

It Seemed Like A Good Idea At The Time: Excerpts
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Chapter 1: My only deer hunting lesson

"There's a deer in that field, and it's a buck!" my father replied shakily as he chambered a round in his scopeless World War I German Mauser. I don't believe he had ever fired this weapon before. He had just acquired it a few months earlier from a man down on his luck.

To my and everyone else's amazement, across the road, standing in a fenced field about 100 feet away from a farmhouse was a forked horn mule deer buck. My dad, nearly delirious with buck fever now, dashed across the road. He ran until he came to the fence separating him from his trophy. Resting his rifle on one of the fence posts he took aim at the deer standing 50 or so yards away.

As I watched my father bend down to line the deer up in his sights, I heard honking from the cars that passed by and the obscenities screamed by their respective drivers. My father was, of course, undaunted by this minor interruption and continued on with the task of bagging this deer. My dad aimed, and in spite of the protests now being raised from his own car, fired.

The blast from his rifle shattered the relative quiet of this fairly busy road. The deer, it seems, was oblivious to the fact that he had become a hunter's target rather than just a roadside attraction and family pet. He stood broadside and simply stared in apparent bewilderment at my father and the chaos he was creating. As the bullet whizzed by above him, he barely acknowledged its presence. His left ear twitched slightly but, other than that, he did not move.

Chapter 2: I buy a skunk and get an education:

As a young child, I was especially attracted to the small advertisements in the back of the magazines selling seahorses, skunks, ferrets and the like. The incubators that come with six quail eggs have always intrigued me.

If the truth be known, I succumbed twice and ordered from these ads. The first time I ordered a pair of seahorses. You know the ads: "Get a pair of sea-horses, including a pregnant male and a seahorse aquarium for only \$19.95" A pregnant male seahorse was more than I could resist, so I sent in my \$29.95 (\$10 for shipping and handling). You have probably always wondered what kind of idiots keep these ads appearing for years and years. Well, now you know.

A few weeks later I got my seahorses. They came complete with an "aquarium" about the size and shape of a brandy snifter and a package of salt for making seawater. My seahorses existed in their tiny habitat for about three days and then departed to the big brandy snifter in the sky, seahorse heaven.

I can't really say that I was heartbroken at their departure. Seahorses aren't particularly exciting pets. They move very slowly, if at all. They seem to remain motionless most of the time, not unlike seahorse statues. In fact, they could have been dead several days before I even noticed something was amiss.

Chapter 3: Can you tan a squirrel hide?

Humbug road, out of Yreka, once led to a mining camp named Humbug. A few miners discovered gold in a nearby creek during the rush but it played out quickly. Even so, a good sized mining camp sprang up quickly. As hordes of would be miners arrived and found no gold they quickly said to themselves, "Humbug! I'm going

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back to Happy Camp where at least they have good tobacco" and the name stuck. The town eventually died as the gold played out completely.

There is actually a very interesting legend associated with the area about the lost mine of Humbug Creek. In the 1850's a miner from Humbug was headed to Yreka to see a doctor and stopped to rest along the way. There he saw a quartz outcropping that looked very promising. Deciding he did not need a doctor as much as he thought, he went back to his cabin to get his pick and shovel. The site did indeed live up to his expectations and he brought in sacks of gold worth over seven thousand dollars in 1850.

The miner then made the rounds visiting his family and telling them about his new found fortune and explaining there was much more to come. He explained, the best he could, where the mine was and that he had covered it with brush. Well, as luck would have it, he really did need a doctor and he died before he could dig out any more gold or show anyone else where the mine was located. Many people have since searched for the lost Humbug Creek Mine but have not been successful.

During this particular day squirrel season was open and I was a legal hunter. I had just taken and passed a hunter safety course and was in possession of that all important hunter safety certificate and a valid hunting license. My weapon of choice was my father's Marlin semi-automatic .22 caliber rifle.

After several hours of speeding along the gravel roads in the hills at probably 65 miles an hour, my father, more than likely looking for quartz outcroppings along Humbug creek, caught a glimpse of something gray. He slammed on the brakes and I flew into the dash. Seatbelt use was optional in those days. Next, he backed up to the spot where he thought he had seen something.

Chapter 4: A new rifle and a sore shoulder

That Christmas afternoon, like most others before it, we headed to my paternal grandparents' house. At that time they lived in Hollister California, a small city 27 miles north east of Salinas. Despite what some clothing company has convinced the world, Hollister is not in Southern California, nor is it near the ocean and I am not sure it has ever had a surf shop.

