

## Grant

This is going to be a long one through no fault of my own, and of my most unforgettable characters, this one was the most difficult to write about, because I was too much a part of his bizarre story. It will be the most challenging thing I have written and will shed a few tears with it. My family knows Grant, and a sister once suggested I write his story, but how can you write something like this unless you have a platform to exhibit it? After all these years, that platform is my blog.

As I stated at one time, to remember when you first met an unforgettable character is not uncommon. As bizarre as his life has been, it will not be out of place to state he has no memory of that moment. As a matter of fact, there are five or six years of his life he has no memory of, and that itself is the crux of his bizarre but beautiful story.

I went to work at a manufacturing plant as a welder in 1980, and was eventually placed in the same welding bay as Grant's. He was a rough young man with wild red hair and a beard to match, and a fun aggressiveness to his personality. Always wore striped overalls when welding and cowboy boots when not. He dipped Skoal and chewed tobacco and drank enormous amounts of coffee. He studied under a crazy Korean martial arts expert and earned his black belt in Taekwondo. On several occasions, I saw Grant break bricks with his bare hands. Personally, I would have used a hammer, but it shows the concentration and strength that Grant had, not just in Taekwondo but Life itself.

Over the years, we bonded as best friends do, to the point I was as close to him as I am to my own brothers. He was a competitive man, who loved any challenge put before him. I'm normally not competitive, so any battle we had among us, he usually won. This included the game of "Knock Knuckles" which I usually ended up with sore knuckles. We would find anything we could to create a game. At one point, we had these small metal bolts that were spot-welded on some of the metal we worked with. To this day, I do not remember the logistics of the game, but I do remember it was called, *Peedunkle*. As you know, when you create something, you get to name it.

The fabrication shop we welded in was longer than a football field, and we delighted in rolling large washers the length of the building to see who could roll one further. We even had a foreman rolling the washers back to us from the other end of the building. One time, one of us sent one so perfect, it escaped out of the building, crossed the road and bounced off a windshield of someone's vehicle in the parking lot. The gods were with us on that hijinx, because as far as we know, it did no harm to the vehicle. It just so

happened to be a truck of one of our common adversaries, who probably never realized we didn't like him.

We had a foreman who didn't know what to think of us and often times would peek around the building's columns watching us. We had the respect of the Shop Supervisor, (actually it was Grant he respected) and got away with more tomfoolery than we should have. We experimented with fireworks in the big building, and at one time I caught the ceiling on fire with a bottle rocket. Luckily, the insulation had fire retardant in it.

One day Grant welded some scrap metal into a chair for him to sit on during lunch. Every Friday morning when he went into the locker room to change into his striped overalls, I would get the torch and trim a 1/4" off the legs of his chair. May have been a week here and there I missed, but after a year, his chair shrunk about a foot. The table started out at his belly button, but ended up at his nipples.

Old welders are usually cranky and unlikeable. There was one old fossil who worked in the bay next to us, who would light his heater in the evenings before leaving, so his area would be nice and warm in the morning. As we prepared to leave also, Grant would take the last bit of coffee in his cup and toss it on the heater, putting it out.

The next morning the old coot would come in and get upset because his heater had gone out and spend time trying to figure what was wrong. He replaced thermocouples, valves, solenoids and adjusted anything that could be adjusted. These were double burners and if he lit one, the next morning it was out. If he lit both of them, they both would be out.

Eventually, we decided to really confuse him by putting out the one he lit, then lighting the other. He would come in and stand with a baffled look on his face wondering if that was the one he lit. When I had a can of tuna for lunch, in the evenings as I left I would toss the empty can under another old fart's welding machine. Over the period of a few weeks, the cans would add up as well as the stench.

Then there was the tall thin cowboy who worked with us in the bay. Every morning he would come in and set his lunchbox on one of the welding machines and head to the locker room to change into his overalls. As soon as he went around the corner, Grant and I would look in his lunchbox and see what all he had. Since his wife packed his lunch, he didn't know what was in it. Usually she put several bags of chips in his box, so we would help ourselves to one and split it. We never took any cake or pie, because he

would expect it to be in it. The days when there wasn't anything to steal, we referred to those days as Slim Pickens Days. Always a disappointment.

Grant would pick me up in the mornings on the way to work. It was pretty much an unspoken rule that there was no talking during that time of the morning until well past the first hour of welding. To this day, I still like silence and solitude in the mornings when I first come back to life.

A large weld shop like that has an enormous amount of noise, caused by chipping hammers, sledge hammers, grinders, torches and metal against metal; so the day always started with a pair of ear plugs. During those noisy times, if we were standing right next to each other, we would have to yell. So we devised a simple series of hand gestures to communicate. Sometimes our project would require both us working together and sometimes apart, but the gestures worked perfectly. We could work for hours without speaking to each other, and not just because of the hand gestures, but we also knew what the other was thinking.

