. The rest of the program was to attend a minimum of X number (I forget how many, thus proving I *am* a moron) of group therapy sessions. These were run by a trained social worker â with a degree in psychology, no doubt.

Charmaine was invited to join one or two of these sessions, the ones designed for couples: one substance abuser and one long-suffering spouse. An observation I made over the next six or seven years is that the partner who is the substance abuser is by default the one solely responsible for all the problems in the relationship. Funny enough, it is a rule of thumb that once the abuser gets his head straightened out and finds out what he or she is married to*, the substance abuser* usually files for divorce. I did not like group therapy, but it was a minor inconvenience compared to the consequences suffered by my early morning visits.

The first morning was purely a recce mission. I had a few ideas about trying to dodge taking what I thought would be a pill. I assured the mean-looking nurse that I had not had a drink during the past 12 hours and she told me that if I was lying I would get very sick and perhaps even die once I had taken the Antabus. I was shaking like a leaf, and as nervous as the proverbial cat on a hot tin roof, from the lack of alcohol, and thought that it should be pretty obvious that I had not had my fix. To my dismay she dissolved the pill in a tiny cup of water and watched like a hawk that it all went down. I had seen a friend of a friend once go into convulsions in a pub, and was told that he was on this shit and had taken a drink. This happened when I was still at school, but was so dramatic that I remembered it for years; shit, I still remember it.

I had no choice but to go home and try not to climb the walls. You cannot sleep, and if you do manage to drift off, even for a moment, the nightmares that accompany withdrawal wake you up quickly enough. Self-preservation is a strong thing so I managed to stop myself taking a drink, but my survival instinct was telling me I would die if I did not. Only someone who has gone through withdrawal will understand the agony and fear that accompanies this experience.

After a horrific night, feeling worse than half-dead, I had a plan. While Charmaine was not looking I filled a 2-litre coke bottle with hot water and dissolved as much salt as I could in it. I then hid it in the car. Arriving at SANCA I parked as close to the building as possible and took the lift up to see the nurse. After drinking the Antabus I made a bee-line for my car where I drank the entire two litres of now-lukewarm salt solution. This had the desired effect and, standing next to my car in the middle of a busy town, I proceeded to vomit violently. Somewhat of an expert on this vomiting thing, what.

Shaking badly and feeling 3/4 dead I drove home, stopping to buy a supply of booze close to my house. Not being as stupid as people would like to believe, I did not just down the neat vodka; I tentatively took a small sip of cider that I had purchased for this experiment. The first, tiny sip yielded no immediate results, so I greedily took a much bigger one. Uh oh. I went into spasms that were completely different to the alcoholic fits that I was used to. My heartbeat increased to such an extent that I thought it would burst.My face turned red and swelled alarmingly. Oh yes, I did a bit more of the vomiting thing as well! Lying on the bathroom floor, racked by pain, I thought: â Iâ m not going to make this jol.â

Once it had all subsided to a tolerable level I took another sip of Hunterâ s and waited for the shockwave. Much to my delight it did not come, just the normal gagging of my first drink. To play it safe I drank two more of the ciders and by noon was feeling perky enough to hit the neat vodka and even go out to the hotel. This lasted throughout my SANCA experience, causing much confusion with Charmaine and the staff at SANCA, as they said it was impossible for me to be on Antabus and still be drunk. What can I say, where there is a will there is a way; it also helps to have a very tough body.

Once free of the Antabus, of course I went on a mission of note. The days were deadly boring. I went through the morning ritual, vomiting etc., then drank till I passed out, woke up and drank some more. I no longer bothered to go to the hotel any more; the walk took too much drinking time.

There were a few things that happened to change this: the first being that Charmaine got into trouble and needed my help. In this strange relationship, no matter how we fought, if either of us was in trouble, all fighting stopped and we would join forces to save each other. This time it was because of the money owing for the disastrous café. Charmaine caught me in a lucid (well, as lucid as I got in those days) moment and explained that they were going to come and take all her stuff away. Even drunk, I sensed there was bad trouble and cut my alcohol intake to what I could survive on.

