

# ESCAPE FROM THE RAT RACE

The Second book in the

## North to Alaska

Series

by Fleataxi

### Chapter 1 - A new beginning

Roy was back in his cabin without Oliver the Wolf, who met up with a female wolf he named Francine, who was now pregnant with their first litter. Oliver and Francine had moved into a cave about 2 miles North of Roy's Cabin. While Oliver continued to visit, Francine was heavy with pups, and didn't want to travel any more than she had to.

He had just left the bush pilot at the lake, and was hiking back to his cabin. All alone for the first time in 6 months, he experienced feelings of loneliness, and the stark sense of being the only human for more than 100 miles. At the same time, He realized that Oliver was where he belonged, and human contact is just a radio call away. As Roy reached his cabin, he noticed something that wasn't there before. When he got closer, he could see it was a big stainless steel revolver, then he picked it up, and realized it was a Colt Anaconda .44 Magnum revolver with what appeared to be about a 6" barrel. He opened the cylinder crane, and there were 6 cartridges already loaded, and a box of 50 rounds next to it. He was seriously puzzled, but figured the Pilot didn't leave it by mistake since there was a box of shells next to it. He opened the box of shells, and examined one of the rounds. It was a box of Jacketed Hollow Point rounds, just the ammo he needed to take down a Bear. He picked up the gun and ammo, and set them inside the cabin on the table. He unpacked one of the big tarps, and covered the boxes with a tarp for the night, since he didn't have enough time to unpack all of it. He decided to bring the radio and the hand crank generator inside, and he set it up following the instructions that were included. When He had everything including the antenna hooked up, he tuned to the frequency the pilot told him to, turned on the radio, and keyed the mike. "Roy Williams on 460.650Mhz for a Radio Check, How do you copy?"

He released the mike, and a second later, came the reply "Roy, we read you 5x5, loud and clear. Do you have any traffic?"

He thought about that for a minute, then said "What frequency do I need to use to talk to the Mayor, over?"

A few seconds later, the monitor replied, "The Mayor is on 462.525, go ahead and call him. By the way, if you want someone to talk to you, have them call you on 465.645, OK?"

He Rogered the last transmission, and switched to 462.525 MHz, then keyed the mike, “Mayor, you got your ears on?”

The mayor replied almost immediately, “Affirmative, Read you 5x5, who is this?”

He replied, “It’s Roy Williams out by the HelpmeJacks.”

The Mayor asked Roy how things were doing, and if he could do anything for him.

He explained what had happened with the Colt Anaconda, and asked if he could talk to the pilot. The mayor said he just left to fly home, but left him a message to tell Roy that the pistol was Ron’s and he thought Roy should have it since he took good care of his partner, and made sure the family knew what had happened. Then he told Roy the bush pilot was making another trip up there 4 days from now on his weekly freight run, and asked Roy if he needed anything. He said he’d get back to him at 0800 tomorrow. The mayor rogered that, and signed off.

He looked around the cabin, realized he was way short on room to store all this stuff, then went outside. One side of the cabin was way too close to the trees and outhouse, but the other side had plenty of room for another room to store stuff in, besides, he needed a spot for the cast iron stove he bought to cook on, and keep the place warm. He thought he would build an 8x8 room onto the cabin, and cut a hole in the wall for a door. After he checked out the cabin, he took a walk to check on his building materials, and 50 yards away was a large stand of trees the old trapper had probably used to build the first cabin. He had more than enough wood to build an 8x8 room addition to his cabin. He thought about all the tools he’d need to build the cabin, then thought it would go a lot faster if he could use some modern tools, like a gasoline powered chainsaw and some other stuff like a roll of heavy roofing paper and some roofing nails to attach it to the rafters. He felt another shed roof like the cabin had would work best, and he would slope it from the existing cabin straight away to make the wall farthest away from the door the lowest. He made a list of stuff he needed and set it next to the radio. Then he set an alarm for 0745 so that he’d remember to call the mayor. Since it was getting dark, Roy decided to call it an evening, and closed the cabin door, ate some jerky, read from his Bible, and went to sleep when he got sleepy an hour later.

Roy’s alarm went off at 0745, He got dressed quickly, warmed up the radio, and started transmitting at 0800 sharp on 462.525 “Roy calling the Mayor”

The mayor came back, “Go ahead Roy”

He keyed the mike, read his list to the mayor, and asked if they could ship it on the next flight.

The mayor told Roy that he had most of that stuff in stock, and he could get the rest of it by the time the bush pilot was ready to fly. He said OK, and asked the Mayor to bill his account, and send him a receipt so he could keep track. He ordered a large chainsaw and all the safety gear

plus a planking attachment, 20 gallons of gasoline and several quarts of oil for the chainsaw, a bunch of lag bolts and washers, a roll of heavy duty roofing paper, a box of roofing nails and a roofing hammer. He planned to use the chainsaw to cut down all the trees he'd need to build his extra room, and cut down his firewood for this year, then use the bow saw to cut the wood into usable lengths. He wanted to be ready to go when the tools showed up, so he assembled the wheeled cart and wheeled dolly he had ordered. The cart was for hauling carcasses and other stuff, the dolly was for transporting logs, etc. He built a harness out of scraps of hide to help him pull the cart, since he didn't want to push it. The dolly was much simpler, and allowed Roy to haul a log by setting the low slung dolly wheels so the log balanced. Since he was building an 8x8 foot room, He decided to cut all the logs into 10-ft lengths to allow for the thickness of the logs, and enough room to notch the logs so they would stack. Some of the trees he'd picked were 50-60 feet tall, and would make 5 or 6 logs for his building. Next, he examined the ground where he was going to build, and using the shovel and the pickaxe, removed all the large rocks and smoothed the ground as best as possible. He took shovels of sand, and spread it around where the bottom course of logs was going, so the logs would rest on sand, and make it as level as possible.

Next, while he still had the shovel, he thought about his garden, then thought better of it since he needed to locate it closer to the lake so he wouldn't need to pipe water so far. He hiked toward the lake, and he found a perfect spot about 100 feet away from the lake. Just to be sure, Roy took his shovel and started digging. The soil was rich and loamy, with a good mix of clay and sand to make it drain well. He smacked himself on the forehead, since he forgot the chicken wire to keep the 4-legged invaders out of his garden. He walked back to the cabin, got on the radio, and asked the Mayor if he had any chicken wire handy. The Mayor said the store in town had a lot of it, and told Roy he'd add a roll to the shipment. He asked the Mayor if he could call a gunsmith friend of his, and order a custom shoulder holster for his 4 inch Colt Anaconda, and the 22/45 with the Colt under his left armpit set for cross-draw, and the 22/45 under his right arm for left hand cross-draw with the double mag holder underneath. The mayor told Roy he'd get back to him, and He thanked him. The Mayor said, "Don't thank me until you get the bill." He laughed at that, then thought - "who cares, I can afford it."

Roy assembled the solar powered water pump setup he bought, which included a 12vdc Shurflo RV water pump, a couple of solar panels and a small 12vdc battery in a wooden box with a SPST switch between the battery and the pump. He installed the switch on the outside of the box that would switch the pump on and off. He had about 200 feet of 1/2" PVC pipe in a box, and a bag of connectors, a can of PVC Pipe cement. He was going to pipe the water up from the lake, and have it fill ditches to water the plants, so he had to be careful that the ground sloped away from the outfall point of his water distribution system, He was going to use an open manifold to feed all the ditches at once, instead of messing with a bunch of valves and stuff. He figured it would take about an hour per day to water the garden he planned. He remembered last winter, and he wanted to make sure he had something besides Jerky and pemmican to eat.

The only thing he couldn't get to grow up here was corn and tomatoes. Corn took too long, and tomatoes required too many warm days. He even found a sandy spot that might work for potatoes - he'd have to ask the Mayor to check for him. He remembered seeing a show about the monster veggies they could grow in Alaska. He didn't need King Kong sized cabbage, he just wanted a good eating vegetable. Later in the year, he would have the plane ship some canning jars and a canner to him so he could can stuff for the winter. Since it was getting dark, he walked back into the cabin and closed the door. He ate a piece of jerky from his dwindling supply, but he had food to eat, so he wasn't worried. He wished Oliver was there, since Oliver wasn't a picky eater. Some of this stuff was starting to taste pretty bad. He thought about that for a minute, and realized that he had eaten it all winter, and it didn't taste bad, but coming back from Civilization, where everything was well-seasoned, his raw jerky left a lot to be desired. Roy thought that next time he ate jerky, it was going to be seasoned, even if it meant putting it in the Dutch oven with some water and veggies to cook. As it grew dark, He got ready for bed, and sacked out.

## Chapter 2 - Getting Ready for Building

The next morning, Roy drank some tea and ate some jerky, then he go to work - he only had 1 day until the plane arrived with all the stuff he'd need to build a "room addition" to his cabin. He took the large cart and a shovel to the water's edge to dig clay for chinking. He filled a trash bag with clay, then hauled it back to the cabin. Man, it was a lot easier with wheels. He went back for a second trip, then gathered all the loose debris he could find, mixed it into the clay, then decided to check his snares. Since he already had his 22/45 and his fanny pack, all he had to do was drop the shovel and the cart, then hike over to the first snare in his line. While the pickings were slim, there were enough rabbits in the snares to keep him fed for a couple of days. He skinned and gutted the rabbits back at the cabin, and out of habit whistled for Oliver. He walked outside the cabin, whistled again, and Oliver came trotting out of the forest, looking like the "Big Bad Wolf". He set the pile of guts down in front of him, and Oliver walked up and started eating. When he was through, he looked up at Roy, like saying, "Thanks for the grub, sorry about eating and running, but I've got to get back home." He reached out to pet Oliver, and Oliver sat there for a minute while Roy scratched behind his ears, then as soon as he stopped, Oliver stood up and trotted off back into the woods. He didn't know what to think, except that Oliver was getting more and more wild each day. He walked back into the cabin.

He was thinking about how to get those logs on top of each other. He had ordered a chain hoist, but he needed to build a portable A-frame to lift the logs. It needed to be at least 3 feet higher than the highest wall to allow for the length of the chain hoist. He thought he should use smaller logs up top to make things easier. He could use the biggest logs on the bottom, and the skinniest at the top. Even a difference of 4 inches in diameter could save him hundreds of pounds lifting those logs into place. He also needed to fix the logs into place. He ordered some ½" rebar, a 2 foot by ½" drill bit for his bit and brace to drill holes into the bottom log to anchor it to the ground and pilot holes for the ¾" lag bolts to support the head frame of the door and bolt the existing cabin wall to the new room. After he laid the first course of logs, he was going to drill 2 holes through the log, and pound a couple of 3 ft pieces of rebar through the log, and drive them one foot into the ground. That plus notching the ends of the logs would make that end very strong. It was going to be a lot of work, but it would be the sturdiest cabin in Alaska.

He walked into the cabin, and walked over to the foot of the bed to measure the distance from the foot of the bed to the edge of the wall. The foot of the bed was approximately 5 feet from the wall, and a 3 foot wide door would only leave 2 feet on the end of the wall. The bed was too heavy to move, so Roy figured he'd have to make the headers for the door much stronger than he had planned. He could easily use 4 inch verticals and an 8 inch thick beam overhead. He would hang a hide in the doorway to hold the heat in the main room and cut down on drafts.

When he was finished, Roy buckled on his fanny pack and his shoulder holster, grabbed his water containers and his fishing kit, and walked to the lake. He filled his water containers, set

them down, and walked North to his favorite fishing spot. He sat down and for the first time was able to cast over 100 feet out into the lake. He let the bait settle, then started retrieving it. He didn't make it 10 feet when something hit his lure like a freight train, and took off like a shot. He quickly set the hook just to make sure it was set, and cranked up the drag on his spincasting reel. Soon, He was able to reel in some line, then he started reeling in steadily as the fish tired. The fish tried to run a couple of times, but Roy was using 10/50 Spyderwire on the reel, and there was no getting away. He continued reeling in, until the fish was almost beached. He didn't recognize it, but it looked like a freshwater barracuda. He decided that discretion was the better part of valor and beached the fish the rest of the way, then chopped off its head with his Bowie knife. Picking up the fish by the tail, it weighed a good 20-30 pounds.

Roy hadn't had fried fish in a while, and he had all the fixings, so he quickly gutted the fish, walked down to the water containers, and carried the whole mess back home. He filleted the fish, and cut the fillets into sections, then got out some flour and lard to fry the fish in. As the lard was melting over the fire, He dredged the fish in the flour, and when the lard was smoking hot, added it to the skillet. He grabbed his set of newly purchased Supertongs that some smart person designed for use in barbeques, but would work just as well over an open fire. A couple of minutes later, He turned the fish over, waited about 5 minutes, then turned the now golden brown fried fish out onto a plate. He added salt and pepper to the fish, and ate it with a knife and fork. He was feeling Civilized for once, and said grace just before he dug in. He thought Oliver was really missing out. He was probably eating some poor squirrel or rabbit he caught near his den, and giving Francine the bulk of it since she was near giving birth. He hoped they were OK, and figured he'd better stay away from their den, since Francine wasn't as domesticated as Oliver was, and might object to someone near her cave and her pups. Maybe after they had grown a bit, Oliver would bring them by to show them off. When He finished eating, he cleaned and dried his plates, and set the skillet off to the side of the hearth to let the lard cool so he could re-use it later. He read his Bible for a while then went to bed.

## Chapter 3 - Roy builds a Crane

The next morning, after Roy ate breakfast, he started designing an A-frame crane to lift and move the heavy logs. He wanted to be able to swing loads after he had lifted them so he could place the upper logs on top of each other. He looked for some suitable trees for the boom and the A-frame. He spotted a large tall tree that would work well as the boom, and a couple of really thick trees that would do for the A-frame. He was going to use the dolly wheels to make the crane pivot, so he couldn't make it right now, but he could drop the trees, de-limb them and get them ready so when he had all the logs cut to size, he'd be ready to lift them into place. He took the tarp off the stack of boxes, located the large axe that he just got, and walked over to the trees he wanted for the A-frame gantry crane, and started chopping them down. With a loud crack, the first one fell, and then the other two followed about an hour or so later. He sheathed the big axe, switched it for the smaller axe to de-limb the trees since it was easier to control. When He had the first tree de-limbed, and the branches and leaves cleared away, he walked over to the cabin, set down the axe, grabbed the two-dolly set, and carried it to the trees. He set it next to the biggest tree, and using a large branch as a lever, rolled the big tree into the cradles. He connected the two cradles so they couldn't come apart if he hit a rock, attached a choker chain and the harness to the front of the log, slipped his shoulders into the harness, and pulled the log over to the cabin.

Roy dragged it near where he wanted to build the A-frame so he wouldn't have to move it much more, then flipped the log off the dollies, and carried the dollies back over to the other two logs. By the end of the afternoon, he had all three logs where he wanted them. Now all he needed was the chainsaw to cut down all the trees he needed to build the room addition. Since the plane was coming tomorrow, and He was out of projects, he decided to spend the rest of the day fishing. He repacked all the stuff under the tarps, and covered everything up, then he went into the cabin, put on his shoulder holster and fanny pack, grabbed his fishing pole and mini tackle box, and headed for the lake. When he got there, the first thing he did was take a long drink, since he was parched. When he had drank his fill, he picked up his fishing pole, and walked north to his favorite fishing hole, baited the hook, and cast out into the lake. Unlike yesterday, Roy didn't get a strike 5 seconds after he put the line in the water, so he sat down to wait. After about 5 minutes, He started reeling in the lure, and that's when he got a strike. It wasn't as big as the last fish he caught, but it felt big enough. He kept the pressure on, and pretty soon the fish tired, and He was able to reel him in. It looked like another pike, but much smaller than the last one, maybe 10-20 pounds. Since he didn't have any safe way to unhook it, He decapitated the fish when he had it almost on the beach, then took the hook out with his Gerber Multitool after the fish was good and dead. He quickly gutted the fish, and figured it would be enough for dinner, and he decided that fried fish wouldn't be too bad two nights in a row, so he picked up the fish by the tail, and carried it back to the cabin. He got out the flour, pepper and salt then he filleted the fish and cut the fish into large pieces. He put the pan on the fire to get hot, and added the lard he'd used last night, then when the lard was hot, he breaded the fish, and set it in the hot lard to fry. After a couple of minutes, He turned the fish over, waited a few more

minutes, and turned it again, then put it on a plate, and seasoned it with Salt and Pepper. When he sat down to eat, Roy made sure he said grace, because he was definitely thankful. While he missed Oliver, Roy liked his creature comforts, and good food was something he really enjoyed, even if he had to eat by himself. When he finished eating, He cleaned off his plate, and set the skillet off to one side to cool so he could re-use the lard.

After dinner, Roy decided to call the mayor and make sure the plane was coming tomorrow. Roy turned on the radio, set it to 462.525 MHz, and keyed the mike “Roy calling the Mayor, over”

After a minute, the mayor responded “Roy, what do you need? Over”

He asked the mayor if the plane with his stuff was coming tomorrow, and the mayor said it should be there a couple of hours after morning. He thanked the mayor and signed off. Instead of walking away, Roy remembered he needed to recharge the battery for the radio, so he got out the hand crank generator, connected it to the battery, set it on the table, and started cranking for about 5 minutes. He thought that should be enough, and unclipped the generator’s leads from the battery, and put the generator back up. He picked up his Bible and started reading again. Since this new Bible had the Old Testament, he decided to start in Psalms. Roy always found great comfort reading Psalms, like David understood what he was going through.

He started at Psalm 1: “Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.

4 The ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.

5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

He read this with a mixture of sadness and relief. He felt sad for his sons, since they were walking with the ungodly, and trapped by their possessions. Roy wanted so desperately to talk to them and explain things to them, but mainly to apologize. He felt relief because since he had started walking with the Lord, his life had totally changed, he found contentment without all the possessions - “funny”, he thought, “We call them possessions, yet they end up possessing us.” He sat and thought about that for a while, then as he got tired, closed his Bible and went to sleep.

The next morning, Roy awoke to the sounds of a plane. “Yikes, I’ve overslept.” He said to himself, and quickly dressed to meet the plane. The plane landed on his lake, and taxied within 50 feet of the cabin. The Pilot got out, Roy shook his hand and thanked him for the gun. The pilot told Roy that Ron always used that gun when he was guiding, and he thought it was



strange that Ron left it home that day. Roy explained that Ron had told him to carry a .44 Magnum just like that one, so maybe Ron thought he didn't need it. With that, the pilot, who introduced himself as Jim, handed Roy the manifest for this trip. All the stuff he wanted was on it, and a couple of items he didn't expect, which the Mayor had noted next to them N/C for No Charge. He asked Jim about that, and Jim told him that sometimes the Mayor just threw stuff in he thought you could use, as long as it was relatively inexpensive, and in this case, it was a case of Orange Marmalade, and Roy thought it would go great with homemade biscuits as soon as he got the cast iron stove installed.

He helped Jim unload the plane, since he had to get back to base and reload for the next trip - It seemed Roy ordered so much stuff that Jim had to make a special trip. The rebar and other stuff were lashed to the pontoons to save space, and Roy noticed that Jim had split the load between the two pontoons to keep the plane balanced. Jim also had a small present for Roy, a pint of Bushmills Irish Whiskey that Ron had in his office that was unopened. Jim didn't drink, and didn't want to waste it, so he brought it along. He thought that was awfully kind of Jim, and told him he would think of him and Ron when he made Irish Coffee during the cold winter months. Jim handed Roy the chainsaw in its case, unloaded the gasoline and the other supplies, and as they unloaded them, Roy checked them off the manifest. By now the pile at his door was twice as big as before. He really needed the extra space. Maybe he should make the extra room 10 x 10? He had to think about that, since it meant cutting the logs to 12 feet instead of 10 ft. Jim told Roy he needed to get going, and Roy checked the manifest, and everything he had ordered was on it except the shoulder holster. He figured it would take a couple of weeks to get that. He thanked Jim, and told him he'd got everything, and it was OK to go. Jim got into the plane, and as Roy walked back to his cabin, Jim started his plane, turned and taxied back to the water. He ran to the downwind end of the lake, turned into the wind, set the flaps, and gunned the engine. The now much lighter plane seemed to leap into the air, and in minutes, he was out of sight.

## Chapter 4 - Christmas comes Early to Alaska

When Roy returned to the cabin, he realized he had a lot of unpacking and work ahead of him. First, he got all the fragile stuff into the cabin, and under the bed, next he moved all the flammable stuff at least 50 feet away from the cabin for now. He decided he had to build his room addition before he did anything else, except fish and check his snares when he needed food. The sooner he could get the room up and a roof over it, the better.

He took his manifest and the chainsaw in its case into the cabin, and lit a candle to read by. Roy was amazed by all the stuff he bought, and how much money he had left. The bush pilot had charged him less than 100 dollars for the delivery of over 500 pounds of stuff. When he set the manifest down, Roy opened the case for the chainsaw, and started reading the documentation Stihl enclosed with the chainsaw. He was happy that the plank attachment was included in the case, so he could make planks for the floor. He walked outside to pick up the safety gear he had ordered including a jacket and pants, boots, gloves, and leg/shoe protectors. He also got a hardhat and flip-down visor made of impact-resistant polycarbonate with the attached hearing protectors. He had used chainsaws before, and didn't want to take any unnecessary chances. He had ordered a professional grade Stihl chainsaw with a 30-inch bar and a real aggressive chain since he was cutting mostly softwoods, and didn't want any kickbacks or binds. The whole setup only weighed 15 pounds.

Next Roy picked up the manual for the plank making attachment, and read it carefully. He was going to need it later to cut floorboards for the new room. When he finished reading all the paperwork, he went over the assembly and installation instructions again, and assembled the saw as he was reading them. He noticed the instructions were so full of warnings and disclaimers that it amazed him people would even use a chainsaw after reading them, then remembered that the "city slickers" as he now referred to them, would sue at the drop of a hat, and the company's lawyers were just protecting them as best as they could. He got the chainsaw assembled without it jumping up and biting him, so he assumed it was OK to proceed. He picked up the chainsaw, and put on all his safety gear, then carried the chain saw outside to where he stashed all the gasoline and oil, and filled the chainsaw up to the manufacturer's highly verbose instructions.

Roy walked over to the trees he needed to fell, set the saw down and carefully examined the trees to see which way they were growing, and the easiest and safest direction to fell them. Once he had the pattern figured out, he cleared the area of all loose brush and debris he might trip over if he had to get away from the tree in a hurry, then pulled on his gloves and hardhat, and flipped the visor down. Carefully grabbing the grab bar and dead man, he primed the carb, and pulled the starting rope. After a couple of pulls, the chainsaw roared into life. He let it idle for a while like the manual said, then blipped the throttle to make sure the chain was running smoothly and looked oiled, then released the dead man, which applied the chain brake, lifted the chainsaw to the tree, and started his wedge cut so the tree would drop where he wanted it, then

made the undercut, and the wedge fell out. He applied the chain brake, walked around the other side of the tree, and when he was in a good position with stable footing, revved the motor, released the chain brake, and cut through the trunk from the other side, meeting up with the wedge cut, and quickly backed the saw out of the cut as the tree toppled and fell right where he wanted it to. He thought to himself, "Man this beats chopping trees." and engaged the chain brake, then walked over to the next tree. He dropped 6 large trees in quick succession until the drop area got too crowded for safety. He stopped the chainsaw, and lifted his visor to wipe off his face.

He decided to do the bulk of the de-limbing with the chainsaw, and made extra sure he wasn't cutting anywhere near himself, then fired up the chainsaw and removed the main branches from the tree, leaving the thin little branches at the top alone for now. When Roy finished the bulk of the de-limbing, he worked an 8 inch log under the tree, then measured 12 feet from the base, and cut the tree into twelve foot lengths. He did the remaining trees, then carried the chainsaw back over to the cabin, and dragged the logs over to the cabin using the dolly and harness. The 12 foot logs were a lot easier to drag than the other tree had been. By the afternoon, Roy had over 30 12-foot logs piled up near where he was going to build the room. He decided to call it quits and try his hand at fishing for dinner. He set all the tools back, grabbed his shoulder holster and his fanny pack, put them on and then grabbed his fishing rod and tackle box.

Roy hiked down to the lake, drank his fill, refilled his water containers, then walked north to his fishing spot. He baited a hook, and cast it into the lake, then waited for the lure to sink. He sat down to wait, then started gently jerking the rod tip to give the lure some action. After a couple of minutes, Roy started reeling the line in, and about halfway in, he got a strike that ripped the line off the reel. He set the drag, and the fight was on. This fish fought differently than the last 2, almost like he was snagged on a log, but it kept moving. As he got it closer to the shore, it looked like a huge lake trout. This one was almost 15 pounds by looking at it, and Roy quickly beached it, and put it on his stringer, and back in the water to stay fresh. He re-baited the hook and cast it out again, and wound up almost in the same spot as before. This time, he didn't get any strikes, so he reeled it back in, then cast to a different spot further out in the lake. He let the lure sink to the bottom, then started twitching the rod tip to make the lure dance. After about a half dozen wiggles, something hit his line like it was snagged again. He set the hook, then started reeling the fish in. It was another 10 pound lake trout. He thought they must be spawning to be in so close to shore. When he got hold of the fish, he added it to the stringer, and re-baited the hook and launched it out a third time. This time it just sat there, and Roy reeled it back in, and cast to another area, but still nothing. He decided to take his 20 pounds of lake trout and go home. He picked up his stringer, and headed back to the cabin.

When he got home, he opened the door, and dropped the fish on the table, then put up his fishing gear, and quickly cleaned and filleted the fish, then scored it so he could smoke it. He remembered he had salt, so he liberally sprinkled salt on the fish before he walked out to put it in the smokehouse. The smokehouse was cold since it hadn't been used since last fall, and Roy lit a large smoky fire in the smokehouse after he got the fillets hung. He closed the smokehouse

door, then went into the cabin to pick up the fish guts to see if Oliver was around. He walked to the door and whistled, and sure enough Oliver came trotting on in from the forest. He figured Oliver was watching him bring in the fish, and wanted his share. He plopped the pile of guts on the ground and stepped back. Oliver walked up and ate the whole pile in a few bites, grinned at Roy, then trotted off toward his cave. “Well, that’s gratitude for you.” exclaimed Roy. He took some caribou jerky, sliced it up and put it in a pot of boiling water, and when it was well hydrated, added some mashed potato mix, and some seasonings, then when it was done, spooned it onto a plate, said grace, and ate dinner. When he finished, Roy read his Bible before going to sleep.

## Chapter 5 - I'm a (Modern) Lumberjack...

The next morning, Roy ate the leftovers from last night, and got moving early since he had a lot of work to do. First he put on all his safety gear except his gloves and hardhat, picked up the chainsaw by the guard, walked over to the stored gasoline and oil, and topped off the chainsaw before heading out to saw down some more logs. He was going to try to get enough logs to finish the job today, so he could use the dollies to build the A-frame for the crane he was going to need to lift the logs into place. He selected 6 additional trees that would work for his cabin, cleared all the debris from around the tree in case he had to move quickly to get out of the way, then put on the rest of his gear. Once he had made sure everything was where he wanted it, He carried the saw over next to the first tree, lowered the visor on his hardhat, primed the chainsaw, then pulled the starter cord a couple of times. When it started, he let it idle for a few minutes, then grabbed the chain brake and picked up the chainsaw. When he got it into position to make the first cut, he released the chain brake, and revved the motor. He quickly cut a wedge out of the first tree so it would fall where he wanted it to, then grabbing the chain brake, went to the other side of the tree, released the brake and made a quick cut to join the wedge. He quickly pulled the saw out of the cut, and the tree started falling right where he wanted it to. He stepped back, making sure he had a good hold on the chainsaw as the tree fell with a loud crash. He felt like yelling "Timber.." but there was no one around. He quickly moved to the other trees, and within an hour, all 6 trees were down, and Roy started de-limbing them with the chainsaw. Since he was going to use these to build the roof, Roy figured he should just cut these trees in half, then cut them in half lengthwise with the plank attachment

He remembered he was going to need some planks for flooring, so he looked for the biggest tree he could safely cut, and there was an old one almost 2 feet in diameter, and over 50 feet tall that would make a lot of planks. He shut off the chainsaw, cleared the debris from around the tree, and carefully planned the drop, since this was a big heavy tree. He thought he could drop it towards the clearing OK, but he had to make that wedge cut perfect, since he'd only get one try. Saying a quick prayer, Roy walked over to the tree, patted its trunk, and said, "Sorry Old Timer, but I need your wood." He picked up the chainsaw, set it near the tree where he planned to make his wedge cut, and pulled the starter cord. The chainsaw roared into life, and Roy let it idle for a few seconds before he picked it up and got ready to make his first cut. He would have to be fast to keep this tree from splintering and ruining it. He made an aggressive wedge cut, made the second cut to remove the wedge, quickly walked around the tree, and made his final cut, then pulled the chainsaw out. No sooner had he pulled the chainsaw free, then the tree started falling. He quickly backed away in case the base kicked out, but the tree just leaned over and fell. It was almost a perfect tree felling, and no one was there to congratulate him.

With the tree down, Roy started de-limbing the monster tree. It took several hours, and finally he had the tree de-limbed and ready to cut into 10 foot sections to make the floor of his new

room. First he needed to cut the other trees into sections to finish the roof, so he quickly set a log under the center of the 6 trees he'd cut earlier, then cut them in half. He took a couple of logs and his tape measure over to the other tree, measured 10 foot sections, then propped the trunk up on small logs to keep the chain from striking the dirt and possibly kicking back. When he had the tree up and stable, he picked up his chainsaw, looked it over, then set it on top of the tree and pulled the starter cord. As soon as the motor warmed up, Roy grabbed the safety bar, and revved the motor to make his first cut. The saw blade was so sharp and aggressive that it cut through the tree in nothing flat, then he moved on down the tree to cut it into 5 more sections. When he was finished, he shut off the saw, and walked it back to the cabin and set it on the porch to cool off

He took off his Kevlar safety equipment, strapped his fanny pack and shoulder holster on, grabbed the dollies and the harness to drag the logs over to the building site. The first six trees were a breeze, but the 5 sections of the big old tree were Herculean tasks. Finally Roy had all his wood over at the building site, now he could make his A-frame crane and get to work. He took a large coil of 1 inch manila rope over to the logs he had cut to make the A-frame, and started lashing the 6-foot log to the 20- foot long log. When he completed that, he rolled the whole assembly over, and lashed the other log to the same point. When the lashings were complete, he stood one log end on a dolly, and the other on the other dolly, then stood the whole thing up, and quickly lashed a smaller log about 2 feet from the top to hold the legs in an isosceles triangle to use the logs as a pivot and the weight bearing member of the crane. Next, he took some heavy chain, wrapped it around the end of the long pole he was using as a derrick, and attached the chain pulley to the pole using a very heavy nut and bolt to hold the chain. The chain pulley was rated at 1 ton, and was self-locking so he didn't need to worry about dropping the load. He wanted to use a counterbalance on the other end, and he thought if he filled a tarp with dirt, and closed the top using Paracord through the grommets like a purse, he could easily maneuver the crane, and adjust the counterbalance as necessary. The derrick towered almost 20 feet in the air when Roy pushed down on the counterbalance, and it was fairly easy to move. He was glad they gave him a long length of chain in the chain pulley so he could work it from the ground even if it was way in the air. Now that the longest log was only 12 feet long, Roy could easily roll them into place without the dolly, then lift them into place with the crane.

He rolled the first 3 logs into place, then took out the brace and bit, and drilled 2 holes in each log, then cut a piece of rebar into 3 foot lengths with the rebar cutter, dropped them into the holes, and hammered them into the dirt with the 2 pound sledge hammer. Once Roy had the first course in, he double checked he was still square by measuring the diagonals, and he was close enough for gov't work. He notched the tops of the logs and chinked it with mud, and each successive layer would have to be notched and chinked. He cut notches with his axe and hatchet to fit the next course, and spread mud chinking over the centers of the logs. Roy then drove 2 6-foot pieces of rebar into the ground next to the cabin on either side of the bottom log to act as a guide to make sure the wall was straight until he could drive the lag bolts in to secure the logs to the existing wall. He quickly notched the next course of logs before the mud could dry, and lifted it into place using his improvised crane, then turned the log so it lined up with

the lower logs, and Roy lowered the log into place. He tapped the log into place using a heavy mallet, then added some more chinking to the center of the logs he'd just put in place. Roy notched the next set of logs, and thought "this is just like the Lincoln Log set I had growing up as a kid." He hooked a choker around the center of the next log to be lifted, positioned the crane, and hauled on the chain hoist until the log was high enough to swing into place. Roy lowered it into place, and tapped it home with the mallet. Roy disconnected the choker from the log, grabbed the next log, and quickly had it in place. He was almost 1/3 finished with the walls when it started getting dark. He had about a 2 foot high wall started, and 4 more feet to go before he could put on the roof.

Before Roy went inside, he measured where the logs were in relation to the wall, so he could drill and lag bolt them together. The mayor gave Roy something that looked like a lug wrench to turn the lag bolts, he said it would be easier and faster than a ratchet wrench. It had a socket head that matched the lag bolt head, two large arms, and a padded cushion on a bearing so he could use body weight to help push the lag bolt into the wood. Good thing too, since the lag bolts were almost 2 feet long. He went inside, measured from the corner in, and made a mark, then went to the other wall, measured in, and made a mark, then he went outside again, and measured the inside of the wall. Starting at one mark, he measured over, and made another mark, then did the same on the other side. Roy now had 4 marks on the wall than told him were the edges of the logs were, and if he split the distance between the two marks, it should be the center of the log. He already knew how tall the wall was outside so he knew where to drill to put in the lag bolts. He got out the brace and bit and started drilling, soon he was through the inside log, and he made contact with the outside log, when he bottomed out the bit, he backed it out of the hole, put a lag bolt and fender washer into the hole. Roy picked up the tool, set the socket on the head of the lag bolt, and grabbed the handles. Using his chest to push, he started turning the handles clockwise, and the lag bolt went in fairly easily. A couple of minutes later, the lag bolt was tight. Roy picked up the brace and bit, and drilled the other holes, then drove the lag bolt into the hole. He moved over to the other side and repeated the process. Now those logs were firmly tied into the cabin, and not going anywhere. Roy decided to leave the rebar guides in until he had the entire wall built and lag bolted to the cabin. Roy decided to eat some jerky and drink water for dinner, and get some sleep, since he was exhausted.

## Chapter 6 - And the Walls go Up.

Roy got dressed, ate a piece of jerky for breakfast, and went outside to get his walls up. He thought it would go much faster if his logs were pre-notched, so he set about notching all the logs he was going to use with his hatchet and axe. A couple of hours later, he was ready to resume building. Roy added a layer of mud chinking to the last set of logs, positioned the crane, hooked the choker cable around the next log to be lifted, and hauled it into position, turned the log so it was facing the right way, and lowered it onto the log. He disconnected the choker, and smacked the log with the mallet to seat it. Roy hooked the choker around the next log, positioned the crane, and lifted it into place. He kept this up until all the logs were in place, and set. Roy then took his measuring tape, measured the wall from bottom to top, and noted the centers of all the rest of the logs he needed to attach with lag bolts, then checked the other wall. He went inside, put washers on 10 lag bolts, picked up a pencil and the tape measure, and marked the center of the other logs, then drilled the marks with the brace and bit, then drove in the lag bolts. Roy loved working with less primitive tools - it would have taken him all week to chop those trees down, and he'd still be building the room in November.

Roy stopped dead in his tracks - How was he going to get slope for the roof, since the walls were square and level? and what would he make the roof out of? He didn't have enough wood to make planks for the roof and the floor out of that one tree, and they were cut too short. They'd need to be at least 15 feet long, and maybe almost 20. he had those trees he was going to use for rafters, but what did he need to cover the roof with. Puzzled, Roy looked up at the ceiling of his cabin, it looked like regular planks to him. Wait a minute, the rafters are going the other way. That's it, he'd make a ridge line pole with 2 inner supports to hold up this end of the roof, and the other end could rest on the far wall. But he still needed to support those rafters. If he cut logs in a stair step fashion he could tie the rafters to the logs, and the roof would be supported along its whole length. He'd need a couple of logs about the same diameter, and cut at 2,4,6, and 8 foot lengths to have a rafter every 2 feet to carry the snow load, then he'd need to drop a couple of bigger trees to make planks out of for the roof, then top it with roofing paper and sod. He'd need to drill holes through them to tie them together with rebar, since he didn't have any lag screws long enough, or enough of them. He'd have to drill holes in the logs every foot or so to drop rebar through them to hold them in place, and he'd have to see how many lag bolts he had. Roy had some more tree felling to do. As his Dad told him, "No one drowned in sweat." By now it was getting late in the day, and Roy decided that he could drown in sweat tomorrow, and packed it in for the day. He put everything up, ate some jerky for dinner, read his Bible, and went to bed early.



The next morning, Roy ate breakfast, then grabbed his chainsaw, put on all his safety gear, and carried the chainsaw outside to fill it up with gas and oil. He hoped there was another “Old Timer” in the forest nearby, since he would need something that big, or he’d have to cut down 3 smaller trees to get enough planking to cover the roof. When he walked into the woods, there was a tree that almost seemed to be “Old Timer’s” twin brother. Roy was glad, thinking “this could be easier than I thought.” He put the chainsaw down, cleared all the debris away from the tree, and carefully planned the drop. When he had everything figured, he put on the gloves and hardhat, flipped down the visor, and walked the chainsaw close to where he was going to make his wedge cut. Roy primed the carb, grabbed the chain brake, and pulled the starter rope. After a few pulls, the chainsaw started right up. He let it warm up for a few minutes, then picked it up, revved the motor, and released the chain brake. Roy made another perfect wedge cut, then turned around, and made his main cut, pulling the saw out from the cut just as the tree started to fall. He quickly walked away from the tree just in case, but again it was a perfect drop. The tree fell right where Roy wanted it to, and it broke clean at the cut. He then de-limbed the tree, and rolled it onto some logs so he could cut it into 20 foot lengths. Roy used a tape measure just to be sure. Earlier he had measured from the roof line on the cabin to the far wall, and it was 16 feet, so that would give him a good overhang to keep the snow off the wall as much as possible. He marked the tree in 20 foot increments, and proceeded to cut it into 20-ft sections, getting 3 good sections, and 1 short section that he could use for other stuff. Roy carried the chainsaw back home, took off his safety gear, and almost had a Connipion fit. The Dollies were still on the crane. He carefully picked up one leg at a time of the crane, and got the dollies out. Roy was awfully glad the crane was just resting on the dollies instead of connected more permanently. He went back in the cabin to get the harness, and carried the harness and dollies over to the sections of tree, rolled the sections onto the dollies, and pulled them home with the harness. This was twice as hard as last time, since the last ones were only 10 foot sections. Eventually, Roy got the trees over to the work site.

Roy sat down for a while, and read up on how to install the plank cutting attachment to the chainsaw. He wanted 4-6 inch thick planks, and didn’t have to worry about rough edges, since the roofing paper was going to make it waterproof. The planks were just there for support. After reading the directions twice, he picked up the attachment, and the enclosed tools, mounted the plank cutter to the chainsaw, and set the depth at 2 inches to remove the bark without wasting too much wood. He went back inside the cabin, put on all his safety gear including his hard hat and gloves, then went out, double checked the equipment, crossed his fingers, and pulled the starter cord. The chainsaw fired right up, and kept running when he turned it on its side to line up the guard with the edge of the log. The guide set the thickness of the planks, and the width was determined by how big in diameter the tree was, and how close to the center you were. Roy had already checked this tree against the length of his bar, and he made it with an inch to spare. As he started feeding the log into the chainsaw, the sawdust was flying everywhere. Good thing he was wearing a full face shield. Roy made the first pass, then engaged the chain brake, and walked back to the top of the log. He reset the guide to make a 4

inch plank next. the rest of the morning, Roy cut planks out of the tree. By evening, he had enough planks to cover the roof. Roy had enough, and was more than ready to call it a day. He put everything up, washed up, ate dinner, and went to bed exhausted.

## Chapter 7 - Roy makes Flooring

Roy woke up the next morning well rested, made breakfast which included coffee for the first time in almost a year, then donned his safety gear, and went outside to finish sawing the 10-ft logs he'd cut the other day into planks for his new floor. Roy wanted to finish with the planking attachment so he could take it off in case he needed to log some more trees. He picked up the chainsaw, took it outside to top off the fluids and check the saw over carefully. The teeth on the saw were still razor sharp - that was a major change from the last time he owned a chainsaw, then he thought that had been almost 10 years, and the metallurgy had changed since then, and the teeth probably had an extra-hard coating on them, like the Titanium Nitride he had on his knives. After he had thoroughly inspected the saw and filled all the fluids, he carried it over to his work area, set the 10 ft log onto the saw horses, and set the width of the plank cutting attachment so that just the bark would be removed. Since these floorboards had to fit together, Roy had to remove the bark so he could get fairly square planks.

Roy put on his helmet and gloves, dropped the face shield, primed the carb, and pulled the starter cord. The saw started on the first pull, and he let it idle for a minute to warm up before he lifted the chainsaw up to the log, and rested the guide on the outside of the log. When he was ready to start cutting, Roy released the chain brake and revved the throttle, then slowly fed the chainsaw into the wood, wood chips were flying everywhere, and he was thankful for the face shield. When he had made the first pass, Roy grabbed the chain brake, idled the saw and set it down in a safe spot, then took his logger's tool and rolled the log 90 degrees to cut some more bark off. He repeated the process until he had 4 clean sides. Roy then rolled the log so the widest face was up - he wanted planks that were wider than they were thick, set the guide to 3 inches and started cutting. As he finished the planks, Roy set them aside in a pile to put inside the new room later. Roy's planks were averaging 12 inches each, so he cut a total of 15 planks so he had some spares. Roy had a log left that he had already removed the bark from, and thought he could use some bigger boards and posts, especially for the door frame, and to support the floorboards, and keep them out of the muck, so he set the plank cutter for 6 inches and cut the log up into 12x6 x 10 ft planks and got about 15 planks from the log. He needed 3 to form the door frame, which left 12 to hold up the floor. Roy made a note to himself to order some decking nails to secure the planks to the floor joists, then thought of something, shut off the chainsaw, and walked into the cabin to check the manual.

Sure enough, there WAS a way to cut the 12 x 6 planks into posts using the planking attachment, and it showed him how in the manual - all he had to do was re-arrange a few guides, and he could saw through 3 planks at a time to make posts - they definitely wouldn't look like they came from a lumber mill, but he didn't care. He could get twice as many 6x6 posts out of his 12 x 6 planks, and really support the floor. Roy took the Owner's Manual outside, and the tool kit that Stihl provided with the saw, disconnected and re-arranged parts of the plank cutting attachment so that the guide would allow him to cut the planks to half-width 3 at a time. He set 3 12 x 6 planks on the sawhorse, lined them up as neatly as possible, put his

safety gear back on, and started the chainsaw. Putting the guide on the right side of the plank, Roy released the chain brake, and fed the wood into the saw. He worked very carefully because he was relying on the mass of the wood to prevent any pieces from jumping around and causing havoc. When Roy had the 12 planks cut into 6x6 posts, he breathed a sigh of relief. A couple of posts had jumped around right as he got to the end, but the guide kept them in line enough to finish the cut. When Roy was finished, he took the plank cutter off the chainsaw, and sat down to catch his breath. Roy said a prayer of thanksgiving that nothing had happened to him, and also prayed that he'd never have to do anything that foolhardy again. Roy knew Chainsaws were nothing to experiment with, and they weren't designed to become improvised saw mills.

Roy took inventory of his "building materials" - Door frame - check, floorboards - check, floor joists - check, roofing planks - check, ceiling joists - check. The only things he was missing was the set of logs, the ridge pole and the 2 posts that went around the doorframe to hold up the center of the ridgepole. Roy found an 8 inch log that would work for the stepped logs to get the slope for the roof, and carefully measured two of each length he would need, then put his gloves and hardhat back on, fired up the chainsaw, and made short work of the logs. Roy next marked 1 foot intervals on the logs to drill holes to drop rebar through and tie them together. Roy took off his safety gear, walked back to the cabin for his brace and bit, then spent the rest of the afternoon drilling holes in the logs. When he had finished, Roy counted the number of lag bolts he had left - he had 20 bolts and washers left, just enough to bolt the new logs to the cabin wall, and bolt the doorframe to the logs. By the time it got dark, Roy was all too willing to call it quits. He packed up all his gear, and went inside to eat and sleep.

The next morning, Roy was looking around for the ridgepole, he knew it was around here somewhere - he had cut an 8 inch tree into a 12 foot length so it would overhang the walls by a foot so he could attach it to the walls. Finally, Roy found it behind the wall of the cabin. Roy walked around the cabin to get his ladder - the lighter one this time. Roy carried it over to the wall, then set up the crane to hoist the logs, then carefully marked and drilled holes in the top log of the wall so that the rebar would tie all the other logs together, then climbed back down and cut the rebar to the right lengths, and set it into the holes. Roy attached the choke chain to the 8 foot length of log, lifted it into place, stuck the rebar into the holes, and slowly lowered the log and guided it down onto the top of the last log. When he got it within 6 inches, Roy scampered down the ladder, grabbed some mud chinking, and laid it between the logs, then set the log down and tapped it home with the mallet. Roy unhooked the choker chain from the last log, hooked up the 6 footer, guided it into position and inserted the rebar into the log, and slowly lowered the log while adjusting the rebar. Roy filled in the gap with chinking, then lowered the log all the way down and released the choker. Roy repeated the process with the 4ft and 2 ft logs, then moved to the other side. Roy finished mounting the stepped logs, then finished the day by lifting the ridge pole into place, drilling a hole through both ends, and driving rebar down the holes to tie the ridgepole to the walls. Roy wanted to tackle the roof another day, and he still had to cut the door, brace it with a new doorframe, and lay the floor for the new room. Roy policed up the area, packed up his tools, went inside to make a list of the stuff he was going to need, then called the mayor to ask if Jim could run it up for him in the

next week. The mayor told Roy that Jim would be making his usual run later this week, and he'd see what he could get between now and then. Roy thanked him, and signed off. Roy made dinner, read his Bible, then went to sleep.

## Chapter 8 - Roy the Roofer

Roy got up early, got dressed, ate a good breakfast of oatmeal with cinnamon, sugar, and raisins and drank some coffee. Roy was going to need all the energy he could get today. Roy made shallow notches on the ridgepole every foot to match the rafters, and notched the top log of the far wall as well. Then he lifted the rafters into place, and drilled through the connections, and pounded in a short piece of rebar to make sure it was solid. It took longer doing it this way, but Roy knew exactly how fierce the winds were during winter, and didn't want this roof collapsing. Roy next lifted the planks into place, then muscled and slid them exactly where he wanted them to be, and used a 10 penny nail to nail them to the rafters. When he was finished with the roofing planks, Roy walked back down the ladder, hooked the choker cable around the roll of roofing paper, and hoisted it onto the roof. Roy laid the first layer crosswise from the bottom up, with about 8 inches of overlap, nailing it in place with roofing nails, then he took the rest of the roll, and laid a second layer in the opposite direction with 8 inches of overlap, and nailed it down with roofing nails.

Roy could have stopped there, but he wanted to duplicate the trapper's sod roof for extra insulation and protection, so he climbed down off the roof, took his shovel and filled the tarp with good dirt, and lifted the dirt-filled tarp onto the roof, then spread the dirt out. Roy continued until he had about 3 inches of dirt on his roof. Roy was finished with the roof until Jim came with the seeds tomorrow - Roy had ordered enough grass seed to cover both roofs with fresh grass, and the Mayor knew exactly what type of grass Roy needed.

Roy also asked for an additional 300 feet of ½" PVC pipe, and a second pump setup with valves and switches, and a small 50 gallon captive air tank for inside the second room. Roy was going to have inside plumbing. Well water anyway, as long as it didn't freeze. Roy knew this would be a much more involved task, and probably wouldn't work in the winter, but he needed the water for the garden, and if he was going to pump water halfway to the cabin, why not the rest of the way. Roy also ordered a water heater attachment for his wood stove, and a utility basin with faucets for hot and cold water. Since he was done as far as he could go on the house today, Roy started working on his water distribution system. He grabbed the big wheeled cart, his solar powered pump, and all the PVC pipe he had along with the glue and connectors, put his pickaxe on the top, strapped on his fanny pack and shoulder holster, and pushed the whole assembly to the lake. Roy dropped the pump assembly off near where he had planned his garden, and set up the solar panels to begin charging. Roy took out his compass, took a bearing to the lake, and drove in a flag that he could spot from the lake at the site to help him keep on line. Roy then went to the water's edge, took a 20 ft piece of pipe, tied a piece of netting over the end to keep junk out of the water, and laid 15 feet of it into the lake. Roy stuck a rock under the underwater end to keep it off the bottom, then proceeded to dig a trench for the rest of it. When he came to the other end, he glued on a connector, added another 20 feet of pipe, and kept going. He knew it was going to freeze in the winter, but he didn't need it then, and it probably wouldn't work anyway if the sun wasn't out, so he dug a shallow trench and buried it.

Roy planned to store the pump assemblies during the winter anyway, so he wasn't worried about freezing. If Jim had a scuba tank, he'd blow the pipes out and plug them, but if not, the pipes would probably not crack, since schedule 40 PVC was fairly sturdy. The soil was fairly soft, so Roy made it to the first pumping station by nightfall, and left his tools there. The plane would be arriving the next morning. Roy thought about that, and realized that he had left plenty of room for the plane to taxi in, since the garden was off to one side. Just to be on the safe side, Roy drove in another flag, and tied some surveyor's tape to the sticks to make them even more visible. If Jim missed that, he'd need to talk to the FAA about Jim's ability to see well enough to fly. When he was finished, Roy headed home for dinner and bedtime. Roy got home just as the light was fading, and decided some more oatmeal would be good for dinner, and he ate a piece of jerky. He sprinkled salt on the jerky this time before he ate it, and it was much better. Roy would have to have them ship a couple of gallons of Teriyaki Sauce with the next trip to marinate the jerky with for next year. After dinner, Roy read his Bible, then fell asleep.

## Chapter 9 - Jim the Delivery Man

The next morning, Roy awoke to the roar of a big plane - Dang, he'd overslept again. Roy quickly got dressed, and walked outside just as Jim taxied up to the door. Roy didn't need to worry about his garden, Jim missed it by over 20 feet. When he'd finished taxiing, Jim shut down the engine, and came climbing out of the cab. "Roy, I can't stay long, but I made you the first stop, since as usual, you order the most stuff. You keep this up, and I'll have to paint the plane brown and wear a brown shirt and short pants." Jim and Roy both got a good laugh out of that. Jim handed Roy the manifest, and Roy helped him unload. Roy noticed a small box with his gunsmith's address on it - If it was the shoulder holster set, his gunsmith was working fast. Roy set it aside, and helped Jim finish unloading. When they were finished, Roy asked Jim if he could stay for coffee. Jim said maybe next time - he was in a hurry and had to be back to the airport by noon to fly in some customers for a hunting lodge. Roy shook Jim's hand and thanked him, then Jim jumped in the cabin, closed the door, fired up the plane's engine, turned around, and taxied out of there.

Within minutes he was airborne and out of sight. Roy was very curious about the contents of the box, and cut it open with his pocket knife. It was the shoulder holster, exactly as he had ordered, and another box of .44 Magnum ammo with a note, saying they were the gunsmith's personal reloads for the Anaconda that pushed the envelope a little, but were more likely to take down a large bear with one shot. Roy carried the box into the cabin, took off his shoulder holster, and tried the new one on, after a few minor adjustments, it fit perfectly, and the guns locked into the Kydex holsters like it had been custom made for them. Roy transferred the 22/45 and both its mags, as well as the Colt Anaconda to the new holster. Roy looked in the box, and underneath all the stuff was a cleaning kit for the .44 magnum including a large jar of Hoppes #9, some good gun oil, and a tube of graphite powder, which Roy immediately recognized as the lubricant of choice in Alaska, since most oil based lubricants froze in the brutal cold. After wearing the rig for a while, Roy adjusted the tie-down clips as the holster settled in. The only time he was aware of the rig was when his arm brushed against the cylinder of the massive Colt Anaconda. From now on, Roy would wear this rig everywhere outside since he didn't have Oliver to warn him anymore.

Roy took the cart, and the new plumbing supplies down to the garden site, installed a T-connection and 2 gate valves, then the second pump unit to pump the water to the house. Since he was installing a captive air tank, Roy didn't need an on-off switch for the second pump, and thinking about it, disconnected and removed the first one, since the head pressure of both gate valves off would close the pressure sensor that controlled the first pump anyway. If he wanted to water, all he had to do was open the gate valve to the garden, and the drop in pressure would turn on the pump. Roy left the gate valve to the second pump open, since the only time water would be moving through it was if the captive air tank in the cabin ran low. He really installed the gate valve so he could remove the pump in the winter. Roy thought about that, and installed



another gate valve between the lake and the first pump, since he had it anyway, and wasn't going to need it for anything else. Roy finished plumbing his pumping station, leaving the actual manifold piping until later (he had all the connections, he just didn't want to mess with it right now.) and continued to run pipe from his pumping station to the house. A couple of hours later, he made it to the cabin, took his bit and brace, drilled 2 holes in the wall, ran some 2 foot sections of PVC pipe through the walls, and made the connections. The lower one was part of his drain, and he was going to route that to a sand/gravel trap to drain all the water into the ground, and he connected the upper one to the supply pipe. Roy was stuck, since he didn't have access to the other room yet - he hadn't made the door.

Roy figured "No time like the present" and put down all his plumbing stuff on the porch. He took off his shoulder holster and fanny pack, put on his safety gear for the chainsaw, carefully measured and marked the door opening, going a little higher than he needed to frame to the bottom of an existing log, took the chainsaw to his gas and oil supply, filled it up, grabbed the door frame beams and the remaining lag bolts. Roy put on the gloves and hardhat, primed the chainsaw's carb, then pulled the starter cord. The chainsaw started right up, and after a brief warm-up, Roy did a plunge cut right into the upper-right corner of the doorframe, then quickly cut down to the floor, then repeated his plunge cut on the right side of the door. With the doorframe cut out, but still in place, Roy shut off the chainsaw, took the sledgehammer, and knocked the logs out of the door opening. As soon as they were gone, Roy quickly braced the opening with the new beam and posts, and quickly cut them to fit so the crossbeam was resting on the two vertical posts.

Roy quickly marked the centers of the cut logs, and drilled holes to drive lag screws and washers in to hold the opening securely. Roy drove a lag bolt into each log through the posts, and one in the center of the beam, then went inside the new room to measure the ends of the 4 stepped logs so he could attach them to the cabin wall with lag screws. When Roy had their centers marked, he drilled pilot holes, and drove in the lag screws to secure the stepped beams to the wall. Roy now had an official 2- room cabin. Roy needed to set in the floor next before he moved anything into the room, but first he needed to pour a bed of sand onto the dirt to lay the floor joists on to keep them from rotting too fast. Roy walked outside, got the tarp, the shovel and the cart, and started digging sand to fill in the dirt. Roy hauled about a dozen loads by dusk, then smoothed it out as best as he could with the garden rake, and called it quits for the day. Roy went to check his haul, and was puzzled by the 2Kw gas Contractor's generator sitting there. He didn't order one - then he saw a note from the mayor saying this was a loan to use for a week until Jim came back along with the screw gun he had loaned him to drive all those decking screws to do his floor right. Roy stood there with his mouth open, wondering what was going on here, then figured the Mayor was an OK guy, and just wanted to help. Roy put the rest of the stuff under cover, then washed his hands and made dinner, then sat down to read his Bible before falling asleep.

## Chapter 9 - Roy gets a Wood Floor

The next morning, after breakfast, Roy took the generator, the extension cord, and the screw gun with the decking screws and set them right on the porch next to his front door. Roy then carried in the floor joists, leaned them against the cabin wall near the door, then made sure he had all 24. He took out his tape measure, then started laying 6x6 floor joists in the sand every 6 inches leveling them as best as he could, then toe nailed them into the logs at the base of the walls to hold them in place. Roy went back outside, got an armload of flooring planks, and laid them where the floor joists had been. Roy checked the generator, topped off the oil and gas, primed the carb, pulled the starter cord, plugged in the extension cord, picked up the screw gun, deck screws and the first piece of planking, and a chalk line marker, carried the plank into the 2<sup>nd</sup> room, laid it on the joist, and snapped a chalk line in the center of the plank right over the joist, picked up the screw gun and deck screws, and started driving deck screws every foot or so down the line. Roy repeated the process, but used fewer screws in the middle of the room, since the boards were being held in by their neighbors. Finally, Roy had the floor done for all intents and purposes, since he had no intention of sanding, staining, or varnishing it.

Roy took the tools back out, and started carrying in the bigger stuff he needed to go in the room, like the cast iron stove. Roy routed the chimney pipe out through the opening between the roof and the stepped logs that he was going to fill in later with some more boards. This meant the stove had to go in the corner near the common wall, which worked out best anyway, since the heat might keep his bed warmer in the winter. Roy mounted the water heater box to the back of the stove, and connected it to the hot side of the faucet. He connected the captive air tank to the supply pipe, installed a tee connection, then plumbed one side to the water heater, and the other into the sink. Roy took some of his decking screws and mounted the sink to the cabin wall next to the stove, then installed the small pedestal which hid the drain pipe, and connected the drain pipe to the other pipe in the wall. He'd finish building the rest of the drain system later. Roy had a wood-burning stove he could cook on, and soon he was going to have hot and cold running water. He still had an outhouse, but there wasn't anything he could do about that. A septic system could freeze solid up here, and he didn't have year-round water anyway.

Roy carried the rest of his stuff into the cabin, trying to organize it as he went. Roy soon realized to make the best use of space, he was going to need shelves, but he didn't want to tackle that right now. Instead, Roy walked outside the cabin, turned off the generator to conserve fuel, grabbed his shovel and a couple of smaller pieces of scrap wood, and dug a big hole several feet deep about 2 feet away from the cabin, filled the lower half with rocks, and the upper half with sand after he connected the drain outlet to a piece of perforated pipe to disperse the water as it flowed out of the drain. The box that surrounded the hole prevented the water from traveling on the surface, and made sure it was at least a foot beneath the ground before it could percolate out. When he was finished, Roy walked out to the garden, and opened the gate valves to let the water flow into the cabin. Roy could hear the water surging through the pipes

as it tried to drive the air out, so Roy ran to the cabin, and opened the cold water tap to release the air in the lines. About 15 minutes later, the water was pouring steadily out of the faucet, so Roy closed the cold faucet, and opened the hot faucet. Within a minute, water was coming steadily out of the hot faucet as well, so Roy closed that one too. Roy took a good look at the cast iron stove, and noticed the firebox was  $\frac{1}{2}$  the size of the fireplace, which meant if he wanted to cook on it, he'd have to cut the wood much smaller. Since he had the right tools, that wouldn't be too much of a problem. Roy decided to call it a day, packed everything up, washed up, then ate dinner and went to bed. Roy thought he had better make the place weather-tight, so tomorrow morning, he was going to fill in those holes in the wall with the scrap lumber left over from his projects.

Roy got up, got dressed, ate breakfast, then scrounged around for some scraps to fill in the holes in his wall. Roy spotted some cast-offs from his plank cutting process that were too thin to use, but were more than thick enough for what he needed. The ladder was still up against the cabin wall, so Roy climbed up with the piece of wood, and a pencil to rough fit the piece to the opening. Roy marked the size of the opening, and the size and location of the chimney pipe, then climbed back down. Roy had a leftover piece of chimney pipe to draw the exact size of the hole needed, the brace and bit and a keyhole saw made short work of the hole, and a crosscut saw quickly cut the board to size. Roy dragged the generator outside, hooked up the extension cord, the screw gun, then started the generator as he picked up a handful of decking screws, climbed the ladder, slipped the wood over the chimney pipe, which wasn't finished yet, and screwed it in place. Roy took the ladder around the other side, and marked the size of the opening, then cut the board to fit and scampered back up the ladder, and screwed the board in place. Roy then packed mud chinking around all the openings, filling in the cracks except for the opening for the chimney pipe, which was close enough for government work, and needed a small gap to avoid burning the wood. Roy carried the ladder back around the front, and attached the rest of the chimney pipe to the existing pipe, including the required spark arrester. Roy had selected the highly baffled pipe, since the wind could howl around there. Roy quickly remembered, and shut off the generator.

Roy put up all the stuff, and separated the stuff the mayor had loaned him from his stuff so he could send it back the next time Jim showed up, then went to go chop wood for his stove. Roy had some 2 foot long wood he was going to save for the fireplace, and some scraps he could feed to the stove right now. What he needed was a fresh supply of hardwood cut to length for the cast iron stove. Roy thought he had one last use for the crane, then he could steal the dollies back, so he would tackle that first. He had a couple of 50 pound bags of seed that he didn't want to haul up the ladder to spread grass seed on the roofs, so Roy used the tarp and the crane to haul a bag onto each roof, then climbed the ladder, opened the bag, and started tossing grass seed onto the roof, then when he had spread both bags, he remembered he needed to water the seeds, so he walked back up and down the ladder with a bucket of water until both roofs were well watered. Roy thought there must be a better way, and another part of his brain said, "Stop complaining, last year you were dragging water from the lake." Roy realized he was being a whiner, and stopped whining.

When he was finished, he put on all his safety gear, then grabbed the chainsaw and took the dollies out from under the crane, and decided to go logging. Roy walked about 50 yards to the hardwood trees, and selected a couple of the smaller ones, cleared the brush, put on his gloves and hard hat, started the chainsaw, and quickly felled 6 large trees. Roy propped the trunks up on logs, then de-limbed them and piled the trunks onto the dollies for the trip back. When he got back to the cabin, he set the first log in the sawhorse, and proceeded to cut foot-long segments off it at a very fast pace. He cut the rest of the logs into foot long pieces within an hour, and set down the chainsaw, and turned it off. Roy picked up his splitting maul, and set the log on a stump to protect the maul, and started splitting the log into 2 pieces at a swing. Roy soon had a huge pile of small wood for the stove, and started transferring it into the 2<sup>nd</sup> room along the wall around the stove and the sink. Roy filled in all the available space with wood, and set a galvanized bucket full of tinder next to the stove to start it in the morning. Roy picked up the chainsaw, put it on the porch to cool off, and took off his protective gear, then went inside to check out the stove. Before he lit the stove, Roy double checked everything was clear, and there weren't any surprises in store for him, and the chimney's damper was open. Roy set a small fire in the firebox to check the draft, and it was working perfectly. Roy walked outside to check the new chimney, and there were no leaks, and everything looked good. Roy went back inside, and fed the fire until the cast iron stove was red hot and smoking, then let it cool. Roy knew he'd have to do this a couple of times to get rid of the preservatives that they put on the metal at the factory before he could cook on it due to the smell the preservatives gave off when they heated up. Roy opened the door to vent the cabin and get rid of the smell. Roy was curious to try the new water heater, and turned on the hot water tap. In minutes, the water was almost boiling hot. Roy would have to be careful with the hot water, and not trust it like he trusted his home hot water not to be scalding hot. At least he didn't need to use the fireplace to make tea anymore. Roy almost smacked himself when he remembered - He HAD a tea pot. Now that he had a stove, he could make tea like a civilized person. When the stove had cooled completely, Roy fired it back up, and soon the preservative was cooking off the metal. Roy let it cool again, then cleaned the ashes from the firebox. Roy didn't need the ashes anymore, since he had bought a 12 pack of soap in his first shipment of stuff, so he took them around back and dumped it onto his garden. By the time he got back it was getting dark, so Roy decided to eat dinner and go to bed. Tomorrow he'd need to tackle the garden. Roy thought he was even busier than when he was just surviving. He was right. Roy ate dinner, read his Bible, then went to bed.

## Chapter 10 - Roy the Gardener

When Roy got up, he got dressed, used his stove for the first time to make oatmeal with cinnamon and raisins, and coffee. When he was finished, he put on his shoulder holster and fanny pack, grabbed the cart, his gardening tools, and some other stuff he might need, and wheeled the cart out to his garden site. Roy had a long day's work ahead of him. First thing he had to do was turn and aerate the soil, so he took a shovel and started digging a 20 ft x 20 foot square of ground where he wanted to plant stuff. When he got the ground turned, he went back through it with a tool that looked like a pitchfork, but was used to bust up any clods of dirt. By this time he finished, Roy needed a breather. Roy sat down on a nearby log, and drank from his canteen, then refilled it from the pipe that was to water the garden by opening the gate valve and closing it when his canteen was full. Roy was pleasantly surprised that the water flowed away from the pipe, and to the other end of the garden, just as he hoped. Roy then picked up a bow rake, and raked the garden as level as he could get it, then carved rows with his hoe. He wanted to plant rows about 1 foot apart to prevent crowding, so he spaced the rows a little over 1 foot apart, to leave room for water channels. When Roy had the rows all ready to plant, he sat on the log again, and read the directions on the seed packets to make sure he sowed the seeds correctly, and planted compatible plants next to each other.

Since part of the growing season was already over, he was going to plant his fast growing vegetables and root vegetables this year, then try some of his slower growing varieties next year. Roy planted a row of carrots, a row of onions, a row of garlic, several rows of salad greens, a row of cabbage since it grew so well in this area, and since he had room left over, a bed of potatoes. Roy was also going to start a compost heap to fertilize the garden. He had some seeds left, but they were nitrogen fixers that he would plant after his crops came in, then turn under to boost the nitrogen in the soil for next year. When Roy was finished planting the seeds, he carefully covered them with his hoe, then started building the open manifold he was going to use to water the garden with. Roy attached a Tee connection to the end of the pipe that came out of the gate valve for the garden, then cut a bunch of pipe about a foot and a half long using the Remgrit saw blade on his Gerber Multitool, and built a manifold with 8 tees and 2 90-degree elbows, and stuck a short piece of pipe into each opening to guide the water into the ditches he was going to use to water the garden. When he finished, Roy opened the gate valve to the garden, and water flowed into all 10 ditches. Roy noticed that more water was flowing out of the center pipes, and less out of the edges. Roy scratched his head for a minute, then stuck his hand in front of the openings, and it was enough to stop the flow to the 2 inner pipes. Roy let the 2 inner ditches fill with water, then covered them with his hands and let the outer ditches fill. Roy was going to have to bring a piece of wood from now on so he could block more pipes to more evenly distribute the water. When the ditches were flooded, Roy shut off the water at the gate valve, and waited for the water to percolate on down. When the water went down, Roy opened the gate valve again, and flooded the garden again. When it had flooded a second time, Roy shut off the water, picked up his tools, and headed back to the cabin.

When he got back, he put the tools up in the second room, and washed his hands in the sink. Roy could get used to running water. Since it was about dinner time, Roy fired up the woodstove so he could cook something for dinner. Roy looked around the cabin, and found his canned food he had ordered, and located one of his favorite foods as a kid - a can of Spaghetti-Os. Roy took out a saucepan, opened the can, and dumped the contents into the saucepan. Roy stirred the pot occasionally, and when he was finished, he emptied it into a bowl, said grace, and ate it with a spoon like he used to as a kid. When he was finished, he washed out the pan and the bowl in the sink with hot water, then put them up. Roy grabbed a washcloth and a bar of soap, since he had the hot water, he might as well bathe. He filled the sink with hot and cold water since the straight hot water was way too hot, then lathered up a washcloth and took off his clothes, and scrubbed himself from head to toe. When he was all lathered up, he quickly drained the sink and refilled it with clean water, wrung the wash cloth until he got rid of the soap, and rinsed the soap off of his skin, then toweled himself dry, and put on clean clothes. Roy felt much better being clean. He had thought of getting a tub, but he couldn't stand sitting in dirty water. Roy then washed the clothes he had just taken off, and grabbed his washboard to really scrub the dirt out. The first time he drained the sink, the water came out black - Roy thought he should probably wash his clothes more often. When he had his clothes rinsed and wrung dry, Roy strung up a rope in the room on 2 nails, and hung his clothes to dry. By now it was getting dark, so Roy sat down to read his Bible for a while and went to bed.

The next morning, after he got dressed and ate breakfast, Roy put on his safety gear to go fell some trees for firewood. Roy decided to leave the trees surrounding his cabin standing for now, and fell the trees further away from his cabin so he would have an emergency supply of wood. Roy picked up the chainsaw, his gloves and helmet, and walked outside to fill up his chainsaw and check the oil. When he was finished checking the chainsaw, he grabbed the dollies and the harness, and dragged the dollies behind him to the large stand of trees on the far end of the clearing. Roy set everything down, selected which trees he wanted, then planned the drop, and cleared all the loose brush and debris from around the trees so he wouldn't trip if he had to move fast, then put on his gloves and helmet. Roy dropped the face shield, and bent over to start the chainsaw. When it was idling for a minute, Roy picked it up, released the brake, and made his first wedge cut, then his bottom cut to clear the wedge, and quickly moved around the back of the tree, and cut straight through to the center of the wedge. As he yanked the chainsaw out of the expanding cut, and engaged the chain brake, the tree toppled with a loud cracking sound, and Roy quickly stepped back several steps just in case the tree fell badly. Roy moved over to the next tree, repeated the process, and within an hour or two, he had a dozen trees on the ground. Roy started de-limbing the trees by propping the trunk up on a log, and cutting the branches off. Soon he had a dozen large trunks, and a pile of branches sorted by size. Roy would come back later and cut the larger branches into usable size to burn in the wood stove.

Roy rolled each trunk onto the dollies and dragged them over to the sawhorse, then walked back to get the chainsaw, helmet and gloves from where he had left them next to the trees, and carried them over to the sawhorse. Roy donned the rest of his safety gear, cleared the area

around his sawhorse, and started the chainsaw. Roy cut the trunk into foot long pieces so he could use them in either the stove or fireplace, then got the other trunks and cut them up. By this time, Roy was Dog tired, set his gear down on the porch, stripped off his Kevlar jacket and pants, walked inside the cabin, poured a big glass of water from the sink, then sat down and ate a piece of jerky from his fast dwindling supply. Roy thought "I'd better go hunting or at least check the snares pretty soon before I run out of meat. As soon as I've got all the firewood in, I'll check out the hunting areas, and I can fish every day when I have my chores done from now on."

Roy got up after lunch, and walked out to his garden with a large piece of scrap wood, opened the gate valve for the garden, and when the center section was full, blocked the center pipes with the board. The board worked much better than his hand, and he could block 4 outlets at a time, so the outer ditches filled quickly after the center was blocked. When the outer ditches filled, the center ones had drained, so he filled them again, and then re-filled the outer ditches and shut the gate valve. Roy left the piece of wood next to the garden, and walked back to the cabin, grabbed the roll of chicken wire and some long straight poles he had saved from his wood cutting for this purpose, and rolled the whole pile out to the garden on the cart. Roy pounded the first stake in with a rock, then planted a pole every 6 feet around the garden, then took the 4 foot wide roll of chicken wire, and un-rolled it around the poles. When he had completely surrounded the garden in chicken wire, he cut the wire with his Gerber Multitool, then tacked the wire to the poles. Roy then made a second lap around the poles with the remainder of the wire, since he knew those "wascawy wabbits" would try to get at the garden if they could. Roy nailed the second layer over the first, and the combination hopefully would be enough to stop even the most determined rabbit or other garden raiders. Roy left himself a route into the garden by bending the nails on one pole instead of driving them home. It should hold up against a rabbit, but he could open it fairly easily. Roy put the rest of his stuff back on the cart, and rolled it back to the cabin, and put everything up.

Roy grabbed his fishing pole and tackle box on the way out the door, he had already put on his shoulder holster and fanny pack when he went to work in the garden, and walked back to the lake to try his luck at fishing. Roy spent the rest of the afternoon fishing, caught some fish, brought them home to clean and gut them, smoked some of them, and fried one of them for dinner. Roy set the guts outside for Oliver if he was in the neighborhood. Roy whistled for Oliver, but didn't see him, so he left the pile of guts on the corner of the porch, and went back into the cabin to fix dinner. After dinner, Roy cleaned up, washed up, and changed into clean clothes, sat down to read his Bible by kerosene lamp, then went to bed.

Roy woke up at dawn the next morning, got dressed, ate breakfast, put on his leg protectors, picked up his splitting maul, and went outside to split all the wood he had cut the previous day. Roy looked at the massive pile of logs, and shook his head, then got to work. He set a log on top of the stump, picked up the splitting maul, and split the log into quarters. Roy kept it up until he ran out of room, then set the maul down, and started stacking the wood on the far side of the cabin to keep the splitting area clear. When the area was clear again, he started splitting

wood again, and kept alternating splitting and stacking until he had split all the wood he had cut. Roy had a huge pile of split wood, but realized that he would need 5 to 6 times this quantity of wood to make it through the winter, so he had a lot more wood left to fell and split. When he was finished, he took off his safety gear, walked into the cabin and took a drink from the sink and ate some jerky. After a while, he went outside to the garden to water it, turned on the gate valve, flooded the ditches twice, then shut off the gate valve and walked back to the cabin to pick up his fishing gear. Roy fished for the rest of the afternoon, caught some larger fish, a couple of Northern Pike, a lake trout, cleaned and gutted them, then smoked them in the smokehouse. Roy made dinner, washed the dishes, took a sponge bath and washed his clothes, changed into clean clothes, sat down and read his Bible before going to bed.



## Chapter 10 - Close Call

Roy woke up early the next morning, got dressed, ate breakfast, and got ready to do chores. He donned his safety gear, grabbed the chainsaw, topped off the fluids, slipped the harness for the dollies over his shoulder, and walked off to the area he was cutting trees. Roy selected another 6 trees to fell, and cleared the brush and debris from around them, planned where he wanted to drop each tree, then started the chainsaw after putting on his gloves and dropping the visor of his helmet. An hour later, all 6 trees were down, and he started de-limbing them. When they were down to trunks, Roy shut off the chainsaw, loaded the logs onto the dolly, and dragged them over to the sawhorse next to the cabin, then picked up the chainsaw, gloves and helmet, and carried them over to the sawhorse. Roy put on the gloves and helmet, lifted the first log into the sawhorse, dropped the visor, and fired up the chainsaw and quickly cut it into 1 foot segments. Roy cut the rest of the logs into 1 foot segments, left them where they lay, and set the chainsaw on the porch to cool.

Roy took off his safety equipment, put on his shoulder holster and fanny pack, picked up his fishing pole and tackle box so he could go fishing after he was done watering the garden, and set off for the garden. When he got there, he turned on the gate valve to let water flow into the garden, and when the middle was full, blocked the pipes with the board to let the edges fill, then switched back to the middle, and back to the edges. When all the ditches had been filled twice, Roy shut off the water, left the board next to the pump, and picked up his fishing rod and tackle box. Roy walked to the lake, and started fishing, but couldn't catch anything. After an hour, Roy got frustrated, reeled the line back in, and headed north to another part of the lake. Roy found a perfect fishing spot about ½ mile north on the lake and he thought he saw big fish rippling on the surface. Roy cast his line out where he thought he saw fish, and almost immediately caught a big fish. Roy landed it, hooked it onto his stringer, then quickly cast again. Roy caught 3 lake trout fairly quickly, then cast way out there, and let the line settle. Just as he was ready to sit down and wait for a strike, Roy heard a loud growl behind him in the bushes - it sounded like a Bear. Roy opened the bail, dropped his rod, and turned around to see a huge bruin standing on his hind legs and growling fiercely at him. Roy reached for his .44 magnum, since the bear was less than 50 yards away, and obviously in no mood to discuss this rationally - probably cranky and hungry after his long nap. Taking a perfect isosceles stance, Roy thumbed back the hammer, settled the front sight on the bear's heart, and said to the bear, "OK we can do this the easy way or the hard way - so tell me, do you feel lucky?" The bear sat down turned around and walked off. Roy carefully set the hammer back down, and said to himself, "If I'd known Bears responded to Clint Eastwood, I'd have tried it sooner."

At that point Oliver showed up, and looked at Roy like "Thanks a lot, there goes dinner." and turned around and walked off into the brush. Roy followed, since he wanted to see the pups. As he got closer to the den, Roy got nervous, because he didn't know how Francine would react to him being so close to the pups. Roy was finally within sight of the den, and Francine was out front nursing the pups, which appeared to be about 6 weeks old. Roy stayed where he was until

Francine saw him, and she turned to the pups instead of getting obviously defensive, so Roy kept getting closer, keeping a close eye on Francine, making sure she was OK with him being there. So far so good - Roy was about 10 feet away. Oliver all of a sudden showed up next to him, so Roy crouched down to pet Oliver, and Oliver let Roy pet him, scratching between his ears. Roy kept speaking softly to Francine, and when she was done nursing, the pups got curious and wandered over to where Roy was. Roy wasn't too sure about this, but since the pups had come to him, he figured Oliver and Francine were OK with it. One of the bigger pups walked right up to Roy, sniffed his hands, then licked his hands. Roy knew that he was OK now unless Francine objected. The other pups came around one by one to introduce themselves, when Roy counted noses, there were 4 pups. That was pretty good for a first litter. Roy hoped they could keep them fed, but none of the pups appeared skinny, Oliver and Francine looked like they were eating well, maybe that's why he hadn't taken so many rabbits this spring - Oliver was catching them to feed his family. Roy thought that was OK, he didn't really like the taste of Rabbit or Squirrel anyway. Roy decided to take down his snares unless it was an emergency, so Oliver and Francine could have all the rabbits.

Roy remembered he'd left his fishing pole by the lake with the line in the water, and hustled back to the lake. As he got there, he could see line going out, but he still had line left, and the rod was still on the beach. Roy quickly picked up the rod, closed the bail with about 100 feet left, and the fight was on. It felt like he hooked a big lake trout or a Pike, but he'd have to see when he got it landed. It took him almost half an hour to land the fish, and it was the largest pike he had ever seen. It was almost 3 feet long, and had a mouth like a barracuda. Roy didn't take any chances, and as soon as he had the fish beached, lopped the head off with his Bowie knife. Roy picked up the fish by the tail, and the stringer, then grabbed the tackle box and headed back to the cabin. Roy skinned and gutted the fish, then cut the fish up to smoke it since he just ate fish the other day. When he had the fish in the smokehouse, Roy had some daylight left, and decided to split some wood. He put his leg and shoe protectors on, grabbed the splitting maul, and walked out back to the pile of logs, set one on the stump, and started splitting wood. When he ran out of room, he piled the split wood on his woodpile out back, then split some more. Roy had half of the wood split when it grew dark, so he decided to call it a day, carried the maul back into the cabin, then cleaned up and made dinner. Roy opened a can of corned beef hash, set a fire in the wood stove, then as the stove got hot, put the pan on the stove, let the pan get hot, and added the corned beef hash. Roy kept stirring it so it wouldn't burn, and slid it onto a plate, added salt and pepper, carried it to the table, sat down and said Grace "God, I just wanted to say thanks for the food, and I especially wanted to thank you for sending that bear away, and letting me see Oliver's pups. Amen" With that, Roy dug into dinner, and soon his plate was empty. Roy carried his dish to the sink, cleaned off the dishes, then poured a sinkful of water to take a bath, then changed clothes, read his Bible, and went to sleep.

## Chapter 11 - Getting Ready to Hunt

Roy ate breakfast, did his chores, then thought about what he should do today. Roy felt he should get ready to go hunting while his jerky lasted, since he didn't want to cook outdoors in case it attracted something he'd rather not deal with now that Oliver had a family to take care of. By now, Roy had relegated the flintlock to the spot above the door. He unloaded and thoroughly cleaned it, sealed the container with his possibles bag, powder and lead, then placed it under the floorboards where he found it. He had the Stainless Steel .308 Browning A-Bolt with the BOSS unit, a synthetic stock and a Leupold scope for hunting. He had 10 boxes of 20 rounds each of Federal SPBT 190 gr. Hunting Rounds that his gunsmith shipped with the gun. As usual, Roy knew the gunsmith had not only boresighted the gun, but had confirmed the zero personally at his 100yd indoor range and printed out the results from the chronograph listing the velocity at the muzzle, 100 and 300 yards as well as the estimated drop. Just to be on the safe side, Roy wanted to re-check the zero, since the scope might have been bumped during shipping. Roy picked out a suitable log, marked the center with a 1" dot from his kit, and paced off 100 yards. Roy realized that this could be an exercise in futility, since he didn't know the exact range, but he figured he was plus or minus 5 feet of 100 yards.

Roy just wanted to make sure the scope was close. He walked back to the cabin, uncased the Browning rifle, took out a box of ammo, noticed the boxes were all the same lot number - good thing to know, Roy would have to ask the gunsmith to set the rest of the case aside for him if it worked well. Roy loaded 5 rounds in the magazine, put a tarp and his shooting pad on the porch, put on his hearing protectors and shooting glasses, laid the rifle down and got into a good prone position. Roy flipped the covers off the scope, settled his body, then tensed slightly until he was in a perfect military prone position, lined up the sights to the target, then dialed the scope to maximum magnification, took off the safety and chambered a round. Roy got a final position, steadied the scope on the center of the dot, let out his breath, blew out half of it, and held it as he squeezed the trigger. The trigger broke like a glass rod, and Roy knew he hit the bullseye. Roy fired the other 4 rounds, and then checked his target. He had 5 rounds all on the 1 inch dot, and the first one was dead center bullseye.

He KNEW this gun was a shooter now. He was really impressed with the work the gunsmith had done. Not only had he perfectly bedded and fitted the stock to the receiver, but he had dialed in the trigger break, slicked the action of the bolt, and adjusted the BOSS unit to that particular round. This was almost as much fun as shooting a Phaser. Roy left the action open for the gun to cool down, then field stripped the gun, and ran a patch through the bore. The first oiled patch came out clean, so he stopped there and re-assembled the gun. When the gun was totally cool, he put it back in the case, Roy checked the sling the gunsmith packed with the gun, and noted it was a high-end neoprene sling with a built-in case for 5 additional rounds of ammo and the plastic ammo carrier that came in the ammo box. Roy thought that was a nice touch, since those 5 extra rounds could come in handy.

Since he was done goofing around for the day, Roy figured it would be a good idea to fell some more trees for firewood, so he donned his safety gear, grabbed the chainsaw, helmet and gloves, then filled the chainsaw. When the saw was full, he grabbed the dollies, dragged them over to the stand of hardwood about 50 yards away from the cabin, then selected the trees he wanted to convert to firewood. He made sure to choose trees that were smaller than the rest, since he needed to save the bigger trees for building projects or other stuff. He spotted a large stand of 8 inch trees that were about 20-30 feet tall, with fairly straight trunks. Roy thought that if he dropped half of them, it would just about give him enough wood for the winter. Roy cleared the debris from around the right side of the stand, and planned to drop all the trees into the clearing in front of them that he had created by his previous logging efforts. Roy put on his gloves and helmet, and fired up the chainsaw, after letting it idle for a minute, Roy started cutting down trees like a beaver on speed. In a couple of hours, he had felled almost half of the stand of trees, so he moved to the downed trees to de-limb them. First he slipped a log under the trunk to keep the saw blade from hitting the dirt, then started cutting off branches, and was left with a 25 foot log about 8 inches in diameter. Roy piled the branches off to one side, then started the next log. Roy made quick work of de-limbing the trees, and started loading them into the dolly 3 at a time since they were so small. Roy secured them with a chain that was attached to the dolly for this purpose, then slid the harness over his shoulders, and pulled the trees over to his sawhorse next to the cabin. Roy pulled the rest of the trees to the cabin 3 at a time in about 10 trips, then he picked up his saw, gloves and helmet, and carried them over to the cabin. It was starting to get late, so Roy decided to cut the trees into logs tomorrow, and set the saw and his gear inside the cabin, and looked around outside to make sure everything was OK, then he went inside for the evening.

Roy made dinner, washed his dishes, took a bath and changed clothes, then sat down and went over his emergency gear, double checking everything, then sharpened his knives and hatchet and wiped them with a silicone impregnated cloth. Roy then took the rest of his jerky out of the box, and put it in a Ziploc bag. Then he filled up his canteen and Camelback container at the sink. Roy was now ready for hunting. He'd bring his day bag, shoulder holster, Browning A-Bolt .308 Rifle, and push the cart just in case. He had the cart set up to either push unloaded or lightly loaded, or to pull with the harness he also used for the dollies as a wheeled travois, which was much easier than when he used the 2 sapling method. Roy read his Bible for a while, then went to bed, because he wanted to be up early to go hunting.

## Chapter 12 - Hunting Alone

Roy awoke the next morning, got dressed quickly and ate breakfast, then picked up and arranged all his gear, then picked up his rifle, connected the sling with 5 spare rounds for a total of 10 rounds on hand, put his shoulder holster, day bag and fanny pack on, opened the door, looked around to make sure all the fires were out, and closed the door. Roy took a compass bearing eastward toward his hunting preserve, and started off. Roy couldn't go so fast, since he had the cart with him, but he figured he'd make faster time on the way back to make up for it. Even though he was hunting for meat, Roy was going to bring the whole animal back if he could since Oliver would appreciate the food. Speaking of which, Roy whistled for Oliver, but got no response - maybe Oliver was too far away to hear. Oh well, Roy could hunt by himself just as well, it was nice to have Oliver around to let him know if there were any bears around, or other large predators. Roy barely made his first campsite by night fall, set up a lean-to using his tarp and a stick, made a fire and ate a piece of jerky, then went to sleep.

First thing the next morning, Roy was up and packing - he had a long way to go. Roy reached the spot where he last saw the moose, and he couldn't believe his luck, a HUGE bull moose was standing not more than 100 yards away eating grass. Roy set everything down, unslung his rifle, got into a good prone position, quietly cycled the bolt and took off the safety, remembered to lift the scope caps, got a good sight on the moose, dialed up the scope to max, then aimed at the moose's heart, slowly let half his breath out then held it as the scope stood right over the moose's heart, and squeezed the trigger. There was a large bang, and the moose dropped like a ton of bricks. The rest of the moose spooked at the noise, but Roy had what he wanted. He put the safety on the rifle and unloaded it, and went back to pick up his stuff and the cart. Roy wheeled the cart right up to the moose, slid a rope around the moose's chest, and using a small come-along winched the moose onto the cart. When the moose was all the way on, he grabbed the front edge of the cart, and hauled down on it until it was level, then moved the moose carcass further up the cart, until it balanced without him touching it. he left the rope attached to keep the moose positioned, then threw everything but his fanny pack and shoulder holster onto the cart, slid the harnesses over his shoulders, and picked up the cart to head for home.

Roy made it back to his camp just as it was getting dark, so Roy decided to skip the lean-to and build a big fire. Roy ate another piece of jerky then got up and drank from the Camelback until he was full, then sacked out and went to sleep. The next morning, Roy started walking home, and made it just before dark. Roy slid the whole cart into the smokehouse for safe keeping, and decided to butcher and skin it the next morning, and carried the rest of the stuff inside the cabin. Roy was glad to notice that nothing had been disturbed while he was gone, and started a fire in the fireplace. He ate dinner and went to bed because he was Tired.

## Chapter 13 - Oliver the Mooch

The next morning, Roy got up and dressed so he could take care of the moose before it got warm out. He cleaned off the table, got his knife and hatchet handy, then opened the cabin door, and Oliver was standing there. Roy thought that was odd, then remembered Oliver had probably smelled the moose from his den. Roy thought “Yeah now you show up, but where were you when I had to drag this heavy carcass back here.” Roy opened the door the rest of the way, and Oliver followed him out to the smokehouse. Roy opened the door, and Oliver was practically drooling with anticipation.

Roy wheeled the cart outside, realized he had enough room on the cart to butcher the moose right there, so he wouldn't have to move it again, so he tipped the cart so the moose's head was down, and slit its throat. Blood came gushing out, and Oliver gossed out Roy by lapping up all of it. When the moose was good and bled out, Roy took his Ulu/hatchet and slit the moose open from the throat to the sex organs. Peeling back the skin, Roy made an incision into the abdominal cavity to gut the moose, and started piling up the guts for Oliver. Oliver turned toward the woods, “woofed” once, and Roy saw Francine and the pups. “Dinner for 6, Do you have a reservation? Luckily we have café seating available. Please be seated, your waiter will be along shortly.” Oliver stared hungrily at Roy, and Roy said, “OK Oliver, chows on.” and plopped the moose guts on the ground next to Oliver, but a safe distance away from the moose itself. The rest of the family trotted over and started eating. The pups ate a little meat, but Francine and Oliver pigged out. Roy thought the pups weren't fully weaned yet, so they weren't hungry, but it was obvious that Francine and Oliver could use the food. Roy only kept the choice pieces of meat for himself, and basically gave Oliver and Francine as much as they could eat.

Roy took the leg quarters, and the rib meat into the cabin to finish them later, skinned out the moose, and cracked its skull to brain tan the hide. When he was finished with the carcass, Roy wheeled what was left away from the cabin a safe distance, and dumped the carcass on the ground. Roy thought that Oliver and Francine would take care of any useable meat he missed. He walked inside to strip the meat into sections to jerk it, then took the Teriyaki marinade powder Jim had brought with him from his last trip, and mixed it into the meat, then he took it outside to hang inside the smokehouse. When Roy had the smokehouse full, he started a fire and closed the door. Roy took the scraps and walked over to Francine and Oliver, and added them to the pile. Both Francine and Oliver were stuffed to the gills, and were lying on their sides. The pups were getting their share now as they nursed from Francine. Roy thought about that, and walked back into the cabin, and brought out Oliver's old water bowl, and filled it with water from his canteen. Oliver rolled over, and drank the whole thing dry, so Roy refilled the canteen at the sink, then filled the bowl again so Francine could get a drink. She lifted her head enough to drink while the pups continued to nurse, and she too emptied the bowl, but it took longer. When he was finished, Roy grabbed a big water container, and washed off the cart where it was far away from the cabin. Roy left it there to dry overnight, and went back inside.

He put up all his stuff, cleaned his knives, drank a bunch of water, then remembered he had all those logs he needed to cut into stove and fireplace lengths then split. Roy got up, put on his safety gear, grabbed the chain saw, and checked out front, but Francine and Oliver were nowhere to be found. Roy thought maybe they had dragged their full bellies off to the den since they had the pups with them. Roy walked over to where he had stored the gasoline and oil, and filled the chainsaw up, then carried it to the sawhorse, where he had a log already waiting for him. Roy put on his helmet and gloves, and started the chainsaw, waited for it to warm up, then started cutting the logs into 1 foot sections. A couple of hours later, he had all the logs cut into sections, so he set the chainsaw down to cool, took off all his gear except the leg/shoe protectors, and picked up the splitting maul, set a log onto the stump, and split it into 2 pieces with one blow. Roy kept this up until he ran out of room, then started stacking wood around the back and side of the cabin. Roy was mostly stacking on the side now since he had the back area full of wood. Later, he'd have to rebuild the windbreak around the front of the cabin. Roy hoped the new room would also act as a windbreak, so maybe this year, he wouldn't have to dig out so often. Roy finished splitting the wood shortly before dark, so he piled what he had left, picked up his stuff, and went indoors for the evening. Later that night, he heard wolves howling, it started as a solo, then a lovely duet, then the Choir joined in. What the pups lacked in volume and experience, they made up with enthusiasm. They kept it up for almost 20 minutes, then silence resumed. Roy wasn't sure what to make of the serenade, but it sure was pretty. Roy read his Bible, then went to sleep, dreaming of wolves.

## Chapter 14 - Roy and the Garden

When Roy got up, he ate a leisurely breakfast of oatmeal with cinnamon and raisins, drank a cup of coffee, and went outside to do his chores after strapping on his shoulder holster and fanny pack - after the scare with the bear, he wasn't going ANYWHERE unarmed again. Roy walked around back, looked at the woodpile, thought he was about halfway through what he would need for the winter, then remembered he'd also need wood between now and then. Roy realized he would have to fell the other half of that stand that he cut down the other day, then have to start looking for small hardwood trees even further from his cabin, well maybe he should leave the wood where it was, and start chopping it further away right now. Roy walked over to the garden, and noticed that things were starting to sprout. He also saw some incriminating bunny tracks around the fence. Roy would set some small traps like a Connibear 110 around the garden to take care of that. Roy thought about the pups, then realized they weren't attracted to the garden, so they'd be safe. Roy turned the water on to flood the ditches, then diverted the water as the center filled up. Roy knew he'd have to start weeding as soon as the weeds started popping up, but the good news was if the weeds were edible, he'd have some early greens. "Waste not, Want not" was one of his father's favorite sayings. When the garden was thoroughly watered, Roy shut off the water and went back to the cabin.

Roy picked up the chainsaw, donned his safety clothing, picked up his gloves, helmet and the dollies, and walked over to the gas and oil to top off the chainsaw. Roy also inspected the chainsaw for any wear or parts that needed tightening, and was amazed the chain was still extremely sharp. Whatever they made these chains out of was way better than the stuff they'd used 10 years ago. Roy brushed the debris off the housing and cooling fins of the chainsaw, then picked up everything and dragged the dollies past his usual tree lot, looking for another stand of small hardwood trees. He found a small stand of 8-inch trees that would be easy to cut and split. He figured there were about 50 trees in all, and it would take him most of the day to cut them down and drag them over to the sawhorse. Roy put on his gloves and helmet, then cleared all the debris from around the trees, while planning how he was going to cut all those trees down without a lot of wasted effort. When he had his plan firmly set, he fired up the chainsaw, let it idle, and holding onto the brake, carried it to the first tree he was going to drop, dropped his face shield into place, released the brake, revved the motor, and started cutting down trees. Since they were much smaller than the big trees he had cut down to build his room addition, it didn't take long to drop them all into a pile and start de-limbing them. Roy piled the branches into 2 piles, one he would later cut up for kindling, and one he would let decompose to keep the forest healthy. Roy lifted the logs onto the dollies, stacking them onto it 3 at a time, cinched them down, then dragged them over to the sawhorse.

Later that afternoon, he had them all dragged over to the sawhorse, and Roy decided it was time to go fishing. He set the chainsaw on the porch to cool, took off all his protective clothing, put on his shoulder holster and fanny pack, grabbed his fishing rod, and headed to the lake. Passing by his garden, Roy saw even more suspicious looking rabbit tracks, and reminded



himself to call the Mayor when he got home. Roy hiked North to his new fishing spot since the one close to the cabin wasn't producing right now, set his tackle box down, and turned around to look for that pesky bear. Roy didn't see him, but that didn't mean he wasn't around. Roy baited the hook, and cast it far out into the lake, and hooked another large fish. He dragged it right in, saw it was a lake trout, so he unhooked it, put it on his stringer, and set it in the water, then baited the hook again. Roy caught 3 10-pound lake trout in about ½ hour, and was just about to go home, when he looked up, and saw a flash of fur. Roy dropped everything in his hands, drew the Colt Anaconda, and not more than 40 yards was what appeared to be the same bear. Roy thought this bear was either very brave or very stupid, but he wasn't going to take a chance, and as soon as the bear reared up, Roy thumbed back the hammer, put the sights right on the bear's heart and pulled the trigger. The gun roared and the barrel twisted skyward, but Roy hung on, and as soon as he got the gun under control, lined up to take a second shot, but the bear was on the ground and not moving.

As soon as Roy's breathing returned to normal, he walked over to the bear and realized his first round had punched right through the bear's heart and he was deadlier than a doornail. Roy knew he was going to need the cart and the come-along to get this bear home, so he walked back to the lake, picked up his stringer of fish, rod and tackle box and walked home as quickly as he could. He hung the stringer in the smokehouse, grabbed the cart with the come-along, and quickly retraced his steps to the bear. Roy set the cart as close to the bear as he could, looped the strap from the come-along around the bear's chest, and tilted the cart to slide the body up the cart, then started cranking on the come-along. An hour later, Roy had it on the cart and balanced, and hooked up the harness so he could pull the cart back to the cabin. About halfway to the cabin, Roy noticed he had company, but recognizing Oliver, Francine and the pups, he figured all was well and they just wanted the leftovers. When he got to the cabin, Roy went inside to get a big drink of water, went to use the outhouse, washed his hands back inside the cabin, then came back outside to skin and gut the bear. Roy took his Ulu/hatchet and opened the bear from neck to butt, then opened the abdominal cavity, removed the contents, set them on the ground for Oliver's family who had gotten much more trusting since the last time, trotted right over and dug in. Even the cubs were eating this time. Roy figured that they must be weaned by now, and would be eating regular food. Once he gutted the bear, Roy skinned it, then smashed open the skull and brain tanned the hide. Again Roy saved the claws then threw the hide onto the smokehouse to dry. Instead of butchering the bear inside the cabin, Roy cut the largest hunks of meat off the bear, and removed the bear fat in case he needed it for candles this winter. When he had removed all the meat he had wanted, Roy dragged the cart over to where he had dumped the moose carcass, noticed that the moose was just a pile of bones now, and added the bear to the pile then he rinsed off the cart to get the blood and guts off it.

Roy left the cart on the porch to dry off, and went inside to slice the bear meat into pieces suitable to smoke and jerk. When he had all the bear meat sliced, Roy added another packet of Teriyaki Marinade mix to the meat, mixed it thoroughly, then hung it to dry in the smokehouse after taking the fish down and cleaning them. Roy smoked 2 of the fish, and decided to have the 3<sup>rd</sup> for dinner - Roy liked fried fish. Roy fed the pile of fish guts to Oliver's family, who by

now resembled Porky Pig. Even the pup's bellies were so big they looked like they would explode. As long as the pups could make it until they were a year old, they would be OK since they could hunt as a pack when they were about a year old. In the meantime, Roy would help out wherever he could - especially since he didn't like the taste of Bear or fish guts. When he'd made dinner, Roy said grace, thanked God everything had turned out OK, and asked a special blessing on Oliver's family that all the pups would survive, and they would make it through the winter. Roy sat down to a dinner of fried lake trout and mashed potatoes. When he was finished, he cleaned his dishes, took a bath, and got changed. Then he read his Bible and went to sleep.

The next morning, Roy ate breakfast, then donned his safety gear to go out and cut up those trees into logs. He carried the chainsaw over to the gas and oil, topped it off, then walked over to the sawhorse, put the first tree into the sawhorse with about a foot sticking out, dropped his face shield, and started the chainsaw. Since he had done a lot of this, Roy soon had a large pile of logs, and decided not to split these, since he needed medium logs to keep the fire burning overnight, and these were the right size. By now, Roy had most of the side and back of his house stacked with logs and split wood, so now he could start rebuilding his windbreak in front of the house. Roy set the chainsaw down on the porch to cool, took off his safety gear, strapped on his shoulder holster and fanny pack, checked the hides, and realized the moose hide needed to be rinsed, so he took it down and rolled it up to rinse it in the lake when he went fishing. Roy remembered to pick up his pole and tackle box so he wouldn't have to come back when he was done watering the garden. Roy thought about that and grabbed a small container of raw bear fat to dab on the chicken wire fence hoping the smell would drive off the garden robbers. Roy walked to the garden, turned the valve on to start watering, and smeared bear fat midway up the fencing all around the garden, then came back and diverted the water to the outside of the garden, then repeated the process. Roy washed the bear fat off his hands while he had the water running, then shut it off, and picked up his stuff and headed to the lake.

Roy rinsed off the moose hide near his drying rack he made when he was first stranded over a year ago - Was it over a year already? Roy was shocked to realize his 1 year anniversary had come and gone, as well as his and Susan's wedding anniversary, and it had been almost 2 years since Susan's death. When he had finished washing the moosehide, he spread it over the drying rack, and walked North to his latest fishing grounds. Roy baited the hook, cast it out, and sat down to wait. While he waited, he had a chance to reflect on his life. Roy wasn't happy remembering his past, but the times with Susan made up for it. Roy felt a jerk on his rod, and looked up to see the tip bobbing like one of those bobble-head dogs in the back of some cars. Roy set the hook, and started reeling in but found the going rough, and landed a very large lake trout. Roy put it on his stringer, then re-baited the hook, and tossed it back out. Roy started thinking about Susan again, and soon he had another big fish on the line. Roy didn't realize it, but he kept dropping his lure into a large school of lake trout that were actively feeding near shore on some minnows. Roy finally quit when he had 4 large lake trout on his stringer. On his way back to the cabin, he picked up the moosehide, which was mostly dry, and carried it back to the cabin. When he got in, he put the skin back up on the smokehouse, rebuilt the fire inside,

closed the door, gutted, and filleted the fish, keeping one for dinner, and smoked the rest. By now the smokehouse was full. When he had cleaned up, Roy decided to give the Mayor a call, and turned on the radio, which was already set to the mayor's frequency. "Roy calling the Mayor on 462.525 - mayor you there, over?"