To expound on all the monkeyshines we enjoyed, would require more writing than is in my vocabulary. Suffice to say, we enjoyed working together and were well known throughout the plant.

Every year during NFL football, we would bet on the point spread of the Dallas Cowboys. We never betted money, only fried pies; and when I lost and brought him a pie, he savored it. There was a strong interest in hunting which also included firearms in general. This included reloading and all the specs that go with firearms such as trajectory, minute of angle, caliber, smokeless powder, black powder, muzzle velocity and on and on. He had collected many weapons over his earlier years that included the awesome 458 Winchester Magnum. Basically, an elephant gun. Now many of you are thinking, why would he want a weapon like that when there are no elephants roaming free on the North American Continent, but you must understand, *it doesn't matter*. Something like that does not have to be used for hunting, as many of us just like dealing with those things that are on the scale of awesome. We can cover further issues on that later, if you choose.

Grant also served as a surrogate father to my three boys who had an interest in sports that I lacked. He spent hours playing games with them and won most of the time. My sons realized they had to gang up on him in order for him to suffer defeat. And yet, I often wondered who actually won and who let the other ones win.

The man has a great many interests, like that of many intelligent individuals who love life and all it encompasses. These include religion with its ancient history, science, philosophy, politics, physiology, sociology, astronomy, chemistry, current events and the strange little things of quantum physics. Pretty much any -ology and -onomy. We covered the topic of hunting along with the firearms and he introduced me to the books of Peter Hathaway Capstick, who was a Great White Hunter in the sixties and seventies. I was fortunate to convey that interest to one of my brothers.

As his interests expanded, Grant started reading the Classics, especially the works of Charles Dickens. I started reading also and became fond of the books, and eventually moved on to Hugo and Tolstoy. Over the years we spent not hundreds, but over a thousand hours in discussion on these topics. I would go over to his house, or he and his wife would come to ours.

During this period of time, Grant lost his only brother to a tragic automobile accident. This was more than just a tragic event because Grant and his brother were very close.

As fate has a tendency to intervene, the oil crises in the early eighties caused us to be laid off from our jobs. For the two years we were not working together, our connection lessened. I went to work for an Electrical Contractor and as I type this, I truly cannot remember what happened to him. But it would not be until we were called back to the plant, did we meet up again.

As common sense would prevail, the company put us back together welding. Me laying a bead of weld the best I could and Grant laying his perfect bead. We took our time and built some of the best derricks that rolled out of the plant. One day, we had a couple of men in suits come into our bay and crawled through the derrick we were building, then left. Didn't know who the characters were but later our foreman told us they were the authors of the "Blue Book" for the Quality Control in the company, and said it was some of the best welding they had seen on derricks.

Then there was one week Grant did not come to work, which was very unusual because no matter how sick he was, he always showed up. There was one weekend he went shooting and the metal jacket of one of the bullets ricocheted off the target and penetrated the edge of his leg. An "in and out" wound. He simply cleaned it out with a q-tip and went to work that next Monday. He was very sore but still at work. So when Grant did not show that week it seemed strange, yet it really did not register until years later when I was able to connect this with what really happened.

When Grant returned after the unusual absence, he seemed to be preoccupied with something. I still have an image in my mind of him sitting alone and in deep thought, which was not normal for him. Gradually over time, he returned to his old self. Almost. As the economy goes, there was another downturn in the oil business, so we were laid off again. I went back to work for the Electrical Contractor and Grant joined his father in setting up a tobacco shop in our small town.

Since the oil industry is always feast or famine, we were called back to work again, but Grant elected to stay at the tobacco shop; and to reduce the boredom of waiting for customers, he would start doodling on paper. Gradually, the sketching would evolve into actual drawings and then went to canvas and oils. During the time of him working the smoke shop, he became quite proficient in his art.

After a few years, he and his dad closed the shop, so Grant took his two-car garage and turned it into an art studio. This would become a sanctuary for me during the decade that followed.

Fate is an unusual character that at times creates a stronger bond between people. My wife and I moved into a house just down the street from Grant and his wife. This enabled me to drop by his house often in the evenings to continue one of our many discussions. Usually we had several pots of coffee and listened to Classical music as we conversed. There were many times we would sit in silence during the sunset, with the studio reflecting the beautiful hues created by the Texas Panhandle skies. Those were times in my life of great solace and I sincerely miss those evenings. As in everyone's life, there are times we wish to relive, and these are mine.

During the years we were neighbors, our interests carried from one house to the other. We often joked how so many bizarre things went between our houses. I would have to sit with him to remember what all crossed our street from house to house, but one was a piano.