When I was on a level, Charmaine explained the situation. She had a piece of paper from the Sheriffâ s Department saying they would arrive shortly and confiscate all her belongings in the house. Alcoholics have an amazing ability to get out of trouble, and I came up with a plan. First I had to clean myself up, as bathing

or brushing my teeth was not very important to me when on a binge. I shaved, put on a suit and tie and sallied forth to the Sheriffs offices, armed with the piece of paper. There, I put on an act that might not have won an Oscar, but it accomplished what I needed: storming in, demanding to know what the hell was going on, and cursing Charmaine from here to eternity. Once I had everybodyâ s attention, I explained that the silly bitch, who *used* to be my girlfriend, had run away, leaving me with all the shit. The furniture and household goods were all mine and by no means would I allow them to take anything. This worked marvellously and instead of them taking â myâ stuff, all I got was sympathy. South African males, particularly the Afrikaans-speaking variety, are generally very sexist! This called for a renewed bout of serious drinking, with Charmaine buying!

Then, one day something happened that made me want to try and stop drinking altogether. My fish tank was sideways. After some deliberation I realised that it was *me* that was sideways! I tried to get up but my muscles had lost comms with what was left of my brain. The only things that really worked were my eyes. Now, even having seen some bad shit in my life, this scared me a lot. Some time later the rest of my body started to work again. I spent the rest of the day thinking about what a pathetic life this was.

The day after that, Charmaine took me to the hospital, as I was so sick I could not even drink. The doctor tested for this and that and asked if I had been drinking; my balance was wonky and my reactions almost non-existent. Both Charmaine and her mother told the man that for the past two and a half days I had just lain on the couch and had not been left alone for even a minute, so could not have had a drink. He went ahead and tested my blood alcohol anyway. On receiving the results he said it was impossible, I had so much alcohol in me I should be comatose. This, after not drinking for more than two days. He went on to say that I would probably never recover my reflexes and that my liver and kidneys were damaged, possibly beyond repair.

I was taken home and slept for another day or two. Then my body started screaming for alcohol; my level had dropped below my acceptance rate. The withdrawal symptoms were worse than the alcoholic fits and the Antabus put together. My body shook; I sweated but was freezing cold. My whole body ached, every cell screamed for a drink. I itched everywhere and could not lie still. I was so thirsty, but vomited up even plain water. I tried to sleep but when I did nod off the nightmares were so horrible I woke up. Eventually I was scared to fall asleep. I ranted and raved, shouting abuse at the world, I punched the walls and hit my head against the floor. I suffered from hallucinations but also saw demons I KNOW were real.

This lasted for about three days and, still shaking from weakness, I managed to get some bland rice to stay down. Then I could drink watered-down orange juice, and Charmaine gave me vitamins. Charmaine contacted an organisation that helps rejects like me and I tried to follow the advice I received. For a while all I could manage was to stay up for a few hours at a time. My once-strong body was now a wasted wreck and I had to sleep most of the day. My sleep was tortured by horrific dreams, but I used the advice so freely given to me, and it got better. I had a few different odd-jobs, sometimes sober, sometimes drunk. The most interesting ones were for the Military. What can I say? The jobs were spread over the next couple of years and lasted from 48 hours to five weeks.

Battle School (Part 1)

The first job came out of the local newspaper. The Commandos needed a few good men to get their ratings up in the changing South African Army. The pay per day was more than my combat pay *per month* as a conscript

years before. The ad had a phone number and I duly called and set up an appointment, at Wits Rifles.

It was very strange to walk into a South African army camp again after so many years. The interview was conducted by a Major Carlton-Barber, a *soutpiel,* which was a bonus. He wanted to know why after all these years I thought I was capable of representing his unit. In for a penny, in for a pound. I told him about my mercenary activities. Like most conscript or commando soldiers, he had no particular liking for mercenaries, but considering the men he had, my experience with weapons was needed badly. There was an Ops coming up and they did not have even one 81 mm mortar man. They did have a lieutenant to do the map and co-ordinate work, but that was it. I was in. With an invitation to come and meet the rest of the unit the following Wednesday evening, I left my details with the civilian secretary.

Having found my old uniform and spiffed it up a bit, I arrived on time. The meeting was at the NCOâ s (non-commissioned officers) mess. The SADF has strict rules, copied from the British, about rank structure and who socialises with whom. Now, I may have attained rank in other armies, but here I was just a troop. In order to enter the mess one has to stand in the doorway, slam oneâ s boot into the ground and shout, â Permission to enter the mess, Sâ major!â This done, one is granted permission by the highest ranking NCO and one may approach the bar and greet the highest ranking officer. What a lot of crap.

