

Beach Party Days

Beach Party Days: Credits

This book has made use of lyrics from numerous songs from the fifties and later decades. The lyrics were used as background to support the story line and help the reader to get a feel for the music of the times and what young people were listening to on radios, in movies and on record players.

In the vast majority of situations the authors used only portions of the song lyrics to set the tone of events and underscore what was happening in the personal lives of the characters. In a few cases we included the entire lyrics of a song when that added meaning to the story line. In addition there are several passing references to a song title and artist for which none of the lyrics are included. The lyrics used were transcribed by the authors from several sources, including the authors' memory, records and CD's owned by the authors, and from free websites on the internet.

The authors wish to acknowledge and give due credit to the artists, songwriters, and publishers who own the rights to the songs for which we used a portion or all of the lyrics. These credits are found at the back of the book in the Reference Pages. While every effort was made to identify the sources of the song lyrics used, we respectfully invoke a disclaimer if we mistakenly overlooked/misidentified any songwriter or publisher/administrator who owns the rights to the song lyrics. In many cases the songwriters are no longer living, particularly for those songs from the fifties.

It is not this book's authors' intent to benefit financially from the use of these lyrics, but only to help the reader gain a fuller understanding of the event and times depicted.

Beach Party Days: Forward

*The road is long
With many a winding turn
That leads us to who knows where
Who knows when
But I'm strong
Strong enough to carry him
He ain't heavy, he's my brother*

*So on we go
His welfare is of my concern
No burden is he to bear
We'll get there
For I know
He would not encumber me
He ain't heavy, he's my brother...*

From the song by The Hollies – “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother”

This is a story about friendship. Many books have been written about friendship between and among women. But this book is about friendship among four men, a unique friendship that endured the test of time and survived to overcome distances of time and place. This story is written from a decidedly male perspective and at times the text may seem coarse or crude. There are two primary objectives that the authors set out to achieve.

First and foremost we wanted to relate how four men, who by happenstance began a friendship as teenagers, and then because of life’s vagaries went in separate directions, but many years later renewed their friendship with the help of the Internet.

Second we wanted to call attention to the unique period in the history of America that these four men were a product of and greatly influenced by – the period known as the Fifties, specifically the period that bridged the late Fifties and the early Sixties. The Fifties have been characterized by a number of historical observers, and by many who came of age then, as the last period of innocence in America. This period was characterized by popular TV shows such as “I Love Lucy”, “Father Knows Best”, “Leave it to Beaver”, and “The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet”. The Fifties were not all motherhood and apple pie, however; the winds of change were beginning to stir in the latter part of the decade.

The Sixties after the JFK assassination on the other hand were tumultuous, ushered in the “Me” generation, and several “revolutions”, namely in the sphere of race, sex, and feminism. Some would include a new spirit of anti-government sentiment, a deep distrust that manifested itself in the anti-war protests, cynicism, theories of

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government conspiracy, social experimentation, the spread of drug usage, and self-centered behaviors. America was forever changed following the Sixties.

While parents of teenagers in the fifties may have thought that the Rock and Roll and the Rhythm and Blues music of that era was the “Devil’s music”, imagine the consternation of parents with teenagers in the late Sixties, with the drug scene, Haight-Ashbury, Woodstock, and the sexual revolution. With all of the dramatic changes radiating out over the ensuing decades from those tumultuous Sixties, what would those parents of fifties teens, if they were still alive, think of today’s environment and its influence on today’s teenagers?

The four friends in this story were not unaffected by those dramatic changes – perhaps no one of their generation was; and yet the grounding they had from the culture of the Fifties era enabled them to hold on to a sense of romanticism about those years, and to some degree a yearning for the simpler, more sheltered, vibrant and wholesome era that their memories evoke.

Underlying the culture of the Fifties was a reliance on Moral Absolutism, a belief that most behaviors were unambiguously either right or wrong, that absolute good and evil existed in the world, and that certain actions are good or evil, regardless of the context of the act. The decades from the Sixties and beyond led to a gradual erosion of standards based on Moral Absolutism. What ensued was the ascendancy of a culture based on Moral Relativism, the thinking that there are no absolute truths and that behaviors embody varying degrees of right and wrong – that is, all “shades of gray” exist and that there is no one "right" way of doing many things. This yielded catch phrases like, “Do your own thing”, “If it feels good, go for it”, “I’m entitled”, and to some of today’s absurd postures emanating from “political correctness”. Various forms of these opposing world views have been around for a long time, going certainly as far back as the philosophers in ancient Greece, and probably to early biblical times.

The four central characters in this book, and indeed all the persons depicted, may bear some relation to actual persons, but in fact each character is a composite of a number of people, who were either known to the authors or in some measure fictional persons.

Much the same can be said about the episodes and exploits in which the central characters get involved. That is, while some of the exploits may be based on actual happenings, they have been intentionally embellished to make them more interesting to readers of all ages. At least that is our hope. Many of the episodes in this story were universal to teenagers during those times. But we have purposely used fictitious names, so that anyone who might think they recognize any of the characters or their exploits will not feel embarrassed or think we have been disloyal.

The exception is the numerous factoids that appear throughout the book – these are actual historical events that occurred in America and around the globe. We have tried to be true to the actual dates and descriptions in order to provide a perspective around the characters, their attitudes and the social framework of the times – to give readers a feel

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for what it was like. Obviously there were many more such factual, historical events, but we had to limit our selection to those that we felt would best show the tenor of the times and those that would have an influence on future decades.

We hope you will enjoy this story. For those who experienced the Fifties we hope you will find an affinity with this story. For those who were born in later decades, we hope you will gain a perspective on the history of those times and an appreciation for the tenor of that era and how it molded the authors.

Sincerely,
Earle Burnell, Rafe Cerny, James Heinrick, Bo Orechio

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September 22, 2000...

James Heinrich had just read the email chain that he received. He typed out his reply and sent it out to his three old friends...

Subject: Re: Cottage Rental

Date: September 22, 2000

From: James.Heinrich@cableband.com

To: Rafe.Cerny@usa.com, Orecchio.Boaz@usa.com, Earle.Burnell@usa.com

Hi Guys,

I'm really looking forward to getting together with the three of you. It's been six months in the planning since we first started communicating via email and almost that long when we first started talking about trying to get together for a long weekend. I think Nags Head is the perfect place for it, after all some of our best times together were at the beach in Sea Bright after we graduated from QHS almost forty years ago. We were good buddies then and it will be great to have this mini-reunion to catch up after all these years.

*Your Pal,
Hein*

From: Orecchio.Boaz@usa.com

Sent: Friday, September 22, 2000 2:54 PM

To: Earle.Burnell@usa.com, Rafe.Cerny@usa.com, James.Heinrich@cableband.com

Subject: Re: Cottage Rental

Great News on the cottage! Burn, don't give us any crap about the rent we're going to share the cost. Only a month to go; I can hardly wait!

Bo

From: Rafe.Cerny@usa.com

Sent: Friday, September 22, 2000 2:08 PM

To: Earle.Burnell@usa.com, Orecchio.Boaz@usa.com,
James.Heinrich@cableband.com

Subject: Re: Cottage Rental

Burn,

We want to split the cost of the rent; let us know what our share is. I'm looking forward to your Gumbo!