What Hollister does have, however, is a branch of the San Andreas Fault Line and earthquakes. Hollister lost buildings in both the quakes of 1906 and 1989, and it shakes rattles and rolls with regularity because of smaller quakes. There are places where the fault crosses the road where you can see cracks that must be repaired regularly.

In addition to earthquake enthusiasts, Hollister is well known among the motorcycle community. In fact Hollister, rather than being known for surfing, is known as the birthplace of the American Biker. This all started in 1947 during the Gypsy tour on the 4th of July. Nearly four thousand bikers converged on the small town of only four thousand five hundred residents. Many of these bikers were young men just recently returning from the horrors of World War II. Crowded conditions and inadequate facilities exacerbated the problem. Tempers flared and booze flowed. One motorcycle gang known as the Boozefighters lived up to their name and many members were arrested for fighting and racing up and down the street.

The "riot" that ensued during the rally resulted in about sixty arrests and no serious injuries. There were no reports of rape, murder, arson or other destruction of property. However, the idea of out of control bikers appealed to the media and the

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incident quickly became more than it actually was. The 1953 movie, "The Wild One" starring Marlin Brando also helped cement the legend and the biker subculture was born, in Hollister, in 1947.

Chapter 5: What's a federal duck stamp?

Neither of us wore camouflage. I knew this was important but had not yet allocated money for its purchase. Since I had never actually been duck hunting, I could not see the benefit of purchasing something I might never use.

My father, on the other hand, was here just to stop my whining. He was certain, as was I, that he would never do this again. He had no intention of ever purchasing anything for this sport.

While we weren't camouflaged, we were not totally ignorant. We wore the dullest clothing we had. For me that was a dark suede jacket and blue jeans. My father was clad in a dark green Air Force flight jacket and dark gray polyester trousers. My footwear consisted of brown cowboy boots and my father wore a pair of old slip on dress shoes. I don't think he owned any casual shoes.

As we entered the small office building to check in, I began feeling very self conscious. We were surrounded by many hunters adorned in the latest olive and brown hunting attire. Perhaps the other hunters thought we were lost and asking for directions.

I bolstered my self confidence by assuring myself the office attendant and other hunters thought we left our camouflage in the vehicle and would dress later. However, as soon as the attendant asked to see our hunting licenses, the truth became apparent.

"Ok, we need to see your hunting licenses," the game warden said as it was finally our turn to check in.

Suspecting nothing at all was wrong, my father and I did as we were instructed. We dug the licenses out from our wallets and handed them over. As the attendant inspected our licenses he suddenly became very serious.

"Where's your federal duck stamps?" he asked rather gruffly as if we were trying to get away with something.

"What do you mean? Here's our duck stamp right there," my dad, said pointing to the California duck stamp.

"In order to hunt migratory waterfowl you need both a California and a Federal duck stamp," the attendant said, finally realizing he was dealing with neophytes and his tone changed from authoritative to genuine concern.

Chapter 6: Are you cooking a rat?

The San Luis reservoir fills during the winter and in the summer its water feeds farmlands and communities on both California's coast and in its San Joaquin Valley causing its level to drop considerably. This reservoir is the largest off-stream reservoir in the United States and cost over \$300 million to construct. The dam itself is 382 feet high at its highest point and it stretches for 18,600 feet in length. The dam took four years to complete and the entire project, including an electrical generating plant was finally completed in 1969. Unfortunately, six construction workers were killed while constructing the dam.

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In all, the California Aqueduct canal runs over 700 miles, all the way to the Los Angeles area. Henry Miller, who developed so much of the San Joaquin valley and built irrigation canals that are still in use today, would be proud of this system that built upon his ideas.

The huge San Luis Reservoir should be a boater's paradise, but in reality, it is not. The problem is wind and lots of it. The winds in this area come on quickly and strong. When the winds blow in, the resulting swells and whitecaps test the boating skills of even the bravest boat captains. The California Parks Department has installed wind warning lights at highly visible locations along the lake. When the winds reach thirty miles per hour, which they often do, boaters must leave the lake.

What San Luis Reservoir is best known for is not boating, but fishing. It has become an incredible fishery for striped bass. The first stripers were not officially planted in the lake, they found their way in through the California Aqueduct system. San Luis Reservoir and O'Neil forebay, just below its dam, have produced some monster stripers.

