

Chapter 9

Eventually, the powers that be found me. I don't know how long I had been asleep or how long I had been there, but they found me. "They" ... being the Counselor Quentin, Hooligan Jeff and a man they called "The Pastor". The one they called The Pastor seemed to be the guy who was in control of the entire Church Camp Cult Operations.

I can only imagine how it went down. I suppose somebody back at camp under the Prayer Pine eventually asked just where the hell poor little David Oliver had disappeared to. Perhaps after some intense grilling one of The Hooligans might have given into the scrutiny. And perhaps, they then led them to me. That has been my working theory for all these years.

The Counselor and The Pastor were mumbling stuff like "Oh dear God", "Oh Good heavens" and "David, David are you alright buddy?". Obviously, I was not alright.

The Pastor took a knife out of his pocket, cut the rope and duct tape. He turned to Jeff and said, "Jeffrey, can you get his clothes, please?" The clothes he was referring to were the clothes The Hooligans had stripped off me that were still laying nearby in the dirt of the sides of the gully.

"Yes, sir" said Jeff who snapped to attention, ran a few steps, picked up my clothes, ran them back to me and said, "Here ya go, pal.". Yes, he actually called me "pal". Imagine that.

We made the long walk back to camp, nobody, including myself, mentioned the absence of my glasses. They didn't even know me well enough to realize that they were missing. Nothing was said.

We arrived at camp, walked around the recreation area to a building which I had not previously noticed. It smelled musty like an old bank lobby or a dentist's lobby. We walked through a series of doors into a large office with a semi-circle desk. There were photos of The Pastor and his family, little golf knick-knacks, a large framed

photo of Jesus on one wall while on the other wall was a photo of Albert Einstein sticking his tongue out at the camera.

The Pastor motioned for Jeff and me to sit down in front of his desk. The Counselor moved a chair to the side of his desk and sat down looking at us. "Boy..." began the Pastor. Then he stopped, shook his head slightly and continued, "No...you're not boys anymore, you are young men, aren't you?"

Jeff and I slightly nodded in agreement.

"So..." said The Pastor, "We're going to deal with this like men then right here and now." I don't know what he was thinking but I was starting to feel like I had done something wrong and I was about to get my ass paddled or something like that.

"look guys. I don't know what you've heard about summer camp-the hazing, the initiations and things of that sort. But I'm here to tell you that this sort of thing must stop right now. This isn't a Marine boot camp; this is a church camp...right?" He paused as if trying to let that sink into our skulls.

Jeff nodded. The Pastor raised his eyebrows at me, so I gave an empty nod as well.

"No Jeff..." he began. "We're not going to have this kind of horseplay again, are we?"

"No, sir." Said Hooligan Jeff grinning ear-to-ear.

"And we're not going to have to call your parents, are we? We can take care of this right now like reasonable adults here in my office, correct?"

"Yes, sir," echoed Jeff. Oh brother, he had them fooled.

The Pastor turned to the Counselor and said, "Quentin, do you have anything to add?"

The Counselor thought about that, clasped his hands and said, "I know we all love one another here. And God loves us too. He's going to see us through this crisis just like he led Moses through The

Wasteland." He turned back to The Pastor and said, "Will you lead us in prayer to send us back into the rest of our glorious evening?"

We bowed our heads. The Pastor gave us a short saccharine benediction. Finally, he said, "We're all in this together men. Jeff, David, Quentin and myself. We are all going to shake hands and walk away from here as friends and brothers in Christ."

I put my hand out to shake Jeff's hand thinking that the worst of this ordeal could have been behind me now. He slowly and painfully grabbed my hand, squeezed it until it felt like my bones were going to crush and gave me a weasel-like smirk. I knew if I didn't get the hell out of this camp, The Hooligans were going to kill me for sure.

"OK, then." said The Pastor, "Go in Peace and not in Pieces"

"David, "said Counselor Quentin, "supper time has passed but go on over to the cafeteria anyway. I think there is still some staff there. They'll fix you up with something to eat, partner. Take your time. When you're finished, come meet us down by The Lake for evening vespers."

I walked out of the building across campus to the cafeteria. It must have been about seven in the evening. I couldn't see perfectly without my glasses, but I could see well enough to get around where I needed to go. I had no idea of what I was going to do about having to survive another night in the cabin with the Hooligans. I just knew I had to get some food; I hadn't eaten anything all day.