Rafe

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From: Earle.Burnell@usa.com
Sent: Friday, September 22, 2000 1:35 PM
To: Rafe.Cerny@usa.com, Orecchio.Boaz@usa.com, James.Heinrich@cableband.com
Subject: Re: Cottage Rental

Hi Y'all,

We got the cottage on Nags Head for the weekend of October 27-29. We got a very good break on the rent because Carlie's family has rented the same cottage the past 3 summers, so no need to sweat the rent. I'm going to treat y'all to my Louisiana Cajun Gumbo, so come with an appetite.

I'll send directions to Hein separately. Bo, Denise, and Rafe are stopping at our farmhouse and we'll caravan down to Nags Head. I'll bring a cooler full of beer and soda pop.

Burn

Morning, October 27, 2000...

Earle "Burn" Burnell hadn't felt such cheerful expectation in a long time, perhaps not since he and his wife Carlie were about to close on their farmhouse. He was taking the afternoon off and getting ready to leave work at 11:30am. It was a good while ago, when he last saw at least two of the old gang. And it seemed like an eternity the last time all four of them were piling around. His friends mostly called him by his nickname, rather than his given name of Earle, and he liked it that way. Not that he disliked his given name. He had recently become involved in tracing his family tree and discovered that "Earle" means "nobleman". And "Burnell" means "strong as a bear". He especially liked that.

It was more the anticipation than anything else that had him feeling "up". Yeah, he had been in touch with Bo often over the years...usually one or the other would call on New Years Eve. And during the last 8 years, they had gotten together a couple of times, with Bo and Denise coming down from New Jersey, or Earle and Carlie driving from their farm in Virginia to Bo's condo in New Jersey.

But today was different! It was Friday, October 27, 2000 and Bo, Denise and Rafe were already on the road to the Burnells' house. He had seen Rafe but once since the early 1960's. Earle, Bo and Rafe had had a bit of a reunion with others from high school in 1992, when the Quaytown High School Boosters Club had organized a dinner dance to honor athletes from past winning teams. Earle and Carlie had traveled up to New Jersey and stayed with Bo and Denise. God, that was great to see all the football, baseball,

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basketball players, and cheerleaders from those high school days. “It was 1959, when we graduated from QHS”, he mused. “I know a lot of years have come and gone since then, but I’ll be damned, in some respects it really doesn’t seem that long ago. So many memories are as crystal clear as a mountain stream where you can literally pick out the rainbow trout”.

The last time he saw Rafe before that Booster Club affair was a long time ago...August 1961 to be exact. The memories began to float back into his mind. Shit! 1961 seemed like such a long time ago. Yet he could recall a lot of things as clearly as if they had happened only weeks ago.

The world was *such* a different place then. The Korean War had ended in July 1953 and America was at peace until the Vietnam fiasco in the mid-60s. In between those two wars, with energy never before experienced, American industry expanded to meet peacetime needs. Americans began buying goods not previously available, which created corporate expansion and jobs. Growth everywhere! The baby boom that was underway following WWII was overloading suburban school systems. The “white flight” to suburbia was taking its toll on the large cities. That August of 1961 Earle was headed back to Louisiana in his 1956 blue Ford Fairlane and he dropped Rafe off at Milton College in Ohio on his way. “Damn! I loved that 1956 Ford Fairlane Custom!” he exclaimed aloud to himself.

But what made this all the more special was that James was coming up from Charleston and the four of them, along with Denise and Carlie, were renting a cottage on the Outer Banks in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina for a long weekend. It promised to be a great reunion for the four of them; a time to renew their friendships and laugh about their escapades together. Earle wondered what James would look like. He had not seen Hein, which was what they called James, since 1961. “Holy crap!” he thought. “There it was again, almost 40 years had gone by, since they had all been together.”

Well, he had to shake a leg. Bo, Denise and Rafe would be arriving within the hour at the Burnell farm and they would then caravan to Nags Head. James was to meet them there at the cottage that Earle and Carlie had rented through a friend. Carlie loves the beach, but Earle being fair of skin burns too easily. Even so, every year they vacation in the summer at a cottage on Nags Head. It is kind of a tradition in Carlie’s family and something that she and their two kids are all happy to continue.

Earle left his company’s office; his long lanky legs, just slightly bowed, covering the ground to the parking lot quickly, with his long sinewy arms attached to broad shoulders propelling him forward. Earle opened the driver side door on the company pickup truck, stepped on the step rail and easily slid his still trim 6’ 3” frame into the cab. He was maybe about 20 pounds heavier than he was in high school and college, although at one point after his first marriage ended he had put on more weight and had a bit of a beer belly; but after marrying Carlie he got back to working out and lost that excess baggage.

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“Damn, I’m still in pretty good shape for my age!” he thought to himself. Looking in the rear view mirror, he said under his breath, “Your hair is a bit gray and sparse these days, though, ole boy. And thank God for contact lenses”. A smile broke out across his broad face with high well-pronounced cheek bones, nearly perfect nose, strong chin and forehead and his pale blue eyes lit up with the self examination. He picked up the billed Louisiana State College cap from the seat, put it on, started the truck and headed home. He popped in one of the two CDs of late 50’s Rock and Roll music that Rafe had recorded and sent about a month ago. His could sense his excitement rising, as he listened to the sounds of Jerry Lee Lewis, belting out “Breathless”...

*Well, come on Baby, now don't be shy,
This love was meant for you and I.
Wind, Rain, Sleet or Snow,
I'm gonna be wherever you go.
You leave me Breathless!*

Boaz “Bo” Orechio woke early. He always did when he felt anxious or excited. He hit the head, took a leak, brushed his teeth, shaved and took a shower. The hot water cascaded down and temporarily at least eased his racing mind...but not for long. Did he pack everything? He mentally went over a list in his mind, trying to discover anything that he and Denise might have forgotten. “Camera? Got it! Underwear, socks, shirts, other clothes? Yeah, got them! Oh, damn! Almost forgot the beach chairs.” He hurriedly dressed to leave the bathroom, so that Denise could get in and get ready.

As he rushed out of the bathroom, Denise was there waiting to get in, and trying to stifle a big yawn, she said, “Relax, Bo! We still have an hour before Rafe gets here. You are going to have a heart attack if you don’t calm down.”

Bo responded, “I can’t help it. I’ve been looking forward to this weekend for almost six months”. Then, he added, “We’ve been planning this since the spring. In fact we first started talking about this over email almost a year ago. You know that I feel that those days in high school and the years right after are among my greatest memories.”