A state record striped bass of 67 pounds, 8 ounces was taken from the forebay in 1992 by Hank Ferguson, who lived in nearby Merced. In August 2008, Frank Ualat, from Fresno, caught another huge striper in the forebay. This monster weighed in at 70 pounds, 6 ounces. However, Frank weighed this lunker on scales that were not certified and then went home, chopped up the huge fish and ate it. It seemed like a good idea at the time. But, because the weigh in was not official, Hank, not Frank, is still the record holder.

Chapter 7: What's that smell?

One evening after work, I was headed down to the creek to fish. Mr. Johansen, my landlord and neighbor, caught me along the way and began some small talk.

"Yeah it's hard to believe," he began, "but they found two bodies right over there."

He was pointing to a fence post at the back corner of his property.

"What? When?"

He had piqued my interest.

"In the flood," he said mater-of-factly.

The flood my landlord was referring to occurred in June 1972. The Black Hills above Rapid City and the surrounding area received 10 - 15 inches of water in a six hour period. The resulting runoff overwhelmed Rapid Creek and Canyon Lake at the southwest corner of town.

Straining under the excess water, the dam at Canyon Lake gave way and sent a wall of water running through Rapid City along the creek that I now lived very close to. The flood was deadly and more than two hundred people died. Some of the bodies were never recovered and some of them were recovered in what was now my backyard.

My favorite bait store in Rapid City displayed a huge mounted rainbow trout on its wall. On the plaque below the huge trout it said, "Another victim of the 1972 flood. Found in the front yard of Regie Anderson."

I started looking for another house that next day. Living close to a creek seemed like a good idea at the time, but now I was convinced otherwise.

Chapter 8: Finding paradise

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I pulled off the interstate at the Sturgis exit. In 1979, not much was happening in Sturgis when the bikers were not in town. Even today, not much happens in Sturgis when the most famous seven day bike rally in the United States is not going on.

The rally began in 1936 and began to take off in the 1960's. The Sturgis rally earned a reputation of being rowdy and often lived up to that reputation. In 1976 for example, a group of inebriated bikers poured gallons of gasoline on the highway and lit it on fire. Then, they proceeded to hold races on the burning asphalt. It seemed like a good idea at the time. When the fire trucks arrived to put out the fire, the bikers encouraged the fire fighters by shooting out their tires.

In an attempt to beef up attendance numbers, officials in Sturgis began to issue temporary permits to vendors at the rally in 1979. That year, nine permits were issued. In 2008, six hundred ninety eight vendor permits were issued. Attendance currently nears four hundred thousand bikers annually.

Passing through the sleepy town of Sturgis that fall morning, I took a right on another state highway. We were not on this road long at all until the farm houses became more and more sparse. Dotted along the highway were little stock ponds but there were no ducks to be found on them.

Chapter 9: When caught trespassing, lie

As we were contemplating the lack of ducks in this previously wonderful duck pond, I spied a vehicle coming toward us from the rear of that pond.

"Oh no! What will we do? We're trespassing. That has to be the owner! We're going to end up in jail. Or, they might just shoot us," I said, the adrenaline running through my body.

"Calm down. It's no big deal," my wife consoled, trying to calm me. "And besides, you have a gun don't you. He can't shoot you."

That made sense. As long as I had my shotgun, I was sure he wouldn't shoot me for trespassing. I worried that he could indeed call the sheriff though.

As the beat up white pickup neared the face of the dam it stopped. Out popped a grizzly old man in overalls and a blue flannel shirt that was tucked in on only one side. He grabbed a small rifle as he left the truck.

"He's going to shoot us!" Raymona screamed, now as scared as I was.

As we watched in horror the man picked up his rifle and aimed.

Chapter 10: In the ditch

I started up the mountainous road slowly and as I feared, going up proved to be more difficult than going down. The truck slipped and slid all over the road. My snow tires alone did not provide enough traction to climb this steep ice covered road. Every corner became life threatening and the steeper the hill became the less likely our chances of ever reaching the top. I had chains with me but had elected not to put them on. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

"I'm losing it Mark!" I screamed as the truck began to slide backwards on a corner.

"Go for the ditch!" Mark suggested strongly.

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I tried my best to avoid going over the cliff. I jammed the steering wheel first to the left and then to the right. The truck slid from one edge of the road to the other edge. Somehow I was able to hit and land in the ditch.

"I think I'll put the chains on now," I stupidly remarked.

"I don't think that will help you get out of the ditch," Mark commented.