Commissioned officers are allowed in NCO messes but not vice versa, unless the NCOs get special permission. As a troop to be allowed in a NCO mess is a privilege only allowed in certain units. So there I was, a *sleg* troop, minding my own business ... but Carlton-Barber had not kept our interview confidential. As I was on the wagon I ordered a coke, which caused a general commentary, none of it very pleasant, about a tough mercenary drinking cold drink. I really did not give a damn, as most of these â soldiersâ had never been operational in their lives, and could kiss my arse. Later in the evening one sergeant major got particularly nasty and I thought a fight would break out; he was big, but pretty drunk. One of the officers ordered him to leave it alone. We got instructions on the upcoming Ops and an invitation to come for a drink every Wednesday night.

The deployment day arrived and we set off for South Africaâ s Army Battle School at Lohatla. I had heard of this place, none of what Iâ d head was agreeable. It rated up there with other hard-core training grounds like Letaba Ranch and Die Brug. So far, the drill was a lot more relaxed than I remembered from the old days, so what the hell. I sat with the Mortar Lieutenant and got an update of how the Commando units worked.

We were to be a Motorised Unit using Armoured Troop Carriers, but the mortar crew would get Ratels that were specially modified for the 81mm Mortar. Cool ... I had never seen a Ratel up close, other than the one at the old Portuguese Fort in Luanda, and the idea of driving around instead of humping all that kit sounded good to me.

It was a long bus ride as Lohatla is in the far Northern Cape, an inhospitable semi-desert part of the country. Snakes, spiders, scorpions and ostrich abounded. As per usual, we stopped at the HQ to draw kit, weapons, vehicles and clothes. Moreover, as per usual the store-men, with thousands of socks on the shelves behind them, hassle to give out even one pair. I had to explain where my original issue items were and why what I had was so worn out. Considering my original issue was about 13 years back, no wonder my socks had holes in them. However, having been through this a few times before, I managed to get what I needed and two pairs of brand new boots as well. That done, we went to collect our vehicles.

Overall I was not too impressed with these â weekendâ soldiers, but one man stood out. Without saying a word or doing anything in particular, he just had a different feel to him. Later on I went to greet him, and that is how I met the best all-round weapons expert I have ever known. When we shot our rifles in, he proved his marksmanship. Each man gets ten bullets and fires them at a designated target in order to check the weapon and sights. Attieâ s target had one ragged hole in the targetâ s chin area. The sergeant told him how

useless he was. Attie is extremely polite, and said that all the shots were in the same hole. This was in Afrikaans, to which the Sergeant replied: â Kak!â To prove his point and restore his honour, Attie suggested that after each shot a new target be placed behind the first one. This organised, he took 10 quick shots. True as shit, every target had a hole in it, with a slightly jagged hole in the front one.

Since this was Battle School, the emphasis was on schooling. We attended a lot of lectures and weapons training. The regular army guys were in their late teens and early twenties, so Attie and I stood out as old men at the age of thirty-something. It showed when a Colonel gave a sand model lesson and asked what would we do in such and such a situation â we both gave the same basic plan but added that we would take the enemyâ s armoured vehicles out with RPG-7s. The Colonel was reasonably impressed with the plan but said, â Kak, boet!â to the RPG suggestion.

He informed us that they now had an FT5, and got one of his men to fetch the thing. It looked like a piece of PVC toilet piping. Off we went to the big firing range to check this thing out. Attie and I had never seen one before so the Colonel explained how the sights worked and how to load the thing. It was a two-man weapon so I loaded it up and slapped Attie on the shoulder to let him know it was ready. Whoosh! And bang, there went an old tank in the middle of the range. Everyone, including Attie, was suitably impressed.

The trip was a good one overall, and as I was still on the wagon, there were no unpleasant incidents. My skill with the Mortar pipe was duly noted and I was told I was welcome to visit the NCO mess in future.

The Mess(y) Days

I earned some money from the Commando jol and continued to look for normal employment, eventually getting a sales job with a printing company. I am the worst candidate for a salesmanâ s job, but always seem to end up in one. Dealing with people all day makes me nervous. When I get nervous, I drink. My drinking is bad for everybodyâ s health.