Denise then went into the bathroom to get ready. Like just about everyone, except his mom, Denise preferred the use of his nickname, “Boaz seems so...what was it? Oh, I guess it’s just that it’s such an old time, biblical name” she said to herself, as she finished brushing her teeth and prepared to take a shower. “Bo sure gets himself worked up,” she thought. “He’s normally a bit high strung, but I haven’t seen him so excited in a long time. Must be something about that Italian blood” she said, amused at the thought. She stepped into the shower and closed the glass door behind her 5’5” trim and still shapely body, with particularly attractive legs that ran from firm thighs down to calves and ankles that most women her age would die for. She put on a shower cap so as not to get her hair wet. It was cut just above the shoulder and she had tinted it last night to maintain the auburn color, which complemented her deep blue eyes. She kept it parted in the center

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and curled with a curling iron and it cascaded down to cover her petite ears. Her face was angular finishing down to a thin but firm jaw. She had a small, dainty nose. When Denise smiled, it was with pearly white teeth through well-formed lips that were neither too thin nor too full.

She was six years younger than Bo and like Bo had been twice previously married and divorced. “Third time around should be the best and final”, she mused. They had been lovers for a number of years before deciding to get engaged; but they had decided to hold off getting married.

Bo went downstairs to the kitchen to have a cup of coffee and once again mentally went over the list of things for the trip. But he couldn't help himself; memories seemed to wander in and out of his mind, making it more difficult than it should have been to concentrate on checking for anything that might have been overlooked.

He stepped into the powder room across from the kitchen and looked at himself in the mirror. “Damn! The years have taken a toll on you, my friend”, he said kindly to the face looking back at him in the mirror. “People that knew my dad say I look a lot like him now; looking at his photo on the stairwell wall, I can agree with that”. He had gained weight since those days forty years ago, mostly in the last 10 years. “What happened to that skinny, 145 pound kid with the dark black wavy hair?” He mused. “At least the eyeglasses are gone, thanks to lasik surgery. Must be the good living”, he smiled back at the mirror. “You've had some ups and downs over the years, but by and large it's been a good ride. It just doesn't quite measure up to those carefree days when the four of us had been the closest of friends. Well, soon Rafe will be here and we'll get on our way.” He took one last look at the well-tanned face in the mirror with the black eyes, bushy gray-black eyebrows, broad nose, gray goatee and buzz cut gray hair that was a concession to the partly bald noggin. “I still tell the women that they don't know what they're missing if they haven't had Italian”, he laughed to himself and went back to the kitchen and his coffee.

He had been communicating via email over the last six months or so with Earle, Rafe and James. Between the four of them they had patched together all sorts of shared experiences from their high school and post high school years. It seemed that each of them was able to recall a few things that the others had forgotten, but for the most part they all remembered the same things about schoolmates, teachers, places and events. They were teenagers on the cusp of attaining manhood and those common experiences melded them together in a friendship that men only rarely achieve. Bo supposed that it was similar in ways to the tight bonds that develop between guys that fight side by side in wars.

“I can still remember the 1958-1959 school year like it was yesterday... the Thanksgiving Day football game against Mason, our arch rivals, the Senior Class trip to Washington, winning the Seacoast Conference in baseball, graduation, the Senior Prom, and fun times together on our trips to Staten Island”, Bo recalled. “Then there were those couple years after QHS. Fun times at the beach during the summers, sharing our college

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experiences through long letters to one another, getting back together on holiday breaks from college, and then that one year when Burn, Rafe and I worked together at the Emerson plant in Woodbridge. Burn and I had left college after that first year. Burn came back to New Jersey from Louisiana, and Rafe took a year off from college in Ohio. We used to car pool together and at lunch time check out the babes that worked in the office at Emerson.”

One of the most welcome items over the past several months was a crossword puzzle that Rafe had designed, complete with a list of clues. Rafe had sent it to the three of them by email. Bo remembered sitting at his kitchen table trying to do the puzzle until it was well past his normal bedtime. It was a large puzzle with over a hundred entries across and over a hundred down. The clues required recalling people, places, and events that the four friends had shared throughout the six years of high school and beyond during which they had been close.

A number of the clues were for memories of their escapades that the four of them had been recalling to one another in emails during the past few months. Others required digging out the QHS Yearbook in order to find the answer. Some of the things in the puzzle were hilarious, like the clue about what had happened to one of them in the back seat of a car the night of the senior prom. Bo and his date were going at it hot and heavy. He had the top of her gown pulled downward, caressing her tits and she had his zipper open with her hand around his cock. The answer to the clue was “sperm”.

“I couldn’t help but laugh my ass off at some of the clues and answers”, he recalled. And he burst out laughing again at the thought.

Once again he remembered the beach chairs, and went out the sliding doors, walked beyond the terrace, to the storage shed in the back yard common area of the condo complex. He opened the shed and pulled out three beach chairs, then went back into the house to the kitchen. Picking up his coffee cup he checked the wall clock again, for what must have been the hundredth time. Still nearly twenty minutes before Rafe is due. He looked around the floor in the hallway between the kitchen and the living room at all the bags and boxes and whatnot that were assembled for the trip.

“Shit!” he said to himself. “I hope the van has room for all of this stuff. It will be impossible trying to decide what to leave behind if we can’t fit it all in. Well, screw it! Denise is right! I’ve got to calm down and stop worrying. Rafe said he rented a seven passenger van, so there should be plenty of room.”

Ten minutes later Denise came out of the bathroom and walked downstairs to the kitchen to get a cup of coffee. “She smells as fresh and sweet as only a woman can after a morning shower”, he thought to himself. Bo put his arms around her and gave her a hug. “You’re right, I need to calm down”, he said. “You are really good for me, you know that?” he asked rhetorically.

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“And don’t you forget it”, Denise said with a big smile, and she kissed him. Then she moved over to the counter and poured herself a cup of coffee.

Just then from the kitchen window they saw the headlights of a van as it drove into a parking spot outside the house. Rafe had arrived a few minutes early.

Rafe Cerny’s alarm rang at 3:30am. Well actually it was 2:45am, since he always kept the time set 15 minutes fast. He had had trouble sleeping during the night. Even though he had wanted to get to bed early, it just didn’t happen. He had made a list and had packed and checked off everything that was on the list, but it just took more time than he had anticipated. Typical, he thought! Whenever he got excited, his planning skills seemed to vanish like a puff of smoke on a windy day.

He was tempted to hit the doze button and take advantage of the 15-minute time differential, but he feared he might sleep through the alarm the next interval. He had to be on the road by 4:30am to make it to Bo’s by 5:30am. “One thing I know about myself”, he thought, “is that I passionately hate being late for anything, especially when I committed to someone.”

So Rafe dragged his ass out of bed, feeling like he hadn’t slept a wink (and in truth, had nodded off intermittently for no more than a couple of hours). He looked over at the other side of the bed, where he still imagined Paula would be asleep. “No time to get into that”, he scolded himself. Paula had no interest in going on the reunion trip to Nags Head. She had gone up to Connecticut to help her sister deal with their mom’s situation. Their mom was getting very forgetful, signs of dementia her doctor said.