Pianos. This had become another one of his interests. He would purchase old pianos that were ugly as road kill, and rebuild them from inside out. What ended up was another work of art; a beautiful instrument with incredible woodwork! He tells the story of finding a penny stuck under a keyboard and removed it. When he re-assembled the piano, he had trouble with the keyboard working smoothly, until he remembered the penny. He replaced it, the same penny, and it was smooth as ivory again.

Grant explored many different things and his house always had the fragrance of pipe tobacco, and garlic. That was during the garlic phase where he would do just about everything legal and moral one could do with the spice. On several occasions I partook of his roasted garlic, and to the other extreme, pickled garlic, which cleans out your sinuses. He created huge pots of beans that would feed him for days, and created a recipe for pancakes, which were thick enough to use for pillows.

My visitations to his house eventually drew in a couple of other odd people, and on Friday nights, five of us would gather for a "Science Meeting". In reality, the conversations bounced all through the known Universe and brought many good laughs.

As with too many marriages, Grant and his wife would often be separated as she had her own life to follow. I didn't question it. At the time when Grant lived alone, his artwork started to become more and more bizarre. But as far as I was concerned, it was just because the old boy was a bit bizarre himself. If I was a psychologist, I would have recognized what some of his paintings meant; but I am an Electrician, if it doesn't have wires, I'm lost.

Now, let's jump to the future. Grant eventually met a young lady who was an artist also, but her art involved the written word. Kelly is an accomplished writer with several books to her name, and as they became closer, it was apparent they helped each other deal with certain life issues both had.

One evening, they sat me down and explained to me what had really happened to Grant during the previous decade. I am an individual who is hard to shock, and the story they imparted to me was bizarre. Only a few people would believe it, even among our friends and families.

*The Story:* Many years ago, when were welding at the plant, Grant woke up one Saturday morning with no recollection of the previous 5 or 6 years. He still had the short term memory of a few weeks, so he knew where he worked and he knew me. Didn't know how we met, but he knew me. He also knew he was married, but didn't know anything about his wife. Didn't know her past, how they met or when they married. This loss of memory covered the period of his brother's tragic accident and his grandmother's death.

In an attempt to find out what happened, he called a mental health office and asked to talk anonymously. Evidently, this is not uncommon. One of the experts told him this can be caused by a tragic event in life in which the mind removes all memory of it by

erasing a few years before and after. He was told, if you look in the middle of that period, you may find what caused it, which was the time of his brother's death. He was also told, if it didn't return in a few years, it would not. And it did not.

Grant kept his memory loss to himself as long as possible, hiding it in the depths of his mind. At first his wife did not know, nor did his parents. I don't know how long that lasted, because it is hard to hide something like this from those who know you, sometimes better than yourself. But somewhere in there, his wife figured something wasn't right, and confronted him. Afterwards, it was then necessary to tell his parents. I know his mother was heartbroken because he did not remember his brother's death.

During this time of "hiding", Grant would listen very closely to any conversation in an attempt to gain information of those lost years. As a result, Grant has acquired almost total recall. He and I could sit and have a 20 minute conversation, and two weeks later, he could regale it verbatim. He is incredibly good at telling stories, but during this time he stopped. Instead, he would ask me to tell the story to someone, in order for him to discover that part of his past. I doubt I told it correctly, but it was enough to give him an idea of what he didn't remember.

As you would expect, this was a trying time for him. Eventually, his wife moved on and he lived alone with his artwork. He took in students to teach what he learned with art, which expanded to sculpting in alabaster and metal casting. One method he used to become a better artist was to copy the paintings of the Masters of the Baroque Period. Later, I used this same technique to become a better writer by reading the Classics. It's seeing how those in the past worked with their gift. In every aspect of Art, Grant excelled, except the casting. They just would not come out right and it was one of the few times I witnessed genuine frustration on his face. Don't tell him, but I actually found it amusing.

It wasn't until he told me his story, did I realize the art he had been producing mimicked what was inside his distraught mind.

Since Grant had no recollection of the consummation of his marriage, they were able to get an annulment; and since she was a part of the family, she was adopted by his parents. Strange? Yes, in essence, his wife became his step-sister.

As with everyone, we see only what's inside the box with us. Kelly became an angel out of the darkness and helped him see from the outside in, and the two became partners in Life when they married. A remarkable thing I noticed in his memory loss was a change

in personality. He no longer had a desire to wear western clothes and he had little desire to hunt. Still enjoyed firearms and being out in Nature, but he became less aggressive. Not as competitive as in the previous years. He gained more patience, which enabled me to carry on a conversation with him.

Many years ago as a youngster, I stuttered big time, and had many people tease me about it. As I grew, I was able to control most of it, but when I started a conversation with someone, they would become impatient with my words and talk over me. Grant may not know this, but his ability to let me speak, gave me a gift that enabled us to have in-depth and invigorating conversations.