A few minutes later, the Mayor came on the line, "Roy it's me, what do you need, over?"

Roy told the mayor what had transpired the last week or so since he had talked to him. The mayor said they had a fur buyer in town that could give him \$100 for the moose hide and \$500 for the bearskin if they were preserved right. Roy explained that he had brain tanned and rinsed them both, then allowed them to air dry. The mayor told Roy that it sounded like they were in good shape, and he would take care of the transaction for him if he wanted to give them to Jim when he made his run in two days, and post the money to his credit union account. Roy gave the mayor a list of the stuff he wanted to buy, and the mayor told Roy they would be on the next trip. Roy asked the mayor to call his gunsmith and ask him to reserve the rest of that case of .308 ammo, and to ship him another 100 rounds each of the .308 and his .44 Magnum JHP hand loads when he could. Roy signed off and turned off the radio, then cranked on the hand crank generator for 5 minutes to recharge the battery, and put the whole thing up. When Roy got off the radio, he decided to make fried fish for dinner, fired up the wood stove, heated a cast iron skillet, added the grease he had been reusing from the last couple of times, breaded the fish with flour and cornmeal, added salt pepper and some other seasonings, then when the oil was good and hot, slid the fillets in to fry. Roy turned them over when they were golden brown, and slid them onto a plate when they were finished. While the fish was frying, Roy made a small batch of instant mashed potatoes, and served it next to the fish. Roy said grace, and ate his dinner. After dinner, Roy cleaned his dishes, took a bath, and went to sleep.

Roy spent the whole next day sawing wood and piling it in front of the cabin to start his windbreak. He took a break to water the garden, and saw no more bunny tracks; he hoped the bear grease was working. When it got dark, Roy went inside, washed his hands, and opened a can of corned beef hash, and fried it in the cast iron skillet. After dinner, he cleaned up and read for a while, then went to bed early since Jim was supposed to be flying in some stuff for him first thing in the morning.

## Chapter 15 - Jim makes another Delivery

Roy was up with the sun the next morning, ate breakfast, then waited patiently (yeah right.) for Jim to show up. “It figures, the first time I’m up early - Jim’s Late.” Roy grouched. He sat down to read his Bible while he waited, and soon he heard the roar of an airplane. He put his Bible down, and went out the door of the cabin to wait, then remembered the skins, took them off the smokehouse roof and rolled them up. He finished just as Jim taxied up. He turned around with the skins in hand, walked to the plane as soon as Jim had stopped the propeller and opened the door, and handed Jim the skins, who then put them in the back of his plane and then shook Roy’s hand. “Roy, how are you doing - I see you shot a huge bear recently.”

“Jim, I tell you, that same Bear came nosing around my fishing spot last week, and I drew that Colt Anaconda you gave me, but he sat back down and left before I had to shoot. A couple of days ago, I decide to go fishing at the same spot, and guess who shows up? Right as I was packing up to go home, Mr. Bear decided to make an appearance. I figured this bear wasn’t going to back down twice, so I drew the revolver, cocked the hammer, and as soon as he stood up and growled, I shot him. I managed to nail him in the heart, but it was basically a lucky shot. I don’t remember any .44 Magnum I shot recoiling that much - what gives?”

“Roy, you shooting factory ammo or Reloads?”

“The box the gunsmith sent me was a box of hot reloads, but I didn’t think they’d be that hot.”

“Your gunsmith probably knew a thing or two about bears, and your Colt Anaconda - It’s got a strong enough frame to handle +p loads even out of a .44 Magnum, but I wouldn’t want to shoot a lot of them through it.”

“Well Jim, I’ll tell you - that round definitely worked. I’ll make sure to thank the gunsmith.”

“Even better would be to spread the word around Allakaket that this gunsmith knew his business, and knew how to load ammo for Alaska - he’d make 10 times what he invested with you in future business.”

“Thanks Jim, that’s an excellent idea, now let’s unload the plane, and maybe I can interest you in a cup of coffee?”

“OK, I’ve got the time since I only have to make 2 other stops, and they’re on my way home.”

With that, they quickly unloaded the plane. Roy had bought several cases of food, some other supplies, and some tools and screws for building shelves for his second room - he’d gotten tired of picking stuff up every time he needed something. He was looking at Jim with a strange look, because it looked like Jim had the Mayor’s generator, a Skill saw, and an electric drill to boot.

When He asked Jim, he told Roy that the mayor wasn't using it, and it would make building shelves much faster. Jim was right about that. He'd have to remember to thank the mayor next time he saw him. Jim handed Roy a large snow shovel and a pair of Tubbs snowshoes that were the right size for him with integral short ice crampons so he wouldn't fall down when he stepped on the ice. When they got the plane unloaded, Roy and Jim went inside his cabin, and Roy had a pot of water boiling on the woodstove for water.

"Roy, the place seems bigger than the last time I was here?"

"I made it almost twice as big by adding a second room - I didn't have enough room to store all the stuff I had, so I added another room."

"Ok - I see now - good idea building it against the existing wall. I guess that was what all those lag bolts and washers were for."

"Right, and I put them in by hand."

"That must have taken a long time. Next time you need to do something like that, let me know, and I'll ship the mayor's generator and drill up to you."

"OK Jim, but I doubt there will be a next time - I'm done renovating this cabin."

As Jim looked around, he noticed the sink, turned the faucet on, and got steaming hot water.

"Yikes, that water is HOT. You've got hot and cold running water? How'd you do that?"

"It's only until winter, then everything freezes. I'm piping water from the lake to water the garden, so I just extended the line out to the cabin and added another pump. They're solar powered, and I've got a 50 gallon captive air tank to maintain pressure so it doesn't need to run every time I open a tap. I hope you can help me blow out the pipes this fall so the pipes don't freeze."

"I might be able to bring something up this fall, how big is the pipe?"

"I used ½" PVC, and there is a little over 300 feet total, but we can blow it out in two stages thanks to the gate valves."

"I've got a friend that's a diver, and I might be able to borrow his tanks, and a homemade adapter I made for blowing out pipes. Seems a lot of people just pack up and leave during the winter, and pay good money to get their pipes blown dry so they don't freeze."

"Jim, I'm sure that will work great, but Coffee's Ready - how do you like it?"

"Just give it to me black."

They sat down and enjoyed the coffee for a while before either one said anything. Finally Jim asked Roy what happened to Oliver. Roy told him that Oliver had a family now, and 4 growing pups. Jim was glad to hear that since he thought that Wolves belong in the wild. When they finished the coffee, Jim got up to leave. Roy stood, opened the door, and offered his hand, which Jim shook. Jim reminded Roy that it would be 2 weeks until his next trip unless he had an emergency. Roy thanked him, and Jim walked out to the plane, started it and taxied off to the lake, then turned into the wind and took off.

Roy had a lot to do, and plenty of daylight left, so he thought that since the Mayor had been kind enough to loan him the tools, he should build the shelves right now. He needed lumber to make shelves and supports, which meant he needed to drop a large hardwood tree, and he knew just the one. He went inside, put on his safety gear, picked up the chainsaw, walked it over to the gas and oil, and topped it off. He carried the chainsaw and dragged the dollies over to a large hardwood tree a little over 50 yards away from the cabin that he had spotted when he was building the second room, but didn't need the wood. The area around it was already clear, the trunk was just less over 2 feet in diameter, so it was safe to cut, and he had a cleared spot to drop it in. He set down the chainsaw, put on his gloves and helmet, primed the carb, and pulled the starter cord. On the second pull, the chainsaw started with a roar, so He engaged the chain brake, and let the engine idle for a minute to warm up while he got situated. Since this was a big tree, He would have to work fast, and move fast to stay out of its way as it came down. When the saw was warmed up, He dropped his visor, revved the motor, picked up the chainsaw and released the brake.

Roy made the first wedge cut, then cut the wedge out, then quickly moved over to the other side to cut through to the wedge. As he finished his final cut, He heard a cracking noise, and quickly pulled the chainsaw out, grabbed the chain brake, and stepped back quickly to a safe distance as the massive tree fell. It made cracking noises all the way down, then landed with a "Whump". He looked up to make sure no branches were hung up that might come down on him, then walked over to the tree, and started de-limbing it. Since it was so big, there was little chance of the saw blade hitting the ground, and it was too big to lift. He had the tree de-limbed within an hour, and was rolling it onto the dollies. When he had the log onto the dollies, He walked the chainsaw over to the porch to cool off, then took off his gloves and helmet and set them next to the chainsaw, and walked back over to the tree to drag it over to the sawhorse.

Roy got the tree over to the sawhorse about 2 hours later, and sat down to drink a bunch of water. By now the chainsaw was cool to the touch, and He got out the planking attachment and attached it to the chainsaw, then put his safety gear back on including his gloves and helmet, double checked the planking attachment, set it for a shallow setting to de-bark the tree with minimal wood loss, and started the chainsaw, and quickly de-barked the tree. He re-set the planking attachment to make 2-inch planks, and started cutting. The tree was about 30 feet tall, and he wanted 10 ft planks, so he could get 3 planks per pass. After 2 passes, he shut off the saw and re-set the depth to 6 inches for the supports, and made 2 passes. He turned off the saw, let it cool, and then took off the planking attachment. He was stacking these planks on logs as

he cut them, so he took his tape measure, and measured 10 feet, and cut the 2 planks into 10 foot lengths, then cut the 6 inch planks into 8-foot lengths (which was the height of the wall) and stacked them.

Roy set the chainsaw down, got the Mayor's generator out and the large Skill saw with a worm drive and a 14-inch blade, and set the fence for a 6-inch cut. He fired up the generator, plugged in the extension cord, then plugged in the saw. He took the saw over to the stack of 6 inch thick planks, locked the rip guide in place, put his visor down, set the Skill saw at the edge of the plank, and pulled back the trigger on the saw. When the saw was up to speed, He slowly fed the blade into the wood, running the full length of the plank to rip a 6x6 inch post off the plank. Roy repeated the process 3 more times, and then set the next 2 planks up on the sawhorses. He had 16 6x6 8-ft long posts to support the shelves, and enough shelves to do floor to ceiling shelving on the back wall with 18 inches between shelves. He might make some shelves taller, after he saw how tall some of the stuff was, but he thought 18 inches would work. Before he made any more cuts, He decided to measure everything in the 2<sup>nd</sup> room, and how big the stuff was that he wanted on the shelves. He measured everything, decided what he wanted on the shelves, and then figured 18 inches between shelves would be more than enough. With 16 6x6 posts, the shelf would probably support a Mack Truck. Roy set the saw for a 2 inch depth of cut, and marked out 2 inch notches every 18 inches starting at the very bottom of the 6x6 posts. He thought it would go much faster if he did the posts 2 at a time, so he marked one and cut 2 posts at a time. He would have a 5-shelf wall-to-wall storage shelf, with a little room on the top. When he finished notching the posts, Roy measured in 2 inches, and taking a 2 inch wood chisel and a mallet, knocked the notch out of the posts. He looked in his bag of screws, and just as he suspected, the mayor was thinking ahead, and gave him a bunch of 3/8 x 12-in lag bolts to bolt the shelf to the wall. He grabbed 2 posts and his level, went into the 2<sup>nd</sup> room, which he had cleared out to give him enough room to work, stuck one of the posts in the corner, made sure it was plumb, then drilled 2 3/16" pilot holes through the post and into the log behind, then chucking the nut driver assembly into the drill, drove the lag bolts into the wall. He measured every 1.25 feet, and made a mark where the next support post should go, then went outside and brought in 6 more posts to complete the back wall. When he was finished, He had 8 posts along the 10 foot back wall lag bolted into the logs. Roy brought in the bottom shelf, set it on the floor, then grabbed the next shelf, maneuvered it carefully into position, and quickly set up the 2 front corner posts to help hold up the shelving. Once he had that in, the rest of the shelves slid right into place with a lot of grunting and groaning. When he had it all assembled, He took the drill and the 1/8 drill bit, and drilled pilot holes into the posts where the notches were cut to screw the posts to the shelves. He secured every other shelf this way, alternating shelves, so each shelf was connected to at least every other post using 8-inch screws.

When he was finished, Roy swept off the dirt and sawdust off the shelves, and started stacking stuff on the shelves. He put the heaviest stuff on the bottom, and all the foodstuffs together and over by the stove. He slid the 5-gallon cans of kerosene out from under his bed, and put them in the corner farthest away from the stove. Roy put the lanterns and wicks towards the top of the shelves. He had a bunch of gardening tools and stuff that was too big to fit on the shelves, so he

thought he would make a tool corral to hold them in the far corner of the room. When Roy was done, he had a bunch of floor space that was suddenly freed up. He thought it might be an idea to order some 5 gallon water containers with spigots for the winter and a porta-potty just to be safe in case he got snowed in. He had enough wood storage to last a week, but he didn't think he could hold it that long. By the time he was finished, it was starting to grow dark, so he decided to call it a day, and cut wood for the fireplace and stove tomorrow. Roy re-lit the fire in the stove, put on a saucepan, added a can of Spaghetti-O's, and when it was done, spooned it into a bowl, said grace and ate dinner. Later, He cleaned up the mess he had made, washed his dishes, took a bath, read his Bible, and went to bed.



## Chapter 16 - Roy does his Chores

The next morning, Roy ate breakfast, and got started on a long list of chores. First thing, he cleaned and rearranged the cabin. When he was finished inside, he put on his Kevlar pants and jacket, slipped on his Kevlar leg protectors with the shoe protectors, grabbed the chainsaw, his helmet and his Kevlar gloves. Roy wanted to cut down that section of woods he had started earlier, so he picked up the harness attached to his dollies, and dragged them out the cabin door. He set everything but the chainsaw down, took it over to the gas and oil, topped it off, inspected the chain, and it was still almost as sharp as when he had bought it. He didn't understand, every chain he had bought before needed sharpening by now, but this one must have been made by Timex. He decided not to look a gift horse in the mouth, and carried the saw over to the stand of trees he wanted to cut down, then went back to get the rest of his stuff. He cleared the debris from around the stand of 12 inch hardwoods, put on his gloves and his helmet, made sure the attached ear muffs were positioned properly, dropped the visor, and started the chainsaw.

After letting the engine idle for a few minutes, Roy tweaked the throttle, released the brake, and started cutting the trees down. A couple of hours later, he had a nice high stack of downed trees. He started de-limbing the trees that were on the top, and sorted the burnable wood from the stuff that was too small to bother with. When he was finished, he loaded the logs 3 at a time onto the dollies, and hauled them over to the sawhorse. Roy looked around at the stand of trees he had cleared, and realized he had created another clearing. He thought that was probably how the clearing around the cabin came to be, since it looked like this area was old-growth except for the trees right around the cabin, that couldn't have been more than 10-20 years old. He carried the chainsaw over to the sawhorse, put his helmet and gloves back on, stuck the first log into the sawhorse, fired up the chainsaw, and quickly cut it into 1 foot sections. He kept this up for the rest of the afternoon, stacking logs in his front windbreak as he ran out of room. He had a nice windbreak by this time, as high as the roof of the cabin and twice as wide as it was high. Roy took off his safety gear, left the chainsaw to cool on the porch, slipped into his shoulder holsters, grabbed his tackle box and fishing rod, and headed for the garden to water it.

When he got there, he didn't see any more rabbit tracks, so that was good news. He checked the plants, and they were starting to send up shoots. In a couple more days, he'd need to thin the carrots and other root vegetables to give them enough room. Roy watered the garden twice, then turned the water off and headed to the lake. He hiked north to his fishing spot, set down the tackle box, baited his hook, and threw it way out into the lake. Roy let the line settle, then sat down to wait. He didn't have to wait long, and the rod tip started twitching, so He set the hook. The fight was on, and halfway through, Roy felt the line part. "DAMN.. @#\$@#\$. Of all the @#\$@#\$ lousy things why now?" When he calmed down, Roy felt very bad, because he remembered all the tough scrapes he had got through, and if not for the grace of God, he would have been dead now. Roy fell to his knees, crying, saying how sorry he was. Roy was weeping, remorsefully confessing his weakness, and his need for God's grace and forgiveness.

Then the weirdest thing happened. As he was kneeling there crying, he felt a nudge on the thigh, when he looked over, he saw Oliver sitting there looking at him like “What’s Wrong Boss.” Roy wrapped his arms around Oliver’s neck and burst into tears. Oliver must have sensed Roy’s need for companionship, and sat down while Roy cried. He felt like a dam had burst within him, and he couldn’t hold back the tears. When he had cried himself out, he let go of Oliver, and Oliver licked his face, cleaning off his tears. This almost made him lose it again, but he was able to regain his composure. Roy then remembered a phrase, “Man’s Best Friend” He definitely agreed with that. When he had calmed down enough, Roy sat down and petted Oliver for a while, then Oliver’s ears perked up and his head turned. Roy’s eyes followed Oliver’s and saw Francine standing there with the pups. They all gathered around Roy and Oliver, and he played with the pups under Francine’s watchful gaze. Oliver laid down, thankful for the break. “What’s the matter Oliver, kids wearing you out?” The pups’ attention couldn’t be held long, and soon they started playing among themselves.

Roy had an idea, picked up his rod, cut about 20 feet off the line to make sure he had removed all the damaged line, tied a new swivel and hook onto the line, crimped a weight onto it, baited the hook, and cast it out into the lake. Shortly, he hooked into a large lake trout, when he landed it he gave it to Oliver and his family. As Oliver and family dug in, He cast the line again, and hooked another large fish. By the time he had finished reeling it in, they had finished the fish, and all that was left was the bones. He plopped the other fish in front of them, and turned to catch another fish. Roy knew it wasn’t a very good idea to feed the wolves, but he figured if all the pups made it to their first birthday and they were able to hunt as a pack, it would be worth it. When they finished the second fish, Oliver lead his family back into the woods, then turned around as if to say “So Long and Thanks for All the Fish.” then turned back around and trotted into the woods with his family, headed back to their den. He caught a couple more fish, then noticed it was getting dark, picked up his stringer and went home. It was almost full dark by the time he reached the cabin, so he put the fish in the smokehouse, picked up the chainsaw and dollies, put them back where they belonged, grabbed the fish, skinned and filleted them, and hung them in the smokehouse, and built another fire. Roy opened a can of Corned beef hash, lit a fire in the cook stove, set a skillet on the stove, and heated the hash. When it was finished, he put it on a plate, sat down to eat, then remembered to say Grace. He felt an indescribably wonderful peace, and then he ate dinner. After dinner, he cleaned up, took a sponge bath, then changed his clothes and sat down to read his Bible. Roy was reading in Revelation, and while he didn’t totally understand it, he knew Jesus would come back one day to claim those that were his, and He hoped he was in the chosen. He decided to kneel in prayer and re-dedicate himself to God. When he finished, he knew he was going to Heaven when he died. Roy knew it wasn’t going to be too much longer, he just turned 55.

## Chapter 17 - Willy Make-it?

The next morning, Roy got up, ate breakfast, and put on all his safety gear, then grabbed the chainsaw to go cut down some more trees. He filled the chainsaw up, dragged the dollies out to a large stand of trees, and was going to get started when he saw a large tree that would give him as much wood as 10 of the smaller ones. He set down the saw and dollies, put on his gloves and helmet, fired up the saw, and after it idled for a few, carried it over to the big tree. It was over 18 inches across at the base, and was about 40 feet tall. As he started his first cut, he felt something was wrong, because the blade was binding. He didn't know it, but the tree was rotten, and he had just upset its balance. The tree started toppling with Roy right in its path. He let go of the saw, and tried to run out from under the tree, but tripped on an unseen root just under the surface. As Roy fell to the ground, he screamed "Jesus Save Me." because he knew he was right under the tree. The last thing he felt was a blow to the back like he was hit by a baseball bat, then darkness.

Roy woke up, felt like he was surrounded by a bright light. "Am I in Heaven?" he thought, then looking up, he saw Susan, but it couldn't be her - she looked like Susan when he first met her and fell in love. Her lips never moved, but he could hear her voice in his head, "Roy, you have to go back - you're not finished running the race yet. I'm watching over you, everything will be all right. You'll meet someone, but don't feel guilty if you fall in love, I want you to be happy in the time you have left, we'll be together for eternity when your time comes. We're all so proud of you and the progress you've made since you moved to Alaska - but don't backslide. My time is limited here, but I just wanted to tell you I Love You, and I'm happy and safe here. Goodbye for now my love."

Roy woke up with a throbbing headache, he tried to wiggle his toes and his fingers, but he couldn't move his left arm. He lifted his head up enough to look at his arm, and it appeared trapped under a branch. Roy wondered why he wasn't dead, then realized the branches must have broken the tree's fall so it didn't land directly on him. He carefully studied the branch, noticed it was too thin to support the tree, so if he could saw or break the branch, he could extricate himself. He knew his left arm was broken by the pain he felt, but was pretty sure he had nothing more than a concussion besides that. Roy looked around, but the saw was on the other side of the tree, out of reach. He felt around his pockets and belt, No Gerber tool. Finally, in his right front pocket, he felt a hard lump. He pulled it out and it was his Swiss Army knife - This was too good to be true. Saying a quick prayer of thanks, he opened the knife one-handed by holding the knife in his mouth, and pulling the saw blade out with his hand. He strained to get his right hand up to the branch where he could cut it off, and slowly sawed through the branch. After a couple of hours, Roy finally sawed through the branch. He was almost free. He folded the saw back up, stuck the SAK in his pocket, grabbed the branch, and pulled with all his might. Roy screamed from the pain of the branch dragging over his broken arm, but he had to get that branch off if he had any chance to survive. He gave another mighty tug, and the branch moved some more, but so did the tree. He would have to be careful, or he'd finish the

job himself. Roy tugged a little more carefully, and the branch moved, but the tree stayed still. He kept tugging, and slowly but surely, his arm came loose from the tree. Finally with one last tug, the branch moved enough to slide his broken arm out. Roy pulled his arm out, and he had never experienced such excruciating pain. He almost passed out, but slowly got to his knees, then to his feet, looked around to get his bearings, then holding his broken arm with his good arm, stumbled back to the cabin. He almost fell twice, and when he had to drop his broken arm to push the door open, he almost fainted again. As soon as he got inside the door, he grabbed a bandana and fashioned it into a sling, checked himself as best as he could, and except for some minor cuts and scratches, and one heck of a headache, he was feeling pretty good considering. Luckily, Roy had the battery fully charged for the radio, so he picked up the microphone, turned the transceiver on, keyed the mike and said “Mayday, Mayday, Mayday.” then released the mike.

Immediately, the radio operator in Allakaket came back, “Go Ahead Mayday, Read you Loud and Clear.”

Roy keyed the mike, “This is Roy Williams out at the HelpmeJacks, A tree fell on me, I have a broken left arm above the elbow and a concussion - I need a Medevac. Over.”

The Operator said “Roger, broken left arm and concussion - need Medevac. Are you stable?”

Evidently the operator wanted to know if this could wait, but Roy knew enough about concussions that he needed to at least see a doctor right away, and be kept under observation.

“Not Stable - need Medevac due to concussion, and possible open fracture above the elbow.”

“Roger, will contact Jim and the Clinic, Keep your radio on, and the frequency clear - We will call you back.”

Roy set the microphone down, and went to the sink to drink some water. He thought about some Advil, then remembered the rule, “No Meds until the doctor checks the concussion” since the meds could mask symptoms.

Half an hour later, the operator called back, “Allakaket Operator calling Roy, over.”

Roy grabbed the mike, keyed the mike and said, “This is Roy, Over.”

“Medevac will be there in two hours, Doc will be waiting at the clinic. Make yourself as comfortable as possible, but don’t take anything besides water.”

“Rodger 2 hours for Medevac, nothing but water, Over and out.”

Roy looked at his watch, and realized it would be dark by the time Jim got there with the plane.

Since his arm was broken, he couldn't carry anything, so he decided to leave everything in the cabin. Time dragged slowly by, and finally, He heard the roar of a plane, then a couple of minutes later, a thoroughly scared Jim came crashing into the cabin with a huge 6 D-cell Maglite. "Roy, you OK?" "Yeah, Jim, could you shut that light off - you're blinding me." Jim hustled over to his friend, lit a lantern, took a good look at Roy, walked over to the radio, and keyed the mike "Allakaket Operator, this is Jim, I'm at Roy's cabin, he's OK but he does have an apparent broken arm and he says his head hurts. I'm leaving now, will call when I'm on final into Allakaket. Over and out." Then Jim switched off the radio.

Jim carefully helped Roy up, asked if he needed anything, Roy told him to just leave it since he had a busted wing, and to get him into the plane. Jim walked Roy out the door, blew out the lantern, closed the door behind him, and helped him into the plane. Jim ran around to the other side, buckled Roy in, then turned the plane around and taxied out to the lake. He didn't waste any time getting into the air. He was worried Roy was going into shock, so he reached back, grabbed a blanket, and threw it over Roy. Jim flew as fast as he could to Allakaket, and called in from the plane's radio when he was on final approach, "Allakaket, On final - have the doc standing by with transport - he's going into shock." He blacked out as Jim touched down, partly from shock, and partly from pain. When he awoke, he was in the clinic, and the doc was bandaging his head, and setting his arm. He said, "I'd love to give you something for that arm, but with the concussion, I can't give you anything stronger than Advil."

Roy groggily replied, "OK whatever you say, Doc." and promptly passed out.

## **`Chapter 18 - A Stranger in a Strange Land**

When Roy woke up in a strange room, he was very confused until someone noticed he was awake, and a pretty brunette got up from her chair, where she was reading a book, walked over to his bed, and introduced herself. “You might not remember me, but I’m Ron Fellow’s younger sister, Anne. You might remember my brother Steve - the doc. We decided you’d be more comfortable over here instead of in the one old 1950s style bed over at the clinic. Besides, you were OK except for a knock on the noggin and a busted wing. Steve should be by in an hour or so to check on you, in the meantime, if you need anything, I used to be an RN in Dallas TX. Roy’s head was swimming, so he decided that discretion was the better part of valor, and went back to sleep.

Roy woke to poking and prodding, and opened his eyes to see a 20-something year old man who looked vaguely familiar with a stethoscope around his neck. He said, “Hi, I’m Doctor Fellows, but my friends call me Doc.” Roy reached with his right hand to shake, and Steve accidentally bumped his cast, sending a wave of pain through Roy. Roy responded by involuntarily gripping Steve’s hand almost to the point of serious pain. Each rubbed their “owie” and Steve apologized. Then he told Roy “I have good news and bad news - the good news is the concussion was minor, but the bad news is you suffered a simple break of the left humerus which means you will be in a cast for 4 to 6 weeks. You’ll have to stay here for the first week, then you can go back to your cabin if you can get someone to stay with you. Since my older sister happens to be an RN, grew up around here, and also happens to be free for the next couple of months, I’d highly suggest you bring her with you. I’ll be back to check on you later today, then once a day for the rest of the week. I’ve prescribed Darvocet for the pain of that broken arm, and since your concussion has basically gone away, you can take one now. A word to the wise, Anne is capable of handling ornery patients, so my advice is to go along with her, and everyone will be much happier. With that Steve walked out of the room, and after a minute, Anne walked back in. Roy remembered her now - She was the pilot’s sister, who was the reporter that asked her all the questions about Ron. As she got near the bed, he said kind of sarcastically, “I thought you were a Reporter, not a Nurse.”

Anne bit her tongue, then decided to rise to the bait, “I am, I’m also a licensed RN in the state of Texas. I was living with my boyfriend, who was a Rodeo Clown, with the emphasis on Clown. I moved back here when I found him sleeping with his best friend’s girlfriend. I’ve been helping Steve out at the clinic. I love it here, but Steve is getting bored - he wants to join the Air Force and become a Para-rescue Jumper. Roy decided he wanted a Darvocet, and asked her for one. Anne came back with a horse pill and a plastic tumbler of water with a flexible straw. Roy took the pill from her hand, then she set the straw in his mouth, holding the cup for him. Roy drank the whole cup, then remembered he hadn’t been to the bathroom in a while. “I need to go.”

Anne told Roy that Steve said he wasn’t supposed to get out of bed for the first day or so until

his equilibrium returned, so she would bring a bedpan. Roy wasn't too happy at that idea, but basically had no choice. Anne carried the bedpan over to the bed, and with minimal embarrassment for either of them, positioned it so Roy could use it. Roy felt funny about a strange woman handling his plumbing, then remembered she was a nurse, and did this all the time. Roy groaned with relief, and when he was finished, she took the pan away. When she came back, she said that she was glad he was being so cooperative. Roy told her that her brother the doc told him he'd better cooperate or else. Anne laughed at that, and Roy smiled at her laughter. It reminded him of Susan's laughter when they were dating. Roy remembered Susan, and felt bad for a minute, then he remembered what she said while he was trapped under the tree, felt better, then said a quick "thank you" to Susan. Anne was sitting there for a second with a strange look on her face, then asked him what was wrong. Roy explained that her laughter reminded him of the way his wife used to laugh when they were dating. In response to her confused look, Roy elaborated by saying she died of Ovarian Cancer a few years ago, and he had been all alone since then in the cabin.

She said, "That's right, you were stranded in the crash that killed Ron." She saw Roy was crestfallen, and added "Don't feel bad, He died doing what he loved, and probably never felt a thing. Besides, when you found him, you gave him a decent burial, then risked your life running the river in a dugout canoe to let us know. You realize no one has done that since the 1800's. Someone tried it last year in a river raft and almost drowned. "

Roy sat there with his mouth hanging open, then decided to reply. "I'm no hero, I needed to get back to civilization for several reasons, one of which just happened to be that I wanted Ron's family to know what had happened to him. I didn't want to run that river, it was the lesser of 2 evils. It would have taken me 6 months to hike to a town, running the river took a couple of days."

Anne replied, "One of these days, you're going to have to tell me about it. But for now you need your rest. I'll bring you something to eat later. Roy conked out again as the pill took effect.

## Chapter 19 - An Angel of Mercy

When Roy woke up, he was really hungry. Good thing Anne had anticipated that, and had a meal ready for him. She warmed it in the Microwave oven, then brought it in on a tray. They had brought in a Hospital Table while he slept, and Anne placed the tray on it, then wheeled it over to Roy. Since the only thing wrong with Roy was his left arm, the Doctor placed no restrictions on his diet, so Anne decided to feed him a meat and potatoes diet to get his energy back up. Dinner was Pot Roast, and as Roy hungrily waited, Anne cut it into bite-sized pieces so Roy could feed himself. Roy was thankful that it wasn't his right arm that was broken, because he was almost 100% right-handed. When she finished, Anne tilted the head of the bed up, and slid the table in front of him. Roy remembered to say grace, and Anne looked at him praying with a smile on her face. "I guess that explains why you could have a 10 ton tree fall on you and get out from under it with only a busted wing and a headache. I'm not very religious myself, but I don't knock it either."

Roy decided to talk to her instead of letting that comment pass. "You know Anne, I've had too many close calls in the last 2 years that turned out OK to call it luck - I really feel God is watching out for me, and I know where I'm going if I die - do you?" Anne kind of shook her head and then hung her head. Roy told her they could talk about this later when he could think straight and he had his Bible handy. Then Anne dropped a bombshell on Roy.

"Steve asked me to stay with you for a couple of months - you are going to need someone to keep an eye on you and help out while you recover, then you're going to need some physical therapy and rehab for that arm. It's going to take a couple of months to get your arm back in shape until you can be left alone out there. In the big city, we could cut you loose after the cast came off, but out here, you need help until the arm is 100%. Jim's going to help me set up a cot in your second room for me, and we can put a divider in your door opening for privacy when we need to take baths."

Roy's eyes got as big as saucers, and his chin was trying to hit the floor. He'd never even thought about another woman until now, and all of a sudden Anne wants to move in with him. Roy quickly realized it wasn't going to be that kind of relationship, and he calmed down a little, but still he liked his privacy, and the solitude. On the other hand, he did need the help, she was qualified, and much easier to look at than Jim. She was almost 20 years younger than Roy, but that didn't matter since he didn't plan to get romantically involved. Roy asked her "I know you lived around here, but can you handle life in a small cabin?"

Anne scowled for a second, then remembered that Roy had no idea of her background, so she cooled off, and told Roy about her childhood growing up in the wilds of Alaska, how she learned how to shoot, fish and trap as a young child, spent her teenage years hunting with her older brother, then moving to the city to pursue her Nursing career. Then she ran into Dave, her no-account ex-boyfriend when he came into the hospital after having been stomped by a bull in



a rodeo accident, finally moving back here when Ron turned up missing and she found her boyfriend in bed with his best friend's fiancé. By then, Steve had graduated Med School, did his residency at the Emergency Room in a big Dallas hospital, and needing to pay off his huge Student loan debt, took a 4-year assignment to work in Alaska, and wound up back in his home town with his big sister as his nurse. Roy was amazed at the coincidences in Anne's life, then he realized they weren't coincidences, that there was a reason she was here now, and he was in the hospital and needed a nurse to care for him. Roy's first thought was it would be an excellent chance to witness to her, then thought that the companionship could be nice too. Roy finished his dinner, and Anne gave him another Darvocet, and Roy was soon fast asleep.

The next morning, Roy woke up and his headache was gone, he could focus his eyes, and when Anne greeted him, she looked even cuter than before. She had his breakfast ready, cut it up for him, and cranked up the head of the bed so he could eat, and slid the table in front of him. Roy was really hungry, and cleaned his plate full of scrambled eggs, sausages, hash browns, and English muffins with jam. Anne took his plate away, and asked Roy if he needed anything. Roy said no, but he could use some company.

Anne replied, "Since I don't have any other patients - I can stay a while." and started laughing. Roy asked her if she could put his arm in a sling and help him get dressed so he could get out of bed. He told her the headache was gone, and he could focus clearly, so the symptoms of the concussion were gone, and his equilibrium should be back. She got on the phone, called Steve, who said that if he was feeling up to it, it was OK with him, but to restrict him to the hotel for a day to see how well he navigated and balanced. Anne set down the phone, gave Roy the good news, helped him get dressed in a pair of coveralls with snaps on the left sleeve to make getting dressed easier, slid socks and booties on his feet to keep his feet warm, then picked up his sling, and carefully put his cast into the sling, then the strap around his neck. When he was ready, she helped him up, and he stood without too much difficulty, he was weak, but his balance was working OK. Since he only had one working arm, he couldn't use a walker, so they gave him a crook-top cane to help him balance. Roy took a few minutes to get used to walking with the cane, then walked over to the hotel's library, picked out a good book, and sat in an easy chair near the fire to read.

Anne went back into the room to straighten up and grab her book. She joined Roy in the library, and asked him what he was reading. He was reading a book by Louis L'Amour called "Last of the Breed" about a Native American US pilot that was shot down in Siberia, escaped a POW camp with the clothes on his back, and survived several years. Roy said it was one of the best survival books he had ever read. He asked Anne what she was reading, and she told him she was reading the Special Forces Medic Handbook. Steve said it was one of the best field medical manuals ever written. Anne figured Steve should know since he had applied for the Air Force Para-rescue Jumpers, and was accepted into the Delayed Entry program because he needed to finish his contract to get his Guaranteed Student Loan forgiven. Roy asked her why Steve wanted to do that, it was probably the most grueling and dangerous training program in the US Military. They had more people die in training than in operations. Anne said she knew,

but suspected Steve was an Adrenalin Junkie, since as long as she could remember, he always wanted to do the riskiest thing he could think of - matter of fact, he was the guy who tried to run the rapids a couple of years ago and almost drowned. When Anne asked him why he did it - he said he was bored and wanted to see if he could do it. Roy shook his head, he knew a couple of guys like that in Vietnam. They were with MAC-SOG, since that was the most dangerous assignment they could get, and they were always going out headhunting. Roy sadly remembered neither of them lived through the war.

They went back to reading their novels, and a couple of hours later, Anne got up, and came back with a grilled ham and cheese sandwich for both of them. Roy set the plate on the end table next to him, and ate one handed. Anne was amazed at his manual dexterity, and asked him about it. Roy explained he was a retired Master Machinist, and he had to get his hands into all kinds of tight spots to fix broken machines. Anne nodded with understanding. She asked him if he ever did any gunsmithing, and Roy said no, but he could turn out a match accurate barrel for any rifle in existence given the specs and the right tools and materials. Anne told Roy her favorite gun was a Browning A-Bolt with a BOSS unit in .308. She claimed to be able to hit the right eye of a gnat at 300 yards with one shooting match ammo. Roy almost fell out of his chair, then told Anne about his custom Browning A-bolt he had ordered from his gunsmith. She said she'd love to shoot it, with that big scope, she should be able to tell which way the gnat was facing when she shot it. Roy shook her hand and said "Deal."

Roy went back to his book, and Anne started reading hers again. When the dinner bell rang later that afternoon, Roy decided to eat at the table. To accommodate him, they set his place at the end of the table, with Anne next to him. Roy bowed his head before he started and said grace silently, since he wasn't sure about the rest of the guests. When he looked up, several heads were bowed, including Anne's. Roy thought that was an interesting development, but decided against commenting about it for now. Anne served Roy's plate for him, and sliced his food, then put the plate in front of him. Roy noticed that everyone at the table obviously had a healthy appetite. At your average Los Angeles French Bistro, the quantity of food on the table would have fed the entire clientele for a day. When dinner was finished, Roy was stuffed and exhausted, and after saying goodnight, headed back to his room. Anne helped him use the bathroom, then helped him into bed. She gave him another Darvocet to make it easy for him to sleep, said goodnight, turned off the light, and retired to her room.

The next morning Steve checked in on Roy, and said that he was recovered enough to go back home, as long as he took Anne with him. Roy asked if Steve knew when Jim was going to be flying up his way again, and Steve said he'd check, and tell him or Anne, whoever he saw first. As he was finished, Anne walked in, and Steve told her the good news. Anne said, "I know, I just talked to the mayor, and Jim is flying out tomorrow, so I guess I need to pack my stuff since Roy obviously wants to get home real bad." Anne left to pack, and Roy walked over to the front desk to settle his bill. Roy asked if Steve had left his bill, and the front desk clerk said she didn't have one for him. Roy walked over to the Clinic to speak to Steve. Steve told Roy he wouldn't be getting a bill, since the state already paid for his services, and the only supplies

he used was a couple of rolls of bandage and some casting material he had in stock. Roy felt badly, and said he really wanted to pay Steve. Steve said instead of paying him, he'd appreciate if he would take care of his sister, since he was leaving next month to join the Air Force since his contract with the State was just about up, and he had been accepted for the Pararescue Jumper school. Roy congratulated Steve, and said he would keep an eye out for her. Steve kind of grinned at that, but said nothing. Steve asked Roy to sit down and talk to him for a while. He asked Roy about his adventures after the crash, and how he managed to survive what had to be a wild ride down the river. Since Steve didn't have any patients, and the State required him to keep the clinic open during the day, they retired to Steve's office, sat in some comfortable chairs around a wood stove, and drank coffee as Roy related his story to Steve. He kept Roy talking almost until supper time, then Roy remembered he needed to meet Anne for dinner at the lodge. He asked Steve to join them, and he accepted in a heartbeat. He told Roy that he ate dinner at the lodge several times a week, since the food was so good. They got up and walked over to the Lodge.

Anne seemed amused to see Steve and Roy acting like long-lost friends, and figured they had more in common than either of them realized. They sat down for dinner, and amazingly, the owner asked Roy if he wanted to say Grace. Roy was first floored, then honored, and then they bowed their heads, and Roy said a simple grace out loud, all the people at the table responded "Amen" when he finished. Then the table got noisy as the conversations resumed and the food was passed. Roy ate heartily, and noticed Steve and Anne's plates were full as well. Roy thought that they skipped lunch around here, and ate a big breakfast and dinner so they could get stuff done during the short summer. After dinner, they retired to the sitting room, where Steve and Roy continued their conversation.

After a few minutes, Steve interrupted Roy, walked over to Anne, and told her she should bring her tape recorder and her laptop with her, because he felt Roy's story was so fascinating, and Roy such a good storyteller, that his life story, from the plane crash to the present, was worth telling and possibly publishing. Anne smiled at that, and told Steve that would give her an excuse to stay a while. Steve smiled, and nodded without saying anything. Anne thought that Steve was fixing her up with Roy since he was leaving, possibly for good. She looked over at Roy, and realized while he was 20 years older than her, she could do worse. He was a good Christian man, didn't drink, smoke or swear, and as long as he stayed out from under trees, would probably live a long time. Steve walked back over to Roy, and asked him if he minded Anne writing down his story while they were staying together. Roy thought about it for a moment, realized that telling Anne his story would pass the time while his arm healed, and might help in other ways. Roy was starting to notice Anne was a very attractive lady, and she had a bubbly personality. Roy felt guilty for feeling that way, then remembered what Susan said, and said a silent prayer of thanks. Still, Roy wanted to take things slow and easy, and wanted to avoid falling into any sexual temptation. It would be tough, but he made up his mind that they would remain chaste until they were married, God willing. The three of them talked for hours until Roy started falling asleep in his chair. Roy looked at his watch, and it was almost 10 o'clock. Roy hadn't stayed up that late for years. Roy said he needed to go to bed,

so he could get up early to catch the flight back home. Anne said she had everything packed, and she would meet Roy at his room at 7:00 before breakfast. Jim would be ready to go right around 9:00, which would give them plenty of time for breakfast, since Roy had already paid for his room. Roy said goodnight, and headed off to his room, took a Darvocet, and was soon fast asleep.

## Chapter 20 - Long flight home

Anne met Roy at 7:00 sharp, with a couple of duffle bags full of clothes, her laptop, and her microcassette recorder. Roy looked at the pile and quipped, "I'm glad I have a busted wing, because if I carried all that stuff, I'd break my back." Anne just smiled, and said he didn't have to worry, the Mayor was going to give them a lift to the airport, and would help with the bags. With that, they walked into the dining room to eat breakfast. As usual, the spread of food was enough to feed an army, but by now he was used to it, sat down and started eating. An hour later, Roy was stuffed, and pushed carefully away from the table. He didn't have any baggage to pack, since he came down here without anything besides the clothes on his back. Steve had given him a couple of green surgical scrubs with the left sleeve cut open, and fastened with snaps. Anne picked up her duffles, and dragged them to the door of the lodge. The Mayor met them at the door with a Jeep Cherokee, put Anne's bags in back, opened the back door for Anne, then the passenger door for Roy. By the time Roy navigated himself into the jeep, they had 15 minutes to make the plane.

When they got to the runway, there was a big pile of stuff, and two guys standing there, obviously hired by the mayor to load the plane. Jim landed right at 9:00, taxied around to face into the wind for take-off, waited while they loaded the plane, then helped Anne and Roy into the plane. Jim promised Roy that he'd fly a little more smoothly than last time. He explained to Anne and Roy that the last time they flew together, Roy was going into deep shock, and Jim didn't have time to finesse the landing, he needed to get down FAST. Jim made sure the cabin doors were secure, and the load was secured in back, then told them to fasten their seatbelts, then revved the motor, and took off. After a slight bump as they transited from the land to the water, Jim pulled up at the last minute, then flew at treetop level until he built up his airspeed, then slowly climbed to cruising altitude. The ride smoothed out at 2,000 ft, and Roy was able to look around and enjoy the scenery. A little over an hour later, they circled Roy's lake to land, and Jim set the plane down with barely a bump, taxied to the edge of the water, then taxied up to the cabin. Jim stopped the plane, opened the doors, then Anne and Roy got out to inspect the cabin. Everything seemed OK, the garden looked like it could use some water, but other than that, things were normal. Jim opened the back of the plane, grabbed Anne's duffle bags, set them on the ground, then proceeded to unload almost half the plane. Roy saw all the food and stuff they were unloading, then realized they needed enough food to last 2 or more months without Roy hunting or fishing. Roy hoped it wouldn't take that long, but it never hurt. The strangest thing was a large solar panel. Anne explained that she needed to recharge the battery in her laptop if she were to write his story. This was a solar recharger that Steve had built for her, and it worked great. Jim helped them bring all the boxes of food and stuff into the cabin, helped Anne set up her cot in the spare room, then asked if they needed anything else. Anne said she could handle it, and thanked him for the help. Roy offered Jim some coffee, but Jim had to pass since he was on a tight schedule today. He took a rain check for later, got into the plane, fired up the motor, turned the plane around, and taxied off to the lake, turned into the wind, and took off.

When they got inside, Roy asked Anne to sit down, he needed to talk to her. Anne was unsure of herself, but sat down at the table.

“Anne, I’ve been living by myself since my wife died, I haven’t had a woman around, and this cabin definitely looks like a bachelor pad. I appreciate your help, and I don’t want to make you a maid or anything, so I’ll help clean up as much as possible.”

Anne laughed, “Roy this place is way cleaner and more organized than any cabin I’ve seen. Did you build those shelves yourself?”

“Yeah, and if it weren’t for the chainsaw and a couple of tools the mayor loaned me, it would have taken forever. I hate to bring this up, but there is another problem, you won’t have much privacy or comfort around here, and I want to preserve your modesty as much as possible.”

“Don’t worry Roy, I brought a big heavy curtain and a curtain rod for the door between our rooms. You stay on your bed and I’ll stay on mine, and we’ll do fine.”

“Ok Anne, just one more thing - I hope I don’t blow it by mentioning this to you, but I find you attractive, and I want to make sure nothing inappropriate occurs between us while you’re here.”

“I like you too Roy. I guess we’ll cross that bridge when we get there. Oh, I remember - you’re afraid I’ll attack you during the night? Don’t worry, despite what I told you, my Daddy raised me to be a good girl, and I’ll keep my hormones in check.”

They both had a good laugh, and Roy broke the ice “Friends?”

“Definitely. We’ll see about the rest later.” With that, Anne started arranging the food on the shelves, while Roy walked outside to check on the smokehouse. Surprisingly, none of the meat had rotted. It must have stayed smoky in there long enough to finish drying the meat. Roy started taking down the dried meat and carrying it into the cabin. Anne met him at the door. “Just what do you think you’re doing?”

“I’m unloading the smokehouse. I’m only using my right hand, and this stuff weighs almost nothing.”

“Ok, just remember you’re taking pain killers for your busted wing, and they will suppress ANY pain, including overdoing it - so take it easy.”

Roy realized Anne had another thing in common with Susan. Her ability to make him say “Yes Dear.”

An hour later, Roy finished unloading the smokehouse, he was tuckered out. Roy guessed Anne might know what she was talking about - this one-handed stuff was for the birds. By the

time Roy had finished, Anne had “her room” all straightened out, and was marveling at the sink. “How did you manage Hot and Cold running water up here?”

“Don’t get too attached to it, during the winter, the pipes would freeze unless I drained them, so it’s just for the warmer months. When it starts snowing, we’re back to melting snow in that big pot on the stove. I had to run water to the garden, so I just ran it a couple hundred feet further to the house. It’s all solar powered. I need to go out and water the garden - would you like to come with me and I’ll show you?”

“I’d love to, where is it?”

“We taxied past it in the plane this morning. If you’re coming, I need you to strap on that fanny pack, and wear my shoulder holster. You never know what you’ll run into out here. By the way, I’ve got a couple of semi-tame wolves with 4 pups living around here - so don’t shoot them.” Roy handed Anne the fanny pack with the knives and the canteen, then helped her into the shoulder holster, and helped her adjust it. Roy’s face got red because he forgot that the straps would ride close to her breasts, and bumped into them a couple of times while adjusting them. “Whoops, sorry about that.”

“OK, I know you weren’t trying to cop a feel, or I’d have to deck you.”

When they got everything situated, Roy opened the door, and started walking toward the lake. When he got to the garden, it really needed water, so he opened the gate valve, and filled the ditches, then blocked the center ones with his board, and filled the outer ditches. Roy gave the garden a very good watering in hopes that the plants recovered. Some of them were starting to wilt. When Roy was finished, he spotted Oliver in the edge of the forest, and whistled. He warned Anne that Oliver was coming over to check them out. Oliver wasn’t too sure about this new person, but Roy’s presence made him feel easier about it.

As Oliver approached, Anne crouched down saying, “Nice doggy” and Oliver, being a terminal suck-up wandered over to Anne, who stuck out her hand for him to sniff. Oliver liked her scent, and licked her hand. Anne kept talking to Oliver, who then sat down next to her, and let her pet him.

Roy’s chin almost hit his chest, and said, “I guess Oliver likes you - must have good taste in women, Just don’t let Francine catch you flirting with her husband.” At that point, Francine made her appearance. She wasn’t too happy, and let Oliver know it. Oliver turned and woofed at Francine, and she walked over to Oliver in a much less dominant pose than she had a minute ago. She sat down next to Oliver, and Roy walked over to pet them both. A couple of minutes later, the pups joined the group, and they all got to know Anne. “I guess you can stay a while, since the wolves like you.” After playing with the pups awhile, Oliver and Francine turned to go home, and walked back into the forest with their pups following along behind in single file. Roy asked Anne if she’d like fresh fish for dinner. When Anne said OK, they walked back to

the cabin to grab Roy's fishing pole. Roy forgot he had a busted wing, and asked Anne if she'd mind retrieving if he cast. She thought that would work fine, and they set off for the lake. When they reached Roy's fishing hole, Anne helped him bait the hook, and release the bail, then stood back and let Roy cast. While it wasn't an Olympic Record, Roy got the line out where he needed it to go, and handed over to Anne.

A couple of minutes later, the rod tip started twitching, and Anne set the hook, then started reeling in the fish. She commented it must be a big fish, and Roy told her it probably was a lake trout, since that is where they like to hang out. 10 minutes later, she landed the fish, and put it on the stringer. Roy decided to let her fish while he took a nap. Anne said that was OK by her, and proceeded to cast out to Roy's spot. Roy sat down, careful not to hit the cast, then laid on his right side, and was watching Anne fish. She seemed like a natural, and then he remembered she grew up here, and probably fished with her brother Ron on a daily basis, whenever they weren't hunting. Roy noticed how pretty Anne was, even from behind. She had long brunette hair that she wore in a ponytail to not get in the way of stuff, and a nice curvaceous build. He figured she was between 5'6" and 5'8" and 120-150lbs. She was really strong, so he figured if she were a little heavy, it was muscle, not fat.

By the time Roy was done admiring her figure, Anne had caught 3 more fish, and the stringer was full. She walked over to Roy to help him up, and she pulled too hard, so that they almost bumped face to face. Impulsively, Anne bent down to kiss Roy on the lips. It wasn't much of a kiss, but Roy felt like he'd just grabbed hold of a live wire. Anne released Roy, bent down to pick up the fish, and wordlessly walked back to the cabin. Roy didn't know what to make of that, but knew better than to talk right now - it would be better for Anne to bring up the subject. Roy DID know one thing - Anne was a good kisser. Roy followed her back to the cabin in a daze. When they got back, it was late afternoon, Anne told Roy she could clean and gut the fish quicker and easier than he could, so he offered to get the fire going in the stove, and get out the pan, the grease, and the flour to bread the fish with. Anne asked him to get down a can of corn too. Roy said OK, and walked into the back of the cabin, and took the cans down from the shelf. When he was finished, he walked back to the table, and Anne had the fish cleaned, gutted, and filleted. She was in the process of scoring the fish they were going to smoke when he walked in. Roy commented that she was fast at cleaning and filleting fish, and she told him that she had probably done thousands in her life and working fast made it less smelly. Anne handed Roy the fish that they were to smoke, and he took them out to the smokehouse, hung them over the rafters, and built a small fire inside, then quickly closed the door. When he got back inside, Anne had the grease warming on the stove, the fish all ready to bread, and another pot on the stove heating the canned corn.

Roy thought to himself, "OK, she hunts, fishes, cooks, cleans, likes wolves - AND she's a good kisser. Man, I better not blow this one." Roy asked Anne if she needed anything, but she said she was almost finished. Roy told her he had some primitive plates and cups, as well as some silverware. Anne told him to go ahead and set the table. By the time Roy was finished, Dinner was ready. Anne went to the table, picked up the plates, deposited several large pieces of fried



fish on each, as well as half the canned corn, then carried them to the table. They sat down, and Roy bowed his head to say grace. Anne joined him, and Roy thanked God for the good food, for saving his life, and for his new friend. Anne smiled at that one. When he finished, they both said Amen. Anne smiled at Roy, then started eating. Roy was impressed that a small lady could eat so much food, then he remembered he was hungry too, and started into his food. When dinner was finished, Anne cleared the table, and washed the dishes. When she was finished, Roy asked her if she minded him reading the Bible to her. He normally read each night, but since he now had company, he wanted to read it to her. Anne said OK, but told Roy she wasn't that familiar with the Bible, and only remembered some Old Testament Bible Stories from the few times they went to church when she was growing up. Roy said "No Problem, I didn't read the bible either for years until I came up here. Then I had some really neat dreams, and felt Susan telling me I had to get my spiritual act together, and ever since then, I've tried to read the Bible every day. Anne said "Wow. That's never happened to me, then again - the only dead person I know is Ron." Roy explained that it didn't take a message from the dead to believe the Bible, the reason for believing the Bible was written all over the place in it. Jesus died for Us. Everyone on the Earth. All we had to do was accept that gift, and we could be with him in Heaven for Eternity. Anne's eyes were as big as saucers - she'd never heard that before. Roy decided to start with the basics. "Anne, I'm going to read some stuff to you, but it's going to be out of order. I'm going to start in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of John, if you want, you can sit next to me and read it with me. Anne moved over next to Roy, and Roy showed her where John 3 started:

**"1 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.**

**2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."**

**3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."**

**4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"**

**5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.**

**6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**

**7 "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'**

**8 "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."**

**9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"**

**10 Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?**

**11 "Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.**

**12 "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?**

**13 "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.**

**14 "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,**

**15 "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.**

**16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**

**17 "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.**

**18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**

**19 "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.**

**20 "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.**

**21 "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."**

**22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized.**

**23 Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.**

**24 For John had not yet been thrown into prison.**

**25 Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification.**

**26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified--behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him."**

**27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.**

**28 "You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.'**

**29 "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.**

**30 "He must increase, but I must decrease.**

**31 "He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.**

**32 "And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.**

**33 "He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true.**

**34 "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.**

**35 "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.**

**36 "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son**

**shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."**

When he finished reading, Roy asked Anne if she understood. She couldn't speak, but shook her head No. Roy asked her if she wanted him to explain it. She finally said OK.

"Anne, the first 2 verses in Chapter 3 are setting up the conversation that Jesus is having with Nicodemus - a Pharisee - He was an important spiritual and civil leader for the Jews in Jerusalem. He came to Jesus at night because he didn't want the rest of the Pharisees to know he was meeting with Jesus, since they all hated him and wanted him dead. Nicodemus was asking Jesus several questions, because he had rightly guessed that Jesus was the Messiah, God's Chosen One. Jesus answers Nicodemus' unasked question, "How do I get to Heaven?" Jesus told him he had to be born again. I'm sure you've heard the phrase "Born Again Christian" - usually used disparagingly by the Liberal Media. Actually, Jesus is talking here about a Spiritual Rebirth, like he says in the next verses. Jesus addresses Nicodemus' lack of faith - "How can I explain heavenly things when you won't believe earthly things?" Jesus tells Nicodemus he is the Son of God, and that he must die for Everyone's sins. I'm sure you've heard John 3:16, or at least seen a banner at a football game with the number on it. It's one of the most famous passages of the bible. It basically says that God loved the world so much that he sent his Only Son to die in our place. Imagine, God's Son coming down from heaven, taking on a human body, and dying on a cross so that we might be with him for eternity if we only believe and accept his gift."

Anne started crying at this time, and Roy set down the Bible to hold her. "I didn't know - all these years... All these wasted years." Anne continued to sob, and finally came up for air.

"Anne, the Good News is God Loves You, and wants you with him forever. No matter what you have done, he will forgive everything you've ever done, give you a full pardon. You've heard about a Presidential Pardon, or a Governor's Pardon - well the Creator of the Universe wants to give you a Full Pardon, and all you have to do is accept." It says so right here in verses 17 and 18. All you have to do is ask for God's forgiveness and Believe that his Son died for your sins."

Anne had stopped crying by now, and asked Roy, "Is it really that easy?"

Roy thought about his answer for a minute, and said, "That's what the Bible says. I believe it, and I know Susan believed it - and I'm sure she's in heaven, because I've seen her."

At this point Anne broke down and fell onto her knees crying. Then she asked God's forgiveness, and it was like a light went on in her face. She remained on her knees, but was no longer crying. It was almost like a miracle had happened, and that's what was happening. Roy slid off his chair, knelt down next to her, and prayed with her. He was praying for Jesus to open her eyes to the truth, and to set her free from all the guilt and hurt in her life. Finally, Roy was too tired to keep praying. Just then, Anne turned to him and gave him a Big Hug.

“Roy, you were right. I don’t know how to describe it, but you were right. I was kneeling there praying, and all of a sudden, a huge weight was lifted off my shoulders, and I knew that God loved me. I know it isn’t going to be easy from here on out, but I’m sure that I’m going to heaven. I’m so glad you did this. I’m free of all my guilt and fears. What’s really weird is I REALLY LOVE YOU but I don’t want to jump in bed with you right now, like I would of in the past. Later, maybe, but not right now.”

“Anne, this is going to take some getting used to - until I met you, I was still in mourning over Susan. Now I understand she was right, and I can love again. I want to really get to know you, and if my first impressions turn out right, I think I’d like to marry you. We’re going to have to be careful, and not give in to carnal temptations. How about we limit contact to kissing, holding hands, and an occasional back rub?”

“Oh Roy, you’re such a romantic. I haven’t known a man like you since I was a kid. Every one of them always wanted to jump right into bed, then I never saw them again. This sounds like fun.”

“Anne, I don’t know how to tell you this, but I need to get to bed. I’m worn out.” Anne leaned over, and gave Roy a goodnight kiss, then got up, pulled the curtain, and said goodnight. Roy blew out the lantern, stripped down to his longjohns, and got into bed.

## Chapter 21 - We've Only Just Begun

Roy woke up the next morning to the smell of Breakfast cooking. It had been years since he woke up to the smells of someone cooking breakfast for him. Maybe this wasn't such a bad idea after all.

Roy got up, got dressed, then tapped on the curtain like a door, "You decent yet?"

Anne giggled and said, "Right silly, I always fry bacon in the buff. Come on in."

Roy pulled the curtain aside, Anne was wearing a long robe with a bathrobe over it, and Alaskan mukluks on her feet. Roy wished he had his cast off so he could wear his caribou buckskins and his fur lined boots - they were much warmer than the Levis and flannel shirt he was wearing. Roy looked at the stove and commented, "Is all that for us?"

"Unless Oliver and Francine are hungry. I hope I didn't make too much, I'm used to eating a big breakfast, skipping lunch and eating a nice dinner. You get used to eating more food living up here, especially in the winter, or when you're doing heavy work like logging and all the other stuff you need to do for yourself around here."

"I wouldn't know, Oliver and I basically lived on Jerky and pemmican all winter."

"Well, Roy, that's what the Indians lived on as well - it seems the fat in the pemmican has tons of calories, and the jerky is a lot more concentrated than eating a steak full of water. 6 oz of Jerky just about equals 1 pound of steak."

"Wow, I didn't realize that, I guess I was eating more calories than I realized."

"Regular food isn't as calorie dense as the stuff you've been eating, so you need to eat more of it. I'll work your jerky into my cooking plans, and if it's OK with you, I thought of some stuff we'll need, like canning supplies for that garden, and the meat you'll catch when you hunt. I have a sneaky suspicion we'll be spending the winter together, so we need to plan accordingly."

"Whoa, jumping the gun just a bit aren't you?"

"Maybe, but it's better to be prepared for both of us staying comfortably instead of surviving on short rations all winter."

"You're right Anne, sorry about that, I was just kidding."

"No you weren't. You were being a typical gun-shy middle-aged male. You've been living on your own for a while, and having a woman around the house will take some getting used to."

Combine that with your recent loss of Susan, and this will take a LOT of getting used to - but I promise not to bite...Much."

"Anne, you are positively a Riot. Where did you get your sense of humor?"

"Probably from my Dad's side, Ron got it too. You'd have liked him if you got a chance to know him."

"Well, if he was anything like you, we'd have gotten along great."

"Breakfast is ready, you want to get the plates out?"

Roy got the table set quickly, set a lantern in the middle of the table, and lit it - it wasn't easy one-handed but he managed. Anne brought the plates of food to the table, and she sat down. Roy bowed his head to say grace, and Anne joined him, then they ate together. After breakfast, they cleared the table, then Roy said he needed to call the Mayor, and asked Anne to help him with the radio. Roy set the radio to the mayor's frequency, checked all the other dials and switches were right, and then keyed the mike. "Roy calling the Mayor, how do you read?"

"I read you loud and clear, how are you doing Roy? Over"

"We're doing fine - I need you to make a shopping list for me, we're going to need some stuff."

"I kind of figured that, OK ready to copy."

Roy transmitted a long list of stuff they needed, including a second shoulder holster and Colt Anaconda for Anne and a couple of boxes of ammo, another Browning A-bolt since Anne had to sell hers, all the canning equipment Anne said they were going to need, some more food stuffs and supplies, and a New King James Bible for Anne just like Roy's. The Mayor told Roy he had everything in stock except for the guns, which he would order through Roy's gunsmith. The Mayor talked to Roy's gunsmith last week, and placed an order for a new Remington 700 in 7mm Magnum. The mayor was really impressed by the knowledge and pricing of Roy's gunsmith, and told Roy that he'd probably get a bunch of work from the people around Allakaket. Roy was glad to hear that, since he knew that his gunsmith could use the business. He was a friend of Roy's that worked for an Airplane manufacturer as a Master Machinist like Roy, but lost his job when the company lost a contract for a new jet fighter. He went to work for Roy for a couple of years to pay the bills, then opened up his own gunsmithing business. He did mostly custom work, and some custom reloading for customers that he had made guns for. His hand loaded .308 ammo was so accurate that they really didn't need the BOSS unit, but it was nice to have just in case Roy couldn't get any more of his hand loads. Another thing he did was build custom scope mounting rings. He told Roy that he was amazed that people would spend several hundred dollars on a Leupold scope, and then skimp on the mount. He machined mounts out of billet steel that were guaranteed never to lose their zero. He even made a set of

QD mounts for people who wanted to switch between daylight and NV scopes without losing their zero. His mounts were so well engineered and heavy duty that he was getting orders from people with BMG-50 rifles to make rings for them.

Roy came back to reality when the Mayor asked him if there was anything else he could get. Roy put Anne on the radio, who added a couple of items, then signed off. She put the microphone down, walked over to Roy and gave him a Big Hug. Roy asked, "What was that for?"

"That was so sweet, ordering me a new Browning A-Bolt and a .44 Magnum setup like yours."

"I figured if you were going to stay up here a while, it would be an idea so I could get my shoulder holster back, and you could help hunting."

"You mean no "Me Tarzan, You Jane" stuff - You want me to go hunting with you?"

"Sure, I needed someone to skin and gut the stuff I shot."

Anne grinned and replied, "More like YOU will clean and skin what I shoot."

"Actually, Anne, I just wanted you to be with me, and if you like hunting and want to come with me, I'd love to have you. I've got a girlfriend most men dream about. You like to hunt, fish, you're drop-dead gorgeous, you're a trained nurse, and you think I'm funny."

Anne gave Roy another hug and said, "Flatterer. You probably say that to all the girls."

"No, the last girl I said that to, I married." Anne put her head on Roy's shoulder and started crying. Roy realized he still didn't understand women, and the best thing to do was to keep holding Anne while she cried. Soon enough, she came up for air, wiped away her tears, and said, "You really loved her, didn't you."

"I still do, but that doesn't mean I can't love you too. Susan told me in a dream when I was pinned under the tree that I might meet someone, and to go ahead and love them, since she wanted me to be happy."

"Roy, that is the most romantic thing I've ever heard. I hope I get to meet her."

"Anne, we both will someday when we're reunited in Heaven."

"Roy, can we go see Ron's grave site? I'd like to say goodbye"

"OK, Anne. Let's go water the garden, and I'll bring the fishing gear, since it's on the way."

"I think I need to come up with some recipes for serving fish."

“Anne, I practically lived on the stuff all summer, but I didn’t have access to the town for supplies, so my diet was pretty boring. Luckily Oliver loved fish, so he ate the dried fish all winter, and I got to eat the moose and caribou jerky, which tasted a lot better. With that, Roy helped Anne into the shoulder holster and fanny pack, then picked up the tackle box.

“Anne, remind me when we get back to order you a fanny pack of your own. What kinds of knives do you like carrying?”

“I like your Bowie, but I prefer a skinner to this <skip> thing you’ve got next to it.”

“I know, I prefer a skinner too, but when I bought it, I was also thinking survival, and I used it as a hatchet enough times to make it worth it. Since we’re together, I think I could let you skip the <skip> and just get a straight skinner. I’ll call the Mayor when we get back, and order another set of knives and a fanny pack when we get back. It will take my knife maker a couple of months to make them, but it will be worth it. I’ve only had to sharpen the Bowie once or twice since I’ve been here, and the Ulu got a little more use, so I’ve sharpened it about 4 or 5 times, but I was basically just touching up the edge since that Titanium Nitrite coating is so tough.” Roy opened the cabin door, and Anne walked with him to the garden. They stopped briefly to water the garden, and refill the canteens, then walked to the lake. When they got to the lake, Anne marveled at the beauty around her. “I understand why you wouldn’t want to leave here, It’s so beautiful.”

Roy gave Anne a gentle hug around the waist - “Now that you’re here with me, I’ve got no reason to leave.” Anne leaned her head onto Roy’s shoulder, then they headed North to visit Ron’s grave. When they got there, Roy stopped and knelt. Anne walked closer to the grave, and knelt next to her brother’s grave, and started crying. Roy thought Anne would like to be alone with her brother, and stayed where he was. After a while, Anne called Roy over, and he knelt next to her. Anne was talking to her brother, then she said, “Ron, this is Roy - he’s the guy who pulled you out of the lake and buried you so you could rest in peace. Anyway, I just wanted to tell you we’re in love, and I’m sure he’s “Mr. Right” - not like that idiot rodeo clown in Texas. Roy’s special, and I’m sure you two would have liked each other. I hope you’re OK where you are, and I just wanted you to know I’m here, and I’m finally happy. Talk to ya later Bro.” Anne bent over to kiss Ron’s dogtag that Roy had left on the grave marker, got up, and helped Roy to his feet. When they were both standing, Anne buried herself in Roy’s arms, sobbing uncontrollably. When she regained her composure, she told Roy that after her parents had died when she was young, Ron basically raised Anne and Steve. He was the only Daddy she remembered. She thanked Roy for taking care of him, then they picked up the fishing gear and went fishing. They caught about 6 large lake trout, so Anne called it a day, and they walked back to the cabin. Anne set the fish down, Roy turned on the radio and called the Mayor, to ask him to order the knives and a fanny pack for Anne. She started cleaning the fish, and before he signed off, Anne had the fish gutted, skinned, and filleted. Roy took most of it out to the smokehouse to smoke, and Anne grabbed the two bigger fillets for dinner. While Roy was setting up the smokehouse, Anne started a fire in the woodstove, got out the cast iron skillet,



and when it was hot, added the grease from last night to the pan. While the grease got hot, Anne breaded the fish, and got it ready, then slid the fillets into the hot grease, then turned around to check the pantry. She spotted a can of mixed vegetables, got out a small saucepan, opened the can, and heated it on the stove while the fish cooked. Roy walked back into the cabin right as Anne finished cooking, so Roy set the table and lit the lantern as quickly as possible. Anne set the plates on the table, then sat down. Roy bowed his head to say grace, and he realized he had a lot to be thankful for, and spent a few minutes thanking God for everything. Finally, Roy said Amen, and they started eating before their food got cold. Between bites, Roy told Anne that his Summer routine used to be to chop wood in the morning, then fish in the afternoon. Now with a busted wing, he couldn't chop wood for a while. Anne commented that she thought they had more than enough wood, and when his arm healed, she'd help him cut some more just to be on the safe side. She told Roy to do whatever he felt he could, since exercise was the best form of therapy for a broken arm. Anne thought they could remove the cast in another 4-6 weeks, and she asked Roy how the arm felt, and to wiggle his fingers. Anne told Roy they'd have to do this daily to make sure his arm was healing properly, and that she needed to know ASAP about any pain or lack of feeling in the fingers. When they were finished, Anne asked Roy to read some more of the Bible to her. Roy said "OK, I think we should start at the beginning" and opened his Bible to Genesis. He explained to Anne that some people thought Genesis was just a story, but Roy felt it was an accurate description of the creation of the world, and God's creation of Man. With that, Roy started reading. Anne interrupted occasionally, and Roy explained things as well as he knew. He could see Anne was intelligent as well, and that he should add a Concordance and a Strong's Dictionary to the shopping list, because soon she will be asking questions he didn't know the answers to.

When he finished reading, they both got tired. Anne stood up, said goodnight, and gave Roy a fairly passionate goodnight kiss on the lips. Roy sat there stunned as Anne walked into her bedroom and closed the curtain. Roy thought "Man this sure beats living with a Wolf." and got undressed to go to bed.

## Chapter 22 - And the Beat Goes On

When Roy awoke the next morning, Anne was already up and about. Roy got the lower half dressed without help, then Anne showed up to help him with his shirt. As she helped him get dressed, Roy noticed that Anne had a few crinkles around her eyes, and that they got bigger when she smiled. He also noticed she had the prettiest green eyes he'd ever seen. Anne had real gentle hands, and Roy didn't experience any pain as she helped him get dressed. When they finished, she told him that she had a pot of coffee and some oatmeal with raisins and cinnamon all ready for breakfast. Roy handed her a couple of bowls, and after she filled them, and a mug of coffee for each, they sat down to breakfast. As they ate, they started talking about Roy's adventure, and Anne quickly got up to get her tape recorder. She set it on the table, and asked Roy some questions.

He started at the beginning of the story, with him and Susan selling their house and traveling. When he got to the point of Susan's death, Anne was crying. She stopped the tape, and asked Roy a couple of questions. Anne told Roy she suspected the physician may have given Anne a deliberately fatal dose of sedative to take when the pain got too bad. She said it happens all the time, since Cancer is not a pleasant way to die, and many compassionate physicians give their end-stage cancer patients what they call a "black pill" to take, and never wake up when the pain gets too bad. Roy looked like he was going to cry, then Anne leaned over and gave him a hug, and asked him if he felt better knowing that Susan died peacefully in her sleep, rather than in a hospital stuck full of tubes and in pain. Roy thought that Anne was especially sensitive, and felt she had been through this before with other patients and families. Finally she came out and said, "Roy - sometimes the best we can do for a patient is to make them comfortable, and give them a relatively painless way to die in peace. I'm sure you would have wanted it to happen this way."

"Anne, I know you're right, but I still miss her, and sometimes I'm mad at her for leaving me."

"Roy, she didn't have any choice in the matter. If what you said was true, she was already end-stage and in increasing pain. Even putting her in ICU would have only delayed the inevitable by a week or two, at the cost of her going through a lot of unnecessary pain. This way, you got to spend as much quality time with her as you could, and when she realized the pain was becoming unbearable, she took the pill the doctor gave her. The other way, she'd have been stuck full of tubes, wasting away, unable to talk, and in a lot of pain, even with painkillers. There's nothing to be mad at her about."

"I know, but sometimes..I don't know."

Anne moved closer to Roy, and held him almost like a little boy "It's OK Roy, I know almost how you felt, until yesterday, I never had any closure with Ron, and hoped somewhere in the back of my mind he might still be alive until I saw his dog tag hanging from that cross. We'll

get through this together.”

“Anne, I don’t know what to think, except Susan must have sent an Angel to look after me.”

Then they both started crying again. When they had regained their composure and disentangled themselves, Anne turned the tape recorder back on, and Roy resumed the story. He talked about traveling for a while, running out of things to do, then reading an ad in a magazine about Caribou hunting in Alaska, and calling Ron and talking to him. Anne hung on his every word, while the tape recorder got everything. Roy went into his preparations, including Ron’s advice about packing everything in waterproof “river runner” bags, and carrying a fanny pack, and even what kind of knives to bring. Roy told her of his getting in shape, kicking a long-term smoking habit, and cutting back on his drinking. Anne was impressed, but didn’t want to disturb his narrative. Roy continued describing packing, and boarding the airliner to fly to Alaska, and all the hassles he had with getting his guns and knives onto the plane. If he didn’t have all his ducks in a row, including showing the airline his application for an Alaskan Non-resident Hunting permit, he was sure that they wouldn’t have let him board.

Then he described meeting Ron, and how he was in a hurry to get airborne. Roy reached over to stop the tape, and reached for Anne’s hands. “I don’t know how to tell you this, but during the flight, I got the feeling Ron was showing off and not being too careful. Then he banked hard away from Mt. McKinley right through a cloud bank, and flew in the clouds for several miles. I’m sure he got lost in the clouds. I think what killed him was a downdraft that dropped the plane into the lake before he could recover from it. I’m sure he was killed on impact, since when I looked over, his neck was severely broken.” Anne reached over and turned the tape recorder back on.

Roy continued to tell his story, including details of the plane crash, his miraculous escape from the plane without major injuries, and his almost drowning, then succumbing to hypothermia before he got out of the water and made a fire. Roy told her of the week spent by the lake with the fading hope of rescue, then the realization that he was truly stranded, and that no one knew where he was, and that he was on his own. He told her about finding and restoring the cabin, finding the flintlock rifle and the gear, making lead balls, snaring and fishing for food, then deciding he needed to shoot some big game, and the preparations that went into that. Finally he got to his Alaskan Hunting Adventure, where he shot his first moose, and his first big game animal with a smokepole.

Anne stopped him at this point, and asked, “You shot a 1000 lb plus bull moose with an unfamiliar flintlock rifle? Wow. I’ve shot flintlock before, but never hunted with them. I felt they were too unreliable.”

“Me too, but beggars can’t be choosers. I had to kill some large animals if I were to survive the winter. I didn’t think I could do it on fish, rabbits, and squirrels. As it turned out, the flintlock was a lifesaver, since it allowed me to have enough meat not only for me, but for Oliver as

well.”

“Roy, I don’t understand, what’s the deal with Oliver? You befriended a Wild Wolf. What were you thinking?”

“At the time I thought it was a good idea, and it turned out Oliver saved my life at least twice, and more than paid for all the food I fed him when he alerted me to a couple of bears that could have been dangerous.”

“OK, but HOW did you do it?”

“I figured Oliver was a Lone Wolf that had been driven out of his Mother’s territory, and had traveled from Denali National Park to this area, since this was the closest habitat that would support a wolf that wasn’t some other pack’s territory. When I first met him, he was starving, and I had some fish guts from a fish I had cleaned, so I piled them up next to me. Anyway, it worked; Oliver walked right next to me, and sat down to eat. When he finished, I stuck my hand out in the classic “sniff my hand and let’s be friends” pose. Oliver sniffed my hand, and smelling the fish guts on it, proceeded to lick my hand clean. When we had finished making friends, I picked up my fanny pack, and headed for the lake to catch some more fish. When I fed Oliver a couple of whole salmon, that sealed it as far as he was concerned. From then on, we were inseparable - at least until Fran showed up.”

“Anyway, I skipped a real hair-raising experience - I need to backtrack in the story to before I met Oliver. I went berry picking down by the lake, and surprised this BIG brown bear bruin while he was eating. When he stood up, he was easily a foot taller than me, and I’m no shrimp. He obviously thought I was encroaching on his private berry patch, and he wasn’t happy. Unfortunately, I looked around, and there wasn’t anything around I could climb. He wasn’t backing down either. I quickly grabbed the rifle, shouldered it, and shot the bear in the chest as he stood about 40 feet away. I knew I wouldn’t have enough time to reload, so I dropped the rifle, picked up my knife and <skip> to defend myself as best as I could. I would have never survived an attack from an uninjured bear, but the bullet in his chest should slow him down, and hopefully he’d bleed out before too long. I fended off his first couple of swipes, then cut him a couple of times. Good thing I had lanyards on both weapons, since the knife got knocked out of my grip a couple of times. As the bear weakened from blood loss, I took advantage of an opening, reversed my grip on the <skip> and smacked him between the eyes with the hammer head, stunning him long enough to take the Bowie and slit his throat. That ended the fight, and after I recovered, I skinned and gutted the bear, then removed the claws to make a necklace.”

“Of all the Foolhardy, Stupid things you could do, WHAT possessed you to take on a Bear with just primitive weapons?”

“Anne, Lighten Up - will you! It’s not like I had any choice. I told you, I surprised a feeding

bear in dense cover. Neither of us saw, heard or smelled each other until the confrontation. Believe me, if I'd had any option, I would have took it. Besides, I DID take the other route a couple of months ago - It was a similar situation, right after I met you the first time. I was out fishing, and this grouchy bear decided I was in his fishing spot. I dropped the rod, and pulled Ron's .44 Magnum, thumbed back the hammer, and stared down the bear with a quote from Dirty Harry - I guess even the bears in Alaska have heard of Dirty Harry, because this bear backed down, so I didn't have to shoot it."

"Roy, I guess I don't understand men too well - I mean you seem Brave and Foolhardy at the same time, yet in another situation, you use your head and bluff your way out of it."

"Anne, there's no disconnect here - I wasn't bluffing, I had the hammer back and my finger was pulling the trigger, I only had about 1 pound of pull left before the trigger let off, it's just for some reason, the Bear decided he didn't want to challenge me that day. By the way, I ended up shooting him a week or two later anyway, when he challenged me again, and wouldn't back down. It's not the first bear I've shot around here either, Oliver spotted several of them while we were out hunting, and they were too close to let go, so I shot 2 of them. Remember, this was Ron's gun, and he told me to bring a revolver just like it - he told me the bears were real thick North of Mount McKinley. He wasn't kidding, I haven't seen this many bears before in my life. I'd highly recommend you keep that gun handy when we're out and about until I get healed up."

"Roy, remember my earlier crack about Tarzan and Jane, well - I had the wrong book, you're more like Jeremiah Johnson."

"Anne, you may have said that in jest, but I DO have a buckskin jacket, pants, and knee-high moccasins I made myself last winter, and I imagine I looked pretty wild and wooly when I came into town the first time."

"I didn't think you looked that wild and wooly, but you'd been in town for a day or two before I met you, and you had a chance to clean up. You MADE that outfit. Wow... I guess this means we are going to need matching sets for this winter. Speaking of which, we're going to have to do some hunting, which means I get to do the shooting for a while."

"Not so fast there little lady. Let's see you shoot first." (Roy went into the other room to get his gun case with the Browning A-bolt and set it down on the table)

Opening the case, Anne practically drooled over the Stainless Browning A-Bolt in .308 with a Fluted Match Barrel, BOSS unit, McMillan Synthetic Stock, 3x12x50 AO Leupold scope and Harris Bipod.

"Roy, this is the most beautiful rifle I've seen."

“I ordered one just like it for you.”

“No Way, Roy, I’m keeping THIS one. You won’t be able to shoot for at least a couple of months, so I’m claiming this one. Can I go ahead and shoot it? I want to get it dialed in.”

“OK, we’ve got a couple of hours of daylight left. Let’s go outside and shoot it. I’ll set up some targets for you - how far do you want to shoot?”

“How about 1 target every 100 yards from 100-400 yards. 400 yards should just be about to the lake.”

“You’re Kidding me, right? 400 yards. I can’t hit anything outside of 300, even with a good scope.”

“I forgot to tell you, Ron was an Army Sniper, and he taught me how to shoot long distance.”

“Wow, when I get better, I want lessons.”

“Deal - now let’s get those targets set up - I’m going to want a 12” target to make it easier to pick up in the scope at 400 yards. How about some of these logs?”

“OK, those will work good - set them on the cart, it will make it much easier.”

An hour later, they were ready to shoot. It turned out the lake was almost exactly 400 yards from the cabin. Anne made a quarter-sized mark on each log to use as a bullseye. She handed a set of earplugs to Roy, then inserted hers. She spread a tarp on the ground, set the case on the right side of it, took out the rifle, loaded the magazine with 5 match rounds, extended the legs on the bipod, got into a good prone position, made a few adjustments to the Browning A-Bolt and her body position until the scope’s crosshairs rested on the center of the bullseye she had made on the 100 yard log. She looked at Roy, who gave her a thumbs up, and Anne cycled the bolt and released the safety. Anne slowed her breathing and even her pulse as she concentrated on the sights and the bullseye, and as the crosshairs steadied on the bullseye, inhaled and blew half of her breath out, held her breath, and squeezed the trigger. The rifle roared, and Anne saw the 100 yard log split with a dead-center shot. She wrote the 100 yard settings as well as the environmental conditions just like Ron had taught her in her logbook then she lined up the crosshairs on the 200 yd target, noted any breezes and their direction, and dialed in her corrections. Satisfied, she resumed her position behind the scope, cycled the action, steadied up, caught the target in the crosshairs, and gently squeezed the trigger. The 200 yard log was hit dead-center, so she wrote the 200 yard settings into her log, then switched to the 300 yard log, dialed in the windage and elevation adjustments, steadied herself behind the rifle, and as the sights settled on the bullseye, squeezed the trigger. This round hit dead center as well, but didn’t destroy the log, so she reloaded, and quickly put 2 more shots into it for a very tiny 3-shot group. Then she moved on to the 400 yard target. Before she got set up, she wrote the

dope for the rifle and scope in her logbook for her 300 yard shot, then reloaded. Anne got back into her prone position, sighted through the scope, doped out the wind, adjusted the scope, then steadied up and concentrated on the sight and the target. When she was in the zone again, she cycled the bolt, cleared the safety, then carefully sighted in on the bullseye. There was a slight wobble in her hold at 400 yards, but that was to be expected, Anne knew to shoot between her pulses, and how to use the adductor muscle of her leg to get a rock solid position. Finally the image stabilized, and she focused on the target and sight to the exclusion of everything else. When the bullseye was in the exact center of the crosshairs, she squeezed the trigger, and was rewarded with another bullseye. Anne put 4 more rounds into the target, then set the rifle aside to cool. She got up, removed her earplugs, and walked over to Roy who was staring openmouthed at her.

“Remind me never to get on your bad side. I’ve seen some serious marksman before, but I’ve never seen a woman shoot like you just did. The only time I’ve seen anything close was a friend of mine who must have been a sniper in Vietnam. You were hitting that 400 yard target like most people shoot at a 100 yard target. I’m dying to check out that 300 yard and 400 yard target. First, let me get at tape measure.”

“Wait a minute Roy, there’s a dial caliper in this kit - obviously your gunsmith knows what he’s doing if he plans to measure his rifle’s groups with a caliper.”

They left the rifle cooling on the porch, and walked hand in hand out to the targets. The first two were destroyed, but Roy could clearly see the bullet impact in the center of the bullseye. When they got to the 300 yard log, Roy was standing there dumbfounded. All 3 bullet holes were touching. Anne measured the outer edge of the group, subtracted the width of the bullet from the group size, and came up with a quarter inch group. When Roy saw the number on the caliper, he almost passed out. Finally they made it to the 400 yard target, while the bullet holes weren’t touching, they were a very tight cloverleaf. The final number Anne came up with was a little over ½ inch. Roy couldn’t believe it. He’d just seen a woman shoot a half-inch 5-shot group at 400 yards.

Roy turned to Anne and said, “OK you can do all the shooting you want when we hunt - just let me take the easy ones.”

“OK, as soon as your arm heals. That Bipod definitely helps, I normally shoot three-quarter inch groups at 400 yards prone. That is a sweet rifle - I think he did some action work, as well as bedding and a few other tricks. That Rifle is a Tack-driver.” Anne threw her arms around Roy and squeezed the stuffing out of him, and then proceeded to give him a deep soul-kiss. Roy recovered from his shock in time to return the favor, and soon they were deeply involved in a very passionate kiss. When they finally came up for air, Roy said, “I think we had better push up that marriage date or we could be in trouble.”

“Roy, are you proposing?”

Roy thought about it for a second, got on one knee with tears in his eyes, and looked into Anne's eyes. "I never thought I'd say this to anyone else, but I love you Anne, and I want to spend the rest of my life with you. Will you marry me?"

Anne helped Roy up, planted another lip lock on him, and when she finally came up for air she said, "Of course I'll marry you, I know I can't replace Susan, but I feel the same way you do. I want to spend the rest of my life with you."

"Anne, you just made me the happiest man ever - let's hurry back to the cabin to see if they have a minister in town."

"Roy, the Mayor is an Ordained Methodist Minister."

"Great, that settles it - next question is when?"

"As soon as we can, it will take the mayor a day to get the license faxed over from Juneau, and I want Steve to be there to give me away, and he leaves next week for the Army."

"Great, that settles it - let's go call the Mayor and give him the good news."

They walked hand in hand back to the cabin.



## Chapter 23 - Wedding Bell Blues

When they got back to the cabin, Roy started asking Anne a bunch of questions. “Anne, I know the Bride is supposed to plan the wedding, but I had a couple of questions for you. Is a Religious Ceremony OK? How about Rings? Any idea about readings, etc?”

“One at a time there Roy. First of All, it IS the Bride that is supposed to plan the wedding, but I can understand your questions. Since I’ve never been married before, I don’t know what the traditions, etc. are. Can you help me?”

”Ok, first of All, we need to decide on whether we will have a Civil or Religious ceremony - My preference is for a Religious Ceremony, but it doesn’t have to be a traditional ceremony. I don’t care what we wear, as long as it’s Gender Appropriate - I’m NOT wearing a dress.”

“Roy, you’re such a kidder...Of course I want a Religious Ceremony, otherwise I wouldn’t have mentioned the Mayor was a Methodist Minister. Second of all, I don’t have a dress, and I’d rather see you in pants than a dress - thank you very much.”

OK, Anne - how about Rings - do you want a Diamond, or a pair of gold bands for us?”

“I don’t think I could wear a diamond here, besides you’re the only person besides me that’s going to see it regularly, let’s go with the gold bands. We can wear those around here OK. As far as the readings, you know I don’t know much about the Bible - how about if you show me some relevant passages.”

“I knew you were a bright girl when I met you - speaking of which, I don’t know how old you are, and I don’t want to get accused of robbing the cradle. I promise I’ll never ask again.”

Anne could see Roy’s face was flushed with embarrassment, he realized he had put his foot in his mouth, but she realized she hadn’t told Roy - This could be fun...She thought she’d let him squirm a while longer. “How Old do you think I am?”

Roy almost fainted from the strain, “I Hope you’re over 30. I figured somewhere between 30 and 35.”

Anne decided to let him off the hook “Roy you’re sweet, I’ll be 32 in July. So you’re NOT robbing the cradle unless marrying a spinster is considered cradle robbing.”

“A beautiful woman like you - a Spinster? <serious belly laugh> It’s not like your living with 20 cats in a one-room apartment. I’ll be 56 in December.”

“No kidding - I figured you were a couple of years older - guess I didn’t see you at your best.

Don't take that the way it sounds, it's just people in the hospital look older due to their poor skin color. Not trying to change the subject, but could you please show me those readings?"

"Yes, Dear - I'll be there in a second." Roy got up and picked up his NKJV Bible, opened it to the New Testament. "Let's start in Corinthians. This is a letter written by Paul, to the Church in Corinth, it talks about the nature of love, but is very appropriate for weddings."

Anne read the text, and looked up at Roy when she was finished turned to Roy and told him "That is so perfect, I'd love the Mayor to read that section of the Bible at our Wedding." Roy made a notation that Anne couldn't read, but any Bible student would recognize:

1CO 13:1-13. Anne asked him about it, and Roy told her "that's how Chapters and Verses of the Bible are written. We're reading in the First Book of Corinthians, Chapter 13, and verses 1-13 - so 1CO 13:1-13 means First book of Corinthians (there are 2) Chapter 13, Verses 1-13 - It's a form of shorthand used by Bible Students, instead of writing everything out. I'd like to show you another chapter, but before I do, don't get offended by the passage, some women misinterpret it, and some men abuse their privilege. I'll try to translate for you." Roy opened his Bible up to Ephesians 5:22-33.

Anne started reading "Whoa...What's this SUBMIT BS? No Way Jose."

"Anne, let me explain - if you read the next couple of verses, it makes sense - Husbands aren't supposed to dominate their wives. They are responsible to God for them, and as a result, they need to be responsible for certain decisions involving Spiritual matters. Husbands and wives are supposed to be a team, if you'll read in verses 28-33, you'll see that, as well as modeling the Marriage relationship to the relationship Christ has to his church. Christ offered himself up for death for his church. I'm not saying I have to die for you, but I'd definitely risk or even lose my life to save yours."

"Roy, you're such a romantic" <Kiss>

"OK, I think this about covers it - I think we can definitely leave the "obey" part out of the vows."

"Roy, that was the smartest thing you said all day."

Enveloped in pre-nuptial bliss, the two walk over to the radio to tell the Mayor.

They quickly assembled the radio, giggling like kids, then Roy turned on the power, keyed the mike since the radio was already set on the Mayor's frequency, and said, "Roy calling the Mayor, are you there, over."

A few seconds later, the Mayor replied, "Go ahead Roy, I'm here - Everything OK over there?"

“Everything’s Great - Anne and I have something to tell you, and a favor to ask you.”

“OK, this ought to be interesting.”

Anne took the mike from Roy’s hand, “Bill - we’re getting married, and we want you to do the ceremony.”

“Congratulations you two - when are you going to get married?”

Anne kept talking since Roy was obviously tongue-tied, “As Soon As Possible, Bill.”

“OK, it will take me a couple of days to make the arrangements here in town, and have the license e-mailed to my office. Ordinarily, I’d do marriage counseling, but I think I can skip it with you two. Also, there’s a blood test requirement, but I know for a fact Steve ran Roy’s blood when he was in the hospital, and Anne is a licensed RN and has to have her blood tested periodically for communicable diseases, so I know you’re both OK. Do you want to wear a dress Anne?”

Anne thought about it for a second, then asked Bill what he could do in a couple of days. Bill told her that he could get a rental tux and a wedding gown in Anne’s size by Saturday, which was the soonest he could do the wedding anyway. Since today was Wednesday, and it was late in the afternoon, Bill would have to bust his tail to get everything in time. Anne asked Roy to plug his ears for a second, and gave Bill her measurements. Bill asked Roy for his pants and shirt size, then they realized Roy was still wearing a cast. He can’t wear a standard tuxedo with a cast. Bill said he would come up with something and not to worry. Bill told Anne that Jim the pilot would be there Friday Morning to pick them up, and to bring enough clothes to last the weekend. Anne remembered the rings, and asked Bill - she wanted 2 14kt yellow gold rings, hers should be a size 8, and his should be an 11. Roy commented on her “dainty fingers” and she replied that it was from throttling Steve as they were growing up. YIKES. She’d forgot to tell Steve.. Bill said he had all he needed, and told the two lovebirds to try and keep their hands off each other for a couple of days. Anne asked if Kissing is OK, and Bill laughed and said OK, as long as they behaved themselves. Bill signed off, and Anne switched frequencies to Steve’s radio at the clinic. “Anne calling Steve, ya there Bro?”

“10-4 Read you 5x5, go ahead Anne.”

“Guess what Steve, Roy and I are getting Married. And I want you to give me away.”

“Great Sis - when’s the wedding?”

“Saturday in town - everyone is invited. Make sure Bill has your measurements for your Tux.”

“Anything Else?”

“We’ll be flying in Friday, I’ll talk to you then.”

“OK, Anne - see you then, Bye.”

Anne turned off the power to the radio, then connected the bicycle generator to the battery, and started cranking. She kept at it for 10 minutes, then disconnected the generator, knowing the battery was fully charged again. Anne walked over to Roy, and gave him a hug and a kiss. Roy said, “I could get used to this.”

Anne said, “That’s only the appetizer, just wait until your wedding night.”

Roy’s eyes got as big as saucers, then he got an evil grin. “You can tease as much as you like, but we both have to wait for Saturday Night.”

Anne sat down heavily, “Don’t remind me - I’m getting weak in the knees just thinking about it. It’s been a while for this old lady, I’m not sure I can handle it.”

Roy said, “Old Lady - yeah right. If you’re an Old Lady, I must be Methuselah. It’s been so long for me, I hope it’s like riding a bike, otherwise, I might need a road map and driving directions.” They both laughed at that, then they sat down to just enjoy each other’s company until Anne realized what time it was, and scampered off to the kitchen to make dinner. Roy heard all kinds of noises emanated from the kitchen, and Anne finally emerged half an hour later, with a large pot of stew. She set it on the table, and Roy set the table, including some kerosene lamps that he lit as they were setting the table. When they were done eating, Anne cleaned the dishes, then they read the Bible together, said goodnight and went to sleep.

## Chapter 24 - The Longest Day

Roy dressed quickly when he got up, then went out to check the smokehouse. Several pieces of jerky were done, so he took them down and brought them into the house. When he was finished, Anne was up and starting to make breakfast. She opened the drape between their rooms, then looked at the size of Roy's bed, and commented that if they were going to be married, they needed to build a bigger bed. Roy thought about that for a minute, told Anne "I have a better idea." and called the Mayor. The mayor did some checking, then called Roy back. Roy thanked the mayor and signed off.

"Roy, what was that all about?"

"It's a surprise."

"OK, so you want to be mysterious, I can handle it."

As Anne continued making breakfast, Roy snuck up behind her and wrapped his arms around her and kissed her neck."

"Down, Boy... You might start something we can't finish - Today."

"OK Anne, you're right - but just wait for our wedding night."

"I think it's best if we were busy doing other things today to keep our minds off it. Why don't you go fishing, and take the .22 with you. I'll keep busy around the house - but don't be gone too long."

"I'll water the garden on the way out, OK?"

"Sure Roy, at least the garden should be OK for a couple of days while we get hitched. Make sure you pack a week's worth of clothes."

"I don't think I own a week's worth of clothes. I just thought of something else I need to do. With the 2 of us here, we're going to need to do more laundry, and we need a clothesline to dry it on. For the remainder of the summer, we can run it outside, but during the winter, it's going to have to string inside the cabin, which means I'm going to need a couple of eye hooks."

Anne finished making breakfast - she made pancakes, sausage and eggs, which they ate with real maple syrup. Roy hadn't eaten a breakfast this good in a long time, and commented to Anne, "Wow - I'm really a lucky guy, I'm getting a wife who's an excellent kisser, likes to fish and hunt, can shoot better than me, and can cook too."

Anne got up and told Roy, "I don't know whether to kill you or kiss you, so I guess I'll kiss you." When they came up for air, Roy said he'd better get outside quick. He finished breakfast, drank his coffee, then Anne belted the fanny pack around his waist and slid the 22/45 into the belt of the fanny pack. Then she handed Roy the fishing rod and tackle box. She gave Roy a quick kiss on the cheek, and sent him on his way. As he walked toward the lake, Anne got busy cleaning and straightening what soon was to be her house. "It's not that bad - it just needs a woman's touch" - famous last words. Luckily for Roy, they didn't have any windows that she could decorate, so Anne satisfied her nesting drive by thoroughly sweeping the floor, organizing stuff, and making a list of things she wanted for the house.

Meanwhile, Roy had gone out to the garden, and finished watering the garden in half an hour, leaving him about 3 hours to fish before he thought he had better head back to the cabin. Roy made a note to himself to water the garden again on his way home, since things were starting to grow fast. Roy picked up his gear, and headed off to the lake. Roy dropped his stuff at his usual fishing spot, picked up a 4 foot long piece of wood that might come in handy to get back up with, then cleared off a fire ring, surrounded it with stones, then built a fire - all this one-handed. Roy set the canteen cup on a flat stone near the fire, and poured water from his canteen into it. He added a tea bag and a couple of packets of sugar. Roy carefully baited the hook on his fishing rod, opened the bail, and got ready to cast. Roy was really glad it was his left arm that was broke, because there was no way he could fish left handed. After he cast the lure way out into the lake, he switched the rod to his left hand, and held it carefully while he closed the bail and set the drag. Roy had time to kill, so he walked back closer to the fire, sat down carefully, then picked up the fishing rod, and drove the handle into the soft dirt to hold the tip up. Then he picked up his tea, and sat next to the fire drinking the tea. After watching the fire for a while, and no action on the lake, Roy got sleepy, and basically fell asleep sitting up.

Roy dreamt he was with Susan again, she was dressed in all white like their wedding day, but she was much brighter and almost hard to look at. Susan was speaking to Roy, "Roy, it's me - Susan. I'm so happy for you. You're right, Anne is an Angel, and you need to take care of her. She's a real tough cookie, but she's had bad luck with men, and will be as skittish as a colt for a while. You're going to have to be on your best behavior, and be very attentive to her needs - I'm not talking about flowers and candy, just help out around the house, and let her know you appreciate her, and that you love her."

"Susan, I still love you. I don't want to leave you, or forget about you."

"Roy, It's OK. I'll always be with you, and even though you love Anne, there's a part of you that we'll always share, your memories of us may fade, but you and I will always be in each other's hearts. You need Anne, you're going to live a long life, and you are going to need a companion. Don't worry about me, I'm in Heaven, and I'm so happy here with Jesus. You wouldn't believe the beauty of this place, it's indescribable. I'll see you soon, bye for now."

Roy said "Bye Susan" and all of a sudden she was gone, he was wide awake, and the line was

going out on the fishing rod. Roy made a mad grab with his left hand, got a grip on it, and started cranking back in. Luckily it was a small fish, or Roy would have had problems. Roy realized his arm was still too weak to fish properly, so when he finally pulled the fish in, he packed up, knocked down the fire, and drowned it with a couple of canteen cups of water, then picked up his gear and headed home. He stopped at the garden, filled the garden full of water twice, then closed off the water valve, picked up his stuff and headed home. Anne was seated at the table writing something when Roy came home.

“Hi dear, you’re home early.”

“I tried my hand at fishing, and I figured I’ll have to wait until the cast comes off to go fishing again. I had the weirdest dream, you want to hear about it?”

“Sure, wait a minute while I pour some tea I had on the stove - do you want a glass?”

“Thanks honey, lemon and sugar please.”

Anne brought 2 steaming mugs of tea into the dining room, set them on the table, and sat down. “Go Ahead - I’m all ears.”

“Anne, you remember those dreams I told you about with Susan - well I had another one this morning while I was out fishing. The funny thing was I was sitting down by the fire, and the next thing I know Susan’s standing in front of me wearing a glowing white garment. Susan told me she was happy for me, and that she wants us to get married and live happily together. She also told me to be considerate to you, and help out around the house, and not treat you like a maid.”

“That’s good, because I’m a little old to wear a French Maid’s outfit.”

They both got a good laugh at that, and Roy said “OK, I guess I won’t have to order the French Maid’s Outfit, but how about a nice negligee?”

Anne said, “OK, but any color but white - I prefer Red.”

They sipped their tea, and Roy asked Anne what she was writing when he came in. she told him it was a shopping list of stuff they needed Roy explained they needed to watch the funds, because he wasn’t going to get any more money until he turned 60 besides the Annual Payment for Alaskan Residents. He told her he had about \$80 thousand left in the bank from selling his motor home. The insurance company had already paid off on the policy, so that was gone.

“Roy, I didn’t marry you for your money. It’s nice that we can buy stuff, and I promise to go easy, and not buy a bunch of frilly stuff.”

“I appreciate that Anne - You know, I really felt like fish for dinner, and I can’t fish one-handed. Would you mind going fishing with me?”

“Roy, I’d love to - let me get the fanny pack and the holsters first - just in case.”