I started going to Wits Rifles every Wednesday night, getting a little bit more arrogant and aggressive each time. One memorable night the NCOâ s mess closed before I had finished drinking. No problem; I went into the Officersâ Mess. The Commanding Officer of Wits Rifles told his Second- in-Command to kick me out. Now, the CO was a Lt. Colonel, a similar rank to what the other army had given me, so considering that, and being drunk, I felt shit for his rank. To piss me off further he was a â desk jockeyâ soldier, so in no uncertain terms I told him what I thought of him and his rank. As not one of his officers even tried to defend him, I pointed out his men obviously felt the same way but just didnâ t have the balls to say so.

His 2IC was a clever man and said they would serve me as long as I sat quietly in a corner. All I actually wanted was to drink, so this suited me fine. After that night I was not welcome in the camp anymore. During this time, I also managed to get kicked out of a M.O.T.H. club for behaviour not befitting a soldier and foul language. The WWII vets have better manners than modern soldiers.

I also left my sales job and just drank full time ... again.

Battle School (Part 11)

Much to my surprise, the secretary of Wits Rifles phoned to ask me to take part in a Grading Ops at Lohatla. The army was now the new SANDF, run mainly by the old enemy. They did not like the Commando Units at all: a majority white Afrikaner organisation within their structure. In an attempt to disband them with a minimum of fuss, the powers-that-be decided that each unit would be evaluated. If they did not come up to scratch they would cease to exist. Now, I may have been a drunken lout, but my assessment of the Commanding Officer and his lackeys was accurate.

Carlton-Barber was the exception, and he had a deal for me. I would go with them for their evaluation but stay in the shadows; no parades, roll call and all the other stuff I thought was a load of crap anyway. Only when they needed the weapons fired would I come into play, and since the high ranks stay as far away from any hard work or physical danger as they can, the chance that we would bump into one another was zero. One thing: the bus would have to pick me up outside the camp. No problem.

We got to Lohatla without incident. This time we were doing Mechanised Infantry, which just meant everyone got Ratels. The same lieutenant that did the map work was there. He and I got on okay; only thing was, there was no one else to fire the weapons. We recruited some of the new army (SANDF) guys to help. As we did not have time to train them before the evaluation, we would have to do it with only one 81 mm Mortar, where there were supposed to be four. Fortunately, we found a coloured lieutenant who could operate the sights.

A mortar crew consists of three people: one to set and aim the sights, a second to help adjust the weapon, check the ammo is correct and drop the bomb into the tube, and a third who passes the bomb to the second and helps carry and clean the pipe bore between salvos.

We took our four Ratels to the magazine and loaded them all with ammo, not mentioning to the storeman that we were using only one pipe. I love things that go bang ... as soon as we were out in the bush and out of sight, I loaded most of the bombs into â myâ Ratel. We were literally sitting on piles of bombs.

We had a few days to practice and to get to know each other, and stayed away from the rest of the unit, as mortarists usually do. A small degree of error at the pipe will cause the bomb to be dropped very far out, a few kilometres away, so our practice area is huge and people tend to stay away. The coloured lieutenant spoke like a posh Brit, very well educated and all that, what. Not a bad chap, all of 22 years old.

Part of the evaluation was to give supporting fire in a night attack. The mortars first â softenâ the target and then the infantry â cleans upâ . One pipe will put illumination flares up so the infantry guys can see the target. We have to be very accurate, firstly with the HE (High Explosive) bombs, as we donâ t want friendly troops to walk into our fire, and then with the illumination so we light up the enemy positions without showing up our own troops.

The day before the attack we cheated a little bit and sneaked into the target area to get exact distances. Lohatlaâ s rocks have a high iron content, making compasses almost useless, but all is fair in love and war, right? The only problem was that we only had one pipe, and to keep our rate of fire correct, and the illumination in the air was impossible. Kak! With enough vodka anything is possible. What we did was to put ten HE into the target, turn the elevation screw six times up, put four illumination flares in the air, turn the screw 6 times down and ten HE into the target again, and so on. This would not have worked if the pipe was on the ground, as each bomb would have caused it to sink deeper. Well, we had a vehicle of 18 tons and it was not moving. To prevent fouling, we had one troop standing on top of the vehicle to push an outsized ramrod with steel wool down the tube in between flying bombs. If he got the timing wrong he would have lost his head. I once saw a troop lose his fingers by being too slow to move his hand from the opening of a small 60 mm Mortar; the tailfins of the bomb caught him and sliced his fingers clean off.