Another aspect I realized while writing this, was Grant's dogs. In the earlier years, he had an English Pit Bull that was as solid and active and ornery as its master, but in the years after his memory loss, he acquired a Great Pyrenees; a beautiful white ghost that would have exploded in fury to protect any innocent. Like its master.

As time moved on, Grant's father, a very intelligent and jovial man was diagnosed with cancer. This hit Grant hard, and it took a toll on his mother, whom I often thought of as my second Mom. So, he was hammered by his father's cancer as well as the heartbreak of that beautiful woman.

Grant would take his father to Amarillo, about an hour's drive for his treatments. Still being an aggressive man, he would sometimes react hard to some situations. He told me once, when they arrived at the clinic and helped his father out of the car, his father's trousers fell down because of his weight loss. When this happened, a young punk standing nearby started laughing. Grant helped his father to a wheel chair and left him inside with the care of good people, then went back outside and pummeled the kid leaving him on the ground with blood all over his face. This happens when a man is pushed beyond certain limits and innocent people are abused.

As with too many cancer patients, his father succumbed to death in May of 2004. I was one of his pall bearers and saw the pain and suffering in Grant's eyes and his words. In the months that followed, I took a job in Afghanistan leaving Grant and Kelly to their own. When I returned to the States two years later, I was saddened to see that Grant was using alcohol to relieve his anguish.

While I was preparing to move to Moscow to work for several years, he and I had conversations concerning his pain and alcoholism. Sometimes the calls would come in the middle of the night, and I never refused to talk to him. One day he came over to my



house and we sat in the back room. He was intoxicated, but when I started a conversation with him on ancient history, one of his passions, his enormous knowledge kicked back in and he started regaling the historic battle between Mark Antony and Cleopatra. It was a reminder to me of the man inside the battered body. The beautiful mind that was still intact.

I did my best to help him move through this time of his life. Many years ago, a dear friend who had a problem with narcotics, asked me to go with her to an AA meeting. What I saw gave me an understanding and respect of the process used to help people cope with the chains of addiction. So I offered to accompany Grant to a meeting to be with others who experienced the alcoholism he was going through. As I expected, he progressed rapidly; but instead of others helping him, he ended up helping others cope with Life. To this day, I sincerely hope I had some help in bringing him back from the depths of the darkness.

His mother had health problems and eventually required 24 hour care, so Grant and Kelly would take turns spending the night with her. The toll was enormous on both of them, then an incident took place that devastated both Grant and Kelly, and gave me an anger that still boils my blood to this day.

His step-sister (former wife) and one of his cousins decided that Grant, being an alcoholic (he had just passed his 100 days of sobriety) was not fit to care for his mother. They devised a plan to take his mother away to live with his step-sister in Oklahoma. They told her they were going to pick her up to have her hair done, then whisked her away to Oklahoma. I doubt she even had her hair done first. And to add to it, they kept her and Grant from communicating, when both needed it.

As you can imagine, Grant and Kelly, totally living their lives for his mother, were tormented. Up to this point Grant was pulling himself out of the pit of despair, and this incident shoved him back down into the darkness, and back to the alcohol.

When this happened, the Courts sent him off to a rehabilitation house down in South Texas. It was almost a year before he was to return home in sobriety. Unfortunately, I was in Afghanistan and unable to welcome him back, but his sobriety stayed firm and resolute, even when his mother passed away in November, 2008. My wife and I were living in Moscow at the time and I was unable to be there for him and Kelly.

Now, enter the final twist.

Kelly had a problem with headaches throughout her earlier years and consulted a Pain Specialist who determined her ailment, and was able to relieve it through surgery. During her consultations with the doctor, she and Grant became good friends with him; and in a conversation one day they told him about Grant's memory loss. He suggested Grant have a CAT scan. What was revealed shed a whole new light on what happened to Grant. The test showed scarring, where decades ago on that Saturday morning, Grant suffered a brain aneurysm.

Grant has been through a great deal of despair and unjust circumstances, and yet prevailed. In reality, I expected nothing less of him. What he has endured made him the individual he is. I am most happy to say, Grant is alive and well to this day. During any written conversation between the two of us, I have to use Kelly as a go between, because HE TYPES IN ALL CAPS. I refer to him as *Grizbutticus*, or the shorter version of *Griz*, and Kelly as *Eagle Head*. They in turn refer to me as *The Jackal*. I do not know why and perhaps it's best I don't know. We still meet once a year to re-discover all the secrets of the Universe, but keep them to ourselves so others too, will have the enjoyment of those discoveries.

There is a great deal more I could have written about this story, but some of it includes the Paranormal and the Spiritual. To add them would have given a more bizarre story that even I do not fully understand. Perhaps best. But suffice to say, the only regret I have concerning Grant, is those years with him are in the past and I can relive them only in my memories.