Roy helped Anne slip on the shoulder holster and fanny pack. Anne slipped the 22/45 out of the shoulder holster and said, “Roy, this doesn’t look like any other .22 pistol I’ve seen - what are all the little holes around the barrel?”

“Anne - that’s called a suppressor, and if you want to find out how it works, let’s put it back in the holster, I’ll bring this box of .22 rounds so we can reload, and this empty tin can for you to shoot at.”

They carried everything out the cabin door, including the fishing gear. Roy tossed the can about 40 feet away and told Anne to shoot it with the 22/45.

Anne said, “Shouldn’t we wear earplugs?”

“Just trust me on this one, Ok Anne.”

Anne shrugged, pulled the 22/45 out of the holster, lined it up on the tin can, cleared the safety, put her finger on the trigger, and squeezed. There was a soft pop, and the can jumped about 6 inches. “Cool - it makes almost no noise.” Anne proceeded to quickly shoot the rest of the magazine into the tin can, which was dancing around every time Anne hit it - she never let it stop moving “This is Fun... How much ammo do you have?”

“I’ve got over 2,000 rounds in the cabin, but I only brought 100, and we need to save 30 rounds to reload both mags, so you can shoot 70 rounds, plus the rounds in the magazines.”

Anne emptied the first magazine, did a combat reload, and kept right on shooting. When she finished the second magazine, the tin can was shredded. Roy was amazed - Anne had just put 30 rounds into the tin can at about 40 feet, and she never let it stop moving until she had to reload. Roy handed her the box of CCI Minimags, and Anne quickly filled the mags, loaded the gun, cycled the action, and topped off the mag. She picked up the fishing rod and tackle box and continued to walk to the lake.

When they got to the lake, Roy quipped, “You know Anne, the way you shoot, I think they should have called you Annie as in “Annie Oakley”. Remind me never to get you mad at me.”

Anne laughed and told Roy that she and Ron used to spend hours plinking with Ron’s Ruger Mark II, and one of their favorite pastimes was to see how many times they could keep a tin can moving. With the 22/45’s high capacity mags, she got 5 extra shots. She used to shoot Ron’s 10/22 with Ramline 25 round banana magazines, and could keep a tin can dancing at 25 yards



for the whole magazine. They used to shoot varmints with the 10/22's out to 100 yards with a Simmons 3x12x50 AO Scope.

"Anne, you have a big advantage over me, I didn't start shooting until I got into hunting in my 30's when we moved to Wisconsin and all my friends hunted deer each fall, and went duck and turkey hunting. I can barely hit a deer-sized target at 300 yards, and you shoot a tiny little group into a log at 400 yards. When I heal up, I want to take shooting lessons if you want to teach me."

"Roy, I'd love to. Are you sure you can handle taking lessons from a girl?"

"A girl that shoots like Annie Oakley - you bet." Anne walked over and gave Roy a big hug and a kiss.

"You say the neatest things, Roy - now how about I catch dinner?" Anne picked up the fishing rod and tackle box, and walked to their fishing hole. Roy quickly baited the hook for Anne, then she cast way out into the lake. When the lure settled, she twitched the rod tip a couple of times, then the rod almost bent in half. Anne set the hook, then started reeling in the line. Eventually she landed a 10lb lake trout, and put it on the stringer, and cast back out into the lake. A few minutes later, she had another one hooked. As Anne was landing the second fish, Roy turned around and Oliver was staring at them from the edge of the forest, and Roy could see Francine and the pups right behind them. Roy tapped Anne on the shoulder, "I think Oliver and Family have shown up for dinner, feel like feeding the wolves?"

Anne unhooked the lake trout, and turned around, Roy whistled, and Oliver trotted right up to them, then Francine and the pups. They had grown a lot since the last time Roy had seen them. Anne plopped the fish at Oliver's feet, and Oliver proceeded to eat it right there.

"I think the rest of the family is hungry too - think you could land a couple more fish?"

Anne cast out into the lake and soon had another large fish on. She reeled in, and landed another large lake trout. This time, Francine and the pups walked up, and Anne laid the fish in front of them. Francine and the pups made short work of the fish, and Oliver was almost finished with his. Anne quickly cast out into the lake, and caught 3 more fish in short order. She gave one more to Oliver, and another one to Francine and the pups, then put the second fish on the stringer. When Oliver finished eating, he walked over to Roy and Anne, and sat down. They petted Oliver, and he looked into Anne's eyes as if he were saying "Thanks for the fish." Francine and the pups joined them as soon as they finished, and the pups played while Oliver and Francine sat there and got their ears scratched. Finally Oliver stood up and headed back to the woods. As his family trotted back to their den, Oliver turned around and looked at Roy and Anne, then followed his family. Anne picked up the stringer, the fishing rod and tackle box, turned to Roy and said, "Let's go home too." They walked hand in hand back to the cabin. When they got inside, Anne put all the stuff up, then quickly cleaned and filleted the fishes.

She dumped the guts in a pile outside, then got out the skillet, heated the lard, breaded the fillets, and fried the fish. Roy got the table set, lit the lantern, then went into the kitchen to wash his hands. Anne asked him if he wanted mashed potatoes with dinner, and he handed her a sauce pan that she filled half full of water and set on the stove to boil. She got down a box of instant mashed potatoes and a can of Butter Buds. When the water was boiling, she added 2 cups of Instant Mashed Potatoes, and a ¼ cup of Butter Buds, as well as a teaspoon of salt and a dash of pepper. She stirred the mixture until all the water was absorbed, then Roy handed her the plates. She put 2 large fillets on each plate and a mound of potatoes. They carried their plates over to the table, sat down, and Roy said Grace. “Father I thank you for this food, for the cook, and for everything you have done for us. Please continue to bless us, Amen.” Anne echoed Roy’s “Amen” and they ate dinner quietly for a while. Anne asked Roy, “I understand that Oliver is at least partly tame, but why did Francine and the pups come in too?”

“Anne - this goes back to the prehistoric ages when Man first domesticated wild dogs. For the longest time, Man and wolves were competitors, then over time, some dogs came closer and closer to Man’s fire, and eventually were fed by Man. When the dogs stayed around, they got fed the scraps from Man’s kills. The dogs eventually got used to living with Man, and soon ended up hunting with him, and even protecting Man and their families. See, Wolves and other dogs have a hierarchal society, and the Alpha Male is in charge of the pack. Domesticated dogs accepted Man as the Alpha male of the pack that included the dogs and Man’s family. Oliver and Francine obviously see me as the Alpha Male and you as the Alpha Female of their pack, so they trust us. Even their pups will treat us as the Alpha Pair.”

When they were finished with dinner, Anne cleaned the table, and Roy got out his Bible. He waited until Anne was seated next to him, then asked if it was OK to read to her out of the Bible. Anne said OK, then Roy turned to Genesis and said, “since we were talking about Man and Wolves, I thought you’d like to read Genesis, and hear how God created the Universe, and everything in it?” Anne nodded, so Roy started reading. When he got halfway through, Anne took over. They sat there reading the Bible and holding each other until bedtime. Anne stretched, and said “It’s getting late - we’ve got a lot to do tomorrow, and Jim should be here shortly after breakfast to take us to town. Goodnight Sweetheart, Pleasant Dreams.” With that, Anne kissed Roy on the lips, then walked into her bedroom, and shut the drape. Roy got undressed, blew out the lantern then slipped under the covers.

## Chapter 25 - The Day Before

Roy woke early the next morning to the smell of bacon frying. He rolled out of bed, got dressed, then walked over to the curtain separating the rooms “Knock - knock.”

“It’s open silly, and I’m already dressed - sorry to disappoint you.”

“Well Anne, Guess what. Today’s the last day you have to worry about it. We’ll be married tomorrow, and I’ll definitely be seeing you in your Birthday Suit.”

“I didn’t know this was going to be formal - I didn’t bring a thing to wear.”

Roy walked around behind Anne, and gave her a big hug from behind, then kissed her on the neck.

“You better stop that, or I’m liable to burn breakfast, and break our promise to the Mayor.”

Roy kissed her one more time, then patted her butt for good measure. “I’ll try to keep my hands off you until tomorrow night. I’ll go in the other room where it’s safe.”

Anne finished breakfast, and Roy brought her the plates. She made pancakes, bacon, and eggs for breakfast, since they would be too busy to eat lunch today, and she figured she had better feed Roy pretty well, since the way he was behaving, he was going to need his strength. They sat down together to eat breakfast, and just as they finished, Anne heard the roar of Jim’s plane coming in for a landing. Good thing they packed last night. Anne quickly did the dishes, then knocked down the fire in the stove just to be safe. Jim had taxied up to their door, and was walking through the front door. “Where’s the two lovebirds? You guys ready yet? We’ve got a lot of stuff to do, and little time, so let’s get going.” Jim shook Roy’s hand, and gave Anne a big hug, then they grabbed their luggage, and boarded the plane. Anne helped Roy buckle in, and as soon as they were buckled in, Jim revved the motor, turned the plane around, and taxied out to the lake, then turned downwind so he would be running into the wind for takeoff. As soon as he reached the end of the lake, he turned facing upwind, revved the throttle to 100% power, and charged into the wind. The ride was very bumpy until they built up speed, and the wings started generating lift. They were still not flying until the very last minute when Jim pulled the yoke back into his lap, and cleared the tree line at the end of the lake by 10 feet. Jim continued to gain altitude until it was safe to turn back to Allakaket. Jim banked the plane until they were facing south, and headed toward Allakaket. Half an hour later, they were on final for the town, and Jim radioed ahead so the Mayor could meet them with his Jeep. They landed with a thud on the lake, and Jim taxied right up to the shore, and stopped next to the Mayor’s Jeep. Anne opened the door on her side, Roy unbuckled his belt, and got out, and Jim handed the Mayor their bags. Jim told Roy he had a couple of trips to make, but he would see them again for dinner, and jumped back in his plane, and as soon as they were clear, started up the prop,

turned and taxied back to the lake, then took off. Roy and Anne got in the Mayor's Jeep for the ride to town. the mayor told Roy he had booked them separate rooms for tonight, and Anne looked at the Mayor, who said, "Don't worry, I booked the Bridal Suite for tomorrow night - I assume you guys didn't want to be disturbed. Have you kept your promise so far."

Anne answered for both of them, "It hasn't been easy, but we survived so far."

Roy laughed and told the Mayor, "This is one of those times I wish I didn't have a busted wing."

The Mayor told him, "I'm sure you'll figure something out." Then they arrived at the Hotel. The Mayor took their bags, and showed them to their rooms. While Roy was busy getting situated, the mayor showed Anne the dress he was able to rent for her. It was a lovely off-white dress with a veil and short train, just as she had requested. They walked out of Anne's room, and locked the door behind them. Roy had opened his closet, and was amazed to find a tuxedo hanging there. Upon closer inspection, Roy noticed the left sleeve had snaps all the way to the shoulder, but they were so well hidden that he couldn't see them from 6 feet away. Roy walked into the hall, shook the mayor's hand and told him, "I don't know how you did it, but you managed to find a tuxedo for me to wear." Anne squealed and gave the mayor a big hug. With that out of the way, they walked into the hotel's kitchen where the owner was hard at work.

"I wanted you to review the menu for tonight and for tomorrow's reception."

Anne picked up the menu and was reading, Roy read over her shoulder:

### Dinner

Prime Rib  
Butterflied Breaded Deep Fried Shrimp  
Mashed Potatoes  
Gravy  
Mixed Vegetables with garlic butter sauce  
Rolls and Biscuits  
Baked Apple Pie and Ice Cream

## Reception

Cold Cut Platter

Cheese Platter

Veggie Platter

Hoagie Rolls

Mayonnaise, Mustard, Ketchup, Vinegar, Oil, Seasonings

3-tier Wedding Cake (vanilla) with Cream Cheese Frosting

Champagne

Anne looked at the menus, then at Roy who was nodding vigorously “Yes”.

Anne turned to the Hotel Owner, and asked him what all this would cost. He told her he normally charges \$500 for enough food to feed all the townspeople food like this, but he would write off half of it, and their rooms as his wedding present to them. Roy told the mayor to make sure the Hotel owner got paid out of his account. The hotel owner smiled and said thanks. When they were finished, Anne and Roy walked over to the Clinic to see Steve. When they opened the door, Steve nearly flattened Anne, then swept her off her feet in a big bear hug. “Anne, I’m SO happy for you. I expected you would stay with Roy a while, and while my back is turned, you two fall in love. Roy, Congratulations. I know you’ll make Anne happy. I can’t wait for tomorrow. I wish Ron were here to give Anne away, but I’ll be honored to stand in his place.” Steve was shaking Roy’s hand vigorously, until he noticed Roy’s pained expression. “Oops - Not a good idea for the Doctor to wreck his own work.” Steve invited them over to the pub for a drink, and something to eat, Steve missed breakfast since he had an emergency. “Roy, you’ve got to try the Mooseburgers. They taste just like hamburger, and Bill puts a special seasoning blend in them and the fries that he won’t tell anyone about.” With that, they walked over to the pub, and were immediately shown a table.

“Roy, remember - this is where we first met. Who would have guessed in two months after that, we’d be getting married.” Anne leaned over and kissed Roy on the lips.

Steve looked at his menu. “OK if I order for us?”

Anne said “Sure Steve, go ahead.”

When the waitress came over, Steve said “3 Mooseburgers, Medium Well, with Moose Fries, and a pitcher of Moose Drool.” She noted the order on her pad, walked back to the cook, and clipped the order next on the wheel. She brought the pitcher and 3 frosty glasses, then 10 minutes later, their order. When the waitress left, Steve started talking about joining the Air Force and becoming a Para Rescue Jumper. Roy asked him, “Isn’t that Dangerous?”

“Yes, it’s the most dangerous job in the military, more PJ’s get killed in training than any other branch, proportionally. The training is dangerous, but when you come out on the other end, your job is to save another life. They especially recruit young single ER qualified docs, so I was a prime candidate for the recruiters. My obligation to the State of Alaska ends this month, and the week after that, I report for training. I’ve always been an adrenalin junkie, and this is the biggest rush in the Armed Forces. We are Airborne qualified, dive qualified, and go through the same training the 11 Bravo do so we can rescue a downed pilot under enemy fire. With my MD and 4 years ER training, they are waiving most of the medical training requirements, but I still have to take the specialized training to learn how the Air Force does it under field conditions.”

“Steve, I know telling you BE CAREFUL isn’t an option, but please don’t take any unnecessary risks, I don’t want to lose you too.”

“Don’t worry Sis, if my number comes up, it won’t matter whether I’m here in Alaska, or behind enemy lines somewhere rescuing a downed pilot. You know I love you, but this is something I have to do. Maybe I’ll settle down when I get it out of my system. Anyway, tomorrow’s the big day. We should probably talk to the Mayor about the ceremony when we finish here.”

“Steve, I hate to sound like a televangelist, but I need to know where you stand spiritually. For Anne’s and my peace of mind. If you don’t want to discuss it, it’s OK.”

“Roy, it’s funny you should mention that. I was raised Methodist, but fell away while in college. When I got to the ER, my faith was renewed by what I can only call miracles. Patients who should have died, were even clinically dead on arrival, but somehow survived. Several of them related visions they had while clinically dead that frankly rocked me to the core. One gang-banger described a scene of indescribable suffering and torment, where a young mother described seeing a place of peace and contentment. Since then, I’ve renewed my relationship with God, and even attended church when I could.”

“Steve, you never told me this.”

“Anne, I didn’t know if you were ready to receive it. I mean we both were living sinful lives while we lived in Texas.”

“Well, I’m ready now, Roy’s been reading the Bible to me, and explaining things to me. I recently become a Christian, but don’t think I understand it all.”

At this Roy spoke up, “Maybe we should continue this conversation at the Mayor’s, I’m sure he’ll have something to contribute.” They had finished eating, so they got up, and Steve paid the tab, then they walked over to the Mayor’s office. As they walked into the Mayor’s Office, he got up, shook Steve and Roy’s hands, and gave Anne a big hug. Roy spoke up, “Before we get started, Anne has some questions for you, she’s a new Christian, and wanted to ask you.”

“OK, let me get my Bible, and I’ll answer any questions you have. OK, Anne, Fire away.”

“First of all, Roy lead me through what he called “the sinner’s prayer” a couple of weeks ago, and I felt such relief, but when he read the Bible to me, I didn’t understand some things.”

“Anne, none of us profess to know all the Bible, learning the Bible is a lifelong process. There are some tools that can help your understanding. A Strong’s Dictionary helps with translation questions. You see, the Original Bible was written in Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek. As you know there are two major books in the Bible, the Old and New Testament. The Old Testament dealt with the time before the birth of Jesus, and the New Testament dealt with the time after Jesus’ birth. The Old Testament was written in Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew, the language of the people called Jews, and the New Testament was written in Greek. No one has spoken Aramaic for centuries, and that caused problems when the Bible Scholars first attempted to translate the Bible into Latin, and later into English. As a result, translation errors have cropped up due to the meanings of words changing over the centuries, and Strong’s does the best job of illuminating the original meaning of the word in Greek or Aramaic. Also, there are Concordances written by Theologians and Bible Scholars that amplify sections of the Bible, and attempt to shed light on various passages. Hopefully those books Roy ordered are in the shipment Jim is getting for you today. When you get them, either Roy or I can show you how to use them, and it will make things much easier.”

“OK, but some of the passages don’t make sense, take for example John 1:1.”

“Let me get my Strong’s out, and I’ll show it to you. <reaches up onto bookcase, pulls down large book> OK, turn to John 1:1 in my Bible and read it please.”

- 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 2 He was in the beginning with God.
- 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.
- 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.
- 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

“Ok, Anne, now let’s open Strong’s. The first question you probably have is the first sentence, right?” {Anne Nods head} Let’s open Strong’s and find the answer. First we look up the word in the front, in this case we’re looking for the word “Word”. <Thumbing pages> Ok, now that

you've found that, look up John 1:1 under WORD. There's a number there that corresponds to the Greek definition of that word. <writes number down> Now, let's turn to that number in the Greek dictionary in back. <thumbing pages> Now, read the definition."

"I see it, in this case I think the word "Word" is referring to Jesus Christ. OK, I get it now, they are saying in the beginning, God and the Word, meaning Jesus, were one, and they created the Universe. Thanks, Bill - Now I don't feel like such an Idiot."

"Anne, No one who believes in God and his Son are idiots. You will understand the Bible, it just takes time, and the proper tools. It took me 10 years to study for the Ministry, and I'm still learning. Now let's adjourn to the chapel to practice for your wedding."

"Bill, wait a minute, Jim isn't here."

"Don't worry Roy, all he has to do is stand next to you and give you the rings. I'll talk to him later if he doesn't make it back in time." With that, they walked next door to the small church that also doubled as the Town Hall, except now it was decorated, and looked like a small country chapel. "Ok, Roy, let's take it from the top. I enter from the side door, you walk down the aisle and stand off to the left, then Steve escorts Anne down the aisle, hands her off to you - I forgot, Anne what do you want to do with your veil - leave it down for the ceremony and lift for the kiss, or raise it when Steve hands you off, or have Steve lift it?"

"I'd like to have it up for the ceremony, so is it OK if I lift my veil when Steve hands me off?"

"Sure, and I guess that means I'll have to leave the "Obey" part out as well."

"You better believe it Reverend." <Laughter>

"OK, now we're up to the point where you and Anne face the altar and hold hands, <they turn toward Altar and hold hands> I've got the readings you wanted me to do marked. I'll read the readings then ask each of you if you consent to be married, and give a brief instruction, then you'll repeat your vows, kiss, and I announce you as Husband and Wife. You're taking Roy's last name, right?"

"Of course - By the way, what is your last name?"

"Just in case you're in the wrong room, My name's Roy Williams."

"Anne Williams, I like that."

Great, now that we've got that settled, why don't you two walk down the aisle together, and we're finished here until tomorrow at noon. Just remember, your rehearsal dinner is at 5:00 at the lodge. Roy, that's when Mickey's little hand is on the 5 and his big hand in on the 12."



“Of all the luck, we get a preacher that thinks he’s a comedian. See you at 5 Mayor.”

Anne turned to Roy, “We’ve got a couple of hours to kill, what do you want to do?”

“Anne, the way I’m feeling, we should stay outdoors and in public.”

“Roy, is it just me, or are you turning into a Horny Old Fart?”

“I guess you’ll just have to see tomorrow night.” <Evil Grin>

“Ok, you dirty old man, let’s go for a walk.”

They spent the rest of the afternoon walking, holding hands, talking, and occasionally kissing. Roy hoped he could control himself until tomorrow night. Finally, five o’clock rolled around, and they headed to the lodge. All the townspeople were there, and everyone shook Roy’s hand, and gave Anne hugs. Roy hadn’t seen most of these people before, but Anne seemed to know everyone, and introduced them to Roy, and explained to him who they were (her teacher from school, etc.) Mercifully the receiving line was short, and Roy was able to sit down with Anne at the head of the table. The townspeople sat down, the Hotel owner and his servers brought out several huge Prime Rib Roasts, set them on a side tray to be sliced to order, and put all the rest of the food on the table. When the food was on the table, the Mayor tapped his wine glass to get everyone’s attention, gave a brief speech welcoming Roy, and asking the village’s blessing on their upcoming wedding. With that, they bowed their heads, and the Mayor said grace, then they passed the food and the bottles of wine. The server walked to Roy’s right, and asked him how he liked his Prime Rib. Roy told him Thick and medium rare with all the trimmings. Anne concurred, and soon two huge plates of prime rib appeared in front of them. Roy looked puzzled, then turned to Anne, and whispered into her ear. She quickly cut her meat, then took Roy’s plate, and cut his prime rib for him since Roy’s cast prevented him from using his left hand, then she set his plate back in front of him. Roy piled the horseradish and sour cream onto his plate, and got a ramekin of Au jus from the server; put a pile of mashed potatoes and a bunch of fried shrimp and smaller piles of vegetables and the other fixings onto his plate. Anne turned to him giggling and whispered, “Eating for Two?” Roy almost choked on a forkful of mashed potatoes.

“I’m kind of old for that, but if you want kids, I think I can manage.”

Anne turned beet red, and whispered back, “You horny old goat. I’m sure you’d love your part of the scenario. I guess I better wear you out tomorrow night so I can get some peace. At your age, that shouldn’t take too long.”

“We’ll see who cries “UNCLE” first tomorrow night.”

The mayor noticed all the whispering on their end of the table, and said, “Enough of that, you

two - if you're going to whisper, speak up so the rest of us can hear." At that, they both turned bright red, and the Mayor knew what they had been talking about. All conversation stopped for a minute, and several people were giggling. Finally, conversation resumed at the table, so Anne and Roy were able to resume eating without any further embarrassment. Roy noticed he hadn't seen Jim for a while, and he wasn't in the receiving line, when Jim showed up, apologizing for being late, explaining that he was making a delivery, sat down and filled a plate with food. Roy wondered what Jim was up to, but didn't ask. Later, when dinner broke up around 10:00pm, Anne walked Roy to his room, kissed him goodnight, and fought herself to keep from just walking into Roy's room and attacking him. She told Roy that he shouldn't see her the morning of the wedding, besides she was going to be busy, so he should plan on eating breakfast by himself. Just make sure he was at the church, dressed, and in position by noon, or else she'd have to hunt him down with a 12ga Shotgun. Roy assured her he'd be there, and no need for the shotgun. Roy hoped the Mayor and Jim could help him get dressed, since he couldn't put on the top half of the tuxedo by himself. Roy kissed Anne goodnight, and walked back out to the front to see if he could catch the Mayor. Luckily, he was still there, helping out. Roy asked him if they could help him get dressed tomorrow, and the Mayor told him just to bring his tux to the church at 11:00 and they could get dressed in the nursery room next to the main chapel. Roy thanked him, and headed back to his room, got undressed, and went right to sleep. Roy was exhausted by now, and figured he'd need his sleep. Roy spent the evening dreaming of Anne and Susan. Meanwhile, Anne had gotten undressed, and fell into bed. She was out like a light within minutes.

## Chapter 26 - Roy gets Hitched

Roy woke at 9:00 the next morning - then it hit him "I'm getting Married Today." The first thing he did was say a special prayer, and thanked God for today, for Anne, and for Susan. He knew he was doing the right thing, but he was still nervous. Then he remembered he was even more nervous when he married Susan. He rolled out of bed, used the bathroom, brushed his teeth, and got dressed. He walked out to the dining room, and there was a note on the door saying it was closed due to the wedding that afternoon. Instead, there was a sign pointing around the corner to the day room, and they had set up a breakfast bar with hot food, cereal, muffins, juice and coffee. Roy picked up a tray, set a plate, cup and utensils on it, then set it on the slider bars in front of the breakfast bar. He spooned in some scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, and pancakes, grabbed a bran muffin, poured some orange juice and coffee, and sat down at the table. The mayor and Jim were sitting down eating when Roy sat down next to them.

"You ready for the big day?"

"Ready as I'll ever be - did you talk to Jim about this afternoon?"

"Jim's an old hand, this is his 4<sup>th</sup> wedding as a Best Man, and so he knows what to do. Lets' finish up breakfast, then it will just about be time to get ready."

"Anyone seen Anne?"

"No, but several of the womenfolk were headed to her room - and I saw someone bringing a tray of food into her room." They ate breakfast without further conversation, and then they sat around until just before 11:00, and then Roy went to his room to get his tuxedo and carried it to the chapel to get dressed. Roy figured he'd need the extra time. When he got there, there was 3 bags with Bill, Jim and Roy's names on them. Roy opened his bag, and there was a pair of shoes, socks, the cummerbund, a bow tie, and a carnation boutonniere with a floral pin to pin to his lapel. Roy hung his tux on the hanger, then sat down to wait for Jim and the Mayor. A couple of minutes later, they filed in and when they all gathered in a huddle, the Mayor led them in prayer, then they got dressed. The Mayor and Jim helped Roy get into his tuxedo, then they got dressed. Roy was wondering why the Mayor was wearing a tux, and he told Roy the congregation had decided not to have Bill wear vestments, that they preferred him wearing a suit, and he always wore a tux for weddings. Roy thought that was a good idea, and didn't comment further. They finished dressing at 11:45. Jim excused himself saying he needed to escort people into the chapel. He told Roy to be ready to go by 11:55, and walked out the door. 10 minutes later, Jim came for Roy, who got up, smoothed his pants, and walked out to stand next to the altar with Jim. Then the Mayor entered and stood at the Altar. Finally at 12:00 sharp, someone pressed a button on a cassette player, and the familiar strains of Mendelssohn's Wedding March echoed through the church, as the doors opened, the audience rose to their

feet, and Anne appeared at the doorway. She was radiant in her Ivory wedding dress, and Steve was walking next to her with his hand tucked into her right elbow. The aisle was barely big enough in the small chapel, but Roy didn't notice, all he could see was Anne. When she made her way to the front of the church, she smiled at Roy, and he felt like a 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks display was going off. Roy extended his right hand, Anne reached out with her left, and they clasped hands. Anne turned to Steve, gave him a kiss on the cheek, and Steve sat in the front row. Then they turned to face Bill, who had his Bible in hand, and was looking at the two of them. As the music stopped, Reverend Bill started the service with the eternal words "Dearly Beloved..."

Roy didn't really hear the words, he was too entranced by Anne. She was so beautiful, and his heart was so full of love that he thought it would burst. Finally, it dawned on Roy that Bill was saying something important, and he needed to pay attention. "Do you Roy, wish to pledge your life to Anne, to be her husband for the rest of your life?"

Roy responded, "Yes, I Do."

Then Bill asked Anne the same question, somehow she found her voice, and her response was a strong "Yes."

Bill continued in his readings, and when he was finished, he stepped back, and a couple from the back of the church came up the outside aisle with a guitar and a mandolin. They sat in two folding chairs that were set off to the side, and got ready, then they sang the famous duet from Fiddler on the Roof, "Sunrise Sunset". Even though he appeared to be in his 60's, he still had a powerful Baritone voice that accompanied his Ovation 12-string folk guitar as beautifully as his wife's Alto voice accompanied her mandolin. When they were finished, there wasn't a dry eye in the congregation. When everyone finally finished honking and wiping, Bill got to the good part. He turned to Roy, and asked him to repeat his wedding vows to him, then asked Anne to repeat her wedding vows to him, then asked Jim for the rings, and gave a brief instruction of the symbolism of the round gold rings they were exchanging. Roy put the ring on Anne's finger, then she put a ring on Roy's finger.

Then Bill said the most important words of the ceremony, "By your exchange of vows, and exchange of rings before God and these witnesses, by the Authority of God Almighty and the State of Alaska, I now declare you Husband and Wife. What God has joined, Let No Man put Asunder. I now present to you Roy and Anne Williams. You may kiss the bride. Anne wrapped her arms around Roy and put a lip lock on him that he had never felt before. Bill was worried they were going to pass out when finally they came up for air. Then they turned, and as the strains of the Trumpet Voluntary echoed through the chapel, they walked down the aisle to the applause of everyone in the church. They stood in the vestibule while the church emptied, then the townspeople formed two lines and pelted them with rice as they walked over to the Hotel for the reception. The owner of the hotel greeted them, and opened the door to the dining room. The room had been decorated, and looked fabulous. There was a huge 3 tier cake in the

corner, and in another corner, a pile of wedding presents, and some cards. They had a buffet table all set up. The hotel owner motioned for the Bride and Groom to go through the buffet line first, then seated them at the head table. When everyone was seated, Jim as the Best Man toasted the couple and acted as MC for the reception. Several people brought cameras, and by the time they were finished, Roy and Anne were seeing stars. Finally, it came time to cut the cake and open their wedding gifts. Roy was surprised by the number of cards vs. gifts until he opened some of the cards, and they mentioned that Jim and a friend of his had made several trips Friday delivering and setting up the gifts, including a new King bed from the Mayor and the Hotel owner, a washboard and wringer, a large galvanized tub, and a few other large items. Then they opened the gifts and found a salt shaker and a pepper mill, a cast iron skillet and Dutch oven, a tea kettle, and a coffee pot, a large stainless Stock Pot for making soup, a set of knives in a butcher's block, a maple cutting block, a 4-piece set of cutlery, a 4-piece set of plates, bowls, and cups, and finally a His and Her's set of towels. Jim told them that they had also delivered all the stuff he had ordered including a new rifle, and the set of pistols and the custom shoulder holster. Roy wished he could get the cast off sooner, since he wanted to go home and try out his new toys, but first they needed to retire to their Honeymoon suite. Anne and Roy got up to leave, and were mobbed by the wedding guests. Finally, they were alone in the honeymoon suite.

“So, Anne Williams, do you want to help me get undressed, or are you going to attack me with my clothes on.”

Anne walked toward him - and we will draw a curtain over what happened after that.

## Chapter 27 - The Morning After

Roy awoke the next morning next to Anne, who was positively beaming.

“Anne - What Happened?”

“Roy, you made me the happiest woman on the planet - we’ll have to do this more often.”

“I hate to tell you this, but if I do THAT more often, you’re going to kill me.”

“OK Roy, I promise, no more than 3 times a night.”

“Anne, I don’t know if I can. I’m not a young man anymore - you on the other hand are INSATIABLE...”

“Roy, I wouldn’t exactly say that. I’m definitely satisfied.. I think it has just been a long time for both of us.”

“Good thing you’re a nurse - I thought I was going to need CPR for a minute there. Anne, can I just hold you for a while, or are you starving?”

“I think I can safely wait until noon. Oh, Roy - I love you so much. I’ve got some very good news for you. Remember the other day when you were worried about our finances? Well, you don’t need to worry any more. Ron had a \$250,000.00 Life Insurance policy that he got when he was in the military - they paid part of the premium, so he got enough to make sure both Steve and I could be taken care of and have a good education in case something should happen to him. Anyway, when the FAA declared him Missing and Presumed Dead, we filed the paperwork with the Insurance Company, and six months later, he was declared legally dead, and the insurance company settled. Steve got \$125,000.00 and I got \$125,000.00. I used some of it to pay off debts, but I still have over 100 grand in the bank here in Allakaket. Between my 100 grand and your 80 grand, we can live off the interest easily up here.”

“Anne, that is so generous of you to offer, but you don’t have to.”

“Roy, I WANT to. Please...It would make things much easier.”

“OK, Anne, We’ll talk to the mayor about combining our two accounts into a joint account. Right after I tickle you. <Serious Giggling and Laughter>

Later that afternoon, when they finally got out of bed and got dressed, they went into the dining room, where they were still serving a buffet breakfast for Sunday Morning. Roy was famished, and piled a lot of food on his tray. Anne looked at the mountain of food, and giggled “I guess I

really did wear you out.”

“I’m trying to regain my strength.” Anne went through the line, then they sat at the table and ate. Half an hour later, Jim walked up and asked them if they are ready to go home. Roy told him as soon as they had finished breakfast and packed. Jim said that would work great for him since it was going to take at least an hour to load the plane. When they finished eating, they quickly packed, checked out of the hotel, and were seriously confused when their bill was stamped “Paid in Full” and signed by the owner. He just happened to walk by, and Roy thanked him for his hospitality. He told Roy that the Mayor had already paid for the entire weekend’s festivities out of Roy’s account, so everything was paid for. That reminded Roy that they needed to talk with the Mayor, and walked over to his office.

“Bill, Anne and I need to convert our separate accounts to a joint account.”

“I already took care of the paperwork -Anne tipped me off. All you have to do is sign a new signature card, Roy you sign first, and Anne right below.”

After they signed, the mayor offered to drive them out to the airfield, and they piled in the Mayor’s Jeep. When they got to the airfield, Jim had just finished loading, and took their bags. They thanked the Mayor, and got on board the plane. Anne belted Roy in, then buckled her seatbelt and locked the door. Jim jumped into his seat, locked the door, buckled his belt, put on his radio headset, and checked to make sure he was clear, then started the engine. When the engine had warmed up, and the prop was spinning at the proper RPM, he contacted the tower for permission to take off. The tower said there was no traffic in the vicinity, so they were free to taxi and take off anytime. Jim told them to hang on, pushed the throttle to take-off setting, and quickly taxied out to the lake. By the time he hit the lake, he was starting to accelerate rapidly, then reached lift-off speed as he reached the end of the lake, and pulled the yoke back into his lap. They cleared the trees by 50 feet, and Jim kept the nose level to gain airspeed, then trimmed for a gentle climb to 5,000 ft for the trip home. Before they knew it, they were circling the lake to land, and Jim touched down with barely a splash, and a soft bump as the pontoons made contact with the lake. They taxied over to the end of the lake where Roy and Anne’s new house stood, and they quickly taxied to the front door. Roy immediately noticed something was different - there was a window next to the front door.

As soon as Jim had stopped, and shut down the plane, they hopped out, and walked over to their house. Roy stared openmouthed at his cabin. There were 2 windows. Jim noticed Roy’s stunned look, and said that while they were gone getting married, Anne thought it would be nice to have 2 windows in the house. Jim and his friend, who was a master carpenter, installed them while they did everything else. Roy caught on to that last phrase, and was almost afraid to ask. When they opened the door, Roy noticed the door opened inward, actually fit, and locked. It was also heavily weatherproofed. When he stepped inside, he hardly recognized the place. Jim explained they needed to move a few things to make way for the king size bed. Roy’s food locker was missing, and the table had been pushed over next to the wall. Where Roy’s old bed

used to be was a new King Size bed with head and foot boards. Roy's moose hides that were on the bed were rolled up on the table, and the Bearskin was now a quilt over the bed. As Roy continued into the cabin, there was another window in the second room, and the room was clean and tidy, with the exception of all the boxes from their wedding gifts that were stacked in the corner. Roy noticed a new Rubbermaid container, and saw that it was labeled "Jerky Storage" - So that's where it got off to. In the back of the room, he noticed a curtain like a shower curtain, but dark, and when he opened it, he saw the commode he had purchased earlier. He figured Anne wanted some privacy if she needed to use the facilities during the winter. Roy was happy with the windows - they let in a lot of light. Roy thought that they would make it colder in the winter too until he spotted the heavy curtains hanging from the brass curtain rod over the window. He also noticed the panes were extra thick, and asked Jim about that.

"They're special windows for rural Alaska - they don't open, the outer layer is scratch-resistant hard polycarbonate to prevent freezing and breakage, they are triple pane, and are Argon gas filled for insulation. These windows are better insulators than the logs around them."

"Thanks Jim, what do I owe you?"

"Nothing - just part of my wedding gift to you two."

Jim walked outside to finish unloading their stuff. Anne turned to Roy and said, "I hope you're not mad."

"Anne, I could never be mad at you. I just didn't know that windows like that existed. It's so much brighter in here. I was living in a cave before this. Now I only need to light the fireplace for heat, not necessarily light. I used to read my Bible by firelight. Let's go see what Jim is bringing in." They walked into the main room as Jim put some boxes on the table. Roy gleefully noticed one was from his gunsmith, and one was from his knife maker. Also the box from the Christian bookstore was there - hopefully it contained Anne's Bible, the Concordances, and a copy of Strong's Dictionary. Finally Jim said that all the boxes were in, then brought their suitcases. Jim shook Roy's hand, and gave Anne a hug and a kiss on the cheek, then walked back to his plane and left. Roy opened the box from his gunsmith, and took out a Colt Anaconda with a 4 inch barrel, target sights, and stainless steel construction, then digging deeper, a Ruger 22/45 with a note attached - "Roy, I'm giving this to you and Anne, it is fitted with an integral suppressor, and has been sighted in for 50 yards. Since I have my Class II manufacturer's permit, I made this, and I'm carrying it on the books as a demo gun. It's been used by Animal Control officers in several states to put down injured animals. They liked it so much, they usually bought one for each officer. Anyway, since this is my demo gun, there is no paper trail to you." Roy dug deeper, and there was a custom DeSantis double shoulder holster for the Anaconda and the 22/45. Roy turned to Anne and said, "This one's Mine." then opened the box from his knife maker. It contained a duplicate of his Frontier Bowie, and a classical skinner with a gut hook, both in ATS-34 and titanium nitride coated with Kydex sheaths. Roy handed these to Anne, and dug into the other box, and found a fanny pack



just like his. Anne took the knife sheaths and threaded them onto the fanny pack belt opposite the military canteen. Next he opened the box from the Christian Book store, took out a beautiful leather covered New King James Bible by Zondervan, and a set of Concordances, and a Strong's Dictionary. Anne squealed, and gave Roy a Bear Hug when she saw the Bible and the books. Anne opened the rest of the wedding presents, and found a place for them. Roy looked longingly at the shoulder holster, then at his left arm with a cast and a sling, and realized that he couldn't wear a shoulder holster until the sling and cast came off. "Rats."

"What's wrong Roy?"

"I've got a new toy that I can't play with until my cast and the sling come off."

"You poor widdo boy - got a brand new toy that you can't play with." Anne got right in his face and whispered "You can play with this toy any time you like."

"Anne, You're a Brazen Hussy. Ease up girl - I fully well intend to keep you occupied, it's just I have to wait another month before I can wear a shoulder holster. No offense, but you've been living in cities and towns for the last couple of years, and your senses aren't as acute as mine are. The two bears I killed were less than 40 yards away, and I had to practically draw and shoot in one instant. I just don't want something to happen to you or me because I couldn't protect you."

"Before you get your britches all bunched up, let me check something real quick."

Anne came back a few minutes later holding a belt holster that looked like it would hold a .44 Magnum just like Roy's. "Jim gave this to me when Ron died; It's the holster from his .44 Magnum that he used before he got a shoulder holster." Anne handed it to Roy, who accepted it with a tear in his eyes.

"Anne, I don't know what to say."

"Roy, Ron always protected me, so I think he'd like it if you were able to protect me too."

Roy broke down crying, and held Anne for the longest period. Finally, they dried their eyes, and Roy told Anne "Anne, you're perfectly capable of defending yourself; I just want to have the capability to protect you if I can. I'll treasure this, and when I get out of this sling, I'll give it back to you, and you can put it in a special place." Roy made room on his pistol belt that carried his fanny pack, knife kit, and canteen, threaded the belt through the loops of the holster, then took the Colt Anaconda out of the shoulder holster, checked to make sure it was loaded, found it was unloaded, opened the box of .44 Magnum rounds the gunsmith shipped with the Anaconda, and loaded six rounds into the cylinder, closed the cylinder, and holstered the gun. Roy breathed a sigh of relief, and Anne gave him another hug.

Since they were done unpacking, Roy suggested they water the garden, and go fishing. Anne got the fishing rod and tackle box, and met Roy at the door. She set everything down as Roy handed her the shoulder holster and fanny pack. She adjusted her shoulder holster like she had been wearing one all her life, then picked up the fanny pack, and belted it around her waist. It was just like Roy's except she had a Skinner blade instead of a <skip> like Roy's. She picked up the fishing rod and tackle box, Roy opened the door for her, let her go through first, then shut the door behind them. They walked to the garden. Roy was surprised how fast things grew in Alaska - some of the plants were visibly taller. He opened the gate valve, flooded the garden, then blocked off the center ditches to water the outer ditches. When he had watered both twice, he shut off the water, set the board down, and walked over to Anne, took her hand in his, and walked the rest of the way to the lake.

When they got to the lake, they turned North to their favorite fishing spot. Anne put the tackle box down, baited the hook, and cast the line way out into the lake. Several minutes later, she was reeling in a large fish, when a noise behind them alerted Roy. The largest bear he had ever seen was maybe 50 feet behind them. It was standing on its hind legs, and looked ready to charge. Roy knew he'd never get his gun out in time, when all of a sudden, off to his right in the bush Oliver emerged from the treeline, and charged the bear, growling and snarling. The Bear turned to face the new challenge, and Roy, seeing his opportunity, grabbed the butt of his Colt Anaconda, pulled it from the holster and in one smooth movement, drew it one-handed and pointed it at the bear. As the bear turned toward Oliver, the front sight of the Anaconda steadied on the ear of the bear. Roy knew a head shot with a bear wasn't a good idea, but it was the only shot open, and he hoped he could shoot the bear right through the ear canal and penetrate the extremely thick skull. Right as he pulled the trigger, Anne screamed, Oliver leapt at the bear, and the Anaconda roared. When the smoke cleared, the bear was dead in its tracks. Anne had her gun out and pointed at the bear, and Oliver was looking confused. Roy walked up to Oliver carefully, talking quietly to the very enraged wolf.

"Easy there Oliver, it's OK. Good Boy Oliver. Oliver.."

Finally, Oliver looked at Roy, then at the now dead bear, and sat down.

Anne walked up, "What happened Roy?"

"A Bear snuck up on us while you were fishing. I just heard the warning growl as he got ready to charge. Oliver must have been waiting in the treeline hoping for a handout, and when the Bear threatened us, Oliver acted to protect us by attacking the bear. While the bear was distracted, I was able to draw and fire. I got a lucky shot and shot the bear right through the ear canal. I didn't have enough time to wait for a better shot, since that bear would have mauled Oliver. Anyway, looks like we've got a bear to skin, and you had better reel that fish in before he breaks the line."

Anne turned quickly to the fishing rod, and finished reeling the fish in. As Anne unhooked it,

she called Oliver over, and gave him the fish. Roy asked Anne if she could handle bringing the big cart over here by herself. Roy wanted to stay with Oliver and the bear to make sure Oliver didn't destroy the bearskin before they could gut and skin it. Anne walked quickly to the cabin and came back about 15 minutes later with the cart, the come-along and the harness to pull it. While she was gone, Oliver finished eating the fish, and Roy bent over to pet Oliver and thank him for saving their lives. Oliver didn't know what Roy was talking about, but liked Roy's tone of voice and the petting, so he sat there while Roy petted him. Anne got the cart set up at the head of the dead bear, and Roy helped her get the strap of the come-along around the bear's chest, then they hauled the bear onto the cart, and quickly got it balanced. Anne told Roy she'd have to wear the harness and lift the cart, but if Roy could push and help her she'd appreciate it. Roy wasn't too happy, but then realized Anne was right, there was no way he could pick up the handles of the cart wearing a cast and a sling that kept his injured arm in front of his body. Roy helped Anne into the harness, and she picked up the cart - it wasn't as heavy as she thought it was. Roy had laid all the fishing tackle and stuff on the cart, freeing up his good hand to push the cart from behind.

As they were heading back to the cabin, Roy whistled at Oliver, who woofed, and soon Francine and the pups trotted up to Oliver, and they all walked back to the cabin. When they got close, Roy told Anne they should butcher the bear right on the cart, and he'd start fetching water. Anne took her skinner and got to work, and by the time Roy got back with a bucket of water, Anne had the bear opened from ribs to butt, and was removing the guts. Roy asked her to save the bear fat, the hide, and the larger cuts of meat, and give the rest to Oliver and his family. Anne agreed, since Oliver had basically risked his life to save theirs. As Anne finished gutting the bear, she gave Oliver and Francine a large pile of all the bear's innards. They devoured the pile, even the cubs got into the act, and it was quickly gone. Anne and Roy both started skinning the bear, and as they exposed the larger cuts of meat, they removed them from the bear, and Roy walked them into the cabin. Anne quickly de-boned the rest of the carcass, and the wolves pigged out. Anne finally got the skin free, and Roy took his <skip> and cracked the skull open to brain tan the hide.

"Roy, what are you doing?"

"Anne, it's a primitive tanning technique called 'brain tanning'. It seems that when God designed the animals, he made the brains just the right size that when mixed with water, it's just enough material to tan the hide. I've done it with all the other hides, and it works pretty well. You smash the brain into the hide, mix it with water, and spread it onto the inside of the hide, then let it dry."

"Neat, I was wondering how you tanned all those hides - can I try?"

"OK, Anne, but it's kind of gross and smelly."

"I can handle gross and smelly - I'm a nurse remember." Anne took over from Roy, and he was

right, it was pretty disgusting and smelly, but she would never admit it to Roy. When she was done, Roy took the hide and spread it over the smokehouse, It took much longer with just one usable arm, but he got it done. Meanwhile Anne had wheeled the carcass to where the other skeletons were, and dumped the body off the cart, then took the buckets and washed off the cart. As she backed up, Oliver and his family started picking through the carcass. Roy went inside, got another bucket of water, and Oliver's water bowl, and set it next to the wolves. Oliver drank from his bowl, while Francine and the cubs drank straight from the bucket. Roy had to go back for several refills while Anne cut the meat into strips to jerk it, and stuffed the bear fat into an empty coffee can with a plastic lid. When he was finished giving the wolves water, Roy took the meat out to the smokehouse, and hung it up. He removed the dried fish that was done to make room for the bear meat. When he had all the bear meat up in the smokehouse, he started a fire, and closed the door. Anne had saved a couple of steaks for dinner.

When they were finished, Roy washed his hands, then sat on the bed. Anne cleaned up, then walked over to Roy and hugged the stuffing out of him and gave him a big kiss.

"What was that for? Not that I'm complaining."

"Roy - you're such a man sometimes. One of the reasons I love you so much is I know I'm safe when you're around."

"Me Tarzan - you Jane?"

"Not exactly, but even us liberated women still like to feel protected - as long as you're not overprotective."

"I don't understand, All I did was shoot a charging bear."

"Yeah, a charging bear that was going to have us for lunch. While I was frozen in place, you reacted, and as coolly as Clint Eastwood shot that big bad bear right through the ear. I'm a good shot, but I'm not that good at reactive shooting. I just froze instead of drawing and getting a shot off until it was all over."

"Don't worry about it Anne. That's why I was so glad that you gave me Ron's holster - it's not that you can't defend yourself, I feel better if I can defend you, and I'm not just sitting there watching a bear eat you for lunch. I don't know how to train you to react the way I do, I just think that when you've been totally responsible for your survival, certain instincts kick in that short-circuit your thought process and you react automatically. I didn't even think, as soon as Oliver charged the bear, something clicked inside me, and I just reacted. Luckily I was fast enough to keep Oliver from getting hurt. I'm sure he would have died protecting us, I'm just glad he didn't have to. This isn't the first time he's saved my life. He's alerted me to bears several times before, this is the first time he's attacked one though."

“I’m just glad everyone’s OK. I guess I’ve become a City Girl, and I need to change how I think real quickly.”

“Don’t be hard on yourself Anne, It took me a while when I first got here until I could react without thinking to a dangerous situation. While you were raised here, and have all the skills necessary, it’s just a matter of remembering the mind set.”

Anne slid next to Roy, and soon they were holding each other and passionately kissing. When they finally came up for air, Roy said that he was too tired to handle any more excitement, and asked for a rain check. Anne gave him an evil grin and said, “How about after dinner.” With that, Anne got up and started making dinner. She fried the bear steaks in the cast iron skillet, made mashed potatoes and gravy, and heated a can of corn. Roy cleaned off the table, set it, and lit a lantern. When dinner was ready, Anne put the steaks on the plates, and carried it to the table. When they were seated, Roy bowed his head and said grace. “Dear Lord, thank you for this food, please bless it, and thanks for sending Oliver to protect us. Please take care of Oliver and his family, and please continue to protect us and bless us. Amen” Anne’s Amen echoed Roy’s and soon they were eating a very tasty bear steak. When they finished, Anne cleared the table as Roy got out their bibles. They sat and read their Bibles for a couple of hours, and Roy showed Anne how to look stuff up when she had questions, and soon she was thumbing through Strong’s and the Concordances like she had been doing it all her life. Roy realized that Anne was really intelligent, and beautiful as well. When they finished, they got undressed, and slid into bed giggling like kids.

## Chapter 28 - How the Garden Grows

The next morning, they rolled out of bed, Anne grabbed her robe and started breakfast. Roy followed her a minute later, wearing his greens. He helped Anne fix breakfast, and was cuddling her while he was at it.

“Roy, I thought you got enough of that last night.”

“I just like to hold you, and I like your smell.” Roy reached around from behind her, and wrapped his arms around her, nuzzling her neck.

“You keep that up and I’m going to burn breakfast.” Roy let her go, and grabbed the coffee pot, filled it full of water, added some coffee to the basket, and set it on the stove.

“I need to go check the smokehouse, I’ll be back in a minute.”

“Breakfast should be done when you get back Roy.”

Roy walked outside, opened the smokehouse door to let the smoke out, saw the fire was out, rearranged the meat, and lit a new fire, then closed the door. Roy walked back in the house, and sure enough, Anne was just putting breakfast on. Roy was having a hard time concentrating, because Anne’s robe was wide open. After she put down the plates, she looked at Roy, saw where he was looking, and quickly closed her robe “You ARE a dirty Old Man.”

“Can’t help admiring the view. You are very beautiful. I love looking at you.”

“Sit down and eat your breakfast. You definitely don’t need Viagra, maybe I should start putting Salt Peter in your food.”

“Your Loss.”

They ate breakfast, then Anne got quickly dressed before Roy had any other ideas. When they had finished cleaning up, Roy said they might need to check the garden, since he hadn’t done anything but watering it since he had planted it. Anne walked back into the second room, and carried out two gardening stools, and a bunch of gardening tools. Anne set them on the table, and Roy helped her get on her shoulder holster and fanny pack, then Roy belted on his fanny pack with the holster for his .44 Magnum, and helped her carry the stuff out to the garden. Anne suggested they weed and thin the garden before they water it, since this will be so much easier to do if the ground isn’t muddy. First thing they did was carefully take down the chicken wire fence, and roll the chicken wire up to put back up later. Roy started at one end of the garden, and Anne at the other, and they had the weeds pulled in a couple of hours, and then they thinned the seedlings for the ideal plant spacing. When they had finished, they put the chicken

wire fence back up. Roy looked at the pile of weeds, and asked Anne if any of them were worth keeping. Anne recognized several tasty greens, as well as some that she definitely didn't want to eat. She quickly sorted the weeds into two piles, and Roy pulled a Ziploc bag out of his fanny pack and started stuffing the good greens into the bag. When they had the fence up and secured, Roy turned on the garden water, and flooded the garden several times. He figured that the garden would be ready to harvest at least part of the vegetables in a month or two, then he could try a late season planting for some of the fast growing vegetables. Roy asked Anne if she felt like fishing. She said "Just make sure you keep your .44 Magnum handy, and watch for bears instead of ogling me."

Roy uttered the famous words, "Yes Dear", and they walked into the cabin to put up the garden stuff, and pick up the fishing gear.

Anne asked Roy, "By the way, do you have a fishing license?"

"I had one over a year ago when I got stranded, who are you - the Game Warden?"

"OK, when we get back to the cabin, I'll call the Mayor and he'll file a Homesteader's permit for us that allows us to take whatever game we can consume each year. We can't sell meat, but we can sell excess skins as long as we are eating the meat. Your smokehouse should be proof enough to the Game Warden if he ever shows up."

"Does he ever show up?"

"Ron and I have only seen one once in over 20 years, and that was because he was an Outfitter. The State isn't too worried about Homesteaders over-fishing or hunting, since they have to live here each year." Anne picked up the fishing rod and tackle box, then headed out the door. Roy opened the door for her, then they walked hand in hand down to the lake. When they got to their fishing spot, Anne looked around nervously, but didn't see any bears. Roy decided to make sure, and let out a Rebel Yell that nearly made Anne jump out of her shoes. "I haven't heard one of those since I left Texas - where did you learn it?"

"I used to fish and hunt with a bunch of Good Ol' Boys who were proud to call themselves Rednecks. They taught me one night around the campfire while we were sipping a jug of shine. They explained the Shine helped us Yankees get in the proper mood. Anyway, it worked. There aren't any bears around here for miles now."

"You probably scared every herd of caribou around here all the way to Canada."

Anne got the fishing pole ready, baited the hook, opened the bail, and cast the line way out into the lake, and soon had landed a large lake trout. Anne put it on the stringer, re-baited the hook, and cast to the same spot. Soon she had several fish on the stringer. Roy commented that Oliver and Fran didn't show up, and Anne said that they were probably recovering from pigging

out yesterday, and lying in their den unable to move. When she had a stringer full, Anne turned to go, and saw Roy was indeed watching out for Bears instead of ogling her figure. “Roy, I was Just Kidding. I’m glad you take your protection duties so seriously, but you can look too.”

“Anne, don’t worry, I sneaked a couple of peeks while your back was turned.”

Anne laughed and picked up the stringer, the fishing rod and tackle box, as Roy imitated a SWAT team clearing a building, running from tree to tree, yelling “CLEAR”.

Anne was laughing so hard she almost dropped the fish.

When they got home, Roy took off his fanny pack, helped Anne unload the fish and the tackle, then helped her out of the shoulder holster and fanny pack. Roy decided against any more “Dirty Old Man” stuff since Anne was sitting there with her skinner out skinning the fish. Anne filleted one of the fish, then cut up the rest for jerky. While Roy said he didn’t like dried fish, he’d never had her fish chowder. Roy hung the fish up to dry, as Anne cleaned up the cabin and repacked everything. Anne called the Mayor, and he filed the appropriate paperwork for their Homesteader’s Permit, and told Anne that Jim was going to make a run in a couple of days, and he had some stuff for them. Anne was surprised, since she didn’t remember ordering anything, then figured Roy had ordered something earlier that just took later getting there. When she finished, she recharged the battery with the military surplus hand crank generator, then put everything up. Roy got out their Bibles, and while it was still light, they read their Bibles together. Soon it was getting dark, and Anne decided it was time for dinner. She breaded the fillets, got the stove running, put the cast iron skillet on the stove to get hot, added a saucepan next to it, put some water in it, and made instant mashed potatoes. Once the skillet was hot, she added the lard to the pan, and had the fish frying in minutes. Meanwhile, Roy had cleaned off the table, set it, and lit the lantern. He handed Anne the plates, and then they were sitting down for Dinner. Roy said Grace, then they started eating. Roy started choking halfway through, and Anne quickly got up as Roy appeared to have an obstructed windpipe, and couldn’t breathe. Anne wrapped her arms around Roy’s waist, and performed the Heimlich maneuver. Roy coughed up a piece of fish, and immediately felt better. After he caught his breath, Anne told him to drink water to wash any debris down, and to make sure he chewed his food from now on.

“Anne, what did you do?”

“It’s called the Heimlich maneuver, and it’s something everyone should know. Many people die each year from obstructed airways. Often if it’s a piece of food blocking the windpipe, the Heimlich maneuver clears the obstruction by forcing the air in the lungs out the throat, expelling the obstruction like a cork from a kid’s popgun. I should probably teach you CPR and some advanced First Aid stuff while I’m at it. That reminds me - I need to get a Trauma Kit here - all we have is whatever is in your emergency kits. As accident prone as you are, I really should have a Trauma Kit here. I’ll get hold of Steve tomorrow if he hasn’t left, and have him order one from a Medical Supply company he uses. They give him wholesale pricing. While



I'm at it, I'll order some general medical supplies as well."

"Anne, thanks - you just saved my life. If you think we need it, by all means get it. I have a current Red Cross Basic First Aid and CPR card, but I always wanted some advanced training."

"I can't certify you, because I'm not a certified instructor, but I can train you all the way to ALS/Paramedic if you're interested."

"In that case, shouldn't we have more than just 1 kit, just in case?"

"You're right. We can leave the Trauma kit here in the cabin, but we can carry a smaller Trauma/Medic kit in the field when we go hunting. That way if you shoot yourself, I can keep you alive until Jim comes to pick you up, or if another tree falls on you. It means you'll have to carry a backpack instead of that little fanny pack, but you can also carry a lot more stuff. I'll also get a daybag for myself with a Camelback hydration pack, and some other stuff."

"Anne, I already have a bag set up exactly as you will probably need it, you might want to change some of the contents, but it's a large daybag with a Camelback 90oz HAWG container, and a larger version of my fanny pack kit. Matter of fact, Ron gave me a list of stuff to put in it."

"Great, if that's the case, all I'll have to do is change the clothes, and add some extra Medical gear that Ron wouldn't think of, like a disposable surgical stapler."

"Nope, don't have one of those in there. Anne, when did you say Steve was leaving?"

"He was supposed to leave less than a week after the wedding."

"Maybe you ought to call him right now just in case."

"Good answer, I wanted to talk to him anyway." Anne walked over to the radio, tuned Steve's frequency from memory, turned the power switch on and keyed the mike, "Yo Bro, you there?"

Steve's voice was heard from the speakers, and he was laughing his head off. "Anne, I know that's you - no one else dares talk to me like that. Glad you caught me, I'm just closing the Clinic for good. I'm shipping out day after tomorrow."

"Steve, can you order some Medical Kits and supplies for me? You still have that contact in that Medical Supply company that gives you stuff for Wholesale?"

"Yeah, I can still get stuff from him, what do you want?"

"First of all, I want a Major Trauma Kit, a Trauma/Medic kit, and a whole bunch of stuff that

you're going to have to use your DEA number to order, along with a page full of Medical Supplies." Anne told Steve a list of the supplies she needed.

"What are you doing, setting up your own clinic?"

"No Silly, Roy's a little accident prone, and I wanted to have a Major Trauma Kit with all the Meds just in case he shot himself or another tree fell on him. I mean, he just was choking on a piece of fish, and I had to do the Heimlich Maneuver on him to get him breathing OK again."

"He's OK, his color's normal - are there any signs of tracheal damage?"

"He's fine, Bro, just relax. Anyway, if you could get this stuff for me, and ship it to us through the Mayor, I'd appreciate it."

"Ok, Sis, I'll do it - just watch it with the narcotics and stuff. I can get in a lot of trouble with that."

"Steve, Who was your nurse for all that time, and I did work in Dallas for all those years as an ER Charge Nurse - I think I know what I'm doing."

"Ok, I'll place the order right now, and bill your account. By the Way, this was supposed to be a surprise, but I'm flying up with Jim to say goodbye to you both, and check Roy's arm."

"Great, Bro - See ya then. Bye." Anne cleared the mike, waited a few seconds for a reply, then shut off the radio, and broke out the hand crank generator to recharge it.

"Anne, what was all that stuff you were talking about? I followed for about the first dozen items, then I didn't recognize anything."

"I just ordered a whole bunch of First Aid and Medical supplies, including common drugs and antibiotics just in case. I also ordered a full set of IV solutions, as well as blood expanders and other specialized Medic gear that a Combat Medic would need."

"You expecting a WAR?"

"No, silly, It's just easier to carry this specialized stuff."

"OK, Anne - you're the expert. You'll have to show me how to use all this stuff."

"Ever started an IV, or gave an injection?"

"Of course NOT."

“Oh Boy, are WE going to have fun - I hope you’re not afraid of the sight of blood.”

“I doubt it Anne, Remember, I skinned all those Bears and Caribou.”

“OK, but your blood, or mine is different than a dead animal. Advanced Life Support techniques can get messy.”

“I’ll handle it. I want to be able to save your life too.”

“Roy you are so sweet. It’s getting late, let’s get to bed.”

“Thought you’d Never Ask.”

With that, they got undressed, and under the covers in a minute, giggling like kids.

## Chapter 29 - Free at last.

The remainder of the time Roy had to be in the cast passed quickly, but not quickly enough for Roy. Anne helped him do his daily PT exercises. Roy did not enjoy it, but he needed to do it if he was going to be able to use his arm when the cast came off. Finally the day arrived, and after breakfast, Anne came out of the back room with what looked like a mechanic's tool bag, sat Roy down at the table, and told him she was going to take his cast off. Roy was overjoyed, and quickly sat down. He almost got back up when he got a look at the tool she was pulling out of the bag. Anne told him to sit down and relax - This wouldn't hurt a bit. Roy was thinking "Yeah right, in that case, I'll take the cast off you." but took it like a man. Anne put some goggles on, took out a cordless drill and a toothless saw to cut the cast off, told Roy to sit still, and started to cut the cast off starting below his shoulder and ending at his hand. Then she took a device that looked like a pair of pliers, and wedged the crack open, and slowly opened the crack with the tool until the whole cast had a crack running down it about  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch wide. Then she reached in and grabbed the plaster cast, and with more strength than Roy knew she had, she cracked the cast in two, and it fell off his arm. Roy's arm had atrophied from being in the cast for 6 weeks, and he was shocked when he saw it. Anne didn't look concerned, so Roy relaxed.

Anne finally told Roy, "We're going to have to do a lot of hard work to get your arm back in shape. We need to resume your PT exercises, and start lifting weights - we've got plenty of cans of different sizes. I want you to start with an 8oz soup can, and eventually you'll be curling #10 cans. Right now, I want to test your range of motion. Hold on a second while I get a notebook, I need to write this down."

Anne returned in a minute with a notepad, and a device that looked like a protractor. Anne explained they needed to measure range of motion, and the elbow angle was an easy measure. Roy set his arm on the table flat, and Anne asked him to leave his elbow on the table and lift his hand to his face slowly, and stop when it hurt. Roy got about halfway and stopped. "Not bad - Especially for someone your age." As she wrote in the notebook, she had him repeat it several times - she wanted to verify her number she told him, but she really wanted to make him use it under controlled conditions. After about 6 reps, she asked him to stop. Next she measured flexation and rotation of the wrist. Roy did OK, evidently his arm had healed nicely. Anne told Roy that it looked like his arm had healed fine, and to stop using the sling unless he really had to. Roy stood up, and swept Anne off her feet, and gave her a big hug and a kiss. Roy asked her if she wanted to go fishing.

They grabbed their stuff, and Anne helped Roy with his shoulder holster and fanny pack. Roy felt much better wearing the shoulder holster than Ron's old belt holster. The Colt Anaconda got heavy hanging on his waist. Roy figured it would be a couple of weeks before he could shoot the 22/45, but it helped balance the shoulder holster, so he left it there. When Anne was all loaded up, Roy opened the door, then they walked hand in hand to the garden. Stuff was

definitely growing now, and Roy made sure he watered it twice a day now that the days were getting longer. Roy filled the trenches twice, then shut the water off. They set off to the lake, and soon reached the shoreline, and turned right to walk to their fishing spot. Anne baited the hook, then handed the rod to Roy, "Go ahead, you need the exercise." Roy took the rod in his right hand, opened the bail, and cast the lure out into the lake, then used his left hand to crank the reel back in until the lure was right where he wanted it. After a few minutes, the rod tip twitched then bent sharply. Roy made sure the fish was hooked, then started reeling slowly in. Since he maintained pressure on the fish, the slower retrieve didn't seem to hurt. Soon Roy had the fish close enough to land, and Anne grabbed the line to land the fish, then she put it on the stringer, checked the lure, and told Roy to go ahead and cast again. Roy made sure she was out of the way, then cast the lure out to the same spot. It seemed the fish must be holding on that area for some reason, because there were always fish in that spot. Roy caught several more fish, and was feeling much better because he was able to support Anne again. When they had enough fish, Anne carried the stringer, and Roy carried the rod and tacklebox (Anne figured it was light enough for Roy to carry home - it would be good exercise.). When they got home, Roy put up the rod and tacklebox while Anne started cleaning and filleting the fish. When she finished, she kept two fillets for dinner, and Roy hung the rest in the smokehouse to dry.

When they were finished, they washed their hands, and Anne suggested they water the garden again. They walked hand in hand out to the garden, and while Roy watered, Anne checked the garden, and removed a few weeds they had missed before. She told Roy that they'd be able to start harvesting carrots and some of the greens in a couple of weeks. Roy asked Anne to check on their canning supplies when they got back. They walked back to the cabin, and Roy decided to check out the perimeter of the cabin, check on the woodpiles, etc. Roy was pleased, there was more wood left than he had hoped. He checked the gas, and a can was empty that he swore was full the day of the accident. He thought that he should ask the Mayor when he called to order some more stuff about it, and went back inside. Anne checked on the canning supplies, and made a list of things they'd need. Roy broke out the radio, and set it on the Mayor's frequency. "Roy Williams calling the Mayor - You got your ears on good buddy?"

"10-4 there, right back at you Roy - What convoy are you driving with?" The Mayor was having a hard time not laughing at the old cliché.

"Bill, do you know anything about the missing can of gas, or the fact that my woodpile is 30% bigger than it should be?"

"OK, Roy - you got me. While you guys were getting hitched, Jim and a few guys from town wanted to do you a favor and felled a bunch of trees just in case it took you longer to heal than you thought."

"Bill, I don't know what to say ...Thanks A Lot."

"You want to make the guys really happy, buy a round the next time you're in town."

“You got it Bill, I got a list of stuff we need. Some food and stuff, but what we really need is some canning supplies. We need several cases of the large Mason jars with Lids and Rings. Also, can you include 5 pounds of Canning Salt just to be safe?”

Anne interrupted Roy, and asked him to go into the other room then talked to the mayor for a few minutes, then hung up.

“What was that all about?”

“It’s a surprise Roy. You’ll just have to wait.”

It was starting to get dark, so Anne made dinner and they read their Bibles before going to bed.

Two days later, Roy awoke to the sound of Jim’s airplane. Ooops - Overslept again. They got dressed quickly, and by the time they were dressed, Jim was at the door with several packages, including a bag for Anne. Roy helped Jim unload, and Anne disappeared. 5 minutes later, there was a high-pitched squeal from the second room. Roy rushed in, and Anne grabbed Roy and hugged the stuffing out of him.

“What’s up. I thought something had happened to you.”

“Roy you better sit down for this one.”

Anne led Roy to the bed, where they sat down. “Roy, how would you like to be a Daddy again?”

“What, How did that happen? Doh, that was a stupid question. I didn’t think I still had it in me.”

“Well you big stud, you got me pregnant. Now what are you going to do?”

“I’m going to celebrate of course. Hey Jim, come on in here. Did you know about this?”

“Not exactly - I peeked while I was flying. I guess this means that the box of cigars and the bottle of Whiskey the Mayor gave me is going to come in handy after all. Congratulations you two.” Jim gave Anne and Roy a big hug, then went outside to get the cigars and the whiskey. Anne decided that it wouldn’t be a good idea for her to have any, so Jim and Roy sat on the porch on a couple of stumps, sipped the whiskey and smoked the cigars.

“Jim, I’m happy and scared at the same time. You know it’s been almost 30 years since the last time I had kids around. I hope I remember what to do.”

“Roy, Anne’s got the hard part. All you have to do is help her raise the kid. I know you guys

will do well. I've known Anne since she was a kid. I was always Uncle Jim to her. I guess life has come full circle."

"Jim, I never knew. How would you like to be a semi-official Granddad, since you're the closest to one our child will ever know."

Jim choked up, and fought back tears. When he could finally speak, he told Roy. "It would be an honor. I promise to spoil your kid rotten, and then hand it back to you."

"Gee, Thanks Granddad." Roy punched Jim in the shoulder.

They spent the rest of the afternoon talking and drinking. When the bottle was empty, and it was getting dark, Anne walked out onto the porch to check up on them.

"Jim, I think you shouldn't fly tonight. I've already made up the cot. She helped them into the house, and when they got inside, she had dinner ready. They sat down, Roy said grace, and they ate fairly quietly. When dinner was finished, Anne helped Jim to the cot, laid him down, then came back to get Roy. He barely made it to bed. Anne helped him get undressed - she wasn't sleeping with a man wearing his boots. As soon as she got him tucked in, she joined Roy. "Goodnight my beloved Husband." Roy murmured "Goodnight" and fell asleep.

The next morning, Anne had a big breakfast ready for Jim and Roy. When breakfast was finished, she asked Jim what he was doing today. Jim admitted he had nothing scheduled today, so Anne asked him if he could fly her into Anchorage.

Both Roy and Jim looked at her sideways.

"Roy, I'm over 30, this is my first pregnancy. I should have an amniocentesis to make sure there are no birth defects.

Roy almost fell out of his chair, but didn't say anything. He knew if the child had serious birth defects, the doctor would recommend an abortion, which he was dead against. Roy decided he had to leave it in God's hands. "OK, Anne - I understand. It think it's a good idea to know. You do whatever you feel is right."

"Roy, I'm scared too. I want this baby as much as you do. Anyway, it's in God's hands." Roy held Anne's hands in his, and prayed for a couple of minutes, asking God's mercy and blessing on their baby. When he was finished, he heard 3 Amen's. Roy looked over at Jim. "I'm the Grandpa here. I want Jr. to be OK too."

Anne looked at Roy and Jim, "What were you two talking about yesterday?"

Jim spoke up, "Remember when you used to call me "Uncle Jim", well when I told Roy, he

nominated me the “Semi-Official Grandpa” since I’m the closest thing your kid will have to a grandparent. I hope you don’t mind.”

“Don’t be silly Uncle Jim.” Anne laughed for a while remembering why she called Jim Uncle. Then she got sad when she remembered Ron was the one that suggested it when their parents died when she was a teenager.

“If you two are done blubbering, you might want to get airborne. It’s a long trip.” Anne was walking out the door when Roy stopped her, and had her put on her fanny pack “just in case”. Jim was not happy, but realized that Roy was worried about Anne flying without him, and this was his way of keeping her safe. Roy walked them out to the airplane, and helped Anne get in, then gave her a big hug. “Roy, I’ll see you before nightfall. I love you, see you soon.” Roy closed her door, and got clear so Jim could start the plane. Once Jim had performed his ground checklist, he started the engine, and warmed it up. When he was happy with the way the engine was running, he turned and taxied to the lake, then turned, revved the motor to takeoff speed, and sped down the lake. They were airborne with 100 yards to spare, then quickly flew out of sight. When they were gone, Roy got on his knees and prayed that Anne would have a safe trip, and the baby would be OK.



## Chapter 30 - Homecoming

Just before dusk of the longest day of Roy's life, and the most prayerful, Roy heard the drone of an aircraft engine. Minutes later, the pitch changed, it was coming toward the house. Roy got up from reading his Bible, opened the door, and waited until Jim taxied up to the door and shut the engine off. As soon as the prop stopped spinning, Roy was around to open Anne's door and give her a Big Hug.

"Anne, you don't know how much I've missed you today. I don't care what happens, I'm just so glad to have you back in my arms."

"Roy, I've got some great news, I saw an OBGYN that Steve had recommended in Anchorage. She was the best baby doc I had ever spoke to, and believe me; I met some real good ones in Texas. She said I didn't need an Amnio since I wasn't even 35, and this was my first pregnancy, I was in excellent health, didn't drink or smoke, and you had a history of normal children. She did do a thorough ultrasound, and everything is OK. Do you want to know if it's a Boy or Girl?"

"You mean they can tell this early?"

"It's a little easier to identify Boys than Girls, but the new ultrasounds are pretty accurate."

"Well if YOU already know, I want to."

"Ok, Roy - I'm carrying your son. He's got all 10 fingers and toes, and guess what? She dated my pregnancy via the ultrasound and some other tests and as near as she can figure, you got me pregnant on our wedding night, you big Stud."

"That was a night to remember, now even more so." Roy gave Anne a huge hug and a long kiss. Then he noticed something else.

"Are they getting bigger, or am I imagining things?"

"Nope, Madge said I could add 1 or 2 cup sizes during pregnancy, and probably keep one of them if I nurse afterward. You horny old Tomcat. Figures that would be the first thing you'd notice. You better be gentle, they're going to be sore for another 9 months."

"I can handle it if you can."

"Roy, that was One of the Worst puns I had heard in a long time. Let's go inside, I'm freezing and Jim needs to get home." Roy turned around to shake Jim's hand.

“Thanks, Grandpa.”

“Don’t mention it Roy, I needed to go to the FAA office in Anchorage to renew my license anyway, it was due for renewal by the end of the month, so I killed 2 birds with one stone. Anne did some shopping while she waited for me, I’ll help you unload it.”

As they brought several large boxes into the cabin, Roy was curious what she was buying. After Jim left, Roy helped her unpack the boxes, and found out it was mostly pregnancy stuff, including vitamins, books, and some medical gear. When Roy saw the medical gear he asked Anne what it was for.

“Guess what Roy, you get to deliver our baby.”

“WHAT? I’m not qualified.”

“Well, you’re it. It’s too dangerous for the baby to airlift me to Allakaket to deliver at the clinic, and old Doc Miller is a GP, not an OBGYN and hasn’t delivered a baby in 10 years. Besides, Madge said this one should be a breeze. I’ve got all the medical books you will need, as well as a complete delivery kit Madge made up for me. Steve told me the best book to read for Field deliveries is the Special Forces Medical Handbook, since their medics are trained and expected to deliver babies in conditions far more primitive and remote than this cabin. You’ve got 9 months, now get reading.”

“Yes Dear, I hope I don’t faint. The closest I got to Susan when my sons were born was the waiting room.”

“You’ll do OK, besides, you don’t have any choice.

With that, Roy blew out the lantern, and they went to bed.

## Chapter 31 - Medical School

The next morning, Roy got out of bed, and put on his buckskins for the first time in weeks. He forgot how comfortable they were, and the boots completed the Jim Bridger look. Anne rolled out of bed, got dressed quickly (it was cold in the cabin.) and proceeded to make breakfast, Roy went to use the outhouse, then came inside to wash up before breakfast. When he was all washed up, Anne was starting breakfast, so Roy took advantage of the situation, sneaked up behind her, and wrapped his arms around her pregnant belly. She wasn't far enough along to be showing, but Roy wanted Anne to know he loved her, and was ecstatic that she was carrying his son.

Anne turned to him and jokingly said, "Down boy. You got plenty of loving last night."

"I know Anne, I just can't believe I'm going to be a father again."

"I know Roy, I'm overjoyed I'm finally going to be a mother."

Roy gave her a big hug, careful not to hurt her. When breakfast was ready, Roy got the plates out, and Anne dished up breakfast. She turned around and noticed he was wearing his buckskins. Anne let out a wolf whistle, saying "You know how good you look in buckskins? Jim Bridger eat your heart out."

Roy sat down and ate breakfast. Anne told Roy that she had a collection of medical books he was going to have to read and be ready in the next 9 months. She had her Merck Manual, Gray's Anatomy, The US Army Special Forces Manual, and a couple of other books. When she piled them on the table, it was over a foot high. She told Roy that he had 9 months to get ready, not only to deliver their baby, but to help care for it, and also to provide emergency first aid to Anne and Jr. She was going to give Roy the training equivalent of an EMT II or a Paramedic. Then she really dropped a bombshell on him.

"Roy, you're going to get to know me much better than you thought. Since we don't have the luxury of models, cadavers, etc. to learn on, I'll be your model. You'll be able to practice most of the stuff except I won't let you stick me to practice an IV, because if I get an infection from it, it could harm the baby. First things first, I need to teach you Adult CPR."

"Can I finish breakfast first?"

"Sure you big chicken."

As soon as breakfast was finished, Anne started explaining CPR and the Heimlich maneuver to him. She showed him by grasping him from behind the proper position, but didn't squeeze since he had just ate. After that, she laid on the bed, unbuttoned her top, and told Roy to sit next to

the bed. She told Roy that CPR was a combination of manual chest compression and rescue breathing, designed to support life until they could reach definitive help. The One-Man CPR technique for Adults was 15 1.5" chest compressions followed by 2 full breaths, at a rate of 80 compressions per minute, or count out loud between compressions to keep pace. Anne unclasped her bra and showed Roy where her sternum was, and how to locate the proper point to place his hands for chest compression, then asked Roy to place his hands like she showed him. Roy was feeling very uneasy, but realized he needed to know this if he wanted to save Anne's life, so he put his right hand between her breasts, felt for the tip of the sternum, and moved the heel of his hand up 2 finger spaces from that point, then covered his right hand with his left, and locked his elbows as Anne told him. Finally she asked Roy to take his hands off her before he got any ideas. She re-buttoned her blouse, but stayed on the bed. Next she tipped her head into the proper position for rescue breathing, then talked Roy through doing it to her. Finally she said, "Now here's the best part, you get to practice rescue breathing. Act like you're going to give me a huge open-mouthed kiss with my mouth wide open. Since I'm conscious, don't actually breathe out forcefully, but you can get a feel for it, so to speak."

Roy grabbed Anne, and gave her a wet sloppy kiss.

"That's not how you do it silly."

"I hate to tell you Anne, but Susan and I were just certified as First Responders by the American Red Cross less than 2 years ago. However I did enjoy trying CPR on you."

Anne stood up and tossed one of her lighter books at Roy, luckily she missed, since even the lightest one would have hurt.

"Why didn't you tell me."

"You were having so much fun, I didn't want to spoil your fun."

"OK, just for that, I want you to open my Merck Manual and start reading at chapter 1, At the end of the chapter is a self-quiz, so you better make sure you retain what you read. A passing score is 80% in this school, by the way. If you do good, we can go fishing this afternoon. While you're reading, I want you to hold this 8 oz. can of tomatoes in your left hand and flex your wrist."

"Yes Dear, could you do me 1 favor though?"

"Depends."

"Can you make me a pot of coffee, I think I'm going to need it." Roy broke out several #2 pencils and a large legal pad, he was sure he was going to need notes for this. He was reading the introduction to medical terminology, while some of the words were familiar, the

abbreviations were like reading Greek, actually he thought it was, since Modern Medicine originated in Greece. He'd have to ask Anne about that later.

The time passed quickly, and just after noon. Roy finished studying Chapter 1, and told Anne he was ready for the test. Anne gave him a blank piece of paper, and took his notes and stuff away.

"Hey wait a minute, I was counting on having that."

"I never said it was open book. What are you going to do, lug the book out to the field so you can patch me up. You have to know this stuff cold."

That brought Roy's train of thought to a dead stop. If he didn't know this stuff cold, Anne could die. Still, Roy felt confident enough to go ahead and take the test. Anne scored the test, and told Roy he got a score of 85%. He only missed two. She figured he got "q.i.d." and "q.d." confused. Even some doctors she knew goofed on that one. One doctor wrote QID on a prescription when he meant QD, and almost killed a patient. Nurses looked out for that all the time, but unfortunately the patient had an inexperienced nurse. Anne gave Roy a big kiss, then went to pick up the fishing tackle. Roy got up, put on his shoulder holster and fanny pack, and helped Anne into hers. Then she picked up the tackle, and Roy opened the door. They walked hand in hand out to the garden. Roy quickly watered the garden, and noticed nothing amiss, and shut off the water. They walked down to the lake, and Anne handed Roy the fishing rod. Anne looked around nervously for any sign of a bear, but didn't see any, so she turned around and relaxed. Roy cast the lure deep into the lake, and within minutes had his first strike. He landed it a couple of minutes later. Roy's hand and wrist were feeling better, and he realized it was because Anne was making him use it, and the stiffness and soreness were working themselves out. As he tossed the lure out into the lake, Roy remembered they hadn't gone hunting yet this season, and if they wanted some meat, they needed to get out and hunt. Roy suddenly realized Anne was pregnant, and probably wouldn't be able to go with him in 6 months, so if they wanted to go together, they needed to do it quick. Roy hooked a second Lake trout, and easily reeled in the line, and landed the fish. As he was unhooking the fish, he mentioned what he had realized to Anne. and she said "Took you long enough to figure that out."

Roy was confused, then thought they could talk about it later. Meanwhile he had a fish to catch. As he wiggled the rod tip, another Lake trout took the bait. Roy set the hook, then started reeling it in. As he landed the fish, Anne let out a yelp. Roy turned around, and Oliver limped into view, his left front paw appeared to be injured. Roy quickly put the fish on the stringer, and called Oliver over. Oliver stopped next to Roy, and Roy carefully reached down to take Oliver's injured paw. For some reason, Oliver didn't resist, and promptly sat down. It looked like Oliver had torn a pad in a fight with something. Anne opened her first aid kit, got out the Hydrogen Peroxide preps, the 4x4's, a single-use foil pack of antibiotic ointment, and a roller bandage. She handed the HP to Roy, who carefully swabbed the injured area of Oliver's paw,

and got all the dirt out of the wound. Anne then applied the antibiotic ointment to a 4x4 pad, and Roy wrapped it around the injured paw, and wrapped it with the roller bandage, and finished it off with a wrap of Duct tape to tape it to itself. He bandaged it snugly, but not too tight, then took his canteen and cup out to give Oliver some water. When he was finished, Roy thought about Francine and the pups, told Anne to stay there with Oliver and he'd be right back. Roy ran as fast as he could for the den, and when he got there, Francine was sitting there with the pups like nothing had happened. Roy did a quick head count, and all the pups were there, so he walked back to Anne and Oliver.

"Everything is OK at the den, Oliver must have tangled with something while he was out hunting."

Anne's big sigh of relief told Roy that she was worried too. Since Oliver was still sitting there, Roy decided to feed him one of their fish, since he looked like he could use a good meal for once. Roy took the last fish they caught off the stringer, and dropped it in front of Oliver, who laid down and started eating the whole fish. Roy thought he should catch a few more just in case, so he picked up the fishing rod, and tossed the lure out into the lake, and quickly caught another fish. Good thing, since Oliver had just finished eating the first one, and was definitely looking forward to seconds. Roy tossed the second fish to Oliver who swatted it with his good paw and started eating it before it had even stopped struggling. Anne was fascinated and Grossed Out at the same time. Roy cast the lure out into the lake again, and caught another fish, but Oliver had slowed down a little, so he put this one on the stringer when he finished. There was still room on the stringer, so Roy cast the lure out into the lake again. After a few minutes, he caught another fish, and landed that. Oliver was still eating the last one, so Roy put this one on the stringer too.

When Oliver finished eating, he limped over to Roy's side, and Roy petted him just like Old Home days. Roy started crying because he had really missed Oliver, but didn't realize it because he was so busy with Anne. Oliver just sat there for a while as they got reacquainted. When Roy had regained his composure, Oliver walked to the lake, and noisily drank his fill, then walked back to Roy and licked his hand as if to say "Thanks for the first aid and the grub, but I got to get home, the Missus will wonder where I was." Oliver limped slowly into the forest toward his den. Roy hoped his bandage job would hold. Roy knew that when the wound healed, Oliver could chew the bandage off, and would be as good as new.

Roy picked up the stringer, and Anne picked up the fishing pole and tackle box, and they walked back to the cabin. On the way home, Roy quickly filled the garden full of water. When they reached the cabin, Anne set the tackle box down, grabbed the stringer from Roy, and opened the door, sat at the table, and started cleaning and gutting the fish. Roy put up the fishing rod and tackle, washed his hands, then went out to check on the smokehouse. He made room for the fish that Anne would have for him in a minute, and took in the dried meat to store in the meat box in the second room. Roy had an armload of dried jerky, and put it into the box on the shelf, then took the fillets from Anne and hung them up. When he was finished, he

started a fire in the smokehouse, and closed the door. When he got back inside, he told Anne they needed to go hunting as soon as she felt Roy could handle pulling the cart. Anne thought to herself, “that might take a week or two”, then told Roy that it depends on how hard he worked at rehab. Roy promised to be a good patient. Roy asked Anne if it were OK for her to shoot, or if he should. Anne thought about that for a minute, realized she wasn’t more than a month pregnant, the Browning .308 with the Boss unit and the muzzle brake was fairly easy on the recoil, and that lead or anything else wasn’t a problem since it was outdoors. Then she remembered Roy’s recently healed arm, and what the recoil might do to it.

“I think I better shoot if we go in the next two weeks, I don’t want to risk your arm right now. I’m not far enough along for the concussion or recoil to hurt the baby.”

“OK, Anne, if you say so. You do realize that in a couple of months if we need me to hunt, I’ll have to go by myself. And after you have the baby, I’ll have to go by myself until Jr’s big enough to handle being outside overnight.”

“I know that Roy, but it’s worth it to be carrying your baby.”

Anne knew exactly what to say to make Roy all gushy and he walked over and gave her a big hug and kiss. “I love you so much.” Roy then thought how fortunate he was, He had loved Susan for the first half of his life, had a family with her, then he briefly had a wolf as a friend, now he had a wife and a second family. Roy realized he was more blessed than he realized, and said a quick prayer of thanks. Roy made plans to go hunting in the next couple of weeks, and asked Anne what he needed to do to get ready. She said she wanted all the stiffness and soreness out of the arm, and 80% of the range of motion of the right arm. She told Roy that was a tall order for 2 weeks, but she figured he was in excellent health for his age. Roy went back to his studies, and Anne made a list of the chapters he needed to know and what order to read them in. She also mixed in the other books on a topic basis, so he got a well-rounded idea about the particular chapter, both from a conventional hospital situation, and a field improvisation situation. Anne realized the reason Roy was studying so hard, was he realized that if anything happened to Anne or Jr. that he would have to do what he could to save their lives without much help. Even if the plane left as soon as they called, it would take at least ½ hour, and there was no guarantee it could even make it if the weather was bad. That meant an hour round-trip, and that ate up most of the golden hour that she’d relied on as a RN in Dallas. Basically, they were on their own barring a major miracle. Anne settled down when she remembered that she grew up in this environment, and she turned out OK. In some ways it was safer: No crime, auto accidents, or drugs. And definitely no MTV.

After a couple of hours, Anne went into the kitchen to make dinner, and when it was almost ready, she asked Roy to clear off the table so they could eat. Roy piled his books off to one side, set the table, and since he already had the lantern lit from studying, he let it burn. He carried the plates in to Anne, who loaded them up with food. When she sat down, Roy said Grace. He had a lot to be thankful for, so it took a while. Finally he said Amen and they dug

in. After dinner, Roy fed the fireplace because it was getting cool outside. Then he commented to Anne they really needed some more firewood. Anne told Roy that would have to wait a month or so, and he could only log the smaller trees, she didn't want him to go splat. Roy kissed her on the forehead, and promised to be careful. Then he went back to his studies. He kept his nose in the book until bed time, when Anne put her hand on his shoulder, announced it was bedtime, and he should put up the books. Roy turned and gave her a big kiss, and then they got undressed and got into bed.



## Chapter 32 - Roy Continues his Studies

Roy got dressed as soon as he got up the next morning, and started the fireplace, since it was cold in the cabin. Anne got dressed, started the woodstove, and started breakfast. Roy lit the lantern, broke out his medical books, and got to work. When Anne had breakfast ready, he cleared away his books, and ate breakfast. When they had finished and cleared the plates, Roy resumed his studies. He kept at it until after noon, when he told Anne he was ready to take the next test. As before, she took away all his notes, and Roy started the test. Half an hour later, he finished, and Anne scored the exam. The look on her face told him everything.

“Roy, you got 100% this time. You must have really been studying hard.”

“Anne, I realized yesterday what you said, I need to know this stuff cold. I want to make sure I know this stuff in case I need it. The last thing I want to happen is for something to happen to you or Jr. because I was slacking off while I was studying.”

“Roy, I appreciate the sentiment, but even with all the time we have, it’s unreasonable to expect you to know everything in a short period of time. EMTs and Paramedics do a rotation in ER to get first hand knowledge of this stuff. Book knowledge is great, but you have to realize you have no practical knowledge to go along with it. Besides, even with your best efforts, one of us could die just because we are so far from a hospital. I’ve lived here all my life, and I accept it, but you can’t feel guilty if something happens to us beyond your control or abilities. You’re not an MD, or a Surgeon. If you get a ruptured appendix out here, barring a major miracle, you’re going to die.”

Roy just stared at Anne; he’d never thought of it like that. He didn’t like it one bit, then he realized that he was a bit of a “Control Freak”. Suddenly Roy remembered a Bible Verse.

Ps 115:11 “You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield.”

Roy felt badly because he knew better than not to trust the Lord to take care of him and his family. He took Anne’s hands in his and told her what he just thought. Anne broke out her Bible, located Psalm 115, and read it. Most of her studies until now were in the New Testament, so she had a bunch of questions. Roy explained that most of the book of Psalms was written by King David, a great king of Israel, yet he had his faults. This particular psalm may have been written by Moses or one of his compatriots.

“Roy, you’re telling me this was written over 2,000 years ago?”

“Anne, actually some parts of the Old Testament are so ancient they can’t be accurately dated. Some passages go back to the start of recorded history.”

“That is so amazing, that a writer 2,000 plus years ago wrote something that means so much today.”

“Anne, I believe the entire Bible is the inspired word of God, he may not have put pen to ink himself, but the writers of the Bible were definitely writing at God’s direction.”

“What about all the translations? Just from what little I know, there seems to be major differences between different Bibles.”

“OK, here’s my understanding of it - the Original Texts were the Word of God, Man took the Ancient Greek and Aramaic and translated it first into Latin, then into English, French, Spanish and other languages. The differences can mostly be accounted for by differences in translation. English is a modern language, and is still evolving. When the King James Version was written over 300 years ago, English was a totally different language. Words have changed meaning, new words evolved, and old ones went out of use.”

“Roy, thanks for answering the question, but I really didn’t need a Doctoral Thesis explanation. Can we go fishing or something - you need to get out of the house.”

Roy put up his books, Anne grabbed the fishing rod and tackle box while Roy put on his shoulder holster. It was easier to put on today, hopefully that meant he was getting better. Next he belted on his fanny pack, then helped Anne with her shoulder holster and fanny pack. Then they walked out to the lake, stopping to water the garden. As they reached the lake, they turned north to their favorite fishing hole. Roy kept a sharp lookout for marauding bears. Finally they reached the spot, Anne baited the lure, and handed the rod to Roy, who promptly heaved the lure way out into the lake.

“Oops, guess my strength is coming back.”

“That’s OK, Roy, it just means you’ll get more of a workout reeling it back in.”

Roy started reeling the line back in, when he thought he was snagged on a log, until it started moving. Whatever he had hooked was HUGE. Roy carefully set the drag so as not to snap the line, and still land the fish. This one wasn’t going without a fight, and pulled like it was a contestant in a Tractor Pull. Finally, the fish tired, and Roy was able to gain ground after a half-hour of fighting it. When the water got shallow enough to see it, the fish looked different than anything he had caught before. He asked Anne what he had caught, and she looked at the fish, and it was almost 2 feet in diameter, and almost 3 feet long.

“I’m not sure what you caught, but whatever it is, its’ a Whopper.”

When he finally landed it, and Anne got a good look at it, she asked Roy to release it if he could. Anne thought it was a mature breeding female lake trout and it looked like it was ready

to give birth. Roy grabbed his multipliers, and without touching the fish any more than necessary, unhooked it and let it swim away. Anne explained that one pregnant female could re-populate a huge part of the lake. Roy was glad he let her go, because he wanted to catch more fish. Roy fixed the lure, and cast out into the lake again, this time a little less far. As the lure settled, he felt a tug on the line, and set the hook. By the way it was fighting him, Roy figured he had hooked another big fish. As he got it closer to shore, the fish's colors started to show, it was a big huge Lake Trout, and it had an iridescent color to its body, almost like a rainbow trout, but Roy knew that Rainbows never got this big. He brought it into shore, and after removing the hook, put it on his stringer. He guessed it weighted 10 pounds easy. Roy landed a few more large fish, then called it a day. On the way back, they watered the garden, and Anne picked some fresh vegetables for dinner. When they got to the cabin, Roy set the fish on the table, and Anne quickly gutted and cleaned the fish while Roy put up the fishing gear, and re arranged the smokehouse, taking down meat that was done and bringing it inside to store. Anne kept 2 fillets for dinner, then Roy put the rest in the smokehouse, built a new fire, and closed the door. As afternoon became evening, Anne got dinner ready and Roy read his medical books. Anne gave Roy a 5-minute warning, so he cleared off the table quickly, set the places, and took the plates in to Anne so she could plate the food. Anne had gone all out with the vegetables, and served a butter and garlic sauce with the carrots, greens and onions. She made fried fish for the main course, and baked biscuits in the Dutch Oven, which she covered with an Orange Marmalade Glaze. Roy was drooling just smelling the good food. He helped Anne get seated, then quickly sat down and said grace. When he was finished eating, he asked Anne "How much longer until you think we can go hunting. I wanted to get a couple of trips in before you were too far along to go with me."

"Roy, we went over this yesterday. I still say it will take at least a couple of weeks to regain full strength and flexibility in your left arm. I know you're right handed, but you still have to pull that big heavy cart loaded with whatever we shoot."

"Ok, Dear, you know best. I just remembered something. I need to fix you up a day bag like mine, and we need to upgrade the first aid kits in both bags."

"Roy, I'm glad you mentioned that, when you taped up Oliver's bandage with duct tape, I cringed. They make a product called Vet Wrap that is much better for that job since it only sticks to itself."

"I know Anne, I was thinking of putting Coach Wrap in my kit, but the Duct tape can do that job, and a bunch others. When everything you need to survive has to fit in a small fanny pack, everything has to perform multiple jobs, or be indispensable. Tell you what, you make a list of the medical supplies you'd like to carry with us in your day bag, and we'll call Bill and order it. I wanted to get you a daybag with the 90oz Camelback hydration unit anyway. Plan on no more than 30 pounds of gear, plus the water to keep the load light. We will still wear our fanny packs, but this will give us some redundancy, and greater depth with the first aid kits. I'll carry the spare ammo for the rifle and the pistols since I can carry more weight, and you can carry the

first aid kit since you'll probably use it anyway. Do you think 25 rounds of .308, 50 of .44 magnum, and 100 .22 rounds would be enough? That's not including the 2 spare 15-round mags each for the .22's, the 2 speed loaders each we're carrying for the .44 magnums, and the 5 rounds in the magazine of the .308."

"Roy, I think that's more than enough. We've got 6 rounds in the Anacondas each, 12 additional rounds in 2 speed loaders each times 2 people equals 36 rounds between the two of us, plus 50 additional is 86 rounds. Unless you're planning on starting WWII, it should be more than enough. Let's call Bill and have him order the stuff. I have a pretty good idea what I need."

Roy broke out the radio, set the tuner to Bill's frequency, turned it on, and keyed the mike, "Roy Williams calling Bill, you still awake there Mayor?"

"Roy, I was just shutting down for the night, what can I do for you?"

"Anne needs to order a daybag like mine with the 90oz Camelback insert, and she has a list of medical supplies she wants to buy to fill it."

"Hi, Bill, it's Anne, OK- Here's the list." Anne started reading off a list to Bill, as he wrote furiously. Finally, he read back the entire list, said it would take about a week to order all the stuff and get it delivered. Anne said that would be fine, told the Mayor goodnight, and signed off.

"Roy, Bill said it would take about a week to deliver the stuff I ordered, so it will work great."

"I heard some of the stuff you ordered, what are you planning on doing, opening an ER?"

"No, silly, Steve gave me a list a long time ago of the stuff I'd need to make a mini-paramedic kit, and most of this stuff is designed by the military. I also ordered 2 Katadyn Voyager purifiers to filter drinking water. Your guts may be used to drinking straight out of the lake, but I can't risk dehydration after a couple of months. I also ordered a few spare filters so I can use it in the house."

"Anne, you are one smart lady." Roy went back to his studies, and Anne read her Bible until they went to bed.

## Chapter 33 - The Wait is Almost Over

The remaining time passed quickly, but not quickly enough for Roy, who was getting a bad case of Cabin Fever. He did his exercises, and increased his strength and flexibility daily. About a week had passed when one morning they were awakened by the sound of a plane coming in for a landing. They got dressed quickly, and by the time Jim's plane had taxied to their door, they were fully dressed and ready to help unload. This was a fairly light load compared to the usual, but several boxes were marked Fragile from a Medical Supply company in Washington. When they finished, Anne asked Jim if he could stay for breakfast, Jim declined saying he had a full schedule ahead, and thanked her for the offer. Jim got back in his plane, turned around and taxied out to the lake to take off. When they walked back into the cabin, Anne started opening boxes, and took out the packing list from the Medical Supply Company. Dang, Steve's account must still be good, since they shipped Morphine and other drugs you need a DEA number to order. Anne was glad to get it while she could.. As she looked over the list, she saw auto injectors with pre-measured dosages of Morphine, Atropine, Epinephrine, Benedryl, and a couple of local anesthetics. Also it had IV kits including D5W, Ringer's, and Plasma. They were specially packaged for long-term storage at room temperature or above. They also included bandages, Vet Wrap in case Oliver needed bandaging again, tape, a Burn Kit, a Sawyer Extractor, and foil packets of triple antibiotic, cortisone cream, Aloe Vera, burn gel, alcohol preps, a couple of CPR masks and a box of hypoallergenic Latex-free exam gloves and Providine Iodine.

Next, Anne unpacked a day pack with a Camelback HAWG hydration pack, and carefully packed the medical kit inside, as well as a few other items she might need. When she finished, she lifted the pack and tested the weight, right around 30 pounds, she'd be fine. She opened the last box, and remembered she ordered the Katadyn Voyager purifier, and added it to the kit, keeping the spare filter in the cabin storage shelf. Before she closed the bag, she got a couple of Ziploc bags, and took 10 pairs of gloves, and about a half-dozen of the foil packed items out of each box, and repacked them in bag. It took a lot less room, and was a little lighter. She figured if she needed more than that - they really needed an ER anyway. She took the camelback out of the bag, took it to the sink, and rinsed it out, then let it air dry. Later she'd fill it using the Katadyn Voyager purifier. While she was doing that, Roy took out his bag, and repacked it, putting the spare ammo on the bottom, then the change of socks and underwear, then some jerky and other dried foods in Ziploc bags, and the tarp and 2 Mylar sleeping bags. Roy didn't want to be weighed down with sleeping bags and a tent, so he brought the tarp and the Mylar bags just in case. Normally he liked sleeping under the stars, and hoped Anne did too. When they finished, Anne made breakfast as Roy hit the books. As he learned more medical terminology, he started covering more material in a shorter period since he didn't have to look stuff up as much. He was starting in Anatomy and Physiology. Luckily for him, Anne didn't make him memorize the Latin names for all the bones and muscles - he could use the vernacular. She wanted him to know the names well enough to be able to read the books, so he spent the last week working through Gray's Anatomy. Some of the stuff was enough to make

Roy worry about losing his lunch. He got through those parts quickly, and was still passing the tests with 85% or better. Soon, breakfast was ready, and Roy set aside his work. Anne fed him a large plate of scrambled eggs, pancakes, bacon and real maple syrup. Real maple syrup was cheaper in Alaska due to the lower shipping costs from Canada. When they finished, Roy resumed his studying, and Anne read her Bible. Around noon, Roy decided to take a break, and put his books up.

“Anne, do you think we could go hunting tomorrow?”

“Roy, I thought you’d Never Ask. Sure, I’m packed already.”