This was going very well but then we had a hiccup. An HE bomb got stuck in the tube. No problem, there is a specialised tool which we call an *uittrekker* to pull stuck bombs out of the tube. You drop it down the tube, it attaches itself to the bomb, and is then pulled up by means of a couple of ropes. The bomb is of course considered extremely dangerous and has to be carried, very carefully, to a safe location far away from the troops.

Well, we dropped the *uittrekker* down the pipe, but just before the bomb was out, the ropes snapped. The new South African army does not look after its equipment. The top of the *uittrekker* was just visible, so with an asbestos glove, I grabbed the thing, hauled it out and threw it over the side of the Ratel. Pretty drunk and hyped up, I wanted to throw more bombs at the target. This is where the colouredlieutenant lapsed into his past. He yelled: â *Bisset jou ma se poes, wat doen jy?â* Gone was the posh accent; the Cape Flats took its place instead. Too rude to translate.

Blowing things up is like a drug; once you start you donâ t want to stop, you just want MORE. Countless bombs left that pipe that night and I donâ t think it should ever have been used again. When we finally finished the mock attack I had thrown about 375 kg worth of bombs and was exhausted, but high as a kite. The CO of battle school found out that we had only one tube and came to shake my hand, and his head, at the same time. He thinks all English speaking people are not well in the head, and me in particular. Never mind.

Attie was around and acting even more berserk than I was. We did a daytime attack together, and he used my Ratel as a command post and to store ammunition he had obtained illegally. I now had a bit more space. The new troops were so bad that the *ou manne* refused to do fire and movement with them, so the attack was planned around this problem. In a real war, they would all have died, but this was an indication of our new South Africa and its army.

Attie would set up in his designated position and fire all his ammo before some of the troops had even worked out they were supposed to be firing, then he would run to the nearest LMG gunner, *moer* him out of the way and fire all *his* ammo. Not done yet, he would charge the next, or the nearest weapon he liked, a 60 mm mortar or RPG, and repeat the process. Once he had exhausted all the ammo, he would charge to the Ratel for his stash and frantically try and fire as much of that as possible before the cease-fire order came through. A proper soldier, the moment it did, he stopped; a man after my own heart. He too was congratulated by the schoolâ s CO.

Commandos and Cops, or, Of Soldiers & Policemen Part 2

You would know by now that soldiers and policemen donâ t seem to get along â ¦ not in any country that I have visited. This soldier likes them even less: civilians with a uniform and a gun. For me, boredom is a terrible thing, and sometimes one has to compromise to find some excitement. Therefore, when I heard that Sandton Command assisted in drug raids, I thought I would check it out, gave all the right people for references, and I was in. The next mission was coming up in a couple of weeks. I got the details along with the customary offer to join the lads at the bar once a week. Knowing myself quite well, I stayed away until the night of the ops.

We met at the Commando HQ early in the evening, were issued with kit which, for the first time in my life, contained a bullet-proof vest as well. Slight argument about that, as I felt that ancient thing would hamper my freedom of movement. This was not the thin, reasonably lightweight jacket you see on the movies; it was a

bulky, extremely heavy affair, consisting of two thick Bakelite plates sown in, back and front. That, together with a Battle Jacket holding four 30-round magazines, came to half my body weight. The steel helmet has never been and will never be an option for me. The other guys convinced me the jacket was a good plan as it stopped a blade slipping in, in the crowded clubs and brothels we would be raiding. The helmet? No stories of bricks and bottles thrown from high buildings could convince me to put that piece of shit on. As for it stopping a bullet, *kak!* I have taken one to a civilian shooting range and fired a handgun through the thing; okay, it was a .357, but still.

We were then briefed on what our duties would be. This was interesting. Apparently, when the cops raided a building, the Nigerians in the building opposite would take pot shots at them. As we had no radio contact with either the police or each other, it was understood that when shots were fired we were to locate the target and fire back. I have often heard SADF soldiers complain about the accuracy of the R4 rifle, and how the R1 is more accurate, whadda whadda, whadda. A case of a bad worker blaming his tools? Funnily enough, the R4 rifle was the weapon of choice for some of the snipers in Bosnia. The weight, length and recoil of the R1 are all a pain in the arse. That, of course, is only my opinion, and when one goes into a dangerous situation, one should be comfortable and confident with oneâ s equipment.