The ditch my rear left tire was now in was only about one foot below the rest of the road. But try as I like going forward or backward, I could not free that rear tire from the ditch.

The ditch got deeper the further down the hill the road ran. I knew my only hope was to go forward but I could not make the pickup go up the hill. The tires just kept spinning until they seemed they would soon catch fire.

Chapter 11: Who needs a spare tire?

"Hi, I've got a flat tire. Can I use your phone?" I asked meekly

"Don't you have a spare?" a lady in her mid fifties asked, trying like everyone else to point out my stupidity.

"No. I need to call my wife and have her bring me one," I said softly once again looking down at the ground in shame.

"Ok, come on around here," she said sympathetically pointing to the gate near the counter.

"I'll call collect."

I was getting good at that at least.

"Mona," I began as my senses were returning and I was realizing how utterly stupid I really was. "Guess what?...I forgot to get it....I'm sorry.....Yes, I'm in Hereford.....It's about twenty miles from Sturgis..."

I somehow convinced her to come and bring me the spare. I gave her what I thought were very easy to follow instructions. Once she got off the interstate and headed north, there was only one turn she needed to make to get right to Hereford. The problem was, this road was not well marked.

While waiting for my wife to rescue me, I took a well deserved rest in my pickup. I knew it would be a while before she could find me.

After some time, I decided it would be helpful to Raymona for me to meet her on the road at the intersection where she had to make the turn. This road was about one and one half miles from where I was so I decided to walk.

I could see the intersection for most of the time during my walk. When I got about three hundred yards from the other road, I saw her green Pinto go zooming past. She had missed the turn.

Chapter 12: Securing my freedom with a rifle

Of the many towns and cities in Wyoming, three seem to have names that make me think of the strong western heritage of this state. Those three cities are Cody, Cheyenne and Rawlins. Cody was named after Buffalo Bill Cody who was instrumental in its founding. Cheyenne was named after the Native American tribe. Rawlins was founded in 1882 and named after General John A. Rawlins, a decorated general in the Civil War.

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As the local history books recall, General Rawlins was thirsty one day as he supervised workers building the Transcontinental Railroad. Immediately the scouting party went out to find the boss some water. The scouts returned with water from a spring and Rawlins declared it was the best tasting water anywhere. Rawlins also said it would be nice to have a spring named after him, and so it was, and the town of Rawlins began.

There is nothing particularly "western" about the name of Rawlins. Perhaps it simply makes me think of "raw hide" one of my favorite television shows as a child. And, it is surely more western sounding than Casper which makes think of a white puffy headed friendly ghost. Or how about Gillette, which makes me think of razors rather than cowboys. I really wonder what the pioneers were smoking when they choose the names of Atlantic City or Lusk for their communities. I guess it seemed like a good idea at the time.

On this trip, I was still not quite intelligent enough to know that I should travel with at least a little cash. I suppose the main reason was not that I was always broke, which I was, but that anytime I had cash on hand, I spent it: I still do as a matter of fact. We totaled up our cash and had one dollar and thirty seven cents between the two of us. This along with my dad's gas card and a checkbook were all we should need. I should mention that in those days, there was no such thing as an ATM. Or, if there was, I had never seen one in South Dakota.

On this trip to California I decided to show off my latest firearm purchases to my father and had stuffed a loaded Ruger .357 pistol I had recently purchased into the glove box and put my new Ruger 10/22 behind the seat. I kept the pistol loaded for self defense as we sometimes stopped to rest and catch a few winks along freeway rest stops and had often seen very shady characters hanging out there. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Chapter 13: We need a dog

Invariably, I found myself drawn to the place that set me on the course to be the great duck hunter that I am today, Volta wildlife refuge. I returned there many times and despite loud begging, I never did convince my father to return. Nevertheless, I still did not hunt alone; I was able to convince my brother-in-law, Jerry, to hunt with me.

Each time we headed to Volta, I recanted the story of my successful hunt there. I relayed time and time again how I had successfully bagged my first, and only, spoonbill there. I also told him many times about South Dakota and my personal duck hunting paradise and that nothing, I was sure would ever compare to that.

"Just stick with me Jerry," I stated confidently, "and you'll soon know all there is to know about duck hunting."

"Seems pretty easy to me," he replied.

And it was easy, especially the way we hunted, it just wasn't very successful. During the several times we hunted at Volta, we soon developed a routine: We left Salinas at five thirty in the morning, arrived at Volta around seven, checked in with both federal and state duck stamps and arrived at the hunting area around seven forty five. Next, we would drive to the parking lot in area three and walk a few hundred yards to the first set of reeds.