Roy took out his knife and hatchet and sharpened them to a razor edge, then sharpened Anne’s knives. Next he cleaned and lubricated all the guns, and made sure all the screws were tight, and then he unloaded and reloaded the mags in the .22’s to exercise the springs. When he was finished, he chambered a round, set the safety on, and topped off the mag from a partial box of ammo so he’d have a full one in his bag. He also loaded the Browning .308 A-Bolt and set the safety, and inspected the rounds in both Colt Anacondas and reloaded them. He double checked the ammo boxes in his bag to make sure they were full, then went through his fanny pack to make sure everything that was supposed to be there was there. Then he went through Anne’s fanny pack. When he was satisfied everything was shipshape, he walked out to the smokehouse, took out all the meat that had dried, and refilled his dried meat container in the cabin. Since there was no meat that needed drying, he closed the door and left it as it was. Roy was ready to go hunting tomorrow, so he went back to his studies until dinnertime. They ate dinner early and got to bed right after dark so they could get up at daybreak to go hunting.

The next morning dawned early, and Roy got dressed quickly in his buckskins without starting a fire in the fireplace. As soon as they were dressed, Anne made breakfast, and they ate as the sun was rising. As soon as they finished, Anne took out her Katadyn Voyager filter and filled both of their Camelback hydration bags, and their canteens. Anne couldn’t take the chance she’d need to drink from Roy’s water supply to leave his unfiltered. As soon as they were ready, Anne put the fire out in the stove, closed the damper, and they put on their shoulder holsters, fanny packs, and day bags. They felt like they were loaded for an expedition, but it wasn’t quite that bad. Anne took the Browning .308 off the shelf, double checked the safety was on, and slung it over her shoulder. While Anne secured the cabin door, Roy walked around the side to grab the travois. Since it was unloaded, he decided to push it instead of pulling it. He met Anne around front, and he took a quick compass bearing, and they set off.

As they were walking through the woods, Roy noticed the trees and flowers were in bloom. It was much prettier than in Winter. All the yellow and blue flowers combined with the green leaves of the Aspens, Poplars, and various Conifers. The sights and smells seemed new to him, and he took it all in. He saw rabbits bounding across the clearing and squirrels foraging for nuts and other stuff to eat. While he was watching all the scenery, he was also keeping an eye out for larger predators, since they didn’t have Oliver with them. Roy felt that even with an arm at

80% he was good enough to protect Anne from anything out here. They sipped out of their Camelbacks as they walked, and Roy handed Anne some jerky to chew until they could stop for dinner that evening. The trip to the first night's camping spot passed uneventfully. Anne refilled their camelbacks and canteens from the nearby stream with her Voyager purifier, and Roy gathered firewood. Anne noticed small fish in the stream that looked like brook trout, and they looked big enough to eat. She called to Roy, who handed her his emergency fishing kit out of his fanny pack. It consisted of a 35mm film can wrapped with 10/50 Spyderwire, and filled with 1/8oz. Chartreuse lead head jigs with plastic lures. She tied one of the lures to the end of the line, paid out about 10 feet, and quietly tossed it upstream of the fish she saw. As the bait bumped along the bottom, Anne got a good hold on the line in case the fish took the bait. Sure enough, one of them was hungry or stupid enough not to realize it was a fake until it was too late, and Anne set the hook and quickly pulled the fish in. She let it flop on the ground while she went after his buddy. He must not have been one of the brighter crayons in the box, because he grabbed it too like it was a minnow, and within 5 minutes, Anne had dinner on the bank. Meanwhile, Roy had the fire going, so Anne cleaned and gutted the fish, then Roy stuck them on a forked stick to cook over the fire. Roy turned them frequently to keep them from burning, and when they were done, Roy handed Anne one of the fish, said a quick grace, and started eating the fish right off the stick. When they were finished, they tossed the remains into the fire to burn so they wouldn't leave a smell. As it got dark, Anne and Roy gathered downed leaves and branches to make a comfortable bed. Instead of crawling into separate Mylar bags, Roy unfolded his Mylar blanket, and spread it over them. It barely covered them but since they weren't taking their clothes off, they were comfortable between the small fire and the Mylar blanket. Anne fell asleep in Roy's arms.

They woke up at first light, and they walked a short ways into the bushes to take care of business. Anne handed Roy a tube of Purell to wash his hands with, then they broke camp and packed their gear. Roy took another compass bearing to the spot where he remembered the Moose were hanging out, and set off. They were walking through a large clearing, so Roy wasn't as careful as on the first day, so they made better time. Halfway to the Moose spot, Anne spotted a Huge brown bear about 50 yards away. She quietly got Roy's attention, then whispered to him "Should I take it?" It was a huge bear, and would provide a lot of meat, and it was closer than hiking another day to the moose area. Roy knew Anne could make the shot easily from past experience, so he told her to go ahead. Anne pulled her Colt Anaconda out of the shoulder holster, took a nice solid stance, and thumbed back the hammer. Just in case, Roy drew his revolver too. The bear was sideways to Anne and she waited for a clean heart/lung shot. Finally the bear moved and she had the shot. As the .44 Magnum boomed, the bear roared, charged maybe 10 yards toward them, then fell over. When the Bear was down, Anne looked over and smiled to see Roy was backing her up, but trusted her marksmanship enough not to fire until the bear got too close. The bear was down at the edge of the clearing about 40 yards away from them, so Roy picked up the handles of the cart and maneuvered it over to the head of the bear while Anne kept her gun out just in case. When they got to the bear, he was deader than a doornail. Anne holstered her Anaconda, and helped Roy attach the sling to the bear to winch it onto the cart. When they got the sling around the bear, Roy tilted the cart so

that the bear would slide up the cart. He started cranking on the winch, but his left shoulder started hurting, so he asked Anne to help. Together they got the bear onto the cart and the cart balanced. Once they were good to go, Roy took a bearing back to their camp from last night, and they set off for home. Later that afternoon, they arrived at camp, and they debated skinning and gutting the bear there. Anne wanted to, but Roy told her they could feed Oliver's family with the guts and leftovers. Anne didn't think it was a wise idea to feed wild wolves, but didn't say anything. They made camp, and Anne caught some more fish for dinner. Since the bear stank, they moved it downwind of the camp. They went to bed at dusk and got up at first light for the trip home. Anne led, and Roy followed dragging the cart behind him. He was glad they shot the bear, because he wasn't sure he could drag a Moose that far, even with a wheeled cart. Later that afternoon, they made it to their cabin. Nothing seemed out of place, so they walked right on up. After checking out the interior, Roy helped Anne butcher the Bear. When they were finished, Roy whistled and Oliver appeared right on cue with his family, like someone rang the dinner bell. Roy realized they could probably smell the bear, and just wanted some of it. Oliver was looking better, and had bitten the bandage off his paw. Roy skinned the bear as Anne gutted it. She piled the guts they weren't going to use (she kept the heart and liver, and most of the bear fat to make sausages with) and piled the rest on the ground for the wolves. When he removed the skin, Roy took his <skip> and cracked the bear's skull, and brain tanned it, then set it on the smokehouse roof to dry. Meanwhile Anne was taking the choice cuts of meat off the carcass and carrying them into the house. She left some of the meat on the bones for the wolves. When she was through, she wheeled the cart over to the garbage pile and dumped it. The wolves set upon the carcass as soon as she was clear. She knew the carcass would be clean by morning.

Anne walked back into the cabin, but instead of stopping at the table, kept going until she was in the back room. Roy heard her rummaging around, and went to investigate. Anne was unpacking a box full of canning gear: A pressure canner, canning jars with lids, and a canning book. She took the book into the main room and sat down to read it by the light. She quickly read up on canning wild meat. She told Roy to cut the bear meat into pieces just big enough to fit into the jar. As he cut the meat, she got a pot of water boiling on the stove to sterilize the lids with. She had a set of tongs in the kit just for this, as well as a jar lifter. Once she got the water boiling, she dumped the lids into the boiling water and looked at her watch, then used the hot water from the sink to wash the glass jars since they could be damaged by direct exposure to boiling water like that. She then made the recommended brine solution, and Roy brought some pieces of bear meat for her to can. She set up the canner on the stove, and moved the hot water off the hot spot of the stove. She added the recommended water to the canner, set in the canning rack to keep the jars from banging against each other, then filled the jars with meat and brine, wiping the threads with a clean towel so the jar would get a good seal then set them in the rack. When the lids had boiled the required time, she used the tongs to pick them out of the hot water and place them on the canning jars that were already in the rack. She then loosely tightened the threads so it could form a vacuum as it cooled after the canning process. When she finished putting the lids on the jars, she closed and locked the lid, and monitored the steam pressure carefully. When it reached operating pressure, she started the timer someone had



packed in the kit. She carefully monitored the pressure, and either added wood, or moved the canner off the heat to keep the pressure constant. When the time was up, she tripped the pressure relief valve, and waited for the canner to cool. As it cooled, she heard the pleasant “Ping” of the lids sealing in vacuum. Finally, she took the jar lifter and lifted the canning jars out of the canner, and set them on the counter to cool. When they were cool enough to touch, she carefully tightened the lids finger tight, and left them alone. She processed several batches of bear meat, and when she was out of jars, she still had meat left over, so she got out the sausage kit, and made bear sausage out of the remainder. When she was finished, she told Roy to hang the sausages in the smokehouse and go ahead and start a fire under them, but don’t place the sausages right over the fire in case they dripped - she didn’t want a grease fire in the smokehouse. Anne made a note to order several more cases of canning jars. While she was doing this, Roy walked out to the garden and watered the garden, and came back with an armload of ripe vegetables. He cleaned them in the sink, and left them out of Anne’s way. Then he went back to his studies.

Later that evening, Anne made Bear Steak for dinner with mixed vegetables. Roy set the table for her, then said grace as the food was put on the table. Roy had a lot to be thankful for. Anne was multi-talented. After dinner, Roy leaned over and gave her a big kiss. Anne was confused, “What was that for?”

“Just because I love you so much, and you’re so multi-talented. You not only shoot dinner, you can skin it, cook it, can it, and even make sausage out of it.”

Anne laughed, “Why are you so amazed. I did this all the time growing up.”

“Susan thought steak came from the grocery store, and milk came in cartons. I could just see her skinning a bear she just shot, butchering the meat, canning some of it, and making sausage of the rest.”

“Roy, we’re two different people. I really didn’t like living in the city, and Susan probably thrived in the city. I could never chair a PTA meeting, or arrange a luncheon for 50 people.”

“Glad there’s no PTA around here - you’d probably shoot it, clean it and cook it.”

Anne laughed hysterically for a few minutes, then kissed Roy back.

## Chapter 34 - The Morning After

The next morning, Roy woke up stiff and sore. Anne quickly started massaging his shoulders and back. Roy almost purred it felt so good. Then she hit a “pressure point” and he almost screamed, then the muscle relaxed and he felt better. When she was finished, Roy rolled over and gave her a massage, and a little more.

Several hours later, they finally rolled out of bed since both their bellies were grumbling, and Roy had to use the outhouse. Roy got dressed quickly and went outside to use the outhouse. Meanwhile, Anne got dressed and started breakfast. When Roy came in, he went over to the sink to wash his hands, then had another idea and grabbed Anne from behind as she stood in front of the stove.

“Down Boy, you got enough of that already.” Anne laughed and turned the sausages.

Roy didn’t give up so easily and started nuzzling her neck.

“Roy - if you don’t stop, I won’t be able to - and breakfast will get burnt.”

Roy decided to take the hint and cool his jets - for a while. He decided the safest action was to go back to reading his medical books while Anne finished breakfast.

Roy had just about finished Gray’s Anatomy, and Anne said she would give him a verbal quiz about what he studied. She wanted him to locate the part, its proper name, and function. Roy was not looking forward to it. Anne told Roy that breakfast was ready - “Saved by the bell” thought Roy. He quickly cleared off his place, and Anne carried two plates full of food. Roy noticed she had been piling the food on the plates lately, and took his life in his hands by commenting “Eating for Two?” decided that discretion was the better part of valor, and ducked quickly as she threw a dirty towel at him. After breakfast, Roy resumed where he left off, but Anne spoiled his plans by continuing to massage his neck. Taking the hint, Roy turned around quickly and kissed her on the neck. Judging by her response, he decided to continue this on the bed, and guided her onto the bed. When they woke up later that afternoon, it was almost time for dinner. Roy remembered he needed to water the garden, and Anne said she needed to call Bill to order some more canning jars. While she broke out the radio, Roy got dressed again, then watered the garden and picked an armful of fresh vegetables. When he came back in, Anne was busy in the kitchen getting ready for dinner, so Roy washed the vegetables, then went back to his books. Anne decided to make Bear Stew for dinner, and opened one of the jars of bear meat. She tested the lid, and it was sealed tight. She was glad she remembered how to do this, since if she’d gotten it wrong, she could have ruined the whole batch of bear meat. She put the big Dutch Oven on the stove, started the fire, and added the bear meat when the Dutch Oven was good and hot. After browning the meat, she added enough water to cover, and the vegetables, then she covered it with the lid and sat down to read her Bible.

## Chapter 35 - The Big Quiz

The next morning, Roy woke up and got dressed, Anne rolled out of bed, and went to start breakfast. While breakfast was cooking, Roy opened his books - he knew today was the day of the big quiz and he needed to study. When breakfast was ready, he put his books aside, and ate quickly, then got right back to studying. Around Noon, Roy announced he was ready, and Anne took his books and notes away from him.

“OK, first we’re doing to do the hard part - I’ll say the name of the bone or muscle, and you have to describe where it is, and what it does. For example - If I were to say “Pectoralis Major, you would say. Major muscle of chest, anterior of chest wall, responsible for extending the arm forward.”

With that they began.

An hour later, Roy was sweating bullets, because Anne had worked her way to the bones of the hands and feet. There were tons of little bones in there, and he wasn’t sure if he remembered them all. He felt he was doing OK. Anne kept the pressure up, alternating between muscles and bones. Finally she felt he knew enough Anatomy and Physiology to start studying the circulatory system and the nervous system. She put his book down, and walked over to where he sat. “Roy, I have some great news, You Passed. I think you only missed 5 questions.”

“Is that all? I was afraid I totally messed up on the bones of the hand.”

“Well I gave you partial credit on some of those - I have a hard time keeping them straight myself.

Roy spent the next couple of days studying the medical books, and tending the garden. Finally the canning jars and lids Anne ordered showed up, Roy and Anne helped Jim unload them. In all, there were 12 cases of quart Mason canning jars and lids. Jim was complaining about the weight and the fact that he had to pancake the landing to avoid breaking half of them. Roy asked Jim if he could use a bearskin. Jim’s eyes lit up, and Roy walked over to the smokehouse and rolled the bearskin up and gave it to him. Jim asked him how much he wanted for it - and Roy told him it was a gift. Jim’s smile turned into an ear-to-ear grin. “Thanks Roy, I really appreciate it. You know a good bear skin can bring several hundred dollars on the market?”

“Don’t worry about it, there’s many more out there where that came from.”

Jim took the skin, shook Roy’s hand, and walked to his plane, put the skin in the back, fired up the plane, turned around and taxied out to the lake, then took off.

Roy walked into the house, and Anne was sorting through the boxes. Each box had 10 jars, and each case had 5 boxes, for a total of 50 jars. Combined with what she already had, that was over 600 jars, more than enough to take care of the garden, plus any meat Roy harvested. After they got the jars organized, Anne grabbed her Ball Book, and started looking up canning recipes for the various vegetables she needed to can. When she was finished, she got a pot of boiling water going to sterilize the lids and rings, then used the hot water to wash the jars. Finally she put the canner on the stove on a cold burner, then they went out to the garden with the cart and started harvesting the garden. They picked carrots, onions various squash, radishes, cabbage and garlic. He left the salad greens in the ground to pick as needed. When they were finished, they wheeled the cart back to the house, and Roy helped Anne wash and prepare all the veggies for canning. Anne moved the canner over to a hot burner, added the required amount of water, and started filling jars full of veggies to process. They had an assembly line going, and quickly processed all the veggies they had picked. Anne still had half the jars left over, which was about right by her estimates, since the last time she canned Bear meat, it took almost half of what she had available.

When they finished canning, it was almost time for dinner, so Anne made Bear stew with some leftover vegetables and a can of bear meat.

Roy went back to his studies after dinner, and Anne read her Bible.

The next morning, Roy remembered that he had planted Potatoes, and they were just about due to be harvested. After breakfast, they grabbed the spade fork, a big bucket, and the cart. Roy pushed the cart out to the potato patch, and started digging carefully - he didn't want to ruin the potatoes. As he turned the soil, potatoes of various sizes came to the top. Anne picked them out of the dirt, added them to the bucket. Soon she ran out of room in the bucket, and started setting them onto the cart. The potatoes ranged in size from about the size of a golf ball to the size of a grapefruit. Some were round, some were oval, and some were just ugly. They all looked healthy, so Roy turned the green part of the plant under, and left some smaller tubers in the patch to go to seed and re-populate the patch for next year. Roy estimated he had between 50 and 80 pounds of potatoes. Anne shook her head, and said, "Guess that means we're going to need more jars."

"Anne, if we store them in a cool dark place, they don't need to be canned. Once they start to show signs that they are getting to the point that they start sprouting, then we should can the rest of them. Unless you want to make fish or clam chowder, or a stew with potatoes and can that." When they were finished, Anne said she felt like fish for dinner, and asked Roy if they could go fishing. He got up, put on his gear, helped Anne into hers, and got the fishing stuff. They walked hand in hand down to the lake, and Anne carried the tackle so Roy could keep his hands free, just in case. They walked to their favorite fishing hole, and while Anne was baiting the hook, Roy made a careful visual sweep of the area, on the lookout for large predators. He turned back to the lake just as Anne cast the line out into the lake. She quickly found the spot where the fish congregated, and quickly had 4 large lake trout on her stringer. They decided to

call it quits, and headed back to the cabin. When they got back, Anne quickly skinned, gutted, and filleted the fish, saving one for dinner. She gave the rest to Roy so he could put them in the smokehouse. He walked out to the smokehouse, and put the fish on the top rack where the smoke was the hottest. While he was in there, he removed some of the fish that was dry, and brought it into the cabin. He put it in his dried meat bin to keep. When he came back into the living room, he asked Anne if she wanted to go hunting again soon, since he was feeling much better. Anne said OK, and told Roy she needed to call Bill and order some more canning jars and lids, since she had just enough to process another large animal. Roy nodded, and Anne got the radio out, and Bill's first comment was "what are you guys doing - opening a dry goods store?"

Anne had to laugh, then said that they just wanted to stock up for the winter. Roy may be OK subsisting on Jerky all winter, but she wanted some real food.

Roy just had to shake his head and laugh at the situation. He was becoming Domesticated - and he wondered if that was why Oliver had bugged out on him - maybe the other wolves were laughing at him becoming domesticated? Roy spent the rest of the day studying, and Anne made fried fish fillets and Freedom Fries for dinner.

## Chapter 36 - Hunting With Oliver...And Family

The next morning Roy and Anne were up at first light, ate a quick breakfast, checked and donned their packs, shoulder holsters, and fanny packs. Anne grabbed her rifle, and they walked out front. Roy made sure the door was closed, then walked around to pick up the cart, and he stopped suddenly when he saw Oliver, Francine and 4 well-grown pups. Roy looked at Oliver and said "You want to go hunting Oliver?" The grin and the wagging tail said it all. Roy led the pack around the front, and said to Anne "Looks like we're going to have some company on this hunt."

"Roy, do you think that's a good idea? What if they spook the game, or otherwise interfere with our hunting?"

"Anne, don't worry - before I met you, Oliver and I went hunting together all the time, and he never spooked game. Unlike domestic hunting dogs, wolves are natural stealth hunters and can sneak up on game better than we can."

"OK Roy, if you say so. I'll be glad Oliver is there to keep watch while we sleep."

"Hang on a second Anne - I'm going to go inside and pack more dried fish so we can feed the wolves for a couple of days." Roy walked into the back of the cabin, and took enough dried fish to last the wolves a week. The last thing Roy wanted was to be around a pack of hungry wolves. He packed it in 2 freezer Ziploc bags to eliminate the smell of food. When he added the food to his bag, he shouldered the bag and went back outside. Anne was busy petting Oliver and the pups. Francine was a little more standoffish since she wasn't habituated to humans. Finally she warmed up to Anne and walked over to join her pups who were getting vigorously petted by Anne. Once Roy appeared, they stopped and watched Roy. All of a sudden, the wolves packed up, formed a circle, and started howling.

Roy didn't understand at first, then remembered a show he had watched on Discovery channel about Wolf behavior and remembered they said something about a pack of wolves howling before they went hunting as a pack bonding ritual. As Roy picked up the cart and headed off, Oliver stopped howling and the rest of the pack stopped. When Anne followed Roy, the rest of the pack followed Anne. As Roy and Anne hiked into the woods heading to where the moose and caribou were hopefully, the wolves ranged about 100 yds away, always keeping Roy in sight, but roaming freely, investigating their surroundings. Meanwhile Oliver was busy marking their territory. Roy laughed and hoped Oliver had drunk a lot of water, since there were millions of trees between their cabin and their overnight spot. Oliver solved that problem by drinking from nearby streams that meandered through the forest. Roy walked quickly, knowing that Oliver would alert him to any large predators.

About halfway to their overnight stop, Roy spotted a bunch of snowshoe rabbits feeding about 40 yards away. Quickly setting down the cart, and drawing his Ruger 22/45, he shot all 10 rabbits before any of them realized their friends were deceased. "Looks like we're eating Rabbit tonight" Roy said as he quickly gathered the bodies of the rabbits. Most of them were almost 5 pounds each, and had a nice furry coat they could use for stuff at home, maybe a pair of furry bunny slippers for the Mommy to be. Roy put the them on the cart, then started walking again. Amazingly none of the wolves pestered him. A couple of hours later, they arrived at their campsite. Roy dropped the cart, gathered some wood, and started a fire, then started skinning and gutting the rabbits. Anne said, "I really don't feel like roasted rabbit for dinner, I'm going to try and catch some more fish", took her fishing kit and walked over to the stream. "This must be a good spot for Brook Trout" she thought, because there were 4 more large brook trout in the same spot as last time. She quickly tied the lure onto the fishing line, unraveled about 20 feet of line, then spinning the lure in a circle, cast the lure just upstream of the brook trout. As the lure floated down, one of the fish grabbed it, and Anne set the hook, then quickly hauled it in. She left the fish on the bank next to her, and caught the rest of the fish in about ½ hour. By now Roy had the rabbits skinned and gutted, and the bodies roasting over the fire. Anne carried the fish back to the fire, cleaned and scaled the fish, then stuck them on sticks to roast by the fire.

When everything was finished cooking, Roy turned to the now drooling Oliver, "What do you wish to order, we have fish and rabbit on the menu today." Oliver was looking hungrily at the roasting rabbit, so Roy said, "Very well - Rabbit it is - Bon Appetit." Roy took one of the rabbits and set it in front of Oliver, then set 2 more in front of the pups. That left Francine. Anne offered her a roasted brook trout, and Francine decided that hanging out with humans wasn't such a bad idea and dug in. Roy bowed his head and said a quick grace, because he realized that if he wasn't eating by the time the wolves finished eating, he might have a fight on his hands. Roy ate quickly and Anne noticed Roy's haste, then realized she was eating within 6 feet of a pack of wolves, and broke her previous speed records for chowing down. Once they were finished eating, Roy cracked the skulls of the rabbits, and preceded to brain tan them.

"Roy, I'm glad you waited until after dinner to do that, or else I would have lost my appetite, and I would have been very upset with you.

When he was finished, he washed his hands in the creek, and rolled the skins up and stuck them inside his bag. When Oliver had finished eating, he walked over to Roy, sat down in front of him and started licking Roy's hand. Roy took his other hand and started petting Oliver, soon Oliver was rolling over practically begging Roy to rub his belly. Roy obliged, and soon it was like old times. With their bellies full, the pups got playful, and ganged up on Francine. Anne watched with amusement until the pups ran out of steam, and got off their mom. Francine curled up in front of Anne and Anne gently started stroking her fur. The pups had an exciting day and decided to call it quits, so they laid down for a quick doggie nap. When it started to get dark, Anne got up and moved next to Roy, they shared a Mylar blanket between them and used their packs for pillows. The wolves curled up on either side of them, with Oliver next to Roy

and Francine curled up next to Anne. The pups were split equally between them, and soon they were all fast asleep. Roy knew he was safe, and quickly fell into a deep sleep.

When he awoke, it was morning, as soon as he stirred, Oliver and the pups on his side got up and out of his way. Roy walked over to a tree to take care of a very full bladder. Finally Anne woke up, and as soon as Francine and the pups were clear, she headed into the woods to take care of business. When everyone was finished watering the trees, Roy broke out the water filter, and refilled their water containers, then broke camp and put the fire out. Roy and Anne put on all their gear, then Roy remembered he'd forgotten to reload his 22/45, set his pack down, dug out the box of .22 shells, reloaded the magazine, and stuck it back in the butt of the gun and reholstered the gun. After he repacked the ammo in his bag, he shouldered the bag, grabbed the cart handles, and started off again toward the moose hollow. As he hiked further into the wilderness, he noticed the forest was changing from deciduous hardwoods and softwoods to conifers. He thought that they were either gaining altitude, or had just left a microclimate that supported the deciduous trees better than conifers. The conifers looked like original Old Growth forest, and Roy realized that no one had been this far in to log since it was over a day's travel from the cabin.

Roy knew his property went on for at least another 10 miles, because he wanted to make sure the caribou hunting grounds were well within his property to protect his hunting rights. If it were National Forest land, some bureaucrat might decide that he couldn't hunt there anymore, and he would have to move or starve. Towards the end of the day, they came to the area where the moose hung out. Roy set down the cart, and motioned to Anne to drop her backpack, and un-sling the rifle. Anne cranked a round into the chamber and made sure the safety was set. She thought it would be better to make all the noise they were going to make back here away from the moose hollow instead of near the herd. The wolves sensed that the moose were close too, and got real quiet and hunkered down to minimize their silhouette. Roy and Anne copied the wolves, and crouched down and moved slowly until they could see the clearing. There were a bunch of huge bulls and cows in the hollow. Roy whispered in Anne's ear to try and not shoot any moose in the mud pits, since it was a bear to haul them out. Most of the herd was further away today than last time, and Roy noticed the nearby hollows had dried out, but the ones on the far side of the clearing were full of mud and moose.

Anne selected 2 huge bulls - she figured one for them, and one for the wolves. She got into a good sitting position, rested the rifle on a large branch, put the crosshairs on a huge bull about 200 yards away - this would be a chip shot for her. Anne let the crosshairs settle on the neck of the bull, then zeroed in on the bull's spine, right where it joined the head, and as the sight picture steadied, she took off the safety, put her finger on the trigger, and gently squeezed the trigger. Roy was smart enough to put his fingers in his ears right before she shot, and as Anne pulled the trigger, a loud "BOOM" echoed around the valley. Anne saw the bull was down, and quickly reloaded to take the other bull. The other bull was just sitting there Fat Dumb and Happy when Anne's 180gr JSP 7.62 mm Sierra Boat Tail Bullet ruined his whole day. Anne saw that the 2<sup>nd</sup> bull was down too, moved the safety to the second position that locked the



trigger, but allowed her to cycle the bolt, extracted the shot round, put the spent rounds in her bag, and unloaded the rifle, then flipped the safety to the position that locked the entire rifle. Walking back to where she dropped her bag, she put them back on, and Roy picked up the cart. As they walked into the clearing, the rest of the herd spooked. Roy walked up to the first bull and saw its neck was broken. Roy was impressed, even at 200 yards, that was a pretty tough shot. He checked out the other bull, and noticed the bullet was in the exact same spot. Roy walked over to Anne.

“Remember when I called you Annie Oakley? Well, you’re a better shot than she was. By the way, which bull do you want to give the wolves?”

“It doesn’t really matter, they’re both over 1500 pounds. They’ll dress out to over 1000 pounds, plus the skins. Could you skin that moose so we can save the hide?”

“Good Idea, Anne. I’ll skin this one over here, and then I’ll let the wolves have at it while you skin and gut this other bull. Let me move the cart closer to you so you can put the meat on it.” Roy wheeled the cart near Anne’s moose, then walked over to the other moose, followed by the wolves. Roy took out his <skip>, and choking up, started skinning the moose. Since all he needed was the hide and the head, he was finished in over an hour, carried the hide to a waterhole, then picked up the head and carried it to the hide. Then he told Oliver “Go ahead - it’s all yours.” As the wolves feasted, Roy cracked the skull of the bull moose and started brain tanning the hide. When he finished, he rolled up the skin, put it on the cart, then washed his hands and walked over to help Anne. Anne had skinned and gutted the moose, and was starting to cut the meat into sections. Roy took the skin and the skull and carried it over to the waterhole, and cracked open the skull to brain tan the hide. About an hour later, he finished, washed his hands, rolled up the hide, and added it to the pile on the cart. Roy walked over to Anne, started picking up the cuts of meat as she butchered the carcass, and piled them on the cart.

Roy noticed the sun was getting low in the sky, and told Anne they had better prepare to camp here tonight. Anne told him to get set up while she finished butchering the moose. Roy walked back the way they had come to the edge of the clearing, found a nice patch of bare dirt, made a fire ring with the available flat rocks, and started gathering wood. He used his <skip> to chop the larger pieces into more manageable pieces, and to take some deadwood off some of the smaller trees. When he had a huge pile of wood, he took a smaller stick, and shaved it into a fuzz stick, then opened his fanny pack, extracted his MFS and striker, and a small piece of petroleum jelly saturated cotton, set it in the center of the fire ring, then took the striker, and threw a shower of sparks into the cotton, which ignited immediately. He held the fuzz stick over the flame until it caught, then set it over the cotton, and added several twigs, slowly building the fire. As the twigs caught, he added larger and larger wood a piece or two at a time until he had a nice fire going with about inch thick branches.

Roy sharpened two sticks to cook the moose meat on, and Anne brought over 2 of the choice

rib pieces. Roy threaded them onto the sticks, stuck the sticks in the ground at a 45 degree angle over the fire, and roasted the meat. Roy walked over to Anne, who had just finished butchering the moose, and helped her carry everything they wanted to the cart. Roy picked up the cart and wheeled it next to their camp, but moved it downwind of the fire. He knew the smoke would help keep any flies off the meat. While the meat roasted Roy and Anne took their canteens, and canteen cups out of the case, filled it with water, and set them next to the fire to heat up. When they were good and hot, they added a tea bag, and some sugar, and let it steep. Roy turned the meat, and let the other side cook. Roy was salivating over the smell of fresh roasted moose meat, and couldn't wait until it was done.

Anne was making plans for what she wanted to do with the meat, and asked Roy "I was thinking about what I wanted to do with all this meat. I really don't want to smoke all of it, I was figuring I'd can 1/2 of it, smoke 1/4 of it, and make the rest into sausage with the fat."

Roy told her, "That sounds good to me - I've never had moose sausage though."

"Boy are you in for a treat. Even the poorest cuts of moose make excellent sausage, and I have Ron's old recipe."

"Great Anne, I can't wait. I think we'll be OK tonight with the wolves chowing down 50 yards away. I don't think anything is going to come back here tonight." Roy checked the moose meat, and it was DONE. "OK, Anne - dinner's ready." Roy handed her a "mooscicle" as he called it - moose on a stick, and said a quick grace, then started eating the roast moose right off the stick. Anne had a little better manners, and used her knife to cut pieces off the stick. When they were finished, the tea was ready, and they sipped their tea as night fell. When the stars came out, Roy commented on how clear the night sky was. Anne said she remembered she couldn't see hardly any stars when she lived in Dallas, and she could see a whole bunch when she grew up in Alaska. Matter of fact, their old house was just over 50 miles west of Roy's cabin. Roy said he'd like to see it, and Anne said that it would have to wait, since they would have to fly there.

Suddenly, they heard a noise off to the side, in the dark area between them and the wolves. Roy immediately pulled his 22/45 and pointed it at the noise, but kept his finger off the trigger, since he never used the safety. A few seconds later, Roy recognized Oliver, but his face was covered with gore and blood. For a second, Roy panicked, then remembered that wolves were messy eaters, and didn't have knives and forks - they had to tear their meat off with their teeth. Oliver still looked like a mess, and then he licked his face, and it looked much better. As Oliver got near the fire, he could see that Oliver's belly was practically dragging on the ground. Oliver was one stuffed doggie. He sat down next to Roy with a groan, and didn't move. Roy reached over to pet Oliver, and he seemed to like it. A few minutes later Francine joined them, then the pups. They were all stuffed to the gills. As the fire died down, Roy and Anne wrapped up in a Mylar blanket, and the wolves snuggled up and they were soon fast asleep.

## Chapter 36 - The Long Walk Home

The next morning, Oliver, Francine and the pups were slow to get up. Francine's belly was so big she looked pregnant, and Oliver's belly was still dragging. Even the pups were so full they could barely walk. Roy was in a hurry to get home, so he grabbed Anne's Katadyn Voyager filter, filled both their Camelback bags as well as their canteens, stowed the gear, and asked Anne if she wanted anything for breakfast, handing her a piece of jerky, she took it, but held on to it for later. She was almost as stuffed as the wolves. Roy broke camp, made sure the fire was out, rigged the harness of the cart so he could pull the cart, took a compass bearing back to their other overnight camp, and set off. This time Anne helped him get the cart over the short hill. Roy was glad for the help since his left arm hurt from the effort. Finally, they got it over the hill. "It's all downhill from here" Roy said to himself, then remembered HE was the brakes on this cart. He exerted as much energy going down the hill as going up, but it didn't hurt as much. As the slope eased off, Roy had an easier time with the cart, and noticed the flora and fauna. Roy was curious and asked Anne about different plants. A lot of them looked nothing like the pictures in the book.

On the way down, they stopped at a berry patch, after making sure there were no bears around, but the berries weren't ripe yet. That explained why there were no bears. Good thing too, since Oliver and Francine were still barely able to move. One of the pups was moving so slow that Roy was tempted to put him on top of the cart if he didn't think the little pig would eat the meat. Roy noticed Anne was dragging it too, and decided not to push it. Towards dusk, they arrived at their campground, and everyone except Roy plopped on the ground like they wouldn't even move if a bear showed up. Roy figured that fishing was counterproductive since everyone else was stuffed, so he started a fire, and noticing the clouds for the first time, took one of his trash bags, and constructed a primitive lean-to that would keep the rain off. As it got dark, the rain started. Roy and Anne were warm and dry, but Oliver, Francine and the pups were left outside. They snuggled as close to Roy and Anne as they could, and even snuck under the Mylar blanket to try to stay warm and dry. The next morning, Roy and Anne awoke to find they were sharing a blanket with 4 wolf pups. One of them licked Anne in the face, as if to say "Good Morning, thanks for the blanket." Anne scratched the neck of the pup, and he licked her hand. Roy commented that Anne had made a friend. Anne commented that he was probably just a compulsive suck-up, and knew that brown-nosing his mom and dad had its benefits. The rain had finally stopped, and since they were in a hurry, Roy refilled their water while Anne broke camp, and repacked their trash bag. With a heave, Roy picked up the handles of the cart, and slid on the shoulder harness. Roy thought they should be to the cabin by noon. Since it was flat ground, they should be able to make better time. Just as he thought, they made the cabin by noon. The wolves were so pooped that they just stayed outside the cabin for the night. Anne decided that now would be a good time to use the outhouse. As she walked into it, Roy heard a blood-curdling scream. He ran to her aid just in time to see a muskrat casually stroll out of the outhouse. A few seconds later, Anne came out and explained that she was about to sit down when she felt something furry next to her ankle. Roy tried not to laugh, but failed miserably.

“Anne, you should have seen the look in your eye as you came out here - you looked like you’d seen a ghost instead of a harmless little muskrat.”

“Harmless - that little bugger almost gave me a heart attack.”

“That’s why I always lit a candle when I used it during the winter, so I could see before I sat.”

After Anne’s pulse returned to normal, they went back in the cabin. Roy started cutting the large cuts of moose meat into smaller pieces that would fit inside a quart mason jar. Anne got the canning gear good to go as Roy filled the jars with moose meat, and carried them over to the stove. Anne quickly wiped the rims, and set them in the rack, and set the sterilized lids onto the jars, then loosely screwed the lids down. Once the canner was full, Anne moved it to a hot spot on the stove, closed the lid, and let the steam build up. Once it had reached operating pressure, Anne started a timer. When the timer went off, Anne moved the canner to the cooler part of the stove, and slowly released the pressure. When the gauge read zero, Anne heard several satisfying pings as the lids sealed down against the vacuum. Once they were fully cool, Anne lifted the jars out using a jar lifter, and set them on the shelf. When she was finished, Roy had cut some of the moose meat into strips for jerky, but had left a lot of scraps, chucks, and other pieces of meat that weren’t suitable for jerky. Anne took them, put it all in a plastic mixing bowl, added ½ of the volume in moose fat, added some cure (a spice blend including sodium nitrite), and mixed thoroughly. Next she clamped the meat grinder to the work table near the stove, and started grinding the meat, which blended the seasonings as well as the meat and fat. While she did that, she rinsed some sausage casings, got out the casing stuffing nozzle, and thoroughly cleaned everything. She made 2 passes through with the grinder, then took off the grinding blades, and installed the casing stuffer, and threaded several feet of casing onto the nozzle. When she was ready, she fed the hopper, and turned the crank, while adding more meat to the hopper, slowly sausage emerged from the other end, filling the casing. She twisted the casing every 6 inches to form links, and when she was finished, threw them into a pot of boiling water for a few minutes, then hung them to dry. When they were fully dry, she asked Roy to come in, and hang the sausage in the smokehouse away from the direct flame. He took 6 feet of sausage in with him at a time, and filled the smokehouse with jerky and sausage, then he set a fire in the smokehouse, and closed the door. Anne reminded Roy that he needed to keep it hotter in there with the sausage, so he would need to check it before dinner. Roy carefully cleaned off the table so he could study, and hit the books again. Anne made mooseburgers for dinner, and right before they were ready to eat dinner, Roy checked the smokehouse, and added some wood to the fire. Anne served mooseburgers, freedom fries, and mixed vegetables for dinner. Roy said a quick grace, and devoured his dinner. Roy guessed all that work made him hungry. After dinner, they read their Bible, and then went to bed exhausted.

## Chapter 37 - Disaster

“Allakaket Control, this is PBY Flight 100”

“Go Ahead, Flight 100”

“Allakaket, We are declaring an In-Flight Emergency, We are experiencing Engine Failure and will attempt to land at Allakaket”

“Flight 100, Airspace is clear, just come straight in, Good Luck.”

“Flight 100, Roger. .... Mayday. Mayday May.....”

As soon as flight 100 had declared an Emergency, the Control Tower got all the fire equipment in town moving toward the airport. Bill was right in the middle of it. As he looked up, praying that his 2 friends would make it, one look told it all. The plane was in a near-vertical nosedive, and neither of the props were turning. The big Catalina crashed into the edge of the lake, and a few seconds later, a huge fireball mushroomed from the accident site.

“Oh, My God...NO.” was all Bill could yell. He knew no one could survive that crash. Jim ran up to Bill right after the crash.

“Bill, what happened, did they make it.”

“Jim, Steve and Pete are dead, their plane blew up on impact. They had a full load of Avgas and Diesel aboard. I heard them declare an emergency with both engines out, and as you know, a PBY loaded like that has the glide angle of a rock. Hopefully, I doubt if they survived the impact, let alone the fireball.

“Oh my God Bill - I knew both of those guys, and their families.”

“I know Jim, me too - can you help me with the radio. I need to call Anchorage and notify them of the crash, then I need to call their families.”

“Sure Bill - I’d like to be there when you call the families, since their wives both know me.”

Bill and Jim walked over to the tower, and got on the radio. First they called the FAA at Anchorage, and told them of the fatal crash. then they called the families. Afterward, the entire town met at the pub, to say the mood was somber was an understatement. Finally when he couldn’t stand the tension any more, Bill got up and addressed the crowd.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, by now I’m sure everyone in town has heard of the fatal crash of the PBY. I’d like anyone who is interested in attending a Memorial Service for the pilots to meet at the church tomorrow morning. Meanwhile, there are several issues of an emergency nature we need to address. I checked the fuel tanks just before we were to take delivery. The diesel tank has about 2,000 gallons left out of a 10,000 gallon tank that is supposed to last 6 months. We have about 3,000 gallons of Avgas left. I’m afraid we aren’t going to get any more until the FAA investigates this accident, and I know the people who supplied our fuels don’t own another PBY configured as a tanker. This could be all the fuel we have for the next 6 months at least. We’re going to have to suspend deliveries of Avgas, and save what’s left for Jim’s plane to service the homesteaders in outlying areas. Jim, I hate to tell you this, but all non-essential flights out of Allakaket are grounded until further notice. That means no more flying tourists to the hunting lodges unless you can fly safely round-trip from Anchorage with the fuel you can carry. This is going to be a hardship to the town, but I will join you in that hardship. I’m hereby putting all leases and rents in abeyance for people who are directly affected by the fuel shortage. That includes the inn, since I know they get 2/3 of their business from tourist traffic that unfortunately will stop. Jim, we need to tell the homesteaders they get 1 more flight each. We can either evacuate the ones that don’t want to remain over the winter, or fly in supplies to the ones that do. I’d highly recommend evacuating the hunting lodges, since they won’t be getting any business anyway. Some of them might want to stay, but make sure you tell them after their one flight, any flights better be for a major emergency until we get some more fuel.”

“Bill, what if I fly in a 500 gallon drop tank full of avgas and drop it in the lake.”

“Jim, I don’t think you could safely take off with that much weight, besides, 500 gallons is a drop in the bucket. When we refuel your plane, it takes almost 250 gallons of avgas. That 3,000 gallons of avgas will last about 6 trips, and even still you’ll need to have your tanks full every time you leave Anchorage.”

“Bill, I guess you’re right - Dang it, I hate it when you’re right.”

Despite some minor grumbling, the town pulled together for the emergency. People who had extra fuel stored gave it to their neighbors who were caught short. Since none of the other planes were flying without extra fuel, they could save it for winter to use in the snowmobiles to get around.

Jim took Bill aside, “Bill, you’re going to have to call the homesteaders today and give them the bad news, I know I was scheduled to make deliveries to several of them, and they might want to change their orders under the circumstances. I’ll have to work out the flights to save fuel, but I’m pretty sure I can give each homesteader a planeload of stuff, or about 500 pounds of cargo per trip. Anyone that wants to leave, I’ll pick up on the return trip when the plane is empty.”

“Thanks, Jim, I knew I could count on you.”

As the meeting broke up, Bill walked to his office and started calling homesteaders and giving them the bad news.

“This is the Mayor calling Roy and Anne - over” Bill repeated the call for about 5 minutes before Anne answered the call.

“Bill What’s up? We were listening to the radio when your call came in.”

“Anne, is Roy there?”

“Is everything OK?”

“Not really, I need to talk to both of you.”

“OK, I’ll get him.”

“Bill this is Roy, what’s going on.”

“Roy, we had a fatal crash today.”

”Oh My God, please tell me it wasn’t Jim.”

“No, it was the guys who deliver our fuel every 6 months. Their PBY Catalina developed engine trouble right before they got here - they tried to make the lake, and they crashed. The pilot and co-pilot were killed. Also, they were carrying 10,000 gallons of fuel for Allakaket. Since we are down to minimums, and won’t get any more for 6 months at least, I’m calling all the homesteaders and advising them they get about 500 pounds of supplies or we will evacuate them, it’s your choice.”

“Bill, can we get back to you? We need to take inventory around here and see what we need.”

“Almost forgot to tell you - there’s no fuel available for deliveries, so you have to get by on what you have.”

“Do you have any kerosene?”

“What we have in Allakaket is going to be strictly rationed, but maybe Jim can bring you some from Anchorage. It will be 2-3 times what you’re used to paying, and it’s heavy. Kerosene weighs almost 10 pounds per gallon by the time you add in the container.”

“Thanks for the info Bill, and please extend our condolences to the families of the pilots.”

“OK Roy, I’ll wait for you call back - but I need to know in a day or two.”

“Thanks, Bill, Over and Out.”

Roy and Anne just looked at each other for a while, finally Roy asked Anne what she wanted to do.

“Roy, I’d prefer to stay here with you if we can. This is a setback for us, but you survived without all those deliveries, and I’m sure we can.”

“What about the baby?”

“Roy, you know I can’t fly in another couple of months anyway, and the baby will be fine according to the OBGYN I talked to in Anchorage.”

“Weren’t you supposed to see her a couple more times?”

“Ordinarily, I should see her every 3 months, but she told me that as far as I had to travel to see her, it wasn’t worth the risk. She said I should be fine, that women had been giving birth thousands of years before there were doctors, or even midwives.”

“OK, Anne if you say so. We need to take inventory of everything we need. Also, we need to stock up on baby stuff - since it sounds like it could be a while.”

“I was going to go with disposable diapers, but with the emergency and all, we’d be better off with cloth diapers and a bunch of bleach. I’ll make a list of things I need, and you can inventory the supplies we need, then we can pare it down to the 500 pound limit.”

Roy got up, and went into the Kitchen, and was inventorying staples and canned goods. “Good thing we planted that garden” Roy thought “We won’t need as much canned vegetables as we would have otherwise.” Roy realized that he’d have to do without several categories of canned foods that were now luxuries, since he needed to save weight for baby stuff. Roy made a list of what they had in canned goods, then moved on to the staples. Then he inventoried their other supplies. They had 10 gallons of kerosene, and they went through maybe a gallon a month, even less now that they had the windows providing light during the day. “That should be enough” Roy thought. Next he went outside, inventoried the gasoline and oil. “Good thing Jim gave me that extra 5 gallon can last time.” Roy thought. He checked, and was thankful he had 4 full 5-gallon cans, and 1 partial can. Roy remembered it only took 1 gas can to build the room addition, so he knew that the chainsaw was easy on fuel. Next he checked the woodpile, and saw the logs laying there that needed to be sawn to length. Roy remembered he had a large bow saw that could make short work of those skinny 8 inch logs. He went inside, and checked for spare blades. He only had 1, and since they were light, he ordered 5 more, since he’d need them to cut wood and save gas for felling trees. He walked back outside, and checked the woodpiles. The back of the cabin was full, as well as the windbreak. The only place left to store wood was near his sawhorse between the house and the outhouse. He’d burn that wood last, since it was



the easiest to get to. Roy was grateful they were in as good a shape as they were. He went back inside to talk to Anne, who had just finished her list. Without a word, she handed her list to Roy, who read it:

- 4 dozen cloth diapers
- 2 dozen safety pins
- 3 5-pound containers of Shock-it (Concentrated Pool Bleach)
- 1 large 5-gallon bucket
- 50 pounds powdered laundry soap
- 10 pounds cornstarch baby powder
- Ointments and Moisturizers (Aloe Vera Gel and Destin) 1 case each
- 1 baby food mill
- 1 box baby clothes
- 5 cases of 1 qt. canning jars with lids
- Female Undergarments and “Girl Stuff”
- Boxers and socks for Roy
- 5-gallon bottle of Anti-bacterial soap
- Plastic 55-gallon trash bags
- Large diaper pail with tight-fitting lid.

Roy thought that Anne had thought of everything, so he didn’t need to add anything. Roy estimated the weight of what she ordered, added the weight of the staples they would need, and realized they had enough weight to add 5 gallons of kerosene. Roy decided to ask Anne about it.

“Anne, I figured out all the weight of stuff we would need, and we have at least 50 pounds left, I have 10 gallons of kerosene on hand, and we go through about a gallon per month. I was thinking we should order another 5 gallons if Jim can get it. I figured what you wanted weighed about 100-150 pounds, I think we could use about 300 pounds of staples, and that leaves 50-100 pounds. Is there anything you think I missed?”

“Roy, did you order any canned goods?”

“Not yet, most of the stuff I wanted to order was what I would call luxuries like Spaghetti-o’s and Corned Beef Hash. We’ve got 5 cases of vegetables still on the shelf, plus some other stuff.”

“Sounds like we’ve got the canned goods and foodstuffs covered, go ahead and order the kerosene, we might need it for the winter.”

Roy went to the radio, and called the list into the Mayor. Bill said they’d deliver the stuff next week as soon as they had everyone’s orders in. He told Roy that so far, most of the homesteaders were staying. When he finished, he signed off, and broke out the charger.

Roy cranked steadily for about 10 minutes, then disconnected the charger and put the radio up. Roy asked Anne how many empty canning jars they had left, and she told him 3 cases. Roy was trying to decide whether he should fill them up with vegetables or go hunting again. Finally, he asked Anne. Anne pointed out they had 5 additional cases coming on the next shipment, and the garden was about ready to be harvested. Roy thought “No time like the present” and asked Anne if she’d like to join him in harvesting the entire garden. Anne grabbed her fanny pack and shoulder holster, and Roy put his gear on, then they grabbed the gardening implements they would need to harvest the garden, threw them on the cart, and pushed it out to the garden. Roy and Anne picked all the carrots, onions, cabbage, and whatever was left in the garden from the last time.

Roy asked Anne, “Do you think it would be worth planting another bunch of seeds?”

“It’s a little late to be planting anything now.”

“OK, I’ll seed then entire garden with the nitrogen fixers and then we’re finished for the year.” He took out the packet of seeds, and quickly broadcast them throughout the garden. Roy didn’t have to be careful, he wanted the planting to be random, and he would turn the soil under right before the first snow to enrich the soil. When he finished, he watered the garden, and took all the vegetables back to the cabin. While he cleaned and chopped the vegetables into sizes that would fit into the canning jars, Anne got everything ready to can. When Roy was finished, Anne took the vegetables and dumped them into a stock pot of boiling water, then quickly scooped them into the cleaned and prepped canning jars. Once everything was in the canner, Anne put the lids on the cans, spun the rings down, and closed the canner. After the recommended processing time, she hit the pressure relief valve, and the lids “pinged” as they cooled and set up a vacuum. She lifted them out with the jar lifter and set them on the counter to finish cooling while she prepared another batch. When she finished later that afternoon, they had gone through 2 cases of jars. That gave them 5 cases full of vegetables to last the winter. Anne knew they would have enough to last the winter easily. When she had cleaned off the counter, she took some dried moose meat, added some leftover vegetables, and made moose stew for dinner.

Later that evening they ate moose stew for dinner, Anne read her Bible, and Roy studied his Medical Books. After a while they decided it was time for bed, got undressed, and Roy blew out the lantern.

## Chapter 38 - Evaluation

The next morning after Breakfast, Roy remembered to check their supply of Ammo. They had 200 rounds of .308 SPBT Match Ammo, 100 rounds of .44 Magnum JHP ammo, and 500 rounds of .22lr CCI Mini-mags. Roy picked up his list, thought for a second, and thought he'd call Bill and see if they could get another 1000 rds of .22lr ammo. He wanted to talk to Anne first, and went into the "kitchen" where she was cleaning up from breakfast. "Anne, I was reviewing our ammo situation, we have enough to make it through the winter, and most of next year if they can't get any more gas, but we only have 500 rounds of .22. I know that's enough for what we need, but that doesn't leave anything for recreational shooting. Would it be OK if I asked Bill to add 1000 rounds of .22lr to the list - it will only weigh 5 pounds."

"Roy, if we have 5 pounds available, instead of ammo - since we have enough, wouldn't it be a better idea to get some more baby stuff?"

"Like what dear?"

"More diapers, or talcum powder, maybe some zinc oxide, heck I don't know. I was planning on having unlimited access to stuff for the baby, now it looks like we are basically on our own."

"Anne, make a prioritized list of what you need for the baby, and the approximate weight of each item. I'll call Bill when you're ready and see if we are under our 500 pound limit."

Anne sat down, and added some items to her list, and estimated the weight of each item. When she was finished, Roy called Bill.

"Bill, it's Roy - do you have our weight total yet?"

"Hi Roy, nice to hear from you - let me get it."

"Roy, your order came up to 450 pounds. Would you like anything else?"

Roy looked at the list, and totaled 50 pounds off the list.

"Bill, hang on a sec, let me ask Anne something."

"Anne, Bill said we can order another 50 pounds. Do you want me to order the first 4 items as written, or do you want me to order the whole list and reduce quantities?"

"Go ahead and order the first 4 items, the rest of the list isn't critical. We already have

plenty of the last 4 items.”

“Bill, Anne said we need 2 dozen more cloth diapers, 1 more 5 pound box of Shock-it, another box of laundry soap, a couple of tubes of zinc oxide, and another case of Baby lotion. That should total 50 pounds.”

“How you set for coffee?”

I’ve got enough - barely.”

“I’ll add 5 pounds of coffee to that list, OK.”

“Thanks Bill, I’ll appreciate that this winter.”

“You guys take care, and you should see Jim in a couple of days.”

“Thanks Bill, see you later.”

“Anne, Bill said we should see Jim later this week, and he ordered all the items for us, and even threw in a 5 pound can of coffee.”

“Roy, that’s great - with the extra stuff we’ll be OK. I’ve never been in a Survival Situation, so I need all the help you can give me as far as prioritizing and organizing everything.”

“Anne, I wouldn’t worry about this situation. We’ve got a huge quantity of supplies as long as we don’t waste anything. The way you shoot - 200 rounds of .308 equals 200 moose or caribou - I doubt we will need that many animals in 20 years.

“Anne - I can’t believe I forgot this - Jim was supposed to be by before winter to blow out our pipes so they don’t freeze.”

Roy, I don’t think it’s as big of a deal - if we disconnect the pumps and take them indoors won’t the pipes drain naturally if the cabin is higher than the lake?”

“Anne, I don’t know what I’d do without you. I know what I’d like to do with you.” He started tickling her. Anne and Roy didn’t get any work done for the rest of the day.

**\*\*Two days later\*\***

Roy and Anne rolled out of bed, and Roy got dressed quickly because it was cold in the cabin. Anne got dressed before starting breakfast. Before either of them could do anything else, they heard the roar of a plane. By the time they got organized, Jim was taxiing the plane up to their front door, and shutting down the engine, he couldn’t waste any fuel. Roy

and Anne walked out to meet the plane. Jim handed Roy a manifest showing what was shipped, and told Roy to make sure it's all there, since he has a planeload of stuff, and he didn't pack it personally. They quickly unloaded their 500 pounds of supplies, and Roy checked it off the list, then Jim handed him another box. "Jim, we've got everything on the list, what's this?"

"Bill wanted to surprise you, don't worry I had more than enough room and weight left over. I got to go, so I'll shake your hand, and give Anne a hug. I hope the next time I see you, I'll be a grandpa. Take care Roy, and keep in touch."

"Jim, what are you going to do now that Allakaket doesn't have any fuel?"

"Don't worry about me - several other bush pilots have already offered to keep me busy until we get the fuel situation straightened out."

"OK, take care and I'll see you later." Roy gave Jim a handshake that quickly turned into a "mountain man" hug. Anne walked up, and no words were needed. Jim gave her a big hug, then told her "Take care mommy, hopefully the next time I see you, I can spoil my grandson. God Bless, and take care of Roy for me."

Anne was practically in tears when she said, "Don't worry Uncle Jim, we'll be fine - I've got Jim Bridger here to protect me." They both got a good laugh at that, then Jim got back in the plane, started the engine, turned around and taxied off, then took off as soon as he reached the end of the lake.

Roy wondered what Bill had given them, and as he set the box down on the table, he couldn't contain himself, and opened it. Inside was 5 pounds of Teriyaki seasoning powder, 5 pounds of Sugar, 5 pounds of Tea, and 5 pounds of Coffee. Roy walked over to the radio, and called Bill to thank him.

"Bill, thanks for the extra box - it will come in real handy."

"I kind of figured if you were on your own, you might want some teriyaki seasoning for all the jerky you will need to make. The sugar, tea and coffee were just to make sure you didn't run out. Make it last, I don't know when we'll get another load of fuel."

"Thanks Bill - I'll make sure I do that. Over and out."

Roy helped Anne pack all the supplies, then they did an inventory. They had 8 cases of 1qt canning jars with lids, 6 cases of commercial canned vegetables and other stuff, 5 cases of home canned vegetables, 3 cases of canned moose meat, as well as hundreds of pounds of flour, sugar, salt, lard, baking powder, various seasonings, coffee, canned milk, rice, instant potatoes, beans, and a gunny sack full of potatoes. Anne had a separate area she was storing "baby stuff" in, so he didn't inventory that. He took down his bow saw, and tied the 5 extra

blades to it with a piece of string. He picked up his axes, took them to the table, and sharpened and oiled them, then put them back up. He had a 5-gallon plastic pail full of non-hybrid seeds for next year, and the year after if necessary. He had a box full of wicks and parts for the lanterns. Over in the corner were 10 pieces of PVC pipe left over from his project, and a jar of PVC cement. Roy thought that might come in handy in case some of it was damaged this winter. Roy checked the jerky box, and it was almost full. He took some spare gallon Ziplocs, and sorted the jerky into fish, bear and moose jerky, then put it back in the box. Basically, they were set for the winter. Roy knew he would need a couple more moose or caribou before the winter set in, but even if he didn't, they wouldn't starve. Roy had a brilliant idea while he was standing there - if he could build a sheltered entryway out of the woodpiles, the door shouldn't get snowed in as badly. He walked over to ask Anne "Anne - last year, I almost got stuck in the cabin when the snow drifted the door closed. I had an idea that might prevent it. What if I were to build an alcove in front of the door out of our woodpiles that would shelter the door on both sides and above?"

"Wouldn't that just move the problem away from the cabin door - it would still drift in where the alcove ended. Besides, in order to have 6 feet of cover, the woodpile would have to be 18 feet long and 18 feet wide. I've got a better idea. When we were "snowed in" usually what happened was the door froze in place due to the warm air melting the snow and freezing between the door and the jam. What we did was use a thin saw blade to cut the ice away from the door, then all we had to do was push the door open against the weight of the snow."

"You're right Anne, I never thought of it, but that had to be what was happening. One time I had to cut the door free using my Bowie knife. A saw blade would be 1/3 as thick, so it would be much easier. Not only that, but if I used some heat, the ice would melt as well. Thanks Dear."

Roy remembered something, "Anne, we have 8 cases of jars and lids left, how many cases do we need to can a moose or caribou?"

"It takes between 1 and 2 cases of 50 quart jars to properly can a large moose or caribou, but if you make jerky and sausage, we can use 1 case per animal."

"We've got 5 cases of jars available. If we process 1 case per week, that will give us an additional 5 cases full of canned meat for the winter. We're done with the garden, and I can smoke and jerk any fish we catch, so we can add up to another 5 cases of meat."

"Great Roy, why don't we go hunting tomorrow, then once a week for the next 5 weeks to fill all the jars. That way - we'll have food to last the winter, spring, and into the summer next year. If for some reason you can't hunt next spring or summer, we don't have to worry about running out of food."

As soon as Anne said that, Roy took out their packs and inventoried their gear, sharpened their knives, and got ready to hunt at first light tomorrow. Anne made dinner as soon as it got dark, and they were in bed shortly after dinner so they could get up at first light.

## Chapter 39 - Hunting for Dinner

First thing the next morning, Anne and Roy got up and dressed. They checked the cabin to make sure the fires were out, and quickly donned their gear. Roy opened the door and grabbed the cart, and whistled for Oliver. When he turned around, Oliver and family were standing there like “What are you waiting for - we’re burning daylight.”

Roy thought to himself “Either that wolf is psychic, or the world’s biggest mooch.” When he walked around the front, he said “Guess who’s coming with us again?”

“Let me guess - the Big Bad Wolf and the 3 Little Pigs?”

“Actually, it’s The Big Bad Wolves and the 4 Little Pigs.”

“Roy, I don’t mind the company, but are you sure it’s OK to be feeding the wolves?”

“It’s not like we’re tourists in Yellowstone, Oliver is already habituated to humans, and Francine and the pups have adopted us as their surrogate Alpha pair. Besides, they are also hunting on their own, or they’d be starving - the pups are fully weaned now. I’m just helping them fatten up for the winter. I want all 4 pups to survive, so they have a better chance of having a successful litter next spring. Do you know how hard it is to establish a resident wolf pack in this area? I haven’t seen any signs of other wolves for miles around. Besides, a resident wolf pack will help keep the small rodent population down, since that is their main prey. Wolves rarely attack a moose or caribou unless they are trapped in snow and can’t escape. Basically, despite what some people say, a truly wild wolf population is no threat or competition to us. If we were raising sheep or cattle, that would be a different story, but since we’re Hunter/gatherers, they can safely co-exist with us.”

“Roy, you know what I love about you - I ask a simple question and get a Doctoral Dissertation.” {laughing}

“Well, you DID ask. Anyway, we need to get the show on the road.” Roy picked up the cart and made sure the straps were on it, then carried it around front. He didn’t bother with the compass since he knew his way by heart now. Roy led with the cart, Anne walked next to him with the rifle slung over her shoulder, and the wolves trotted along behind, pausing to investigate interesting sights and smells. With Oliver along, Roy felt comfortable setting a fast pace, and made their campground hours before dark. This time, he packed his tarp and both Mylar blankets since it was getting colder at night. This tarp was actually what was known as a “Sportsman’s blanket” and the inside was laminated with Mylar, and would keep him extra warm acting as a reflector for the fire. While Roy constructed a lean-to and a reflector fire, Anne caught several brook trout, enough for everyone, even the wolves. By the time she came back, Roy had the fire going, and the tarp set up. She quickly cleaned the



fish, threaded them on the sticks Roy had reserved for them, and fed the Wolves the extra fish and all the fish guts. When the fish was cooked, Roy and Anne ate what they wanted, and gave the scraps and bones to the wolves. When they were done eating, Anne quickly refilled the Camelbacks and their canteens with her Katadyn Voyager filter. When it got dark, they cuddled under the blankets and went to sleep.

The next morning, they were up at first light. After he took care of the call of nature, Roy checked the fire was out, took down the tarp, and quickly repacked everything. Anne tossed Roy a tube of Purell, and he washed his hands quickly, then handed Anne a piece of jerky for the trail. Roy walked over to the cart, and picking it up, got moving quickly in the direction of the moose hollow. Later that afternoon, they reached the hollow, and all the moose were gone. Roy hoped it was late enough in the season for the caribou to be in their spot. Anne looked a little alarmed, then realized that the moose should be moving to another area since it was fall already. They shared a look, and finally started laughing realizing how silly they were. Roy shrugged, picked up the cart, and pressed on. A couple of hours later, they walked into a stand of aspen, and Oliver alerted, so they knew the Caribou were back. Roy set down the cart as quietly as possible, while Anne unslung the rifle. Roy kept the wolves quiet while Anne cycled the bolt to chamber a live round and extended the bipod since there weren't any downed logs around to use as a rest. Anne and Roy crept forward until they had a clear view of the clearing. It was full of caribou. Anne and Roy quickly conferred, and decided to shoot 4 caribou now while they had a chance, and give one to the wolves. They would only cart the skin and meat back with them, and would camp here until they were ready to move again. Since Anne had 5 shots in the magazine, she was certain they could easily harvest 4 caribou since they were all within 200 yards of the edge of the clearing. They selected 4 of the biggest animals, making sure to not shoot obviously pregnant cows or the prime bull. When Anne was ready, Roy laid a tarp quietly on the ground, and Anne laid down, adjusted the bipod and her prone position so she was looking right at the first caribou they were going to shoot. She remembered it was easier to traverse left than right for a right-handed shooter, so put the scope on the right-most caribou they wanted. When she had her sight picture and was "in the zone" she quietly cleared the safety, and took aim on the neck of the first bull. As she steadied up, she held her breath, then squeezed the trigger. Roy remembered to stick his fingers in his ears just in time - the noise from the side of the muzzle brake was awesome. As the gun roared, one caribou dropped, and Anne was a blur of motion cycling the action and sighting on the next animal. 3 seconds later, all 4 caribou were on the ground. To say Roy was impressed was an understatement. It would take him that long just to shoot 2 caribou. Anne unloaded and safed the rifle, then went back for their stuff. As they walked into the clearing, the herd stampeded. Anne selected the caribou to give to the wolves, and Roy skinned it first. As soon as he skinned it, he removed the head so he could brain tan the skin, then gutted the animal and left it for the wolves. As soon as Roy left, the wolves descended on it, and were soon pigging out. Meanwhile, Anne had started on the first caribou, and Roy started on the other. They first skinned and gutted all 3 caribou to allow the meat to cool, then Roy took the skins to a nearby stream to clean them off, then cracked the skulls to brain tan the skins. While he

tanned the skins, Anne was well into quartering the first caribou, setting the good meat in a plastic trash bag to keep the flies off. Anne left the guts and edible meat they weren't taking in a pile for the wolves. She kept everything they could use, either to can, jerk or make sausage, but there were some parts of the caribou that were edible, but there was NO way she was eating them. When Roy finished brain tanning the hides, he rolled them up and placed them on the cart. Noticing it was getting dark, Roy found a suitable spot to camp for the night, upwind of the carcasses that were beginning to smell from all the blood and gore. He set up the Sportsman's blanket again as a tarp and reflector, built a reflector fire, and had it going as Anne finished the second Caribou. Roy decided to help her butcher the third caribou since Anne was visibly getting tired of the hard work. Roy quickly sectioned the meat, then started butchering it. Anne took a choice cut of meat over to the fire, and started broiling in on a stick. When he was finished, Roy put the meat in the same garbage bag that Anne used - it was full by now. Roy hoped the wolves were hungry - there was enough stuff laying around to feed several packs of wolves. Roy looked over, and Oliver and family had just about finished the first carcass, and were starting on the second one. Roy figured by tomorrow they would be so stuffed they couldn't move. Roy and Anne rolled into the blankets as it got full dark, and were soon fast asleep.

The next morning, Roy woke up, and looked around for Oliver and family. Oliver was as full as Roy had ever seen him, and even Francine had made a total pig of herself. The pups were so gorged that Roy was sure none of them would be able to move today.

When Anne awoke, Roy asked her if they should stay there today with the wolves, or make their own way home. Anne was sure they couldn't move today, and wasn't too sure about their being able to travel tomorrow. Since they didn't keep the whole carcass, they were fairly lightly loaded, and could easily make it to their campsite.

"Roy, I don't really know what to do, on one hand, if we stayed, we might have to spend 2 days here until the wolves could travel, and we could easily make it home in that period, on the other hand, it would be nice to have the wolves along for security."

"Anne, I think the wolves will be fine here by themselves, and the only thing we need to worry about on the way home is bears. We're just as much at risk with the wolves as without - except they might give us some warning - they're certainly in no condition to fight off a bear."

Roy walked over to Oliver and sat next to him. "Old friend, I don't know if you can understand what I'm saying, but if you can, I need your help. If we stay here for 2 days with you, all this meat we got may spoil. If we leave, we might leave you vulnerable to a Bear or other large predator. I don't know what to do." Roy stroked Oliver's fur, and all of a sudden, Oliver sat up and looked toward the Cabin, then looked like he was smiling. Roy felt deep within his Spirit that it would be OK to leave the wolves alone, and they would catch up when they could. He patted Oliver for a while longer, then turned and walked over

to Anne.

“I don’t know how I know; I just felt a sense of peace after talking to Oliver. I’m sure they will be OK, and will join us as soon as they can travel.”

“Roy, that was the weirdest thing, while you were petting Oliver, I was petting Francine, and I got the same feeling. They’re in their natural environment, and we need to get back to our house where we’re safe.”

“Well, that settles it.” Roy picked up their tarp, repacked their gear, and put on their backpacks, fanny packs, and shoulder holsters. When they were ready to go, Roy said goodbye to Oliver quickly, picked up the handles of the cart, and slipped into the shoulder straps, then turned around so he would be pulling the cart, and picked up the handles. As they walked away, Oliver and his family walked with them to the grove of Aspens, where they bedded down to digest their meal. Roy kept walking, but had tears in his eyes. He felt like he was deserting his best friend. Roy got over the feeling after they were out of sight, and he made good time over the flat ground after they crested the small hill. After they crested another small hill later that afternoon, they made their campground just before dark. Roy quickly made camp while Anne caught a couple of brook trout. He had a fire going by the time she came back, and they quickly cleaned the fish, then stuck them on sticks to roast over the fire. When they were finished eating, Roy said a quick prayer for Oliver and his family, then curled up with Anne under the Mylar blanket.

The next morning, when they awoke, they saw Oliver and family walking up the path to them. It seemed that laying were they were instead of forcing themselves to walk when full gave them the time to digest their huge meals, since they weren’t as bloated as yesterday. When they approached the camp, Oliver walked up to Roy, who hugged the stuffing out of him. Oliver must have thought that humans were strange, since he had just seen him the day before. With the reunion out of the way, they broke camp, and got on the trail home again. By nightfall, they were home, and the wolves continued on to their den.

Right after breakfast the next morning, Roy and Anne got busy canning and smoking the meat. By dinnertime, they had processed 2 cases of caribou, and Roy had smoked 1/3 of the meat while Anne was busy making sausage out of the less choice cuts and the fat. Roy hung the teriyaki flavored caribou meat and the sausage in the smokehouse while Anne finished cleaning up from canning. Roy felt like celebrating, so they opened 2 cans of Spaghetti-O’s and ate that for dinner. When Roy said grace that evening, he was especially thankful for the caribou and for Oliver and family’s safe return. Anne didn’t understand the tears in his eyes, but decided not to ask. After dinner, they read their Bibles before going to bed exhausted. The next morning after breakfast, Roy told Anne he was ready to take a week off from hunting. Anne said he could either resume his studies, or go fishing. Roy thought about it, and decided to study all morning, and go fishing in the afternoon for dinner, since the smokehouse was full. He told Anne what he thought, and she thought it was a wise decision.

Roy broke out the books, and quickly got to work. By the time the afternoon came around, he was ready for a break. They quickly donned their shoulder holsters and fanny packs, then Anne got the fishing gear, and they walked hand in hand to the lake. As they were walking north, Roy worried about running into a bear, but luckily they were elsewhere, or else word had gotten through the Bear Grapevine to stay away from that guy who did the bad Clint Eastwood impressions. Either way, they had a relaxing afternoon fishing, and called it quits when they had 2 large lake trout. They walked back to the cabin, where Anne cleaned the fish, then breaded and fried them. She made a pot of instant mashed potatoes and a can of vegetables. Roy said grace before dinner, and they ate dinner quietly. Roy paused and reflected between bites how his life had turned out. He had loved Susan, had two sons by her, and a happy life until she died. Then he spent almost a year on his own with only a wolf for company. Suddenly he remembered a famous quote. "Dog is the Mirror Image of the Name of God because he mirrors God's love to his creation." Roy couldn't hold back anymore, and started crying right in the middle of dinner. Alarmed, Anne walked over to Roy, held him and asked him, "What's Wrong?" Finally, when he stopped crying, he explained why he was crying, and started crying all over again. Roy had always loved dogs, but didn't always have a dog in his life. He related to Anne how he had several dogs through his life, and it was always right when he needed a friend, like the day his Dad died. And he found Oliver at the low point of his life, right when he needed a friend. It was as if God had sent a furry angel down to minister to him. Anne held Roy close, she never realized he was such a softie. He was a walking contradiction. He was as tough as a Grizzly Bear, but as gentle as a Lamb. Anne realized just how much she really loved Roy right then and there. She knew as long as he was around, she would be as safe and protected, and loved as deeply as Ron had loved and cared for her. She didn't have to be scared anymore, she knew Roy would rather stick a knife in his chest than break her heart. Anne quickly dissolved into tears right along side Roy. When they dried their eyes, they knew they had each found someone special. Roy helped Anne to quickly clean up after dinner, then instead of reading their bibles, they went to bed early and cuddled until they fell asleep.

## Chapter 40 - Chores

The next morning after Breakfast, Roy went outside to check things out. That's when he noticed the 8 logs sitting next to the sawhorse that needed to be cut into firewood lengths. Roy walked back into the cabin, told Anne what he was doing, and grabbed the bow saw and blades, then walked outside, set the first log in the sawhorse, and sawed it into 1 foot lengths so it would fit in the cook stove. It took him most of the morning and afternoon just to saw the wood, then he still needed to split it. Roy decided he might as well get it over with, and traded the bow saw for the splitting maul. Swinging that heavy maul after sawing all day was more work than he was used to - that gas powered saw was a real work saver, and now he realized how much work it saved him. By the time he was finished around dinnertime, he was exhausted. Anne came out to check on him, and made him drink a quart of water, which he drank quickly - the cold water tasted good. Anne went inside and poured another quart, which Roy also drank, all though not as quickly. Roy sat on a stump to catch his breath, and cool off. Half an hour later, Anne came out to tell him dinner was ready, and she helped him into the house. Roy walked back to the kitchen sink to wash his hands before dinner, then sat down to eat. He said a quick grace, and was glad Anne made a large dinner, because he was HUNGRY.. He ate seconds of everything, and drank another large glass of water. Roy got real sleepy after dinner, so they went to bed early.

Roy woke up the next morning stiff and sore, so Anne got him a glass of water and some Advil. After the Advil and a massage, he felt much better. Anne got up to make breakfast while Roy got dressed in his buckskins. After breakfast, Roy remembered he needed to rinse the caribou skins that had been drying on the smokehouse roof. Anne decided to go with him, and donned her gear, and grabbed the fishing tackle since they were going to the lake anyway. Roy donned his gear too, and grabbed the skins off the roof of the smokehouse and set them on the cart. When they were ready, Roy wheeled the cart to the lake to rinse the skins off, and clean them. He set the cleaned skins on his old drying rack, and lit a small fire to help them dry. They walked north to their fishing spot, keeping an eye out for bears. Roy was amazed that he hadn't seen any bears this fall - maybe the word really got out after all. Anne baited the hook, then cast out into the lake. Half an hour later, she had a nice lake trout on the stringer, then she cast again. It took longer this time, and the fish was smaller. Roy commented that the fish might be migrating to a more freeze resistant part of the lake for the winter. They both noticed how cold it was getting in the afternoon, and Roy told Anne that if they wanted any more Caribou they had better go tomorrow. Anne agreed, and they hurried back to the cabin since they weren't dressed for how cold it had gotten. Roy quickly retrieved the skins, rolled them up and stuck them on the cart. They walked briskly back to the cabin to keep warm. Roy unrolled the skins when he got back and set them on the roof of the smokehouse to dry. Roy checked inside the smokehouse, re-arranged the meat, and lit another fire. He closed the door, and walked into the cabin. Anne had gutted and filleted the fish by the time Roy got back inside. They decided to eat dinner early, so Anne took the freshly cleaned fish and breaded it to prepare it for frying. Roy went through

all their gear, and unpacked their heavier jackets. He didn't think they would need their parkas, but he did pack their medium weight waterproof hooded jackets, gloves, and warmer socks. He decided that they should wear their waterproof boots with their medium thickness wool socks. They had heavier socks and insulated pack boots for walking around in the snow, so Roy thought that they would be warm enough. Roy decided that he would have to relegate his Apache style caribou skin boots to indoor wear for the rest of the season. Roy cleaned and sharpened their knives, checked their ammo, reloaded the rifle, and put another box of .308 SPBT ammo in his backpack. Both .44 Magnums hadn't been shot, but Roy still inspected them and the 22/45 pistols thoroughly. When he was finished, he replaced them in the shoulder holsters right as Anne finished dinner. Roy washed his hands and set the table for dinner. Roy said grace, then they ate dinner. Roy was noticing he was hungry by the time dinner rolled around, and realized without all his "modern conveniences" he was working a lot harder. They went to bed early so they would be up and moving at daylight.

## Chapter 41 - Last Chance Hunt?

As soon as the sun was up, Roy and Anne were up and getting dressed. They quickly checked the cabin to make sure the fires were out, then donned their shoulder harnesses, fanny packs, and backpacks that Anne had filled with water the night before. Since it was cold out, they both were wearing their jackets, gloves, and boots with polypro liners and wool hiking socks. Roy had packed several spare pairs so they would have clean socks. Anne grabbed the Browning A-bolt, and checked that the magazine was full, and locked the action with the safety lever, then slung it over her shoulder. Roy walked out, grabbed the cart, and made sure the straps were on it. They were in a hurry, so he didn't bother whistling for Oliver. He rounded the cabin, and met up with Anne. She said "What no escort this time?"

"They might show up later - let's go, we're burning daylight."

Roy handed Anne a piece of Teriyaki Bear jerky. Anne was glad Roy had used the Teriyaki seasoning, or she might have decided to go hungry. As they walked along, they noticed the deciduous trees were starting to change color - They knew winter wasn't far away now. Roy walked at as rapid of a pace that Anne could safely maintain for the distance they had to go today. Roy wanted to be at his campground with a couple of hours left of daylight. By late afternoon, they arrived at the campground. Roy quickly set up their shelter, and made a fire while Anne caught a couple of fish. She was amazed the Brook trout were still hanging around this late in the season. Roy collected a large pile of wood, and had a roaring fire going by the time Anne got back. While she cleaned the fish, Roy made some improvements to their campground. He used another tarp as a groundsheet, planned on sleeping wrapped up in Mylar blankets again. Since Oliver wasn't there, he wanted to keep the fire going all night if possible. He realized it would die out while they slept, but any fire might keep predators away. Anne stuck the fish on sticks, and started broiling the fish. When they were done, Roy said a quick grace, and ate his fish. When they finished, they burned the remainder of the fish so they wouldn't leave any fishy scent to attract anything to their camp. Roy remembered the best way to avoid problems was to keep a clean camp, and just to make sure, he would sleep with his Anaconda next to him, and also his Surefire P3 flashlight. That had to be one of the brightest flashlights he had seen for its size. He didn't have a lot of batteries for it, so he just used it for emergencies, or to light targets at night, using the Harries Technique. When they were done eating, they rolled into their blankets, said "goodnight" and quickly fell to sleep.

The next morning, Roy was awake at first light. He quickly looked around, but didn't see anything. He woke Anne, then walked behind a large tree to take care of his full bladder. As soon as he was back, Anne picked another tree, and was back by the time Roy had packed up the tarps and put out the fire. She refilled their Camelbacks and canteens using the Katadyn Voyager, then tossed Roy the tube of Purell to wash his hands. When they had

both washed their hands, they donned all their gear and Roy handed Anne another piece of jerky, then picked up the cart, and headed off. They quickly reached the Moose Hollow, and it was deserted like last time. They pushed on, and by later that afternoon, were at the stand of Aspens that marked the edge of the Caribou's feeding grounds. Roy quietly dropped the cart and his backpack. Anne dropped her backpack next to Roy's, unslung the rifle, and released the safety. Since the chamber was empty, now was a good time to eliminate one source of noise. They crept up to where the edge of the stand was, and the clearing was full of Caribou. Anne and Roy had already decided to shoot 3 caribou, and skin and quarter them there. They would have to stay overnight, but it was an acceptable risk for all the meat they could carry in one trip if they did it that way. 3 Caribou would just about use up the rest of their canning jars.

Roy quietly unfolded the tarp, and Anne unfolded the bipod legs, then laid prone, got a good shooting position, and selecting 3 larger bulls, aimed at the one furthest to the right. She steadied her breathing, then cycled the action, got a good sight picture, then as the crosshairs settled on the neck of the first bull, gently squeezed the trigger. As soon as the gun went off, she was cycling the bolt and ready for her next shot. Before the smoke had cleared, 3 bulls were down and not moving. Anne put the safety back on, and Roy tried to get the ringing in his ears to stop. Seems he forgot to plug his ears. They walked back to their gear, and as they broke cover, the herd of Caribou stampeded again. Roy couldn't figure Caribou, whenever he shot deer, the entire herd was off to the races at the first shot. Maybe since this herd hadn't been hunted for years, they weren't too hunter savvy. They walked up to the three bulls, and Roy wasn't surprised to see they were all shot through the neck. Either Anne was a markswoman, sniper, or a show-off. Right now Roy didn't think it would be a good idea to ask since she was armed. Roy thought that having a wife that shot better than you was a novel way to avoid Divorce Court.

He started skinning and gutting the first bull as Anne started on the next. Since the wolves weren't with them, they could each skin and gut a bull without having to hurry so the wolves could eat. Once his bull was skinned and gutted, Roy started working on the skin, took it to the nearby stream to wash it off, then cracked the bull's skull to brain tan the hide. When he was finished, Anne was ready for him to brain tan the other hide, so Roy obliged. Anne had once admitted that Brain tanning was about the grossest thing she ever had to do. Roy didn't have too many problems with it, and told Anne it was like playing in the mud, expect for the smell. Anne gladly let Roy brain tan all the hides he wanted to. By the time he was finished, she had started skinning and gutting the third bull. A few minutes later, she handed him the hide, which he washed then cracked the skull. When he finished, Anne told him to go to the stream and clean up, he smelled. Roy washed up, and cleaned his knives, then went back to the first bull, and started butchering it. Anne had a trash bag to put the meat into, so Roy helped her fill it. They both finished their bulls about the same time, so Roy started on the third bull while Anne washed up, she was covered with blood and gore up to the elbows.



When she was finished, Roy asked her if she'd rather butcher the bull or set up camp. Anne told Roy he could set up camp and drag all the wood over to the fire ring. With that settled, Roy got up, walked over to their old fire ring, and set both their backpacks down. He spent the next hour gathering wood, and setting up the Sportsman's Blanket and the ground sheet. When he had a big enough pile of wood, he started a nice roaring fire. Anne finished butchering the bull, and selected a couple of choice cuts of meat to broil over the fire. While she skewered the meat, Roy wheeled the cart with the meat and skins downwind of their camp in the smoke plume of their fire to keep the bugs off, and diffuse the smell of the meat. He walked back over to where Anne was, took out their canteen cups, and made tea while the meat was cooking. When the meat was done, Roy said grace, then they both ate their meat. Anne said, "I wonder where Oliver and Francine are - they never missed a free meal?" Roy was wondering too, but thought that they were probably hunting as well, since the pups were old enough to hunt now, and told Anne what he thought. She agreed that they might be hunting themselves. When they finished dinner, Roy put up everything, and they rolled into their blankets and were fast asleep. Roy woke up several times that evening and thought he heard something, but it wasn't close enough to worry about, so he went back to sleep.

They broke camp at first light, and made it back to their overnight camp with daylight to spare. It was too late to try to make it home, so Roy decided to stay overnight. They scouted the area around them, and didn't see any bear tracks while Roy was gathering wood, so they knew it was relatively safe there. Anne caught several brook trout, but they were smaller than the ones that she had caught the other day. She had caught enough for the two of them, but there was no way she could have fed the wolves as well, so she was glad that she didn't have to. By the time she had cleaned the fish, Roy had the tarp and groundsheet up, and the fire going. He helped her skewer the fish, and they ate them as soon as they were done. Again, Roy burned the leftovers in the fire, then they turned in. Roy slept peacefully, and they woke at first light, took care of business, then quickly broke camp and headed home. 4 hours later, they saw their cabin. Anne was glad to be home, sleeping on the ground was not fun for a pregnant woman. Roy checked things out, and nothing had been disturbed, although there were some strangely familiar wolf tracks around. Roy thought "Well Oliver, you snooze, you loose." Roy pointed out the tracks, and Anne agreed they looked like Oliver's tracks.

Roy carried the meat into the cabin, and they put their stuff up. He went outside to unload the smokehouse, and bagged all the dried moose and caribou meat, then carried it back into the house and put it in his jerky box. He asked Anne what to do with the sausage, and Anne told him that it should be done by now, but they needed to hang, so they could leave them there until she thought of a way to hang them out of the way. Meanwhile, Anne got out her canning supplies, and got started while Roy started cutting up the caribou meat into quart-sized chunks. They had it down to a science by now, and by the time Anne had the canner ready to go, Roy had enough jars filled to do one batch, and was starting on the next. Anne canned the first batch and Roy kept cutting meat. With them both working, they quickly filled and canned all the jars they had left, with some meat left over. Anne set up her meat

grinder, and ground the caribou meat and fat into sausage, added the cure, then ground it again to mix it, then took the grinder attachment off, and put on the sausage tube, and took the remaining casings out of the water, threaded them onto the sausage maker, and kept the hopper fed with ground caribou meat as she turned the crank to make sausage. Every six inches, she twisted the casing to make a link, then when she had a dozen links, cut the casing, tied a knot, and dropped it into boiling water for a minute, then hung it to dry.

By the end of the day, Anne was pretty sure if she saw another Caribou it would be too soon. Roy was amazed at the amount of meat they got out of 3 caribou bulls. They had 3 cases of Caribou meat canned, and about 3 dozen sausage links, plus some meat Roy wanted to make jerky out of, but it was much less than he did before, since the “jerky box” was pretty full. Roy saw that Anne was Dog Tired, and volunteered to make dinner. By now, Anne was glad to take a break, and sat down. Roy opened 2 cans of Corned Beef Hash, and got the cast iron skillet hot, then cooked both cans. He took a cup of powdered eggs, added water to it, and mixed thoroughly. When the hash was done, Roy added the egg mixture to it, and cooked it thoroughly. When it was done, Roy got out two plates, and divided it up. He carried the plates to the table, and Anne looked at him kind of funny until he said, “I know Corned Beef Hash is usually Breakfast food, but I felt like making it for dinner.” Anne had no objections, she was too tired to care. Roy noticed the pregnancy was taking a lot out of her, and resolved to do more around the house from now on. Luckily, most of the heavy work was done since they were basically done hunting for the winter, and had plenty of food left. Roy said Grace, tasted his food, and decided it needed salt and pepper. Anne tasted hers, and agreed. Later, Roy cleaned up after them, and sat down to read for a while. Anne announced she was tired and going to bed, so he put his medical books up and joined her. After she got into bed, he blew the lantern out, and said goodnight. Anne slept like she hadn’t slept in a week in her nice comfortable bed.

## Chapter 42 - Decisions

Roy got up and made breakfast for Anne since she wasn't feeling too hot - Roy thought it might be morning sickness, but didn't want to ask. After breakfast, Roy was sitting around thinking when he had a brainstorm. "Anne, I've got over 20 gallons of gas left, and the only thing I can use it in is the chainsaw. I highly doubt we can store that much fuel over the winter, and I know you don't want gas in the house. Instead of chancing it going bad, I think I should use it to fell some more trees and saw them into usable lengths. I nearly killed myself the other day trying to saw that log into the right lengths. If I use half the fuel to fell and de-limb the trees, then the other half to cut them to length, I can make sure I have enough fuel to finish the job. I feel we have less than a month left before the snow flies. If you remember, once the snow starts around here, that's just about it for outdoor stuff. Speaking of which, we need to get set up for the winter here. I need to fill up all those water jugs we have, and set up the curtain for the commode, as well as string the clothesline so we can dry clothes inside. Is it OK with you if I stack wood indoors for the fireplace? Since the Jerky Box is gone, I can use the spot it occupied to stack split firewood for the fireplace."

"Roy, that's an excellent Idea - Just be extra careful with the chainsaw since they are using Jim's plane for emergencies only, and it's not based in Allakaket any more - that can add an hour to the trip here alone. I don't want another tree to fall on you. I'll help you with the indoor stuff, but it might take me a while in my condition (rubbing her swollen tummy)."

"Anne, I thought of something you can do - How do you like sewing?"

"Roy, please tell me you're not turning into a Male Chauvinist Pig."

"No Way Anne - I plan on letting you wear shoes at least." Roy ducked just in case, but Anne couldn't find anything to throw. "Seriously, we have 6 caribou skins, and if you don't mind sewing, you could make some buckskin clothes like I did last year. It would give you something to do, to take your mind off being uncomfortable."

"How do you know I'm uncomfortable?"

"I've never seen you fidget so much before, and I can tell that some things are getting difficult. I promise I'll help whenever you need me - after all, you're carrying our son."

"I guess it's kind of hard to hide. I didn't know that being pregnant was that big of a deal, but I can barely see my feet, and I'm pretty sure I don't want to see my ankles."

"Anne, you are so beautiful right now - you almost seem to glow. I remember when Susan was pregnant with our first son. She was a much smaller woman than you, and by the time she was due, she looked like she had a basketball under her maternity top, but her face

glowed.'

"Ok, Roy, that sounds like an idea. Since my shape is changing from week to week, I'll just make myself a long ankle length gown with a lace-up bodice so I can nurse. I can just use your existing buckskins as a pattern for your clothes, and cut to match."

"Anne, just make sure to leave a ½" on every seam edge, since caribou hides don't fold easily, you need to make a bigger seam."

"Anything else I need to know?"

"I'll tell you later, I used a thick piece of hide to push the needles through, but you probably have something better in your sewing kit." Roy gave Anne a kiss, and walked outside to check on things. He had plenty of room on the leeward side of the porch, he had to make sure to leave room to get to the outhouse, but between the room he had on the leeward side of the cabin, and the leeward side of the porch, he had enough room for a sizeable quantity of firewood. Roy had an idea, but first he had to check a few things out. He walked over to his gas cans, verified that he had over 20 gallons, plus the oil he needed to mix with it, and it all still smelled fresh. Roy walked back into the cabin, and took down the case with the chainsaw, and when he opened it, noticed the teeth were starting to get worn. "About Time" he thought - if he remembered correctly, this was the first time the teeth needed sharpening. The manufacturer had packed a sharpening kit which included a jig that mounted to the bar to set the filing angle, and a set of diamond encrusted hones. Roy was puzzled that they didn't just include a file, but it might have to do with the fact that this was the first time it needed sharpening. Roy took out the instructions, and started reading the sharpening instructions. The Diamond hones made sense when he read that the teeth were treated with Titanium Nitride to increase wear resistance. He knew from his knives that TiN was one of the hardest materials to sharpen. Roy hoped they didn't make the teeth out of D-2, or this could take a while. Luckily for Roy, chainsaw teeth were made out of a different metal, and after he got the hang of it, sharpening the saw didn't take as long as he thought.

When he finished, he told Anne he was going out to saw some wood, put on his fanny pack and safety gear, then slid on his shoulder holster. He realized that was overkill, but until the snow started falling and the bears were hibernating, he didn't want to be outside without a gun. Anne tried not to laugh at his appearance, then realized that Roy was dressed like he was going into a nuclear hot zone because he WAS a safety freak. That made Anne feel better, even if her belly hurt from all the giggling she was doing. Roy went outside, grabbed the dolly, the harness and the chains, and dragged them a ways away from the house to a stand of 8 inch Aspens that were the right size for firewood. He wanted to reserve the rest of the wood around his house for a windbreak and an emergency supply of wood. He realized that the longer they stayed here, the further he'd have to travel for firewood, and decided to leave the rest of the wood near the cabin alone. He was about 100 yards away from the house, which was close enough to drag 8 inch logs, so Roy was glad he didn't have to cut

down some “Old Timers”. He walked back to the cabin, picked up the saw, filled it full of gas/oil and carried it to the stand of trees. Since he had previously been felling trees in this area, the brush was already cleared out, so all Roy had to do was get ready, plan a sequence to drop the trees in, and go to work. He set the chainsaw on the ground, primed the carburetor, and pulled the starter cord. After a few pulls, the engine started, and Roy let it warm up while he checked his safety gear, then dropped his visor. Once he picked up the saw, he wasted no time felling all the trees in the stand. He ran out of gas and daylight about the same time, so he left the wood and the dollies where they were, and walked back to the cabin. Anne had dinner and a big hug ready when he walked in the door. Roy left the chainsaw on the porch to cool off, and was busy taking off his grimy gear when Anne practically tackled him as he walked through the door. “Anne, what gives?”

“Roy, I’m so glad to see you. I was worried about you all afternoon.”

“I was just in the next clearing, if you were worried, why didn’t you walk over to see me?”

“I didn’t want to get anywhere near that chainsaw - they scare me to death.”

“By any chance did you see the Texas Chainsaw Massacre when you were living in Dallas? Anne - that’s Hollywood. A chainsaw is actually safer than most power tools when used right.”

“Anyway, dinner’s ready, so wash up.”

Roy walked into the kitchen, and cleaned up as best as he could until after dinner, then joined Anne at the dinner table. Anne took the rare opportunity to say Grace. “Dear Lord, thanks for the food, and thanks for giving my husband back to me. - Amen.”

Throughout dinner, Roy had the feeling Anne wasn’t telling him everything. After dinner was cleared, he took the chance to really clean off the grime. The water in the sink was dirty enough to grow potatoes in. When he finished, Roy washed his clothes and hung them on the clothesline he set up in the second room. Anne was already lying in bed when he came back, so he blew out the lantern and climbed into bed next to her. The next thing he knew, Anne was holding on to him like a Python, and crying. Roy, being a man, didn’t have a clue what was going on, so he held onto Anne until she stopped crying. When she finally stopped crying, she told Roy what was wrong. “I’ve never been so scared in my life - I was imagining all kinds of things. The worst was that I was about to become a Young Widow with a fatherless son.”

Roy had an idea what was bothering Anne, and a solution, then he remembered that Women didn’t always want you to solve their problems, so he just held her. They continued cuddling until she fell asleep in his arms. Roy felt the baby stir, and he almost started crying. Eventually they both fell asleep.

## Chapter 43 - Making Firewood

The next morning Anne made Roy all his favorite foods for breakfast. When they were finished eating, Roy told her he still had to cut all that wood into firebox length, and it would be faster and safer if he used the chainsaw. He'd be right outside this time. Anne gave Roy a big hug and told him not to worry, she'd be fine. She had a dream last night and she saw Ron who told her that everything was going to be OK, and Roy was there to keep her safe and love her and protect her like Ron had. Roy looked at Anne kind of funny then realized she wasn't kidding. He thought he was the only one that got those kind of dreams. Anne gave Roy a kiss and told him she'd be all right from now on, and turned to clean up the dishes from breakfast. Roy could see the changes in Anne, and saw it was harder for her to move around. He picked up his plate and helped her do the dishes, then wrapped his arms around her waist and held her from behind. As they were holding each other, Roy felt the baby move with his hands. He reached down and kissed Anne's neck. He whispered into her ear "Anne I love you so much." gave her another kiss, and a playful pat. Then he picked up his safety gear, set it on the porch next to the saw, then grabbed his shoulder holster and fanny pack. Anne gave him a big glass of water. Remembering how dehydrated he got last time, he drank it down, and soon had to visit the outhouse. With that out of the way, he walked to where the logs were sitting, and rolled them 3 at a time onto the dolly, chained them into place, and shouldered the straps and dragged the logs back to the cabin. He made at least 5 more trips before he had all the wood stacked next to the cabin. He decided to get another glass of water, walked inside, told Anne he would be just outside the cabin for the rest of the afternoon, grabbed a drink of water, and walked back outside. He noticed Anne was working on the Caribou skins. He was glad she was doing something to take her mind off the discomfort of being pregnant. Roy walked outside and was just about ready to start cutting wood, when he looked up and saw Oliver staggering into the clearing, his shoulder and paw were torn up, and he looked like he was in a fight. Roy hoped the other guy got it worse than Oliver. Quickly he ducked back into the cabin, told Anne "Oliver's Hurt Bad - clear off the table and get the trauma kit." then he ran out and heedless of his own safety, scooped up Oliver and picked him up. Roy doubted Oliver was capable of attacking him, since it looked like he was bleeding from a shoulder wound, and his front paws were torn. Roy carried Oliver inside, and Anne had cleared the table off, lit their biggest lantern, and had the Trauma kit handy by the time Roy set Oliver gently on the table. Anne was worried that she couldn't save Oliver, but Roy pleaded "Anne - we have to try. He's saved my life more than once."

That shocked her out of her lethargy. She'd never worked on dogs before, but remembered stuff she'd picked up from Ron, who used to doctor their dogs. She took out a pack of Ringer's Lactate and an IV kit, and quickly located a vein in his foreleg and started an IV. Anne didn't want to try anything else, since she was sure that all the human solutions wouldn't work, or might kill him. As soon as she had the IV in, she taped it in place, then set it wide open to get the fluid into Oliver as fast as possible. She then stopped the bleeding

as best as possible. Most of the damage was surface cuts which she closed with sutures. Oliver's shoulder was a mess, and required almost 50 stitches to close. She figured Oliver weighed about 150 pounds, so cut the usual dose of Penicillin in half, and gave him a shot in his butt. When she had all the wounds closed, she bandaged the wounds with gauze and vet wrap. Anne never thought they would need to use the trauma kit on Oliver. Roy got on the radio, and called Allakaket. Luckily the MD on call had some experience in Veterinary Medicine, and suggested they switch to 10% Glucose in Normal Saline and keep the IV in until he was conscious, or they had administered 3 liters. They would need to keep him quiet while the stitches healed, and keep pushing the penicillin. He doubled the dosage, telling her it was OK to continue the Penicillin IM for a week if necessary. If Oliver was up and around and conscious, to discontinue the IM penicillin and give him the same dosage in tablet form tid or qid. They needed to push fluids to overcome dehydration due to blood loss, and to put him on a light diet. The doc asked if they had any rice, and Roy said Yes. The vet recommended a blend of meat and rice about a cup or two 3 times a day until Oliver was on his feet. He said that the stitches should come out in a week, but that was up to Oliver. Just keep him warm and quiet, and he should heal unless he lost too much blood.

Roy gently laid Oliver on the bearskin rug, and covered him with another skin. He grabbed his gear, put it on quickly, and grabbed the first aid kit.

"Roy Williams - Where are you going?"

"I've got to check and make sure Francine and the pups are OK. I'll be back as soon as possible. Keep an eye on Oliver for me, and please pray."

"Be careful Roy - don't get hurt."

"I'll be fine - I need to make sure Francine and the pups are OK, and I'll be right back."

With that, Roy was out the door, jogging toward the lake. When he got to the edge of the lake, he turned North then walked into the woods towards their den. When he got there, Francine was there with the pups, and everyone was OK. Evidently what had happened to Oliver happened away from the den. Roy stepped into the clearing and crouched down. "Moment of Truth" Roy thought. Francine made her way warily to Roy, then smelled Oliver's scent on him, and approached closer. Finally she sat down next to him. Roy didn't try to pet her, but instead looked into her eyes like he was trying to talk to her.

"Francine, Oliver's hurt bad - he's at our Cabin. We did all we could, but now he needs to rest. Take care of the pups, and I'll send Oliver back to you as soon as possible."

Francine picked up her paw and put it on Roy's leg - she'd never done that before. Roy hoped that meant she somehow understood. Then he remembered he left Anne all alone in the cabin, and turned around, and jogged all the way home.

“Francine and the pups are fine, I think Oliver ran into something away from the den.”

Anne walked quickly to his side and gave him a big hug. “Oliver is fine, he lost a lot of blood, but wolves are tough, and we got the bleeding stopped and replaced the fluid loss. I just started the second liter. I called the doc, and he said to save the Ringers and give him normal saline and 10% glucose, so I switched the IV when he finished the Ringers. Good thing we have six liters of Ringers.”

Roy broke down and cried - he had almost lost his best friend. Anne held onto him and cried too. Finally when they dried up, they noticed Oliver was regaining consciousness. He wasn't totally out of the woods, but it was a good sign. Anne removed the IV as soon as the second liter of 10% glucose solution was in, and bandaged the puncture site, since Oliver was waking up, and she didn't want him to pull his IV and cause more damage. Roy sat next to Oliver, petting and talking to him. Slowly Oliver woke up, and finally he opened his eyes and weakly licked Roy's hand. He started crying all over again, then went and got Oliver's water bowl and filled it full of water. Oliver was conscious enough to lap the water, then he went back to sleep. Roy laid right down next to him, and didn't move for the rest of the afternoon.



## Chapter 44 - Payback

The next morning, Oliver was conscious but too weak to move. Anne made a big pot of the dog chow the vet recommended, a mixture of meat and rice boiled together and served warm. Oliver drank a bowl of water and ate some food.

Roy could stand it no longer - Someone or Something had hurt his best friend - he was so mad that he could just about kill whatever was responsible with his bare hands. He had a pretty good idea it was a Bear, and if it were wounded, it was probably nearby, which meant it was a threat not only to them, but to Francine and the pups, who were almost defenseless without Oliver. Roy got up from where he had laid next to Oliver all night, and without a word, started strapping on his gear. He carried a day bag as well as his fanny pack. He left the rifle alone - he wanted to do this up close and personal. His need for revenge was burning inside him.