The other duty I had would be to â look afterâ the female policewomen. I thought this was not only a sexist approach, but also that some of those policewomen sure didnâ t look like they needed *me* to look after them. Shit, I think in a stand up brawl, they would have kicked my butt.

We then went to meet up with the police team at a station well outside our targeted area. There were 300-odd of them, and a lot of trucks, cars and bikes. The most interesting amongst them was a chap that arrived on a Harley. He had a van Dyke beard and long hair, and was dressed like an American biker advert. Under his leather vest was a huge stainless steel .44 magnum. I later learned that his police issue pistol was tucked in the back of his pants. This character was apparently the main undercover drug inspector. There were uniformed cops and plain-clothes cops that still looked like cops, but he looked like a pimp or major dealer, and had the attitude to go with it. After hanging around for a few hours, we finally boarded our respective vehicles and set off for the Brow. This was done with huge fanfare, patrol cars clearing the way, lights flashing. They blocked all intersecting roads so our passage was as swift as possible, the idea being to take the building by surprise and have it cordoned off as quickly as possible, nobody in or out.

The targeted building was a mixed-up affair with bars, clubs and whorehouses on the top and bottom couple of floors, with resident flats in between. As the main force charged the building, we army chaps scanned the opposite building for signs of trouble. If a curtain twitched, it was immediately covered by a couple of R4s. Much to my disappointment, nothing happened. I would have loved to shoot myself a drug dealer â ¦ just for fun, you understand.

Once the cops were in, our duty changed, and we accompanied the female officers into the clubs. There was total chaos: noise, shouting and some hitting. The cops seemed to know their business and drugs of all types were being flushed out. One of the army Bedfords became a prisoner vehicle, while another was used to pack confiscated drugs. Pretty soon both were full, and we had just started. From the club we moved to the whorehouse. Here was another shock. Most of the prostitutes were under 18 years old, blonde and Afrikaans. Since the mission was to find drugs, the cops ignored them and raided the office. More prisoners and many drugs; I then learned about â Black Dollars.â

Apparently, there was this scam where a person bought plain black paper and it was supposed to somehow turn into dollars. Doesnâ t sound very clever to me, but the fact is, boxes of black paper cut to the size of banknotes were being taken out along with the containers of drugs. While this was going on inside the building some cops were outside watching both the prisoners and the windows. I had come out to help with window-watching, and, to my amazement, saw hundreds of little black pieces of paper floating down. Then

some packets of white powder joined in. One cop did some quick floor- and window-counting, and got on the radio, telling his colleges where it was coming from. They were by now raiding the residential part of the building.

Standing around watching windows was becoming boring and I decided that at the next building I would rather join the â kicking down doors brigade.â Once the building was well and truly raided, and the prisoners and drugs dropped off at Hillbrow police station, we repeated the procedure on the other side of town. Again, highly disappointed that no-one shot at us, I joined up with the Harley man and a policewoman to kick in some doors. This was fun. The guys downstairs would estimate the window and floor and give us the info. We got to kick in the doors. Sometimes they got it wrong and all we would find was some terrified old-age pensioner that was stuck living in this hell-hole, having bought the flat when things were better in this country. Their retirement money was all spent, and their flats had no resale value now that the Nigerians had taken over the buildings. Hillbrow was called the southern capital of Nigeria and the Congo. More often than not, though, we would find some character throwing evidence out the window. He would be warned to cease immediately, lie on the floor, etc. etc.

One memorable scene was when a chap that was ditching packets of cocaine refused to listen. Mr Harley told him to stop it, twice, and when the chap did not listen, Mr Harley casually reached into the back of his pants, pulled out his pistol, and shot the perpetrator through the knee. Pandemonium! Cops bursting in from everywhere, radios blaring: â Shots fired, shots fired!â in various languages, and loads of yelling, some of it from the guy that had just been shot. Some of the cops were yelling at Mr Harley, but he had a real attitude, although I think maybe he violated some civil code or something, considering the drug dealer had no weapons visible. Personally, I think he should have shot the guy through the head; save a fortune of taxpayersâ money on hospital fees and the plane ticket to get him back to his own country, till the next time he gets caught and the whole thing starts again. Apparently, that would be considered a gross infraction of human rights, or some shit. Donâ t you love â democracyâ ?