Once settled in at the hunting area, we would unload several boxes of shells at ducks flying several hundred yards above us. As the pain in our shoulders grew too

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intense to continue, we determined food would help ease the pain. Almost without fail, by nine o'clock we were usually eating breakfast at the nearest McDonalds.

After repeating this routine several times we decided it would be much easier and less painful to simply meet for breakfast at nine every Saturday morning and skip the effort and expense of duck hunting. We tried this a few weeks, but it just wasn't the same and that gave us way too much time around the house to work on honey-do lists.

One Saturday morning, eating breakfast at McDonalds with Jerry, I had an idea.

"You know what we need Jerry?" I started, ready to inform him of my brilliant idea.

"What?" Jerry responded halfheartedly, obviously not knowing the magnitude of the brilliant idea I was soon to reveal.

"A dog," I said matter-of-factly.

"I have a dog and so do you," Jerry said with an inquisitive look.

"A hunting dog: One that can retrieve ducks! Then we can hunt anywhere. Then we could actually bring home all the ducks we shoot then." I said revealing my plan with pride.

Chapter 14: Hit by a logging truck

Before arriving in Grangeville we passed the little town of White Bird and the long and steep White Bird Hill portion of Highway 95. Along the highway is the site of the battle of White Bird in the Nez Perce war. The Nez Perce were the tribe that saved the lives of Lewis, Clark and the rest of their band of explorers. This war began in 1877 when the Nez Perce, tired of having one of their major food sources, the camas root, being plowed under and turned into fenced pasture.

The Nez Perce were led by the now famous, Chief Joseph. The battle of White Bird began on June 17, 1877 when about one hundred soldiers and some local volunteers traveled through White Bird Canyon looking for the Nez Perce. Before the soldiers were ready, some of the local volunteers fired on the Nez Perce warriors. Apparently, it seemed like a good idea at the time.

The sixty or so Nez Perce warriors returned fire. By mid morning the soldiers were retreating to Mount Idaho with the Nez Perce giving chase. When the battle ended, thirty two soldiers were killed. The Nez Perce made it through the battle with only three warriors wounded. The Nez Perce also collected many firearms and ammunition left by the retreating soldiers, which enhanced their capability to wage war in the next few months. The Nez Perce war officially ended in September 1877 when Chief Joseph surrendered and uttered those famous words, "I will fight no more forever."

"Mona, look at that!" I yelled pointing to the huge elk rack on the top of a pickup leaving the campground we were about to pull in to.

"Is that an elk?" Raymona asked.

"Sure is. I told you this was a good place," I replied confidently. "I'm sure we'll both get a deer and maybe even an elk."

"What are all the horses for?" Raymona asked, noticing several being loaded into trailers.

"I don't know. But it looks like everybody is leaving. We're going to have this campground all to ourselves."

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I was an experienced hunter. I bagged a Mule Deer doe ten years ago, my first and only. Until two weeks ago I had not yet even seen an elk or a buck deer since moving to Idaho one and a half years earlier.

Chapter 15: My son poaches his first buck

Unexpectedly, the creek bed became very steep and rocky. We came to a spot that would have created several beautiful waterfalls had there been water in the creek as it cascaded down the rocks to the flat area about thirty feet below. That day, instead of beautiful, it was ominous.

I decided to follow the bank along the creek bed instead of the creek itself. It appeared to be less steep and an easier climb down, even with the low growing prickly pear cactus that were very plentiful along the bank. I don't know if my decision was correct or not, but in the end, the result was probably the same.

About half way down the cliff, carrying a rifle and a backpack, I slipped on a rock and began to fall. The first part of my body to hit the cactus was my right palm. The second part was my backside as I ended up sitting firmly on a cactus.

"Ahh! My butt is full of cactus too," I screamed as I immediately jumped up and began picking cactus needles from my hand.

"Didn't you see the cactus before you sat down," Mike said, laughing hysterically despite my pain.

"Well, you're going to have to help me get the spikes out," I pleaded, still in pain as I pulled as many of the needles as I could find out of my skin, knowing I was asking too much of a ten year old boy.

"No way," Mike replied with only a little sympathy.

The rest of the hike to the truck was very painful. Mike's laughter died down slowly and he eventually became contemplative. I surmised he was actually considering the task of pulling cactus needles from my backside.