Anne caught him preparing and asked “Roy Williams, where are you going?” knowing full well from the murderous look in his eyes that scared her to her core that he was going out for revenge.

“Anne - whatever mauled Oliver is still out there. As long as it’s alive, it’s a threat to us and the wolves. A wounded bear won’t hunt - they become scavengers, and this place is loaded with food smells. Stay here and take care of Oliver. I’ll be back as soon as I can - it couldn’t have got far.”

Anne realized there was no talking Roy out of this - so instead she gave him a big hug and kiss “Make sure you come back Roy - we need you too.”

“Anne - I fully well plan on it - Right now I’m too mad to lose - If I catch up with that Bear, he’ll be lucky if I shoot him first before I skin him. It might take me a day or so to track it down, don’t worry until I’ve been gone at least 3 days. I’ll come home by dark on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day if I don’t find it - then again I’m pretty sure it’s real close judging by the damage done to Oliver this bear was hurt bad and won’t travel far.”

Roy gave Anne a last hug, and patted Oliver, then left. As soon as he got out the door, he headed to where he found Oliver and started looking for sign. Almost immediately he spotted a faint blood trail, he was pretty sure it was Oliver’s since it was dripping fairly slowly. There was just one droplet for every couple of feet. Roy followed the blood trail 10 feet, then stopped and did a 360 to look and listen for signs of trouble. He did this 5 times, then he came across a spot that he was pretty sure was the site of the fight, since all the brush was beaten down, and there were multiple blood marks. Finally, Roy got onto the Bear’s trail. Oliver definitely got the better of the fight - this bear was bleeding heavily, judging by the size of the blood trail left. Roy was very careful now, because he could come across

whatever animal caused the blood trail. A wounded animal was very dangerous. The blood trail led to a fallen tree. Thinking that the animal might be right on the other side of it, Roy circled around carefully to the left, with his .44 Magnum out and pointed in front of himself at low-ready. As he got around the side of the tree, he saw a large brown bear slumped up against it. Roy wasn't sure if it was alive or dead, so he picked up a rock to see if the bear would move if he hit it. The resulting roar of pain told him the bear was still alive, so taking careful aim, Roy eased the hammer back on his Colt Anaconda and centered the left eye of the bear in his sights. When his sight picture steadied, he squeezed the trigger, and the bear collapsed. Roy figured the bear was almost dead anyway, but just in case, he decided to shoot it, and put it out of its misery, besides if it got better, it might come after them again. He holstered his gun, and calmly walked back to the cabin. As soon as he opened the door, Anne practically tackled him in her happiness to see him again. Anne asked him what had happened.

"Oliver definitely got the better of that scrap, when I got to the bear, it was alive, but just barely. I shot it both to put it out of its misery, and to make sure it couldn't come back to hurt us. He's only about a quarter mile away, so I'm going to get the cart and drag the carcass over to Francine and the pups - I'm sure they could use the meat with Oliver out of commission."

"OK, Roy, just be careful."

Anne gave Roy another hug and a kiss, and Roy went to refill his camelback before heading out and grabbing the cart. When he got to the bear, he slung the strap around the carcass and hauled it aboard the cart using the winch. It was a very big bear. Roy was tired by the time he finished, but he had one more chore to do. He turned around, slung the straps around his shoulders, and picked up the cart handles. Good thing he had taken the time to balance the load, or he would have never lifted it. About an hour later, he came to Oliver's den. Francine and the pups were sitting there like they were expecting him. Francine alerted to the smell of the bear, but didn't get any more aggressive. Roy felt this was close enough, and dropped his burden on the ground, and taking his Bowie knife, slashed open the stomach of the bear from brisket to butt. Francine and the pups walked over and took care of the rest. Roy picked up his cart, and walked back to the cabin.

When he got inside, he could see Oliver was feeling better. He was still asleep, but woke up when he heard Roy come in. Roy laid down next to him, and petted Oliver for a while. He started talking to Oliver "Buddy, I got the bear that attacked you - he's now feeding the missus and your pups. They'll be OK until you get better, so rest easy friend."

Anne took Roy aside and said that she thought Oliver was healing remarkably well for all the damage, and might be OK to get up and move around within a week.

"Good thing I bagged that bear - they'll need the food. It will be a while until Oliver is fit to

hunt again.” Roy swore under his breath - the timing of Oliver’s injury couldn’t have been worse. His family needed lots of food to get fat for the lean winter. Anne was in no condition to go hunting anymore. Maybe he could bag a couple of caribou or something, but then he’d have to drag it all back by himself. Roy didn’t know WHAT to do.

“Anne, I need your help. The timing of Oliver’s injury couldn’t have been worse. They are going to need more meat to gain enough weight to make it through the winter. Oliver won’t be catching anything much bigger than a lazy bunny any time soon. I was thinking if I went hunting and bagged a couple of caribou, I could drag back the meatiest quarters back to the den, and they could feed on that and gain weight.”

“Roy what about us. I mean if something happened to you, when the food ran out, unless they could fly us out of here, we’d starve.”

“Anne, Francine and the pups can’t fly out of here - if they don’t get some food, they’ll starve. Oliver has saved my life and yours more than once. I owe it to him to try.”

“OK Roy, I can see your point, but please be CAREFUL - I don’t want to loose you.”

“Not to worry, from what Susan said, I’m going to be here a while. Anyway, it’s too late to go today, so I’ll get ready to go first thing tomorrow. All I’m going to do is skin and brain tan the hides, then quarter the carcass and haul it back to the den. That has to be much lighter than hauling the entire carcass.”

“I think you’re right, anyway, let’s eat dinner, I’m hungry.”

Anne had dinner ready, so she served it up, and Roy said Grace. He was almost in tears thanking God for sparing his friend, and providing for Francine and the pups. He asked that his hunt be successful, and that they all would survive the winter. Anne said “Amen” loud enough to wake Oliver, who looked around, and not seeing anything dangerous, went back to sleep. After dinner, Roy checked and packed his backpack and fanny pack for a week outdoors. He explained to Anne he shouldn’t be gone more than 4 or 5 days, but he wanted to be prepared. He packed enough jerky for a week, and his jacket since it was starting to get cold at night. Anne handed Roy a small nylon package.

“Anne, what’s this?”

“It’s my mummy bag - it’s good to 40 below - I know you don’t like tents, but this might keep you warmer than that space blanket. Besides, if you noticed, I’d sewn two loops onto the bottom of your daybag to carry it. I’ve got something else for you.” She handed him a box, and when he opened it, it was a set of “mountain man” clothes made out of caribou skin with the fur still on. Then she handed him a set of apache style lace-up boots with vibram soles.

“Anne - where did you get the soles?”

“I had these buried away in case you wanted another set of boots. You would never imagine how hard they are to hand sew. There are 2 more sets of soles in storage in case you wear these out - but next time, you can stitch them on.”

Roy hugged Anne hard enough for her to complain “Easy Dear - there’s not as much room here as there used to be.” Roy eased up immediately, and she held him for a long time. When he finished packing, they went to bed since he wanted to be up and going at first light.

## Chapter 45 Hunting

The next morning, Roy was up bright and early, Anne made him breakfast, then he sat down and petted Oliver, who was looking better, but still not up and around. Anne had his Caribou skin clothing out for him already, so he put on the shirt and pants, and they fit perfectly, and the seams were much straighter. He put the boots on, and while they were smug, they were a perfect fit. Roy thanked Anne, and said that she could make clothes for him anytime - she was much better with a needle and thread than he was. He got up and gave her a big kiss, then went to open the door because he heard a whine. When he opened the door, Francine and the pups were sitting there, so Roy let them in. Francine walked up to Oliver, and sat down in front of him, then licked his muzzle. Oliver gave her a lick behind her ear, and then the pups came around. Roy was amazed how gentle the normally boisterous pups were around Oliver, it was almost like they knew to be gentle around their dad. Roy picked up his gear, and was ready to leave when Francine and the pups got up to follow him. Anne said "I guess this means you're going to have an escort after all."

This changed Roy's plans - with the wolves following him, he wouldn't have to lug all that meat back. Thinking quickly, he asked Anne "Do we need any meat, and do you have any canning jars left?"

Anne waddled to the kitchen, and said "I've got a case of jars left, why?"

"What about if I shoot 2 caribou, let them eat 1 whole one there, and I bring back both the skins and the meat in quarters. We could fill up the jars, make sausage and I can jerk the rest."

"Sounds like a plan - hurry home dear." Roy gave Anne a big hug and a kiss, put his shoulder harness, backpack and fanny pack on, and picked up his rifle, slinging it over his shoulder, then walked outside and grabbed the cart. He whistled for Francine and the pups, which followed right along with him. He set a quick pace since he had an escort, and figured Francine and the pups would alert him to anything dangerous. This late in the season, most of the bears would be heading to their dens to sleep the winter away. Even so, better to be safe than sorry. He reached his first campground before dark without incident, and was amazed there were still some brook trout remaining in the stream. Taking out his mini fishing kit, he tried his luck at catching them. They must have been hungry, because they gobbled the bait as soon as it appeared in front of them. Soon he had 4 nice brook trout, and saving one for himself, gave Francine and the pups the other 3. When he had gutted the trout, he added the guts to their share, then made camp and broiled the fish over the fire on a stick. When he was finished, he made a comfortable bed out of boughs, and unrolled his mummy bag. He took his boots off and crawled into the mummy bag. He was as warm as he ever was, and it was cold outside - he could tell because his nose was cold. Francine and the pups snuggled close to stay warm. "I hope Anne doesn't mind wolf fur on her mummy

bag” thought Roy as he drifted off to sleep.

Roy was up at first light, and shook out the mummy bag, which was covered with dog hair, then put his boots on. Next he decided he needed to water a tree, and when he came back, he struck camp, put everything back in his pack where it belonged, then put on all his gear, grabbed the cart and shoved off. Francine and the pups, who were looking more like wolves every day, trotted alongside when they weren’t exploring the neighborhood. Roy was in a hurry, and didn’t have time to notice scenery this time, since he needed to bag two caribou today and skin them before dark. The moose hollow was deserted as he suspected, so he pushed on to the caribou field, making it right before noon. He put down the cart, dropped all his stuff, and crawled to the edge of the clearing.

The pickings were mighty slim, since all the cows and the dominant bulls had moved on. All that was left was several sub-dominant bulls who were maybe 2-5 years old. Roy picked the largest 2 of them, stuck his earplugs in his ears, and set up the bipod on his rifle. Lying prone behind it, he got into a good position, and glassed the bulls with the scope. He estimated the range at about 200 yards, and adjusted the scope down 8 clicks for the range. Then he cycled a round into the action, and released the safety. He steadied his breathing as best as possible, and squeezed the trigger right when it steadied on the bull’s neck/shoulder junction like Anne did. “Shit.” he muttered as he saw the bullet go sailing over the bull, but recovered quickly and chambered another round. “So much for sniper shots Roy - just do the job.” The next round nailed the bull right in the 10-ring of the heart/lung region, and the bull went down in a heap. Reloading before the herd could spook, he targeted the next bull and shot it in the same spot. He too fell in a heap. Roy unloaded the rifle and closed the action on an empty chamber, then went back to get his stuff. As he wheeled his cart into the clearing, the rest of the caribou fled.

Since both bulls were about the same size, he walked to the closest one, skinned it and cut the head off, then left the rest to the wolves. He walked the cart over to the other animal, and skinned and gutted it, then cut the head off and quartered it. He set the quarters of meat in a trash bag on the cart, and started brain tanning the skins. It was getting dark when he finished, so he moved over to the spot he made camp last time, and quickly made camp, setting up the tarp with the Mylar lining, and building a reflector fire. Roy wasn’t really hungry, so he drank some tea and ate jerky until he felt like it was time for bed. He could see the wolves chowing down until the light faded. Finally he got sleepy and took off his boots and climbed into the mummy bag. He woke up a couple of times during the night when he heard noises, but it was just the wolves enjoying their feast.

The next morning, the wolves were stuffed to the gills and in no position to move. He quickly packed his stuff and got ready to go. Roy knew they would be OK and would catch up after they digested their huge meal, so he got into the harness so he could pull the cart and picked it up. It was much lighter than when he had the bear on board, and he made good time back to his campground. There weren’t any fish around, so he ate some jerky for

dinner. He was glad that they were flavored with teriyaki; otherwise he was pretty sure he needed to get a lot hungrier before he would eat this jerky plain. He made a camp fire, and set up the tarp to reflect the heat of the fire, and unrolled the mummy bag. When he got tired, he took off his boots, and making sure his guns and flashlight were close at hand, climbed into the mummy bag. He slept soundly, and didn't hear anything at all.

He awoke at first light, put his boots on, watered a different tree this time, and packed his bag. Making sure the fire was out, he put his gear back on when he spotted Francine and the pups waddling down the trail towards him. They still looked like potbellied pigs, but at least their bellies weren't scraping the ground anymore. Since he didn't have too far to go today, he waited for them. Francine and the pups drank from the stream, then watered every tree in the neighborhood. When they were finished, Roy picked up the cart and started off, but moving slower than last time in deference to their porked-out bellies. Roy walked comfortably toward the cabin, with Francine and the pups waddling along behind. Shortly before dark, they arrived at the cabin. Roy set the cart down, and Anne met him outside.

Roy was worried until Anne said that Oliver was fine, she just didn't want to step on his tail when she gave him a big hug. Anne squeezed Roy as hard as she dared in her very pregnant condition, and gave him a big kiss. Roy kissed her back, then told her he needed to wash up, and walked in. Oliver was sitting up wagging his tail as Roy walked in. Roy walked over and wrapped his arms around Oliver's neck and gave him a big hug. "Oliver seems you've been feeling better. Me and the missus took the pups out hunting, hope you don't mind. They ate a whole caribou by themselves - they still look big enough to bust. Anyway, I'm glad your better, but you need to stay here for a few more days until the stitches come out." With that, he got up and washed off. Anne met him at the door "I don't know who's got the biggest belly around here - them or me."

"Anne - they're bellies are much bigger proportionally. I don't think your belly would drag on the ground if you got on your hands and knees."

"Maybe not, but I feel like I'd need a crane to get back up."

Roy took this opportunity to run his hands over her.

"Roy, not while the kids are awake."

Roy looked down and Oliver was giving them a funny doggie look, like "what are you two doing?"

Roy started laughing and said "OK, I'll wait until the kids are asleep." and gave Anne a big kiss and a pat. When he went back outside, Francine and the pups were sprawled out where they lay. Roy took the meat and hung it in the smokehouse for now - he'd bone and butcher it tomorrow. While Roy was taking care of the Caribou quarters, Anne made a simple

dinner, she didn't really feel like slaving over a hot stove tonight. Later that evening, Roy took a bath, and crawled into bed with Anne. Reaching over, he started tickling her, as she giggled, Roy said "Quiet, you'll wake the kids." They spent the rest of the night in each other's arms.



## Chapter 46 - Chores Again?

When Roy got up, Anne didn't seem to be feeling too good, so he made breakfast. He reconstituted some powdered scrambled eggs, and sautéed a can of Corned Beef hash. When it was cooked, he added the eggs, and stirred until it was thoroughly cooked. Meanwhile he had a pot of coffee percolating on the stove. He set the table, then served breakfast. By the time breakfast was ready, Anne was feeling better. When they finished eating, Roy prepared some food for Oliver, who was eating like a pig. When Oliver finished eating, Roy let him out to answer the call of the wild, but kept an eye on him. As soon as he was finished, Roy called him back in. Oliver walked back in and promptly plopped down on the bearskin rug. Roy called the Doc, and asked him about removing the sutures. He said he would get back to him about what to do, since it would be at least another couple of days, and he wanted to e-mail a veterinarian friend of his to find out what sedative to use, and how much.

Roy remembered that he had a smokehouse full of caribou quarters that he needed to de-bone and butcher, so he cleaned off the table, and Anne got out the canning equipment, and their remaining case of canning jars and lids. Roy cut the meat off the bones, and then cut it into sections small enough to fit in the canning jars while Anne boiled water and otherwise got ready for canning. Roy could see the difficulty she was having, and realized this would be the last time she could do any kind of heavy work for a long time. When he had all the meat cut and in jars, he helped Anne with canning the meat, and then he ground the leftovers into sausage, then stuffed the last of their sausage casings with the ground caribou. This process took most of the day, and when he was finished, Roy felt as tired as Anne looked. He heated up a couple of cans of Spaghetti-O's for dinner, and they went to bed shortly thereafter.

The next morning, Roy went to work on his woodpile, splitting wood he had previously cut, and stacking it in front of the cabin, leaving a route out the front door and to the outhouse. When he finished, he told Anne they needed to take the water pumps in soon, and he called the Mayor, who said they had at least a couple of more weeks of good weather before they were expecting any snow. The mayor told Roy to call the Doc, he had some info he requested. Roy switched frequencies, and the doc started talking to him, but he might as well have been speaking Greek. He put Anne on the radio, and she took notes, then said she would call him back. She looked through their med kit, and sure enough, there were several 20ml vials of injectable Diprivan (propofol). She called the doc back, and told her to inject 3-6mg/kg IM before she removed the sutures and Oliver would never feel a thing, and he'd wake up within a half hour. Anne was standing there with a funny look on her face, when Roy asked her what was wrong, she said, "I never ordered this stuff - Steve must have included it since it's a fast acting sedative and it wears off fast, and doesn't suppress respiration. It's the drug of choice for out-patient surgery. Best of all, it works on Humans and Animals."

“Great - so when are we going to remove Oliver’s stitches?”

“They’ve been in a week, they can come out any time now. Can you help me check his sutures, I want to make sure they aren’t infected before I take them out.” Anne looked Oliver’s sutures over, and they weren’t infected. She tugged experimentally on a couple of them, and the tissue was almost totally healed around them - she was amazed at how fast wolves healed.

She told Roy that the sutures really needed to come out now, before the skin closed in around them. She took out her suture removal kit, washed her hands, and had Roy do the same, then they both put on exam gloves.

“Roy, how much do you think Oliver weighs?”

“Before or after a meal?”

“Before - I need to know his weight so I can estimate the dosage. I’m going to go with the 3mg/kg dosage just in case we overestimate his weight.” Anne got out her calculator “Let’s see - 150 pounds divided by 2.2 equal 68 Kilograms - times 3 equals 204 mg. The concentration on this vial says 10mg/ml and it’s a 20ml vial - that’s 200mg - close enough.”

She noticed the confused look on Roy’s face, and stopped what she was doing “Roy, you need to know this. This is how you figure a dosage. The PDR or other source will give dosage in a form like milligrams per kilogram of weight, and you need to have the drug vial in front of you, and know the concentration of drug in the vial. In this case it is 10mg/ml. We estimated Oliver’s weight at 150 pounds, and you take that figure and divide by 2.2 to get kilograms, in this case 68 kilograms. Multiplying the low end of the dosage by the weight in kilograms since we only want to mildly sedate Oliver gives you a dosage of 204mg. The vial says the concentration of drug in the vial is 10mg/ml since the drug is in an injectable vehicle and not 100% drug. The vial contains 20ml. Multiply the concentration by the volume equals 200mg available in this vial. Since the recommended dosage was 204 mg, we simply give Oliver the entire vial. Since that is usually NOT the case, remember that ml=cc, and the syringe is marked in cc. Say the dosage was 100mg, instead of taking half the vial and maybe making a fatal error, divide the recommended dosage by the concentration and it will give you the cc’s, or in the example 10cc’s - got it.”

“Thanks Anne, I actually understood it, maybe later you could write that down and put it on a card with the drug vials.”

“Great idea Roy, sometimes it’s hard to remember that stuff under pressure. I’ll do it right after we remove Oliver’s stitches.”

Since Oliver was laying on his side already, Anne walked over to Oliver, shook the vial to

make sure the medicine was thoroughly mixed, inverted the vial, inserted the needle and pumped the vial full of air. When she was finished, she pulled the needle partly out, until it was just inside the liquid of the vial, released the tension on the plunger and the syringe filled itself due to the excess pressure in the vial. She drew out 10cc, bent over and slid the needle into Oliver's hind quarters. He didn't even growl he was so tired. Anne was glad, and started injecting the drug slowly, monitoring Oliver's level of consciousness, and talking to Roy all the while, explaining what she was doing. "The point of sedation is to relax the patient, and reduce the level of consciousness until the subject doesn't feel pain, but not to the point of unconsciousness or anesthesia. This drug also works in combination with Nitrous Oxide as an anesthetic. You give this drug in a divided dosage, and slowly. There, now I've got the first half in. Oliver seems to be resting comfortably, but I want his level of consciousness just a bit deeper so he doesn't bite us when we remove his stitches." Anne quickly reloaded the syringe with the remaining contents of the vial, and carefully expelled a drop of drug with the needle facing up to make sure there were no air bubbles. She didn't need to do that last time, since she never removed the needle from the vial between expelling the air in the syringe into the vial, and withdrawing the fluid. She approached Oliver, and relocated her injection site slightly then injected Oliver with the remainder of the drug. Oliver was thoroughly sedated by now, and Anne was sure it would be safe to remove his stitches. First she bent the needle against the table, and disposed of the used syringe into a red plastic sharps box they had in the other room.

Roy was holding the suture removal kit, and Anne tore the plastic covering off, removed the suture scissors and tweezers, and started cutting the knots of the sutures, then pulling the sutures out by the knots. She was glad they sedated Oliver, since some of the stitches were stuck, and she had to pull harder than she liked, but they all came out clean without any bleeding. An hour later, all the stitches were out, and Oliver was starting to regain consciousness. A couple of hours later, Oliver had fully regained consciousness, so Roy sat a bowl of water in front of him, and Oliver drank the whole bowl.

"Oliver should be OK to let out for good by tomorrow or the next day, let's keep a close eye on him for the next couple of hours, but I'm sure he's going to be ok."

Anne cleaned up the area around Oliver, and Roy made dinner, while cooking a batch of food for Oliver. Roy set the table, and when dinner was ready, plated it and served it. They said grace and ate quietly. After dinner, Oliver woke up enough for Roy to feed him, and Roy filled his bowl. 15 minutes later, it was empty again, so Roy refilled it, and gave him some fresh water. After dinner, Oliver sacked out again, and a couple of hours later, Roy and Anne joined him.

## Chapter 47 - Recovery

The next morning, Roy and Anne got dressed, and Roy went to check on Oliver. He was standing near the door, and Roy knew that he needed to go out. Roy let him out and watched him carefully. Oliver seemed to be a little stiff, but was moving OK and didn't seem to be in pain. Roy walked outside to use the outhouse, and remembering Anne's little adventure, shined a flashlight into the outhouse to make sure it wasn't previously occupied. When he was finished, he called Oliver, who trotted over to see him. Oliver sat down next to him, and proceeded to lick Roy's hand. Roy petted Oliver carefully, avoiding the areas that they had just removed the stitches from. Without thinking, Roy bent over and picked up a stick and threw it. Oliver sat there and watched it sail into the brush without so much as moving. Roy started laughing "Oh well, guess I forgot to teach you how to Fetch." Roy then opened the cabin door, and whistled for Oliver, who walked right in as if he owned the place, then plopped down on "his" bearskin rug. Meanwhile, Anne had made breakfast, and heated up some food for Oliver as well. Roy could tell that Oliver was feeling much better when he wolfed his breakfast in four big bites. Roy knew that Oliver needed to go back to Francine and the pups soon, besides, he was just about out of smoked dried fish. Roy didn't really care for it, but was glad he had it to feed Oliver during his convalescence. After breakfast, Roy reached a decision. "Anne, I think Oliver needs to go back to Francine and the pups - they need their Daddy."

"I think you're right Roy, make sure you put on your fanny pack and shoulder holster. Since he was wearing his Caribou skin clothes - with the hair on for extra warmth, he didn't need a jacket yet. Roy put on his shoulder holster and fanny pack, kissed Anne, and headed to the door. "Come On, Oliver - let's go."

Oliver got up, and headed toward the door when Roy opened it, and walked outside. Roy headed toward the lake, then turned north until he was near the den, then he sat down by the lake, and Oliver sat beside him. "Well Oliver, I have to let you go again. You need to be with Francine and your pups, as much as I love you and love having you around, I can't be selfish. I'll pray for you and your family every day. If I don't see you between now and Spring, Good Luck and Godspeed." Roy held Oliver around the collar for a while and cried - he was going to miss Oliver more than he realized. When he stopped crying, he let go of Oliver, and Oliver turned to lick Roy's face. He licked all the tears off his face, and then turned around and trotted to the clearing. Before he disappeared from sight, he turned his head and looked back at Roy, as if to say "So Long and Thanks for All the Fish." Then he was gone. Roy got up to go home, and didn't remember anything until he opened the door. As soon as he got inside, he gave Anne a big hug and broke down again. Realizing what was happening, Anne held onto him without asking any questions. Finally when he stopped sobbing, Anne said "I know Roy, I'll miss him too, but I know he'll be all right, and we'll see him next Spring."

## Chapter 48 - Spring has Sprung

The rest of the winter passed uneventfully, and Roy was remembering all that had happened. There were several blizzards, and he had to dig out more than once, but with the larger windbreaks, the snow didn't drift right up to the door as it had last year. Two weeks after returning Oliver to Francine and the pups, he had to take the water pumps out and store them in the cabin. He filled up every water container he had first, which amounted to almost 50 gallons of water. Anne was going to miss the hot and cold running water, but they would make do. Once it started snowing, Roy collected the snow he had to shovel into a large pot to melt near the fireplace, then he transferred the water to his plastic water jugs, and kept them filled. Anne took advantage of the porta-potty as she got more pregnant, and Roy dumped it every couple of days. Storms didn't sneak up on them anymore, since the mayor called as soon as the Weather Service predicted a major storm for their area, so he had plenty of warning to get ready. Anne spent most of the winter laying on the bed or finding another comfortable position to sit and read her Bible. Roy continued his medical studies, and finally understood the doctor when they talked. He told Roy that they should get him an EMT certificate to make it official. Since there wasn't any mail service, the point was moot.

While the lake was still frozen, the US military kicked loose a ski-equipped C-130 to bring in several fuel bladders full of Aviation gas and diesel for the community. This filled the tanks of the fuel depot, but they still restricted flights since there were no hunters or anyone moving around for the winter. When the lake melted, the Mayor decided it was OK to resume limited flights, and took orders from the homesteaders to restock their cabins. Roy and Anne took advantage of the situation to order a bunch of disposable diapers, and enough food to restock the pantry. Roy checked the pipes, and they hadn't frozen during the winter. Evidently there was enough of a slope to drain the pipes naturally. Roy reconnected the pumps to the pipes, and re-established water service to the garden and the cabin. Anne was grateful for hot water again, and immediately took a bath.

As her due date approached, Anne got more and more uncomfortable, and Roy wound up doing most of the household chores and whatever needed doing outside. Finally, Anne told Roy "It's Time, I think my water just broke."

Roy went into "Panic Mode" as most husbands do at this time, then Anne reminded him "Roy, this is my first delivery - it could take a while."

Anne started her deep breathing techniques as the contractions started. When they got 5 minutes apart, Roy stripped the bed, replaced the bottom sheet with a piece of Visqueen, and tucked the corners under. Anne stripped off her clothing and got into bed. Roy got out the delivery kit - actually it was already out, he just moved it within arm's reach, and started the delivery protocol of measuring Anne's dilation, timing the contractions, and listening to the fetal heartbeat to make sure the baby was OK. Remembering something one of the Village

Women had told him, he took a bottle of Olive Oil and spread it around her perineal area because she said it would prevent tearing the Perineum, making an episiotomy unnecessary. This seemed to help as Anne progressed to delivery, he couldn't see any signs of tearing.

With every contraction, Anne's cries of pain grew louder and louder. Roy knew the birth would be soon, since he could see the top of his son's head protruding from the birth canal. Roy placed his gloved hand there to support and provide gentle resistance to keep the head from being delivered too fast. Roy reminded Anne to pant during this phase of delivery, but she was doing fine all on her own. As his son's head was delivered, Roy remembered to support the head with both hands, and allow it to rotate naturally. Roy slipped his fingers around his son's neck to feel for the umbilical cord, but it wasn't in the way. He immediately suctioned his son's mouth and nose to clear his airway, then let Nature take its course. Roy spoke up to encourage Anne. "You're doing fine Anne, the head is delivered and I'm waiting for the shoulders. This should be over in a matter of minutes." Soon both shoulders were out, and then came the rest of his son. Roy took this time to thoroughly suction out his mouth and nose, keeping him in a slightly head-down position to encourage the lungs to drain. Once the cord stopped pulsing, Roy tied it off, and cut between the ties. He wrapped his son in a delivery blanket, then placed him on Anne's belly.

"Congratulations Anne - we have a Son. All 10 fingers and toes are there, and everything's OK. Just waiting on the delivery of the placenta, then we're done here."

As soon as it was apparent the Placenta was being delivered, Roy told Anne to "Push" to expel it. As it was delivered, Roy bagged it and set it aside, then cleaned Anne up.

Jr. was doing just fine, and after Roy was finished with Anne, applied some drops to his eyes, checked his respiration and color, and he was pinkening up nicely. He kept massaging Anne's belly to prevent uterine relaxation and excess bleeding. Roy picked up Junior and moved him closer to Anne's breast. He found her nipple all by himself, and was soon nursing vigorously. Roy covered the two of them with a light blanket to let them rest as they were both exhausted. He checked Anne's temperature every couple of hours, and checked Jr's pulse and respiration, and everyone seemed OK.

"Anne, we can't keep on calling our Son Junior - he needs a name."

"How about Ron?"

"Works for me - Ron Williams, welcome to the world."

Ron had his priorities straight and was busy with dinner. Roy got on the radio to give the Mayor the good news.

"Roy, congratulations to You and Anne, what's your son's name?"

“We decided to name him Ron. Ron Williams.”

“Great - I’ll tell Jim and everyone else. Let us know when they’re up to visitors. I’m sure Jim wants to see his new grandkid.”

“Bill, I’ll talk to you later, the 3 of us are pretty tired right now.”

Roy turned off the radio and sat down in the chair. “Imagine that - me a Dad again. Hope I do better with this one than the last 2.”

Roy bowed his head in prayer “Thank you Lord for giving me a Son, I’ll try to do my best to raise him right, but I’m going to need a lot of help. Take care of Anne too. Amen.”

By the time he got up, Anne was almost asleep with Ron still suckling intermittently, he was pretty tired too. Roy went into the kitchen, washed his hands, and made a can of Spaghetti-O’s for dinner, then ate at the table. Anne had rolled over to give Roy some room, so he got undressed and laid next to his wife and new son, then pulled a bearskin over himself and partly over Anne, then they all fell asleep.

## Chapter 49 - Diapers

The next morning, Roy remembered his son had spent the night with a naked butt. Fearing the worst, he got a pair of infant disposable diapers out, and uncovered Anne and Ron just enough to quickly diaper his son. Good thing, because 2 minutes later, his son filled his diapers with a foul smelling substance. "I knew there was something I forgot." Roy picked his son up, laid him on the improvised changing table, cleaned him up, and powdered his butt, then put him in clean diapers. Since it was cold in there, or at least cold enough that Roy felt he needed it, he dressed his son in his jammies. Roy realized that his son wasn't going to be in infant sizes long. He was a big kid. When he finished, he held his son for a while and talked to him. "Welcome to the world Son. I'll try to do a better job with you than I did with the last 2." Roy sat there entranced with his son, then noticed he was squirming and making sucking motions, and realized he wanted breakfast. He walked over to the bed, and laid his son right where he had picked him up from. His son found Anne's nipple quickly, and was soon suckling again. Anne moaned in her sleep, and moved to hold her son. Roy felt an intimacy with the 2 of them he had never felt before. The scene before him of mother and son was mesmerizing in its simplicity and timelessness. Roy just sat there for a minute, then realized he was standing there in the buff, and it was cold in there. Roy quickly got dressed in his buckskins, and went outside to use the outhouse. When he came back, his son was still nursing, so he covered them up again, at least enough to keep Anne comfortable, and went into the kitchen to make coffee. Breakfast would have to wait. When the coffee was done, he poured a mug, sat down with the steaming hot coffee and his Bible, and started reading. He must have fallen asleep in his chair, because the next thing he saw was Anne's face shaking his shoulder. "Roy, do you want breakfast?"

"What time is it?"

"Almost noon dear - did you put diapers on Ron?"

"I did that this morning, and 2 minutes later, he filled them with a big stinky load."

"Poor guy - not even a Daddy by 1 day, and you're already changing stinky diapers."

"Anne, let me make breakfast. You should take it easy."

"I was hoping you'd say that. I'm not too hungry, but I could go for Bacon, Eggs and Pancakes."

"Anne, I'd hate to see what you'd be like if you were hungry."

"Real funny Daddy, now go make breakfast."



Roy put his bible up, and noticed Anne was holding Ron in her arms, and she was dressed in her housecoat. Her son was still nursing.”

“I can see healthy appetites run in the family.”

“Good thing I’ve got two spigots, this little bugger’s almost drained the first one.”

“Another chowhound in the family.”

Roy got up and made breakfast, and when he was finished, sure enough, Anne had switched Ron over to her other breast. Roy set the table, and Anne ate breakfast while Ron got his breakfast. When she was finished eating (it took longer one handed) Anne commented she had better increase her water intake - good thing Roy had got the pumps hooked up last week. Roy brought her a big glass of water and Anne drank it right down. He poured her 3 more glasses, and she drank them all straight down. Finally, she started sipping glass #4, which meant she was almost full. When she finished the 4<sup>th</sup> glass, she handed Ron to Roy, and made a beeline for the outhouse. When she came back, they all got back into bed again, so she could nurse and be comfortable and warm. Roy had no problem with that, since he was still sleepy. Anne lay with her back to Roy, who wrapped his arms around her and Ron, and they were soon fast asleep.

## Chapter 50 - The Runt

Roy awoke the next morning to a scratching noise at the door. He opened it carefully, and Francine was sitting there with a pup held by the scruff of the neck. Roy could tell immediately that it was a runt by its size. Francine walked into the cabin, and deposited the pup on the bearskin rug where Oliver used to sleep, then turned around and walked to the door and sat down next to Roy. Roy was petting her when it dawned on him what Francine wanted. She didn't want her pup to die, and she didn't have enough milk to feed all of them, so she brought it over to Roy's cabin in the hopes that they could save it. Roy talked to Francine and told her not to worry - they'd take good care of her pup. Francine seemed to understand, and licked Roy's hand, then walked out of the cabin without looking back. She had to get back to her other pups. Roy immediately bundled up the pup to keep him warm, and put a hot water bottle next to him, then got on the radio to ask for help. Jim was with the mayor, and told him that he had hand-raised a litter of pups once, and it was the same idea. He gave him a basic puppy formula that would give him what he needed. Roy checked, and sure enough, the runt was a male pup. He couldn't keep calling him The Runt, so he asked Anne. She immediately suggested calling him Sam, since that was the name of a boy that used to pester her in kindergarten, and this would be payback of sorts. Roy went into the kitchen, and started some water boiling. Good thing they had those disposable infant bottles. When the water had cooled, he added a can of evaporated milk to 3 oz of water, and a tablespoon of fresh lard, and 2 tablespoons of dehydrated egg powder. He didn't have the yogurt, so he would have to think of something to replace it. He whisked the mixture thoroughly, and poured about 100 ml into a bottle, then poked several holes in the nipple until the mixture just dripped out when he inverted the bottle. He tested the warmth of the mixture against his skin, and it was warm but not hot. He walked into the living room, and lay down next to the pup, curled him up against his chest, and fed him the bottle. At first the pup sucked weakly, but he gradually gained strength, and soon finished the bottle. Roy refilled the hot water bottle, and tucked Sam back into the bearskin rug next to the water bottle. Sam would be as snug as a bug in a rug. He remembered that since Oliver slept there repeatedly that Sam would be very comfortable since his dad's scent was all over the rug.

Roy checked the pup in 3-4 hours, picked it up, carried it outside and took a piece of wet cotton and rubbed its butt. A few minutes later, Sam dropped a puppy pile, and peed. Roy carried Sam back into the cabin, laid him in the bearskin rug, and refilled the hot water bottle. Sam zonked out as soon as Roy added the water bottle. 3 hours later, he warmed some more formula and fed Sam again, then took him out to the same spot and Sam went on his own without any help. Roy felt like Anne had the easier job, all she had to do was lay there and let Ron nurse. 3 hours later, it was feeding time again - this could get to be a royal pain. Roy heated some formula, fed Sam who sucked the entire bottle down. Roy burped Sam, and when he was finished, they played for a few minutes. Sam was a beautiful pup, with black and white mixed fur, and deep blue eyes. He looked more like a Sled Dog than a wolf. Roy remembered reading somewhere that domestic dogs resembled wolf teenagers.

He could easily agree to that. Sam was more fun than Oliver, but tired easily. Roy put Sam back to bed with a fresh water bottle, and lay down on the bearskin next to Sam to get some sleep of his own. Luckily Anne was now feeling good enough to change Ron since Roy was dog tired. Anne thought the two of them lying next to each other was seriously cute. She hoped Sam didn't have any fleas, then remembered Alaska was too cold for fleas. Roy woke up when Sam started whining, so he made a fresh batch of formula and fed Sam another 100 ml of it. Roy thought that Sam and Ron were both a bunch of chowhounds. When he finished feeding Sam, he took him outside again, and Sam went right where he did last time. Roy praised Sam, and rubbed his fur, then picked him up and carried him back inside. He gave Sam a fresh hot water bottle, and Sam was soon fast asleep. Roy joined him again, and Anne was lying in bed nursing Ron.

When it got dark out, Roy decided to make dinner, but made Sam's formula first and fed him while dinner was cooking. He grabbed his flashlight to light the way for Sam's nightly excursion. Sam had the routine down cold, and was in a hurry to get back inside, since it was still cold outside. Roy put Sam down with a fresh hot water bottle, and finished dinner. Anne ate one handed while Ron nursed. After dinner, Roy cleaned up and Anne changed Ron's diaper, then they went to bed.

The next morning, Roy called Jim, and he did some checking, and suggested adding a teaspoon of Karo syrup to the mix. Roy had a quart in the pantry, so he added the syrup to the next batch. Sam seemed to be thriving on the formula. Jim said he had some liquid vitamins he'd bring up on the next trip. Roy asked him to bring a case of the next size larger disposable diapers, and a couple of cases of evaporated milk. Jim said he'd be there later that week. Sam loved the new formula, and was practically wolfing it down. Roy could almost see Sam getting bigger by the day, he was no longer a scrawny runt, he was a roly-poly puppy. Roy kept Sam entertained, and Sam snuggled up to Roy at naptime. Sam had definitely imprinted on Roy. Roy was glad, because if Sam were domesticated, he would be a playmate for Ron as he grew up, and a measure of security when he hunted. Roy called Jim back as soon as Sam went down for a doggie nap, and added a bunch of things to the list. It might be a while until they got re-supplied again, so he wanted to make the trip count. Sam woke up a couple of hours later, and guess what, he was hungry again. Roy felt like this would never end, and hoped wolf pups weaned early.

A couple of days later, Jim showed up, and the first thing he did was pick up Ron and hold him. Anne closed her top when she heard the plane, so everyone was decent. Jim held Ron for the longest time, and only handed him back to his mother when he started squalling. "That's one thing I love about being a Grandpa, I get to spoil them to death, and then hand them back to you." Jim checked out Sam next, and was impressed by his weight gain. He was gaining weight faster than if he'd been in the wild. He wouldn't be "the runt" much longer. Jim started unloading the plane. They had ordered so much stuff that it took a while. Anne made sure they stocked up on diapers and baby stuff. Anne was confused when Jim brought in a food mill. "Roy we already have one of those."

“I know, but I figured Ron wouldn’t like his food mill used for grinding fish. Sam can eat a puree of dried fish and fish oil in a few weeks, I checked. NO more bottle feeding 6 times a day. Glad I still have a bunch of dried fish left.” Jim walked in with a gallon of Cod Liver Oil, and he was glad to be rid of it. He wondered how long the plane would smell of fish. When Jim finished unloading the plane, he held Ron again for a while, then he had to get going, he had a bunch of deliveries to do.

When they unpacked everything, there was a note stating that Jim didn’t charge them a shipping fee since he wanted to see his grandkid anyway. The extra case of diapers was a gift as well. Roy counted, and sure enough, there was an extra case of diapers. Jim also delivered a 5 gallon container of old avgas and oil mixture they couldn’t use in the planes, and a 5 gallon galvanized bucket with a note to burn the diapers and scatter the ashes since the diapers didn’t decompose well. Roy thought that was a good idea, and moved the galvanized bucket to the trash pile, and stuck the plastic bags full of diapers in the burn bin. It was already full enough to burn, so he added a cup of the fuel mixture to the barrel, and tossed a lit match into the barrel after moving the fuel can to the other side of the cabin. The fuel mixture burned the trash very effectively and completely. The trash pile smelled better too.

Roy went back inside and fed Sam again. He was feeling much better, and sucked down an entire bottle of formula in a couple of minutes. After Roy took him outside, gave him a fresh hot water bottle, and he curled up and went to sleep.

## Chapter 51 - Through the Fire

Six months later, Roy was amazed they had survived the last 6 months. Ron and Sam were demanding, and needed to be fed regularly. Roy and Anne slept when they could. Finally, Ron started sleeping regularly, and Sam was weaned off the bottle, and now ate a stinky mixture of ground fish and cod liver oil alternating with the formula in a bowl. Ron had transformed from a helpless infant into a demanding baby. His cries said “I want it NOW.” and Anne got pretty good at “guess what’s wrong with the baby”. Sam was much easier to handle, except for a couple of mistakes house training him. Eventually Sam just stood next to the door and whined when he needed to go, and Roy took the hint. Sometimes Roy wondered who was training whom. Sam became a playful puppy, and Roy had to be careful of his teeth, which had grown in nicely. In another month or two, Sam could handle fresh meat, and that meant that Roy would have to go hunting or fishing. Roy would rather go fishing, since it was a lot closer, and their pantry was still well stocked with meat. They got a fresh shipment of staples when Jim came over to visit once a month. He said he wished he could come over more often, but Bill was still restricting flights since they didn’t have a reliable source of fuel yet, and were relying on the good graces of the US military to fly fuel in. In a real emergency a C-130 could LAPES in fuel bladders, but it was risky and expensive. Jim gave them a 5-gallon jug of waste fuel each month, and took the empty fuel can back with him. Roy was grateful since Ron’s diapers were now getting really stinky. Roy added Sam’s piles to the burn can before he burned it, and killed 2 birds with one stone. He made sure to leave a sample out so Sam could remember the spot.

Sam had outgrown his roly-poly puppy stage, and was looking more like a wolf every day. They played every day, and Jim brought Sam a present on one of his flights - a large piece of manila rope about 3 feet long with knots in each end so they could play “tug of war” or fetch. Roy enjoyed being able to play with Sam, since Oliver wasn’t the playing type. Sam and Ron also became fast friends. Anne was worried, but Roy knew that Sam had habituated to people, and had accepted them as his mom & dad, and Ron as his pack mate. When Sam was big enough to go on long walks, Roy took Sam fishing. Sam drank deeply from the lake, and took a doggy nap while Roy brought him dinner. 15 minutes later, Roy dropped a large lake trout in front of Sam. Eventually Sam tired of playing with his food and recognizing the smell, bit into the belly of the fish and ate it. When he was done eating, his little belly was so full that he didn’t want to walk home, so they lay there on the beach next to a blazing fire while Roy cooked his dinner. Sam really liked getting scratched behind the ears, and getting his belly rubbed. When Roy had finished eating, Sam felt better, and they walked home together. Sam still stuck close to Roy and hadn’t developed his adventurous streak yet.

Roy developed a pattern of feed Sam in the morning, burn the diapers and doggy pile, check the garden and water it, then take Sam fishing. When he got home, Anne had dinner waiting. Ron was now to the toddler stage, and he bumped into everything until he got over

the wobbles. Soon he was chasing Sam around the house. Sam liked his naps, but liked playing with Ron too. Eventually they both got worn out and wound up sleeping together on the bearskin rug. Anne tolerated it, she was worried about all the germs until Roy pointed out the obvious, that Sam probably had fewer germs than Ron did. Jim brought all the vaccines for Sam and Ron with him when they were needed, so she wasn't too concerned, except for one day Sam jumped up and put his paws on Ron's shoulders, and knocked Ron on his butt, then stood over him licking his face. Anne almost lost it, but Roy was watching the proceedings, and recognized it as common wolf behavior. The fact that he was licking Ron's face was actually a submissive gesture. Anne took Roy's word for it, but was still nervous with a WOLF so close to her son. Finally Roy took Anne aside and explained a few things. 1) There is less than 1/10 of 1% genetic difference between *Canis Lupus* and *Canis Familiaris*, and the Domestic Dog is really a wolf in sheep's clothing, and looks different from their ancestors only due to extensive in-breeding for selective traits. Matter of fact, you can out-breed certain medium to large breeds like German Shepherds to the point that they resemble wolves again. Domestic Dogs are actually a case of arrested development, and never mature beyond what would be the teenage stage of a wolf.

Anne was mollified but still not convinced. Still she trusted Roy's judgment. Sam and Ron continued to play together. As Ron got older and better able to walk and eventually run, Sam and Ron were inseparable. When Ron was old enough, Anne and Roy took Sam and Ron hunting with them. Roy bought a large 6-man tent to have enough room for the family to all sleep together. This of course included Sam, over Anne's objections until Roy pointed out that he slept better with Sam nearby and Ron practically curled up with Sam every night. Anne knew when she was beat, and relented. Anne hated it, but decided it was for Ron's own safety, so she attached a "kid leash" to the back of his overalls to keep him within 15 feet. She said that she felt like she had a dog on a leash, and Roy gave her "the look", so that was the end of the discussion. Anne made sure to protect Ron's ears when Roy was going to shoot, so he didn't associate guns with painful noises.

Sam was now an Adult dog, and had been reunited with Francine and Oliver, but preferred the company of Ron, besides Roy fed him a big fish every day. Sam grew to become very protective of his adopted family, and alerted Roy to several bears, which either made a hasty exit, or wound up as a bearskin rug. Sam had even learned to play "fetch". As Ron got older, Anne didn't need the leash anymore, since he had learned to stay within sight of his parents at all times. Anne was very grateful when Ron finally outgrew diapers. Ron and Anne decided that one kid was quite enough, and they concentrated all their energies on raising Ron. Anne bought all the educational books she needed, and started homeschooling Ron as soon as he was out of diapers. As a result, his standardized test scores were way ahead of his age group. By age 6 he could read and write. While it wasn't Shakespeare, it was really good for a 6 year old. Anne spent several hours each day teaching Ron everything she could. He absorbed information like a sponge. Roy and Anne taught Ron to love and respect nature, and taught him about the God that created it all. Ron was full of questions, which Roy and Anne answered to the best of their ability. It was soon obvious

that Ron would do better with a computer, so Roy bought a new laptop, and bought enough solar panels and deep cycle batteries to keep it running. Internet access was too expensive, so they decided to wait until later. They bought all kinds of educational software including the entire Encyclopedia Britannica on CD-ROM

Roy taught Ron all about living in the wilderness, and how to survive in the wilds. He debated telling Ron his story, and decided to wait until Ron was bigger. Grandpa Jim still came over once a month to spoil Ron rotten. He gave Ron his first knife, a Swiss Army knife - the Hiker model. Ron cherished it, and learned to use it properly. As he got older, Roy taught him how to use the emergency gear, and for his tenth birthday, gave him his very own fanny pack emergency kit. He was still too young to carry a gun, but Roy got him started with a Czech single-shot .22 target rifle. It seemed that Ron took after Anne's side of the family, and took to shooting like a duck to water. He was soon hitting empty soup cans at 100 yds with open sights.

By now, they had a resident wolf population, and Oliver was getting long in the tooth. One day he showed up at Roy's door, and Roy understood Oliver's time was up, and Oliver wanted to say goodbye to his best friend. Roy spent the rest of the day with Oliver by the lake, and the next morning when they got up, Oliver was lying by their door, dead. Roy grieved as though he had lost his best friend (he had) and carried his body to a shady spot near the cabin and dug a deep hole to bury his friend. The entire family went to the graveside when Roy buried Oliver. Roy read "The Rainbow Bridge" and everyone was crying. Ron and Sam only understood that Roy was sad. Anne did her best to comfort her husband, but she was pretty broken up too. The first generation of pups had spread out and established their own families, and the second and third generations were spreading out too. Sam's siblings stayed close to home, and the mournful howling of wolves that night sent chills up Roy's spine, almost like they were grieving for their father as well.

Francine followed her mate a few years later, and Roy buried her right beside her mate. He didn't grieve for her, but was sad to see her go. Sam recognized the body of his mother, and it took several days to get him back to normal.

For Ron's 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, Roy called his gunsmith, and he had another Ruger 22/45 with a suppressor in stock. Seems some Liberal East Coast City fathers had decided that suppressors were evil, and made their Animal Control officers get rid of them. The gunsmith picked them up for a song, rebuilt them, and sold most of them. He delivered the gun with a shoulder holster and 5,000 rounds of CCI Mini-Mag .22 ammo in time for Ron's birthday. Anne was OK with Ron having a suppressed pistol since they were in the middle of nowhere, and it was much cheaper to practice with a .22 and he didn't need to use hearing protection. Grandpa Jim flew up for Ron's 12<sup>th</sup> birthday party, and surprised him with a Kabar knife in a Sheathmechanic Kydex Sheath with a piggybacked pouch. The big surprise was when Ron opened the present from his parents. His eyes got as big as saucers, and he gave his Mom and Dad a big hug, then strapped on the shoulder holster. Roy adjusted it for

him, but admonished him not to wear guns in the house, so he left the 22/45 in the box. They carried it outside, and Ron brought a bunch of cans they were saving for this occasion, and set them from 20 feet to 25 yards off their back porch. Mom & Dad put on their holsters too, and as soon as they were ready, Ron carefully loaded all 4 of his magazines, pointed the gun downrange, and loaded the gun, then proceeded to go 10/10 at the soup cans that were 20 feet away. He reloaded with the other mag, and tried cans further out. Soon he was hitting cans 25 yards away regularly. When he had to reload, Mom got into the act, and went 8/10 at 25 yards. Finally Roy, the admitted pistol shooting champion of the family, went 10/10 at 25 yards. Even Jim gave it a try, and his ear to ear grin said it all. He'd have to see if he could get one too. One thing he did know, is every time he came up, he was going to bring another 5,000 rounds of CCI Mini-Mags.

Roy gave Jim the phone number of his gunsmith, and soon Jim had a suppressed 22/45 as well. They spent time shooting every time Jim made a trip up to the cabin. Since they had finally solved the fuel delivery problem (smaller planes and more frequent deliveries) Jim was able to come up to their cabin at least once a month. Ron continued to grow up, and Sam was getting noticeably older. One day Ron asked his Dad "Is Sam going to die?"

"Ron, everything dies, but the good news is when we die, we go to be with Jesus in Heaven. I believe that when we get there, we will be reunited with everyone we love. I'm sure Oliver is there waiting for me. Remember "The Rainbow Bridge" I read at Oliver's funeral?"

"Dad, I don't want Sam to go - I'll miss him."

"I know son, I still miss Oliver. But just remember, it's not "goodbye" it's "See You Later." OK, Ron."

Ron was trying not to cry, and Roy decided his son needed a big hug. Father and son wound up crying together. When they were finished Roy told his son "Don't ever be afraid to cry. There are some times it's not a good idea, but when things really hurt, just let it out. It takes a real man to be able to cry unashamedly."



## Chapter 52 - First Caribou

That fall, Ron was old enough to go hunting with Roy, so Anne spent that summer teaching Ron marksmanship with her Browning A-Bolt BOSS .308 rifle. By the end of the summer, Ron could out-shoot his Dad, and was fast approaching his Mom. He just needed more experience in range estimation and figuring the wind. Anything within 300 yards was in big trouble. Roy explained to Ron why they needed to hunt, and you never hunted for a “trophy” only when you had to eat, and then you used every part of the animal you could. That was the way the Indians did things. He didn’t agree with everything the Indians did, but using every part of the animal made sense since you didn’t waste a valuable animal. Ron was looking forward to shooting his first Caribou, since it was considered a rite of passage in Alaska. Roy had decided that Ron was old and mature enough to have his own set of knives. While he liked his Mom’s skinner, he agreed that if you could only have 2 knives, then the <skip> combo made sense, since you didn’t need to carry a separate hatchet. Roy contacted his knife maker, and 3 months later, Ron had his very own knives just like his Dad’s. When he got them, Roy sat Ron down and told him how he had used his knives just like Ron’s to survive that year when he was stranded. When he realized who Ron was, he wanted to run up and give his Mom a big hug, but first he wanted to visit Ron’s grave, so they packed up their kits and started walking toward the lake. Roy kept a wary eye out for bears, Ron didn’t have a .44 Magnum yet because he was too small to handle the recoil. It was still early in the season, and Sam was with them, so he wasn’t too worried. Roy hoped that Sam would last for one last hunt, because Ron and Sam had gotten really close in the last couple of years. It really wasn’t fair, just as they got old enough to really enjoy each other, the canine part of the team grew old and died.

When they reached Ron’s gravesite, Roy explained how Ron was a really well-known bush pilot, probably one of the best in the area. He got lost in the clouds, hit an air pocket and never recovered. About a week after Roy pulled himself out of the wreckage, he found Ron’s body and buried it there. He told Ron how he used the knife and <skip> to survive until he found the black powder rifle. He told his son how he fought off a bear with just a black powder rifle, and the knives. Ron looked at his dad in a different light - he was just like the mountain men he read about in his books. Then he noticed for the first time his dad was wearing buckskins, well technically Caribou skins, but it was the same idea. When he shot his caribou, he wondered if his Mom would make him a set of buckskins out of the skin. Ron asked his Dad, who told him that if there were enough hide left, depending on how good a job Ron did skinning and tanning the hide, they’d see. Ron now knew the ball was totally in his court, if he wanted a set of buckskins, he’d have to shoot an animal that was large enough, and he’d have to put the bullet in a spot that wouldn’t ruin the hide, and he’d have to be careful skinning and tanning it, just like his dad had to do to survive. He understood this was a test, but also a learning experience. He knew his Dad couldn’t realistically put him in a life and death survival situation, but he could let him experience the pressures. Ron looked at the grave of his namesake without any significant feelings, then

turned around to leave. Roy stayed for a while, remembering all that had happened to him over the years. He was definitely getting older, and was facing Eternity. He hoped he had the time to pass on his knowledge and experience to his son, but was OK if God decided to take him before then.

They walked back to the cabin, and Roy decided to turn it into a learning experience for Ron, asking him which plants around him were good to eat, and which weren't, and how he would build stuff with only the tools on him right now. That one stopped Ron right in his tracks. He realized he hadn't spent enough time studying Primitive construction techniques. He told Roy that he hadn't seen anything about that. Roy realized it was time they got Internet access for Ron. Satellite DSL connections were expensive, but he had the money to burn now. His investments had paid off, and Anne's savings had matured and virtually doubled since they had been married. They lived off the interest for years without touching the principal, and reinvested all the returns they didn't spend on their simple lifestyle. When he got back to the cabin, he was going to call Bill and have him set it up.

A couple of weeks later, Jim and Bill flew up to their cabin to install the Satellite DSL connection. They drove a pole into the ground, and using the instructions, set the azimuth and elevation of the dish, then connected the dish to the satellite receiver, and the receiver to the laptop. Ron loaded the software, and was soon surfing the Internet. One of the first things he did was a Google search for "Primitive Survival" and got pages and pages of websites. He visited each, and bookmarked the ones he liked. He ran across a funny site called the Frugal Squirrel - he thought the Squirrel "Nutz" looked funny. Anne didn't approve, but didn't say anything. At least he wasn't looking at Playboy. He found the Plainsman's Cabin, and several other websites. Then he located several sites about flintknapping, and how to make clay pots, soap, bow and arrow, and primitive gunpowder. He asked his dad about those sites, and Roy told him before he left, he spent over a year surfing the internet to update all his knowledge from his days as a Boy Scout.

He showed Ron the site on Blackpowder Rifles that had all the information on his .54 caliber Hawkins rifle. Ron asked if he could shoot it, and Roy had to explain that the recoil was almost twice as severe as the BOSS .308 since there was no muzzle brake. Ron's eyes got as big as saucers - he thought the .308 was bad. Then remembering was his mom told him "Recoil is Relative" - meaning that in the heat of the moment you might not feel the recoil, but your shoulder would remind you later. He liked shooting the .308 and hitting targets out to 400 yards. He still couldn't figure out how his mom shot groups half the size of his - She was OLD. Then he thought that maybe being experienced had something to do with it, after all she had been shooting for almost 30 years now. His dad was no slouch, but couldn't compete at 400 yards. Anne explained that men have too much fast twitch muscle and not enough slow twitch, which makes them jittery, but better pistol shots since speed is a priority in pistol shooting. It wasn't who shot first, it was who shot first with a lethal round, even though a disabling round could end a fight. Ron liked shooting his .22 pistol, and couldn't wait to shoot the cannons his mom and dad had. His mom explained that he needed to be

much bigger and stronger, especially upper body strength to be able to safely shoot a .44 Magnum. He had started volunteering to help his dad haul and split wood to build upper body strength. He figured by his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday he might be able to do it. Roy was glad for the help, he was getting older and didn't have the stamina he once had. He'd celebrated his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday a few years back. He felt weird being a senior citizen with a teenage son. Ron helped his dad more and more with the chores as his dad slowed down. Ron understood on a primal level that his dad was getting older, but didn't want to think about it too much - he was having too much fun with him as a fishing buddy. Old Sam was really starting to slow down, he wasn't a puppy any more, and his muzzle was turning white.

Finally, hunting season arrived. Anne put in a big order for canning jars, and Teriyaki seasoning a few weeks before. The entire family went hunting this time, as they had done the last couple of years, except Anne and Roy were now sleeping on air mattresses. Ron pushed the cart since he was in the best condition. His dad would help him get it home, since it was still too heavy with 3 caribou on it for him to pull by himself. Ron had the rifle slung over his shoulder. Anne and Roy carried their shoulder holsters, and Anne carried the other rifle, since they wanted Roy to have his hands free in case they met up with a bear. Sam walked beside them. He used to trot, now he just walked like he was tired. When they reached their first campsite, Sam plopped down and didn't move. Ron and Roy set up the tent, then caught dinner in the stream. Anne gave Sam a big bowl of water, and refilled it 3 times. When Ron had caught gutted, and cleaned the fish, Sam ate the leftovers, and a few pieces tossed to him by Ron. They all piled into the tent and went to sleep.

They were up at first light, and Ron was eager to get to the Caribou hunting grounds, so he helped his dad pack everything up and get ready. They started walking toward the Caribou grounds. They weren't even interested in the Moose, and weren't disappointed when they came to the empty moose hollow. An hour later, they were climbing the little hill next to the Caribou hunting area. Roy stopped Ron and told him they were getting close, so he'd take the cart so that Ron would have the best chance at a shot without tired arms. When they reached the grove of trees, they set the cart and everything else down. The four of them snuck up on the herd of Caribou who were feeding in the field of lush green grass without a care in the world. Roy quietly laid out a tarp for them to lie on, and Roy and Ron extended the bipods on their rifles, and lay down prone. Roy made sure everyone had their earplugs in, and Ron selected a big bull, but not the prime bull to shoot. Roy decided to nail a couple of his buddies, and they made plans. Ron would shoot first so the noise of Roy firing wouldn't disturb Ron or spook the Caribou and possibly blow Ron's shot. With that, they both locked and loaded, and Ron concentrated on the neck/shoulder region of his bull. He wanted his first bull to be a perfect shot. As the crosshairs of the scope settled on the spot Ron wanted the bullet to hit, he cleared the safety, and the trigger broke without him remembering touching it. The gun roared, and when the smoke cleared, the Caribou went down in a heap without moving a step. Roy quickly shot the other 2 bulls, but wasn't as picky about where he shot them, and nailed them both with a heart/lung shot. All 3 bulls were down, and when they had safed their guns, Roy gave Ron a hug and a "attaboy". Anne

hugged her son, and told him it looked like a perfect shot from where she was. Ron picked up the cart, and walked it over to the bulls. Looking at his bull, it was clear his shot had severed the spinal column right above the shoulders - exactly where he aimed, even though the estimated 200 yards was a chip shot for him. He didn't realize that almost half the deer hunters in the USA couldn't have made that shot. Roy told Ron to go ahead and butcher the bull himself. He'd be right over at the other bulls if he had any questions. Ron tried, but wasn't as experienced as his dad, and made a mess of the bull. He did manage to get the skin off in one piece, but his butchering techniques looked more like a scene from The Texas Chainsaw Massacre than the work of a professional butcher. Good thing Sam was good and hungry. Roy finished first, and he and Anne got the tent up and the fire started. By the time Ron had the skin off and the meat quartered and in bags, it was getting dark. Roy had 3 large pieces of meat broiling over the fire, and Sam was pigging out eating everything they didn't want from the caribou. Ron walked up to the fire exhausted. He asked his Dad if it were OK to brain tan the skin tomorrow. "Dad, I didn't know that would be so much work."

Roy told him "Don't worry, it gets easier with experience. It's also easier with a real skinning knife instead of the <skip> you have. Next time you're with us, borrow your mom's skinner until you have more experience. The Ulu works great, but takes a longer time to learn how to use."

The next morning, Ron had an easier time brain tanning the caribou hide, but he agreed with his mom that it was really stinky. As soon as Ron had brain tanned the hide, and washed his hands, they packed up to leave. Sam was a smart wolf and didn't pig out to the point where he couldn't walk, and staggered behind them when Ron picked up the handles of the cart, and slug the straps over his shoulders. Groaning with the effort, he tried to get it moving by himself. Seeing his difficulty, Roy got behind and pushed, and they got it started. Roy helped him all the way up the hill. Ron managed to get it down the hill safely, and when they were on flat ground was barely able to manage by himself. They weren't setting any speed records, but Sam wasn't exactly moving all that fast either. They made it to their other campground just before dark. Ron and Sam were so dog-tired they just collapsed in place, Sam's head on Ron's lap - his favorite spot. Anne and Roy got the tent up by themselves, and caught dinner. The smell of frying fish woke Ron and Sam up enough to eat and they each drank almost a half gallon of water. They staggered into the tent and collapsed in the corner. Anne and Roy took the time to blow up their air mattresses and unroll their sleeping bags.

They got up at first light the next morning. Ron was stiff and sore, but he had to pick up the cart and drag it home. Roy helped as much as he could. Sam just managed to put one paw in front of another. Later that afternoon, they arrived at the cabin, and Ron dropped the cart, walked inside, and plopped down on his bed in the second room. Sam managed to walk slowly into the cabin and lay down on the bearskin rug next to Ron's bed. Roy decided now would not be the time to yell at Ron, maybe making him pull the cart was a bit too much, but he wasn't in good enough shape to do it any more. Admitting that he was getting old was

hard to do. He and Anne hung the meat in the smokehouse for now, they could jerk and can the meat tomorrow. Roy unrolled the skins and spread them over the smokehouse roof. Anne was too tired to cook, and Roy wasn't that hungry. They got undressed and sank into their bed. "Anne, I hate to admit this, but I'm getting too old to do this, and Ron is too small to haul that load home all by himself. Is there anything we could do?"

"How about a double harness, with Ron lifting and both of you pulling, it might be easier, kind of like the traces for a sled."

"Now I know why I married you - you're so smart."

"And I thought it was just for my looks."

Anne and Roy held each other then went to sleep.

The next morning, Anne made breakfast, and then the three of them starting the canning and jerking process. Anne was an old hand at canning by now, and Roy knew just how big to make the pieces. Ron watched and helped where he could. The kitchen was too small to get more than 1 person near the stove at a time. Roy asked Ron to take the skins down off the smokehouse and take them out to the lake and wash them. He reminded him to bring his fanny pack and shoulder holster, and to take Sam with him.

Halfway to the lake, Sam alerted. As Ron turned to find out what Sam was worried about, a huge bear charged. Instinctively, Sam charged to defend Ron. Ron dropped the caribou skins he was carrying and drew his Ruger 22/45. A .22 pistol isn't much against a bear, but it was all he had. He had 3 15-round magazines loaded, maybe he'd get a lucky shot. Sam tangled with the bear, snapping and snarling about 30 feet away from Ron, who was trying to get a clean shot at the bear's head. Every time a vulnerable part of the bear appeared, he squeezed the trigger. He managed to score with each bullet, it's just that they weren't doing much damage. He emptied his first magazine, and loaded the second one, and kept firing. Finally the second to the last round of the second mag managed to hit something vital, and the Bear roared in pain. By now Sam had multiple wounds, and was bleeding out almost as fast as the bear. The bear still wasn't down, so Ron kept shooting. Finally when he was almost out of ammo, the bear fell over and didn't get back up. Ron ran over to Sam who was bleeding on the ground, and scooped him up and ran back to the cabin, yelling at the top of his lungs for his parents. Right as he got to the cabin, Sam died in his arms.

"NOOOOO. Don't Die."

Roy and Anne came running when they heard Ron scream right outside their door. Roy had his Colt Anaconda out. As soon as they saw Ron and Sam they knew what had happened. When he stopped crying, Ron told his Dad that Sam had died protecting him from a bear. Anne checked Ron all over, and there wasn't a scratch on him.

Roy sat Ron down and asked him if he wanted to be alone with Sam for a while, or if he wanted to bury him now.

“Dad, can I be alone with him for a while?”

“Sure son, we’ll be right inside if you need us.”

Roy and Anne went inside and started praying.

Meanwhile Ron was talking to Sam “Thank You Sam. I don’t know if you can hear me, but you saved my life. I’ll always love you. Bye for now.”

Ron held Sam’s lifeless body in his arms and cried a while, remembering all the happy times they had together, remembering when they used to play and run around when Sam was still a puppy.

Later that evening, Ron dug a grave next to Oliver and Francine for Sam. He made a wooden grave marker for Sam that said:

SAM  
JN 15:13  
Greater love hath no man than this,  
that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Roy led the memorial service, and He read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm:

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.  
3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.  
4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.  
5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.  
6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.  
(NKJV)

When he finished, Anne read “The Rainbow Bridge”

“Just this side of heaven is a place called Rainbow Bridge.  
When an animal dies that has been especially close to someone here, that pet goes to Rainbow Bridge. There are meadows and hills for all of our special friends so they can run and play together. There is plenty of food, water and sunshine, and our friends are warm and comfortable.

All the animals who had been ill and old are restored to health and vigor. Those who were hurt or maimed are made whole and strong again, just as we remember them in our dreams of days and times gone by. The animals are happy and content, except for one small thing; they each miss someone very special to them, who had to be left behind.

They all run and play together, but the day comes when one suddenly stops and looks into the distance. His bright eyes are intent. His eager body quivers. Suddenly he begins to run from the group, flying over the green grass, his legs carrying him faster and faster.

You have been spotted, and when you and your special friend finally meet, you cling together in joyous reunion, never to be parted again. The happy kisses rain upon your face; your hands again caress the beloved head, and you look once more into the trusting eyes of your pet, so long gone from your life but never absent from your heart.

Then you cross Rainbow Bridge together.... “

Author unknown...

They cried together a while, and finally Ron picked up the shovel and started burying Sam's body.

When the sun was about to set, they heard a Wolf pack howling in the distance. It seemed a fitting sendoff to one of their own.

The next morning, Roy and Ron walked over to check the bear and retrieve the caribou skins.

Roy turned the bear's body over, and counted over 30 .22 bullet holes in the chest, and several scars where rounds had just missed the eyes. Roy was impressed that his son would have enough courage to face a bear armed with a .22 pistol.

“Ron, why were you trying to kill the bear instead of running away to safety?”

“I had to protect Sam. If I got a lucky shot and killed the bear sooner, Sam might have lived.”

“Ron there was nothing you could do with a .22 to kill a bear at close range fast enough that Sam wouldn't have died from his injuries. His Daddy, Oliver got mauled by a bear within 100 feet of the cabin, and barely made it back in time for Anne to sew him up and stop the bleeding. We're almost ¼ mile away from the cabin - that's 4 times as far, and you'd have to carry Sam. Unless your first shot killed the bear, which is a million to one shot with a .22, there would have been no way you could have saved Sam. Sam was doing what brave dogs and wolves have always done, defended their families even if it meant their death. I'm sure Sam might have known he might die, but chose to defend you instead of running away. YOU chose to defend him instead of running away. In my book, you're both heroes.” Roy gave Ron a big hug, picked up the skins, and carried them to the lake to wash them off.

When they were finished, Roy said “I'm going to have to talk to that gunsmith about getting you something bigger than that .22. I'm not sure if you can handle the .44 Magnum yet, and I

don't want you to injure yourself trying, but maybe a .357 Magnum might work - at least it's better than a .22."

When they got back, Roy called Bill. Jim was there, and Roy asked them if there was good revolver a 13-yr old could shoot that might work on bears. Jim's voice went up an octave when he asked Roy what Ron needed a gun for bears for. Roy told them the whole story, including the death of Sam and how Ron faced a full-grown bear with only a Ruger .22 pistol. Roy told them he wanted to get Ron a .44 Magnum, but wasn't sure he could handle the recoil. Bill said he'd call the gunsmith and see what he said.

Half an hour later, Bill was on the radio. "Roy, the gunsmith said the .44 Magnum is the minimum handgun he'd recommend for bear up there. He said that in order for a .357 Magnum to have a chance at killing a bear, it would need to be loaded to +p+ levels, and the felt recoil would be in the same ballpark as a .44 Magnum. Since the Colt Anaconda is heavier than most Ruger .357's, the weight would help control the recoil. Anyway, he said to let Ron try to shoot it under controlled conditions, and see if he can learn to handle it - he was going to make up a lot of "Light" rounds so Ron could work his way up to the big full-house rounds. Jim and I will be up later this week with the ammo."

Roy turned to Ron. "OK son, the Gunsmith said it was the .44 Magnum or Stay on the porch, so it's time you learned how to shoot one of these. Grandpa Jim said they'd be up later this week with some practice ammo for you, so you can get used to the recoil before you have to handle the full-house rounds. OK."

"Cool Dad. I always wanted to shoot those Hand Cannons you and Mom have."

Later that week, Jim and Bill showed up with 200 rounds of the .44 Magnum Lite rounds. Anne broke out the plugs and muffs to keep everyone's hearing intact, and Roy rolled a 12" diameter log about 20 yards out in front of the cabin. He figured that would be far enough to make Ron concentrate on the sights and not rush it. Everyone put on their eye and ear protection, then Roy showed Ron how to load and shoot his Colt Anaconda. He opened the crane release, pushed out the cylinder, pushed the ejector and dumped the rounds into his hand. He handed his son the unloaded and open gun with the barrel pointed down range. Ron carefully took the gun by the grip, making sure the barrel was still pointed downrange, and opened a box of the .44 Magnum Lite ammo the gunsmith marked "open first" They were about 75% of factory spec ammo. Ron carefully loaded and closed the cylinder, kept the barrel down range, and took a firm two-handed grip just like his dad had taught him. He looked left and right to make sure the range was clear, then sighted the center of the log, and like his Dad had showed him, thumbed back the hammer with his non-trigger hand until the hammer was at full-cock while keeping his finger off the trigger. When the hammer was back, he moved his finger carefully to the trigger, took a couple of deep breaths, and held the 3<sup>rd</sup> one, and squeezed the trigger. The Anaconda roared, and when the smoke had cleared, there was a huge hole in the center of the log. Roy was watching the barrel, and while it went higher than he liked, it wasn't unsafe, and



Ron had an ear-to-ear grin on his face. He brought the gun down out of recoil, cocked the hammer, and triggered off a second round, that hit within an inch of the first. He shot the rest of the cylinder exactly like that, and all 6 rounds were within an inch of each other.

To say that Roy was impressed was an understatement. His best group at 20 yards was 2-3 inches. Then he remembered Ron wasn't shooting the hot rounds yet. Ron put 50 rounds down range into the center of the log before his wrists got tired. When they finished Roy asked the dumbest question of his life "Ron, would you want a Colt Anaconda just like mine?" Ron practically squeezed the breath out of his dad when he hugged him.

"I'll take that as a YES. Bill, when you get back to Allakaket, call my gunsmith and order another Anaconda and the special holster."

Bill had a surprise for him. Out in Jim's plane was a big box from the gunsmith. In it was a Colt Anaconda he had in stock, and the double shoulder holster, adjusted to fit Ron. when Ron opened the Box, his eyes lit up like Christmas had come early. "I don't know what to say, except thanks everyone." Ron put on the shoulder holster, put the Ruger 22/45 on the right side and the Colt Anaconda on the left since the holsters were set up for vertical cross-draw. Roy opened up a box of the Hot .44 Magnum rounds, and Ron loaded the gun and stuck it in the holster, then loaded the 2 speed loaders included.

Jim told them they had another surprise, but they needed to get into the plane. Roy told Ron he'd have to leave the guns behind, since he wasn't legally old enough to go armed into town. Ron frowned, but did as his father asked, and put the shoulder holster in the box, and set it on the kitchen table. Anne came out with jackets for everyone - typical Mom. They all boarded Jim's plane. It was a tight squeeze, but they made it, and they taxied and took off. Everyone was pretty quiet on the flight to Allakaket except Ron - this was his first plane ride, and Roy was playing Tour Guide. Half an hour later they landed at Allakaket, and got into Bill's SUV. They drove through town, and stopped at a house on the other side of town. No sooner had they got out, then they were mobbed by Husky puppies. Jim answered the unasked question when he told Ron to pick one to take home with him. Ron was having too much fun playing with the puppies to chose, but soon the choice was self-evident when one of the males jumped onto his lap and started licking his face. "I guess I'll take this one. Does he have a name?"

"Nope, that's your job." The male he had chosen was a beautiful black and white mixed coat with blue eyes just like Sam. Ron was halfway tempted to call him Sam, but thought better of it.

"How about Lucky?"

"OK, Lucky it is. Do you want to stay in town and have dinner at the lodge, or do you want to get back home?"

Ron spoke up “If it’s all the same to you Grandpa Jim, I’d just as soon get home and play with Lucky.”

They all got back in Bill’s car and drove to the plane. Bill stayed in Allakaket, so there was much more room. Jim offered to let Ron sit in front. Ron bounded right up and into the front seat, keeping a good hold on Lucky’s collar. As soon as they were in and belted, Jim fired up the motor, and soon they were taxiing out to the lake and took off. The view from the front was spectacular, and Ron forgot all about his puppy for the rest of the trip as he marveled at the view. The landing was as smooth as glass, and they taxied to their cabin. Jim stayed in the plane, and said he needed to get back before dark. Roy, Anne, Ron and Lucky got off the plane and headed to their cabin.

## Chapter 53 - New Puppy

When they got home, Ron and Roy sat down for a minute. “Ron, Lucky is your dog, you are totally responsible for him. You need to feed, water and clean up after him. My first suggestion would be to get him housetrained ASAP to keep your mom happy. Luckily he’s weaned, so you won’t have to hand feed him like I did with Sam. You don’t remember, but Francine dropped Sam on our doorstep as a puppy because he was the runt and she didn’t have enough milk for all the pups. I ended up hand-feeding him a bottle every 3-4 hours for 3 months until he could eat solid food. Anne was feeding you every 3-4 hours too, but she could at least feed you while she lay down. I think she fell asleep a couple of times when you were nursing. Good thing she didn’t roll over in her sleep.”

“Gross Dad. That was a little more information than I needed.” (Ron was still at the “Girls are Gross” stage) Ron walked over and picked up Lucky. He was heavier than he thought, and almost dropped him until he got a better grip under his butt. He carried Lucky inside and sat him on the bearskin rug next to his bed. He sniffed around and burrowed into the bearskin, then promptly fell asleep. The next morning, Ron picked Lucky up and carried him outside. As soon as he set him down near where Sam used to go, he immediately dropped a puppy pile and peed. Ron praised Lucky, then picked him back up and carried him inside. He set Lucky back on the bearskin, then opened the bag of Puppy chow and gave Lucky a cupful with some warm water. Lucky chowed down, and ate it all in a matter of minutes. Ron filled a small bowl with cold clean water, and left it next to the food. Lucky lapped at the water experimentally, then sat there lapping up the water until the bowl was empty. Ron gave him another bowl of water, then figured he had better take Lucky outside just in case. Ron’s timing was perfect, because Lucky let go with a huge stream of pee as soon as he was in Sam’s old spot. When he finished, Ron said “Good Boy” and petted Lucky for a while, then carried him back inside the cabin. By then Anne had breakfast ready for them. Ron put Lucky down on the bearskin and washed his hands, then sat at the table to eat breakfast. Roy said grace, then they passed the plates of food.

Roy noticed Ron was eating more food than he was now - it was about time. At 13, Ron was about to hit his growth spurt and should shoot up 3-6 inches and gain 50-100 pounds. Roy was glad since he was not going to be able to do as much heavy work in a couple of years like he used to. He would still be able to instruct his son, but soon Ron would have to take over cutting firewood, the heavy labor parts of hunting and any repairs to the cabin that might need his strength. Anne was still homeschooling Ron, but part of the day was spent with his father outdoors learning stuff about survival, primitive techniques, hunting, fishing, and camping. Roy wanted to impart all of his knowledge to his son while he was able. Frankly he was glad that Ron was able to handle the .44 Magnum revolver. With the hand cannon, Ron could defend himself against anything out there he might run into. Lucky would need a couple of years growth and education before he would be able to protect Ron and the rest of the family if something like a bear decided to crash their party.

Later that day, Roy took inventory of their recently canned meat, and decided they needed to go hunting again, at the rate they were going through meat, there wasn't enough in the pantry for an emergency reserve. They needed 3 more large caribou before Roy would be satisfied. He talked to Anne, who said "Whatever you say dear."

Ron took the news a little better than Anne. His response was basically "Yippee." Ron loved to go camping and hunting. They spent the rest of the afternoon getting ready, and Ron remembered Lucky.

"Dad, what are we going to do with Lucky, he's too young to walk that far, and we can't leave him in the cabin by himself for 4 days."

"Son, we'll just have to bring him with us. Put him on the cart, and he'll get a free ride. Just make sure to bring enough puppy chow for him. Bring enough for a week just to be on the safe side, and both his bowls."

Roy watched Ron sharpen their knives using the DMT bench stones. The DMT diamond impregnated sharpening stones are one of the few sharpening stones that can sharpen ATS-34 steel knives, especially when coated with Titanium Nitride. Ron had it down to a science, and kept the same angle relative to the stone as he sharpened both sides. When he finished, Roy tested the edge by shaving hair on his forearm. Ron didn't have enough hair yet to test a knife this way, he had to drag a fingernail across the edge to get a sense of the sharpness. This was much more dangerous than shaving, since one slip, and there went your thumb. Next they cleaned, lubricated and re-loaded all their guns. Finally they checked the camping gear and cleaned the Camelback water carriers. They still brought the water filter, even though they didn't need it any more. There was no resident population of beavers, and they hadn't gotten sick from the local water in years. Anne made a hearty dinner, and Ron fed Lucky and took him outside. He came back in, and washed his hands for dinner. Roy said grace, and they passed the plates of food. When they were finished, Ron asked to be excused, and walked over to the bearskin to play with Lucky. They went to bed shortly after dinner so they could get up at first light to go hunting. Anne had been busy, and made a double harness for Roy and Ron. Roy was in front, in the "lead dog" position, with Ron in the rear holding the handles of the cart. This would take a little getting used to, but Anne thought it would work better than a side-by-side arrangement. They were individually attached to the cart, so Roy couldn't pull Ron over, and Ron couldn't cause Roy to trip if they didn't move together. Ron made sure he packed enough puppy chow for a week, both of Lucky's bowls, and a leash for Lucky if he felt like getting adventurous in camp. He also brought a much smaller piece of bearskin for Lucky to burrow into at night. When they were all packed, Roy told Ron "Goodnight Son, get some sleep, we'll be up at first light tomorrow." and went to bed.

## Chapter 54 - Lucky's First Hunt

As usual, they all were up at first light. Anne made breakfast, and Ron fed Lucky, then took him for his morning constitutional. When he came back, Ron washed his hands, and sat down to eat breakfast. When they were finished eating, everyone cleaned up quickly, and Anne made sure the stove and fireplace were cold out. Ron and Roy packed everything quickly, and double checked everything. This time, Ron put his shoulder holster just like his dad's on too. He was proud to have a Colt Anaconda to help defend the family. They all put on their daybags and fanny packs as well. Ron carried the tent and some extra stuff for Lucky out to the cart, then picked up Lucky, clipped the leash to his collar, and set him on the cart. When Roy and Anne were ready to go, they set off at a fairly quick pace. Later that afternoon, they arrived at their campsite. Roy and Ron quickly made camp while Anne caught several brook trout for dinner. Ron fed Lucky and set him on his bearskin rug. Lucky didn't feel like exploring, and sat right next to Ron. Anne cleaned and cooked the fish while Ron and Roy finished setting up camp, then the set down to eat dinner. After dinner, Roy blew up the air mattresses, and unrolled the sleeping bags. Before it got totally dark, Ron took Lucky over to a nearby tree, downwind from their campsite to take care of business. Lucky relieved himself, and then followed Ron back to camp. He gave Ron no trouble on the leash, and naturally heeled right next to Ron. Lucky lay down next to Ron on his bearskin rug and was soon fast asleep.

They were up at first light as usual. Ron fed Lucky and led him over to the same tree. Since they were in a hurry, they ate jerky, and Ron put Lucky's food and water bowls on the cart. Lucky ate breakfast on the move. They made excellent time, and were soon at the Caribou hunting grounds. Lucky had shown no inclination to bark, and Ron hoped their luck would hold. Roy laid a tarp down at the same spot as last time, then Ron and Roy got ready to shoot while Anne kept a firm hold on Lucky. She thought he might startle from the loud noises. Roy and Ron selected 3 large bulls like before, but they were farther away this time, so Ron decided to get the guaranteed kill shot and aimed for the heart-lung region, it was a much larger target than the spine. Ron shot first, and his bull dropped, then Roy fired 2 quick shots to drop the other bulls. Lucky didn't make a sound, he just whined a little when the first rifle shot went off. Ron picked up the cart and wheeled it over to the bulls, and this time he borrowed Anne's skinner. Roy was right, it was much easier to use than his <skip>. It took half as much time this time to skin and gut the caribou. They left everything they didn't want for the scavengers since Lucky was too young to eat the leftovers. Ron had his bull quartered and in bags just when Roy was finishing the second bull. Since it was too late to make it back to the other campsite, Anne took the time to start making camp, and Roy helped her get the tent up when he finished. Ron ended up with the messy job of brain tanning all 3 hides. Lucky investigated the goings-on and decided that it smelled much better in camp, and beat a hasty retreat.

When he was finished, Ron made sure to thoroughly wash his hands and the knives. As before, Roy had 3 large pieces of Caribou roasting over the fire when Ron got finished.

“Ron, I’m proud of you Son. You did a much better job this time, and if you notice, you also did it quicker than last time.”

“Dad, you were right, Mom’s skinner is much easier to use than the <skip>, but I still think the <skip> combo is worth being slower and more difficult to use as a skinner, since you can’t chop wood with the skinner.”

“Smart observation Son. What do you say let’s eat and hit the sack, I want to get an early start.”

They ate dinner and Ron took Lucky about 20 yards downwind of camp to take care of business. Lucky curled up next to Ron and was soon fast asleep.

The next morning, they got up and dressed, and Lucky made a pit stop. Roy handed everyone a piece of jerky, and Lucky got fed on the cart again. Ron picked up the cart, and Roy slipped into a sling to help pull the cart, so they were able to go much faster. Later that afternoon, they reached the cabin, and Ron and Roy started hanging the meat, and they would can it tomorrow. Ron took Lucky over to his spot and he did his business.

The next morning, they all pitched in and had the meat canned, made sausage, and jerked some of it all before dinner. Ron got to take Lucky out and play, it seemed he was getting to the stage that he could run around and play for a while without getting tired. Roy figured that Jim had better include several bags of dog food in his next trip, Lucky was growing faster than Sam did. Roy got on the radio, and talked to Jim. Jim told him he was way ahead of him, and had already requested several bags of dog chow - he saw how big Lucky was getting, and knew he was going to be eating regular dog chow soon.

Jim arrived several days later and delivered 4 50 pound bags of dog food, 6 cases of Mason canning jars, and 6 months worth of staples. Ron had hit his growth spurt, and was eating like a horse. When they had everything unloaded, Jim joined them for some target practice. Ron helped Roy and Jim move some 12 inch logs out in front of the porch, about 25 yards away, and then Anne added some empty soup cans for .22 practice. Everyone put on their eye and ear protection, then Ron unloaded the hot reloads and loaded a cylinder of practice ammo for the Colt Anaconda. After getting the All Clear from Roy, Ron proceeded to put 6 rounds into the center of the log at 25 yards. When he was finished, Jim sat there open mouthed. All 6 rounds were in the center of the log, and the edges were touching, and it looked like a daisy about 2 inches in diameter. If you subtracted the diameter of the bullet, that meant he shot an inch and a half group at 25 yards with a .44 Magnum hand cannon.

Roy shot next, and his group was about 3 inches in diameter. He thought he was doing OK since any of those rounds would have killed a bear, and that was the whole point of this exercise. When they got done shooting the hand cannons, they switched to the Ruger suppressed 22/45’s, and Anne won that contest - she was still the best shot with the little .22 pistols. She was regularly hitting soup cans at 50 yards with open sights. Anne seemed to be

having a problem controlling the recoil of the hand cannons, but was good enough to take care of any bear that threatened the family. She was Wyatt Earp with the .22 pistol though. She shot good enough with the Browning A-Bolt BOSS equipped .308 to make the ARMY shooting team, and maybe qualify as a sniper.

A week later, Jim flew in again, this time he had a surprise for them. Anne's Brother Steve had decided to come home on leave, and wanted to see his Sister and his nephew. Steve had never met Ron, so it was quite a shock to Ron to see a large man wearing an Air Force Colonel's uniform step out of Jim's plane. Anne ran up to Steve and gave him a big hug.

"Steve, you're home - why didn't you call?"

"Anne, I got two weeks leave, and I wanted to spend some time with you. I couldn't call most of the time because I was involved in some very classified missions. I missed you and Roy." Ron walked up to him, and Steve picked him up and gave him a big bear hug "You must be Ron. You weren't even born the last time I was in Allakaket. I was at Roy and Anne's wedding, matter of fact, I gave the bride away."

Ron finally realized this was Steve, his long-lost uncle. He finally noticed the rows of decorations on his uniform and the Special Forces Beret he was wearing. He was full of questions, but waited until the adults were finished welcoming Steve home. Roy immediately offered to put Steve up in the cabin for as long as he wanted to stay, they had a spare cot they could set up in the second room next to Ron's bed. Steve accepted, since he didn't know that many people in town, and he was here to see Anne, Roy and Ron. Jim helped Steve carry his stuff into the cabin. He had 2 duffle bags full of stuff. Roy hoped he packed some civilian clothes, otherwise he would always feel like saluting.

When they got inside, Roy asked Steve about what he was doing in the Air Force. Steve gave them the Reader's Digest version, skipping the classified stuff. He had been in Desert Storm II, Kosovo, Central America, and several countries he couldn't tell them about. Anne asked him how he came to be a Colonel in the Air Force. When he left, he was just going to be a Para-rescue jumper.

"Anne, I got into the program, then I was accepted for Air Force Special Forces. Those are the guys who fly the Pave Hawk MH-60G behind enemy lines to rescue pilots or to support Special Forces operations. They needed volunteers for a special program that was so classified that we had to volunteer without really knowing what we were volunteering for. Anyway, I was tired with just training, and I figured this would be the best way to see some action. Boy was I right. First they sent me off to the Ranger's Special Forces School, where I received some very advanced training, then they spent the next 6 months training me in the Pave Hawk before I went on a single mission. When DSII came up, we were assigned to the Rescue Squadron. Every time a pilot went down, we got the call. While there weren't as many missions as Desert Storm, they were really hairy. One of the guys I rescued is now a General in the Air Force, and

he put through the paperwork for me to go OCS. I went through OCS and came out an “Instant Officer”. The jump in pay was nice, but I was still doing the same job. We kept getting assignments from JSOC, sorry that’s Joint Special Operations Command, and finally we were integrated fully into the JSOC command structure. That’s when we were issued the Special Forces berets. Anyway, I’ve been in the Air Force for 13 years, and Special Forces for 10 years officially. I get command of the entire Pave Hawk Wing next month, so I applied for leave, since I’m going to be busier than a 1-armed paper hanger when I go.”

Just then Lucky walked in “Roy, where’s Oliver?”

“Steve, Oliver died a couple of years ago - remember, Ron’s 13 now.”

“I guess that make sense, who is the cute puppy?”

Ron spoke up “His Name’s Lucky.”

“Here Lucky” A few seconds later, Lucky sniffed experimentally at Steve’s hand, and Steve stroked Lucky’s fur. Minutes later, Lucky walked over and plopped down in from of Ron. Steve was looking at Lucky and Ron when he noticed Ron was wearing a double shoulder holster with a Ruger 22/45 and what looked like a Colt Anaconda. “It couldn’t be” Steve thought “He’s too young to be carrying that hand cannon.” Steve’s curiosity got the better of him and he asked Ron if that was a Colt Anaconda he was carrying.

“Sure is, want to see it?”

Steve nodded, so Ron slipped it carefully out of the holster, making sure not to point the barrel at anyone, opened the crane, and dumped the rounds into his hand like his dad had shown him. When he unloaded the gun, he handed it butt first to Steve. Steve was impressed with Steve’s gun handling knowledge. He didn’t have anything bigger than a .22 when he was Ron’s age. He admired the gun for a minute, then handed it back to Ron.

“Roy, I’m not trying to criticize, but why does Ron have a huge hand cannon at 13? When I was his age, I was still playing with .22 rifles.”

Before Ron could interject, Roy spoke up. “Steve, Ron killed a bear that was attacking him and Sam a couple of months ago with his Ruger .22/45 Sam died protecting him, and Ron got a lucky shot and hit the bear in the eye with his second to last round.”

Steve’s eyes got as big as saucers. “You killed a charging bear with a .22/45?”

“Actually Sam did most of the work, all I did was get a lucky shot to kill him. That damn bear cost me my best friend.”



Roy decided to give Steve some “back story” at this point, and told Steve about Sam, and how he came to be in their family and what he knew about the encounter with the bear.

“Ron, I’ve met some brave men in my day, but I don’t know anyone who has faced down a bear with a .22 pistol. Can I shake your hand?”

Steve stood up to shake Ron’s hand, and ended up giving him another bear hug.

“Roy, you did the right thing giving Ron a .44 Magnum to protect himself. Ron was always around when we were out in the wilderness, and he never went anywhere without his .44 Magnum.”

“Steve, Jim gave me Ron’s .44 Magnum Colt Anaconda after I had returned from Allakaket the first time. He said that for some reason Ron left the gun in his drawer this one time. Since he already had one, he decided Ron would have wanted me to have it. Since then, I’ve shot about 6 bears with it, and I gave Jim the skins from 2 of them.”

“I guess you guys have a lot of bears around here. I need to do my mile run with my Morning PT, is it OK if Ron comes with me to keep me company, and keep the bears from getting to me?”

Roy laughed, “I’ll do one better. I stay around the house most mornings now, so if you want to, you can borrow the entire shoulder holster and wear it when you’re out running. If you want to shoot your brother’s old gun, we have a couple of hundred practice rounds that Jim brought up with him last time.”

“I’d like that.” Steve turned to Ron “So you up for a little morning PT?”

Ron still had a slight case of Hero Worship, so he said “Yes Sir” immediately.

“Great, I get up at 0600 every morning for 30 minutes of calisthenics and a mile run.”

“0600?”

“Six AM to you civilians - you probably get up at first light anyway around here.”

“Sure Uncle Steve - I’ll be ready and waiting.”

## Chapter 55 - PT

Ron was up at first light, and got dressed quickly. Steve was up 15 minutes later, and was glad Ron was already up and dressed. Ron took Lucky out and took care of business, then fed and watered Lucky. When they were ready to go, Ron grabbed his shoulder holster and fanny pack, and took them outside and left them on the porch. If they were going to do calisthenics, he didn't want them banging into him. Steve was wearing a set of BDUs since it was still cold there in the morning. He normally worked out in t-shirt and shorts, but it was just above freezing this morning. Steve said one word "Ready" and started doing jumping jacks, counting out loud. Ron quickly joined him, and although he got a C- for form, he got an A for effort. Steve smiled, and after he did 100, switched to push-ups. He dropped into the classic military pushup position, and Ron hurried to match him. When they were both up, Steve started counting. Ron joined him in the cadence this time. After 50 pushups, he was pleasantly surprised to see Ron still working at it. Normally he did 100, but knocked off after 75 after seeing the strain on Ron's face. He stood up and jogged in place a minute to loosen his legs, then stopped long enough to gear up. Ron hurried into his shoulder holster and fanny pack, then Steve led off to the lake at a jog/trot. Ron ran 3 paces behind Steve, and kept up all the way. It was about a ¼ mile to the lake, so Steve turned north and kept running. He turned around after another ¼ mile and headed back to the cabin. Ron stayed with him all the way back, and when they got to the Cabin, Steve called "Squad march" even though there was only 2 of them. They marched the last 100 yards to cool down, and when they got to the cabin, they took off the gear, and went into the second bedroom. Breakfast was already ready, but Steve felt he needed to get cleaned up, so Roy told him he'd need to take a sponge bath, since they didn't have showers here. Steve got a good laugh, then Ron showed him where the towels were, and how to operate the water. The hot water was almost scalding since Anne had just cooked breakfast, so Steve opened both faucets, and had reasonably hot water. When he finished, Ron took a quick sponge bath, then they sat down for breakfast. When they finished, Steve asked Roy what the plan was for today.

"Ron and I were going to cut and chop some firewood. I could use the help if you don't mind."

"Lead on McDuff."

Roy got the chainsaw and his safety gear, filled the saw, and carried the whole collection to the grove of trees that were over 100 yards away from the cabin. Ron carried a single-bit ax to chop the branches off, and pulled the dollies. About half way there, Steve volunteered to carry the saw. When they got there, Roy started putting on his safety gear, and had Ron and Steve move a safe distance away. Saying a quick prayer, Roy fired up the saw, and started dropping trees. He was an old pro at this, and soon a dozen large trees were down. Ron and Steve took over, and quickly de-limbed the trees, and dragged them to the dollies. Steve slid into the harness, and easily pulled 3 12-in logs that were almost 30 feet long. Roy envied him his strength and stamina. Even in his prime, Roy didn't have muscles like that. He thought that

since Steve was a Para-rescue jumper, he hit the weight pile on a daily basis, since he might need to carry a 150 pound soldier to safety. With Ron and Steve helping, they made short work of the logs, and soon they were ready to chop and split the logs. Steve lifted a log into the sawhorse, and Roy fired up the chainsaw. As soon as he was done cutting the log, Steve pushed the end towards him, and he kept cutting until Steve got too close for safety and had to stop pushing. During the breaks, Ron picked up the logs, moved them a safe distance away, and split them with a sledge and a wedge. Roy used to use a splitting maul until Jim pointed out the sledge/wedge combination was faster and easier. After the logs were split into a useable size, Ron stacked them around the house. The entire process used to take a whole day, but Steve was able to help them turn it into a morning task. When they were finished, Roy cleaned off, and got a large pitcher of tea and 3 glasses. The water from the tap was cold enough that it didn't need ice. When they drank the entire pitcher, Steve asked "What next?" Ron asked if they could get in some target practice.

"Let me check with your Mom first."

Roy took the pitcher back inside, and Anne told him it was OK, and she'd be out in a minute or two to join them. Roy gave them the good news, and Steve said he needed to get something, and was back in a minute with his personal sidearm, A P-14 Limited in Stainless steel. He brought 1,000 rounds of FMJ practice ammo with him, and 4 magazines. Steve took the entire case outside, and quickly unloaded the 200gr Corbon Flying Ashcans from the magazines, and stored them in a Ziploc bag, then reloaded them with the FMJ ammo. Steve put on his earplugs and Gargoyle Shooting glasses. Ron thought Steve looked like Arnold Swartzenegger with those glasses

"I'll Be Back." said Steve in his best (Lame) Ahnold Voice.

Ron laughed, and said "Don't quit your day job."

Anne joined them, and soon they were dragging several 12 inch log segments out to the "front yard" at 20-50 yards. When everyone had the eye and ear protection on, Ron volunteered to go first. He dumped the hot reloads out of the Colt Anaconda, and loaded the practice ammo. As soon as he was done reloading, he looked left and right to make sure the range was clear, and said "Clear", then brought the .44 Magnum up to firing position, thumbed back the hammer, and put a round dead center in the 25 yard target. Again, he kept firing about a round per second, and 6 seconds later, he had about an inch group into the log.

This time it was Steve's turn to stand there open mouthed. "Dang, Ron - were did you learn to shoot like that."

"My Mom taught me how to shoot rifle, and my Dad taught me to shoot pistol."

"You shoot good enough right now to qualify Expert in the Air Force."

Roy spoke up with a hint of pride in his voice “You think that’s good, let him shoot his Browning A-bolt .308 at a target 400 yards away - the kid’s practically a Sniper.”

“This I gotta See.”

Anne walked in to get the rifle, while Ron and Steve marched a 12-inch log out to about 400 yards. Roy set up a shooting position for him, and when they got back, Anne had the Browning A-bolt out of its case, and Steve was admiring it.

“That’s a beautiful rifle. I always did prefer Synthetic stocks to wood stocks for precision marksmanship.”

Ron picked up the rifle, and 5 rounds of Lake City Match Ammo, and walked over to the shooting position. He got down in a Military Prone position, loaded the rifle, and got set. He left the bipod up, preferring to shoot regular military to supported military. When he was ready, he checked the range, and yelled “Clear”. He cycled a live round into the action and cleared the safety. He steadied his breathing, and concentrated on the target. As soon as the crosshairs on the Leupold scope aligned exactly with the center of the log, he touched the trigger, and the gun roared. He cycled the action without moving anything but his shooting hand from the trigger to the bolt, and shot 4 rounds in rapid succession. He left the bolt open to cool the gun off, while they walked down to the target to check the damage. 5 rounds were within 2 inches of each other. Steve’s eyes started bugging out. He had worked with the Air Force Shooting team before, and they were the only people he knew that could shoot sub MOA groups at 400 yards. Ron had just shot a .5 MOA group.

“Ron, I don’t know how to tell you this, but you could qualify for the Air Force Shooting Team right now - Except you’re only 13.”

Ron’s smile would have lit an average gymnasium. Even Roy and Anne were suitably proud of their son.

“Steve, if you think I’m good, you should see Mom. She makes my groups look like shotgun patterns.”

“Guess I should have been paying more attention when Ron tried to teach me how to shoot, Right Anne.”

“Ron seemed to have inherited his rifle shooting ability from me, but Roy was the one who taught him how to shoot pistol like that.”

“Ron, How would you like to try my .45?”

“Sure, if it’s OK with my dad.”

Ron turned to look at Roy, who said it was OK.

Steve showed Ron the basics of how to operate the 1911 .45acp semiauto pistol. After some experimenting with grips and stances, he decided to try a Weaver stance, and asked Steve to hand him a magazine. Before he loaded it, Steve reminded Roy and Anne that the 1911 throws its cases to the right, and would they please all move over to the left side of Ron so they wouldn't get nailed with the empty casings. After they had moved, Steve handed Ron a 14-round magazine that Ron slid into the magazine well and slammed home just like Steve had shown him, then pointing the barrel downrange, grabbed the back of the slide, and pulled. It was hard to pull, but he got it, then he let the slide fly forward to chamber a round. Since he was ready to shoot, he didn't set the safety. Keeping the gun pointed downrange, Ron took a firing grip on the gun, and assumed the Weaver stance. He aimed at the 25 yard target, and as the sights formed a perfect 6 o'clock hold, he gently squeezed the trigger. The gun recoiled, but not as badly as the .44 Magnum did. As soon as he brought the gun back down out of recoil and the sights were aligned again on the target, he squeezed the trigger. 14 rounds later, the slide locked back on an empty magazine. They walked down to the log to check Ron's group, and Steve turned to Ron and said, "Are you sure you've never shot a .45 before?" Ron's group was about 2 inches around, which was pretty good for his first time, and beat the pants off 90% of the people who qualified with the .45 in the Rangers.