Rafe nearly staggered into the bathroom, yawning and attempting to shake the cobwebs from his head, while scratching himself though the bottom of his PJ’s. He turned on the tap, splashed cold water on his face, grabbed a face towel and dried himself. He looked in the vanity mirror and almost winced at the image staring back at him. He silently addressed the mirror, “Forty years ago you had a full head of dark brown hair with a big wave combed up in the front. And your face was angular with deep blue eyes and good complexion, except for the occasional zit. Not to mention the body that used to be 165 lbs of well-proportioned and well-conditioned muscle.” He hesitated, not particularly liking where the comparison was headed. “Now you’ve got thinning, salt and pepper hair. You’re at least 50 lbs over your ‘playing weight’ and those tight abs have given way to a bit of a beer gut with love handles, and the chiseled chin and muscular neck are now disguised by a bit of a double chin when you look down. And the old saying holds, ‘like father, like son’ you inherited dad’s baggy eyes and Slavic nose.” He shook his head and proceeded to rinse out with Listerine and brush his teeth with Sensodine toothpaste. Then he shaved and looked again in the mirror. “Ah, what the hell! There are a lot of guys in much worse shape than me. I should be thankful. At least I’m still 5’ 10” and haven’t reached the age where I’ll start to shrink”, he chuckled.

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He shed the PJs, took a quick hot shower, dried off and walked naked back into the bedroom. Before pulling on his under shorts, he critically eyed his physique in the mirror on the dresser. “Well, despite the recent lack of use, at least the dick hasn’t shrunk, either,” he said with a short laugh that was a subconscious attempt to not betray his true feelings about the lack of use.

After getting dressed, Rafe made himself a cup of tea and finished packing the few remaining items in the rental van. He had picked up a 7-passenger Dodge Grand Caravan last night after work and packed most of the things before going to bed. Rafe and Bo would share the driving and the cost. One of the last things he put into the rear of the van was a surprise for the guys that he was pretty sure they would get a kick out of.

He took a couple sips from the tea and jumped into the van, popped a CD into the CD player and drove out of the driveway. The music on the CD was a mix of old 1950’s and early 1960’s rock and roll. As the smooth Doo Wop sound of the Flamingos singing, “A Kiss From Your Lips”, wafted out of the speakers, Rafe sang along ...

*A kiss from your lips changed my whole life around.
A kiss like yours, no words can be found.
Gee! Gee! How blessed I am to have the kiss from your lips*

*A kiss from your lips, holds a story still untold
A kiss from your lips, more precious oh than gold
Gee gee how blest I am to have a kiss from your lips*

*I've loved for many years
And kissed oh oh a thousand lips
But nothing went right, until that night
I slipped a kiss from your lips...*

He began to get a feeling of contentment, and his mind ranged back to those “golden” days, as he began to recall some of those old memories about the girls he had dated ...while he sang along...

Rafe was recalling that summer of 1961. “Every Saturday and Sunday, the four of us would be down on the beach in Sea Bright. Sure, there were others in the crowd, guys and gals, but mostly it was Bo, Burn, Hein and I. We had all become good pals during our high school years at QHS, class of ‘59. And once we reached 18 in our senior year, we would invariably head over to Staten Island where the drinking age was 18. And even though Burn was a year younger, he looked the oldest, had the deepest voice, the heaviest beard, and had no trouble buying beer or whiskey even in the local package stores around Quaytown where the drinking age was 21.”

“Hein was in the Marines by ‘61, but he would hitchhike up on weekends, because he had met Lorrie, who would later become his first wife. On Saturdays, after leaving the beach, we would go home to get something to eat, change clothes and a group

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of us guys and gals would rendezvous at a house party or at a beach party in the Highlands. Gosh, those were some great times. We had a hell of a lot of fun, yet it was all clean and rather innocent compared to what I see going on these days with high school and college age kids.”

Rafe had to change lanes to pass a few slower cars and SUVs. When he got back in the center lane on the interstate, his mind returned to his thoughts about his three pals. “We were really great pals back then, but our lives soon led us down different paths after about 1962 and over the years we seemed to have lost that sort of group kinship we enjoyed back then. Seems like such a shame...all those years gone by the boards now.”

“Maybe that’s why the four of us have gotten such a strong sense of friendships renewed these past six months, communicating via email, sharing our collective recollections of those ‘Glory Days’. Not the sad shit that Bruce Springsteen sings about – we really and truly had some great times together, and although we have all grown in many ways, we can look back on those memories with fond appreciation, and yet still take satisfaction in what we have become and the hope we have in the future. Because when I think about all the history our age group has witnessed, it just astounds me!”

Rafe had paid the toll a few miles back. He exited the highway and headed for Bo’s condo.

James “Hein” Heinrich had just finished packing his car. It was a used compact Kia Sephia that he only recently bought. It had reasonably low mileage and was in good mechanical condition with nary a scratch or dent. The last thing he wanted to be sure to pack was a surf pole and his piss bottle. He needed the bottle on long trips, because of the medication he was taking. “Damn near bought the farm last year with that massive heart attack!” he thought.

At 6 foot and 170 pounds, James was the same height as he was when he was honorably discharged from the marines and not that much over the 160 lbs he was then. He still had an ovular face with blue-gray eyes, a sturdy Germanic nose, firm chin, and a good shock of hair, although it was getting more gray than brown, but was still combed the way he had let it grow after his four years in the marines.

He hadn’t been to Nags Head for a number of years, ever since he and the “Bitch” got divorced. As part of the settlement, the two cottages they owned in Nags Head were sold. “Boy, did she ever rake my ass over the coals”, he said to himself. “But to hell with that bit of past history. Today I’m off to meet up with the guys”.

James’s second wife Ellie could not make the trip, because she worked in retail and was unable to get the time off. So the plan was that he and Rafe would share the 3rd bedroom at the rental cottage, the one with twin beds. “I hope my snoring doesn’t keep Rafe awake all night”, he thought to himself. “Ellie says that sometimes it sounds like

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one of those jackhammers they use to break up a street. I'll just have to make sure that Rafe gets plenty to drink and passes out, so he won't hear a thing. Har! Har! Har!" He laughed aloud.

James thought back to when he last saw Rafe, Bo, and Burn. "Let's see," he mused, "it must have been around 1981, when I last saw Rafe. That was when he left Municipal Life, where we both worked. I still remember being his Best Man at his wedding to Paula...must have been around 1968. While I was married to Lorrie, we used to have Rafe and Paula down to our house in Homevale for parties with my Marine buddy, Stan DelaCrois and his wife, Jill. And Rafe and Paula would stay over when there was one of the QHS class reunions, every 5 years."

"But then in 1982, the 'Bitch' had the balls to demand a divorce, after I caught her in the sack with our neighbor. At first I was reasonably satisfied with the divorce settlement, even though it took nine months of haggling. It wasn't until later that she decided to really screw me on college expenses for the kids...cost me a bundle. Ah, well, that's out of my control now, but it still pisses me off, because Ellie and I are still forking out the 'extortion' payments".

"As for Bo, I think the last time I saw him was at one of the QHS reunions...must have been way back at the 5-year reunion in 1964. After that he seemed to disappear. At the later QHS reunions, many a classmate asked about him, but no one seemed to know where he was living, and none of the classmates that still lived in Quaytown ever seemed to have seen him around. Sure will be good to see him. Someone said that he got divorced from Joan. I still remember his wedding at St. Cecilia's; same church where Lorrie and I got married."