We did two more buildings, the same *modus oparandi,* and by the time the sun was coming up, I was beginning to think, â Iâ m getting too old for this shit.â The flak jacket felt like it weighed a ton; it was biting into my breastbone which has a small bump on it from an old injury, and I needed a drink. As we were wrapping things up some cops thought it would be hilarious to let off a few â big bangâ crackers to wake everyone up. They had an arsenal of note pointing at them within milliseconds; some people were not amused. After that I went home and had a few shots of vodka and slept on and off for the rest of the day.

Since I was not part of Sandton Command, it was a hassle to get paid and I only went on those jols when I got really bored.

Second Attempt at being a Civilian and Responsible Adult

Considering, my mental state, my age, and my experience, or rather lack of it, this was easier said than done. Again the time-frame is all mixed up, and the following events may not be in chronological order. Some of the time I was sober and some of the time not, but at this stage it did not matter if I had been drinking or not, my brain was short-circuiting. My options were severely limited. I had a choice of attempting to join the printing game or doing something to do with animals or guns, the security industry for instance.

Animal Jobs

My attempt at rejoining the printing business was an unmitigated disaster. I fell into the salesman slot by chance many years back but was never any good at it, and hated it to boot. Logic and my only civilian work record dictated that this was my best option of finding employment. I hooked a post in relatively short order, but could not hack it. The time freedom of a salesman and the number of lovely bars in and around Johannesburg took care of that. I was back to hanging around at home and at the local pubs in no time flat, with a small amount of operating capital.

In one of the shopping centres there was a bar and a pet shop that kept snakes, so I used to go drinking and then hang out with the owner of the pet shop. One thing led to another and I did odd jobs for him. Having a rat breeding program already set up for feeding my own snakes, I sold surplus stock to the pet shop. It was a good deal: collect the money, walk a few metres, and spend it on neat vodka in the bar. Hamsters were more profitable so I invested a couple of Rand in a pair of those, astute business man that I am. Hamsters are no bloody good as snake food though, as they have two anal glands that stink so badly snakes wonâ t go near them. People buy these smelly things for their kids! They bred well and I had more money for smokes and vodka.

The owner also had a stall at Bruma Flea Market on the weekends, where he made a small fortune selling goldfish in plastic bowls. At one time he was going away for a month or so and needed someone to set up and manage the stall for him. We made a deal, and that made a little money for me. I would pick up the stock, tables and necessary equipment at his shop on Saturday mornings, set it up at the flea market and spend the day selling fish. Actually, that is not quite true; my long-suffering girlfriend would sell the fish. I would be rude to people, look mean, and drink vodka-coffee the whole day. We had a few snakes at the stall too, and a big draw-card was my Anaconda. People would crowd the table just to get a look at this animal up close. Now, my Anaconda and I have similar personalities, and do not like crowds or too much attention, so again I was doing something I hated, just to make money, and very little at that. The weekendâ s business saw to it that I had enough for vodka and smokes for the following week, and alcohol had such a hold on me that I was content with that.

After that I found myself selling tropical fish. A pair of real characters had just gotten into this business and needed someone on the road. My instinct told me that there was something wrong with the situation but I ignored it, thinking I was just making an excuse to not work. I learned a lot about these small animals and the cruelty of importing such delicate things from far away paradises. The tropical fish need to be kept at a constant temperature, depending on the species, but roughly 28 degrees C. They are captured in the tropics and put in plastic bags; these bags are placed in polystyrene boxes in an attempt to keep them warm. Then they are packed onto aeroplanes and flown, usually to Europe, where they get distributed around the world. This means they are in those packets for days on end. Fish are very sensitive to their environment and living in their own waste kills a lot of them. When they finally reach their destination, nearly half will have died. The survivors are placed in holding tanks. This means removing them from the packet that is now colder than 28 degrees C, into unpolluted warm water. This may sound ideal, but the shock of all these changes often kills them. In order to lessen the shock, one has to slowly drip clean water into the packet to reduce the severity of the water difference; but still, more than 40% will die. This is not true of all the species, as some are tougher than

Created from Booksie.com

Generated: 2015-03-31 17:17:34