"Roy, I've got to bring Ron to MacDill with me some time, the guys would never believe this unless they saw it."

He turned to Ron and asked him "How would you like to visit your Uncle Steve at MacDill where I work?"

"Sure, if it's OK with Dad."

Roy decided he needed to put the kibosh on it for now.

"Ron, you're too young to travel that far by yourself. Otherwise, I'd say yes in a heartbeat."

"Roy, one of the nice things about being a Colonel in Special Forces is we have a bit of pull. If the three of you want to spend a week or two at MacDill, I can arrange MAC transport from Anchorage directly to the base. I can put you up in base housing, so your only expense would be getting to Anchorage."

"Can we Daddy, Can WE?"

"Let me talk to your mother about this - besides what are we going to do with Lucky?"

"Bring him, of course."

“Well, that settles that - Ok if I let you know later Steve?”

“Sure, no rush, I’m going to be here for 2 weeks.”

After that, they resumed target practice. Steve was no slouch with the 45, and shot a 2 inch group at 25 yards at a military cadence of 1 round per second. Roy and Anne both shot their .44 magnums, then Anne suggested a little .22 golf. Seems Jim had located a supplier of used range balls, and had brought several hundred with him since he got tired of shooting at tin cans, and introduced them to “.22 Golf”. The object was to shoot a golf ball with a .22 so that it jumped in the air. You won the game by either hitting the most golf balls, or hitting a golf ball in midair. Anne brought out the golf balls, and proceeded to throw a dozen or so out into the front yard. Ron, Roy, and Anne took out their suppressed Ruger 22/45s. Steve was impressed, the last time he had seen suppressed pistols was during a Special Forces mission. He asked Ron if he could take a look at it. Ron removed the mag and cycled the action to make sure the chamber was clear, then locked the slide back and handed Steve the gun. Steve hefted the gun and checked it out. It was exactly what he thought it was, a stock 22/45 with an integral Ares suppressor. He asked Ron for the magazine, and he loaded the gun, cycled the slide, and pointed the gun at a golf ball 40 feet away. He hit it after 3 tries, and by the end of the magazine, he had hit 4 golf balls, but didn’t get close to any of the airborne ones. He was amazed at how quiet the suppressor was - the suppressed 45s they had at MacDill were almost twice as noisy, and they were considered quiet. When they were done shooting .22 Golf, they tallied the score, and Roy won by 1 point, seems no one hit a golf ball in midair, even though Steve and Roy both came close. Ron came in third, with Anne as the low man on the telephone pole. She didn’t worry - pistol shooting wasn’t her cup of tea anyway. It was fun, but she couldn’t get all excited about it the way Ron and Roy did.

When they were finished, it was starting to get dark, so Anne said she’d have supper ready in a little bit. Roy, Ron and Steve sat on the porch talking about guy stuff until Anne called them in for dinner. When they were all seated, Steve noticed the bowed heads, and quickly joined them. Roy said grace, then they passed the food around. Good thing that Anne had made extra, since Steve had a appetite even bigger than Ron’s, and they both went back for seconds. After dinner, Ron took Lucky out for a walk, then fed him and gave him fresh water. They sat around and talked until they got tired, basically catching up. Steve complimented Anne and Roy for how well they seemed to have raised Ron. Anne told Steve that Ron had taken the PSAT over the internet, and had scored in the top 10%, and he was only 13 up against high school Juniors who were 3 years older than he was. She explained that they had home schooled Ron, and he had already passed his High School Equivalency, and that he was doing advanced studies in Math and Science.

Steve asked Ron the \$500.00 question “So what do you want to do when you grow up?”

“Uncle Steve, I really haven’t given it much thought, I want to go to College, but there is no way we can afford it - so I’ll have to think of something else.”

“Whoa Hold on there Partner. You think that a little thing like money will stop you. How would you like an all-expense paid scholarship to the Air Force Academy?”

“Air Force - I never considered the Military?”

“After I saw the way you can shoot, you could get a full-ride scholarship just based on your shooting skills - the Air Force Shooting Team needs people who can shoot Rifle and Pistol like you can. If you don’t loose your skills, you could qualify for the team right now. If you get any better, you could be the best shooter on the team.”

“You mean that the Air Force will pay me to go to college, and all I have to do is shoot. Heck I do that for fun. Where do I sign up.”

“Not so fast Ron, we can’t accept you until you’re at least 17, and that’s with your parent’s permission.”

“Rats - that means I have to wait 4 more years.”

“Ron, have you ever been flying?”

“Just that one trip with Mom and Dad and Uncle Jim where he let me ride in front.”

“Ever think about flying full time?”

“You mean as a Fighter Pilot? I don’t know - seems were the real action is was on the ground. I mean what challenge is there to shooting some poor Iraqi pilot out of the sky over 5 miles away who doesn’t even know you’re there.”

“Well if you’re even interested, I talked to Grandpa Jim, and he’d love to teach you how to fly. The only thing you’d have to pay for is the fuel.”

Ron’s eyes got as big as saucers. “Dad, can I.”

“Ron, first of all, Mom and I need to talk about this, then I need to talk to Jim. Flying’s dangerous. That’s how Steve’s older brother Ron died, in a flying accident.”

Ron seemed disappointed, but said nothing further. A while later, they all went to bed so they could get up early.

## Chapter 56 - Vacation

Steve spent the rest of his vacation helping Ron and Roy cutting firewood, fishing, and spending some time target practicing. Steve and Ron did Military PT every morning, and by the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, Ron was doing the exercises like a drill instructor. They also spent a lot of time talking. Steve realized his nephew was very special. Somehow the combination of Roy and Anne, genetically, psychologically, and spiritually combined into Ron, who had some exceptional abilities. He had a phenomenal memory, could do calculus in his head, could shoot as well as a Special Forces trained Sniper, and had the mentality that it was no big deal to have all these gifts. He said, “God made me this way, I can’t take any credit for it, I can just work as hard as I can to use them to the best of my ability.” Steve guessed he had to add Humility to that list. Steve was salivating at the possibilities of getting Ron into the military, he would be an asset in more ways than one, yet at the same time, he was only 13, and still entitled to his life. Steve realized he couldn’t push too hard, but if Ron wanted to follow in his footsteps, Steve could grease the skids and open a bunch of doors.

When the two weeks were up, Steve almost didn’t want to go back; Roy and Anne’s life here was so idyllic. Yet he had responsibilities, and men to train. When Jim arrived to take Steve back, Roy took Jim aside and had a very interesting conversation with him. It seemed that Steve asked Jim if he’d like to give Ron flying lessons, and up till now, had never even considered it. He checked with the FAA in Anchorage, and they verified that his VFR Instructor license was still valid, and the youngest they would accept a student pilot was 13, with a regular age limit for VFR pilot’s license of 16, but that could be waived for exceptional young pilots. Since there were no IFR fields in rural Alaska, 99% of the bush pilots held VFR licenses. Jim could see the steam coming out of Roy’s ears, but the die was cast - If Ron wanted to take flying lessons, he had to admit that Jim would be the perfect instructor. He was an OLD pilot, and that meant he was careful. As the saying went, “There are Old Pilots, and Bold Pilots, but NO Old Bold Pilots.”

Ron ran up to Jim, “Grandpa Jim, Would you teach me how to fly?”

Ron looked at Roy, who nodded approval.

“OK, Ron, but it’s a long involved process. You have to spend months in ground school learning some very important lessons before you even set one foot in a plane, and I’ll have to borrow a dual-control plane to take you up in. If you study really hard, you might have your VFR Pilot’s license by your 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, which by the way is the youngest the FAA will grant an unrestricted VFR pilot’s license. If you’re sure you want to do this, I’ll come back next week with a load of books you need to study, then you can have Anne or Roy test you on it. When they’re satisfied you know this stuff cold, I’ll apply for your Student Pilot’s Permit, and you can go flying with me.”



Ron gave his Grandpa a bear hug “Thanks Grandpa. I can’t wait. It was so cool in the front seat when we flew up from Allakaket.”

“One Thing Ron - you have to study hard, if I know Anne, she’ll grill you on this stuff, and won’t cut you any slack.”

“So what else is new? Mom’s been my teacher for almost 10 years now. She’s tough but I learn a lot. Bet you didn’t know I’ve already passed my GED test?”

Jim was taken aback, unlike other states, the Alaska General Equivalency Diploma test was a bear, and most high school age students didn’t pass the first time, and Ron was only 13. The GED meant he could legally stop studying if he wanted to, but he kept right after it, studying Advanced Science, Math, and English classes in hopes of passing his Advance Placement test so he could bypass a bunch of lower division college units to save money in college tuition. No wonder Steve was so interested in getting Ron into the Air Force Academy. Ron was a shoe-in if he wanted to go, and now Ron expressed an interest in Flying, and according to Steve, he shot good enough to shoot on the Air Force Shooting Team. Jim would have to make sure this was what Ron wanted, because once he started down that road, he was sure the skids would be greased and doors opened to make sure he stayed in. All in All, life as an Air Force Officer was pretty good. Life as an Air Force Pilot was even better, especially if you got assigned to an overseas European or Pacific base.

Meanwhile he had a grandson to look out for. Ron broke the hug, and ran to Steve, gave him a big hug, and Steve reminded them that they were welcome at the MacDill AFB anytime they wanted to, and he could arrange MAC transport from Anchorage and put them up in base housing for 2 weeks. Steve gave Anne a big hug and almost started crying. He was going to miss his big sister. When Anne let him go, he gave Roy a firm handshake, which evolved into a “guy hug”. Steve’s bags were already loaded on the plane, so Steve got into the passenger seat, and as soon as everyone was clear, Jim started the engine, and as the prop slowly spun up to speed, he completed pre-flighting the plane, and turned to taxi to the lake. Steve waved bye from the passenger seat as they turned around to leave, and then they were taxiing out of sight. Jim turned downwind to taxi to the end of the lake, and finally turned the plane into the wind. After verifying everything was set properly for takeoff, Jim pushed the throttle to take-off, and quickly build up to takeoff speed. Since the plane was basically unloaded, he only needed 2/3 of the lake, so made a steeper than usual take-off climb to impress Steve. He leveled off at 2,000 ft AGL, and turned for Allakaket. He needed to refuel before flying to Anchorage. During the flight, the conversation turned to Ron.

“Steve, I know you are thinking about getting Ron into the Air Force Academy, but he’s only 13. Go easy on the kid, OK?”

“Relax Jim, He’s only 13, he’s got another 4 or 5 years before the Air Force would be interested in him, so you can relax; besides a lot can happen between now and then.”

“That’s easy for you to say Steve, but I have a very impressionable 13 yr. old kid back there with a serious case of hero worship. I don’t want him to base a life decision on someone who spent 2 weeks with him after 13 years. Roy and Anne have done their best to raise their son to keep his options open, now I see the skids are greased for him to become an Air Force Pilot. What if he dies in combat. That would crush Anne - do you really want to put your sister through that?”

“OK Jim, I see your point, but first of all, while I might have greased the skids, he has a lot of hoops to jump through before the Air Force would let him anywhere near a \$10 million dollar aircraft - I think you’re getting a little ahead of yourself. For all we know, Jim, even if he gets into the Academy will be up against the best of the best from the nation, and there are very few Fighter Pilot slots opening up now that World Peace has broken out. Odds are he’ll join the Air Force, be on the Air Force Shooting Team, and go on to lead a normal life.”

“Or if his Recruiter gives him the shaft, he could wind up an Air Force Cook.”

“Not bloody likely Jim. I’ve got enough pull so that if he does his part and excels at the Academy, he can write his own ticket in the Air Force - basically he could do anything he wanted. Some Airman fold under the pressure, but from what I’ve seen and heard about Ron, he’s kind of like me, and he thrives on pressure, and enjoys the rush.”

“That’s true Steve, you were always a daredevil growing up - wasn’t it you that took that crazy ride down the river in a rubber raft?”

“Yeah, and I almost drowned twice - then Roy comes along and does it in a dugout canoe.”

“Except Roy didn’t have a choice - you did. He probably would have died if he had tried to hike from his cabin to Allakaket. But that wasn’t enough of a rush for you, you had to go and do the most dangerous job in the Military, Para-rescue. Then you volunteered for Special Forces - Talk about “Out of the Frying Pan and Into the fire”. I still haven’t heard any stories from you about that, but I can imagine they would be hair-raising.”

“Jim, there were a couple of tight spots, but I just went on training and got through it. They train you to the point that your response to danger is automatic, and you don’t have to think about it. Now that I’m a Colonel, I’ll tell you I miss the action, but now I get to be responsible for the entire wing of Pave Hawks, and the crews including all the PJs.”

“What’s it like to fly in a Pave Hawk flying nap of the earth?”

“You remember the Viper ride at Magic Mountain?”

“Never been on it, but I heard that some riders have fainted from fear.”

“Well, flying nap of the earth in a blacked out Pave Hawk makes that like riding the Tea Cups in Disneyland.”

“I think I’ll stick to fixed wing, thank you.”

“OK, but if you ever want to ride in a Pave Hawk, the offer stands to come down with Roy and his family for a couple of weeks.”

“I’ll have to think about it. OK, we’ll have to postpone the rest of this conversation, I need to concentrate on our approach, we’re about to land at Allakaket.”

“Jim calling Allakaket Tower, requesting approach and landing instructions.”

“Tower to Jim, Pattern is clear, wind is out of the west like usual, just come on in.”

Jim lined up for approach, and cranked the flaps out to full to slow down to his approach speed. He only wanted 10 knots above stall to get the lightly loaded plane down. When his airspeed indicator indicated 100 knots, he called final, and followed the glide slope down to touchdown, as usual, he made a perfect landing, and slid up the bank to the airstrip from the lake. Jim was real glad when they put that concrete ramp in, because more than once someone had hit the dirt bank too fast and nosed over, damaging their prop. Now the concrete ramp smoothed the transition, and now it was practically a cake walk.

Jim and Steve took the opportunity to walk around and stretch their legs while the plane was refueled and serviced. 5 minutes later, they were ready for the leg to Anchorage. Jim did a walk-around just to make sure everything was good to go, checked the fluids, then finally they were seated, and Jim started the motor again, taxied, and called the tower for takeoff clearance. As usual, there was no one around, so he got approval for a direct flight path into the Anchorage TCA. Two hours later, they landed at Anchorage, and Jim drove Steve over to Elmendorf AFB. They had about an hour to kill before Steve caught his MAC flight back to MacDill. They spent the time reminiscing about life and memories of growing up in Allakaket. Finally, Steve’s flight was called, and he boarded an Air Force VIP aircraft. Jim saw it coming in, and commented to Steve, “I guess Rank Really Does Have It’s Privileges.”

Steve laughed and gave Jim a hug and boarded his aircraft

## Chapter 57 Flying Lessons

A week later, Jim showed up with a box full of manuals for Ron to study. Jim had stuck Post-its on the covers with the number sequence that Jim wanted him to read them in, and a huge document from the FAA which was a study guide/practice test and the Official FAA Student Pilot Permit test. Jim told Roy and Anne some Instructors just gave the students only what they needed to pass their Student Pilot test, but since Ron had 3 years, he wanted to make sure Ron new EVERYTHING to pass his FAA Private Pilot's license beforehand. Most of the manuals were extremely technical in nature, but Jim had taken the liberty of getting several copies of last year's FAA private pilot's exam to use as practice tests. Each section was marked out, and Ron could either take the practice test a section at a time, or the whole test at once. Jim wanted to reserve one copy as a final exam, leaving 3 practice test copies. The practice test copies were in the box, and Jim was keeping the original as a final exam, since his Instructor's Permit - not to mention his life - was on the line.

Roy and Anne were very appreciative of the extra lengths Jim had gone to make sure Ron was qualified and safe to fly a plane.

"Roy and Anne - no need to worry, I located a dual-control trainer that wasn't being used. The owner's a friend of mine, and said if we pay for the gas, oil and maintenance, we could use it for free. I looked it over, and it's in excellent condition." Jim turned to Ron "Ron, I want you to know you are getting one heck of a deal - most Instructor Pilots charge over \$100 per hour for lessons, plus plane rental - so don't waste my time."

"Grandpa Jim - don't worry. I'm 100% committed to learning how to fly - even if I never go into the Air Force, having a pilot's license around Allakaket is kind of like having your driver's license elsewhere - you need to have one to have any freedom, or you're always depending on someone else for a ride."

"Well said Ron - now get to studying. You're not going near a plane until you pass the FAA Private Pilot exam." Jim gave Ron a big hug and headed out the door - he needed to make some other stops.

Ron tore open the box, and started reading. He took a legal pad and pencil to take notes. He read the document covering Pilot's license categories, and decided that he needed a Private Pilot's license with a Sea endorsement to fly float planes. There wasn't much point in having a land only license, since most of the "landing strips" were in fact lakes.

Ron devoted several hours per day studying the manuals when he wasn't doing schoolwork, or helping Roy with chores. Gradually he passed each section in turn, and 6 months later, he was ready to take his first "Practice" Test. He scored 80% - But Anne said "Not Good Enough." So back to studying. Ron studied the sections he missed, called up Grandpa Jim

to ask questions, and understood where he made mistakes. 3 weeks later, Anne gave Ron Practice Test #2. Ron scored 95%. Anne told Ron that if he wanted to, he could take the “for real” test next time Grandpa Jim came up. 2 weeks later, Jim came over with the “final exam”. It took Ron 2 hours to take the exam, and he passed with a score of 98%. He only missed one highly technical question Jim had to admit he didn’t know the answer to either. Jim took the test results and several other forms to the FAA office in Anchorage, AK a few weeks later. Don was flabbergasted when Jim told him that a 13-yr old kid passed last year’s FAA pilot’s exam without any stick time. He issued the Student Pilot’s permit for Ron right then and there. Jim flew over to where the dual control trainer was hangared, and offered to fly the owner back to his house if he could fly the trainer to Allakaket. Since he wasn’t doing anything important that day, and was a real old friend of Jim’s, he agreed, and soon the trainer was hangared in Allakaket. Jim had the FAA mechanic that worked there do a full Airworthiness Survey on the aircraft, and found a few minor things that needed to be repaired and maintained. Jim paid for them right then and there so Ron could get flying. Later that week, the mechanic issued an official FAA Airworthiness Certificate for the aircraft when he finished the list of items.

Next week, Jim flew the trainer up to Roy’s cabin and asked Ron if he were ready to go flying. Jim assured Roy and Anne that he would handle the landings and take-offs, and he might relinquish the controls if he felt the conditions were right, and let Ron fly straight and level for a while. Roy and Anne weren’t too happy, but a deal was a deal, and they had promised Ron that if he passed the test, he could learn to fly.

As soon as they were ready to go, Ron ran around to the passenger seat of the trainer, and belted in. Jim went through the entire pre-flight slowly enough for Ron to watch and memorize every step. Finally when he was ready, Jim turned the mixture to full rich, primed it 3-4 times, set the throttle to  $\frac{1}{4}$  and turned the key to the start position. After a couple of slow revolutions, the engine caught, and soon the propeller was spinning. When the motor was warmed and idling at about 1000rpm, Jim eased the throttle out of Start, and bumped it into the lowest taxi position. Jim explained that a land-based airplane could taxi much quicker on the ground, but with the small wheels and big pontoons, he had to taxi as slowly as possible to avoid damaging the pontoons. Jim used the rudder controls to control the brakes to encourage the plane to turn since they weren’t going quick enough for the rudder to turn the plane. When he was facing the lake, Jim released both brakes, and taxied at about 5mph to the lake. When he reached the lake, he told Ron to be ready for a slight bounce as they transitioned from wheels to the pontoons. The bounce was barely felt, then they were floating on the lake, and Jim could now steer the plane with the little rudders on the ends of the pontoons since the brakes didn’t work.

Jim steered the plane to the downwind end of the lake, explaining that you always wanted to take off into the wind, because it increased your effective airspeed, and air speeding over the wings was what created lift, and you need lift to fly - otherwise you drop like a rock.

Ron being the little know-it all said “Actually Grandpa, it’s the difference in air pressure that generates lift; it’s called the Bernoulli Principle.”

“Well, Mr. Know-it-all, you’re half right. Mr. Bernoulli’s Principle doesn’t work if there is no air flowing over the wings, and the forward speed of the wing is directly proportional to the amount of lift generated. OK, tell me the procedure for lifting off.”

“As you rapidly accelerate down the runway, you approach V-1, your decision point to either take off or abort the take-off based on your ground speed, your minimum take-off speed, and how much runway you have left. If you pass V-1, you’re committed to attempting the take-off since you lack sufficient room to safely stop. As you continue to accelerate, you reach V-R, or rotational velocity, the point that the wings are generating sufficient lift to rotate the nose of the plane and transition to wing-borne flight.”

“Great Ron, you can quote the book - now explain what it means.”

“Ok, Gramps - V-1 is the point of no-return, you either stop or fly. V-R is the point when you are going fast enough to lift off the runway and start flying. The closer your V-1 and V-R are to each other, the safer. The more heavily loaded the plane, the warmer it is, and the higher it is, the further they are apart. Density Altitude is a problem at high hot airports like Denver in the summer, where the VR and V1 are far apart, and VR may be past the end of the runway in certain conditions, requiring the pilot to either lighten the plane, or wait until conditions change, because the plane can only accelerate so fast.”

“OK, you’ve got that figured out, now how about VR and V1 for this aircraft.”

“Grandpa, you know I don’t know that - that is type-specific information. Besides we’re waterborne, and I don’t know how long this lake is.”

“Good Answer Ron - OK, this lake is about a mile long at its widest point, and VR as lightly loaded as we are is right about 60 knots indicated. Fully loaded it’s about 65 knots. V-1 on this lake since it’s so small is about 40 knots since we don’t accelerate too well, and there are no brakes on a waterborne aircraft. Once you start accelerating to take-off speed, you’re basically committed to fly, since you can’t stop in time.”

“Thanks Gramps - that’s One fact I didn’t need to know.”

“Get over it Ron - you accept certain risks when you pilot a plane - and a lot of things are beyond your control - like if you hit an air pocket or wind sheer, which is probably what killed your namesake. Stuff Happens around here you have no control over - we fly through and around mountains that create their own weather, and are known to have vicious updrafts and downdrafts of several hundred feet per minute. If you want to get out right now, I’ll take you back to the cabin. Otherwise learn to accept the risks and get with the program.”

“Gramps, if it’s all the same to you - I want to learn how to fly. I just never really internalized the risks before. I mean accident statistics are one thing, and the fact that you can get squashed like a bug in an instant even if you do everything right is another.”

“Ron, there are 3 things you will learn or already have as a Pilot: 1) Faith in God 2) Faith in Yourself and 3) Faith in your plane. If you ever loose one of those 3, Don’t Fly. There are times when you shouldn’t fly - like when the weather is too bad. It’s up to you to weigh the costs and benefits each time you take the stick. Sometimes I fly in marginal weather if there is a life to be saved, but I never fly in marginal weather unless it’s a real emergency. I’m not going to risk my life so a hunter can get to a hunting lodge - he can wait until the weather clears.”

“Well Gramps, I’ve got #1 and #2 down - let’s go work on #3.”

“OK Ron, I’m turning into the wind, make sure your seat belts are fastened and your seats are in the upright position. I’d like to welcome you aboard Jim airlines. Pilot to Co-pilot, prepare for takeoff.” Jim dialed 20% flaps, adjusted the trim tabs, and set the rudder to compensate for the engine torque so they would go straight ahead. He flipped both magnetos off one at a time to make sure they were working, then returned them both to ON and looked over at Ron. Ron gave him a Thumbs up, and Jim advanced the throttle to the stop. The lightly loaded plane leaped forward, and Jim called out V-1 meaning they had exceeded 40mph and were committed. 30 seconds later, and with about ¼ of the lake remaining, he called out VR, and pulled the yoke back into his lap. The plane took a 20 degree nose-up attitude and rotated off the water - they were flying. Jim held the yoke back until they were 500 feet AGL (Above Ground Level) and had cleared the trees around the lake. Jim eased the yoke back to a more sedate climb to altitude, which he set at 2,000 ft MSL (Mean Sea Level). The altimeter slowly crept upwards as he kept climbing.

Ron asked him “Gramps, what’s the max rate of climb for this aircraft?”

Jim answered “The book says 5 feet per second, but I wouldn’t bank on that. Ron did some quick calculations in his head, watching the altimeter and his sweep second hand of his Aviator watch Jim had given him a few years ago. “I think you’re right Gramps, I figured we’re averaging 2 feet per second, and you eased off on the yoke after we cleared the trees, so you’re not climbing at max.”

Jim felt like patting his grandson on the head, but decided he’d better keep both hands on the wheel. When they finally reached their flight level at 2,000 ft MSL, Jim looked around, and the weather was clear. He was high enough to call the tower, so he did. “This is Jim calling Allakaket Tower, over”

“Allakaket Tower, over.”

“Request permission to conduct pilot training around HelpmeJack Lake area, how’s the traffic.”

“Pattern Clear - no traffic for 100 miles if you stay below 5K MSL.”

“Acknowledge Traffic Clear for 100 below 5K MSL. WILCO, Out”

“Ok, Ron. Just tell me what the Tower said.”

“They said that there were no planes for 100 miles around the HelpmeJacks below 5,000 feet MSL. Since this is my first time, I can guess you won’t be climbing much higher.”

“Partial credit for that one Ron, I rarely fly above 2,000 MSL unless I’m flying through a pass, then I climb to clear the nearest peak by 1,000 feet unless the pass is so huge you could fly a 747 through it. Remember if you ever see a mountain goat in the clouds, mountain goats don’t fly.”

“Real Funny Gramps - I saw that Far Side Cartoon as well.”

“Guess what Ron, I want you to take the controls. OK, put your feet on the rudder pedals, but don’t push, and get a feel for how I move the rudder and the stick.”

Ron put his hands on the yoke and his feet on the rudder pedals and felt Jim’s inputs as he maneuvered the plane. Jim banked left, right, climbed, and descended. Nothing too fancy just yet, he wanted Ron to get a feel for how the controls acted and worked together. Jim brought the plane to straight and level, and told Ron. “OK, it’s your turn, just fly straight and level. You felt how much control input I needed to keep it S&L, so don’t use any more than that, or you’ll be chasing the airplane, and you’ll never get it back.” Jim took his hands off the wheel and his feet off the rudders, and Ron was flying the plane. After a couple of minor wobbles, Ron was flying perfectly straight and level. When Ron was good and stable, Jim told him to bring it right around from their 360 heading to 180 without losing altitude. This was a neat trick, since almost any turn with a high degree of bank loses altitude. Ron started the turn with a little Right Aileron, and gradually added right rudder until the plane was tipping about 20 degrees right, and as he noticed the altimeter going down, he thought fast and realized he needed to pull up slightly to compensate. He pulled back slightly on the yoke, and they regained their altitude. Ron leveled out the turn as the compass came around, and they were heading almost exactly 180 - his magnetic compass said 179 instead of 180, but that was close enough for a first time. Some beginners badly overshoot or under shoot their target bearing doing a simple turn. Jim was proud of Ron, but didn’t say anything.

“OK Ron, now let’s try that to the left, Come from 180 back to a heading of 360 degrees magnetic.”



This time, Ron was more aggressive with his turn, and had to add more throttle than last time, but he came out of it exactly at 360 magnetic. When Ron had stabilized the plane on a heading of 360, Jim called “Pilot’s Plane” and put his hands back on the controls. Ron breathed a sigh of relief. Jim said he was going to show him climbing and diving banks, and the sequence of control inputs it took to perform them. Ron tried a few, but was having problems getting the hang of it, so Jim took the plane back.

“Don’t worry Ron, No one gets it right the first time, but you seem to have the knack to be a good flyer. You’re not a natural, but you work hard, concentrate, and plan ahead. I’d rather have a pilot that had to work at it, than a pilot who was a natural at it, since he has to work to understand how the plane works, so if anything goes, wrong, he knows the plane inside and out. I’m going to take us home, I need to get this plane back to Allakaket and get it refueled.”

Jim called the tower “Jim calling Allakaket Tower, Resuming Normal Flight ops.”

“Allakaket Tower, Roger”

Jim told Ron that he had to call in and out of flight ops so the tower would know to give them a lot of free airspace when they had a student pilot up flying the plane. Ron nodded, otherwise he was silent. As Jim headed back to the lake, he talked Ron through the landing procedures and set the plane up to land by cranking out full flaps, and pushing in the throttle to slow the plane to approach speed. Jim noticed a slight cross-breeze, and pointed it out to Ron, who noticed it too. Jim told him he needed to add a little right rudder to compensate for the wind, and started skidding the nose gently into the wind. Jim held everything steady, and the plane’s natural sink rate landed the plane for them. Once they were on the water, Jim chopped the throttle, and the plane settled out quickly and coasted to a stop a  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile from the far edge of the lake. “As you can see, Ron, there’s a pretty small margin of error to land a small plane on a lake. This was a picture perfect landing, and we only made it with a  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile to spare. Landing on a lake is kind of like landing on an aircraft carrier, except you don’t have an arresting hook, and you don’t get a go-around since you don’t have the power to climb out once you commit to land. Once you’ve drifted below the ridge lines surrounding the lake, you’re committed. I’m going to let you practice landing and taking off from Allakaket since their lake is bigger and the mountains surrounding it are smaller. Jim taxied to the cabin door and let Ron out. Ron waved Goodbye, so Jim turned around and taxied off.

## Chapter 58 Misunderstanding

Ron walked into the house looking like he lost his best friend. Anne asked him what happened, and Ron blurted out, “I don’t know if I can get my pilot’s license, Grandpa doesn’t trust me.”

Anne asked Ron what had happened, and he said “I was trying to fly the plane, and I made one little mistake, and he took the controls - It wasn’t even dangerous or anything. I don’t know why he did that.” Ron walked into his room and laid down on the bed. Lucky walked over to him, and started licking his hands. Ron finally rolled over and started petting Lucky, who was getting bigger each day. Anne decided to take matters into her own hands, and tuned the radio to the frequency Jim liked to use in the plane.

“Jim this is Anne. We need to talk. Can you fly back here tomorrow?”

“Anne, sure - I’ll drop off this plane, and be back in mine after first light tomorrow, it’s getting too late to try today. I think I know what’s wrong, but shouldn’t say over the air.”

“OK, see you tomorrow.”

The next morning, they awoke to the sound of a plane taxiing up to the cabin. Anne met Jim at the plane.

“Jim, for some reason Ron thinks you don’t trust him. He said something about taking the controls away yesterday.”

“OK, I know exactly what you’re talking about now - Ok if I go talk to him?”

“Please do - he’s been sulking ever since yesterday.”

Jim walked into the cabin, looked around and didn’t see Ron, so he walked back into the back room. “Knock-knock, OK if I come in?”

“Sure grandpa.”

“Ron, I think you and I got off on the wrong foot yesterday. I think you might have misunderstood why I took the controls yesterday. I didn’t want you to get overloaded and panic when you were having difficulty with the new maneuvers.”

“Grandpa Jim, you took the controls away right as I almost had it figured out, I know what I did wrong, and was in the process of correcting it when you took the plane away. Please don’t take the controls like that again unless I’m doing something dangerous or about to lose

control of the plane.”

“Ron, I wanted to say I’m sorry. You’re the first student I’ve had in almost 30 years. I needed to be more patient. Can you forgive me?”

“Sure Grandpa.” Ron got up and gave his Grandpa Jim a big hug.

“You know Ron, you did very well on those first two turns. “

“Mom and Dad bought me Microsoft Flight Simulator, and I’ve been practicing using the Cessna. It’s not the same though, since the game doesn’t give you feedback like the yoke and rudder pedals do.”

“OK, you realized that it’s not the same as the game, my advice is to stop using the game since it will only mess you up from here on out, you need to get used to the controls of the plane you’re flying. Also, if you noticed, that Cessna had the glide angle of a rock with those big heavy floats on, so you want to remember that when you try and land it, that it needs more altitude and airspeed on approach than your game does.”

“Thanks Grandpa, Can we go flying again next week?”

“Sure Ron, I wanted to go flying at least once a week until you get your license. It takes a lot of practice to master flying, but you have the discipline to do it.”

## Chapter 59 - Flying Lessons, Part II

One week later as promised, Jim showed up bright and early with the Cessna trainer. Ron was so eager to get started that he ran out to the aircraft as soon as the propeller had slowed to a stop. He gave his Grandpa Jim a big hug and Jim told him he needed to talk to his parents first. He'd filled the tanks at Allakaket, and wanted to keep him flying longer than last time. Jim told Roy and Anne they'd be out flying for a couple of hours, and they could call him on the aircraft's radio if they got worried. Anne looked nervous, but Roy said "OK, no problems here - have a nice flight." Ron gave Roy a big hug, then he gave his mother a hug, and they were off. Jim made sure Ron was securely buckled in, had his headset on, and the pedal height was properly adjusted before he even started his pre-flight. Thinking fast, Jim told Ron to talk him through the pre-flight sequence. Ron was thinking "He's starting all ready and we aren't even off the ground yet." Then focused on the task at hand.

"OK Grandpa - Preflight sequence. Perform walk-around, checking all surfaces, and fluid levels. I'll assume you did that at Allakaket after you filled up. Next, interior pre-flight. Prior to engine start, check all controls for free movement and response. Next, Radio check. Tune to Guard and check status light, then switch to tower frequency and perform radio check. Since we don't have comms with the tower, you could call my mom & dad, but I doubt they have the radio on right now. Once all Before Starting checks have been completed, proceed to Engine start sequence. Set Mixture to rich, prime 3-4 times, set throttle to  $\frac{1}{4}$ , and turn the ignition key to Start. Once engine is idling at 1000 rpm, perform Magneto check, and re-set throttle to slow idle."

"Excellent Grasshopper, you will go far."

"Thank you Master Po."

They both got a good laugh out of that tired Kung-Fu joke, then Jim started the engine and taxied out to the lake. Ron was watching him like a hawk, and noticed little things like how he controlled the aircraft using the throttle and brakes on the ground. True to form, Jim taxied out to the lake at about 5mph, then transitioned to the water, and could now move a little faster, and kicked the taxi speed up to about 20 mph. When they got to the end of the lake, Jim reviewed the take-off sequence with Ron, and asked him if he were ready to fly. When Ron gave him a thumbs-up, Jim shoved the throttle to full, and they were accelerating down the lake. As the airspeed indicator read 65 knots, Jim pulled the yoke back, and they were flying. Jim held the yoke back until they had cleared the trees at the end of the lake, then set the plane up to climb at its best speed instead of max climb rate. When he reached 2,000 ft, Jim contacted the tower. "Allakaket tower, this is J145AWC, Juliet 145 Alpha Whiskey Charlie requesting clearance for student pilot training."

"Juliet 145 Alpha Whiskey Charlie, pattern is clear below 10,000 ft, you are clear for student

pilot training. Hey Jim - you getting formal on us?"

"Negative, just teaching my student proper radio procedures, like using my tail number to identity all my radio calls."

"Allakaket, Roger and clear"

"OK, Ron you heard the man, its all clear, go ahead and take the controls."

Jim stayed on the controls until Ron called "I've got the plane" and Jim took his hands and feet off the controls. Ron was really enjoying himself this time, and wasn't as nervous as last time.

"OK Ron, just fly straight and level for a while, then we'll try those turns again."

After about 15 minutes, Jim said, "OK Ron - right bank, maintain altitude and stop on 270."

Ron immediately turned the yoke 20 degrees to the right and held it, using the rudder to ease the nose around. He lifted the nose slightly to maintain altitude, and stopped the turn exactly on 270 at the same altitude he started at.

"Well Done, Grasshopper - now try a left bank and maintain altitude, come to 90 degrees and stop."

Ron thought "This is a walk in the park" and got a little more aggressive in his turn. He held the bank at exactly 20 degrees, and this time, as well as a slight nose-up, he had to add throttle. He stopped right at 90 degrees.

"Learned something this time grasshopper?"

"Yeah, if I exceed 15 degrees of bank, this plane flies like a rock."

"Exactly - this plane wasn't built as an Amphibian, so you need to keep that in mind if you try any aggressive maneuvers. Not only that, but you don't have a lot of acceleration available with this engine, so if you get too far out of control, it might be tough to recover with throttle only. Ok, now let's try some climbing and diving turns. I want a right turn to 270 and gain 100 feet."

Ron knew to gain 100 feet in a turn, he'd have to add throttle and go easy on the angle of bank, so he only banked 10 degrees, and added 20% throttle while keeping the nose up. He came out of the turn at 270, but he was 10 feet too high.

"Not bad - guessing the throttle setting the first time in a new plane can be a bear. OK, same

turn to the left.”

Ron bumped the throttle back a little, and did everything else exactly the same as last time. As he came up on 90 degrees, he eased up on the ailerons and came out of the turn exactly at 90 degrees, and at the indicated altitude. To say Jim was impressed was an understatement.

“Grasshopper - you learn fast. That was amazing. Feel like trying to take off from Allakaket?”

“Sure Master Po, If you feel honorable Grasshopper is ready.”

“OK, 86 the Kung Fu stuff. Turn to heading 210 and descend slowly to 500 feet. Once you reach 500 feet, call your altitude, and I’ll make the landing.”

“Ok Gramps, turning to 210 and descending.” Since he could lose altitude in the turn, Ron didn’t correct for the loss of altitude in the turn, and when he reached heading 210 magnetic, turned the plane straight and level, and reduced throttle until they were losing about 50 feet per minute.

Ron asked Jim if this descent rate was acceptable, and Jim said to increase descent rate to 100 feet per minute, they were closer than he thought. Ron decreased throttle further, and established a sink rate of 100 feet per minute. 10 minutes later, he stabilized at 500 feet, and called his altitude and heading to Jim. Jim said “Pilot’s plane” and took the controls. Then he called the tower, “Allakaket tower, this is Juliet 145 Alpha Whiskey Charlie requesting approach and landing instructions.”

Juliet 145 Alpha Whiskey Charlie. Winds out of the West as usual, pattern is clear, do you wish to land or touch and go.”

“Tower, we’re going to land, and my Student will be handling the take-off.”

“Roger Jim - it’s your life.”

“Funny Tower. Juliet 145 Alpha Whiskey Charlie on Final.” When he saw the lake in front of him, Jim set the flaps to full and slowed to 85 knots indicated. As soon as he cleared the trees, he reduced speed to 60 knots indicated, and sank the last 100 feet to the lake. He maintained 10 degrees nose-up until the pontoons made contact with the water, and he chopped the throttle, and eased off the yoke until the plane was fully down and floating toward the other end of the lake. Jim eased off the flaps as soon as they were down, and the plane coasted to a stop 100 yards from the far end of the lake. Since they still had enough gas on board for a couple more hours of flight time, Jim turned the plane around on the lake and told Ron that he could take-off from the lake, saving him the bumpy transition from land

to water. Jim turned the plane into the wind, and told Ron “OK, the plane is yours. I’m not going to make you go through the restart sequence, since you can’t reach all the controls from your side, so just go ahead and call the tower and prepare for take-off.”

Ron took a couple of deep breaths, and pressed his PTT button. “Allakaket Tower, this is Juliet 145 Alpha Whiskey Charley requesting permission to take-off with student pilot at the controls.”

“Juliet 145 Alpha Whiskey Charley, permission granted, Winds are out of the west at 10.”

“Roger Tower, starting take-off now.”

Ron looked to Jim, who gave him a thumbs-up. Ron dialed 20 degrees of flap, set the rudder to compensate for the torque of the propeller, and shoved the throttle to FULL. The plane quickly accelerated, and as soon as the airspeed reached 65 knots, Ron eased the yoke back until the pontoons left the lake. He held the nose-up angle until he cleared the trees on the far side of the lake by 100 feet, and eased off of the nose-up attitude until they were in a good high-performance climb to 2,000 ft. 10 minutes later, they were at altitude, and Ron set the plane up for straight and level.

Jim told Ron “That was the best take-off I’d ever seen a student pilot do, then again, you’re only my second student. I’m impressed, you stuck with your plan and went with it - that shows confidence.”

“Grandpa, I’d seen you do so many of them, all I did was copy exactly what you did. I knew if you could do it, as long as I did exactly what you did everything would work the same.”

“OK, since we have the airtime, want to try some other things?”

“Sure - just tell me what to do, and how to do it.”

“OK, first thing is MCAS or Minimum Controllable Airspeed. This will teach you exactly where is the stall point of the aircraft. OK, next perform gentle clearing turns, and slow down to 80 knots indicated. Once you reach 80 knots, slowly extend flaps to 40 degrees, maintaining heading and altitude. When airspeed reaches 45 knots, increase throttle to 2,000 rpm and maintain heading and altitude. Make sure to use rudder as you increase throttle to maintain heading. To recover, throttle to full and retract flaps to 10 degrees until 65 knots indicated, then fully retract. You ready, go ahead and try it.”

“OK Gramps, starting turns and reducing throttle. Indicated air speed 100 knots, slowing. OK, 80 knots indicated, maintaining straight and level, slowly extending flaps to 40 degrees, air speed dropping. Flaps to 40 degrees, airspeed still dropping. OK, Airspeed 45 knots indicated. Tell me when you want to recover.”

“OK Ron, hold this for 2 minutes, then recover.”

Ron knew if he looked at his watch, he'd lose the horizon, so he started counting “one thousand one...” until he got to one-thousand 120, and he quickly pushed the throttle to full, and retracted the flaps to 10 degrees. When he reached 65 knots, he retracted the flaps fully and continued accelerating back to 100 knots indicated. Jim was watching the airspeed and altimeter all the time, and he never gained or lost more than 20 feet in the whole maneuver. Obviously Ron was a better natural pilot than he thought, or he could really concentrate. Remembering what happened last time, Jim thought it was probably the latter. That and Jim had the patience to let Ron fly the plane, instead of constantly grabbing the controls. Constantly grabbing the controls would wreck any student's confidence.

“Great Job Ron, you didn't gain or lose more than 20 feet in the whole maneuver. Now you want to try a for-real stall?”

“Sure if you think I'm ready.”

“OK, here's what's going to happen. You're flying straight and level, and I push the throttle to IDLE while you maintain attitude and heading, the plane will lose lift and stall as you drop below 65 knots without flaps. To recover, assume 10-20 degrees nose down, get the wings level, and push the throttle to full, when your airspeed is above 65 knots and the plane is stable, pull back on the stick until wings are level and you're flying at the horizon again. Ready?”

Ron nodded, and Jim pushed the throttle to idle, and the plane slowed dramatically. The stall warning sounded, and Ron waited until he was in an actual stall before he recovered by pushing the nose down and applying left aileron to stabilize the roll to the right. As soon as his wings were level and he was in control of the plane, he reached over and pushed the throttle to full, as the airspeed climbed above 65 knots, he pulled the yoke back and got the plane straight and level.

“Not bad Ron, but why did you wait until you were in a full stall?”

“Jim, you said “a For-real stall” I wasn't actually in a Stall until the wings departed normal flight. If you noticed, we never dropped below 1,000 ft. We had plenty of time to recover.”

“Sorry Ron, you were right - maybe I should have said a “simulated stall”. A for-real stall can be scary if you go into a spin or otherwise totally lose control of the plane.”

“Actually Gramps, that was kind of fun, can we do it again?”

“Sure, but this time let's climb to 5,000 feet to give us a greater safety margin, I don't think my heart could stand another low-altitude recovery.”



“Gramps, that wasn’t that low, I had another 500 feet to go before it was an emergency situation.”

“Ron, you’re right, but did you check your rate of descent? You went from 2,000 ft to 1,000 ft in less than a minute, that’s a descent rate of 1,000 ft per minute. You were falling like the proverbial rock. I would have given you another second to recover before I would have taken over, since you were falling at 16 feet per second.”

“Yikes. I didn’t realize that. I was so busy recovering the plane, I didn’t watch the altimeter unwinding, but I guess you did. Sorry about that - I hope I didn’t give you a heart attack.”

“Not exactly, but I can guarantee my BP and pulse rate were going through the roof. OK, we’re at 5,000 feet - ready to try it again?”

Ron just nodded, and crossing his fingers, Jim pushed the throttle to idle. This time the plane really departed, and Ron used up most of the extra altitude recovering before it went into a spin and he totally lost control. He finally put the nose down steeper, and went all the way around and caught the roll on the upswing. Jim’s face was white as a ghost - he hadn’t trained Ron in aerobatics. Ron must have been practicing on the computer. Good thing too, since the aerobatic maneuver was exactly what was needed to stabilize the plane. Ron gained full control of the plane at 2,000 feet, and when the airspeed reached 65 with the wings level, he shoved the throttle to full again and recovered to straight and level. When Jim’s pulse slowed down enough to talk coherently, he said “Somebody’s been practicing on the computer. Good thing too, since that Aileron Roll was exactly what was needed to catch the stall and get the wings level. You were too far over in the bank to recover using opposite aileron, you would have run out of altitude before you recovered. It’s OK to practice aerobatics on the simulator, but just remember, with the floats, we’re limited to +/- 2 g’s instead of the +/- 4g’s the plane is rated at. The plane will do 4g’s, you just won’t be able to land without the floats, which would have departed the plane.”

“So Gramps, how was that aileron roll?”

“Considering you’re still a student pilot, it was darn near perfect. I’ll teach you how to roll around a center when we get you into a better plane. When you can roll around the same point in space, you have the aileron roll down perfect. You were a little wobbly around the center, but considering it was your first roll in a real plane, and you were doing it while in stall conditions, I would say it was pretty outstanding. Ready to head home - I don’t think my heart can take much more of this today. I want you to fly the approach, and I’ll land the plane, but keep your hands on the controls so you can feel what I’m doing.”

“Great idea Gramps, that way, I can learn to fly a landing without actually doing it myself.”

“OK Ron, descend to 800 feet and turn to heading 185 for home. And NO aerobatics.”

“Roger, Wilco.”

Ron turned into a hard bank, just short of a wingover, and descended rapidly to 1,000 ft. From there he made a more sedate descent to 800 feet.

“OK Mr. Wise Guy - That was awfully close to going aerobatic, but it was fun. Now slow to 60 knots and when you reach 60 knots indicated, lower the flaps to 40 degrees and maintain 10 degrees nose-up.”

“Roger, 60 knots indicated, 40 degrees flap, and 10 degrees nose up.”

As the airspeed dropped, Ron continued to slowly crank down the flaps until they were at 40 degrees. When he was in the groove, Jim called “pilot’s plane” but Ron kept his hands and feet on the controls to get the feel for what Jim was doing. As they descended below 200 feet, Jim noticed a slight crosswind, and turned the nose slightly into the crosswind to compensate. Jim told Ron about the crosswind, and the best way to handle small crosswinds was to maintain attitude, and turn the nose of the plane into the breeze. As they cleared the trees, Jim chopped the throttle, and the plane mushed down to the lake maintaining the 10 degree nose up all the way to touch down. They landed with a slight splash, but nothing too radical. As soon as the plane was down, Jim released back pressure on the yoke, and the plane settled fully onto the lake, and he retracted the flaps. The plane coasted to a stop 50 yards from the other end of the lake. Jim turned the plane around and taxied back to their beach, and ground taxied back to the cabin. When they were finished, Jim shut off the plane and gave Ron a big hug. “You did terrific today, you were put into some situations that normal pilots hate, and you handled it like a pro. If you want to keep this up, I want to teach you everything I know, and go way beyond the FAA requirements for Student Flying proficiency tests.”

“Gramps, I’d love that - when can we start?”

“Give me a week to get my BP back down to normal, and we’ll do this again. Go ahead and continue practicing aerobatics on the simulator, just remember that this plane doesn’t fly the same as the simulator with the huge floats attached to it.”

When the propeller had stopped spinning Jim went inside with Ron to talk to Roy and Anne, basically he wanted to brag about how good of a pilot his “grandson” was. Anne turned white as a sheet when Jim described the 2<sup>nd</sup> stall they did. Roy just looked at the two of them and shook his head. He guessed Ron was taking after Anne’s side of the family, and turning into a hotdog thrill seeker. Roy just hoped Ron wouldn’t die in a plane crash. When Jim left, Roy took Ron out to the lake to talk to him.

“Son, we need to sit down and talk about a few things.”

“OK, Dad, I’m listening.”

“You can tell I’m getting old, and you know that I probably won’t live another 20 years, so I need to tell you some stuff and ask you a favor. Odds are your Mom will survive me by quite a while. I don’t know if she will re-marry, but I want you to tell her after I’m gone I said it’s OK if she wants to. Tell her I loved her, and I’ll always love her, and we’ll be together in Heaven. Your mom will probably want to move back to Allakaket, but I’m asking you not to sell the cabin or the property because even if you join the Air Force, you’ll be retired in your 40’s and you have to admit this is the perfect place to live. Also, you’ll probably meet some sweet girl that you’ll want to marry and raise a family. If she wants to, I’d raise your family here for several reasons. 1) Alaska is the freest state in the Union, and the most remote. 2) If the stinky stuff ever hits the rotating blade, and it’s going to - you’ll be the safest here. 3) I’ve given you the entire property in my will, with a proviso that if Anne wants to live out her days here, she has the right of occupancy. 4) I talked to Jim, and all the bush pilots left around here are over 50, which means if you want to fly bush when you retire from the Air Force, you’re going to be in great demand, and Jim has already told me that he’s going to give you his De Havilland Otter. All it will need is an engine rebuild, and it should be good to go for at least 10 more years after he retires. Anyway, regardless of what you do with your life, know this - I am so proud of you son. Anne and I both love you very much. Just make sure you outlive us, because if you died before your Mom, I think it would kill her.”

“Don’t worry dad, when my number’s up, it’s up, but I can guarantee I won’t do anything unnecessarily stupid, unless you include flying fighter aircraft, to hasten that time. I’ll take care of Mom, and make sure she has everything she needs to live a happy and long life.”

“One more thing Ron - I’ve set aside trust funds for both of you from the balances in my bank. Anne can use her’s to live on, and if you want to buy a plane or something, it will either pay for it, or make a huge down payment on one.”

“Dad, remember Gramps already promised me the Otter - but I could use the money to refurbish it if I need to. I hope you live a long time, because I like having you around. but if something should happen to you, don’t worry, I’ll take care of Mom.”

“Thanks son, I know this is a lot for a boy your age to handle, but I guess you figured out years ago that your “Old Man” wasn’t going to live forever since your mom had you when I was in my 50’s. Anyway, let’s get back in the house before your mother worries about us.”

Roy gave Ron a big hug, and they walked back to the house.

## Chapter 60 - Landing the Plane

Next week, Jim came back for Ron's weekly flying lesson. Ron had been practicing daily on the computer, and was sure he could handle it. He was 10-10 landing the simulated plane on a postage-stamp sized lake. The lake at Allakaket was 3 times that size. As soon as Jim had landed, Ron met him at the plane, and was all excited to go. This time, Jim didn't go in the house, since he thought the less Anne knew, the less she would worry about, and he didn't want her worrying that her baby boy was going to land a plane for the first time. Jim thought she was being overprotective, but that's what Mothers do. Jim asked Ron if he would like to take off from their lake. Ron's eyes got as big as saucers, and then he had a huge grin on his face. "Sure Gramps. Let's go." Ron flew through the checklists, and started the plane, and as soon as everything was good to go, he blipped the throttle and held the right brake so the plane would turn to the right. When it was facing the lake, Ron released the brakes and taxied slowly to the lake, remembering Jim's admonition to go slow on land, since the huge pontoons made ground taxiing interesting at the least. When they got to the lake, he let the plane slide into the water, then applied more throttle to taxi to the downwind end of the lake. When he got to the end, he turned and waited.

"Ready Jim?"

"Yeah, I brought my Rosary Beads, my lucky rabbit's foot, and my St. Christopher medallion."

"Oh, come on Gramps, it's not that bad - I mean you really didn't have a heart attack when I pulled out of that stall using an aileron roll."

"That's OK, Ron - I made sure my life insurance is paid up."

"Don't worry Gramps, I won't do anything stupid - and by the way, thanks for giving me the DeHaviland."

"Not so fast Ron, first of all, you have to get your Commercial ticket before you can fly it, and second of all - I'm not retired yet. Now get this plane in the air and quit yakking."

"Yes Sir." Ron made sure the plane was ready to take-off, set the flaps and rudder, and then advanced the throttle to FULL. As the plane sped down the lake, he watched the airspeed indicator. When it hit 65 knots, Ron pulled the yoke back, and they were flying. He held the yoke back until they were 100 feet above the treeline, then eased back on the yoke until they were in a cruise climb where they were making the best combination of rate of climb and airspeed. He held that climb until the altimeter read 2,000 feet. Jim told Ron to make the tower call.

“Allakaket tower, this is J145AWC, Juliet 145 Alpha Whiskey Charlie, with a Student Pilot in control, requesting clearance for student pilot training.”

“J145AWC. Clear for training, the pattern is clear below 25k. Jim - please don't tell me you let Ron take off from that postage stamp of a lake of theirs.”

“Tower, sure did, and he did it like a pro.”

“Jim, bet you rubbed a hole in your rabbit's foot.”

Jim looked down, and sure enough, he had rubbed the fur off a spot of the rabbit's foot but didn't say anything to Ron.

“OK, Ron, let's review the maneuvers you've been practicing - I think we can skip the stall this time. OK, Turn right to 270 magnetic, maintain speed and altitude.”

“Roger, turning now.”

Ron performed the turn flawlessly, and the altimeter read 2,000 feet when he finished exactly on 270.

“OK Turn Left back to 90 degrees, same conditions.”

Again, Ron performed flawlessly.

Jim had him do some diving and climbing banks, then finally told him, “Ok, Ron, let's head to Allakaket, I want you to land the plane, stop, turn around and take off again. It's too dangerous to do touch and go's in a floatplane on these small lakes. Heading to Allakaket is 180 magnetic, distance about 20nm. The approach is all yours; I won't interfere unless I have to. Ron did an aggressive diving turn, bottoming out at 800 feet, and kept that altitude until he could see Allakaket coming up, and started his descent to 200 feet while losing airspeed and slowly extending the flaps to full. He reached 200 feet and 65 knots about 2 miles away from the touchdown point, and set up for his landing. First he called the tower.

“Juliet 145Alpha Whiskey Charlie on Final.”

“Roger J145AWC, clear to land, good luck.”

Ron continued on down, and as he cleared the treeline, he further reduced the throttle, and started his final descent to the lake. His first landing was near picture perfect, and was maybe 20 feet short of the ideal touchdown point, but Allakaket's lake was huge, so it had a large margin of error, almost 50 yards on either side of the 3-wire as Jim called it. As soon as the floats touched down, Ron chopped the throttle to idle, and quickly retracted the flaps,

and released the yoke, allowing the plane to settle on the lake. When they had come to a full stop, Jim told Ron he was ready to Solo, but since he was too young, he couldn't legally let him, but the rest of their training flights could be done in the DeHaviland, which could do aerobatics even with the floats. Jim gave Ron a big hug, then told him to turn the plane around and prepare for take-off. When he got the plane facing back into the wind, Ron called the tower "J145AWC, requesting permission to take-off."

"J145AWC, Permission Granted. Congratulations on that landing, we were watching it from the tower, and it looked like you nailed it. Tower Out."

Ron looked to Jim, who gave him a thumbs up, and Ron set the plane up to take off, then shoved the throttle to full again. They were up and flying with almost half the lake to spare. Ron did a more sedate climb-out since he didn't need to clear the trees immediately, and passed over the far treeline about 200 feet over the tops of the trees. he slowly climbed to 2,000 feet and turned to Jim and said, "OK, what now?"

Jim thought for a moment, Ron had already done everything he could do in this plane, and he was good enough to get his pilot's license right now. Problem was, he was only 14, and they didn't give out private pilot licenses until you were 16 now, because of a few famous crashes by young pilots out to break records.

"Ron, I've got a letter in my pocket with Steve's base address on it, but I want to give it to Roy since it's addressed to him, so how about we wrap this up, and you set us down on your lake, and see what that letter says?"

"Gramps, that lake is  $\frac{1}{4}$  the size of Allakaket, are you sure you want me to land the plane?"

"I wouldn't have asked if I didn't think you could do it. That landing at Allakaket was a textbook landing. You were only 20 feet short of a perfect landing, so all in all, I feel pretty safe with you at the controls for this landing. Two things I want to tell you, the approach for your lake is much steeper and slower than for Allakaket. Remember when you did that MCAS test, Ok, well you need to get as slow as possible on your approach, and as soon as you clear the ridge, start your descent. You have to loose 200 feet in a  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile, and your touchdown point is only 150 feet from the edge of the lake. Got that?"

"Roger, approach at 200 feet, as soon as I crest the ridge, start a 50% descent rate (for every foot forward, I go half a foot down.) until I either crash or land 150 feet from the edge of the lake."

"Ron - quit being a smart-alec, this is serious, and if you don't take it seriously, I'll never fly with you again."

"Sorry Grandpa, it's just that descent rate is a tad steep, what airspeed do I need at 40

degrees of flap to manage that sink rate, you realize that at 45 knots, this plane becomes a rock.”

“Last time I landed this plane here, I maintained 50 knots indicated once I reached 200 feet and full flaps. As soon as I cleared the ridge, I slowed to 45 knots, and I dropped like a rock, but a rock with a parachute. Make sure you maintain 20 degrees nose-up attitude to compensate for the slow steep descent. As soon as you touch down, throttle to idle, and flaps retracted smartly. Then quickly set the nose down. If you get within 50 feet of the opposite shore, give me hard left rudder to turn the plane, which will give you another 200 feet of rundown area to slow.”

“Ok, Gramps, descending to 200 feet and 65 knots.” Ron decided to loose a bunch of altitude in a hurry, and went into a 30-degree bank. 1 minute later, he had dropped from 2,000 to 200 feet, and he stabilized at exactly 200 feet and 65 knots.

“Ron - don’t do that as long as you’re a student. If you ever did that with a FAA inspector aboard, he would have terminated the test right then and there for an unsafe maneuver. Actually, it was exactly the maneuver I use to get down to this lake, except when I’m carrying cargo, then I just chop the throttle and assume a slight nose down attitude. That gives you maybe .5 negative gee, but nothing is going flying around the cabin with a half negative gee. Ok, you’re on final, start slowing to 50 knots.” As soon as they cleared the ridge, Ron slowed to 45 knots and maintained a 20-degree nose-up attitude. He was only 5 knots above stall, and Jim was right, they dropped like a rock with a parachute. Ron was willing the shoreline closer, but didn’t touch the throttle or the yoke, because pulling back even a little would immediately stall the plane, and he was only 50 feet above the water. If he added throttle, he’d overshoot and crash. He stuck with his plan. His heart was in his throat, but his grandpa had done this hundreds of times with planes that were fully loaded with freight, and he knew the glide slope of the de Havilland Otter with 2,000 pounds of cargo was even worse than the Cessna 172 with pontoons. If his Grandpa could do it, so could he. 3 seconds later, he touched down right on target 150 feet from shore, and as soon as he felt the pontoons touch down, Ron chopped the throttle to idle, retracted the flaps, and released the back pressure on the yoke. The nose of the aircraft came down smartly, and the plane slowed like someone had deployed a drag chute behind them. He came to a full stop 50 feet from the opposite shore. When the plane came to a full stop, Jim said, “Congratulations Ron, you did it just as good as I could have. As you can see, there’s damn little margin for error landing on this lake. 50 feet either way and you crash. Now let’s taxi up to the cabin and freak your parents out.”

When they taxied up to the cabin, sure enough Roy and Anne were waiting on the porch. Roy was grinning like a proud Papa when he saw that Ron was flying the plane, and Anne looked white as a sheet. Jim guessed he had succeeded in freaking Anne out at least. When the propeller had stopped, Ron jumped out of the pilot’s seat, closely followed by Jim. “Dad, I landed the plane, and Jim said I was darn near perfect.”

If it were possible for Anne to get any whiter, she managed. She turned and walked inside the house without a comment.

“Roy, this came from you - it’s from Steve at Mac Dill AFB.” Jim handed Roy the envelope, and they all walked inside. Roy put on his reading glasses, opened the letter, and noticed it was on Official Air Force Stationery.

When he noticed that Steve didn’t write the letter, he got real curious, and kept reading.

It read in part:

Dear Roy Williams:

I’m the CO of the Special Operations Joint Command at Mac Dill. I’m Colonel Steve Fellows commanding officer. He has been telling me about the time he spent with you in Alaska. When he got to the part about your son Ron being able to out-shoot all our members of our shooting team I was interested; when he mentioned that he just turned 14, and he was studying to become a Private Pilot, I was incredulous to say the least. Steve assures me that he actually witnessed Ron’s shooting ability, and also said that his mother Anne, Steve’s sister, makes Ron look like a Rookie.

I’ve attached orders for your entire family, including your dog Lucky to fly from Elmendorf AFB in Alaska to MacDill AFB via my personal C-20H Gulfstream IV. I understand that you live in a remote part of Alaska, and that a very good friend of your family is an experienced bush pilot. I’m enclosing a travel voucher good for round-trip travel from your house to Elmendorf AFB via private bush plane, with travel expenses reimbursed by the US Air Force. If Jim wants to come with you to MacDill AFB, we’d love to have him as well. We’ll put you up in VIP quarters for your entire stay. Steve tells me he wants your family to stay at MacDill for 2 weeks. I can guarantee an exciting visit to MacDill with demonstrations of all our capabilities, and of course as much shooting as you want to do. I’ve enclosed orders allowing you to ship civilian weapons aboard a US Air Force Aircraft. Please make sure that everything you ship is in a locked hard gun case. Any ammo you care to bring should be in a locked case as well. We have plenty of Lake City Match ammo for your Browning A-bolt .308 rifles, but if you have some specially loaded rounds you want to bring, feel free.

I look forward to meeting your family next week.

Sincerely,

Gen. Gene Sheppard,  
CO MacDill AFB  
JSOC



## Attachments

Roy's eyes got as big as saucers. This was Steve's doing, but they were neatly trapped, since a 3-star General had invited them, and detailed his personal plane to pick them up. He imagined if they refused to go, the MPs would come get them. Roy showed the letter to Anne, then Ron got to read it.

"Cool Dad, Steve's CO sent his VIP Gulfstream to pick us up. I've never flown in a Jet before. They even said we could bring Lucky. The departure date from Elmendorf is next week. I need to get practicing."

Anne wasn't as enthusiastic as Ron was, but could tell her brother had neatly trapped them. She said, "I guess this means we better get started packing." Then she turned to Jim.

"When I saw Ron getting out of the aircraft, I knew you had let him land here - do you have any idea how dangerous it is to land a small plane on this lake?"

"Anne, I've done it about 100 times by now, between delivering everything Roy ordered after returning from Allakaket, and all the stuff you've ordered since, I could probably do the landing in my sleep. Relax, Ron did land perfectly. He's a very good student, and listens well. Flying is just like any other skill, practice makes perfect. I wouldn't have let him try it unless I was sure he could do it. He's already made several landings at Allakaket, and taken off from here and Allakaket. He's so good right now that if he were 16, he'd have his private pilot's license. He's way better at this than I was for almost the first 10 years. I'm normally a white-knuckle instructor, but I trust Ron. He is like his namesake, he's real cocky and confident, but at the same time, he has shown a serious aversion to doing anything stupid or dangerous. His time on the Microsoft Flight Simulator just might have saved both our lives when he got into that hairy stall situation, yet he didn't panic and he knew to roll the plane all the way over instead of fighting the roll. You can't teach someone that - they either know it or they don't. Face it Anne, Flying's dangerous, and Ron is good at it. He's not a little boy anymore, and will grow up with or without your support. If you support him, he can be the best pilot I know. If you don't support him, he might get fearful, and a fearful pilot is a deadly pilot. I'm thinking of going with you guys to MacDill. It will be neat to see Steve, and it sounds like fun."

"Fun you say, my brother has every intention of stealing my baby away from me."

"Whoa - hold on there Anne - Ron is NOT a baby - he's 14, and in 4 years he'll be gone from here regardless of what you do - you can either support him, or loose him. It's your call. I'm his grandpa, remember - I don't want anything bad to happen to him either, but he has to grow up and leave the nest sometime. At least this way he'll have someplace to go, and they will train him to the limits of his capabilities. He'll love his time in the Air Force, even if he spends his entire career on the shooting team. I know what you're upset about,

you think he'll become a Fighter Pilot, and get killed in some foreign country. Sorry Anne, but that might happen, and unless you wish to keep him locked in his room, you don't have much that you can do to stop him from following his heart and his destiny."

"Thanks, Jim - you're right, I have been too overprotective. It's just these flying lessons made me think of my older brother. I don't want my son to die in a plane crash too."

"Unfortunately Anne, everyone dies. The question is do you want him to die doing something he loves, or die in a miserable dead-end but safe job."

"OK Jim, you made your point - I'm sorry."

"Just try to be supportive, and don't worry about his future. It's in God's hands anyway."

"You're right Jim. I get in trouble whenever I forget that God is in control of everything that happens to us. We can just screw up things up by being disobedient. Yet, in the end, even with our disobedience, the setback is temporary. His grand plan has already succeeded."

"Exactly, God already has a plan for Ron's life, and nothing you can do will change that."

Ron walked in, "Mom, can we go shooting? I want to make sure that my skills are still top-notch."

"Sure son, why don't you get everything out, then you and Grandpa Jim can roll the targets out while I talk to your dad."

Ron hurried to get everything out on the porch, and Jim helped him roll some logs out to the 200, 300, and 400-yard lines. When they were alone, Anne held Roy and cried briefly, then they prayed together for divine guidance, and they suddenly felt better, as if they knew that everything was going according to God's divine plan. Anne dried her eyes, and went out on the porch to join everyone shooting. Ron was already prone, so they put their earmuffs and shooting glasses on, then gave Jim the OK, who gave Ron a thumbs up. Ron settled into a military prone position, and his concentration was such that when the rifle went off, he was surprised by the sudden noise, but didn't flinch. He was shooting at the 400-yard target, and his first round was dead center. He put 2 other rounds within an inch of the shot in the center, then got up and handed the rifle to his Mom. It may have been the fact that she was emotionally upset, or that she was over 40, but Ron finally shot a group smaller than her's. Her groups were still small enough to beat out 2/3 of the National High Power shooters at Camp Perry. Ron's group, on the other hand, was small enough to win the National High Power competition at Camp Perry, and he was still just 14 years old. Jim just shook his head. He could never imagine shooting 3 rounds into a little over an inch at 400 yards. If Ron could still shoot like that at 17, the Air Force would be winning the Camp Perry Nationals for years to come.

## Chapter 61 - In the Wild Blue Yonder

Next week Jim showed up at first light with his de Havilland Otter. The big old radial engine plane looked just like the one in the Alaska Tourism Commercial. As Jim taxied up to the door, Roy, Anne and Ron were ready to go. All their guns were cased in locking hard cases just like the letter had requested, and their ammo was in locked ammo cans. Roy made sure no one was carrying anything that Security could complain about, and then they headed out to the plane. Jim, Ron and Roy handled the baggage, then Jim got in the pilot's seat, and Ron got into what would have been the co-pilot seat if the plane had dual controls, which it didn't. Roy and Anne piled in the back seat with Lucky between them.

Jim went through the entire pre-flight sequence for Ron's benefit, who was watching him like a hawk. The pre-flight sequence was different for the elderly plane, and Ron had several questions that Jim answered. When the engine was warmed up and idling smoothly, Jim decided to make everyone bust out laughing "Welcome to Jim Airlines, We'll be flying at 2,000 feet to Anchorage Alaska with a stop at Allakaket. Please no smoking during the flight per FAA regulations. Please remain seated with your seatbelts on. Pilot to co-pilot, prepare for take-off."

Jim revved the throttle, and stood on the right brake pedal, turning the plane around so it faced the lake, then taxied out to the lake. Since the Otter was a purpose built Amphibian, Jim was able to taxi much faster than the Cessna that he and Ron were flying for his lessons. Several minutes later, they made it to the lake, and entered the water with less splash than the Cessna made. While they were taxiing, Jim told Ron the take-off speeds and everything else he needed to fly the plane. The take-off speed for the big plane was higher than the Cessna, but it also accelerated faster due to the huge radial engine. He actually had a higher margin for error with the huge de Havilland plane than they did with the Cessna. Jim water taxied to the downwind end of the lake, and turned to face into the wind. He talked Ron through the take-off procedure, which was different from the Cessna. The plane required less flaps, but more rudder due to the bigger motor's higher torque. Jim set the plane up for take-off, and Ron was glued to the instruments. When he was ready, Jim pulled the throttle all the way out to FULL and they were off. With more than half the lake left, Jim reached take-off speed, and eased the yoke back a few inches. Jim explained that with the huge engine, the plane climbed at 3 times the rate of the Cessna, so they didn't need to practically haul the yoke into your lap. Once the airspeed indicator read 85 knots, Jim retracted the flaps, and pushed the throttle back to the cruise setting, and continued to climb to 2,000 feet. An hour later, Allakaket came into view, and Jim called the tower. Jim landed the plane without a jolt, and taxied up to the fuel depot. While they were refueling the plane and checking the fluids, they got out and stretched. Lucky decided this would be a good time to water some trees, so Ron took him for a walk. Roy, Anne and Jim were talking while the plane was being refueled. Anne said to Jim "You were right about Ron, he's fearless in a plane. He was spending so much time watching you fly, I doubt he saw anything outside of

the plane. I'm still a bit of a white-knuckle flyer, and I know Roy is, but you two seem at home in the air. I'm sorry I gave you so much grief last week."

"Don't worry about it Anne, I'm sorry I was so hard on you last week. I thought you were being overprotective to the point of stifling Ron. It seems you've calmed down since then."

"Not exactly Jim, We just reminded ourselves that Ron's future is in God's hands. We've raised him right, and done everything in our power to help him learn to use his God-given talents. It's up to him and God from here on out, we just need to stay out of the way and be supportive."

"Glad you two feel that way, because I'm sure when the two weeks are up, Ron's going to decide to go to the Air Force Academy as soon as he can. That's all he talks about when we're together, except flying."

"I kind of figured that - my brother could sell air conditioners to Eskimos. We're just going to have fun and enjoy ourselves since this will probably be the last vacation we have as a family."

Ron brought Lucky back right as the mechanic pronounced the plane good to go. Ron handed the leash to Anne, and did the walk-around with Jim. Jim pointed out everything that needed checking on the plane, and they both checked it out, including all the fluids and access covers. When they were done, Jim got in the pilot's seat, and Ron jumped into the front passenger seat. After they were all secured, Jim called the tower and got permission for take-off. He intended to fly directly to Elmendorf and land there. They taxied and took off without incident, and as soon as they were within radio range of Elmendorf AFB, Jim contacted the tower and got permission to land - seems they were expecting him, and had cleared the area of military aircraft that might cause turbulence or jet wash.

An hour later, Jim made his approach radio call. The tower told him they had priority clearance for runway 27L for a straight in approach. Jim thought they were really getting the VIP treatment, because the clearance they gave them was right below a declared emergency clearance. As he entered the pattern, Jim turned to enter the downwind leg of his final approach, which gave Ron a view of the huge base. The runways were over 3 miles long, and wider than their lake. Jim identified 27L, and turned on final, then called the tower and told them they were on final. 1 minute later, they were down on the runway. Jim kept his speed up since he knew he needed to taxi over a mile to where their plane was waiting for them. The tower told him to turn left to taxiway 315, and follow the "follow me" truck to their parking spot on the VIP apron. Sure enough, when they reached the end of the runway, he saw a truck with the Follow me lights lit, and he followed it to a remote corner of the base. A man with lighted batons directed them to a parking spot, and as soon as the propeller stopped, they were met by an airman who would be responsible for securing their aircraft and loading their baggage on the VIP plane.

The Gulfstream IV C-20H was parked in the adjacent parking spot, and the crew already had the air stairs down and were loading the aircraft. They walked over to the plane, and another airman saluted them. Roy handed him the General's letter, and they all presented their IDs to the airman, who checked them off his list. Once he had verified their identity, they were escorted aboard the luxuriously appointed aircraft. They would be flying in style. All the seats would have made the average first class seats on the most expensive airline look like tourist class seats. The carpeting was over an inch thick, and the plane was so well insulated that they could barely hear the Rolls Royce turbofan engines spool up. As the air stairs closed, the pilot came on the intercom, and advised them to buckle their safety belts, and return their seats to the upright and locked position for take-off. The crew chief walked back into the seating area, and made sure they were secured. Even Lucky had his own seat, but would probably return to the floor when it was safe. Ron put the belt around Lucky as best as possible, and he sat there and looked at Ron like "What are you doing?" When they were all secured, he walked forward to tell the pilot they were all secure. Ron looked out his small window at the huge Rolls Royce engines and marveled at the huge amount of power he knew they put out. With 2 engines, this plane could cruise at 450 knots and had an unrefueled range of 4800 miles. They could easily make it to Florida without stopping to refuel.

As the plane taxied, Jim turned to Ron and said that they were in for a real treat, since these C-20H Gulfstreams had almost fighter-like performance, and he would feel the g's as the pilot accelerated for take-off. Finally the plane turned down the runway, and plane stopped taxiing. 1 minute later, Ron felt a kick in the small of his back as the pilot shoved the throttles to take-off, and they accelerated rapidly down the runway. Jim thought the pilot was showing off when halfway down the runway, the plane took a 30 degree nose-up attitude and accelerated. 5 minutes later, they were at their assigned altitude of 30,000 feet. Five minutes later, the pilot announced that it was OK to take off their seatbelts. 2 minutes later, the crew chief came back and talked to Roy then Ron. He told Ron that the pilot had asked if he wanted to come forward into the cockpit. Looking back to his dad, who was nodding his approval, Ron unlocked his seatbelt and followed the crew chief forward. The crew chief opened the cockpit door, and Ron noticed the co-pilot's seat was vacant, and the crew chief was directing him into it.

Ron sat down, and the chief buckled him in, and handed him the headset, and showed him how to work it. As soon as he was situated, he heard the pilot's voice in his headset.

"Mr. Williams, welcome to Air Force Flight 1534. Your uncle informed us you were studying to be a private pilot, and thought you'd like to ride in the right seat for a while."

Ron looked over and noticed the pilot had Captain's bars on his shoulder.

"Thanks Captain, Steve was definitely right - I would love it. This plane takes off much faster than the Cessna 172 Amphibian I fly."

“I started in a 172 as well, but mine had wheels. Did I understand your uncle correctly, you’re only 14.”

“Yes sir, I just turned 14. My “grandpa” Jim back there is my IP. I’ve already done 4 waterborne landings and take-offs since I started flying lessons a couple of months ago.”

“YOU’VE ALREADY DONE WATERBORNE TAKE-OFFS AND LANDINGS?”

“Yes sir, not only that, but the lake I landed on was no longer than your runway was wide, and the approach is really steep because of a 200 foot treeline 300 feet before touchdown.”

“Holy Cow. I thought it was tough to land at the municipal airport I landed on.”

“I had a little help, my parents bought the Microsoft Flight Simulator for me, and I practiced landing on a lake that was even smaller than that until I got it right. I had about a dozen serious crack-ups on the simulator until I figured out you needed to float in at full flaps just above stall, then hold it all the way down to the water without touching anything, or you’d either stall or overshoot. On this lake, an overshoot meant a crash, because the downwind end of the lake had the same 200 foot obstruction.”

“Holy Cow, when we land this plane, I need to shake your IP’s hand - it takes real guts to let a student land a plane on a lake that small.”

Their conversation switched to the Gulfstream they were flying, as the pilot explained the controls and instruments. When he finished, he asked Ron to put his hands and feet on the controls and get the feel for the controls. After about 10 minutes, the Captain told Ron “Co-pilot’s plane” and took his hands and feet off. Ron was flying the plane. Ron flew for almost a half-hour before the pilot called “Pilot’s plane” and put his hands and feet back on the controls. After he made a few radio calls, he turned his attention to Ron.

“Son that was the smoothest I’ve ever seen a student pilot fly. Any ideas what you want to do when you get Older?”

“Well my uncle Steve thinks I might be able to make the Air Force shooting team, but I might want to fly too.”

“Well if you decide to fly, may I make a suggestion?”

“Sure Captain.”

“Try to get the F-15 Strike Eagle. It’s one heck of a plane, and they get to do more stuff. F-16’s are nice, but they really haven’t done anything with them for years. It’s not like Russia

is planning to attack us anytime soon, but we will always need multi-role aircraft that can fight, bomb and do most of the other assignments.”

“Yes Sir. Those were my sentiments as well.”

OK Ron, you need to return to your seat, we’ll be landing in a couple of hours, and we need to get some stuff done up here first.” The Captain stuck out his hand, and Ron shook his hand. ”Well Done Son - We’ll see you on your return trip and maybe you can get in some more flying.”

“Thanks Captain, I really enjoyed it.”

The crew chief escorted Ron back to his seat, and Ron strapped himself in. Bubbling with excitement, he turned to Jim. “Guess What - they let me fly the plane.”

Jim’s eyes got as big as saucers, then realized that the pilot’s hands and feet were no more than a fraction of a second from the controls, and they were flying straight and level.

“Well at least you didn’t do any aerobatics this time.”

“Not a good idea with passengers aboard.”

“You’re learning Ron. OK, why don’t you rest for the remainder of the flight - I’m sure you have a busy day ahead of you if I know your Uncle.”

Ron leaned back in his chair, and was soon dozing. He was dreaming of flying as he usually did. He didn’t wake up until the pilot announced they were landing at MacDill AFB.

## Chapter 62 - Reunions

Once the plane landed and taxied to where Steve's Hummer waited, the pilot shut down the engines and an airman chocked the wheels. The crew chief opened the air stairs as soon as the engines had spooled down. The first one out was Ron with Lucky on his leash. Steve was waiting in his dress blues so Ron ran up to him and gave Steve a big hug. "Thanks for getting us here - they let me fly the plane."

"Cool. I hope you didn't try any aerobatics?"

"Not likely with passengers. All we did was fly straight and level. The weirdest thing was there was virtually no noise in the cabin. With the Cessna, the prop noise made it difficult to talk in the cockpit. The pilot was really nice, and answered all my questions, and offered to let me fly on the way back."

By then Roy and Anne had made their way out of the plane, and Anne gave her brother a big hug, and Roy shook his hand. Jim was the last off the plane, and he shook Steve's hand.

"I'm glad you all made it. The crew will unload your gear and meet us over at the VIP housing section. Let's get you settled, then I'll fill you in on what we've got planned for the next two weeks."

With that they boarded the Hummers that were parked there, and they followed Steve to Base Housing. They turned a corner, and the décor changed from GI grey to The Plaza Hotel. The VIP accommodations would rival any 4-star hotel in the USA. They were quickly shown to their rooms - actually a group of adjoining suites. Anne and Roy had their own room, Ron had his own, and Jim had his own, with a common living room with all the amenities. Steve told them the Restaurant was open 24/7 and all the food and anything else they wanted was free, and they weren't even to tip, since the help was all military. Since none of them drank, the liquor cabinets weren't stocked, but the refrigerators were full of soft drinks, water, creamer and iced tea. There was a 12-cup coffee maker and 4 large coffee mugs on the counter. There was an assortment of bagged teas and gourmet coffees on the counter. Steve asked if everything was OK, and Ron asked about Lucky. Steve walked them into Ron's room, and right next to his bed was a cedar doggie bed for Lucky, with bowls of food and water. Ron noticed a bag of dog food that was the same brand that Lucky ate in Alaska - they thought of everything. "Thanks Steve."

They walked back out to the living room, and Steve pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket, and set it on the table. They all sat down to review their itinerary. Judging by the length of the list, they were going to have a busy couple of weeks. The events included demonstrations by the various commands on base, including the Pave Hawks, Rangers, SEALs, Recon Marines and a couple of others. There was also plenty of shooting time



included, and some down time. Roy was glad of that, because he didn't think he could make it through the day without taking a nap anymore. Since it was late in the afternoon, they didn't schedule anything for that day, so Steve used the time to catch up. The conversation revolved around Ron's flying lessons and shooting, like Anne had predicted. Steve's chin hit his chest when Jim told him about the stall incident, and Ron landing on their tiny little lake. Steve was impressed, his nephew was only 14, yet it looked like he had nerves of steel. Later, they walked down to the restaurant. They all ordered huge Ribeye steaks since beef was in short supply in Alaska. They arrived 15 minutes later, cooked to order, with all the trimmings. Steve ordered a bottle of Merlot and 4 glasses. Ron had a glass of Pepsi.

After dinner, they headed back up to their room and talked until about 2200. Steve said they needed to get some sleep, they needed to be up by 0900 for breakfast since they had a busy day ahead of them tomorrow. Everyone said goodnight, and headed off to their rooms for a shower and sleep. Ron took Lucky out to do his business in a clearly marked "Doggie Depository" at least that's what the sign said - evidently some airman's idea of humor. When Lucky was finished they went back up to their room and Lucky laid down while Ron figured out how to work the shower. After turning nearly every knob on the wall, Ron got the water the temperature he liked it, and got it coming out of the shower head instead of the tub faucet. The shower massage feature was something entirely new, but he got it figured out. There was a TV in his room, but Ron didn't know how to use it, so it never occurred to him to turn it on. If he had, he would have realized he was in the "kiddie room" and the TV had a blocker on all PPV and movie channels. Ron was too tired to care, and laid down as was soon fast asleep.

The next morning, they were all up way before 0900, so they got dressed and went down for breakfast. Luckily for them, the restaurant was open 24/7, so they already had a breakfast buffet all ready, and all they had to do was take a tray and pick out what they wanted. There were a lot of foods Ron didn't recognize, but smelled terrific, like cinnamon rolls - so he took one of everything that looked or smelled good. Most of the time his taste agreed with his smell, but he took one bite of the papaya and put the rest back down. He didn't like the taste or texture. Luckily for them, the buffet was heavy on eggs, pancakes, bacon and sausage, so they loaded up with the familiar foods. The kitchen manager just shook his head - they all had appetites like Marines.

When they got back from breakfast, Steve asked Ron if he wanted to join them for PT. Not realizing that Steve would continue their habit of early morning PT, Ron had stuffed himself, so he had to beg off. He told Steve he had eaten too much, but he would make sure to join them tomorrow. Steve jogged down to the elevator, and joined his company out front of the hotel, and did their PT while Ron watched from the window. He wished he could join them, but puking his guts out on the first day wouldn't leave a good impression. Steve came back an hour later and drove them to their first demonstration. The SEALs had arranged a little surprise for them. When they got to the field, they were seated in bleachers, and as a C-130 buzzed overhead, Steve told them to look up and keep looking up. The SEALs jumped

from the rear ramp of the C-130 trailing smoke streamers. 4 of them popped chutes almost immediately, and one of the smoke trails continued down and down until Anne was sure that the SEAL was going to go SPLAT, when at the last second, he pulled his ripcord, and the chute blossomed 2 seconds before he hit the ground. When the team had landed, they walked over and introduced themselves, and explained the guy who almost went Splat as Anne had said was demonstrating the HALO or High Altitude Low Opening technique. Their CO joked that it also meant what you got if you opened too low. The rest of the team was demonstrating the HAHO or High Altitude High Opening technique. With their square chutes, they could cover miles of territory under chute and land far away from the flight path of the C-130. They could jump from up to 30,000 feet from a C-5 Galaxy with oxygen if they needed to. Ron looked up at Steve, and noticed he had the same ice cream cone shaped pin as the SEAL CO. He asked Steve what the badge was for. "It means we are Airborne Qualified - I've jumped out of a perfectly good plane."

Jim was going to say something, but decided against it - he didn't want to spend the rest of his vacation in the Brig.

Ron asked Steve if he ever did a HALO "Not on purpose."

They all started laughing.

When they were finished with the SEAL demonstration, Steve asked Ron if he'd like to shoot on their thousand yard range. Ron's eyes lit up and he asked Steve if he could start on the 400 yard line and work his way out. Steve explained that the range could be set up for anything from 100 yard targets to 1,000 yard targets, there were target pits and berms every 100 yards from 100 - 1,000 yards. Ron got really excited, and said "Sure - I've wanted to see how far I can hit the target at."

Steve drove them over to the range, and their cased Browning A-bolts were with the Range master just as they had left them in Alaska. They each took 200 rounds of Lake City .308 match ammo from the Range master, and proceeded out to the shooting positions. Steve explained that the range master had already setup the 400 yard targets on lanes 10 and 11, so Ron walked out to lane 11, set up his rifle and his shooting pad, and laid prone. He picked up his rifle, and looking through the sight with the bolt open and the magazine empty, visualized the mirage to determine wind velocity and direction. When he had the wind doped, he asked for a trial shot, since he figured he was shooting for score, to confirm his estimate of wind direction. Steve told him OK, and everyone put on their earmuffs and shooting glasses. When they were all set, Steve gave Ron the thumbs up, and the Range master put up the red flag signifying that a range was now hot. Ron loaded a single round in the magazine, and checked his position. He was comfortable, and the scope was centered on the bullseye. He reached over and closed the action, and released the safety, then took a firing grip on the gun, and centered the scope on the bullseye while he took several deep breaths. He blew out half the third breath, and squeezed the trigger as he held his breath.

The trigger broke almost as a surprise, and Ron checked his shot through the scope. It was in the 10-ring, slightly low and left of the bullseye. He made the corrections on the scope, and loaded 4 more rounds. Since the range was still hot, he didn't need to ask for permission. As the scope steadied on the bullseye, Ron squeezed the trigger, and was rewarded with a bullseye. Cycling the bolt, Ron fed another round into the chamber, and fired when the crosshairs were exactly in the last position. He proceeded to put the last 2 rounds right in the bullseye as well. Ron set the gun down to cool, and Steve said they would bring the target to him to measure the group. Ron already knew all 4 rounds were in the bullseye, but he wanted to check his group size. The range master brought him his target, and sure enough, all 4 rounds were in the bullseye. Ron took his dial indicator calipers and measured the outside of the 2 furthest rounds at 1.4 inches. Ron subtracted the diameter of the round (.308) his actual group size was 1.092 inches. For all intents and purposes, he had just shot a 1 inch group at 400 yards. 5 minutes later, a Hummer with flags and antennas on it drove up to the range, and everybody wearing a uniform saluted. Ron thought this must be Steve's CO. When he got close, Steve introduced him as General Gene Shepard.

Ron felt like saluting, but knew it would be improper, so he stood there at his best attempt at attention. General Shepard stuck out his hand, and Ron shook it.

"Steve's been telling me a lot about you Ron, mind if I see your target?"

"Here it is Sir. The first shot was a trial shot to verify the wind. As you can see, the rest of the rounds are inside the bullseye. I measured the group, and the gross measure was 1.4 inches, subtracting the bullet diameter gave me a true group size of 1.092 inches."

"Ron how far were you shooting?"

"400 yards sir."

General Shepard stared hard at Ron, then at Steve - evidently they weren't putting him on.

"Son, could you do me a favor and shoot a group for me at 600 yards?"

"I would be honored sir - by now the rifle should have cooled enough to give me a good accurate group."

Ron walked over to his rifle, and the General joined the group behind the shooting line. Ron's pulse was racing, but he knew how to slow it, he started reciting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. As he recited in his mind, his mind cleared, and he could concentrate on the task at hand. A target was already set up at the 600 yard line. Ron looked at his ballistic table, and reset the elevation knob the required number of clicks for that round at 600 yards. He added a couple of clicks of windage from the table as well. When he had the scope set, he laid on his

shooting pad, got into a good prone position, loaded the magazine with 4 rounds, and closed the action. Looking through his scope, he sighted the 600 yard target, and decided to increase the magnification of the scope. He dialed it up until he could see the bullseye clearly, and focused until the crosshairs were in sharp focus and the target was too. Then he started his deep breathing technique to further slow his breathing and slow his pulse. Once he was in the zone again, he took 3 deep breaths, blew out half the third one, and held it. As the scope settled on the bullseye, he squeezed the trigger. He checked his shot, and could clearly see a hole in the center of the bullseye. That's when he knew he had doped the wind and drop properly. After that it was just a matter of putting the 3 other rounds into the same hole, which Ron did. When the range master brought the target, General Shepard was amazed that all 4 rounds were in a tiny cluster in the center of the bullseye. Ron took out his calipers, and measured the group at 2.4 inches from edge to edge. He then subtracted the bullet diameter to give his exact group size which was 2.092. When the General saw that number, he almost fainted. He knew that his best snipers were shooting 2 inch groups at 600 yards, and his best shooter on the team could shoot a 1.98 group at 600 yards prone.

"Son where did you learn to Shoot?"

"From my mom sir."

Roy introduced Anne to General Shepard.

"Mam, I can't tell you how impressed I am with your son's shooting ability. He's already out-shot half the shooting team, and shoots as good as my best snipers at 600 yards."

"General, My other brother Ron was a Sniper in the Army. When he came back from Vietnam I was still a kid. He lived with us for the rest of his life, and basically raised Steve and I. During he summers, he spent all of our time when we weren't doing chores either fishing, hunting or shooting. 15 years ago when I met Roy in Allakaket, I could shoot groups like my son, but I'm getting older, because I can't shoot less than 1.75 inches at 400 yards prone."

"Ma'am, that is amazing, where is this other brother?"

Anne almost started crying when Steve whispered in his ear that Ron died in the same plane crash that stranded Roy in Alaska.

"Ma'am, I am so sorry - I didn't know. It seems Ron inherited your brother's shooting ability. Son, if you want to, when you are old enough, I'd like you to enroll in the Air Force Academy on a full scholarship. We want you on our Shooting team. How are you doing in school?"

"General, I've already passed my Alaska GED test, and I'm studying for my APT. I took

the PSAT at 13, and my scores put me in the top 10%. As soon as I turn 16, I intend to take the SAT and the ACT since I was home schooled and therefore have no certified GPA.”

“Let me get this straight, at 13 you passed your Alaska GED test, and yet you continued to study for your APT?”

“Yes sir, I knew my parents couldn’t afford 4 years of college, so I wanted to take the Advanced Placement Test and get my Math, English, and Science lower division units out of the way.”

“Son, what level of math are your currently studying?”

Anne spoke up “He’s currently studying second year Calculus - College Level.”

“You aren’t kidding me are you?”

“No Sir - I would never kid a General - Ron told me never to kid an officer higher than Major.”

General Shepard had to laugh at that one.

“Son, it sounds like as soon as you are old enough, you should apply to the Air Force Academy. I’ll personally write a letter of endorsement, and send a copy to your State Senator.”

The General walked away shaking his head in amazement.

“Did you hear that Dad, I’m going to the Air Force Academy.”

## Chapter 63 - Thrill Ride

The next day, Steve had a real treat scheduled for Ron. Anne and Roy opted out, but Jim's curiosity got the better of him. They were driven out to the runway, where this huge helicopter was waiting for them with its Rotor turning. Steve told Ron and Jim that once they got out of the Hummer, they were supposed to walk bent over at the waist, and not stand up until they were inside the chopper. The huge chopper turned out to be a Pave Hawk, one of the most specialized helicopters in the US inventory. Its designation was the MH-60G Pave Hawk, and there were only 10 in the entire US inventory. It was armed with 2 7.62mm GE miniguns, flew nap of the earth at 180 mph, and had the avionics to do that day or night, in fair weather or foul. Its rotor was almost 55 feet in diameter, and had 2 huge GE turboshaft engines. On the ground it looked like a giant green/black insect. Ron couldn't wait to get aboard, and the crew chief helped him strap in. The pilot and Steve had made special considerations, and had strapped Ron into what was usually the Crew Chief's seat so he would have an unobstructed view of the cockpit and out the windows. They put a headset on, mostly to keep out the noise.

Ron could hear the Pilots talking to the tower, then heard the tower give them permission to take off. The engine noise doubled, and the MH-60G leaped into the air, assumed a nose-down position, and charged toward the training area. As soon as they were inside their training area, they called for permission to engage nap of the earth. They dropped like a rock, and Ron knew they were going to crash. The pilot pulled the nose up just in time, and they were flying at 100mph no more than 50 feet off the deck. They flew between trees, and along riverbanks. Ron thought this was outstanding, and Jim was glad he didn't eat a big breakfast. Half an hour later, they landed for a moment, picked up a squad of SEALs, and the next phase of the demonstration began. They demonstrated exiting the aircraft rapidly over water, falling 15-20 feet to the water while the chopper maintained 30 knots forward air speed. Once they had gotten out of the chopper, the pilot turned back around, and hovered with the deck right above the water, and picked them up again, and hooked their ropes into the central connection. The pilot flew to a nearby rooftop, and they fast-rope down to the roof. The crew chief disconnected the ropes, and they flew back to the base flying nap of the earth. Jim enjoyed this a little more than the way in because he knew it would soon be over.

When they landed at the airbase, Steve had another surprise for them. They picked up Roy and Anne, and drove over to the Ranger's compound. Steve explained they had their own compound because they couldn't play well with the other children. Jim started laughing his head off, remembering all the Marine jokes he had ever heard. They were met by the Ranger's CO, and followed his Hummer to the training area. Steve explained they were going to get to do some live fire training. Ron was excited, Roy and Anne were a little apprehensive. When they got there, a Gunnery Sergeant started giving them weapons familiarization training with the M-16A2/203 combination, the M249 SAW, the M9 Beretta, and the H&K MP-5/10SD. Ron's eyes got big when he saw the MP-5/10SD, firing a Ruger

22/45 with a suppressor was one thing, but he had read about the SEALs and Secret Service with the H&K subguns. While most of the H&K subguns in the inventory were the ubiquitous MP-5, the Secret Service and Special Forces had both placed orders for the 10mm version for the extra stopping power of the 10mm cartridge. They came with a suppressor mount, hence the MP-5/10SD for suppressed.

As soon as he was finished with the training, Ron volunteered to go first. The gunny picked up the M16A2 and handed it to Ron, but waited until he had his ears and eyes on. They had a 100 yard target set up, and talked Ron through firing the M-16 from the standing position. He told Ron the gun was battle-sighted so it should hit in the black. He handed Ron a 20 round magazine, and stepped back. Ron looked around to make sure the range was clear, noted the red flag indicating a hot range, slid the magazine into the well, pulled back on the charging handle, and cleared the safety. He took an aggressive stance, brought the rifle up to the ready position, and found the front sight in the center of the peep sight. He fired a single round, and noticed it was low and right. He put the safety on, and received permission from the Gunny to adjust the sights, and dialed 1 MOA of up and left, pointed the rifle down range again, and cleared the safety, then sighted the target through the peep sight. He squeezed the trigger, and was rewarded with a round through the bullseye. The Gunny was impressed. Ron proceeded to put the rest of the magazine through the bullseye. When the action locked open, he safed the gun, and the gunny sent a runner to pull the target. There was 1 round outside the x-ring, and 19 inside.

The Gunny asked Ron if he's like to try again at 200 yards and handed Ron a magazine, while a runner set up a 200 yard target. Ron adjusted the sight accordingly, then when the range was clear and hot, he loaded the rifle and cycled the action. He took the same stance, and proceeded to put all 20 rounds in the X-ring. When the runner brought the target back, the Gunny's chin nearly hit his chest. All 20 rounds were in the X-ring. The Gunny decided to ask Ron to try prone at 300 yards, and set up a target. When the range was clear he handed Ron a magazine. Meanwhile, Ron had adjusted the elevation again, then got into a good Military Prone position, cycled the action, and concentrated this time. It took him a little longer, but all 20 rounds were in the X-ring again. The Gunny thought he had been set up until Steve told him Ron's story. The Gunny was green with envy, since the Army had a Shooting team too.

The Gunny asked Ron if he'd like to fire the M-203 grenade launcher. After showing him how to use the grenade launcher, he pointed out a target about 200 meters away handed him a M781 Blue practice round, and stood back. Ron flipped up the ladder sight, set it for 200 meters, pulled the barrel forward, inserted the round, and closed the breech. He took a standard standing stance, and lined the ladder sight up with the tip of the front sight to get elevation, and pointed the barrel right at the target, then squeezed the trigger of the M-203. There was a loud BLOOP, and a big puff of smoke a second later right in front of the target. Talk about beginner's luck. He landed the round within 10 meters of the target on the first try. Since Ron wasn't in the military yet, he couldn't shoot any high explosive rounds. The

Gunny wanted to see how Ron would do with the MP-5/10 anyway. They moved over to the pistol range for the next part.

The pistol range was right next door (at least in Military thinking) since it was only 100 yards away. Ron ended up falling back to help his dad, who was visibly tiring. Ron was confused, just two years ago, he was moving like a 40-year old, now he was barely getting around. He was tempted to ask a Medic to check him out, but didn't want to embarrass his dad. Besides, it didn't seem his heartbeat was any faster, at least that he could tell from where he was. Maybe it was just arthritis. Ron decided to mention it to Anne later. They arrived at the pistol range, and Roy was grateful to sit down again.

The Gunny showed Ron the course. It was a highly modified Hogan's alley, with pop-ups, sliders and reactive targets. The rules of the game were to engage targets before the "You're Dead" buzzer sounded. The Gunny told him there would be NO targets past 9:00 on his left and 3:00 on his right for safety reasons, and no targets higher than 6 feet above ground level, since they weren't equipped with 60 foot backstops. Ron laughed and told him not to worry. The Gunny told Ron that his gun had been modified NOT to fire full auto, his choices were either a 3-round burst or semiauto, He highly advised the first pass through at semiauto, then he could flip to burst mode the second time through if he wanted. Ron shot a quick glance at Roy. His color looked better. Maybe the heat and humidity were getting to him.

Ron looked back at the Gunny who was asking if he were ready, then indicated he wouldn't need his hearing protection. Smiling, Ron took his earmuffs off. This could be fun. The Gunny asked him a second time if he were ready, and handed him a loaded mag. Ron yelled "YES SIR." and locked and loaded, then cleared the safety, making sure he threw the safety switch the right way to semiauto. The Gunny said just one word "Proceed" and Ron stepped onto the range, scanning left and right, his senses on high alert. He sensed movement to his right, and almost fired when he realized this was also a "shoot/don't shoot" range, and the target was a "don't shoot" mom with a kid. Ron eased up on the trigger, then caught something in his peripheral vision. Scanning right, he ID'd the target as a "Raghead Terrorist" and a definite shoot. He fired a single snap shot through the forehead, and the target went down. Dang this was fun. All of a sudden, two targets popped up on opposite sides of the range. He almost froze, then unlocked, and ID's the targets as "shooters" and put one quick round each through the 10-ring. This was just like shooting bears, except you got to shoot all the bears, and didn't have to worry about "don't shoot" targets.

Ron didn't have time to gloat, because 2 more targets popped up, one behind cover, and the other a mover. The pop-up was closer, so he engaged it first. His first round hit the cover, but he corrected that problem, and the second round took him out. He turned to engage the mover, and it was almost behind cover, which meant the "You're Dead" buzzer would sound. He swung the muzzle over the target, and got off a lucky shot right before the kill zone disappeared behind the barrier. He was still alive, but barely. Not seeing any more targets, he walked slowly down the lane, scanning left and right all the time. He almost



jumped out of his skin when a pop-up jumped up right in front of him. He fired instinctively, and managed to get a good shot off. It wasn't one of his best shots, but it was good enough for the target to go back down. He walked further down the lane, and decided the Gunny must be a sadist when first 3 targets popped up, then two more, then he mixed some more shoot/don't shoot targets into the mix. The final target was President George Bush. Ron almost laughed, thinking how many SEALS might just squeeze off a round if it were Kennedy, Schumer, Fineswine, or Kerry. He moved like a snake, and almost got the entire bunch when the "You're Dead" buzzer sounded. He missed a hidden sniper target at his 10:00 when he was fixated on the GW target. Ron put the safety back on and lowered his weapon. He felt dejected until the Gunny walked up and told him the only shooters to successfully complete that run were Special Forces trained. He did very well for a rookie. Ron asked the Gunny if the last target were Teddy Kennedy or Hillary Clinton, would it be a shoot, or don't shoot target?