"Now when was the last time I saw Burn? It must have been a couple of years after high school, when I was in the Marines. Burn had come back to Quaytown and we all hung out at Sea Bright during the summer. I used to hitch hike home from D.C. on weekends to see Lorrie. We'd all go to the beach and roast our asses on blankets, until it was time to hit the bar at the Danish Hop. Great location! Just walk out of the back door after a few cold ones and you were only thirty yards from the beach; even better going in the opposite direction. Har! Har! Har!"

James tossed in the surf pole and his tackle box. He double-checked to be sure he had his piss bottle that was a necessity due to the medicine he had to take, then got in the car and headed off. He remembered that he had those "Oldies" CDs from Rafe in the glove compartment, so he reached over, pulled them out and put one of them in the CD player on the dash. "It was Nice of Rafe to make up these CDs", he thought. "And the letter that accompanied the CDs explained why each song was selected. Rafe had attached each of the tunes to memories of people, places or events that had meaning to one or more of us".

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Like Earle, James' close friends called him by his nickname of "Hein", a contraction of his surname. James headed out of Charleston on his way to Nags Head, as the Moonglows song, "Sincerely" came through the speakers....

*Sincerely, oh you know how I love you.
I'll do anything for you.
Please say you'll be mine.
Oh, Lord won't you tell me why,
I love that girl so...*

At 5:40 am with the van fully packed, Bo, Denise, and Rafe drove out of the parking lot at Bo's condo complex. Both Bo and Rafe felt a measure of relief, mixed with anticipation now that they were finally starting on their trip to the reunion weekend that had been in the talking and planning stages for six months. The first thing they did was to stop for breakfast bagels and coffee and tea, which they ate on the road.

Denise settled into the center seat on the driver side. She took out her sewing kit and pulled out an appliqué she was working on that would ultimately be framed and hang on the wall in the hallway of their house. She quickly became engrossed in the project. Next destination would be the Burnells' farm in Virginia. The only stops along the way would be for pee breaks and gas for the Van.

Within a half hour Rafe had the Dodge Van headed down the New Jersey Turnpike, when Bo said, "Let's put on some of those 'Oldies' that you recorded, Rafe."

"Pull one from the stack in the cubby hole down there", replied Rafe, as he pointed to the compartment under the dash, below the radio. "I brought additional ones that I recorded recently, and a new one that I just finished yesterday."

Bo rifled through the CDs, selected one, opened the jewel case, and pushed the CD into the CD player in the dash. As the CD began to run through one song after another, Bo started to sing along and then Rafe joined in.

Hearing this, Denise couldn't help but exclaim half-jokingly, "I think I'll have to pick up a pair of ear plugs at the next stop we make. Do you think we can stop near a drug store next time?" She had to speak up to be heard over the combination of the melodic harmony of a fifties vocal group and the off-pitch monotones emanating from the two fellows in the front seats.

Bo and Rafe laughed at Denise's jibe, but that only interrupted their singing briefly. "Son-of-a-bitch!" said Bo excitedly. "These songs bring back so many memories."

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“Yeah, we really had some great times”, said Rafe. “I’ll never forget that baseball game in our senior year, when we won the Seacoast Conference down in Toms River. Boy, did I ever have butterflies in my stomach in the ninth inning. I was out in Centerfield and that last out was a real high fly to me. It seemed like the damn thing was a little pea that was way up there and was taking forever to come down. Man, when it finally came down and nestled in my glove, I breathed a huge sigh of relief.”

“I remember catching Lenny that game”, mused Bo. “Everything he threw at them moved just enough to mess up their timing. I’m glad that Coach Zino gave us the choice to either go for the Seacoast Conference or enter into the Greater Newark Tournament, and I’m glad we decided unanimously as a team to play for the conference championship”.

There were a few minutes of silence as Bo and Rafe listened to the music and reflected on the memories that kept playing out in their conscious minds like old movies. Then Bo said, “I remember those pep rallies on Friday nights before our home football games. We would drive around and pick up wood and cardboard boxes and just about anything that would burn. Then we would toss all that stuff on the bonfire pile. Ruffy would introduce all of us players and whip up the schoolmates with a rousing speech about how we were going to go out and win one for the school. What a good coach he was! Then the bonfire would be lit and we’d sing the old Quaytown fight songs.”

Then Rafe responded, “And let’s not forget what Hein reminded us in his email last month. How after they thought that everyone left the field, Gerry Flower and Robin Edmonds would drive his car around back and under the grandstands and have passionate sex. I guess they thought that everyone was gone. But several of the students and players usually hung around and couldn’t help but hear the springs in Gerry’s car going up and down.”

From the back seat of the van, Denise said, “I heard that!” At that Bo and Rafe laughed so hard that tears began to trickle down their cheeks and their stomachs hurt.

Afternoon, October 27, 2000...

Earle arrived home to his farmhouse about Noon, and after ascending to the top of the hill at the end of the long near quarter mile driveway, he slid the pickup to a quick stop in front of the garage. As he jumped out and closed the driver side door to the cab, he looked back to see the trail of dust he had stirred up in his race up the driveway. Just then, Carlie came out of the front door with that look on her face. “Uh, Oh!” he thought, “You done got yourself into a bit of trouble, boy!”

At a statuesque 5’ 7” Carlie can be an imposing woman. She has thick brown hair cut just below the nape of the neck. She has a cherub like face that lights up when she

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laughs, but can adopt a serious, almost stern, look when she chooses, perhaps useful for her job as a high school guidance counselor.

Carlie walked up to Earle, put her arms around him to give him a hug and a kiss. Then she stepped back, looked over her shoulder at the dust trail that was still slowly wafting away in the breeze. She looked back at Earle and said, “Lord, Burn, what in thearnation has gotten into you? Seems to me you are a little old to be getting so excited about this weekend that you have to tear up the driveway like a teenager.”

“Who you calling *old*, woman!” Earle affectionately scolded. He hooked his right arm around her trim waist, pulled her close, and gave her a long kiss. “You still turn me on, darlin’”, he whispered in her ear.

“Oh, go on with you”, Carlie laughed. “You better come inside and help me get our gear together for this trip”. So they walked toward the house, went up the steps and into the front hallway, where the things they would be taking for the weekend were neatly stacked. Earle picked up their suitcases and headed out to their Ford Taurus station wagon parked near the garage, along side the pickup truck. Carlie picked up two bags of household things and followed Earle out to the car. They continued making several trips until they had just about everything stashed in the wagon.

Just then they heard the sound of an automobile heading up their driveway. As they turned to look they could see a Dodge van approaching. “Here they are”, Earle called out. The van made its way to the top of the hill and the left dogleg into the parking area behind the station wagon. Bo was the first one out from the front passenger side, then Rafe, who was driving the last leg of the trip slid out of his seat. Rafe opened the sliding side door on the driver’s side, so that Denise could get out.

Bo and Burn threw a bear hug around one another, and swatted each other on the back. Denise and Carlie embraced momentarily but warmly and began talking as if they had just been together hours before. Rafe and Earle hugged, stepped back to eye one another, both smiled and practically in unison exclaimed, “Good to see you again!” Earle jibed Rafe, “Put on a few pounds around the middle, since I saw you in 1992 at the sports banquet!”