The Gunny roared with laughter. It seemed another Gunny with a perverse sense of humor did just that, and drove the Delta operators nuts trying to figure out if it constituted a shoot or don't shoot target. He said they argued back at the Delta club about it for days. Luckily their CO never heard about that stunt, or he would have had kittens.

With the "demonstration" over, the Gunny asked if anyone else wanted to try it. Roy was feeling better, and decided "sure why not" and stood up. The Gunny grabbed a fresh magazine from the pile, reset the range, and handed the MP-10SD to Roy. Since the gun was already loaded, all he did was load the fresh magazine, and take the safety off, making sure it was in Semiauto mode. The Gunny asked if Roy were ready, and he heard a low, more subdued YES. Roy had his game face on, and heard a target actuator to his right. Seemed the Gunny was getting crafty in his old age, and switching the scenario around. Roy managed to 10-ring all of his targets, but didn't go for head shots, he just eliminated the targets. He got 2/3 the way through the scenario when the "You're dead" buzzer sounded. Roy thought a target was dead, but didn't realize his round had missed the kill zone. After 5 seconds, the "You're Dead" buzzer sounded to indicate the target wasn't eliminated, but he was. The Gunny walked up to Roy, and said "Not Bad for a Senior Citizen." Roy had to laugh since the Gunny was maybe 5 years younger than him. The Gunny shook Roy's hand, then escorted him back to the bleachers.

Ron wanted to go again, this time in burst mode. The gunny agreed, and told him that if he fired a burst into each target, he would have to perform a combat reload. Ron said he could handle it, the Gunny shrugged and handed him 3 mags. He handed Ron the gun, and Ron loaded a fresh mag, flipped the safety to burst, , and put the other two mags in his right front BDU pocket, just like the Gunny had showed him. He stepped to the line, the Gunny reset the range, then pushed another button that Ron couldn't see, and told Ron to proceed. As soon as he stepped onto the range, targets were popping up left and right - he must have stepped into a Terrorist Convention. He even successfully avoided the "don't shoot" targets, and had made it ¾ the way through when the "You're dead" buzzer sounded. A mover had

made it under cover without any fatal holes in it. The Gunny stood there amazed. A 14-yr old kid had made it  $\frac{3}{4}$  the way through the toughest scenario they had. He called it "High Noon at the Bazaar". Several Rangers had complained the course was unrealistically tough. The SEALs loved it, since they believed the more you sweated in training, the less you bled in battle. The Gunny would have to tell his CO about this kid, maybe they could woo him away from the Air Force.

When they were finished, they gathered for a pow-wow. The Gunny asked Ron what he thought of the M-16/M203 combination. He said that if it weren't for the extra range of the grenade launcher, he wondered why hang all that weight on a "poodle shooter". The Gunny liked this kid. He asked him what they usually shot in Alaska, and he told the Gunny he shot a Browning A-bolt in .308 with a BOSS unit and a Leupold scope. They always carried a double shoulder holster with a Colt Anaconda on one side and a Ruger 22/45 on the other. Gunny could understand the Anaconda - there were big bears in Alaska. He asked Ron why they would carry a suppressed .22 pistol in Alaska. Roy answered for him. "The 22/45 is a foraging gun to kill small game. I've shot a group of 10 rabbits once and none of them knew what hit them. besides, you can shoot all day for practice for only a couple of dollars." The Gunny asked Roy which suppressor they used. He told him "It's the Ares integral suppressor. More than once I've fooled an Airline employee who thought it was a regular bull-barreled 22/45 target model." The Gunny told Roy he liked the Ares 22/45, and Delta wanted to get a bunch for sentry removal, since the noise signature was lower than the suppressed .45s, but some Idiot in the chain of command couldn't pull his head out and vetoed it, saying they had a bunch of suppressed guns already in the inventory. The Gunny switched topics. "You know Ron, I loved the Garand and the M -14. It pissed me off to no end when Gen. LeMay bought all those poodle shooter for his MP's. I mean if he hadn't recruited a bunch of sissies to guard his planes, we would still have the M -14 as our main battle rifle. The Seals love the M -14, and keep a bunch in their inventory, including a few special Sniper grade rifles for their designated Snipers. SEAL snipers are more defensive than offensive, so they like the rate of fire of a semiauto MBR, and had their armorers customize a bunch of M-14's to Sniper weapons that are accurate out 1,000 yards with Lake City match rounds."

They spent the rest of the day firing the weapons. Anne turned out to be pretty good with the M -16 and the MP-5/10 although she didn't try the Hogan's alley. The Gunny asked Ron if he wanted to fire the SAW, and asked Roy if it was OK to go back to the rifle range with him. Roy was too tired to walk back and forth, but they were on a Military base, so he figured Ron was safe. On the way over the Gunny got talking to Ron. "Young Man, you really impressed me with your display of shooting, if I didn't think the Air Force had a lock on you, I'd ask you to consider West Point. I just wanted to tell you that I think you're probably one of the best natural shooters I've seen in my lifetime. Just don't take that gift for granted."

"No Sir Gunny - I won't let it go to my head. Who knows, something might happen

tomorrow, and it would all go away, like if I got hurt in an accident or something. What I really want is an education, what you learn they can never take away from you. Thanks for the offer, but if I went to another academy, Steve would hunt me down and kill me. I really appreciate all you've done for us today, and I had a blast firing the live ammo on your pop-up range. It's kind of like shooting bears back home, except they don't attack you by the dozens."

"You're right Ron, that was unfair, but I wanted to see how you would handle it. Except for 1 mistake, you would have cleared the entire scenario, and would have been the first non-Special Forces trained person to do so. I can tell your parents are very proud of you, but you're mom's scared she's going to lose you. Do both of yourselves a favor, spend as much time with your mom now as you can."

"Thanks Gunny, I'll remember that."

They got to the rifle range, and the Gunny checked the M -249 SAW over carefully, and loaded a box of linked ammo giving him 200 rounds to play with. He had 5 targets set up at ranges from 100-400 yards and had Ron go prone behind the gun. He then coached Ron on the finer points of the SAW, and gave him a scenario to make shooting the 5 targets challenging. First, he was to put a burst into every other target from left to right, then traverse back right to left and engage the ones he missed. If he had any ammo left, he was to shoot a burst into the heads of each target. Ron put his earmuffs and eye protection on, then settled behind the gun and charged it, then released the safety, flipping it to Full Auto. The Gunny had warned him to try and limit his shooting to 3-round bursts. With the rate of fire the SAW was capable of, it would be a neat trick. He thought that if he just tapped the trigger, he should get a short burst out of it. Looking over his right shoulder, he saw the Gunny giving him a thumbs-up, and he settled behind the gun, and aimed at the first target on the left, and when the sight centered on the bullseye, he tapped the trigger, swung the barrel using the bipod to the 3<sup>rd</sup> target, tapped the trigger, then swung to the fifth target, and tapped the trigger. Then he swung the gun back right to left, and engaged the 4<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> targets. Finally, he aimed at the heads of the targets, and put a burst into each, and noticing he still had ammo left, safed the gun and got up. The Gunny made sure the weapon was safe, removed the ammo belt from the gun, then walked downrange with Ron to check targets. The first target had a string of 5 shots from crotch to neck, the 3<sup>rd</sup> target had a shorter string through the kill zone, and the 5<sup>th</sup> target had 4 rounds right in the center of the target, as did the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup>. Every target had a burst of fire obliterating the head of the target. The Gunny just shook his head in amazement, and was wondering when the kid's red cape was coming back from the cleaners. "Kid, you just did something NO trainee has done before. You followed my orders, and hit the targets exactly where I told you to. By the time you hit the 5<sup>th</sup> target, you figured out trigger and muzzle control. Most trainees need several thousands of rounds to get anywhere near what you just did. Do you have any idea how you did it?"

“You said to just tap the trigger, that’s exactly what I did. I didn’t squeeze it, since I couldn’t let up fast enough to keep from shooting half the belt at over 700 rounds per minute. Also, I didn’t touch the trigger until the sights had settled on the bullseye. A line from Mel Gibson’s movie “The Patriot” sums up what my Mom told me “Aim Small, Miss Small.” I aimed for the bullseye, and I expected to hit it. I wasn’t just trying to put rounds in the black.”

“Well I’ll be damned - I guess all we have to do is tell the recruits to do EXACTLY what we say, and don’t touch the trigger until the sights are on the bullseye. Son, those bullseyes are an inch across, and you say you can see them from 100 yards.”

“Yes sir, the 300 and 400 yard ones are hard, but I can barely make them out.”

“Have you ever had your vision checked?”

“Never, I haven’t seen a doctor yet either. Kind of hard to see a doctor on a regular basis when you live in the middle of the Alaskan bush.”

Gunny just shook his head in amazement - he’d been doing a lot of that today. He wouldn’t have believed this kid if he hadn’t seen it with his own eyes. Even after seeing it, he still had troubles believing it. This kid made all the famous shooters he had grown up idolizing look like amateurs.

## Chapter 64 - Screaming Eagles

When he had finished shooting the SAW, the Gunny walked back to the Armory, talked with the Chief Armorer, and brought out a huge Pelican case and an ammo box full of Lake City Match ammo. He set it up on the table, then swore Ron to secrecy. “If the JSOC knew you were shooting this gun, he’d have puppies if he were in a good mood, and he’d bust me to Private if he were in a Bad mood. We’re doing a T&E for Barrett Rifles and Swarovski Optiks for a new sniper rifle based on the Barrett’s light 50 or the M82A1. They had some ideas when they produced the XM107, and wanted to push the envelope again. Swarovski had some ideas about optics they wanted to try out, and Barretts was curious just how precise and accurate a rifle they could build for the BMG 50. This weapon only shoots Lake City Match Ammo, and hasn’t been seen outside this compound. I’ll have some targets set up from 600 to 1000 yards. Here’s the ballistic tables we have worked up so far on this gun and ammo. If you want to, we’d love your unofficial evaluation of this rifle. Your comments will probably make it to the report, attributed to another of the evaluators. You want to do this Ron?”

“Where do I sign?”

The Gunny laughed, and while he set up the gun, a runner was dispatched to set up targets at 600-1000 yards. The Armorer handed Gunny his spotting scope, which he set up on a table quite a distance away.

“Ron, the Barretts M82A3 came with a Swarovski 10x42mm fixed scope with a BDC. The optics lab at Swarovski had an idea for a 10-25x 80mm zoom lens with apochromatic coatings and other enhancements. Basically the scope costs more than the gun, and the gun should sell if it ever came on the market for over 10 grand. I want you to put on these shooting gloves to keep your finger oils off the gun, and here’s a special set of earmuffs that allows you to hear range commands, and suppresses loud noises by 40dB. Trust me, the L82A2 is loud. You see that huge muzzle brake on the end - it looks like it belongs on a tank. If you’re within 20 feet to the right or left of this gun, you WILL feel the muzzle blast. I’m going to set up on this other table with a wireless microphone that is set up to your headset, so I can spot and adjust for you if necessary. Your headset has a boom mike, and a push-to-talk switch that you can tape to the stock. Make sure you don’t touch it unless you want to talk, otherwise, I might wind up hard of hearing. The gun looks almost identical to the M82A3, but if you had them side by side, the barrel is longer and free-floated. The barrel has been air gauged, and the chamber hand cut to the exact size of the Lake City Match Ammo. Matter of fact, Lake City sent part of this lot of ammo to Barretts just so they could cut the chamber exactly right. The box magazine holds 10 rounds, and you should wait a couple of minutes between magazines to allow the barrel to fully cool.”

By the time Gunny had finished explaining things, the targets were set up, and Ron had

made all the adjustments to the gun, including the monopod in the buttstock, and had the bullseye of the 600 yard target firmly in his crosshairs. He was waiting on Gunny, who gave him the all clear. Ron loaded the first round, and was having a hard time calming down. Finally he started reciting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, and that worked. He went into his deep breathing technique, and noticed for the first time the sight wiggling slightly with each heartbeat. He remembered Anne saying something about shooting between heartbeats, but never experienced it. He was experiencing it right now. He had dry fired the weapon a couple of times to get a feel for the trigger break, and it was set very light at just over 2 pounds. He flicked the safety off, and took a firing grip. He took 2 additional deep breaths, and took a 3<sup>rd</sup> one, blew half of it out and held it right as the scope settled on the bullseye. His heartbeat was causing the image to wiggle slightly, so he anticipated the beats, and shot between them. The trigger broke like a glass rod, and even with the headset, the gun roared and kicked like a 12-gauge on Steroids. 3 seconds later, he heard the Gunny's voice over the intercom. "I don't believe this Ron, you just hit the bullseye. Go ahead and fire 2 more rounds whenever you are ready, then reload and acquire the 800 yard target."

Ron steadied down, and fired 2 more rounds. They both found the bullseye, but the group size was larger than Ron had anticipated. The gunny told Ron that he had just shot an 8 inch group at 600 yards. Ron unloaded the gun to allow it to cool quicker with the bolt locked open, and reset for the 800 yard target. He consulted the ballistic table, and added the recommended elevation to the scope setting. When the barrel had fully cooled, he got behind the gun, loaded a fresh magazine, and waited for the Gunny to give him permission to shoot. While he was waiting, he started reciting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Finally the Gunny gave him the all clear, and he cleared the safety, and took a firing grip on the rifle, then cycled the action, loading a round. He adjusted the magnification and focus slightly on the scope to have a clear image of the target, then settled down to shoot just like before. Ron was totally surprised when the trigger broke, but he wasn't surprised when the Gunny told him the round struck the bullseye. Gunny told him to fire 2 more rounds, then the Gunny said that he had shot a 10-inch group at 800 yards. He asked Ron if he wanted to try the 1000 yard target. Ron said sure and they set up for the 1000 yard target as the gun cooled. Meanwhile the Gunny was going out of his tree; this kid was shooting bullseye groups at 800 yards as if he did it every day.

When the gun cooled, Ron loaded another magazine, and dialed in the drop for 1,000 yards based on the ballistic table. While he waited for the All Clear, he dialed up the magnification again, and adjusted the focus. When the Gunny radioed All Clear, he cleared the safety, cycled the action, and took a firing grip on the gun. Ron was amazed at how the target danced in the scope. This was going to be a real challenge just to hit the target. He knew that dialing up the magnification wouldn't help, he could see the target, just fine, it was just that it was bobbing and weaving like a drunk. He pressed the PTT button on his radio headset. "Gunny, the target is bobbing and weaving like a drunken prizefighter."

"Ron, that happens - you're aiming a rifle at an object that is over half a mile away. The

only reason you can see it is the huge magnification of the scope. Just steady down and do your best. My best suggestion is to trip the trigger right before the rifle crosses the center of the bullseye. It takes a fraction of a second, called lock time, between when you touch the trigger, and when the primer ignites the powder, then another fraction of a second while the round leaves the barrel, during that whole time, you can influence the movement of the bullet. Once it leaves your barrel, it's on a ballistic arc to the target. You need to anticipate slightly and lead the target."

"OK Gunny, thanks for the pep talk."

Ron settled down again, and noticed the image wasn't swinging as wildly, just oscillating slightly in a figure 8. Maybe he had just to calm down a little. As he went into his deep breathing technique, the oscillations got smaller and smaller. Right when the sight was entering the bullseye, Ron touched the trigger, and after a few seconds, Gunny yelled, "Kid, I don't know how you did it, but you hit the bullseye."

A few minutes later, Gunny decided to have some fun with Ron "Hey Ron, you see that fly on top of the 1,000 yard target?"

Ron replied "Which One? The Brown one of the Black one?"

Gunny laughed and played along "The Brown One. Shoot it in the eye."

Ron called back "Which Eye?"

Gunny nearly fell off his stool laughing, then realized that if he could see it, Ron just might be able to shoot it.

They repacked the Barretts, and Gunny was talking With the Chief Armorer. The only thing Ron heard was a name "Carlos Hathcock". Ron wondered how he was being compared to the famous Marine Sniper. He hoped he was almost as good as the legendary sniper. What Ron didn't realize was that it was field craft, not shooting ability that separated the wannabes from the real snipers. All the snipers in the program had to shoot to a certain level. The ones that washed out usually weren't due to shooting problems. When Gunny took Ron back to his family, he was still shaking his head. Steve wondered where Ron had been, but didn't ask, he was sure he would hear about it from the Gunny later. He had heard some suspiciously loud booms. Since Roy and Anne were getting tired, and Steve didn't have anything planned for the rest of the afternoon, he drove them back to quarters and then sat around and talked for a while. Later he sprang an idea on Roy and Anne. Since Ron was underage, he needed their permission for him to fly back seat in an F-15 Strike Eagle. Jim's eyes got huge. If he had been 30 years younger, he would have killed someone to get to fly in the Eagle. Roy and Anne were too tired to argue, and signed the papers. Ron was having the time of his life, and they didn't want to stand in his way.

The next morning, Steve and Ron did their PT, plus the entire Pave Hawk Command. Ron was a little intimidated working out with all these soldiers, but focused on Steve. When they finished, the Sergeant complimented him on his form. "When my uncle came to our cabin, I worked out with him for 2 weeks straight, and I tried to do it just like he did."

"You did well, Son. We'd be honored to have you lead the run."

Ron realized the Sergeant wasn't kidding, and almost said "Yes Sir" when he remembered the Sergeant was a Noncom, so he took the safe route "Yes Sergeant." and walked to the head of the formation. With the Sergeant's "Platoon Follow the Kid in front" command, they started off at a jog/trot. As his muscles limbered up, Ron started pushing the pace. He had run much faster than this when he ran with his Uncle, and they were carrying a lot more too. After another 100 yards, he had them up to what was known as a "Ranger Run" pace they could hold forever. Basically it was the fastest jog that the Rangers could accomplish while loaded with gear. Lightly loaded the average Ranger could run a marathoner into the ground. They stopped at 5 miles in deference to the admin pukes in the back, living up to their nicknames. Steve was impressed; Ron must have kept in shape since the last time they were together. The Sergeant didn't let up yet, and ordered "Platoon Quick march" and the platoon slowed to a march, and marched back to the assembly area. When they reached their assembly area, the Sergeant called "Platoon HALT", then "Dismissed". Steve walked over to Ron as did the Sergeant. Steve was beaming with pride "I see you kept up your PT when I was away?" "Yes Sir" (smart Kid - Steve was wearing his rank)

The Sergeant wondered how a 14-year old kid could be so smart, turned out and disciplined. Then he remembered that Steve was his Uncle, and the kid probably had a case of hero worship, like most teenage boys develop. Well, he could do worse for a role model. He had only heard of some of the stuff Steve had done while a PJ, and it gave him nightmares just thinking about it. Steve told Ron to shower and change into BDUs because he had to be at Flight Ops in 45 minutes. He highly suggested skipping breakfast. Ron thought a glass of orange juice wouldn't hurt, and grabbed a quick can of OJ before hitting the showers from the mini-refrigerator in his room. 5 minutes later, he was showered and getting dressed. When he finished, Roy knocked on his door and sat Ron down.

"Son, you have made me so proud this couple of days, but as you can see, your "old man" is getting older and slower in his old age. When you get back from your flight, make sure you come back here and tell us all about it." Roy gave Ron a big hug, and prayed over him briefly, asking God to protect him. They both said Amen, and then Ron said he had to go, Steve was waiting to drive him to Flight Ops. Roy gave him one last hug, then Ron hurried out. He wondered what was wrong with his dad, he had always been so youthful and strong. When he got back, if he was still feeling like that, he'd mention it to Steve. Roy would hate to get poked and prodded, but if something was wrong, besides growing old, he owed it to his mom to keep Roy around as long as possible. Steve was waiting in his Hummer at the bottom of the steps. Ron jumped in, and as soon as he was belted in, Steve took off.



5 minutes later, Ron was at Flight ops getting fitted for a flight suit, and a gee-suit. While they were fitting him, a Pilot Safety Specialist was giving Ron his canned safety speech, explaining all the safety gear in his kit, including his water survival kit, since most of Florida was within 5 minutes flying time of water. Ron laughed when they handed him a .38 revolver. Ron thought to himself, "What am I to do with this, shoot a shark?" Ron knew more about Survival from his Dad than this airman giving a canned speech seemed to know. When he finished, Ron signed his life away. His parents had already signed, but the protocol said that the airman needed the person going up for a check ride needed to sign, so Ron signed.

When he was finished, the IP that was going to fly the plane came in, and had a hard time believing Ron was only 14. He didn't look as young as most 14 year olds. He had the poise and self-confidence that some 18-year old airmen lacked. He gave him his briefing, including his canned joke that if he said "Eject, Eject, Eject." and he said "Huh?" he would be flying his first and only solo. What the pilot didn't tell the check rider is he set the seats so the pilot's ejection handle controlled both seats, with an emergency override in case the pilot was injured and couldn't grab the controls. All the GIB had to do to fire both seats manually was to pull and twist his handle. It took a deliberate act, and was a safety feature to keep the civilian from freaking out and punching them out of a perfectly good airplane. As a further safety precaution, they never told the civilian the procedure until they needed to use it. The IP asked Ron if he had any questions, and when he said NO, the pilot turned and shook his hand. They took a picture at that moment, figuring it would be better to get one now in case the civilian lost his cookies in the air, and soiled his flight suit. Steve handed him a helmet, and Ron followed the pilot out to the plane. This was where the pilot did his real talking "Steve told me you've just about got your Private Pilot's license, and if you were 16, you would have it. That's impressive, I didn't get my private license until I was 18. Just remember things happen much faster in a jet. Have you done any aerobatics?"

"Not deliberately." then Ron told him about the hairy stall recovery. The pilot's estimation of Ron went up a few notches.

"How would you like to perform a bunch of aerobatics?"

"Sure as long as it didn't get you in trouble."

"Son, the only way I could get in trouble was to hurt you or the plane. If you really want to do aerobatics, I need to extend the flight by about an hour, fly out to a tanker, and then out to the training area so we don't conflict with civilian traffic. Most of the flight will be over water."

"So what are we waiting for - let's Go."

The Pilot told Ron, "by the way, my call sign is Hammer. If you need to say anything to me

once we're in the plane, please call me Hammer."

They got to the plane, and the crew chief got Ron seated, the belts adjusted and got him all plugged in, then seated the pilot and plugged him in. The last thing he did was remove the safety pins from the seats, and showed the cotter pins to the pilot, climbed back down and removed the ladder. Then he snapped a perfect salute, which the pilot returned. The pilot's voice could be heard over the intercom. "Ron, I'm set up hot mike for the intercom, and your mike is cold. If you need to say anything, push the PTT button in your hand. You can't be heard over the air, only me. so don't worry about what you say. Ready to go?"

"Yes Sir Hammer."

Hammer started talking his way through the preflight. While Ron couldn't see the gauges, he had a set of instruments in front of him, but was told not to touch anything except the PTT button on his microphone. Somehow, most of it sounded familiar. Finally he got to the good part "Starting One" and a few seconds later "Starting Two". Even with the helmet, the noise of the engines was audible. Finally, after some more instrument checks, and a check of control surfaces and engine controls, the Pilot came over the air. "Ok, here we go - make sure your seatbelts are fastened, and your seats are in the upright and locked position." Hammer was laughing his head off, then said "Just preparing for my future employment in the Friendly Skies." Ron was laughing too, then Hammer called the tower. "Tower, this is Hammer for an aerobatic demonstration flight with Civilian passenger, Contact Shamu and advise we wish to tank as soon as we reach altitude."

"Roger Hammer, will advise, Winds out of the west, you are cleared for high-performance takeoff and climb to angels 30 to meet up with Shamu, then you are cleared direct to training area 1. Good luck and good hunting."

While he was talking to the tower, Hammer had taxied to the correct runway. "Ron, Hold on to your socks, or you might have to pick them up on the way back. Snug back into you seat, and be ready for a kick in the butt." Hammer turned down the runway, and called the tower. "Hammer, Rolling" and pushed the twin throttles to Zone 5 afterburner, and released the brakes. The lightly loaded Strike Eagle rocketed down the runway, and Hammer hauled back on the stick and snapped the gear up in a high-performance take-off with a 50 degree nose up attitude and full afterburner, they actually accelerated as they climbed. After about 10 seconds, he moved the throttles back to Military and continued the climb to 35,000 feet. Seems the military never used actual altitudes over the air. It was an old habit from WWII to keep the opposing forces from knowing the fighter's exact altitude. Angels altitudes were the called altitude, plus or minus the Angels factor to keep the enemy guessing. Even in the days of fully encrypted radio, they still kept the tradition. As he reached altitude, Hammer was on the air again. "Shamu, this is Hammer."

"Hammer, Shamu, come right 270 and we're 10 miles out, you're clear to tank."

Hammer put the F-15 into a military bank, and turned rapidly to 270. 2 minutes later they were at the tanker, and Hammer called the tanker. Receiving permission to hook up, Hammer nudged the plane forward carefully while the refueling probe was held very still in the slipstream of the big jet. When he made contact and the refueling probe slid into the connector, Hammer called “Contact, Fill her up and wash the windows. Do you give Green Stamps?”

The pilot of the KC-135 was having enough problems flying straight and level without Hammer’s attempt at humor. “Negative Hammer, transferring 40,000 pounds, and don’t quit your day job.”

When the fuel gauges indicated the internal and the external conformal tanks were full, Hammer called “Break, and thanks for the gas, Keep the change.” and backed up until the nozzle came out of the plane with a puff of jet fuel that was still in the connector, then he eased his aircraft to the right to clear the tanker, before pushing the throttle to military and heading to the training area. While they were flying straight and level, Hammer had a chance to talk to Ron. “Ron, How you doing back there son?”

“When are we going to get to do some aerobatics. I do this straight and level stuff all day.”

Hammer responded by throwing the plane into a snap roll, and recovered straight and level. “How was that?”

“Thanks Hammer I needed that, better hope the Crew chief has a strong stomach.”

Hammer knew a simple snap roll couldn’t upset Ron, and realized that the kid had a sense of humor. “Oh, funny guy aye. We’ll see how much you’re laughing in a few minutes.”

When he reached the training area, Hammer called for permission for high-performance maneuvering. That was a higher clearance than normally required for a civilian demo ride. Good thing Flight ops had insisted on the gee suit, since High-performance maneuvering allowed up to 6 positive and 3 negative Gees. Good thing Steve wasn’t in the tower, or he might have vetoed the idea, he didn’t want to scare the crap out of Ron.

A few seconds later, a simple “Roger” was all Hammer heard. Ron was wondering what he was getting into, when Hammer threw the plane into another snap roll, followed by a Split S. He was flying just this side of Air Combat Maneuvering. After a series of Rolls, he started a Cuban 8 followed by a reverse Cuban 8. Ron was glad he followed Steve’s advice, or else the Crew chief would have a huge mess to clean up. Instead of scaring Ron, the ride exhilarated him. He loved the high positive and negative Gees, and the feeling of the plane flying in unusual attitudes. When Hammer came on the air, and asked Ron how he was doing, he just said “More.” Hammer decided to go vertical, and pulled the nose up while throwing the throttles into Zone 5. While he was climbing, he performed another roll, then

an inverted inside loop at the top. He didn't want to go outside and risk a red-out. He performed a barrel roll on the way down, then turned it straight and level again. Checking his fuel state, he realized he'd either need to tank again, or cut it short. All that Zone 5 stuff gulped fuel at a prodigious rate. He decided to head for home, called the tower "Hammer, returning to base." and performed a wingover as a last surprise to Ron. Ron was loving every minute of it, and was disappointed when Hammer was obviously heading for home. he wanted more. Hammer came on the Intercom. "How you feeling back there Ron?"

"Thanks for the flight Hammer, it's too bad we couldn't do this some more."

"I know how you feel, but this Zone 5 stuff really goes through fuel, I either need to tank up or head for base. Since the Tanker has moved off, I have to go home."

"OK, thanks Hammer."

They talked all the way back until Hammer called the Tower. "Hammer requesting clearance to land. 5,000 pounds"

The fuel state told the tower that Hammer would have priority, since he would be Bingo in 10 minutes.

"Roger Hammer, cleared in to 27R, pattern is clear."

Hammer had one last thrill for Ron, and performed an aggressive Combat Break at the downwind end of the runway. Then he quickly extended flaps and dropped the gear. He got the 3 green lights indicating the gear was down and locked. He made one final call, "Hammer on final" and the Tower acknowledged, "Roger Final. Clear to land." Hammer flew such a perfect glide slope that if there were arresting gear, he would have caught a 3 wire. The plane kissed down so gently that the only indication they were down, was when the nose wheel came down, and he applied the brakes to stop the plane. Hammer taxied to the shutdown area, then slid the throttles to cutoff, shutting down the motors. He released the canopy when he saw the crew chief's smiling face. He helped Ron out first, then the Pilot. Steve was standing right there. The pilot thought he might have been in trouble until Ron ran up to his uncle, grabbed him and asked if they could do it again. Steve told Ron the next time he would do it, he would be the pilot of the plane. Ron was hooked.

He looked past Steve, and could see Roy was feeling ill when he suddenly collapsed. Ron rushed to his dad, closely followed by Steve. His PJ medical training cut in an instant, and knew Roy was having a Heart Attack. He told Ron to call on the radio for the base paramedics STAT. Ron ran over to the Hummer, and turned the radio on, and pressed the PTT button on the mike. "Medical Emergency at the Shutdown area, Paramedics requested STAT."

When the base operations operator heard the call, he pressed the EMERGENCY button that called the paramedics, and stayed with the call.

“Caller, please ID.”

“This is Ron Williams with Colonel Fellows. My Dad is having a heart attack, and Colonel Fellows is providing First Aid.”

The ops operator knew where Colonel Fellows Hummer was, and sent the paramedics to that location Code 3. They got there 3 minutes later. Steve was still working on his brother in law when the paramedics arrived and took over. They called the base hospital and called Code Blue to get the heart trauma team rolling. They started all the IV's and heart drugs, and Roy responded nicely. They packed him into the ambulance and took off Code 3 to the base hospital. Steve grabbed Anne and said that Roy should be OK, then they hustled into the Hummer and drove to the base hospital. By the time they got there, Roy had been admitted and was stable. When they got there, the base cardiologist said that Roy must be the luckiest person on the planet. If he had that heart attack in Alaska, he wouldn't have made it. As it was, it was a very mild heart attack, and he should fully recover. They wanted to keep him, and perform an angioplasty to determine what damage was done to the heart, and correct any blockages.

## Chapter 65 - Wings Clipped

The next morning, before Anne got there, the Base Hospital's cardiologist stopped in to see Roy. "Mr. Williams, I'm Dr. Wilson, the Cardiologist. You gave us quite a scare yesterday, but you seem to have come through no worse for the wear. From what we can tell, your electrolytes got out of whack between the heat and humidity. You probably weren't drinking enough water, and you had a Fibrillation incident, where your heart started fibrillating, or beating out of sync. Your brother in law assumed you were having a MI, or a heart attack, and started CPR, which didn't hurt, and might have saved your life. When the paramedics arrived 3 minutes later, they put a stethoscope to your chest and could hear your heart fibrillating, and grabbed the defibrillator. They zapped you and got you on Ringer's lactate to get your electrolytes back in balance. By the time they got you to the hospital, you were stable, so we did an echocardiogram, and the heart was fine, but you had a partial blockage, so we scheduled an angiogram, which confirmed the partial blockage. We then did a balloon angioplasty, which cleared the blockage. You only damaged less than 2% of your heart due to the partial blockage, but you need to change your lifestyle if you want to live any longer. First of all, you need to walk an hour per day. Not at first, but work up to it. Second of all, you need to change your diet. You need to eat more fish and less red meat. Your triglycerides and Cholesterol were off the chart. Your Cardiac Risk Ratio was over 8 - meaning you were a dead man walking, and your triglycerides were over 400. We bought you some time, but if you don't change the way you live, your next heart attack will kill you. I've left detailed instructions with Anne. Take care and I hope I never see you again."

"Doc - why do you hope to never see me again?"

"That's what I say to all heart patients I see in the ER, because if I see them again, they are probably on death's doorstep because they didn't listen. So I hope I never see you again."

"Same to you doc."

The doctor walked out and closed the door, and Roy went back to sleep. Meanwhile Anne, Ron and Steve were getting briefed by the ER Resident about what happened, and what changes Roy would have to make.

"Roy was exceptionally lucky. The hot weather imbalanced his electrolytes enough to cause fibrillation, and he fainted. When we got him to the ER, he was stable, so we did an Echocardiogram and located a partial blockage. We cleared the blockage with a balloon angioplasty. His electrolytes were all out of whack, and his cholesterol and triglycerides were way too high. He'll live another 20 years if he takes care of himself. That means no more red meat, fish or chicken only, and he has to walk every day, and eat a balanced diet. No heavy lifting for the first couple of months and he needs to take it easy after that."

“We live in the middle of nowhere Alaska, if he has another heart attack, it could kill him. Should we move?”

“If he follows doctor’s orders, he might never have any other problems with his heart, this was a wake-up call and there was almost no damage to the heart. Except for his triglycerides and Cholesterol, he’s in remarkable shape for his age. So there is no reason to move right now.”

When he finished, the Doctor’s pager went off, and he looked at it, and then ran for the ER. Knowing that Roy was still in his room, Anne knew the emergency page wasn’t about him. Anne told Ron to go with his Uncle Steve, and enjoy the rest of his visit. Anne wanted to stay with Roy until he was well enough to go home. Steve got up and gave his sister a big hug, and whispered something in her ear. She smiled and turned to Ron and gave him a big hug. “Don’t you worry about your Dad, he’s doing fine, it’s just he’s not used to this hot humid weather, and it stressed his heart. He’ll be as good as new when we get him home. He’ll have to modify his diet, but he should be OK pretty quick as soon as he regains his strength. The anesthesia takes a lot out of you. Go have fun, and I’ll see you in a day or two.”

Ron gave his mom a big hug, and took off with Steve. He had told Anne not to worry; he’d keep Ron so busy that he wouldn’t have time to worry about his father. Once they were outside of the Hospital, he asked Ron if he wanted to do some more shooting. Ron’s eyes lit up, and his head nodded vigorously. Steve pulled out his cell phone and made a couple of quick phone calls, then they got into his air-conditioned Hummer and drove to the range. When they got there, Ron was surprised by the number of men there. Steve explained that he had contacted his Sniper training cadre from the various commands. It seemed word had spread around the base about his shooting skills, and his age. They all wanted to shoot with him, and possibly learn something and maybe teach Ron something about long distance shooting. Ron realized he was being put on display, but was too impressed with all the medals he saw to care. The armorer had brought his Browning A-bolt BOSS .308 rifle, and a selection of military sniper rifles, including the Barretts prototype he shot the other day.

When they got out, they were practically mobbed by Delta, Ranger, and Marine Recon Sniper instructors, also couple of SEAL instructors as well. Steve got them to sit down in a semi-circle with him and Ron in the center of it, and they had a brief Q&A session. Ron gave them his background, his bio information, and everything else. Someone in Delta had already pulled his Uncle Ron’s jacket from Vietnam. Ron was one of the top 10 snipers in Vietnam, but wasn’t as famous as Carlos Hathcock or Sgt. Chuck Mawhinney. According to his jacket, most of his kills were unconfirmed, and so classified that they weren’t even in his jacket. Steve wondered how much of his shooting skills were genetic, and how much was Anne’s early training. They asked extensive questions about how he managed to shoot so well. Ron said his ability was a gift from God, and he had to do his best with every shot so as not to waste the gift. Several older sergeants in the back were nodding their heads at this, they definitely understood that kind

of drive. When they were finished, Steve asked Ron if he wanted to shoot his rifle.

Ron asked that they set up a target at the 600-yard line. He had peeked earlier, and noticed the wind was barely blowing, so he could try some Ma Bell shooting. He uncased his rifle, and carefully set it up on his shooting mat. As he always did, he shot from the Military Prone position. This amazed several sniper instructors, since none of their snipers shot Military prone anymore, and used bipods and monopods on their rifles. When he got ready, the range master made sure everyone had their eyes and ears on, and gave Ron the Thumbs up. Ron cycled the action, and looked through the scope. He was amazed at how steady the image was. 1 minute later he was so deep in the zone he didn't even remember pulling the trigger 3 times, let alone clearing and safing his rifle. The next thing he knew, the Range master had sent a runner to get his target, and they were measuring his group with a caliper. All 3 rounds were in the X-ring, and when they had finished measuring and deducting the diameter of the bullet, they started double-checking their calculations, because the calculator said he had just shot a 2-inch group at 600 yards. Steve was about to bust with pride. Ron had saved his best group for the people who would most appreciate it. Ron stood up, and was met by a raucous round of cheers. These guys who he had only read about were cheering him like he had just scored the wining touchdown in the Super bowl. Ron looked at his feet and kicked rocks in his best "Aw Shucks" impersonation. The Delta head instructor told him if he were 21, he'd buy him a beer, but if he wanted to join them at their club, he was sure they could find some soda or something he could drink. He looked over to Steve, who nodded OK.

Ron asked if they would mind if he could shoot some more. The typical response was "Heck Yeah." He put up the Browning A-bolt and picked up the prototype Barretts Sniper Rifle. This gun had an excellent bipod and monopod, so he decided to use it. He asked the range master to set a target on the 1,000-yard line, and was in the process of setting up when the Range Master gave him a thumbs up. He loaded a 5-round magazine of .50 BMG Lake City Match ammo, and cycled the action. He got into a good stable prone position, and noticed the Bipod and Monopod helped immensely, the sight was sitting right on the center of the x-ring and barely wiggling. He adjusted the focus of the scope until he could clearly see the x in the center of the x-ring, then released the safety. He took 3 deep breaths, and blew half the 3<sup>rd</sup> one out, held his breath, and squeezed the trigger right as the center of the crosshairs settled on the X of the x-ring. As soon as he was ready again, he steadied the crosshairs on the bullseye, and soon had 2 rounds in the x-ring. After the bolt locked open when the 5<sup>th</sup> round fired, he safed the weapon, and got up and finally noticed the instructors going nuts. Not sure what was going on, he took his earmuffs off, and heard them yelling and cheering. Then he noticed several of them had broken out 60-power spotting scopes. The Recon Marine sniper instructor was the first one up to him. "Ron, I don't know how you did it, but you shot a 9-inch group at 1,000 yards."

Ron said "So?"

The Marine instructor explained that his best snipers at Recon who have been shooting these



rifles for years were only shooting 8-inch groups at 1,000 yards. To shoot a 9-inch group out of an unfamiliar gun under pressure was simply amazing. Ron told him he didn't feel the pressure. "When I get ready to shoot, I can simply block out everything but the image through the scope, and sometimes I don't even remember firing."

"Ron, that's called 'The Zone' - our best shooters get into it when they shoot. It can't be taught, it's a genetic trait. You concentrate so well that I could have dropped a grenade next to you and you wouldn't have noticed. Man, if you were 3 years older, I'd sign you up on the spot. Unfortunately, Steve's already told us you are planning on going to the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs in a few years. I'm also the coach for the Marine Shooting team, and I'm afraid the Air Force is going to win all the inter-service competitions, including the Camp Perry meet for several years after you enlist. Good luck kid, and thanks for the Shooting demonstration." Ron looked at his watch, then walked over to Steve. "Steve, can we shoot pistols for a couple of hours, we have a couple of hours of daylight left. I want to show these guys how to play .22 golf."

"Ron, that would be an excellent idea - Hey guys, let's meet over at the pistol range, Ron wants to show you how to play .22 golf - it's a neat game they played with .22 pistols at his home in Alaska."

The instructors agreed in a heartbeat. Some of them wondered if Ron was as good with pistol as a rifle. The Marine shooting coach hoped he wasn't or his team would be in major trouble. The range master cased all the weapons back up, and anticipating what he had in mind, handed Ron his Ruger 22/45 in the case and a brick of ammo. They jumped into Steve's Hummer and drove over to the pistol range. Someone at the pistol range must have been tipped off since there was a huge bucket of range balls waiting for them, and the targets had been cleared from the range. As Ron and Steve got out of the Hummer, he carried his 22/45 and the brick of ammo over to the shooting bench, uncased the gun and started loading mags. Steve exercised his pitching arm, and tossed golf balls all over the range from 15 to 50 yards away.

When the rest of the instructors walked up, they were practically drooling over his suppressed 22/45, and were full of questions. They had tried several times to purchase that exact weapon through military channels, but some idiot in supply kept killing it, saying they had plenty of suppressed weapons. Naturally, they all wanted a chance to fire it, so Ron suggested he go first, then they could shoot in the order of rank. That created some arguments until Steve stepped in and arbitrarily sorted them out into order. They were too busy watching Ron shoot to care anyway. He had 2 mags loaded full of CCI Mini-mags, and was already wearing his shooting glasses. He explained the point of the game was to shoot a golf ball underneath so it popped into the air. You got points for each time a golf ball jumped in the air, and you won instantly if you could shoot that golf ball while it was still in the air, or else you won based on total points. Ron inserted his first magazine in the weapon, and taking careful aim, shot a golf ball 15 yards away, and made it jump almost 6 inches in

the air. He tried to hit it in the air, but shot just over it. He sighted another golf ball, and made it jump too, but missed it in the air - it was hard to predict which way they would go. After 2 magazines of 15 rounds each, he had hit 13 golf balls, and he had almost hit 5 in the air. The most senior instructor went next, and soon every instructor on the base was hooked, then they realized this was a great instinctive shooting tool, since you didn't have enough time to use the sights and hit an erratically flying golf ball in the air. Several of them decided then and there to requisition a case of the Ruger 22/45 pistols with the integral Ares Suppressors, and this time they'd fight the REMF's in Supply to get them.

Ron had made a big hit with the Instructors, and the Marine coach was bummed. Evidently, Ron was as good with a pistol as he was with a rifle. When they had finished, the Delta instructors invited everyone over to their club for drinks and a bull session. Steve decided that he should go with Ron, just to make sure no one else tried to shanghai him away from the Air Force. Actually, he wanted to hang out with the instructors, but was rarely invited since he was an Air Force puke. Being Ron's uncle, the invitation extended to him as well.

Ron and Steve got into Steve's Hummer for the drive over to the Army Ranger compound. The Delta Force section was a smaller section off to a corner of the Ranger Compound. Steve followed the vehicle in front of him, and they were waved through the gate with a smart salute befitting Steve's rank. They made a couple of funny looking turns, finally stopping in front of this decrepit Quonset hut that looked like it had been through every war since WWII. A staff sergeant stood outside the door checking ID's, and only admitting a select few. The Delta Instructor walked up to the Staff Sergeant, said a few words, then escorted Steve and Ron into their private bar. Remembering Ranger protocol, Steve immediately took off his cover and stowed it, or else he would have to buy the club a drink. They were shown to a reserved section of the bar with a private entrance. Ron saw a bunch of targets posted on the wall, and asked the Instructor whose targets those were. The instructor answered with some pride that they are the qualifying targets for the best sniper student and instructor for each year. He pulled something out of a map tube, and held it up to the crowd, which yelled their approval. Ron couldn't really see what he was showing them, and was seriously surprised when the Instructor asked Ron to sign his 1000-yard target. It seems Ron was the youngest person in the history of the Rangers to shoot a 1000-yard group that didn't have to be measured with a yardstick. The next youngest person was over 10 years older than him, and his group was ½ an inch smaller than his. Ron was flattered, but tried real hard not to let it get him puffed up. The Instructors gathered around him and toasted him. Somehow someone had found a 6- pack of Coke in the cooler, and Ron was drinking from the bottle, and raised his bottle in thanks. Then they started yelling "Speech - Speech." until Steve finally got them quieted down. Ron stood up on a table so he could address them. "Gentlemen, People in the Military have always been my heroes. If it weren't for you, we wouldn't be here enjoying our freedoms. You guys have all been out and faced the dragon, I envy you. Maybe someday I can do something worthy of belonging here. I really appreciate this, but I don't deserve it. Thanks for everything."

With that, he stood down, and received a huge applause. Steve gave Ron a big hug, and told him “Ron these guys really appreciate stuff like that, I’m really proud of you.”

“Steve, it was from the heart, Guys like you and Ron and these guys all risked their lives so I can live in peace. Maybe someday, I can earn a place in a room like this. I know the only reason I’m here is I’m your nephew and a good shooter.”

The Delta Instructor overheard their conversation. “Kid, you’re not a good shooter, you’re a great shooter. Only 1 out of 1,000 Delta operatives can shoot as well as you can right now. That’s a gift. Use it well. Use it to defend Freedom.” When he finished, he shook Ron’s hand. Steve knew that they had made an indelible impression on Ron. He knew when the time came, he would choose a career in the military. He just hoped Ron wouldn’t have to make the Supreme Sacrifice, and could come home to a normal life after he retired. Steve knew that Ron’s target would be displayed prominently, as well as his age, as a motivation to future Delta Shooters. Even if he never did anything in the Military except shoot competitively, he would influence future Delta members and encourage them to shoot better. When things broke up a few hours later, Steve drove Ron back over to the VIP quarters, and ate dinner with him, since Anne was still with Roy at the base hospital. After dinner, Steve called Anne, and asked her if he could bring her anything.

She requested some food, and a blanket. Steve asked her if it was OK for Ron to come over. Anne said sure, if Steve could take him back to VIP quarters since she was spending the night there next to Roy. Steve got Anne a to-go order, and drove over to the base hospital with Ron. Roy was up and looking better. Ron ran over and gave his Dad a big hug. Roy held his son for a while, then indicated he needed to let go - he was squeezing too tight. They visited for about an hour, while Steve talked with Anne. Ron told Roy all about what he did that day. Roy’s eyes got big when Ron told him he shot a 9-inch 1000-yard group. He really was in shock when Ron told him that the Delta Instructors had invited them over to their club, and made a big deal of putting his autographed target on the wall. Roy realized what a gift his son had when Ron related what the Delta Instructor had told him. Roy knew Delta was one of the toughest teams to get into, and their shooters were top notch. When they finished, visiting hours were over, So Roy told Ron, “I love you son. You’ve made me so proud. I’ll be OK in a couple of days, so make sure you enjoy yourself, and don’t worry about me.” Ron gave his Dad another hug, then turned to leave. He gave his Mom a big hug on the way out of the hospital, and Steve took him back to VIP quarters. Steve made sure he got to his room OK, and Jim was waiting there for him, then said goodnight and left. Jim got an update, and then they got ready for bed.

## Chapter 66 - Hanging with the SEALs

The next morning, Steve dropped Ron off at the SEAL compound, and told him he'd see him in a couple of days. Ron walked to the gate, and was greeted by the CO of the SEAL team. "Ron Williams, Welcome to the SEAL's. Steve asked me to keep you busy for the next couple of days, so I've got a full schedule ahead for you. First of all, my name is Captain Bill Edwards. When we're around other SEALs or military personnel, I'd appreciate if you would call me Captain Edwards, otherwise it's just Bill. I just wanted you to know I knew your uncle Ron, so if you have any questions I can answer, just let me know. I can't tell you everything, some of the stuff he did was so classified that I can't even talk about it now."

"Captain Edwards, can you tell me what Ron was doing in Vietnam - Mom won't talk about it, and I'm dying to know what kind of man my namesake was."

"Ron, your uncle was a bona-fide hero. He started as an Army Sniper, then got recruited into MAC-SOG for duty behind lines including Cambodia. I was a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant in the SEALs back then, and he saved our bacon more than once when he warned us of enemy activity in the area, and took out a Vietnamese Sniper that was waiting in ambush for us. I never met him while he was in Vietnam, but later when I was sheep-dipped to the CIA, I wound up running into him on a couple of ops, and shared a drink or two after the missions were over. He quit when he realized that the people he was sent out to kill were no worse than the people who sent him out to kill them, and the last I heard, he was flying bush in Alaska."

"Ok, Bill - I can fill you in about what happened after that. About 15 years ago, my father Roy Williams hired him to fly and guide him on a Caribou hunt in Alaska. According to my Dad, Ron got lost in the clouds around Denali, and wound up way off course about 115 miles northwest of Denali, where he crashed the plane into a lake after getting caught in a huge downdraft. My dad survived, lived for a year alone in the wilderness, then made a dugout canoe, and paddled over 100 miles back to Allakaket where he met my Mom, who was Ron's sister. Steve met Roy later that day, and Roy went back to the bush after realizing his kids were more worried about giving back the insurance money than seeing him alive. A couple of months later, a tree fell on him and he broke his arm. Steve was working as a State Doctor in Allakaket Alaska at the time, and Anne, my mom, was his nurse. Steve was all ready to go into the Air Force to become a PJ, but didn't want to leave Anne stranded, so he suggested she move in with him as a private duty nurse. They fell in love, and were married a couple of months later, and 9 months to the day they were married, I was born. We've lived in the cabin ever since. Mom taught me how to shoot as soon as I was old enough to hold a gun, and I've been shooting regularly ever since then. Since my Dad's getting up in age, the last couple of times we went hunting, I was the primary shooter, and he helped me haul the carcasses back on a cart."

“Wow, that’s some story, and it explains a lot about you. It seems some of your shooting ability is genetic, and the rest comes from growing up with rifles and learning young, then getting a lot of practice. How would you like to come out on a training run with us along the Florida coast. We have some new boats that really go fast, and then when we get back, you can try your hand in the freefall simulator. It’s a big padded room with a huge fan that pumps air straight up at over 100 mph, and we practice our freefall techniques in there. If you’d like to learn to use SCUBA gear, we have a pool and instructors that would love to teach you.”

“Sounds like fun - when do we start?”

“Let’s get you set up in barracks, and issue you some BDUs. You look like you’d fit a Men’s Small, so I ordered a couple of complete changes of clothes. There are no rank insignia on them, but I had your name stenciled on the shirts so you wouldn’t stand out like a sore thumb.” They drove in the captain’s Hummer, and were quickly at the BOQ building that Ron would be spending the next couple of days in. Someone had already laid out 5 sets of BDUs including briefs and socks, and a brand new pair of boots. The Captain showed him how to store the gear in his footlocker, then waited outside while Ron changed. Bill knew Ron was a quick study when he noticed the cuffs of his BDUs were bloused into the tops of his jump boots, and the boots were tied with a knot instead of a bow. Ron had his BDU cover in hand, and awaited Bill’s inspection at his best attempt at “attention”. Bill looked him over, and complemented him “Well done Mr. Williams, how did you know to blouse your cuffs into the jump boots like that?”

“Captain, when Steve, Excuse me Colonel Fellows, was staying with us, every morning for PT he showed up in BDUs, and he always had his pants cuffs bloused inside his boots.”

“OK, get in the vehicle, and let’s go meet the rest of the team.”

Ron ran around and got into the passenger side of the Hummer and belted himself in securely. They drove to the docks, where the biggest boat that Ron had ever seen awaited them. It looked almost like a picture of a WWII PT boat, but bigger and more rakish. There was a huge machine gun mounted in the bow, and another amidships. The boarding plank was out, and Ron waited for Captain Edwards. As he walked aboard, Ron heard a whistle, and the entire crew turned and saluted him. As he stepped aboard, he turned and saluted the flag, then the crew, and then Ron stepped aboard, was basically ignored by the crew, then he saluted the flag, like Captain Edwards had, and stepped aboard. Captain Edwards took him aside. “Ron I appreciate the gesture of saluting the flag, but you’re not military personnel, so please don’t salute anyone.” Ron nodded, and tried not to feel like he had just been snubbed. Then he remembered he was a guest here, at the invitation of his uncle, and didn’t really belong yet. He thought to himself “Someday I will belong here.” Bill handed Ron a life preserver, and showed him to a seat amidships behind the control console, and helped him buckle in the strange lap and shoulder harness, then handed him a helmet that looked a lot

like a helicopter pilot's helmet. When he put it on, Bill plugged the pigtail into the seat, and he could hear conversations aboard the boat. Bill buckled himself into the adjacent seat, then plugged in, and pressed his PTT switch. "Ron, this is Bill, I'm on the private intercom, so no one can hear us. Just press your PTT switch on the pigtail to talk to me. No one else on the boat can hear you. You'll hear me talking to the crew throughout the mission, but unless I start a sentence with RON, please don't answer. If I'm busy, please save your questions and comments for later." Ron pressed the button on his pigtail. "OK, thanks Captain." When he looked at the seat, he noticed the belts were attached to the seat, and the seat was mounted on a huge swivel pedestal to the deck by 10 1" diameter bolts. Obviously, this seat was designed to take a lot abuse and keep the occupant safe. Just as Ron started wondering what he had got himself into, a diesel engine aft rumbled to life, then the distinctive whine of twin turbine engines rose from a low whine to a scream as the twin TE-94 engines spooled up, yet they weren't as loud as he imagined with the helmet on. Ron realized the helmet was for hearing protection as well as anything else. He looked at Bill's helmet, and noticed a knob in the center of the forehead. He touched his helmet, and sure enough he had the same knob. He twisted it counterclockwise, and slid it down and a clear plastic visor slid in front of his face. Ron thought that would come in handy when the boat reached speed. As the bow and stern lines were tossed off, the bow of the boat turned away from the dock, then he felt the boat moving forward as the water jets swivelled rearward to push the boat forward. Ron reached up and slid the visor back up and locked it for now, he knew they wouldn't be going much faster than 10 knots until they cleared the anchorage. Ron swivelled around in his seat to look around. There were 12 SEALs in seats like his behind him, and there was a small crew operating the boat. Someone opened a door in the front cockpit window, and walked forward to the bow and manned the machine gun up front. Ron decided to ask Bill about it. "Captain Edwards, what's that big gun up front that the crewman just walked up to?"

"Ron, that's a 25mm Autocannon. This boat is designed to go into harms way and deliver several SEAL platoons to their targets. If you turn around, you'll see a 7.62mm GE Minigun mounted in the center of the stern. Those are the principle defensive weapons of this boat, and the boat crew mans and maintains them. While the SEALs have their own personal weapons, they carry a limited amount of ammo, so the boat has to be capable of defending itself. Under the deck are huge stores of ammo for each weapon, and they're fed by a flexible belt feed from those huge magazines. I've yet to see a Mark V come back with the magazines empty, even though they have tried. It's considered bad form to come back from a mission with full magazines, yet it's even worse to come home with empty magazines."

"Why's that Captain?"

"What if you run into another bad guy on the way home, what are you going to do, throw spit wads?"

As they cleared the channel, and headed out into the Gulf, the commander of the boat crew

spun the wheel to head toward their practice area, and advanced the throttles until they were doing over 40 knots. Ron quickly lowered his visor as the spray started kicking up. Bill handed Ron something, and he realized that it was to wipe his faceplate off with. He stuck it in the shirt pocket of his BDU, then realized it might blow out, and stuck it in his right front pocket. Every 15 minutes, he had to take it out and clean off his visor. This boat kicked up a lot of spray. An hour later, they arrived at their practice area, and he throttled back to 20 knots. Ron heard Bill's voice "Ron turn around and watch this."

As soon as the boat had slowed, the SEALs had taken off their helmets, unbuckled themselves from their seats, and made their way aft to their inflatable boats. They split up into groups of 6 and when they were all set, the guy in the bow of each boat flipped a lever, and they slid into the water. Seconds later, Ron heard the roar of twin outboards, then the noise of the turbines grew as the Mark V turned to follow them about a mile behind. Bill explained they were simulating an attack against a defended beach, and the SEALs might need the firepower of the Mark V if they got into trouble. The normal procedure was to sneak in after dark, but sometimes they had to do it the hard way, and attack in broad daylight, so they practiced this attack as well. Besides, it was the only one that an observer could appreciate, since the other attacks were done in pitch dark, and if the SEALs did their jobs right, and they usually did, there wasn't a shot fired, and the opponents never knew what hit them.

As the SEAL teams neared the beach, the Mark V hove-to about a mile off the coast, and waited for "All Hell to break loose" as Bill told Ron. The boat's portside was facing the beach, and the GE Mini-Gun and 25mm Autocannon were facing that way as well, to deliver a full broadside. As Ron watched, several Ma Deuces were brought up from underneath, and attached with tall pintle mounts to spots on the deck that were designed to accept them. A gunner's mate was carrying belted ammunition, and handed two linked belts to each gunner. They now had 2 Ma Deuce BMG 50 machine guns as well as the other guns facing shore. Suddenly, smokepots lit off on the shore to simulate enemy gunfire, and the 25mm Autocannon spoke first, firing a 5 round burst at the smoke. As more and more smokepots were activated by remote control, the other guns joined in, until the Mark V was firing a full broadside with the 25mm, 7.62mm and both Ma Deuce guns firing at the smokepots. The noise was incredible, even through the helmets. Ron knew he would be deafened and in a lot of pain if he were exposed to the noise of all those weapons firing without a helmet. All of a sudden, they all stopped firing. Bill came on the intercom, and asked Ron how he liked it. Ron said he was glad he was wearing that helmet. He never knew full-auto machine guns were so loud. Bill had an idea, and called the Chief gunnery mate, and had them relocate one of the 50's to the starboard, and kick a 50-gallon target drum over the side. The Chief nodded, and uncoupled the 50 from the port side mount, and moved it to the starboard side while 2 other gunners mates tossed a 50 gallon target barrel over the side. Bill switched to intercom. "Ron, how'd you like to try firing the 50?"

Ron's eyes got as big as saucers, and was nodding his head vigorously. Bill reached over

and unfastened his belts, then unplugged him from the seat. A gunner's mate came up and connected a small transceiver to his pigtail and stuck it in Ron's pocket. He heard Bill's voice again. "Ron, you're on hot mike, but I'm the only one who can hear you unless they are on this frequency. Go ahead and stand next to the 50 on the right, and the Chief gunner's mate will talk you through how to safely fire the weapon, but hurry up, that barrel's drifting away. Ron scurried over to the starboard side, and the Gunnery mate gave him a quick lesson on the 50. The gun was loaded and on safe, so he didn't have to mess with cocking the weapon, only aiming, releasing the safety, and firing. Ron grabbed the spade grips, and when he got the command, "Commence Firing Starboard" he touched the butterfly trigger, and fired a half-dozen rounds before he could let up on the trigger. The rounds sailed harmlessly over the barrel, so he lowered his point of aim, and shot the water 20 yards short. The gunner's mate came onto the headset. "Ron, you're on a moving boat, and your target is moving as well, you need to anticipate and lead your target. Keep your bursts short just like you're doing, and you'll get it soon enough."

Ron picked up the barrel in the sight, and finally started allowing the gun to follow the target. The swell was small enough that he could keep the barrel in his sights, and squeezed off another burst that hit the barrel. A big cheer went up from the rest of the boat crew that was muffled through his helmet. He tried again, and just missed. Finally he really steadied down and concentrated, and put a 50 round burst into the barrel, shredding it to the point that it sank. Ron was disappointed since he still had part of a belt left. He safed the weapon and took his hands off the grips, allowing the barrel to point skyward off the starboard side. Bill called him and told him to take his helmet off. When he took it off, and looked around, the entire boat crew, and the 2 SEAL teams who had re-boarded the craft were cheering. Ron was amazed, he never heard the boats coming back aboard. Bill was amazed, no gunner's mate had learned to shoot the 50 that fast and that well. The barrel was a good 500 yards out when he started hitting it, and then he put 50 rounds into it, and sank it with maybe 50 rounds out of a 200 round belt still left. Bill told Ron to get in his seat and get his helmet on, they had a long trip back. Ron handed the transceiver back to the Chief Gunner's mate, and put his helmet back on, and sat in the seat. When he plugged in, he was hearing comments like "Sierra Hotel - Damn that kid's good." He tried not to get a swell head as he buckled himself back in, and got ready for the return trip. As soon as he was belted in, the Boatswain turned the boat back to MacDill and shoved the throttles to the stops. The boat accelerated from 0-50 knots within a quarter mile, and was practically flying over the small chop in the Gulf as they roared back home.

When they got back to the dock, Bill offered to show Ron below decks. Bill opened a hatch and descended a steep ladder. Ron followed carefully. When they got to the bottom, the could see 2 hatches, one leading fore and one leading aft. Bill unlocked the hatch leading aft, and stepped over the 6-inch sill. Bill told Ron to watch his step, and pay attention to overheads and obstructions from here on out, since the space was going to get real cramped. They walked past a huge turbine engine, then turned a corner. The Chief Machinist Mate was sitting at a console monitoring the engines. Since they were shut down, there was



nothing to monitor, but that was the only space below decks and aft he could sit. Bill asked him to explain the engines to Ron.

“Ron, name’s Slim. These 2 big monsters here are the turbines that are the prime movers of this here boat. Between them you see that hunk of metal? That’s a Detroit Diesel. It is used to start these monsters with the APU, then once they’re running, it powers a huge generator for all the power this tub uses. Each of these turbines produces up to 2,300 horsepower, and all that energy is sent through these shafts underneath your feet to those huge jet pumps in the rear. As you saw on the way home, at full throttle, we can accelerate from a dead stop to over 50 knots inside about a quarter mile. About 6 feet behind your head is the magazine for the 7.62mm GE Minigun. Fully loaded, it carries over 50,000 rounds. If you were to go up to the bow, but it’s too crowded in there to let you see it, is another magazine with 5,000 rounds of 25mm ammo for the autocannon. I heard you did pretty good with the 50 up there, Well done son.” With that, Slim turned around and went back to work, and the tour was over. Bill lead him back up on deck, and escorted him off the boat, and back to his Hummer. Looking at his watch, Bill realized it was about time for Dinner. “Ron, how’d you like to eat dinner with the SEALs?”

Ron remembered he was hungry and nodded. Bill drove over to the chow hall, and Ron followed him inside. To say the atmosphere inside was boisterous would have said that a Soccer Riot was a Minor Brawl. Ron picked up a tray and followed Captain Edwards. After filling his tray, he followed Bill to a seat near the teams he was with earlier. As Captain Edwards approached the table, the entire team stood silently and waited for the Captain to take his seat. Ron made sure he was the last to be seated, even though he was right next to the captain. He had managed a few bites when the questions started.

“Hey Ron, we were amazed at how you shot that 50 today. Ever shot one before?”

“No Sir, That was the first time I’d shot anything that was full-auto.”

Captain Bill interrupted. “Ron’s being modest - yesterday he was firing that Barrett’s Light 50 prototype at the 1,000 yard range. The Rangers put his target up on the wall.” A chorus of “Sierra Hotels” echoed around the table.

Ron leaned over to the Captain and whispered “Excuse me Captain, but what does Sierra Hotel mean?”

Captain Edwards almost coughed up a piece of steak he was laughing so hard. Evidently, someone had left a crucial part of his education into the Military Mystique out.

“Ron, Sierra Hotel is two letters in Military Phonetic Alphabet. It’s a statement someone says when they are seriously impressed. It means “Sh\$t Hot”.

Ron whispered back “Sir, I still don’t get it.” Bill whispered back “I’ll explain later.”

## Chapter 67 - Flying with the Eagles

The next morning, they convoyed from Tampa Bay to Orlando Florida, where a company called SkyVentures had a Vertical Wind Tunnel capable of generating wind velocities of 120mph. The SEALs used it as a skydiving facility, and paid an annual fee to the owners to use it before the official opening time of 2:00 pm daily. They arrived at 0800 sharp, suited up, and while they were suiting up in their “flying suits” and helmets, Ron was receiving a safety briefing and instructions in how to fly in the wind tunnel. They knew he was a Student Private Pilot, so they couched the training in those terms. He was excited to get into the wind tunnel, and try flying without a plane. He watched a demonstration by the SEALs, including members of the LeapFrogs, the SEAL Parachute Demonstration team. They put on about a 15-minute performance of advanced skydiving techniques, including various formations. When they were finished, Ron was more than ready to try it. When the chamber was cleared, Ron entered with 2 instructors who would be responsible for his safety. They stood on the mat and the fan got up to speed, and just like he had been told, he jumped forward when the green light came on indicating the wind tunnel was up to speed, and he was flying. His first flight only lasted a few seconds, but after a dozen attempts, he was staying in the air column for a minute at a time. Then they shut the tunnel down, and he walked outside to give some other SEALs a chance.

The 2 instructors asked him if he wanted to do some formation flying, and he agreed in a heartbeat. There was a huge concrete pad out back and creepers to practice maneuvers on the ground before they flew them. Ron would “jump” first, then the instructors would link up on him, and one would catch his hands, and the other his feet, and fly like that for as long as possible. Then they would do the same maneuver, but Ron would spin himself in the air, and switch his hands and feet while the instructors remained stationary. After that, he could practice solo flying as long as he wanted. They walked back into the simulator, and when the green light came on, Ron jumped first, got into a good stable flying position, then the 2 instructors jumped in with him, and they quickly established the first formation. They released Ron, who spun exactly as the instructor had told him by barely moving a hand, and they caught him and they were flying again. A couple of minutes later, the turbine was spinning down, and they floated to the safety mat. During the next session, Ron decided to just have fun, and was doing some pretty strange maneuvers in the wind tunnel. He was using his knowledge of aerodynamics to bend, twist, and turn into different shapes that resulted in some interesting maneuvers. He wound up in a Delta Position, which they had warned him about, and started flying toward the wall. His recovery wasn’t very elegant, but he managed not to cream his face into the wall at 20 mph. He just kissed it, and recovered well enough to keep flying instead of sliding down the wall. He decided that he had enough of “creative flying” and decided to just sit there in the air stream and enjoy the experience. When the turbine spun down this time, he was ready to go. Several of the SEALs teased him good-naturedly on the way out, and he knew that he had arrived. He wasn’t a SEAL by any means, but he had done well enough at something they did to earn enough respect to get

them to accept him as a “kid brother”. By the end of the day, Ron was so tired he slept in the van all the way back home to MacDill. In deference to his exhaustion, they took it easy the rest of the afternoon.

The next day, Bill asked Ron if he wanted to learn how to Scuba Dive. Ron admitted he couldn’t even swim. Bill said “No time like the present” and tossed him an official pair of SEAL shorts, a BDU shirt, and a set of aqua shoes that he could wear in and out of the water. Ron looked funny in the shorts, since he was a skinny white kid, and had never bothered to get a tan. They got out of the Hummer, and this huge SEAL was waiting there for them. Bill introduced them, and then the Instructor said “What are you waiting for, get in the water.”

“I can’t swim.”

“Don’t worry, the water isn’t deep enough for you to drown. All you have to do is to stand up.”

Ron said “OK” and jumped in. He stood there in the pool and said , “Now what?”

“You can’t swim at all?”

“Not a lick.”

“OK, grab the side of the pool, put you right hand on the lip, and the other about 1 foot below the water and lay with your face in the water, and kick your feet. To breathe, turn your face to the side of the arm that is under water, and keep kicking. A nice steady rhythmic kick is what we’re looking for. When you’re doing it right, you should feel you have to push against the wall with your lower arm to keep from running into the wall. Make sure you hold your breath while your face is under water. OK, now assume the position, and start kicking. Ron started doing exactly as the SEAL told him, and pretty soon, he had to push pretty hard to keep his face off the side of the pool. He heard a whistle blow, and stopped.

“OK, you’ve got that part down. Now I’m going to get in the water with you and show you the arm half. This stroke, when put together is called the Australian Crawl or Freestyle. It’s fast but tiring. When we get you outfitted with fins, mask, snorkel, etc. you won’t need to use your hands, but you really can’t call yourself a swimmer until you can do 100 yards of Freestyle in under 1 minute. This pool is kind of small, but later if you get in a 50-meter pool, you might try it until you can get under a minute. OK, here’s the arm stroke.”

The instructor got into the water with Ron, and showed him the arm sequence, and how to breathe. Ron put the whole thing together in about 10 minutes. The instructor, told Ron his name was Bear, since that’s what the other SEALS called him. He told Ron to try 4 laps

across the long way of the pool. Ron struck out, and did pretty good for a beginner. He wasn't fast, but then again, he didn't drown either, and didn't freak out when he got in the deep water, he just kept plugging away. When he got back, Bear was a little less grouchy. "OK, let's try treading water. Just do what I do." Ron could see what Bear was doing, and 2 minutes later, he was treading water.

"OK, let's see how you float. Lay on your back with your arms spread out, and your feet together. You should float OK, since you were pretty flat in the water when you were swimming." Ron laid back, and almost fell asleep he was so relaxed. 5 minutes later, the whistle blew, and Ron realized he had dozed off. "NO napping in the pool - get your butt up on deck and help me with this gear." Ron swam over to the edge, and climbed out. There were 2 tanks with octopus regulators on them, and BC Jackets. Next to them were 2 sets of masks, fins, and snorkels. Bear had him carry everything over to the water's edge, then climb back into the water. Bear followed, then showed Ron how to put the mask, fins, and snorkel on, then showed him how to use them in the pool. Ron thought it was pretty cool that he could swim with his face underwater and still breathe. Moving around the pool with the fins was much easier, and freed his hands to do stuff. Finally, they swam back into the shallow end. Bear reached up and picked up Ron's gear and helped him into the BC Jacket, then showed him how to buckle into it. When he was settled into the water, Bear strapped his tank on quickly, then showed Ron the rest of his gear. He took the high pressure hose attached to the second stage of the regulator/mouthpiece, and put it over Ron's right shoulder, then the rest of the hoses went over his left shoulder. He turned the air valve on, had Ron make sure he was getting air out of the regulator, then showed him the rest of the controls, how to read the pressure gauge mounted into the console with the compass and dive computer on the back, and showed him how to operate the BC. "Push this button to go up, and this one to go down. It uses some air, but kicking hard to maintain depth uses more. For the pool, since it's only 12 feet deep and you're not wearing a wetsuit, I'm going to skip the weights. Tomorrow, when I take you diving to a real pretty reef in the keys, I'll have you wear a 4-3 suit and carry about 6 pounds of weight to compensate for the buoyancy of the neoprene suit. This should be fun. OK, put your mask on, check your seal, then stick the regulator in your mouth, and follow me."

With that, Bear turned and dove toward the deep end. Ron followed a split second later, managing to keep his regulator, mask, and gear all where it belonged. He found the going much easier if he put his arms to his side and used a long slow flutter kick without a lot of knee. Bear sat down in what looked like a lotus position on the bottom of the pool, and Ron followed. His ear was bothering him, and remembered what Bear had said, and pinched his nose to clear his Eustachian tubes. The pain went away immediately, and he settled on the bottom next to Bear, and just sat there breathing and looking around. Bear was pleased that Ron was perfectly comfortable breathing under water, some people freaked out and couldn't do it. So far so good. They swam around for a while, then surfaced.

"OK, Ron, you seem pretty calm down there. We need to work on your emergency drills,

like clearing your mask, buddy breathing, and a couple of other things I'm sure I'll think of later. If your mask gets dislodged under water, you have to know how to clear it. Buddy Breathing used to be a pain, but with the new octopus regulators and the buddy regulator, it's as easy as picking up your buddy's spare regulator, and breathing. Your spare also would come in handy if your regulator was ever damaged, and would not work."

Bear showed him how to clear his mask, how to buddy breathe, and then they went to the bottom of the pool to practice. First Ron took his mask off, put he flooded mask back on, then cleared it by breathing out his nose while pushing on one side of his mask to create a leak on the other that would drive out the water. Then he tapped Bear on the shoulder, thumped his chest in the "out of air" signal, and took Bear's buddy, then dropped his, and breathed from Bear's buddy. Then they reversed the procedure. Bear pointed his thumb up, and they went to the surface. "Ron, you've done great so far. Let's spend the rest of the afternoon fishing stuff out of the pool and playing diver games." He reached out of the pool for his bag of toys, and tossed them into the pool. First they played underwater hockey, with a 6" stick and a 3" puck. They had to swim along the bottom of the pool, pushing the puck with a short stick. When they got tired of that, they tried some other games. Finally, Bear looked at his pressure gauge and his watch, and realized they had been down almost 2 hours. If they wanted to dive tomorrow, they needed to get up to the surface soon. Bear got Ron's attention, then gave the thumb up signal, and slowly rose to the surface. When Ron stood up in the shallow end, he realized that he was real tired. Bear explained that breathing under water is hard work all by itself, but it is worth it. Tomorrow, they would dive a shallow reef, that was about 30-40 feet down. Bear helped Ron out of his gear, and told him to eat some dinner, make sure he drank plenty of water, and see him back there at 0800 tomorrow, and they would go diving at a beautiful reef. Ron staggered out to the Hummer, where Bill was waiting. "So how was it?"

"Great, but I'm more tired than when I hauled those 3 caribou back to the cabin."

Bill didn't know what to say, Caribou weighed almost 1,000 pounds each.

Ron told Bill that he had to eat dinner, drink plenty of water, and be back there at 0800, because Bear wanted to take him reef diving. Bill was astounded. No one but SEALs called Bear by his Team name. Ron must have made an impression on him.

The chow hall was just as chaotic as it was yesterday, but Ron was ready for it. He fell in line behind Bill, and followed him to a table. Again the SEALs stood when Bill arrived, and Ron made sure he was the last one seated. The SEALs asked Ron what he had done that day. He told them about how Bear was teaching him to dive, and that he hadn't even swam before. One of the SEALs was incredulous "You never swam before?"

"I'm from the Interior of Alaska. The warmest the water gets in summer is maybe 40 degrees." Several SEALs started laughing, not at Ron, but at the image of a kid trying to

swim in 40-degree water, and coming out as a Popsicle. Then Ron told them that Bear was taking him diving tomorrow to a shallow reef he knew about. Several SEALs knew where he was talking about, and suggested that he borrow their underwater camera. One of them had an inexpensive camera that would work great up to 100 feet, and didn't weigh a ton like the other SEAL's \$4,000 underwater Hasselblad medium format camera. When they finished dinner, Ron was tired and wanted to go straight to bed. He hit the showers, then practically fell into his bunk. His alarm went off at 0600 the next morning, he took a quick shower, then walked over to the Chow hall. Evidently they must have known about Ron, since no one said anything to him to indicate they didn't recognize him. He didn't eat a heavy breakfast, but made sure he ate enough since he felt he would need the energy. When he was finished, Bill was waiting out front, and drove him over to the dock where Bear was waiting with the boat all ready to go. Bill handed him one of the SEAL's underwater camera, and took off. Ron walked to the edge of the gangplank, and called out "permission to board?"

Bear looked up smiling "Permission Granted - welcome aboard. Help me stow this gear, and we'll get underway. Good thing you're early, I could use the help."

They got the gear stowed, and Bear started the twin diesels, and told Ron to take a seat next to the wheel so they could talk, it was a long ride out. He was driving the base's harbor patrol boat, or at least that's what it was before the team converted it to their dive boat. It had a fairly low freeboard, which was perfect for diving, and could make 40 knots with both engines running wide open, but cruised better at 30 knots. They had installed an air compressor with a 3-stage filter, and a full galley below. One of the first things installed was a seaworthy coffee maker, since some of the SEALs were Naval Chiefs, and a Chief lived on coffee. There was even a fresh-water shower and bunks forward. It had a full navigation suite including Radar, GPS, and LORAN, as well as Marine and Military radios. Bear had already programmed their destination and waypoints based on the charts into the GPS, and all they had to do was follow the directions. Ron was watching Bear navigate, and asked him all sorts of questions. Bear was real patient, and answered all his questions. He even showed Ron how to run the navigation gear. When they got to the dive site, Bear threw out the anchors, and Ron went below to get dressed. 10 minutes later, Ron came up on deck wearing a red 4-3 full-length wetsuit. Bear went downstairs and came back in 10 minutes wearing a green 4-3 suit. He walked over to the tank rack, and took 2 High-Pressure 80 steel tanks out and put a pressure tester on them and made sure they were full. Then he put the regulators on both, and checked them. They were working fine, and he mounted them in their BC's then handed one of the tanks to Ron. Ron put on his tank, and checked everything. Bear performed his own checks, and then checked Ron's gear, then handed him a 6-pound weight belt, and showed him how to put it on, and how to operate the emergency release. Bear put on 12 pounds, 8 on his waist, and 2 pounds around each thigh. Ron was looking kind of funny at him, and Bear explained he balanced better in the water with some weight lower on his body. Bear and Ron muscled the diving ladder over the stern, and then Bear put up the Diver Down Flag, and plugged in the yellow strobe atop it. It started

flashing, and Bear told him to put his mask on, and the easiest way in was to follow him, and jump into the water. He reminded Ron to hold onto his mask and regulator, then he jumped. Ron followed a second later, then he surfaced and swam back to the boat to retrieve the underwater camera. He dove and spotted Bear right below him maybe 20 feet down. His ears hurt, and he remembered to stop and clear his ears, then he proceeded down. When he reached the bottom at 30 feet, Bear was pointing off to the left. They swam over to the left, and saw an unbelievable sight. It was an intact and undamaged reef. Ron didn't know it, but an intact and undamaged reef this close to shore from the Florida Keys was amazingly rare, since some divers weren't as considerate as others, and either through negligence or thoughtlessness, damaged reefs that were popular and closer to shore. Ron started looking through the viewfinder of his camera, then remembered to turn it on, and to turn on the flash. Suddenly, he saw a big reef fish, and just managed to get it in the viewfinder when it was in range, and pressed the shutter. He spent the next couple of hours exploring the reef and taking pictures. He remembered to look at his gauge, and it was way down, maybe 5-10 minutes of air left. He turned to look in a circle, and Bear was 15 feet away, close enough that if he had an emergency he was handy, but not hovering all over him. Ron held up his pressure gauge, tapped it, and pointed up. Bear nodded and pointed up as well. They slowly ascended, breathing normally all the way. When they broke the surface, they were maybe 50 yards away from the boat. Since he had air available, Ron took a visual bearing on the boat, and dove just under the surface, and swam underwater to the boat, popping up just 10 feet away from the stern. Bear climbed up the diving ladder first, and had Ron hand him his camera and fins. Ron was wearing diving booties under his fins to help prevent blisters, so he climbed up the ladder in his booties. The tank felt extra heavy when he climbed all the way out of the water, and Bear helped by grabbing the top of his tank and lifting so he could climb easier. Bear took off his tank, then helped Ron take his off, then he stowed the empty tanks in the tank locker. Bear took the diver down flag down, and started the motor, then set course back to home. Once they were underway, he asked Ron what he thought of the dive.

Ron said, "That was really awesome, or as you guys say, "Sierra Hotel". I've never seen so many fish in my life, and I know that was just a small part of the Ocean. Too bad I live so far away from the ocean. I guess when I join the Air Force, I'll have to get as many warm water coastal stations as possible, so I can dive all over the world."

Bear was laughing at Ron's "Sierra Hotel" - he guessed Bill finally explained it to him. Then he said, "Too bad you don't have another week here - we could get you your open water PADI cert, but Bill told me you guys were going home in a few days. I just wish my sons had been half as interested in what we do and one-quarter as motivated as you are. They both became shyster personal injury lawyers, and they aren't very good either. I really enjoyed having you around, and if you ever get to MacDill, look me up."

"You can guarantee that Bear. Thanks for everything. You made me feel welcome. Sometimes I felt like I was a circus exhibit, and the only reason I was here was for my uncle Steve to show me off. You SEALS really treated me like you wanted me around. Too bad

Steve's got the skids greased for me to enter the Air Force Academy, or I would have liked to try and become a SEAL."

"Ron you just made my day. If we got 20 kids like you applying for the teams each year, we would be doing very well. I understand your reasons to go to the Academy because of the free education, but remember the Naval Academy at Annapolis can give you the same education."

"I know Bear, but having an uncle who is a Colonel in the Air Force plus a three-star General who just happens to be JSOC makes it much easier to get into the Air Force Academy. Besides, if I told Steve I wanted to be a SEAL, he'd probably kill me."

"I don't know Ron, from what I heard from Bill, the men of your family seem to thrive on extremely dangerous pursuits. Ron was a Sniper, and Steve was a Pararescue Jumper. That's even more dangerous than being a SEAL. They lose more people in training accidents than we lose in operations and training combined. What were you thinking about doing in the Air Force?"

"At first I was just going to be on their shooting team, but then I got the ride in the Strike Eagle, and I think I'd like to be an Eagle driver - I mean the F-16 is nice, but all they do most of the time is fly around and train. At least the F-15 guys get to bomb the crap out of someone, and they still go air to air. Besides, the Guy in Back gives you another set of eyes to spot trouble."

"Ron, I think you've thought this out well. I think you've definitely got the personality to be a great Eagle driver, and from what Steve told Bill, that if you were 16, you'd have your private pilot's license right now, and you did all your landings and take-offs in a small amphibian Cessna. That my not so young friend, takes brass ones."

Ron went below to shower and change, and came back up on deck dressed in BDUs. "I washed and hung up the wetsuit on the hanger you had left me. Thanks for letting me borrow your gear. You want me to watch the boat while you go below and change?"

"Ron, normally I'd say OK, but we are just getting into a narrow restricted channel, and it's busy to boot. I'm going to have to stay at the helm and shower later, but thanks for offering."

Half an hour later, they were at the docks. Ron had unloaded and pocketed the roll of film in the waterproof camera, then closed the back and washed the case off carefully with fresh water. When they docked, Ron offered his hand to Bear. "Thanks for everything Bear, I can guarantee I won't soon forget this, and I promise if I'm near MacDill again, I'll look you up."



Bear decided that a handshake wasn't enough, and gave him a "guy hug" and said, "See you later." Ron turned and left, good thing he did because Bear had tears in his eyes. If the SEALs had a bunch of kids like him coming up through the ranks, and he was able to train them right, the SEALs would be unbeatable. He wished Ron well, and knew he was going to miss him.

## Chapter 68 - Downtime

Bill drove Ron back to Steve's Office, then said goodbye. Ron looked like he was really going to miss the SEALs, but Bill was busy, so he shook Ron's hand and helped him unload his gear. He kept the SEAL swim trunks, BDUs, and aqua shoes. If they still fit him by the time he entered the Air Force Academy, he might have a problem, but for now, he was proud to wear them. Steve was busy, but put down his paperwork to talk to his nephew.

"How was your visit with the SEALs Ron?"

"Great Steve, They taught me how to freefall, swim and Bear even took me scuba diving at a reef in the Keys, and I got some great pictures of reef fish. I got to go on an exercise, and they even let me shoot the Ma Deuce."

"Wow, you had a busy couple of days. How did you like it?"

"Steve, I hate to admit it, but if you hadn't greased the skids for me to go to the Air Force Academy, I might be tempted to go to Annapolis and try to become a SEAL."

"They must have really impressed you."

"Actually, Steve they treated me like a kid brother, instead of a circus sideshow."

"I guess I have been trying to show you off, but you have to admit that if you hadn't pulled off those shooting exhibitions you did, you wouldn't have gotten to do half the stuff you did. After that shooting exhibition you put on the other day, every command on the base was trying their best to woo you into joining their command. If you were old enough, it wouldn't have surprised me if a few of them might have tried to talk you into enlisting."

Actually, I really hit it off with Bear, the SEAL diving instructor, he's got a couple of sons he's kind of disappointed in - they became "Shyster Lawyers" instead of SEALs. I guess he really wanted them to follow in his footsteps. He probably forgot that it takes a special kind of man to do what he does. Even as good as I am at 14, I'd have to work my butt off to have a chance to become a SEAL. I do know one thing, I'm going to keep skydiving and Scuba diving."

"Ron, I'm very proud of you - you do know that, right? You're very mature for your age, and your last comment proved that. You realize that even with your extraordinary God Given talents, you'd still have to work your butt off to become a SEAL. I'm really glad you decided to join the Air Force, but I'd be just as proud if you became a SEAL."

"Steve, I'm pretty sure I want to be an Eagle Driver, and fly the F-15 Strike Eagle."

“How come?”

“Well for one thing, you get to do everything. You can bomb targets, then still go air to air. All the Falcon Drivers get to do is flying around practicing, but the Eagle Drivers have seen action in every war we’ve been involved in. Besides, the Guy In Back gives you an extra set of eyes to spot trouble.”

“Seems like you’ve thought this out. We’ve got the rest of today and tomorrow, then the Doctor said your Dad will be OK to go home. He’ll be OK, it’s just this weather messed up his electrolyte balance. Finding that blockage now means if he takes care of himself, he’ll live a lot longer. So what do you want to do the rest of today?”

“Steve, I’m beat, I’d like to visit with my parents and Jim, then eat an early dinner. As far as tomorrow goes, I’m up for anything, but I can’t go airborne for 24 hours after diving according to Bear.”

“Ron, how come you call Chief Simmons Bear?”

“Because that’s what he told me to call him.”

“Ron, he must have really taken a liking to you, even I can’t call Chief Simmons Bear, because I’m not a SEAL.”

“Cool - guess I never thought about that.”

Steve got up, and picked up Ron’s duffle. He noticed a pair of orange shorts on top, loosened the top of the duffle, and spotted the SEAL logo. They were real SEAL gear, not the stuff you get in the gift shop. Someone at the SEAL command either really took a shine to Ron, or was trying very hard to win him over. Judging by what Ron said about Chief Simmons, he guessed it was a little of both. He pulled the drawstrings on the duffle before Ron caught him looking, and carried it out to the Hummer. They went over to VIP quarters to put his duffle up, then headed to the hospital. Steve decided he had time to visit his sister and brother-in-law, so he went in too. Ron led Steve into his dad’s room, and walked in on Anne giving Roy a very passionate kiss. Ron coughed quietly, and they disengaged. Roy held out his arms, so Ron walked over and gave his dad a big hug.

“How are you doing son? I hope this hadn’t cramped your style?”

Steve spoke up “Are you kidding? Ron spent the last 2 days with the SEALs having the time of his life - go ahead and tell your dad all about it while I talk to your mom.”

Ron filled his dad in while Steve talked to Anne.

“Sis, sorry about walking in on you two. How are things?”

“Roy’s a little grumpy, and doesn’t want to change his ways. I agree with him that he doesn’t need to become a vegetarian, but I am going to subtly alter his eating habits. It will be good for me too. How’s Ron doing really?”

“He had such a good time with the SEALs that if he weren’t going to the Air Force Academy, he told me he wanted to be a SEAL.”

“I think I’d rather have him in the Air Force where it’s safe.”

“Anne, he wants to be a fighter pilot. Now before you say anything, I had nothing to do with it, he decided on his own after flying in the F-15 Strike Eagle. He’s probably safer as a pilot than a SEAL. We lose a bunch each year in training accidents, and they have the second highest accident rate next to PJ’s.”

“Thanks a lot Steve - now I have to worry about losing my son.”

“Anne, you had better get over it quick, because your fears will hold Ron back from being the man he’s supposed to be. You and Roy did an excellent job raising him, and he’ll always be your son, but he’ll soon be a man, and will leave to seek his own way in the world. He’s already started the process while he was here, and by the time he’s old enough to enlist, he’ll be more than ready for the Academy, and life among fighting men. Ron and I were both fighting men, and Ron wants to be one too. In his own way Roy is a fighting man too, but his battles were against Nature. I could never do what he did for a whole year with as little gear as he had. Your average Air Force survival kit has more stuff than he did, plus we have years of training to fall back on. All Roy had was his hunting experience, and what he had read. I’ve always admired Roy.”

“Steve, Roy kind of reminds me of you and Ron, but in a different way. He’s got his soft side too. You’d never believe how he cried when Oliver died. Anyway, I want to hear what Ron was saying, Ok if we go back in - by the way, thanks for the pep talk, and you’re right.”

Anne gave her brother a big hug, and they went in.

“And the neatest part was when Bear took me diving on a coral reef - Dad you should have seen all the fish. I’ve got a couple of rolls of film to get developed, and then I can show you the pictures. Hi Mom, everything OK?”

“Just fine Ron, I was just catching up with my Brother - it might be a while before I see him again.”

Ron continued his story as his mom and Steve listened in. She realized Ron wasn’t a little

kid anymore, but he wasn't fully grown yet. They still had some work to do, and they still had a few things to teach him. Anne loved her son, but knew their time together was limited, and he soon would be on his own. She just hoped Roy would still be there. She fought back a tear looking at Ron and Roy together. She loved them both, but differently.

Roy was impressed, Ron had really grown up in the last couple of weeks. He could tell his son was having the time of his life. He was kind of envious, he had never got a chance to do half the stuff his son did this week. Now he was too old to do most of it. He realized that this was the "cycle of life". He remembered how his father got older and eventually died when he was in his 20's. Roy hoped he would live longer than that, but realized that his life was in God's hands. Ron was becoming a man right before his eyes. He hoped he had done everything he could, and prayed that God would guide him for the rest of the time he had left with his son. He was so proud of Ron he was about to burst. Roy reached out and gave Ron a big hug.

"What's that for Dad?"

"Just because I'm proud of you and I love you."

"I love you too Dad."

All too soon, visiting hours were over, so Steve took Ron and Anne out to dinner. Since Roy was out of the woods, Anne decided that she could live a little, and spend some time with her brother. Jim met them at the restaurant, and between bites, Ron filled him in on his adventures. Jim just shook his head in amazement. After dinner, Anne decided she wanted to be with Roy, so Steve drove her back to the hospital, and dropped Jim and Ron off at the VIP quarters on the way. When they had got out of the Hummer, Steve asked Ron if he wanted to do PT tomorrow with them. "0600 sharp, right Steve?" "0600 Sharp, right here. See you tomorrow." Jim and Ron walked up to their room. They talked for a while, then Ron went to bed, 0600 arrived early in the morning.

Steve dropped Anne off at the Hospital. Before she got out, she turned to Steve "Hey Bro, I forgot to tell you thanks for everything. We've really enjoyed ourselves, and if it weren't for you, Roy's fibrillation event might have been more serious. You realize you probably saved his life with the CPR?"

"Anne, you know CPR too, I just happened to be there. I'm really glad it wasn't more serious than it was. I'm glad Roy's OK. If I get a chance, I'd like to talk to the two of you alone before you go."

Anne gave her brother a big hug and got out of the Hummer. Steve waited until she was inside the hospital, and drove back to his office to finish the paperwork.

The next morning, Ron and Steve led the group PT, then Ron ran upstairs for a quick shower and a change of clothes, then met Steve for Breakfast. “Ron, how would you like to do some more shooting today, just you and me - no more sideshows, OK?”

“Thanks Steve, I realized you were just showing me off, but I really resented it sometimes.”

“Sorry Ron, I overdid it a little. How about inviting Jim if he isn’t doing anything?”

Ron walked over to the house phone and called their room. Jim answered, and Ron asked him if he wanted to go shooting. Jim said he would be down in 15 minutes, he needed to get dressed.

15 minutes Jim walked in looking like he just got up. Steve asked him if everything was alright. “Everything’s OK Steve, just enjoying the downtime. In Alaska, I’m busier than a one armed paper hanger. I rarely get to sleep in any more, and TV is a major luxury. Let me get some coffee, OJ, and some toast, and I’ll be good to go.”

Jim returned with a little more than what he had planned. He said the food looked too good to pass up, so he grabbed a plate. Ron and Steve waited for Jim to finish up, then they walked out to the Hummer. Steve got on his cell phone, and called the Armory to get Ron’s weapon out, and have the range master set up the rifle range. When they got there, Jim asked if he could shoot an M -16. The armorer handed him a match AR-15 instead. Jim shrugged his shoulders, and carried it to the range. The range master had set up 4 shooting lanes. Ron wanted to shoot at 400 yards, which was far enough to be challenging, but close enough so he could relax and enjoy shooting. Jim started on the 100 yard line, and Steve on the 300-yard line. The Range master joined them on the 300 yard line. When everyone was set, Ron went prone, and as soon as the Range master gave him the OK to shoot, he started shooting at the 400 yard target. After 10 rounds, Steve looked up, and all 10 rounds were in the x-ring. Steve shook his head and concentrated on his own target. Later that afternoon, Steve had a surprise for him. The shooting instructors from the other commands wanted to make a presentation to Ron. They all showed up at the range right as Ron finished shooting his 10<sup>th</sup> perfect 10-shot string at 400 yards. Ron saw the instructor’s vehicles pulling up, and left his rifle with the action open to cool off, and stood up. Everyone else stopped firing, and stood up in curiosity. Steve was the only one who knew what was going on, and gathered the instructors in front of Ron.

The Delta Instructor started things off. “Ron Williams, we wanted to give you some things to remember your trip by. We also wanted to thank you, and recognize your shooting achievements. That said, Attention to Orders.”

Everyone in the group stood at attention including Ron. The Delta Instructor marched forward solemnly and pinned a marksmanship award on Ron’s chest. Ron couldn’t see it, but Steve was impressed. It was a Delta Sharpshooter medal. It was the top shooting qualification in Delta. Each command pinned an award next to that one, and the final award

was delivered by the JSOC. Ron remembered the first time he had met General Shepard. This time he had a huge Pelican case with him. He set the Pelican case on the bench, and his aide handed him a plaque. The general presented the plaque to Ron, and he read it out loud.

“In recognition of Ron Williams shooting ability this date, specifically shooting a 2.092 inch group at 600 yards, the Special Operations Command, in conjunction with Barretts firearms and Swarovski Optiks, hereby award this Barrett’s light 50 prototype and the Scope, along with 1000 rounds of 50 cal match ammo to Ron Williams.”

When the JSOC finished his presentation, every instructor was ready to burst out in applause, but stayed at strict attention until dismissed. Finally General Shepard shook Ron’s hand, and said “Well Done, Son.”

“Thank you Sir, does this mean this rifle is mine?”

“I know you’re not 18, but my JAG assures me that by the time he’s finished with the legal paperwork, it will all be legal. By the way, Barrett and Swarovski placed a condition on giving you the gun. They want you to act as a consultant on future prototypes. They’d fly you at their expense to MacDill for you to T&E their new prototypes every couple of years, and write a report. They even agreed to pay you \$10,000 per report plus expenses.”

“I don’t know what to say General, except Thank you very much, and please tell Barrett I’d be honored.”

“One other thing Ron, here’s a copy of the letter I sent your Senator, I’m requesting you be admitted to the Air Force Academy as soon as you are old enough.”

Ron smiled and thanked the General, then he was mobbed by the instructors, who were congratulating him, shaking his hand, and pounding him on the back. When everyone was through, Ron thanked the instructors, the General, and his uncle Steve for the great time he had. He said he looked forward to returning to MacDill upon graduation from the Air Force Academy, and he hoped to get assigned to a Strike Squadron as an F-15 Eagle pilot. The instructors were chorusing “Sierra Hotel” despite the presence of the General.

When everything broke up, Ron was eyeing the Barretts when he noticed something different from the last time he shot it. Someone had painted a single white feather on the stock. Ron was floored, since he knew Carlos Hathcock’s signature was a single white feather. Steve helped load the pelican case, and the case of 50 cal ammo in the Hummer, then congratulated Ron “Ron, as soon as you’re old enough, I can guarantee you’ll have an appointment to the Air Force Academy, General Shepard has about 10 times the pull I do, and every cadet he’s recommended for the Academy was accepted.”

“Thanks, Steve, I don’t know what to say, I’ve had enough adventures and experiences to

last a lifetime in the last weeks. But my guess is it's just starting." Steve gave his nephew a big bear hug, and suggested they go and get cleaned up, go see his parents, then go eat dinner. They had an early flight tomorrow. A couple of hours later, a courier showed up looking for Steve. When Steve showed his ID, the courier left a package with him, addressed to Ron Williams. Ron opened it, and it was the title paperwork for the firearm, and a consultancy contract for Barrett Firearms, and a check for \$10,000. Steve was confused until he read the part about Ron's evaluation being included in the T&E report filed by the testing team, and the check was in payment for the report. Steve was floored. Barrett just gave Ron a rifle worth \$10,000 easy, and a Swarovski scope worth much more than that, and now Barrett gave him a check for \$10,000.00 on top of it. Ron saw the check, and realized it would go a long ways to purchasing his own plane. Too bad he was too young to get his license. They put the paperwork back in the packet, and finished dinner. When Ron went to the VIP quarters, he was walking on air. When he told Jim the good news, he was blown away. Ron was wondering why Jim always looked tired, then he realized he was getting old. He was at least 5 years older than his dad. After talking a while, they went to bed.



## Chapter 69 - Homeward Bound

Ron got up early for 0600 PT, and was stunned when there were 3 times as many soldiers in front of the VIP quarters than yesterday. He recognized some of the instructors, but he didn't recognize most of the soldiers. Steve greeted Ron, and told Ron to stand next to him for the entire PT; this was the Joint Command's send-off for Ron. When Ron was next to him at parade rest with the rest of the Company, Steve took command of the Company. "Company, Jumping Jacks, on my count" and they began. When they finished the stationary part of the morning PT, Steve turned to Ron and asked him to lead the morning run. Ron said "With Pleasure Sir" and marched toward the head of the column. When he got to the front, he turned and yelled "Company, Quick March" and started marching toward the running area, when he reached the track, he sped up to a "Ranger Run" and held it for the requisite 5 miles. Steve was off to his right half a pace behind. Steve was positively beaming with pride. At the end of 5 miles, Ron called "Company Quick march" and as soon as they were marching, one of the Ranger instructors started a cadence, and soon the entire company was doing the familiar cadence. By the second refrain, Ron knew the cadence, and joined in with the rest of the company. He felt like he belonged, but not totally. He vowed he would come back to MacDill when he could be counted a full-fledged member of this company of warriors.

At VIP quarters, Ron called "Company Halt" and they came to a stop. From the back of the group came a yell, which was echoed by the entire company "Hooo-rah." It was loud enough to rattle windows on the bottom floor of the VIP quarters. Steve walked over to Ron, gave him a big hug and said "See you later Nephew." then turned to the company and said "Company Dismissed" but every one of the instructors present stopped by to shake Ron's hand, and wish him luck. When they were finished, Steve told Ron he had 15 minutes to shower and get changed before breakfast, their flight was in an hour and a half. Ron hugged his uncle, waved to the instructors, and dashed up to the elevators since he was too tired to run up 5 flights of stairs. When he arrived on their floor, he took his passkey out of his BDU pocket and opened the door to his suite. Roy and Anne were in the main room getting organized and packed. Ron said that Steve was going to meet them downstairs in 15 minutes if they wanted breakfast before the flight. From Steve's demeanor, Ron thought the food at the restaurant would be far better than that offered on the flight. Ron hurried into his room, got in the shower, then got dressed, and was back down in the lobby with several minutes to spare. The elevators opened, and Roy, Anne, and Jim stepped out to join them. They walked to the restaurant, and walked through the breakfast buffet line, and Anne watched Roy like a hawk to make sure he didn't sneak any bacon. They sat down to a quick but boisterous breakfast, then they went back upstairs. When Ron opened the door, Lucky practically knocked him down in his eagerness to greet him.

"Sorry Lucky, I guess I kind of forgot about you."

Ron played with his dog while the adults got everything organized. A bellman appeared with a luggage cart to take their luggage, and Steve met them at the door with his Hummer. Their gun cases had already been loaded out of the Armory while they finished packing, and Steve drove them to the VIP waiting area. When they got out and Steve was unloading the back, Roy commented about the extra Pelican case and a huge wooden ammo case.

“Dad, that’s the rifle they gave me. It’s a prototype Barrett’s Light 50 and a case of 50 BMG Match ammo.”

Roy didn’t know what to think, so didn’t say anything. All their bags were tagged and taken to the aircraft, which was in the final stages of pre-flight. By the time they were all in the VIP waiting area, they were told they could board the aircraft. They boarded the luxurious VC-120 and the air stairs folded up, and as soon as they were seated, the plane taxied and took off. Ron must have been jaded by the high-performance take-off of the F-15 Eagle, because he thought the take-off was pretty sedate. As soon as the seat belt signs were turned off, Ron made up for lost time with Lucky, who really appreciated the attention. The only time Ron stopped playing with Lucky was when the steward came back with the drink cart, and Ron got a soda. Later that afternoon, they were on final for Elmendorf AFB in Anchorage, AK. 15 minutes later they were on the ground within walking distance of their DeHaviland Otter.