“Yeah, I know, but you don’t have to rub it in”, retorted Rafe; “But you look like you’re in great shape...you had a bit of a pot belly at that banquet, as I recall, but now you’re trimmed down. Makes you look even taller.” Both Rafe and Boaz at 5’ 10’’ looked up a bit to Earle at 6’ 3’’. “Burn, you didn’t seem this tall when we played opposite ends on offense during football season. Either you’re standing on higher ground than me, or I’ve shrunk”, continued Rafe. They both laughed.

“Y’all made good time”, Earle exclaimed. “It’s 12:30. What time did y’all leave this morning?”

Bo replied, “I guess it was about 5:40am or so.”

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Denise chimed in with mock petulance, “Yes, he made me get up way before I could finish my beauty sleep.”

“Ah, but you still look like a beauty queen to me”, said Earle graciously.

Denise smiled a bit devilishly and said to Bo, “Do you see that, Bo? Burn is *such* a southern gentleman. He holds the door open for women, and is always complimentary. How come you aren’t more like him, Bo?” she teased. “Carlie, you are so fortunate”, Denise continued.

“Don’t be fooled by the manners”, responded Carlie with a twinkle in her eye.

Bo pointed his finger at Earle and said, “Damn it Burn! See what trouble you’re causing me with that false southern bullshit? I ought to kick your ass!” And at that they all laughed.

Denise then said knowingly to Rafe, “You’ve got to get the tour of their farmhouse! Its a hundred years old and they have fixed it up beautifully.”

Carlie responded, “Yes, Rafe, and everyone, let’s go inside and see what Burn has done with the basement. We still have a few minutes before we have to leave, don’t we?”

Earle replied, “In our emails with Hein we planned on meeting at the beach cottage around 3:00pm. It’s only about 2 hours from here, so as long as we leave within about 20 minutes, we should be okay.”

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Afternoon, October 27, 2000...

At 3:10 in the afternoon Bo pulled the Dodge van behind the Taurus into one of two short, but wide driveways for the cottage. Denise had paired up with Carlie in the Taurus, while Bo, Earle and Rafe had traveled in the van. James had not yet arrived, as they all piled out and surveyed the cottage. It was located in a great spot...only one other house between it and the beach road. The entrance to the beach was only about 150 feet away. You just couldn't go wrong with such a great location.

Just as they started to unpack the car and the van, James drove into the adjacent parking area in his Kia. The group of 5 went immediately to greet James. Introductions were made, hugs exchanged, and the autos quickly unpacked. Then to celebrate the moment, four beers magically appeared and several toasts were given. They assembled in the great room of the cottage, laughing and excitedly talking about how wonderful it was to see what they had been planning for 6 months finally come to fruition.

Rafe was really excited, so much so, that he had nearly forgotten his surprise. But something one of the guys said (probably James, who's wit they all knew well) about how surprisingly little they had changed in facial appearance, but as for the rest of their bodies...no comment, triggered him to remember. So, he quickly went to the bedroom he and James were sharing and came back with a large, black poster board. It was one of those that folded out into three panels; the kind used for presentations and displaying items at convention marketing shows.

Bo immediately got everyone's attention, when he said, "You've got to see what Rafe has put together as a surprise. It's great!" Rafe then opened up the two folds on the board to reveal blowups of the yearbook photos of the four of them. Under each photo he had written their first names in large block letters.

"How the hell did you do that!" exclaimed Earle.

Rafe replied, "I had a friend from church scan them from our senior yearbook into his computer, zoom up the digitized images and print them on an expensive printer".

James just shook his head and said with a devilish smirk, "What some guys won't do to look younger". At that everyone burst out laughing.

Bo looked at James and laughingly exclaimed, "Hein, you still have that great sense of humor!"

Then Rafe began to position the four of them holding the board in front. Denise and Carlie worked the several cameras and took photos of the four buddies standing behind their respective yearbook photos on the poster board. The photo board was then put aside and some good natured kidding ensued about who had put on the most weight and who still had the most hair and whose looks had changed the least. There was no contest on the hair situation...James

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was the outright winner in that department, despite the gray weaved throughout his still course and full dark brown hair. Both he and Earle had crew cuts in high school, but Earle now had a sparse top that was cut quite short. Bo and Rafe on the other hand used to have full heads of wavy hair. But now Bo had a buzz cut of mostly gray hair and Rafe was sporting a thin mop of brown hair with a fair amount of gray strands.

Once everyone settled in, luggage stowed in the three bedrooms, and kitchen and bathroom essentials in place, the six got down to planning where to go for dinner. The planning did not take long and they quickly agreed to a nearby seafood restaurant. With a couple of hours remaining before they had to leave for the restaurant, five of the six were comfortably sitting on the couches and chairs, while Bo stretched out on the carpeted floor. The four old pals began to catch up with each other's lives.

"James, you look a bit tired from the long drive today", observed Carlie. "Would you like to take a short nap before dinner?"

"No, I'm okay. Just need to relax a bit", replied James. He continued, "I didn't want to make a big deal of it, but about a 15 months ago, I had heart surgery, and have a pacemaker implant".

Bo abruptly sat up, leaned against the coffee table, and said, "Oh, no, I'm sorry to hear that! We didn't know. How bad was it?" A few of the others reacted in a similar fashion, while the rest sat initially stunned.

Everyone's attention was now sharply focused, as James began to explain that he'd had a triple bypass and a valve replaced and that he had come very close to dying. He told them about how the emergency squad fortunately arrived quickly. They had to put the paddles on him as they rushed him to the hospital and it was their quick attention that saved his life. He remained in serious danger until about a day after the surgery.

Then, typical of James, to lighten the moment for the others, he finished off his discourse with a humorous anecdote. He recalled how when the surgeon came to see him a couple days after the operation, and the surgeon had remarked how lucky James had been, James asked him how long before he might be able to return to work. The doctor had told him it could take three to six months, and that he would have to take it extremely easy during that time. At this point, James hesitated slightly to set the hook, looked around the cottage living room at the other five, rubbed his hands together and with a wolfish grin gave the punch line. "I said to the doctor, 'Hmm. Let's see. That's anywhere from 90 to 180 days where I can sit on my ass, turn on the TV to whichever racetrack is being telecast, and play the ponies. Either I'll hit a lucky streak and be able to pay your bill, or you'll have to make it up on some other patient, because I'll be bankrupt".

The other five broke up with laughter. Rafe clapped his hands. Earle slapped his knee. Bo went to stand up, but slipped back down and lay on his back chuckling. Carlie, who had been rocking in the rocking chair, abruptly stopped rocking as she laughed. Denise was shaking her head and smiling in appreciation. James had turned the tenseness of the moment into one of

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lightness with his humor. “Well, I see now what Bo meant about your sense of humor”, Denise declared.

With that Rafe got up and said, “That deserves another round. Who wants a beer?”

“Me”, replied Bo.

“Me, too”, responded Earle.

“I’m still good”, chipped in James. “You all remember how I was always the slow drinker when we used to go to Staten Island. Hell, the majority of the time I was the designated driver”.

“Yeah, and we did that long before the term and the idea of ‘designated driver’ came into fashion”, Rafe called out as he headed for the cooler out on the porch. He returned with three beers, and asked Denise and Carlie if they wanted a soda or anything to drink...both declined, answering “No thanks”.

As he handed a can of beer to Bo and Earle, Rafe added, “Hein, do you remember the time when you were driving your brother’s car and we ran out of a bar in Staten Island without paying the bill? Bo, you were there, too.” Rafe continued to relay the story to all.

“It was Fred Ballantine’s idea. He told Hein to go get the car, park up the street and keep it running with the lights off. I still remember that place. It had a bar along the rear wall with a kitchen behind that. On either side of the front door were a handful of square wooden tables and those wooden chairs with the curved backs. On each table was a red and white checked tablecloth. I remember being three sheets to the wind, leaning with my back against the bar and propping myself up on the bar with my elbows, giggling at Fred’s plan. Jack Pauley was with us and he was the most wasted of us all. Joey Silvo was there, too. Joey and I had to practically carry Jack out of the place, as Fred pretended like he was going to pay the bill. Next thing I remembered was running up the street, laughing, and jumping into the rear seat of the car next to Bo. Fred was the last one to come running like hell and jump in the back seat and he yelled to you ‘Go! Go!’ Then, well before we got to the Outer Bridge, Jack rolled down the window, took a gulp of air, pointed up at the sky and drunkenly said, ‘I have reached my star’. Then he threw up all over Joey Silvo who was in the center between Hein and Jack.

“The next day, still hung over, Bo and I went to Hein’s house to help clean the car, but he was just about finished when I got there.”

James laughed and added, “My brother was really pissed off and made me get up early to clean the barf up and fumigate the car. Cleaning the outside down the passenger side door and the rocker panel was the easy part. Cleaning the inside was nasty. I had to keep getting out, moving away and taking deep breaths to keep from up chucking.”

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Carlie got up from the rocking chair and said with a hint of sarcasm, “Oh, nice story! Denise, how about we go to the store and get a few things we’ll need for the next couple of days?”

Denise jumped up and replied, “Sure, we have time before we go out to dinner tonight. Besides, I think the stories are going to get more outlandish as the afternoon wears on.” Denise looked at Bo and asked, “Is there anything you want from the store, honey?”

“No, I’m okay”, said Bo, as he got up. He gave her a hug. Then they were out the door and down the steps to the driveway and the Burnells’ car.

After a few minutes Bo said, “Hein, I know from our emails and from what Rafe told me, that you had a nasty divorce, but now you are remarried. Did your first wife, Lorrie wasn’t it, really have a warrant out for your arrest?”

“Yeah, after about nine month of negotiations, we reached a settlement agreement in 1982, which at the time I thought worked out pretty well. She got the house in Holmvale with a reasonably small monthly mortgage payment and child support. We agreed that when the kids were ready for college I would pay two-thirds of the education expenses. I got the two cottages in Nags Head, which when sold and the mortgages paid off, gave me enough for a down payment on a condo and enough, I thought, to invest for those college expenses.

“It was about 8 years later that she went back to court and got a decree for a rather sizeable increase in the support for college expenses for our youngest. This was after I had met Ellie and we had married and moved to Florida. I just didn’t have that kind of money, because the insurance business just wasn’t paying that well. She had the court issue a warrant to arrest me if I returned to Jersey. So, eventually, we had to reach a settlement, since Ellie still has family there. We’re still paying.”

Rafe shook his head and remarked, “I remember Hein telling me about the arrest warrant. I can’t remember whether I called you in Florida or you called me, James. But it was just around the time of the 1994 QHS reunion...must have been before, because I had asked whether or not you could make it up to Jersey to attend the reunion. Now that I think about it I got your phone number from a guy that graduated from QHS before us; he was a private detective. I can’t remember his name off the top of my head, but I probably have it written down somewhere.”

“So how did you and Ellie hook up?” asked Rafe, after a brief pause in the conversation. “She’s originally from Middlebury, right?”

“That’s right,” replied James. “We met through a dating service that specialized in helping divorced people get together. She went through a tough divorce, too. Her first husband was abusive and chased skirts all during the time they were married.

“What about the rest of you guys?” James asked. “I know Bo was first married to Joan from Ulster Beach, same town that Lorrie was from. Now Bo’s happily engaged to Denise. And, having now met Carlie, I can vouch for Burn’s good fortune in being married to her.”

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Bo went on to describe how his first marriage ended when he discovered that Joan had become an alcoholic and wiped out all their savings on her habit. Then while she was in AA, she took up with one of the men she met there. Bo had hired a detective to track her and once he had enough evidence, he filed for a divorce and for custody of their son and daughter. Joan had no interest anymore in the kids and so Bo got custody and raised them. Sometime after that he had dated and married another woman, but soon they both realized that it was a mistake, and so they divorced. Then he met Denise about 10 years ago and when she got divorced from her second husband, they got together and have been very happy together, getting engaged last year.

“How about you, Burn?” James asked.

Burn had put his size fourteen feet up on the coffee table, and had just taken a swig of beer. He began, “I was married before to a girl I met after I graduated from LSC. It lasted only about nine years. No kids with her, but she had two from a prior marriage. It was not one of my best decisions. I had a lot of wild oats to sow back then, but looking back I think I was really naive when it came to women. Anyway I was drinking a lot and staying out late and had some scary close calls with the grim reaper. Damn near killed myself in a car accident once. After I moved to South Carolina to take a job, I met Carlie, who had just graduated from USC in Columbia. We hit it off pretty well right from the beginning. But, I’m not ashamed to tell you that she straightened this Rebel’s ass out right quick. I cut out the heavy drinking and with her help I guess you could say I grew up and became a man.”

“You grew up all right! Look at the size of those big feet! They are bigger than when we were in high school!” Bo teased.

“I’ll stick one of these size fourteen’s up where the sun don’t shine, boy, and kick your Yankee butt back to Jersey”, Earle jokingly responded.

“I can kick your ass anytime, you big overgrown Redneck”, Bo laughingly retorted.

“Is that the best you can come back with?” said Earle. “And what’s this fetish you have with my ass? That’s the second time today you talked about it.”

They all enjoyed the repartee. Then Earle said, “Well, I guess that leaves Rafe as the only one of us four who is still married to his first wife. Good for you, Rafe.”

“I was your best man”, James chipped in. “How many years is it now, Rafe. It was late 60’s, I believe, when you and Paula tied the knot.”

“December 21, 1968; it will be 32 years” Rafe answered.

“That’s great, Rafe,” said Bo. “There is definitely too much divorce these days”.

Rafe was feeling a bit uncomfortable. He quickly changed the subject. “I brought my Junior and Senior yearbooks and some notes I jotted down about things I remember from our

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high school years and later. It helped to have our collective memories that we've shared through emails."

"I brought my senior yearbook and my scrapbook", Bo offered.

"And I brought some memorabilia from my stint in the Marine Honor Guard", said James.

"Shit! I couldn't find my yearbook", Earle said somewhat disappointedly. "And I forgot to pack the notes you emailed to us, Rafe".

"Not to worry", Rafe said to Earle. "I brought copies with me. Tonight when we get back from dinner, we can spend some time going through this stuff and talk some more about writing that book we all thought would be a good idea. Wasn't it your idea originally, Bo, that we ought to write a book about all the history we've lived through and how we renewed our friendships after all these years?"

"Yeah, but I think we all thought it was a good idea", Bo responded.

Evening, October 27, 2000...

The group had returned from dinner and the guys had settled around the coffee table going through the yearbooks and the other memorabilia. During this process the stories of those past events just seemed to flow from each of the men. Early on, Bo got up from where he had been sitting and announced, "Time to open the scotch. Who wants a hit? I brought along some single malt that I've been saving just for this weekend" Four glasses were poured and the four friends resumed their rehashing of those stories from nearly 40 years ago.

Neither Denise nor Carlie felt strange watching all this, nor did they feel the least bit jealous at their husbands' attention to what to the women was this somewhat mysterious male bonding taking place. Both joined in the conversations and smilingly shook their heads in wonder whenever the four men laughed uproariously at some distant memory recalled. Of course as the stories began to be regaled by one or the other of the men, it occurred to them that some of these episodes were being somewhat embellished after 40 years. From both Carlie's and Denise's perspective some of the antics being recalled and the men's reactions could be interpreted that these four supposedly mature men were rapidly descending into their second childhood.

Bo was thumbing through senior class pictures in the QHS 1959 yearbook. He stopped at a page and said with a chuckle, "Jack Wing! Remember that '57 Chevy he had? He used to turn into a street, double clutch that sucker, throw it in reverse and back up in reverse around the corner to where he originally started to make the turn. I never saw anyone ever do that but him"

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Rafe jumped in with his own memory of Jack Wing. “Oh, I’ll never forget this one night a couple of us were out riding around with Jack in that Chevy. He knew where the Homevale police were hiding, waiting to catch someone speeding on Homevale Road. I think they only had two or three patrol cars in the whole town then. Anyway, he drives by them real slow, and then suddenly floors it, laying rubber for about 30 feet.

“By the time they get their headlights on and siren going and start to give chase, we have nearly a quarter mile lead, because Jack had the pedal down to floorboard. Jack knew those backcountry farm roads like the back of his hand, probably better than the police, and nobody, but nobody could take those turns, downshifting and up shifting like Jack. It didn’t take him long to lose them. At least we thought we had. We were all laughing and congratulating Jack, when he turns off into another road, and all of a sudden there are the cops, coming hell bent for election, with their sirens screaming and lights flashing, and here we go again.

“Jack just calmly said, ‘Watch this!’ After about three or four lefts and rights, we could still see the cop car on the other side of a cornfield. Suddenly we come around this bend doing about 50mph and Jack does a 90 degree turn, tires squealing, the car sliding; I don’t know how he did it without rolling that sucker over! But it was like you see those stunt drivers do it in the movies. Next thing I know we are accelerating through this narrow opening on the right side of the road, with trees and bushes on both sides. No way could the cops see this last maneuver. And low and behold we come out of this narrow path and are on the Garden State Parkway heading north. The trees are so thick between the Parkway and road we left before going through that narrow path that the cops couldn’t see us. They must have been scratching their heads the rest of the night.”

All were amused by the story. Bo said, “I was one of the passengers that night, along with Rafe and I think Fred Ballantine. Rafe isn’t embellishing what happened, not one bit!”

After a minute or so of quiet reflection, as they sipped their scotches, James jumped in and began to recall stories about some of the teachers they all had at QHS. “Remember when we were sophomores and Gerry Rome was a senior and got into fisticuffs with the shop teacher, Mr. Willey? Bam! Bam! Gerry landed two quick punches, then a group of other teachers grabbed and held both of them and the fight was over. You just know that Willey didn’t stand a chance. Rome would have done some real damage if they hadn’t stopped the fight.”

“Gerry had the fastest hands I ever saw”, said Earle. “He could clock you three quick shots before you could get your fists up to defend yourself. He was a tough cookie on the football field and off. I for one wouldn’t have wanted to tangle with him, even though he was only about 5’ 9”. Lightning! Pure lightning!”

“That’s saying a lot, Burn”, Rafe responded. “I still remember that time at the basketball game down at Bayshore Highlands School.” Rafe looked around at the others as he continued, “This was in or junior year and Burn and I were up in the bleachers watching the QHS varsity against Bayshore, when a fight broke out on the floor. Before I could take a step, Burn shoves his jacket and glasses at me and says, ‘Hold this for me!’ I had to reach for his glasses to keep them from falling down through the opening in the bleacher seats.

Beach Party Days: Chapter 2

“When I looked up, Burn was already out on the floor rushing at a guy from the other school. Burn threw a haymaker at this guy that I swear, if it had ever landed, that guy would have been pushing up daisies. Well, the guy moved slightly and the punch went whistling to the side of his head, maybe grazed his ear. Burn is off balance with his feet kind of sliding on the court, and the guy grabs on to Burn’s shirt and pulls it over his head. Burn is flailing away with both hands now, not seeing a thing, but steadily moving forward. The guy is backing up and ducking left and right with a look of absolute terror on his face, knowing that if one of those roundhouse punches finds their mark, he’s in big trouble. So he held on to the shirt for dear life, until he got backed into the wall, then he let go and ran like hell out of the gym. It took Burn a second or so to realize the guy was gone and stop swinging and pull his shirt back down.”

“I remember that like it was yesterday!” laughed Earle. “That was the most frustrating fight I think I ever had”.

It was now 11:00pm. Denise yawned, stood up, stretched and announced, “Well, I’m tired. I think I’ll turn in. Don’t stay up too late you guys. There are things to do tomorrow, places to go, and things to see.”

“I’m going to bed, too!” yawned Carlie. “These old war stories have tired me out. Good night y’all”.

“Good night, Hon,” Bo said to Denise and gave her a big hug and short kiss.

“Good night, Sugar,” Earle said to Carlie, as he squeezed her in a bear hug and kissed her on the lips. “We won’t be up much longer”.

“Good night!” James and Rafe called to Denise and Carlie.

After the women left the room, Bo said, “Okay, now we can get down to some serious remembrances.” By that he meant recalling the stories that the guys couldn’t or wouldn’t want to have the women hear.

Earle went into the kitchen and brought out the bottle of scotch. “This is pretty good, Bo; not too peaty, and not too light or dark. Anyone want a refill, help yourself.” Both Bo and Earle had become connoisseurs of single malt scotch.

The stories continued until some time after 2am. By this time the four old buddies had hit the wall, having all gotten up very early that day. They put the glasses and snack bowls in the dishwasher, then took turns in the bathroom before turning in.

“Good night”, Rafe said quietly. “I can’t remember when I last enjoyed such friendship; probably about 40 years ago, huh”.

“Right on old pal”, said Bo, stifling a yawn.

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They all said their good nights and went to bed, a bit tipsy now, not so much drunk, as tired and feeling a peaceful glow. They were looking forward to the rest of the weekend to renew the kind of friendships that few men ever experience and that they had sorely missed for so many years. They all realized that they could never go back in time and pick up where they had left off, but they felt certain that they could build a renewed, more durable and deeper friendship from this time and place.