After doing a thorough walk around, Jim climbed into the pilot’s seat, Ron sat in the co-pilot’s seat even though the DeHaviland was a single-control aircraft, and Anne, Roy, and Lucky took up what space in the back was available after all their luggage was stored. Jim contacted the tower, and was instructed to wait 2 minutes, and then received permission to taxi to the active runway. The Tower Controller must have been new, because he gave Jim the totally unnecessary warning to beware of jet wash. Jim didn’t respond to the tower, and just let it slide. When he reached the correct runway, he called the tower and advised them that he was at the runway. The tower came back “cleared for immediate departure- buster, traffic pattern is very crowded. Stay below 500AGL until 5 miles away from runway, then slowly ascend to 2,000 feet.” Jim was firewalling the throttle as he acknowledged the call, and they rolled quickly down the runway. Since they had twice as much runway as he needed, Jim stayed in ground effect after he took off to gain speed and depart the busy airfield as fast as possible. Once he cleared the airfield’s fence line by 5 miles, he started a slow climb to 2,000 feet, and maintained that altitude until he contacted Allakaket. They needed to refuel in Allakaket to safely make it to Roy’s place and back. When they landed in Allakaket, everyone bailed out and stretched their legs, and Lucky took advantage of the numerous plants to relieve himself. When the plane was refueled and serviced, Jim did a walk around to verify everything was correct, with Ron walking with him. Finally Jim whistled and yelled “All Aboard”. They piled back on board, and Jim taxied and took off without incident. 2 hours later they were home again. When they had unloaded the plane, Jim told them he had to get back to Allakaket and get some sleep. He taxied out to the lake and took off.

Lucky stopped at every tree in the clearing, he had either to go real bad, or felt he needed to reestablish his territory. Roy and Anne were dog-tired by the time they carried everything into the cabin. They had a real problem trying to carry the wooden case full of 50 BMG ammo, but they got it inside and stored on the shelf. Roy was curious what kind of weapon would take ammo that heavy; the case weighed almost twice what the case of the .308 match ammo did. Ron set the pelican case containing the Barrett's rifle on the table, and opened it for his dad to see for the first time. Roy's eyes nearly bugged out when he got a good look at the rifle and the huge scope, then he noticed the single white feather painted on the side of the synthetic stock. Roy was familiar with the exploits of Carlos Hathcock, and the name the Vietnamese called him "White Feather". When Ron showed him a BMG 50 Match round, he understood why the gun was so huge; the round was easily 2-3 times as big as the 308.

"Ron, how far did you say you were shooting this gun?"

"Dad, the farthest target at their range was at 1,000 yards; my best group was a 5-shot 9-inch group."

Roy almost had another heart attack. He thought 300 yards was a long way, and that was using a scope. His son shot a sub-moa group at over 3 times that distance, and in front of an audience. Roy just shook his head, and marveled at his son. He wondered what he would be like at 18. They packed the gun back in its case, and stored it with the rest of their weapons. Anne decided to make Spaghetti-O's for dinner, since it was quick, and fairly low fat. She got a fire going in the woodstove, and put a pan on to heat, then opened 3 cans. Ron was playing with Lucky while dinner was cooking, and Roy set the table. When Anne said dinner was ready, Ron fed Lucky then washed his hands. They all sat down at the table and Roy said grace. He had a lot to be thankful for, and finally said "Amen" before the food got too cold. After dinner, Roy and Anne read their Bibles and Ron played with Lucky some more - it seemed like Lucky was making up for lost time. Finally Ron tired Lucky out, and he went and laid down next to Ron's bed. Ron picked up his Bible, and read a few chapters before telling his parents he was going to bed.

The next morning, Ron and Roy did their chores after breakfast. There was a lot to do, they needed to chop and haul wood. Ron was surprised that his Dad handed him the safety gear, then sat down on the porch to talk to him.

"Ron, your mother and I had a long talk last night. I know you're only 14, but you are going to have to take over several things I used to do, since the docs say I can't do them, at least for a while. You're going to have a lot more responsibility than I did at your age, but we don't have any alternative. If we want to live out here, wood needs to be cut, and we need to hunt. You could cut wood with an axe, but the chainsaw is faster, and not much more dangerous if you treat it with respect. You've been doing things for the last year that are way more dangerous than running a chainsaw, so we agreed it's time you took over felling

the trees we need for firewood. I'll still supervise and assist where I can, but the bulk of the work is going to rest squarely on your shoulders. I know you're up to it, question is, will you?"

"Dad, I don't know what to say, I don't want to seem like I'm usurping your position, but I can see the wisdom in letting me do the more physically strenuous stuff, at least for now. I'm going to need your help and advice. If it's OK with you, I'll gladly help wherever I can."

Roy gave Ron a big hug "I knew I could count on you son, let me show you how to put on the safety gear."

When they got the safety gear on, Ron picked up the chainsaw and carried it over to the gasoline and oil. Roy showed him how to check the oil level and fill the gasoline. He told Ron never to fill the gasoline when the engine was hot, it might catch fire. When the chainsaw was full, he carried it to the grove of trees Roy wanted to chop down, then they walked back and dragged the dollies over to the spot. Roy gave Ron a safety lecture about how to safely fell trees, and how to safely operate the chainsaw, then they cleared all the brush from around the trees. Looking up, Ron asked Roy which way he thought the tree would fall. Ron agreed with his dad, and planned the wedge and back cuts accordingly. After saying a brief prayer, Ron primed the carburetor and pulled the starter rope. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> pull, the engine caught and soon was idling steadily. Roy cleared back to a safe distance, and Ron lowered the face shield of his helmet, then picked up the chainsaw, and made the first wedge cut, pulled the blade out, and made the second cut, removing the wedge, then he released the chain brake and walked quickly around to the other side of the tree, and made the felling cut then stepped back quickly as the tree fell right where Roy said it would. He set the chainsaw down, and Roy walked over to Ron "Well done Son, now let's get the branches off the trunk." Roy talked Ron through the procedure, then stood back a safe distance as Ron de-limbed the tree.

When they finished de-limbing the tree, Roy helped Ron sort the branches into usable wood they'd come back later and cut up, and stuff they'd leave to decompose and renew the forest. Roy and Ron set the tree on the dollies, and Ron hauled it over to the sawhorses next to the cabin, then went back to the grove and did it all over again. When the day was finished, Ron had done 10 trees. Not a record, but pretty good for a 14-year old. Ron was exhausted when they were finished, and Roy helped him carry the gear back to the Cabin. Ron still had to carry the chainsaw, since it was too heavy for Roy to carry, but Roy did carry all the safety gear. When they got home, Anne had dinner ready, and asked them how things went. Roy felt like a proud papa, and told Anne that Ron had felled 10 trees, basically all by himself. Anne walked over to Ron and gave her son a big hug. "Son, I'm so proud of you, thanks for helping your father. They sat down to eat, and Roy noticed there was not much meat in his stew., and Ron seemed to get the lion's share. Roy was glad that Anne was letting him eat red meat at all, but noticed she was loading him up with veggies. After he said grace, they

ate quietly. Lucky ate his dog food, and then wanted to play, but Ron was too tired for any energetic play, and basically sat down on the bearskin rug and petted Lucky.

The next morning, they were surprised when they heard Jim's plane coming in for a landing. Roy was surprised since Jim normally called first. Jim taxied out to their cabin and shut down. Roy noticed Jim was looking kind of grey, and decided not to say anything. Jim said he had come over for a visit, he had something to discuss with them. When he got inside, they all sat down at the table, and Jim dropped a bombshell.

"Roy, the other day after I dropped you off, I went to see the doctor in Allakaket, and he confirmed my suspicions, he said there was no way I could pass my medical exam to keep my Commercial ticket in 6 months. That leaves the town in a major bind, since I'm the only Bush Pilot in the area with a Commercial Ticket and the DeHaviland Otter that is big enough to carry a bunch of cargo. I need to ask you a big favor. Ron's ready to get his Private Pilot's license, and he would have one if he were 16. I'm pretty sure the FAA would grant an emergency waiver of the 16-yr old requirement for Commercial tickets under the circumstances. They'll probably restrict his ticket for the first 90 days by requiring me to fly as his co-pilot, then I'm pretty sure the FAA will pull my Commercial ticket. Hopefully they'll let me keep my Private and IP tickets. I talked to my friend who loaned me the Cessna, and he said he would be willing to make the loan permanent, since he won't fly it anyway. I was planning on giving Ron the DeHaviland when he turned 16, and this just pushed my plans forward. Anyway, I need your permission for Ron to get his Commercial ticket, and we'll need to build a hangar on your land to store the plane."

Roy spoke first "Jim, this is kind of sudden - do you think we could talk about this first?"

"Roy, I'd love to, but the truth is Ron is going to have to start flying the DeHaviland as soon as possible, since he'll have to fly by himself within 6 months. There is No Way the FAA will allow me to fly as the pilot after I have to take my medical exam. According to my doctor, my arteries are clogged badly enough that I could stroke out any time. If that happened while I'm flying a plane, I could kill someone besides me, and I can't have that on my conscience."

Anne spoke to Roy, she knew what Jim was saying better than anyone else. "Roy, until Jim gets his arteriosclerosis under control, he's a walking time bomb. Even with meds, he could still stroke out if one of the blood vessels feeding his brain gets a clot in it. Even with the meds, it will be difficult for him to fly sometimes. This would definitely qualify as an emergency. I'm not too happy, but this is just like our conversation we had yesterday about the chain saw. It has to get done, and Ron's the only one qualified to do it. There are more people than us relying on the bush planes, all the other homesteaders, plus the hunting lodges rely on bush planes to deliver passengers and freight, or the lodges would go out of business."

“Anne, I hate it when you’re right. OK, Ron - looks like you’re getting your license ahead of schedule.”

“Dad, remember the \$10 thousand dollars Barrett gave me - we could use that toward building a winterized hangar here next to the cabin. If I cleared out the trees around it, we could erect an insulated steel building that would be big enough to hold the plane easily. I’ve already got a guaranteed appointment to the Air Force Academy, and they pay all my expenses, so I don’t need to save money for that, besides, I’ll earn enough flying commercial to cover all my expenses, plus extra to build my savings. Grandpa Jim, I’ll do whatever I have to help out.”

Roy spoke up “Well looks like that’s settled. OK, Jim - I take it you’ll be living in Allakaket until further notice. Until we get the hangar built, can you still keep the DeHaviland in Allakaket, and Ron can fly the Cessna back and forth from here for now.”

“Roy that’s an excellent idea - the Cessna is much easier to land on your lake, and it would make a perfect commuter plane - which is why I wanted it after I gave the DeHaviland to Ron. That way building the hangar isn’t a massive emergency, and we can hire someone to help build it, since neither you nor I are in any shape to build it, and Ron can’t do it by himself. OK, I’ll have the Mayor and my doctor write a letter to the FAA, and see what they say, meanwhile, I’ll have Ron fly back with me in the DeHaviland and come back here with the Cessna - he’s more than ready to solo. You ok with this Ron?”

“Sure Gramps - I was wondering when you were going to let me solo.”

Anne and Roy gave Ron a hug, then Roy handed Ron his shoulder holster and fanny pack. “Ron promise me you’ll wear this from now on when you fly, just in case.”

“Sure Dad, I was planning on it anyway - I remember what happened to you, and I could get forced down by a mechanical problem as well. Good thing to plan ahead just in case. Ok Jim, ready to go.”

When they got to the plane, Jim told Ron to get in the pilot’s seat - he wasn’t feeling too good. Ron walked around the plane, and checked everything out, and then opened the pilot’s door and got in. Jim handed him the ignition keys “She’s yours now - take good care of her.” Jim was starting to tear up, so he turned his head to look out the window. When he had wiped the tear away, he watched Ron do the preflight checks, then start the motor. Once the big radial was warmed up, Ron used the throttle and brakes to turn the plane around, and taxi toward the lake. Once he was waterborne, he increased his taxi speed as he taxied to the downwind end of the lake. Once he turned upwind, he set the flaps to 20%, and checked with Jim, making sure he was good to go. Jim gave him a thumbs up, and Ron shoved the throttle to full, and when he hit 80 knots, he gave the yoke a tug backward, and the lightly loaded plane practically leapt into the air. He maintained maximum climb rate until he

cleared the far ridge, then cleaned up the flaps, and set the plane for a cruise climb to 2,000 feet, and turned for Allakaket. When he got close enough to see the lake, he radioed Allakaket, and received permission to land. He made a perfect landing on the lake, and taxied toward the runway and stopped by the pumps. They filled the tanks on the DeHaviland, then taxied toward Jim's hangar, and put the plane in the hangar. Right next to the DeHaviland's hangar was the Cessna Floatplane. Ron shut down the engine, and went with Jim into town.

"Ron, you flew that absolutely perfectly - you're ready to get your license. Let's go over to the Mayor's office and I need to send some paperwork to the FAA office in Anchorage."

They drove over to the Mayor's office to borrow his fax machine. Bill had his letter requesting the emergency waiver ready when they arrived, and Jim had a copy of his Doctor's letter. He faxed the letters to the FAA office in Anchorage, then told Ron "Now we wait - hopefully they won't take too long to make up their minds. I need to go lay down - these meds take a lot out of you." Bill drove Jim to a house he had rented while he was in town the other day, and then drove Ron back to the airport to fly the Cessna home.

Bill shook Ron's hand and told him "Ron, there are a lot of people counting on you, but I know you can handle it - I'll let you know as soon as we hear anything from the FAA. If there are any emergencies, you'll need to either fly the Cessna to the emergency if you can handle it in the Cessna, or come back here and pick up the DeHaviland. I wish I owned a DeHaviland - that is one sweet plane. I know you're not licensed yet, but the FAA will make an exception for emergencies. See you later, and good luck."

Ron did a very thorough walk-around then climbed into the pilot's seat "Well here goes nothing" he thought "What a way to wind up soloing." and he turned the key in the ignition. Once the motor was warmed up, he made sure the fuel tank read full and all the gauges were working, and turned to taxi to the lake. He tweaked the throttle to get the plane rolling, then taxied at just above idle to the lake. Once he was waterborne, he taxied faster to the downwind end of the lake while he set the plane up for take-off. When he reached the end of the lake, he called the tower and received permission to take off, and pushed the throttle to full. When he reached 60 knots, the plane wanted to fly, so he pulled back gently on the yoke, and he was airborne. He kept the plane at max climb until he cleared the opposite range, then climbed more sedately to 2,000 feet and turned for home. He paid careful attention to his compass, and checked his flight time. When he flew over the lake, he saw the wind was still blowing the same direction as he left, so he turned to land with the wind, and set the plane up for landing. As he reduced throttle, the plane slowly sank toward the lake, and as he cleared the ridge, he chopped the throttle to idle, and he floated right on in like a goose landing on a lake. He landed with barely a splash, and coasted to a stop with over 100 feet to spare. He taxied over to the edge of the lake nearest the cabin, and coasted until he felt the wheels make contact with the dirt and let the plane roll up until he was totally on dry land, then he slowly taxied next to the cabin. Roy and Anne were smiling and

waving as he pulled up next to the cabin. He pushed the throttle all the way to cutoff, and switched the engine off, then climbed out. His Mom was the first to give him a big hug, then his Dad joined in the “group Hug”, finally they let him go, only for Lucky to try to flatten him. He didn’t succeed, but did manage to lick every square inch of Ron’s face. Finally, Ron got Lucky off him, and they went inside to eat dinner.



## Chapter 70 - The new Bush Pilot

The next morning, Bill called Roy on the radio, and asked Ron to fly to Allakaket, The FAA had approved the emergency waiver, and wanted Ron in Anchorage today to take his Commercial Pilot's test. Roy gave Ron the good news, and \$100 in cash in case he wanted to buy anything in Anchorage while he was there. Ron went out and preflighted the Cessna, then started the motor and taxied to the lake. After he checked that everything was set for takeoff, he gunned the engine and was soon airborne. 1 hour later he was in Allakaket. He called ahead for clearance to land, and made a perfect landing. He taxied up next to Jim's hangar and parked the Cessna. Jim was waiting for him in Bill's office. Ron handed Bill the Barrett check for 10 thousand dollars and asked Bill to open an account for him. Bill thought it was irregular for a 14-year old to have a checking account, but figured after the last couple of days, he was going to have to alter his views of irregular. Bill deposited the check, opened an account for Ron, and gave him some counter checks and a checkbook. Bill explained that hardly anyone would take counter checks, so he would order a box of regular checks, and he would set up his account just like his parents, so Ron could call Bill with an order, and Bill would charge 10% over cost plus shipping - wait a minute Ron was the pilot now - guess he needed to modify that to a straight 10%, and he needed to set up an account for fuel in Ron's name. With the paperwork done, Bill drove them out to the airport, and Ron did a walk around of the DeHaviland to make sure it was good to fly, then taxied out to the lake since they had already filled the tank when they landed yesterday.

When they reached the end of the lake, Ron called for permission to take-off, and when the tower gave him the clearance, he pushed the throttle to max, and they were flying. He maintained max climb until he cleared the ridge, then turned and headed for Anchorage as he climbed to 2,000 feet. When he was close enough to Anchorage, he called the FAA tower and asked for landing instructions. They told him to land at the municipal airport, and they would be met by a FAA vehicle that would escort them to the FAA office. Jim told Ron that a wheels landing was different than a float landing, and he needed to descend slower since the runway was less forgiving than water, and he needed to land flatter with not as much flair like a water landing. Jim held his hand up to demonstrate the angle of attack he needed for a successful wheels landing. Ron called "On Final" at 1 mile from the runway threshold, and reduced his speed and held a 20 degree angle of attack until just before touchdown, when he reduced it to 10 degrees. The wheels kissed the runway perfectly without any bounce, and Ron allowed the nose to drop gently and the nose wheel made contact with the runway. Since the runway was way so long, Jim told him not to use brakes until he had to, so he had a long rollout until he spotted the FAA truck ahead, and applied the brakes. He came to a complete stop 50 feet behind the truck, and when the truck lit its "follow me" lights and moved out, Ron added enough throttle to maintain a 50 foot following distance. They taxied for over a mile, then the truck stopped in front of the FAA office, and they were directed by ground crew to park the plane, and Ron pulled it in perfectly, then cut the throttle and shut off the plane. When the propeller came to a complete stop, they opened the cabin

doors and walked into the FAA office.

Jim walked in ahead of Ron, and the guy behind the counter stood up and walked around the counter to shake his hand “Jim, how are you - I heard, what a way to end a 30-year flying career, this must be your protégée I’ve heard so much about.”

“Dan, I’d like you to meet my grandson, Ron Williams.”

“Grandson, I didn’t know you had any kids?”

“Ron Fellows kid sister is his mom. Anne said that since I was always “Uncle Jim” to her, she wanted me to be Ron’s surrogate grandfather.”

“Did you say Ron Fellows - you know he’s the spitting image of his namesake?”

“Yeah, I noticed, also Ron is a sharpshooter. We just came back from MacDill AFB visiting his Uncle Steve Fellows.”

“You mean Colonel Fellows?”

“Yeah, that one - anyway, Steve took Ron out to their range, and he shot a 4-inch group at 600 yards, then a 9-inch group at 1000 yards with their new Barretts prototype. The Delta instructors, I’m told have put his autographed target up in their club on base.”

“Ron, I was watching you come in - you were flying the plane?”

“Yes Sir.”

“That was a textbook landing if I ever saw one, and that also means you flew all the way here from Allakaket.”

“Dan, Ron’s been flying that little Cessna solo for the last day or so, ever since I found out I shouldn’t fly. He’s done at least a half-dozen waterborne takeoffs and landings, including several at HelpmeJack lake.”

“That little postage stamp - Wow. Tell you what, I was going to give you a check ride, but I can see that’s a waste of time. Here’s the Written exam, you have 1 hour, then if you pass it, and a physical, I’ll issue a Restricted Commercial license. The restriction is that for the next 90 days, you fly with Jim as your co-pilot whenever you fly passengers or freight, except in an emergency. Jim, after the 90 days, you’ll have to surrender your commercial ticket, but you can keep your Private License and your Instructor’s permit. You OK with that?”

“Sure, the whole reason for the emergency waiver of the age limit is I can’t fly anymore, at

least with passengers.”

Ron sat down at a desk, and handed the test back 45 minutes later. Dan scored the test and shook his head. Ron had gotten a score of 99%, and he was pretty sure the one he missed was a miss-marked answer.

“Ron, you just missed a perfect score, and I’m pretty sure the one you missed was a miss-marked answer. OK, let’s go in the back and have the nurse do a quick flight physical, then I’ll issue your ticket.”

Ron went into the back room, where the nurse asked him to take off his shirt. She listened to his heart, checked his Blood Pressure and pulse. She had to check them twice, because both his BP and pulse were very low, but not dangerously so. She had him put his shirt back on, and read a wall chart. Not only did he read the 20/20 line perfectly, but the one below it as well. She shook her head, and signed off on his medical evaluation - must be nice to be a kid. When Dan saw his BP, pulse and vision scores, he said “Well that explains a few things. Jim - I think I figured something out. Ron’s BP and pulse rate were almost in the cadaver range, and his vision was better than 20/20. Didn’t you say that Ron Fellows had a super low BP and pulse rate?”

“Yeah Dan, it was scary - he could run 5 miles and his pulse would still be lower than my resting pulse, and now that you mention it, Ron was able to see stuff much farther than I could even when I was younger.”

“Well looks like his nephew inherited those traits as well. Anyway, here’s his Commercial Pilot’s License, with the 90-day restriction. I’ll mail a new unrestricted license in 90-days. Congratulations Ron.”

Dan shook Ron’s hand, then Jim’s, and they walked out of the office. Ron looked at his watch. They could go shopping, but then they’d have to stay overnight, and if he left right now, he could still make it home before dark. “Jim, what should we do - we don’t have enough time to shop in Anchorage and still make it home tonight, and if we leave right now, I can just make it home before dark.”

Jim looked at his watch, then told Ron, “We better stay in Anchorage overnight, it’s cutting it a little too close for safety. What if you run into a headwind, you could be landing in pitch dark. Not a good way to start your first day as a commercial pilot.”

They walked back into the FAA office, and Dan said they could use his phone, and he was about to head home anyway, so he could give them a lift into town if they wanted to spend the night. Jim thanked Dan, and called Bill in Allakaket and asked him to relay a message. As soon as they hung up, Bill called Roy to tell him Ron got his license, and they would be staying in Anchorage overnight, and flying back first thing tomorrow.

Dan locked up the office, and drove them into town. Jim had Dan drop them off in front of a certain store, and had Ron wait outside. When he came out, Jim handed Ron a gift box, and told him to open it. Inside was a sunglass case, and a pair of original Ray Ban Aviator's sunglasses. Ron tried them on, and they fit perfectly. Ron gave Jim a hug and thanked him. Jim told Ron he was hungry and they needed to find a hotel to check into then go get dinner. Ron was strolling around town fully armed, but no one commented, since people routinely went armed in Alaska. When they checked into the hotel, Jim suggested he put the guns in the hotel safe, since he was under age. Ron agreed, and the clerk took the shoulder holster and put it in the hotel safe, and gave Ron a claim check for it with the serial numbers of the guns on it. She recommended a good restaurant right down the street, so they went to eat dinner. After dinner, they went right to bed, since Jim wanted to head back at first light.

Then next morning, they got up, checked out, and were told they had coffee and donuts right around the corner that were free for all guests. Jim found a bran muffin he could safely eat, and Ron ate a huge cinnamon roll and they had some orange juice there as well. Jim asked the desk clerk to call them a cab, and 5 minutes later, a cab pulled up, and took them to the airport, and dropped them off in front of the FAA office. Dan met them before they left, and told Jim he checked the weather, and it was clear all the way to Canada, so they should have good flying weather. When Dan left to go in the office, Ron put on his shoulder holster and fanny pack, then put on his Ray Bans. They both did the walk around, and everything was perfect. Jim suggested they taxi over to the fuel depot and fill up the tanks just to be safe. They got aboard and Ron taxied over to the fuel pumps, and filled both tanks, then paid the attendant. Jim was wondering where he got the money, but didn't say anything. They taxied clear of the pumps, and Ron re-checked everything, then called the tower and asked for take-off clearance. Since it was still early, they were given immediate clearance, so he advanced the throttles and taxied the short distance to the active runway, then called "Rolling" and pulled the throttle to full. At 80 knots, the plane was flying, so Ron pulled back gently on the yoke, and climbed high enough to avoid the fence and surrounding obstacles. He called when he was clear of the airport, and the controller said he was clear to ascend to 2,000 feet, so he put the plane into a cruise climb, and was soon at 2,000 feet. He double checked his compass, and made a small correction so he was flying direct path to Allakaket.

2 hours later, he called Allakaket control, and received landing clearance. He made a perfect landing, and taxied to the runway, and then pulled the DeHaviland up to the pumps, filled the tanks, then taxied to the hangar. Jim gave Ron a big hug when he got out, and said "You done good Ron." Bill met them to give Jim a ride home, and Ron walked over to the Cessna, and preflighted it, then taxied to the fuel pumps and filled it up, then taxied to the lake. When he got to the downwind end of the lake, he set the plane up for takeoff and called the tower for permission. When they said OK, he advanced the throttle to full, and soon he was flying. As soon as he cleared the far ridge, he turned for home, and climbed to 2,000 feet. 2 hours later, he spotted their lake, and turned to land. As he cleared the ridge, he chopped the throttle, and floated right down to the lake, and landed without a splash. When he taxied up to the cabin, his Mom and Dad were waiting for him, as well as Lucky.

It was hard to tell who was more eager to greet him, but Lucky won the “Let’s knock him over with our greeting” contest paws down. After getting his face washed, he got Lucky off him. Anne had a surprise for him, and a celebration of sorts. She had baked a cake, and they presented Ron with her brother Ron’s Pilot Chronograph. It was an Original Tag Heuer Specialist Pilot Chronograph that Anne had kept since Roy gave it to her. She sent it to the jeweler, and except for some minor cleaning, it was as good as new. She had it inscribed, and delivered when Ron had decided to study for his pilot’s license. She told him to turn it over and read the back of the watch. It said “Fly Straight, Fly High and Fly Long. Love, Mom & Dad” Ron asked them where they got it, and Anne explained that it used to be her Brother Ron’s and Roy had brought it to her when he first arrived in Allakaket after spending the winter in the cabin. Ron gave them both a big hug, then turned to cry.

## Chapter 71 - New Kid in Town

The next day, Anne surprised Ron with a big huge stack of books. “Mom, what’s this?”

“Ron, now you’ll be flying others around, you are responsible for them. I know you know basic first aid, but I want you to get some advanced knowledge. Your father had to go through all this when I was pregnant with you, since we decided to have you at home, and I was the only one with first aid knowledge. By the time you’re finished, you’ll have knowledge equivalent to an EMT. It might come in handy some day - like what if neither Steve nor I were there the day Roy collapsed, and the nearest help was over an hour away. That is what you might face someday - not necessarily your dad, but what if a hunter had a heart attack while you were flying, what would you do? Just something to think about. In what’s left of your spare time, I expect you to be studying these medical books. I’ve put them in order, and left Roy’s notes for you to work from so you can study faster.”

“Gee Thanks Mom.”

“OK, Ron - back to work - Roy said you needed to finish cutting that wood today - so get busy.”

“Oh Boy, you mean I don’t have to study?”

“Later, Ron - later.”

Ron and Roy took the gear out to the wood pile, and filled the chainsaw, then he put on his safety gear, and they lifted a log into the sawhorse, and Ron fired up the chainsaw and started cutting logs to fireplace length. Once he had them all to length, he spent the rest of the day splitting and stacking the wood. After dinner, his Mom told him to get studying the medical books. Roy got a good laugh, remembering what fun he had doing just that almost 15 years ago. Ron started with the Merck Manual and started learning medical terminology. Since he was much younger, and a better student, he covered more material per night than his Dad did. 2 nights later, he was ready to take his first quiz. Anne gave him a verbal exam, and Ron almost got a perfect score. Just like his Dad, he got Q.I.D and qd mixed up

“Like Father, Like Son” Anne chortled.

Later that afternoon, Ron heard Bill’s voice over the radio. “Ron this is Bill - you read me?”

“Go ahead Bill, read you 5x5.”

“Got your first flying assignment tomorrow, Meet Jim in Allakaket at 0800 tomorrow, and you’ll fly to Anchorage, load up with supplies, and fly 3 deliveries then RTB. I’ve already

set up your fuel account, what Jim and I worked out is I bill the delivery fee to the Homesteaders, and deduct your fuel costs, and you get the difference added to your account - will that be OK by you?"

"Sure, it saves me having to write you checks, and then you writing me one. I'd appreciate a monthly statement on a spreadsheet if you wouldn't mind."

"No problem, I have to generate one anyway for my books, I'll just print you a copy. If you fly hunters to lodges, you bill either the lodge or the hunters, and pay for your own fuel. When you fill up in Allakaket, I can charge your account, but you need to set up an account in Anchorage to pay for your fuel there."

"Ok Bill, tell Jim I'll be there at 0800 tomorrow."

"Mom & Dad, guess what, I got my first paying job, Jim and I are delivering supplies tomorrow from Anchorage to some homesteaders out here."

Roy said "Wow, that's great son, I hope you have fun."

Ron spent the rest of the evening studying, and was awake the next morning at first light. Anne made breakfast as soon as Ron was dressed, then they sat down to eat breakfast together as a family. Roy prayed with Ron and asked God's protection and blessing over his Son, then gave him a big hug and told him to have fun. Ron kissed Anne on the cheek, and was out the door like a shot. He did a quick walk around of the Cessna, then jumped in the pilot's seat, did a quick preflight check, then started the engine. Once the engine had warmed up, Ron taxied to the lake, and then turned downwind. When he reached the end of the lake, he set the flaps and rudder to their takeoff positions, and gunned the throttle. When he reached 65 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, and he was airborne. After he cleared the far ridge, he set the plane for a cruise climb to 2,000 feet and turned toward Allakaket. He landed at the lake at 0759, and was taxiing up right at 0800. Jim was ready to go, and as soon as they preflighted the DeHaviland, Ron taxied to the lake and got ready to take off. When he got to the end of the lake, he turned into the wind, set the flaps at 20 % and added some right rudder to compensate for the torque of the engine, then called the tower for permission to take off. The tower cleared him for take off, and he gunned the throttle, and was soon airborne. When he cleared the ridge, he turned for Anchorage, and started a cruise climb to 2,000 feet. When he got close enough to Anchorage, he called the tower for landing clearance. They told him to come on in, the traffic pattern was clear. Remembering what Jim told him the other day, Ron set up for a wheels landing, and did another textbook wheels landing. Jim told him where to taxi to, and was met by a huge panel truck full of stuff. The driver and loader loaded the plane, and Jim checked the inventory sheet against what they were loading, then signed for the shipment. Ron watched and learned.

When they were finished loading, Ron taxied over to the fuel pumps and they both went

inside. The owners of the fuel company called Bill in Allakaket to verify that Ron did indeed have \$10,000 in the bank, and that his credit was good. When everything was approved, they gave Ron a plastic card with a magnetic strip to use the pumps 24/7. They told him he needed to code the card with a PIN, and told him how to do it. He swiped the card through the reader, and entered his PIN. They told him to do it again, and he got a green light telling him the PIN was accepted. Ron put the card in its sleeve in his wallet, right behind his Commercial Pilot's license. They walked out to the pumps, and Ron stuck his card in, and entered his PIN, then started filling the tanks on the DeHaviland. He was amazed at how much avgas the DeHaviland held - this could get expensive. He capped and locked the filler necks to the tanks, then got back aboard. As he taxied to the runway, he did his preflight checklist. When he got to the end of the runway, Jim reminded him that he was about 500 pounds heavy, so the plane would need more runway to take off. Knowing he had 3 times the runway he needed, Ron called the tower and got permission to takeoff, and fly straight to Allakaket, if he stayed at or below 2,000 feet. He double-checked everything was set, then turned to Jim, who gave him a thumbs up, and called "Rolling" over the radio, then advanced the throttle to max. It took a while to get up to speed, but soon he was at 85 knots, and the plane wanted to fly, so he pulled back on the yoke, and the plane was airborne. He made a slight turn for Allakaket, and then set the plane for a cruise climb.

Upon reaching 2,000 feet, he relaxed a little and looked around. The terrain he was flying over was beautiful, and sooner than he expected, he realized he was over Allakaket. He called the tower for permission to land, and they said that everything was clear, come on in. Ron turned to come in on final, and noticed the plane sinking faster as he chopped the throttle, so he pushed it back up a bit. As he cleared the ridge, he remembered the faster sink rate, and didn't chop the throttle all the way to idle. He ballooned down perfectly, and touched down on the lake with just a small splash. He taxied right over to the pumps to top off his tanks, then turned around to taxi and take off again. When he got to the end of the lake, Jim reminded him he was a little heavy, and to leave the throttle at max until he cleared the far ridge, and not to turn until he was at least 500 feet AGL. Ron shoved the throttle to max, and watched the airspeed indicator like a hawk. As soon as the airspeed indicator said 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, and cleared the trees by 100 feet. He held that climb until he was 500 AGL, then did a very gentle turn toward the North, where his first customer was. Since he had never been there before, Jim acted as Navigator, and pointed out landmarks Ron could use as a double-check if he were flying alone. Jim told him the names of all the local mountains as he flew past them.

When they got close to the lake, Jim was describing the approach as somewhat between Allakaket and HelpmeJack Lake. He needed a fairly fast sink rate to get down in time, but not like landing the DeHaviland at his lake. He said there was sometimes a cross-wind, so be prepared to turn slightly into the wind to keep from getting blown off course. They flew over the lake, and Jim said "Good news, the wind is dead on,. No cross breeze. Ron set up for landing, extended the flaps, and retarded the throttle to just above idle. He had some throttle left to play with, and he was making a nice conservative approach when Jim said,



“Might give it a little throttle, you’re heavy”. Ron added a few hundred RPM, and Jim seemed happier with the sink rate. The ridge line surrounding this lake was much lower than the ones at HelpmeJack Lake and Allakaket, and as soon as he cleared it, he pushed the throttle in a little to increase his sink rate. He touched down with 50 feet to spare, and slid to a stop with several hundred feet to spare.

“Not bad, Ron. Now you know how much room you have to spare, you can stay on the conservative approach, and not need to dive for the deck.”

“Sorry Gramps - I guess I overestimated the difficulty of the approach.”

“That’s OK. That’s why the FAA wanted me to fly co-pilot for 90 days, so you could make little mistakes, and not crash the plane.”

“Thanks Gramps, I’ll do better next time.”

“I’m sure you will. Now this homestead is off to your right, and the approach is really soft, so take it easy - just coast up until you have to use the throttle, then just barely, and use the yoke to hold the nose up as much as possible.”

Ron did a normal taxi until he got within 50 feet of the shore, then chopped the throttle to idle, and coasted to the shore. When he felt the wheels take over, he just barely tapped the throttle, and held the nose up with the yoke back in his lap. Finally they were on solid ground, and Jim said it was OK to let the nose down now. Ron relaxed his grip on the yoke, and let the nose settle. Jim gave him directions to taxi right up to the cabin, which was a lot smaller than the one Ron lived in. When the plane stopped, and Ron got out, they were met by an old trapper and his dog. Jim walked around the plane to greet him, and introduce Ron.

“Slim, this is my grandson, Ron Williams. He’s going to be the new delivery pilot.”

“Jim - why aren’t you doing it anymore?”

“I can’t pass my FAA physical anymore, so they waived the age limit for a commercial license for Ron, and I’ll be flying with him the next 90 days, then I’ve got to hang up my wings, and go back to being a private pilot.”

“Well Jim, it won’t be the same without you - who could I share my whiskey with - Ron’s too young.”

“Just because I’m not flying deliveries doesn’t mean I’m grounded, just can’t fly commercial anymore. I’ll have the little Cessna Amphibian to fly around with and visit. I intend to get in some fishing while I’m retired. And I know some beautiful little lakes this old bird could never fit in, but the Cessna could do it easy.”

Jim checked the list, and Ron helped him unload about 1/3 of the aircraft. Ron shook Slim's hand, and told him if he needed anything, just call, and gave him their frequency. Then he thought about it, and said "Sorry Slim, I meant you should still call Bill for food and stuff, but if you have an emergency, or need a lift, call me direct on the radio."

"Don't worry there Young Feller, I stuck my foot in my mouth so much when I was a kid, I think I had Athlete's Tongue." They all got a good laugh, and Jim got back aboard, and Ron joined him.

"Ron, Slim's a real character, he's been living out there trapping since the early 1900's. No one knows how old he is, but I'll wager he's one of the oldest living Alaskans around." Ron turned the plane around and taxied back to the lake. Jim said "Ron, you've got plenty of room here, so don't rush it - just like before, when the Airspeed indicator hits 85 knots, not before, or you'll stall."

Ron turned into the wind, set the plane up for takeoff, then looked at Jim, who gave him a thumbs up. Ron pushed the throttle to full, and as soon as the airspeed indicator read 85 knots, he pulled back sharply on the yoke, and they were flying. Ron waited until they were 500 AGL before he changed anything. Jim gave Ron the new heading, and Ron turned the plane. He asked Jim how far it was to the next stop, and Ron said "You might as well stay at 500 feet, because it's only a couple of miles on the other side of that ridge. Oh, and one other thing, when we start unloading, this next stop is a homesteading family just like yours, and he has a 16-year old daughter that is a total babe - watch out though, her Daddy's real protective of her."

"Don't worry Gramps, I'll be a total gentleman."

"Ok, Ron, but when you get a look at her, you might have a hard time keeping your mind on flying."

They saw the lake as soon as they cleared the ridge. The lake was twice the size of the HelpmeJack Lake, but smaller than Allakaket. Since there were no steep ridges around, Ron made a more conservative approach, and made a perfect landing. Jim said "Well done Ron, I hope you weren't showing off."

"Gramps, you know me better than that - besides, I've never met her before, so what's her name anyway?"

"Her name's Samantha, but she goes by Sam. Her Dad's name is Steve, and her mother's name is Mary. Ok, the house is on the left. It's got a nice firm beach, so don't worry about the approach. Just ease it right up like you do at home, and you're fine."

As they taxied up to the house, Ron could see the whole family was on the porch. Jim was

right, Samantha was a total Babe. Ron tried to concentrate on what he was doing, and managed to stop the plane without hitting anything. As soon as the propeller stopped, Ron and Jim hopped out, and Jim made introductions. “Steve, Mary, Sam, this is my grandson Ron Williams. He lives with his mom and dad at HelpmeJack Lake. He’s taking over for me, since the FAA will pull my Commercial ticket in 90 days, when his Commercial ticket restriction clears.”

Steve walked up to Jim. “That’s too bad Jim, but I’m glad that your Grandson is able to take over. Let’s get unloaded, then I know Mary has some lemonade for both of you.”

Samantha cornered Ron “You flew that big monster plane? Wow.”

“Hi Sam, I’m Ron Williams. I did fly Jim’s DeHaviland, but really it’s much easier to fly than the Cessna 185 Amphibian I learned on.”

“Cool, maybe you can teach me to fly one of these days?”

“Sure Samantha, but The FAA won’t let me be an Instructor Pilot until I’m at least 18, and by then I’ll be in the Air Force Academy.”

“Why on earth would you want to go there?”

“Well, the education is free, and I want to fly the F-15 Strike Eagle. Besides, my Uncle is a Colonel in the Air Force assigned to MacDill AFB in Florida.”

“In other words, you’re going to be out of here in a couple of years, and I might never see you again after that.”

“Not exactly Sam, I’m not even 15 yet, and the minimum age I can enter the Academy is when I’m 17 and a half, that’s almost 3 years from now, and I’ll be flying your deliveries from now on; so I’ll see you then.”

“You’re only 14. I thought you were at least 17. Bummer.”

“Sam, I’d rather be friends anyway, even if you’re the most beautiful girl I’ve met.”

“Flatterer - so how many girls have you met?”

“Not counting my mom, just you.”

Sam thought Ron was teasing, then realized he was serious. Man, talk about a Kid.

Just as things were about to get interesting Mary showed up on the porch with a pitcher of

lemonade. "I've got some ice cold lemonade in the kitchen, come and get it."

Ron thought "Saved by the Bell." and went inside, followed by Samantha who was checking out the back view of Ron. She thought that he was definitely a hunk. They all were seated at the kitchen table. Samantha made sure she sat next to Ron, who did his best not to notice she was coming on to him. When they had drunk their lemonade, Jim said they needed to get another delivery done, and thanks for the lemonade. Samantha tried to corner Ron and give him a kiss, but he was having none of it. She thought he was playing hard to get, and tried harder. Mary caught her daughter moving in on Ron out of the corner of her eye and coughed. Ron slipped out of her clutches and got aboard the plane where it was safe. Jim climbed aboard, grinning like the Cheshire cat, he'd seen it all, and admired Ron's moves - he managed to avoid her clutches until next time. Little did Ron know that in a few years, he wouldn't try to avoid her clutches anymore, he would enjoy them. Ron broke all speed records preflighting the plane, and turned it to taxi back to the lake. When he was safely back on the water, Jim decided to give him a hard time. "You've got pretty good moves for a rookie - I saw her try to get you in a clinch. You know the next time you're here, she'll try harder, because she thinks you're playing hard to get. All I can say is don't take advantage of the situation, or you'll break her heart when you leave to go to the Air Force."

"Gramps, the farthest I'll let it go is if she kisses me - I'm not encouraging it. I meant what I told her, I'd rather be friends."

"Ron, if she has her way, it will be more like kissing cousins."

They taxied to the downwind end of the lake, and Ron tried to concentrate on flying. The only way he was successful was to recite the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm to clear his mind of Samantha. He turned upwind, and set the plane up for takeoff. He looked at Jim, who gave him a thumbs up. When they were airborne, Jim told him to turn south, they were going to fly about 50 miles to their next stop.

"Gramps, please tell me there aren't any love-starved teenage daughters at the next house."

Jim had to laugh, "Nope, you got lucky - she's the only love-starved teenager on the route."

"Thank God. I don't think I could handle another one like her."

"OK, Ron, there's almost always a cross-wind at the next stop, make sure you turn the nose into the wind."

"OK, Gramps - let me know when we get close."

"It's just on the other side of this ridge, go ahead and drop down to 500 feet, and slow down."

Ron eased back on the throttle, and cranked out the flaps. Once the flaps were set, he slowed down even more, and spotted the lake, and saw the wind was blowing from left to right, so he kicked in some left rudder, and the nose came into the wind. Jim was pleased that Ron had properly compensated for the cross-wind. As he approached the lake, Ron chopped the throttle to idle, and the plane floated down to the lake. Ron landed smooth as glass, and taxied to the end of the lake.

“Ron, the cabin is on the left, and the bottom is pretty soft, so take it slow.”

Ron coasted to the water's edge, and when he made the transition, he eased the throttle open a little, then taxied to the cabin. They were met by a nice older couple. Ron helped Jim unload the plane, then they taxied back to the water and took off. Jim gave Ron the heading to Allakaket, and they were there less than an hour later. Ron taxied up to the pumps, and was amazed that it only used half a tank - evidently the DeHaviland was pretty good on fuel. When he finished, they taxied to the hangar, and Bill was waiting. When they got out, Bill walked over to Ron and told him that he had gotten 3 terrific reports, and they all thought he would work out great. Bill told Ron that even with the fill-up in Anchorage, Ron cleared \$100 this trip. He usually made between \$100 and \$500 per trip, depending on how much weight he was carrying. Ron thought, “Not bad for 6 hours of flying.” and thanked Bill. He climbed into his Cessna, and topped off the tank before he took off. 2 hours later he was back at home. 15 minutes later, Anne had his nose in a Medical book.

## Chapter 72 - The Hunters

Right before he went to bed, Bill was calling on the radio.

“Ron, this is Bill, you still up?”

“What’s up Bill?”

“I need you to fly 3 hunters to their lodge tomorrow, then other pilot’s plane is down for repairs. I need you to meet Bill at 0700 tomorrow and fly to Anchorage to pick them up at 9:00 at the General Aviation Terminal. I’ve already charged their lodge \$1,000 for the round trip. After fuel and expenses, you’ll clear over \$500 for this trip.”

“Bill \$500 is a lot of money for 6 hours worth of work.”

“I know Ron, but that’s the going rate for Bush pilots, you should have seen what the other guy was charging them.”

“OK, Bill, I’ll be there at 0700 tomorrow.”

“Mom, Dad, Bill needs me to fly some hunters to their lodge tomorrow. It’s unscheduled since the guy who was going to fly them had to take his plane down for repairs. Bill’s paying me over \$500 plus expenses for the round trip.”

Roy spoke up “Ron that’s a lot of money for 1 round trip. Actually, it’s not so bad, I remember how much Ron wanted to fly and guide, it was over \$2,000 for a 3-day trip. OK, you need to go to bed right now, since Bill said you need to be there at 0700. Mom will make sure you’re up at 0430 so you can be there by 0700. I’ll ask mom to pack you some food, since you’re skipping breakfast.”

“Thanks Dad, goodnight.”

Anne knocked on Ron’s door at 0430. “Ron you up?”

“Mom, I’m up and dressed already, go ahead and open the door. I figured out how to set my watch alarm.” Ron walked out fully dressed, and Anne handed him a thermos and a paper sack with a couple of peanut butter & jelly sandwiches. Ron kissed Anne on the cheek, “Bye mom, see you later this afternoon.” Roy gave Ron a big hug, and prayed over him a minute, then Ron had to go. It was just barely light enough to see, so he took his time pre-flighting the Cessna, he didn’t want to miss anything. Finally at 0450, he started the motor and taxied to the lake. While he was taxiing, the engine finished warming up. He turned into the wind when he reached the downwind end of the lake. He double-checked that the

plane was set up to take off, and revved the motor. When the airspeed indicator reached 65 knots, Ron pulled the yoke back into his lap, and the plane took off. He held the climb until he had cleared the ridge, then turned for Allakaket, and cruised up to 2,000 feet. After 2 hours, he called the Allakaket tower, and they gave him clearance to land. He made a textbook water landing, and taxied right to the ramp, and increased throttle to climb the ramp. Since they were in a hurry, he taxied up next to Jim's hangar and shut down. He jumped out, and Jim told him he had already filled the tanks and preflighted the DeHaviland, and they were good to go. Ron jumped into the pilot seat, stowed the thermos and sack lunch, then did a quick pre-flight check, started the motor, and let it warm up for a minute, then turned to taxi out to the lake. He called the tower for clearance to take off and fly to Anchorage. The tower gave him clearance, and asked him to call Anchorage when he was 2 hours out from Allakaket. Ron acknowledged, and quickly set the plane up to take off, then turned upwind when he reached the downwind leg of the lake. He turned to Jim, who gave him a thumbs up, and pushed the throttle to max. The lightly loaded plane lifted off with tons of room to spare, and as soon as he was 500 feet AGL, he turned toward Anchorage and cruise climbed to 2,000 feet.

2 hours later, he called Anchorage Control, who gave him a direct path to the commercial airport, with instructions to stay below 1,000AGL, since the Military base was conducting flight ops. Ron decided to loose the altitude quickly, and put the plane into a diving bank. Jim just looked at him and ruefully shook his head. After all, he was following the tower's instructions. When he was at 1,000 feet, Jim told Ron never to do that with passengers aboard unless it was an absolute emergency. Ron said "I know, straight and level with passengers, but I didn't think you counted as a passenger."

Jim had to agree with Ron's logic. Ron called "Runway in sight" a minute later, then "On Final". The tower acknowledged both calls with a "Roger". Ron made a fast textbook landing, since they were in a hurry. At the end of the runway, Ron directed him the proper gate. The 3 hunters were waiting with their gear when Ron taxied up to them. When he got out, their chins hit their chests - "What's a Kid doing Flying?" Ron stayed aboard for a second since Jim had briefed him about what to do. Jim walked around and introduced himself. One of the Hunters said "There's No way I'm flying with a kid at the controls."

Jim said "First of all, that Kid is my grandson, and he's the best damn bush pilot in the area. Second of all, the FAA gave him his commercial ticket since I can't fly anymore. Thirdly, your fees to the lodge are non-refundable, and you've already been billed for the entire trip, so if you refuse to fly, you forfeit all your money you have paid, and I'm guessing you'd each be out over \$5,000 dollars."

That brought the hunters to a full stop. They weren't a bunch of rich doctors, this was their "Hunt of a lifetime" and they could barely afford it. Jim said "Trust me, Ron knows what he's doing." Jim gave Ron a hand sign, so he got out of the plane, walked over and shook each hunter's hand. They were impressed by his maturity, and combined with the fact that

they'd each be out over \$5K each if they didn't fly, they decided to get aboard. Between Jim and Ron, they got their gear loaded quickly, and the hunters sat in the back seats.

When everything was in place, Ron turned in his seat and said "Welcome to Allakaket Airlines, I'm Ron your pilot, and I'd like to welcome you to the flight. We'll be flying at 2,000 feet, and will be arriving in your lodge in a little over an hour and a half. Please make sure your seats are in the upright and locked position. Pilot to copilot, prepare for takeoff."

The 3 hunters laughed, Ron had done that speech just like the pilot for Alaska Airlines. It broke their nervousness, just as Ron had hoped. He keyed his mike, and received permission to take off. The tower assigned him the #2 position, and told him which runway to use. Jim pointed with his hand, so the passengers couldn't see, but Ron could which way he had to go. When he got to the runway, Ron called again, and he was #1 to take off, and was asked to stay below 1,000 feet AGL until he was 20 miles out, the Military was still conducting flight ops. Ron acknowledged, set the plane up for take-off, and pushed the throttle to the max. It took a while to accelerate, but soon he was at 85 knots airspeed, and he eased back on the yoke, and the plane was airborne. He gradually climbed to 1,000 feet, then turned toward the lodge. Jim had written the bearing and distance on Ron's kneepad that he used for all critical flight information. Once clear of the ATC area, he called the tower, advised them he was 20 miles out, and they authorized a flight level of 2,000 feet. He slowly climbed to 2,000 feet, and an hour later, he spotted the lake the lodge was on. He saw which way the wind was blowing, and turned to land into the wind since there were no clearance issues with this landing. He gradually reduced speed, and fed in more flaps until he was slowly descending to the lake. He cleared the shore by over 100 feet, and floated down to a very soft landing, then taxied over to the lodge's dock. Someone at the dock caught the pontoon, and fastened a rope to the front cleat, then the back one as the plane coasted to a stop. Ron was on the water side, so he stayed put while Jim opened his door and helped them out. The last hunter out turned to shake Ron's hand and said that was the smoothest flight and best landing he had ever seen. Ron thanked him and told him he'd be back to fly them back to Anchorage later.

The hunter got out of the plane, and the guy on the dock unloaded their gear from the plane, and slipped Ron a \$50 that he said was from the hunters. Ron managed a "thank you" before he choked up. Jim closed and locked the back cabin door, and climbed in the front. The dockworker released the cleats, and pushed them away with a logging pole. When they were 6 feet away from the dock, Ron started the motor and taxied the plane to the downwind end of the lake. He had already set the plane up to take off, and when he turned into the wind, set the throttle to max, and was flying with half the lake left. He did a max performance climb-out just like Jim had briefed him. It wasn't necessary for flight safety, but impressed the heck out of the hunters to hear the radial motor of the DeHaviland roaring at full throttle and charging into the air. It gave them a sense of confidence that would be invaluable for the return flight, since they would be looking forward to the flight now. When they landed



at Allakaket, Bill was there to greet the plane with a huge grin on his face. “Ron you did it, the Hunters were still talking about your skill and professionalism. The lodge has agreed to sign a contract to fly their hunters to and from their lodge, and to fly any remote hunters to their camps. You land a couple more contracts like this, and you could easily make \$50K per year.” Ron was stunned, he didn’t know what to say. He remembered the \$50.00 tip and showed Bill. “You keep that - you earned it. I only take 10% off the top for Lodge business as your booking agent. You keep all tips, and everything over and above my fees, and your expenses. All your maintenance and inspections are at cost, and we give you a very preferential rate for labor, since if the DeHaviland goes down for unscheduled maintenance or repairs, I’ll lose a ton of money since I’m part owner of the lodge. We’ll keep it maintained, and you have priority over all other customers for our aircraft mechanic.”

They filled up the tanks, then taxied the plane into the hangar. Ron remembered he hadn’t eaten anything, and was suddenly hungry, so he ate both P&J sandwiches, and washed them down with the hot coffee Anne had packed in the thermos. He climbed into the Cessna, and taxied over to the pumps and filled the tank with Avgas. He was amazed that it had only used \$10 worth of gas. He guessed that the Cessna didn’t use as much fuel per mile as the DeHaviland. When he was finished, he gave his “gramps” a big hug, and said he would see him later. He climbed into the cockpit, and did a quick preflight check, then started the motor. He taxied to the end of the lake, called the tower and received permission to take-off. He quickly set the Cessna up to take-off, and was airborne minutes later. 2 hours later, he arrived at his home lake, and touched down perfectly, then taxied to his front door. When he shut down, Roy, Anne and Lucky were waiting to greet him. He was ready for Lucky this time, and kept from getting knocked over. When he got inside, he told his Mom and Dad all about it. Roy was amazed when Ron related how much Ron could make per year just flying hunters. Doing some quick math in his head, Roy realized Bill was about right.

It looked like Ron wouldn’t need that trust fund he had established for him, then he remembered they needed to build a hangar for the DeHaviland in the next 90 days. He decided to tell Ron about the \$50K he had saved for Ron in a trust fund, and that he wanted to use the money to build a year-round hangar for the DeHaviland next to the cabin. Ron gave his Dad a big hug, then they called Bill. He said he had already located a perfect steel building that was almost twice as big as they needed. It was a good used building that was being dismantled anyway since the owner of the land needed the space. Bill told Ron how big of a space they would need to clear to hold it. Roy decided that their next logging site would have to be where they were going to erect the new hangar. It was heavily insulated and winterized, and had enough room to not only park the plane, but store the pontoons and skis, since during the winter, it was ski-borne instead of pontoon-borne. It even had a chain hoist to pick up the plane and switch the pontoons and skis each season. Roy realized they would need a snow-blower or something to clear a path from the house to the hangar. Bill said he also located a smaller building they could attach to the house that would hold a huge snow blower and enough fuel for the winter. It too was heavily insulated to keep the gasoline from gelling in the winter. Roy was afraid to ask how much it all was going to cost.

Bill said including everything including the snow-blower he could get it installed for under \$40K. Roy told Bill to make it happen, and to take the money out of Ron's trust account, and transfer any remaining balance into Ron's checking account. Bill said that if Ron flew the supply flights and flew the installer crew in and out, he'd save another \$10K, and Bill would cover the fuel costs. Roy said "You've got a deal. We need this finished in the next 90 days so Ron can hangar the DeHaviland here before Jim loses his Commercial Ticket."

"Not a problem Roy. Hurry up and get the trees cleared out of the way, and they can start as soon as you have the trees down. Don't worry about the stumps, they'll remove them."

"OK, Bill, talk to you later."

"Ron, we need to get those trees on the other side of the house felled and out of the way ASAP. I just bought a hangar for your plane, and they can install it in the next 90 days, but we need the trees out of the way first."

Ron gave his dad another big hug. "Thanks Dad, I'll get right on it."

Ron suited up, grabbed the chainsaw, and walked over to the fuel and oil, then carried the chainsaw over to the far treeline. Roy heard the roar of the chainsaw, and later that afternoon, all 20 trees were down. Ron took the next couple of days to haul them over to the sawhorse, cut them to length, and split them to useable sizes. When he wasn't cutting, chopping or stacking wood, Anne had Ron nose-deep in the medical books.

Bill called Ron and said that they were ready to fly the building materials to their cabin. First he needed to pick up the crew and their gear. They would live in a tent outside their cabin while they assembled the building. He told Ron to pick them up in Allakaket at 0800 tomorrow.

The next morning, Ron arrived at Allakaket at 0800 on the dot, and they already had the DeHaviland loaded, fueled, and ready to go. Jim was standing there with the 3 men who would install the building. Ron looked confused, then remembered the FAA restrictions on his ticket, and realized Jim had to come with him, even if it meant they couldn't load as much gear or supplies. They all boarded, and Ron ran through the checklist as the engine warmed up. Jim reminded Ron that he was taking off at max take-off weight, so he needed to take it easy when he lifted off, or the pontoons might separate, since some of the stuff was lashed to the pontoons to make room inside. Ron nodded and continued to set the plane up for take-off. Jim suggested going to 30% flaps instead of 20% to give them extra lift. Ron nodded and set the flaps at 30%, then turned into the wind when he had gone as far downwind as he dared. When he turned upwind, he looked at Jim, who gave him a thumbs up, and Ron pushed the throttle to full, and held on for dear life. The plane slowly accelerated, and he thought it would never get to 85 knots indicated. As soon as it reached 85 knots, Ron pulled back gently on the yoke, and cleared the trees on the ridge by a bare 50

feet. Jim turned grinned, and gave Ron a thumbs up. Ron didn't climb any higher than he had to, and set out for home. Jim reminded him he was real heavy, and would have a huge sink rate, so go easy on slowing down. When he was lined up to land, Ron slowly reduced throttle until he had established the sink rate he wanted. As he cleared the ridge, he just tapped the throttle in some more, and was sinking quickly to the lake. Ron realized he was sinking too fast, and added throttle, but just what he had taken out. It wasn't the prettiest landing he had ever made, but they were down in one piece, and he didn't hurt the plane. After they had unloaded the plane, Ron took a look at the huge pile of stuff. He knew the exact max takeoff weight of the DeHaviland Otter, and they were easily 10-20% over max listed take off weight. Ron pointed this out to Jim, and he admitted the max takeoff weight was a very conservative number, and it could safely be exceeded by 30%.

"You just had to be aware of the overload situation, and fly accordingly, like be more conservative in your throttle settings on landing, since the extra weight makes you sink like a rock." Then he said, "By the way, good recovery, adding throttle was exactly the correct thing to do. Next time you're overloaded like that, keep some energy in reserve. You can always loose airspeed faster than you can gain it."

Ron and Jim flew back and forth from Allakaket to their cabin and made 4 trips fully loaded. By the end of the day, they were both tired, but all the supplies were at Ron's house, and the builders had started clearing the stumps and leveling the spot. When they were finished, they set up concrete forms and unrolled the reinforcing wire grid for the concrete floor, then positioned and tied the anchor bolts into the wire for the steel building. The next day, they would pour the concrete floor, and asked Roy if he had any hot water. Roy told them he had running hot and cold water, and asked them how much they would need. He said they needed to pour a 6 inch slab for a 50x20 foot building or about 19 cubic yards of concrete, and they wanted 60-80 degree water. Roy said "No problem, I can get you boiling running water, and you can combine that with the 40 degree water coming out of the tap. The guy whipped out his calculator, and figured how much 220 degree water he'd need to add to 40 degree water to get 80 degree water. When he told Roy, he replied "I guess we should keep the stove fired up most of the morning, good thing Ron chopped all that extra wood." They had a 5-gallon bucket to haul water, and it barely fit in their sink. Anne asked if they would like a home-cooked meal, and the foreman said they would kill for one, so Anne invited them inside for dinner. It was crowded, but they all fit. Roy said grace, and they all ate dinner. They went back outside to their tent and campfire, and Ron went back to his studies.

The next morning after Breakfast, Ron volunteered to help, and they put him to work hauling water with the wheeled cart. After about 20 trips he was tired, but they needed more water, so he kept hauling water until they were finished pouring concrete. They spent the rest of the day compacting and floating the concrete, making sure the floor was sloped correctly for drainage. Ron took the rest of the day off, and went back to his studies.

The next morning, the concrete was set enough to start assembling the building. Since all

the parts were marked, it went up fairly fast, and the frame was in place the first day, and the skin was ready to go on. They had Ron run to Allakaket for some more supplies and he came back with Jim and a load of insulation. Since insulation was light, they packed the plane as tight as they could, and put a sheet of plywood behind their seats so they could stack the rolls of insulation to the ceiling and into every nook and cranny of available space. They did such a good job of packing that they got the entire load in one trip, and were able to carry more supplies on the pontoons as well.

The next day, they bolted the skin onto the frame, and sprayed it with a waterproofing coating to make it 100 % waterproof. The coating had pigment added, so they didn't need to paint it. The hangar was slate grey, and would stay relatively warm during the winter, without being beastly hot in the summer. Once they had the coating on the outside, they covered the inside with Visqueen, then started laying the insulation over the visqueen and between the frames, and installing the visqueen that covered the insulation. They didn't need or want wallboard on the curved walls, so the visqueen served to hold the insulation in, and acted as a vapor barrier on both sides of the insulation, making it much more efficient. Then they installed a small Franklin stove in the building for heat in case they needed to work inside the building during the winter, and installed the vent pipe. The final things they did were to install the chain hoist, and hang the door. They used a huge roll-up commercial door, since a tilt-up would be impossible to use in the Alaskan winter.

The next day they packed their stuff back into the plane, and Ron flew them to Allakaket. He had to get Jim and the plane first, so he made deliveries on his way out to help pay for the fuel. While he was delivering stuff, he picked up the shed to hold the snow blower then added 4 5-gallon cans of Avgas. The mechanic in Allakaket had re-tuned the motor to run on Avgas, since they didn't deliver regular gas anymore since the PBY had crashed years ago. All they got was Avgas, Diesel and Kerosene. Jim called his buddy in the FAA, told him that Ron was ready to fly by himself, and the hangar was done at their house. Dan gave Ron verbal permission to fly Solo, but to be careful, since his unrestricted Commercial had to wait the full 90 days, since he couldn't change things in the FAA computer without calling attention to himself. He said that if Jim was available, and he had the space, to keep flying with Jim, but he didn't have to. Since the Cessna was already at Allakaket, Ron flew the DeHaviland home and put it in his hangar at home.

## Chapter 73 - Ron gets a Kit

The next morning Roy thought of something, and was soon out looking at the Otter. He found a space just about the size of a large shoebox underneath the pilot's seat that couldn't be used for anything else. He found a large shoebox that would fit, took it in the house, and asked Ron "You have the fanny pack, the knives, the .44 Magnum with 2 6-shot reloads, and the .22 pistol with 2 spare 15 round magazines. I found a space underneath your seat that wasn't being used for anything, and I wanted us to make a list of stuff that would fit in this box that you could use for an extended survival kit."

Ron sat down and started writing. He had a knife and a <skip> just like his Dad, he had the weapons, and he had a pretty good mini-kit in his fanny pack. He thought of several items: A box of 50 .44 Magnum rounds (self-defense and hunting), a box of 100 .22 shells, Underwear, socks, first aid supplies. Roll of 10/50 Spyderwire, Roll of snare wire, 12 Cam locks for snare wire, dozen 8d nails, bottle of Polar Pure Plus, Salt & Pepper, 12 Ramen Seasoning packs, bag of Lemon drops, Tea bags, Lifeboat rations, extra hexamine tabs for his canteen stove, a couple of extra contractor grade trash bags, chemical hand warmers, couple of light sticks, spare compass and maps, LED headlamp with spare batteries. Ron was tempted to write in "ET Phone HOME Satellite Phone" but it would cost thousands of dollars, and might not survive a rough landing, or the batteries could conk out at the worst possible moment.

Next he took the list and prioritized it, and tried to get everything to fit. He had to leave 1 of the 3 contractor bags he tried to put in it. That left 2 in the kit. Ron walked over to Roy and showed him the kit and the list, and then told his Dad that he'd need a separate book bag or bigger sized winter kit to carry his cold-weather gear that he couldn't wear while flying the plane, like a Bivy bag tent, mummy sleeping bag, cold weather provisions (chocolate bars and cocoa), mittens and polypropylene balaclava and glove liners. He wanted a SEVA stove and a quart of denatured alcohol, along with the pot and a mess kit. He'd make sure he had a complete winter kit months in advance. Roy thought that Ron was definitely taking after him.

The next thing they knew Bill's voice was on the radio. "Ron are you there?"

"Hi Bill, what's up?"

"Got a call from that lodge that you delivered the 3 hunters to, they've got their Caribou early, and are ready to go home; can you fly over there in an hour and pick them up?"

"What about Jim?"

"Jim said you can handle it, there aren't any landing or take-off issues, and the FAA said it

was OK for you to fly alone. They have to be in Anchorage in 4 hours to catch their flight home, or they have to stay another day in Anchorage. I already cleared it with the lodge and the hunters. Hurry up and get in the air, and call me when you pick them up.”

Flying directly from their cabin to the lodge would cut almost 3 hours off the trip, and save a huge amount of avgas. If Jim said it was OK, he could do it. Roy heard the radio, and had Ron’s gear all ready to go, and helped Ron into his shoulder holster and fanny pack, then handed him the box. Ron still had the change from the \$100 if he had to stay the night, so he was good to go. He kissed his Mom, and Roy prayed with him, and he ran out to the hangar carrying his box of gear. He slid the shoe box under the seat, and it fit easily, then he walked around the plane, then jumped inside and quickly preflighted the plane, then started the motor, and let it warm up while he finished his preflight checks. He had already written the compass bearing and distance to the hunting lodge, and the bearing and distance from there to Anchorage, so he was good to go. He goosed the throttle, and he was taxiing to the lake. When he had made it to the downwind end of the lake, he already had the plane set up to take off, and had completed all his safety checks. He turned upwind, shoved the throttle to max, and watched the airspeed indicator like a hawk. As soon as it read 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, and he was flying. He was enjoying the feeling of freedom flying this huge powerful plane by himself. When he had cleared ridge and was over 500 feet AGL, he turned toward the lodge and cruise climbed to 1,000 feet since he was only going to be flying an hour and landing again.

An hour later, he spotted the lodge and the lake right where it was supposed to be. He spotted the windsock, and realized there was a slight cross-breeze, but not enough to make it exciting. He turned on final, then turned the nose of the plane into the wind as he descended to the lake. He made a picture perfect landing, and taxied to the dock, where the same guy tied him fast, then opened the back door and loaded all the stuff. With their Caribous, it was pretty packed back there, and he asked if someone would like to fly up front in the co-pilot seat. They all were eager to fly up front, so he settled it by drawing straws. The winner hopped in front, and noticed Ron’s hardware. He joked, “Aren’t you a little young to be armed to the teeth like that?”

“Not out here sir, if for some reason the plane went down, I’d have to survive with what I had on me.”

“Well let’s hope that doesn’t happen.”

“Yes sir, if you’d close the door and buckle in, we’re ready to go.”

He reached over, pulled the cabin door closed, then buckled his seatbelt, then the dockworker waved at him, and pushed the plane away from the dock. Ron started the motor, and taxied to the downwind end of the lake. Since they were a little heavy, he went as far downwind as he could, then he turned upwind, and set the flaps to 30%. Once he was set, he

pushed the throttle to full, and held on until the airspeed indicator said 85 knots, and he gently pulled back on the yoke. He climbed gently to 500 feet, then turned southwest to Anchorage, and cruise climbed to 2,000 feet. He called Bill as he reached altitude, and said he'd be in Anchorage in a little over 2 hours. Knowing that the passengers could hear his radio, Bill said, "Roger, well Done, advise me when you plan to return to Allakaket."

The Hunters spent the rest of the flight looking out the windows, or talking about their hunt. 2 hours later, Ron called Anchorage Control, and was given a straight in approach, since the pattern was empty. Ron slowly stepped down from 2,000 feet to 500 feet as he got closer to the airport. When he had the runway in sight, he called "Final" and cranked the flaps to full, and remembered to lower the landing gear. He slowly eased in the throttle, until he was losing altitude just about right. He crossed the runway threshold about 50 feet in the air, and slowly settled to the runway without a bounce. He knew he had a long taxi, so he stayed off the brakes, and let the plane run to the end of the runway. He remembered which way to turn for the commercial terminal, and the Tower had said Gate 20. He saw gate 12, and kept taxiing until he saw gate 20. There as a ground crew member to direct him into a parking stall, and a skycap to supervise the unloading and transfer of their baggage to the appropriate airline. He shut off the engine, and when the prop stopped turning, he opened his door, and the other hunters opened theirs and crawled out. Walking around to flex stiff legs, the first hunter, who had originally made the crack about flying with a kid, shook Ron's hand, and slipped him a \$20. The other hunters did the same, and they thanked him for a job well done, and they would make sure to pass the word that Ron Williams was a good bush pilot who could be trusted.

With his plane unloaded, he checked his watch. He was over 2 hours away from Allakaket, and another hour away from home, and he had less than 4 hours of daylight left - too close for comfort. He hopped back in the DeHaviland and taxied to the fuel pumps, topped off the tanks, then taxied to the FAA offices. Dan was still there, and Ron asked if he could borrow his phone. He dialed Bill's number, "Hello Bill, It's Ron. I'm in Anchorage, and I think it's too late to head back to Allakaket tonight, so I'll stay here in Anchorage tonight."

"Ron, that's why I told you to call - I thought it might be too late. Dan will drop you off at the hotel you stayed at last time. I've already taken care of the bill, just pay for your own dinner. I'll see you tomorrow morning."

"Bill, can you tell my folks I'm staying over in Anchorage, and I'll see them tomorrow?"

"Sure Ron, anything else?"

"No that's all - thanks for everything."

When they hung up, Dan told Ron he'd drive Ron to the hotel in half an hour when he was ready to go home. Ron asked if there was anything he could do to help.

“I’ve got everything done I need to do by 10:00 every morning, I just have to keep the office open. You want to check out some maps I have?”

“Sure, where are they?”

Dan showed Ron several maps that showed the entire state of Alaska, and various regions. He noticed that the maps were in UTM and Lat/long format. Ron asked Dan about that. “Ron, UTM coordinates are used by the Military and they also work in GPS navigation systems. GPS stands for Global Positioning Satellite. There’s a huge constellation of satellites that orbit the earth and stay over the same spot on the earth. The GPS receiver picks up their radio signals and triangulates your position anywhere on the earth. They make map software that can locate the UTM coordinates of any spot on the map, then all you have to do is enter the UTM coordinates of that spot into your GPS unit as a waypoint, and the unit will tell you which way to go, how close/far you are, and how fast you are going. You can buy a good one for a couple of hundred dollars and have it installed in your plane, including an external antenna. Then all you have to do is enter waypoints for everywhere you travel, and name the waypoints like HOME, Allakaket, Anchorage, etc. Then all you have to do is bring up the way point list, and select the one you want to fly to, and the GPS unit does the rest. A lot of the pilots in Alaska are buying them, because compasses can be seriously inaccurate around here due to the rapidly changing magnetic declination in some parts of Alaska.”

“Thanks Dan, I’ll check on the internet when I get home. I’m definitely going to have some spending money, and it looks like a GPS is a good piece of gear to have.”

Dan tapped a couple of commands on his keyboard, and printed a list of websites, and prices for the best units in his opinion. He also included several different versions of map software that were GPS compatible, and could download maps and waypoints to GPS units. When he finished, he realized it was time to go home, and ushered Ron out of the office, shut the lights off and locked the door. He drove Ron to the hotel, where Ron checked in, checked his guns, and went to dinner. When he came back, he asked the clerk if they had an Internet connection he could use to look up some GPS equipment. She knew he was a pilot, and said it would be OK to use hers. She had to do some paperwork anyway. She let Ron behind the counter, and showed him where the computer was, and in minutes, he was surfing the internet, looking for GPS units. He found several, then noticed the ones that were sold in the Aircraft sites were 3 times the cost of the same portable unit with an external antenna. Ron knew if he could hard-mount the antenna to the roof, he could Velcro the unit to the dash, and connect it to the plane’s power system and have a portable unit so he could take it back and forth to the computer if he needed to download new waypoints. He located several map software programs that said they were compatible with the GPS unit he was thinking about, so he printed up all the information, and told the clerk he was done. She asked him to log off the internet, so he did. He went to bed shortly thereafter, and got up at first light. Bill had already paid his hotel bill, and Ron helped himself to a cinnamon roll and some



coffee, then asked the clerk to call a cab for him. 5 minutes later, a cab pulled up, Ron claimed his checked weapons, and walked to the cab and got in. He asked the driver to drop him off at the FAA building near the airport. The driver dropped him right in front of the FAA building, and he paid the driver, plus a tip, and got out.

Ron saw the light on, and went inside the FAA building. Dan was seated at his desk drinking his first cup of coffee. Ron showed him what he had come up with over the internet, and Dan thought it would be an excellent idea for a light plane. Most of those big GPS units he saw on the Airplane sites were designed for much bigger aircraft. Dan knew the Magellan GPS units took an external antenna, and he was pretty sure one was a hard mount instead of a mag mount. He doubted that a mag-mount antenna would hold up to the top speed of the DeHaviland. He thought he idea of Velcroing the unit to the dash was excellent, and he thought an aircraft mechanic could wire a cigarette lighter plug into the plane's electrical systems easily. The Magellan had a cigarette lighter adapter, and came with a USB cable to connect to a computer to upload and download maps. He knew most of the map software was compatible with the Magellan brand GPS receivers. The only thing Ron needed to decide was how much memory he needed to store maps. If he were just flying around from Anchorage to Allakaket and the vicinity, he could get by with the smallest memory, but if he wanted to travel, he might use the bigger one especially if he wanted to navigate in a foreign city. That point settled it, he had the money now, and he could easily afford the best Magellan unit. For about \$450 plus shipping, he could buy a Magellan color GPS unit that could later be upgraded to 64MB of memory and "World Streets Maps" software to navigate in foreign cities. It came with 16MB of memory, and the US Topo map software, a Cigarette Lighter adapter, swivel mount bracket, and a Titan II remote hard-mount antenna and 15 feet of cable, which would be more than enough to locate the antenna on the roof. The combination would allow him to locate spots on the ground plus or minus 3 feet, and give him real-time data on position, altitude, distance to waypoint, and time to waypoint at current speed. The color display would really come in handy later, if he wanted to use it. The next cheapest unit was only \$50 less, and wouldn't take an external antenna. Ron had guessed correctly that the metal skin of the airplane might attenuate the signal from the GPS satellites. Now all he had to do was convince his parents.

## Chapter 74 - Coming Home

Ron left for Allakaket soon after that, and called the tower when he was close. He received permission to land, and flew straight in, and taxied right up to the pumps and topped off the tanks. The plane mechanic said he would tow it to the hangar, since Bill needed to see him. Ron walked over to Bill's Jeep, and Bill had a big grin on his face. "Ron, the contracts are just rolling in, seems every lodge in the area wants you to fly for them, you're going to be busy for the next couple of weeks. Jim said he wasn't feeling too hot, so you can go ahead and fly them without him. I put \$100 in your account as a bonus for yesterday."

"Thanks Bill. I was talking to Don at the FAA office, and he suggested I get a GPS unit for the plane, not one of those big expensive units they advertise in the airplane sites, but a nice hand held with an external antenna. Magellan makes a color GPS that takes an external antenna, they have a swivel mount to mount it to the dash, and a cigarette lighter adapter. Here, I've got all the info. I'll call you this afternoon if my parents say it's OK."

"Ron, if your parents approve, I'll have the mechanic install the cigarette lighter connection to the electrical system, mount the base and the antenna, and I'll pay his fee, since this will save you a bunch of time, and will make things much safer to boot."

"Thanks Bill, I'll let you know this afternoon."

Ron walked back over to his plane. Since the mechanic hadn't towed it yet, he just turned it around after doing a walk-around, and taxied back out to the lake. While he was setting up to take off again, he called the tower and got permission to take off. When he was at the downwind end of the lake, he turned into the wind, checked the flaps and rudder, and pushed the throttle to full. The lightly loaded plane lifted off smartly at 85 knots, and he cleared the ridge easily. Just over an hour later, he was over his home lake, and turned to land. Landing the lightly loaded plane was a cake walk compared to landing it when it was heavily loaded, and almost had to will it down. Finally the plane landed, and he taxied to the cabin, jumped out and opened the hangar door, and taxied inside. He realized that he should call ahead from now on, and ask his parents to open the hangar door, since getting out with the prop still turning was dangerous, even at idle.

Roy, Anne, and Lucky were still there to greet him, and then he told them all about his experience flying by himself in the big plane. He told them what Dan and Bill said about the GPS. "You know Dad, if Ron Fellows had a GPS unit, none of us would be here."

"How do you figure that Ron?"

"Easy, If he'd programmed the GPS before he left Anchorage with the waypoints and destination of the flight, the computer would have told him where he was all the time, the

bearing and distance to his next waypoint, and his altitude. Even if he got lost in the clouds, GPS reads right through clouds, and he would have known right where he was, and could easily have corrected his course. He would have flown right to the caribou camp, and not wound up lost way off course. Best of all, they only cost \$500, and Bill said he'd pay for the installation. Bill gave me a \$100 bonus today, so I made \$600 or more on this flight, after paying all my expenses. Bill said every lodge in the area wants me to fly for them - the word is getting around fast."

"Ok Ron, sounds like a good investment."

"Great, I need to call Bill so he can order it, and have the mechanic install it."

Ron walked to the radio. "Bill, this is Ron, go ahead and order it. Let me know when you need the plane to install it."

"Roger Ron, will let you know when it's in. You've got a cargo flight tomorrow, so get here at 0800, since you need to fly to Anchorage."

"Bill, I've got enough fuel to make Anchorage easily, flying direct from here will save me several hours, any reason I need to stop in Allakaket?"

"Negative, just remembered Jim didn't feel like flying. OK, call me when you're in the air tomorrow morning."

"Roger, over and out."

Ron set his watch alarm for 0700, so he'd have plenty of time to get up, get dressed, pre-flight the plane, and be wheels-up by 0800 bound for Anchorage.

He spent the rest of the day chopping wood, since Roy had taken over the gardening and other non-strenuous stuff. He still enjoyed fishing, and they had fish for dinner 2-3 nights a week. Ron knew they had several months yet before they needed to hunt. He thought what a BMG-50 would do to a Caribou - probably turn it into hamburger. Guess he still was going to hunt with the .308. Ron wondered where he had deliveries tomorrow. He wondered if he would get to see Samantha. He wondered what she was like when she wasn't trying to kiss his lips off. Ron thought he had better concentrate on the task at hand, since he was splitting wood, and wanted to keep all his extremities. Later that afternoon, he finished his chores, and joined his Dad to spend some time fishing. They walked down to the lake, and after they had cast their lines in the water and sat down, Roy turned to Ron and had one of those "Father and Son moments".

"Ron, I'm so proud of you, you've become a man in a short time, I'm glad you haven't let any of this go to your head, and you seem to be growing up and maturing. Your Mom and I

pray nightly that God would watch over and guide you, and I know he has. I don't know how much longer I have, but I'm really glad I was able to be around to see you grow up. I just wish it wasn't so fast or suddenly, but things happen. I'm pleased you've been able to handle the extra responsibility. Jim says you've done very well flying the plane by yourself. Just promise me you'll be careful. Remember, there are old pilots, and bold pilots, but few old bold pilots."

"Dad, that's one of my favorite sayings. That's why I didn't try to fly home last night. I had enough light to make it, but what if I ran into a headwind, or a mechanical complication. It was far safer to remain where I was, and fly home the next day. Besides, I ran into Dan, and he was the one that told me about the GPS receivers and software. They have topo maps of the entire US on CD-ROMs, and I can download the entire state of Alaska into my GPS, and mark all my destinations as waypoints, and I can fly point to point, saving gas and time, since it tells me how far to my next waypoint, so I don't waste fuel climbing higher than I need to, and I can start descending right when I need to. Also this way, I don't have to use landmarks to navigate with, and can fly point to point, shaving time and miles off my routes. The altitude function will double check my altimeter, since it's vulnerable to weather-related fluctuations."

"Wow, I didn't realize they did all that."

"I'm still carrying my compasses, since if the batteries die, there goes your gizmo."

Roy thought "Smart Kid."

They caught several large fish, and Ron helped Roy clean and skin them, and Anne fried a couple for dinner. Roy smoked the rest. Ron thought of something, and called Bill.

"Bill, this is Ron - do you read me?"

"Still here, just about to pack it in for the night."

"Can you change my order for me, and add the NiMh battery pack to the order. I thought if the batteries were rechargeable, the Cigarette Lighter could charge the batteries, and keep them charged overnight when I wasn't using it, and in the event of an emergency if I had to leave the plane, I'd have a fresh set of batteries in it. I'll carry a set of spares in my emergency kit, but the NiMh batteries sound like a good idea."

"Ron, you're lucky, I haven't ordered it yet, I was going to do that in a few minutes. I'll see if they can throw in a case for it, so you can carry it on you if you need to."

"Thanks Bill. I intend to be wheels up tomorrow at 0800 headed for Anchorage, so I should be there around 11:00 tomorrow."

“OK, I’ll tell the delivery driver to expect you around 1100 tomorrow, could you still call me tomorrow when you take off?”

“Sure, I’ll call you when I’m at altitude so the radio reaches further.”

“Ron, you should be able to reach Allakaket from the ground, you’re radio is more powerful than the one in the cabin, and it’s got a better antenna.”

“OK, thanks for the info, Bill. I’ll call you while I’m warming up then.”

“Roger, out.”

Ron turned off the radio, took out the charger, and spent the next half hour cranking the generator to ensure the battery had a full charge. When it was fully charged, Ron switched the radio back to standby, which would save a ton of power, but let them listen to the radio. When he was finished, Anne said that dinner was ready, so he washed his hands, then sat down to eat. After dinner, he studied his medical books, and went to bed.

His alarm went off at 0700 the next day, and he got dressed quickly, and Anne had packed a thermos of hot coffee and sandwiches, since he didn’t have time for breakfast. He kissed his mom, and Roy prayed with him, then he was out the door. It was cold, so he was glad he was wearing his jacket over his shoulder holster and fanny pack. He opened the roll-up doors, and using his flashlight, did a walk around, then climbed aboard, started the engine to let it warm up while he checked gauges and switches. At 7:45, he bumped the throttle out of idle, and taxied slowly to the lake. Once he was clear of the house, he switched to Bill’s frequency and keyed the mike. “Bill, this is Ron, I’m taxiing to the lake, and should be airborne at 0800 en route to Anchorage.”

“Roger, Ron have a good flight, see you later. Over and out.”

Ron switched the radio back to Allakaket Control, since it was the only frequency in the area that was always monitored. His radio had a GUARD setting, but he didn’t have enough power to hit Anchorage from here, so the Guard frequency was only useful when he was in range. He thought he should replace the radio with one more powerful, but that would cost thousands of dollars, and this one worked fine. He taxied onto the lake, and headed downwind while he set the plane up to take off. Since he was lightly loaded, he set the flaps to 20%, and set the rudder to compensate for the engine’s torque. When he reached the end of the lake, he turned upwind, made a quick sweep of all his gauges, and pushed the throttle to full. At 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, and he was flying. He turned southwest to Anchorage, and 2 hours later, entered the ATC, so he called Anchorage Control to ask for landing instructions. The controller recognized his tail number, and gave him a straight in vector, since the pattern was empty. When he had the runway in sight, he called “Final” and set the flaps to full, and reduced throttle. He remembered to maintain no more than a 20

degree nose-up attitude, and to deploy the landing gear. When he was over the runway threshold, he chopped the throttle, and floated down to a perfect touchdown, then set the nose down gently. He stayed off the brakes until he came to the end of the runway, and turned to taxi to the ramp where the delivery truck met him last time.

He saw the truck, and stopped next to it. Evidently they were expecting him, since no one asked “Where’s Jim”. He helped them load the plane, and checked each item off the packing list as it went in, and made sure the load was balanced front to rear and left to right. He had a second list showing who ordered what, so he could deliver their orders. He saw Samantha’s family on the list, and knew he could visit her today. He noticed the list of deliveries was short, and most of them were on this end of his route. Thinking fast, he worked out a route where he could deliver everything but Samantha’s house, fill up in Allakaket, and stop at Samantha’s on the way home. It would save a ton of gas, and it would allow him to spend the maximum time at her place. He was wondering why he wanted to spend so much time at her place when he realized that the plane was loaded, and they were waiting on him. He made a show of checking the list to get his head out of the clouds, and realizing it was all there, signed the packing list and gave them a carbon. He kept the original for Bill, and the delivery list for his use. He made sure the doors were locked, did a quick walk-around, and taxied over to the fuel depot, where he filled his tanks as full as he could. All of his deliveries except Sam’s place were off a direct-line route to Allakaket, so it would be a piece of cake. Once everything was secured, he taxied to the runway, and called for permission to take off. He was heavy but not overloaded, so he left the flaps at 20 percent, and when he received permission, turned onto the active runway, called “Rolling”, and pushed the throttle to max. It took a while to reach 85 knots, but he had 3 times the runway he needed, so he didn’t sweat it. When it finally reached 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, and he was flying. He cruise climbed back to 2,000 feet, and 2 hours later, spotted his first delivery.

He turned so he was lined up for landing, and kissed the water with hardly any splash. He spotted the cabin right off the lake, and carefully transitioned to the land, then taxied up to their house. It was a younger family with 3 kids, and Ron noticed most of the order was diapers and baby stuff, evidently they still had kids young enough to be in diapers. They helped him unload, and thanked him. He climbed back in the plane, taxied back out, and turned upwind while setting the plane up to take off again. Since the next place was right over the ridge, he’d just climb out to 500 feet above ground level, and be ready to land as soon as he got up. He went to full throttle, and was soon flying. He spotted his next delivery right over the ridge, and chopped the throttle to land while cranking the flaps out to full. The next landing was as smooth as the first, and they only ordered a few cases of canned food, so it only took less than ½ hour to unload and turn around. His next delivery was about 20 miles away, so he thought he should climb a little higher, maybe 1,000 feet AGL, but no higher. He taxied to the end of the lake, and turned upwind while setting up for take-off. He turned into the wind and shoved the throttle to full, and as soon as he was 500 feet AGL, he turned to his new heading. He let the plane slowly climb to 1,000 feet, and

soon he spotted his next delivery. He cranked the flaps out, and cut the throttle to land, and was 3 for 3 on perfect landings. They took 2/3 of what was left in the plane, and he was back in the air within 45 minutes, winging to Allakaket.

He called Allakaket Control and requested landing permission. He landed, taxied to the fuel pumps, filled the tanks, checked the oil, washed the windows, and did a walk-around. When everything was full, he secured the caps, taxied out to the lake, and turned upwind when he reached the end of the lake. He set the throttle to full, and was flying sooner than he expected. He pulled the yoke back, and cleared the ridge easily. He made a bee-line for Samantha's house, and an hour later, he spotted their lake. He noticed a slight cross-breeze, so when he set up to land, turned slightly into the breeze so he wouldn't be blown off course. He made a perfect landing, and coasted up to their cabin. Samantha was waiting for him on the porch. As soon as the propeller stopped, and he opened the door, he didn't even have a chance to catch his breath and say HI when Samantha laid a rather passionate kiss on him. This time he didn't resist, but he didn't encourage her either. He did think she was a really good kisser when she finally came up for air - which coincided with her mom arriving on the porch and coughing. The two of them unloaded the plane, and Ron saw Sam's dad Steve cleaning his guns. He had a beautiful Colt 1911 Officer's gun that he had disassembled, and was ready to clean. Sitting down, Ron asked "Mind if I help?"

Steve looked at Ron, and saw the hardware he was packing. "That's a mighty nice .44 Magnum you're packing, mind if I look at it?"

Ron eased it out of the holster, being careful where he pointed the barrel, and opened the crane, dumped the rounds into his hand, and handed the gun barrel down, and crane open to Steve. Steve was impressed with Ron's gun handling knowledge. He'd never trust Samantha with a cannon like that. He got a good look at it, and noticed it was a Colt Anaconda, one of the preferred guns for guides out here. "Ron, do you guide as well as fly?"

"Not yet sir, My Dad came up here about 16 years ago, and Ron Fellows was his guide. He told him to pack a gun just like this since he'd need it if he ran into any bears while he was hunting. When he married my mom, and she moved into his cabin at the HelpmeJacks, he gave her one just like it. A couple of years ago, I lost a dog when he saved me from a bear attack. All I had was this .22 pistol, but I emptied every round I had into that damned bear to save my dog, but he bled to death before we could stop the bleeding. My dad realized I needed something more powerful than a .22 if I was going to live up here, and the gunsmith said I might as well learn to shoot the .44 Magnum, since a .357 might not do the job, and the heavier gun was easier to shoot. So I learned to shoot my Mom's gun with some light loads he made up. After a couple of boxes, I graduated to the full-house rounds I'm carrying now."

"You went toe to toe with a bear armed with only a .22 pistol?"

“Steve, I had to try and save my dog. I hoped I’d get a lucky hit and kill it, I did, but not before that damned bear killed my dog.”

Steve realized Ron was a really special kid. He had raw courage, brains, and a whole lot of self-control. He saw the end of that kiss Samantha laid on him, and Ron’s reaction. He definitely enjoyed it, but wasn’t encouraging her to continue.

“Ron, what are your intentions with my daughter?”

“Steve, I don’t understand?”

“Samantha is boy-crazy, and it seems you’re the only boy around here even close to her age. I saw that kiss she laid on you, and I’m amazed at your self-control. She gets her passion from her Mom.”

“Steve, I really just want to be her friend, I’m planning on going to the Air Force Academy at 17 and a half. My uncle Steve and his General have already greased the skids for me to enter the academy. I want to be a fighter pilot, and I won’t do anything to jeopardize that. I told Jim that I wanted to be friends with Samantha, and Jim said that if Samantha had her way, more like kissing cousins.”

Steve practically fell off his chair laughing. “I can live with that.”

They finished cleaning his guns, and Steve handed Ron back his Colt Anaconda. Mary asked Ron if he wanted to stay for lunch. He said he could, since he was finished with his deliveries. Samantha heard the good news, and took him outside to try and land another lip lock on him. Ron was stronger than her, and held her at arms length.

“Sam, I like you a lot, but you’re going to have to cool it. I don’t want this to go any further physically. I’m going to be here until I’m almost 18, and I really need a friend my own age. I don’t mind kissing you, but I’m afraid you might want more. I can’t screw up my chances to get in the Air Force Academy, My parents and my uncle would kill me.”

Samantha acted all hurt and disappointed, but she got over it quick, and gave him a kiss just to prove it.

“Ron, I heard you tell my Dad you killed a bear with only a .22 pistol?”

“Well if you heard that, you heard the rest of the story. My favorite dog died in the process of saving me, and I was trying to kill the bear before it killed my dog.”

“Still I think you’re pretty brave, and cute too.”



“Cool your jets Sam.”

“I like the way you say my name - my Dad calls me Samantha.”

“I hate to tell you, but my dog’s name was Sam. I still miss him.”

Ron looked like he was going to cry, so Sam did what women did the world over when their men were about to loose it emotionally, she held him and let him cry on her shoulder. Mary saw the extended clinch, then saw Ron’s shoulders shaking, and knew what was going on, so she went back in the house. Finally when Ron stopped crying, he dried his eyes, and Sam’s beautiful face was staring into his eyes. He said “Thanks Sam” and gave her a kiss, which she enthusiastically returned. Mary came out of the house just then, and said “Lunch is ready.”, so Sam broke the clinch reluctantly, and walked hand in hand with Ron into the house.

Steve saw this and said “I see you two have made friends.” Mary thought “Better friends than you might imagine Steve.” and hoped Sam could keep her hormones in check. She knew Ron had a lot of self-control by the way he broke that first clinch when Sam grabbed him like a python and laid a major kiss on him. She knew Ron was going to need his self-control around her very passionate daughter. They sat down for lunch, and Steve said grace. Sam sat next to Ron, and looked like she would have sat in Ron’s lap if she could have. Steve decided to ignore his daughter’s behavior since Ron obviously seemed uncomfortable with her behavior in front of her parents. “I’ll let this one live” thought Steve.

## Chapter 75 - Back Home Again

After lunch, Sam dragged Ron out on the porch to “talk”. As soon as she was out of the view of her parents, she tried to hug the stuffing out of Ron and perform a Tonsillectomy on him with her tongue. She managed to dart her tongue past his teeth, when he firmly but politely pushed her away by the shoulders.

“Sam, I wasn’t kidding. Cool your Jets, I’m not going anywhere for a while.”

Sam sat back in the porch swing with a huff. Ron slid his right arm around her shoulder and said “Tell me about yourself.”

She said, “What’s to tell, I live in a boring house in the most boring state in the United States. I meet a hunk, and he’s either Gay or really not interested.”

“Sam, just because I’m not attacking you doesn’t mean I’m not interested. I happen to think you’re beautiful and one heck of a good kisser. I’m as straight as the next guy, it’s just you’re moving too fast for me. I’m going to go to the Academy, and I’m not going to let anything stand in the way. You know, I told Jim I just wanted to be your friend, and he said that if you had your way, I’d be more like a kissing cousin. I’ve got no problems kissing and holding you, but it’s got to stop there. Besides that, if I went further than that, if your Dad didn’t kill me, mine would.”

Sam turned her shoulder to kiss Ron, and this time she kept her tongue to herself, and Ron didn’t resist, but didn’t encourage her to go further either. When she got it out of her system, and realized that Ron wasn’t kidding, she came up for air.

“OK, Ron, we’ll try it your way - it’s just in all the movies I’ve seen, the first thing you do when you meet a guy is jump in bed with them. I thought that’s what you wanted.”

“Sam, that’s Hollywood. This is real life. I like you a lot, and want to be your friend, and you don’t have to throw yourself at me to make me like you. Now why don’t you tell me what you like to do? Do you like to fish or hunt?”

I like fishing, but I hate having to skin and gut caribou - that stinks.”

“I know what you mean - last year I had to skin and gut 3 caribou by myself. Do you do any recreational shooting or anything?”

“Dad won’t let me have my own gun, and he does all the shooting when we hunt.”

“OK, maybe I’ll ask him if I can teach you to shoot my .22 pistol.”

“Really, I’d love that.”

“Read any good books lately?”

“Just my textbooks, Dad won’t let me have any romance novels, said I don’t need any ideas.”

“Ever heard of Louis L’Amour?”

“Who’s that?”

“He wrote a whole bunch of westerns, and a couple of books set in different areas. One was set in Siberia, and is a survival story about an escaped POW from the US who survived for years in Siberia. You might want to read some Jack London, and other authors. They won’t give you any “ideas”, and they’re fun to read, and you can learn something from them.”

“I’ll ask my Dad about them later.”

“Shoot.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I’ve got chores to do at home, if I don’t get home before dark, my Dad’s going to be mad at me, and I might not be able to come back for a while.”

“In that case you better go.” Sam gave Ron a big wet kiss, and grabbed his butt. Ron left his hands safely around the small of her back. When she finally came up for air, Ron said, “I gotta go.” and walked into the kitchen to say goodbye to Steve and Mary.

“I’ve got to go home and get my chores done. Thanks for lunch.” They waved goodbye to Ron, who got into his plane as quickly as possible while avoiding Sam’s attempts to suck his lips off. Once he was in the plane, he breathed a sigh of relief, then realized he was breathing harder than he ever had, and his heart was racing. He looked over at Samantha, and realized why - she was a hottie. Once he got his breathing under control, he started the ignition, and performed a pre-flight check. When the engine had warmed up, and his pulse had returned to normal, he turned the plane, and taxied to the lake. By the time he had reached the end of the lake, he was concentrating on flying, and not on Sam. He quickly set the plane up to take off, and when he turned upwind, pushed the throttle to full. When the airspeed indicator indicated 85 knots, he pulled the yoke back, and was airborne. He turned for home, and slowly climbed to 1,000 feet. When he got close to home, he switched frequencies to call home, and asked his dad to open the hangar doors for him. Roy said he’d go do it now, and ended the call. Ron hoped he wasn’t in too much trouble. Ron concentrated on his flying, and made a perfect landing. When he taxied up to the hangar, he

could see his Mom, Dad and Lucky waiting for him. He parked the plane in the hangar, shut off the motor, turned off the fuel and battery switches, and closed the door. He hadn't made it 20 feet to the cabin when he heard his Mother's dreaded words "Ron Williams, where have you been - we've been worried sick about you."

"Mom, I'm really sorry, I was over at Samantha's house making a delivery, and they invited me for lunch, and I lost track of time. I'm sorry."

Ron walked up to his mom, who decided she could be mad at him later, and gave him a big hug. Roy joined in, and they both started crying. It deeply affected Ron to know how worried his parents were, and how upset they were at him for not telling them where he was.

"Mom, Dad, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. I promise from now on if I stay over anywhere, I'll call you on the radio and tell you, so you won't worry about me."

Roy spoke up. "We called Bill, who told us of your route. We frantically called everyone on your route until Steve Morris told us you had just left half an hour ago. He also gave me the blow by blow description of your date with Samantha. He said you were a complete gentleman, but I'm still mad at you - Let's go outside and talk man to man."

Ron was still wearing his shoulder holster, and Roy put his on as well, and added a jacket since it was getting cold. Lucky was miffed since he didn't get to play with Ron, so he decided to tag along. They walked silently to the lake, Ron was dreading what his Dad wanted to say, when Lucky stopped dead in his tracks and growled. Roy and Ron both pivoted and faced the same direction Lucky was, and saw a huge bear not more than 30 yards away, and it appeared that it was about to charge. Both men drew and fired at the same time, and the bear almost flipped over backward, and landed in a heap. Keeping their guns pointed at the bear, they both quickly sidestepped to their left and right, so they could cover each other, and approached the bear. The bear was down and not moving, so Roy told Ron to stay where he was, and point his pistol at the ground in front of him, and don't cover Roy with his muzzle. Roy approached the bear from the right, and nudged it with his boot - it was deader than a doorknob. Roy relaxed, and re-holstered his gun. Seeing this, Ron holstered his gun as well. Roy walked over to Ron and said "Thank you son - I'm proud of you for backing me up and doing everything right - even a wounded bear can still kill you. About this afternoon, you know how I feel about pre-marital sex, and I think you know what would happen if you disappointed me with this girl."

"Dad, relax, I have no intentions of doing anything more than kissing Sam. She's a really good kisser, but I'm not going to let anything get in the way of my going to the Air Force Academy. I just wanted to be friends with her, but she's a 16 year-old boy-crazy girl. I think I talked some sense into her. If you want, I won't see her again."

"Ron, that's not necessary - I trust you, and will take you on your word. Please call us if you

are planning on stopping there again, and call us when you leave. All you have to say is you're at Sam's, and call us when you're wheels up on the way home, OK."

"Sure Dad, I can do that - thanks for trusting me. What do you want to do with this bear?"

"Let's skin it, and can the meat."

"Glad we shot it in the chest. 2 .44 Magnum JHP rounds to the head would have ruined the brain for brain tanning."

They walked back together to the cabin, told Anne what had happened, and Ron grabbed the cart and the harness to pull it home. Together they managed to get the bear onto the cart, and Ron slipped into the harness and lifted the cart, while Roy pushed from behind. An hour later, they made it home just as it was getting dark. Roy said it was too dark to butcher the bear tonight, so they wheeled it into the smokehouse for the night. Anne had dinner ready, and they ate quietly after Roy said grace. After dinner, Roy told Anne how they had killed the bear. When they got the bear onto the cart, they could see 2 bullet holes in the chest, and no exit wound. Judging from the location of the entry wound, it looked like both of them shot the bear in the heart/lung region, destroying the heart and shredding the lungs. Ron spent the rest of the evening studying his medical books, and got to sleep early. Bill had a habit of springing short-notice flights on him early in the morning. Bill never called, so they skinned and gutted the bear after breakfast. When they finished, Ron saw something strange, a female wolf he had never seen before, and she walked right up to Lucky like she knew him, and Lucky shared his food with her.

"I see you two haven't been introduced. Star this is Ron, Ron, this is Lucky's girlfriend Star. I think she's one of Francine and Oliver's descendants. She and Lucky have been hanging out together for the last week. It seems you're not the only one with a new girlfriend."

"Well I see Lucky is living up to his name. How old do you think she is?"

"My best guess is 12-18 months, since if she were older than that, she would already have mated, and not be interested in Lucky. Since he isn't fixed, there's a good chance they might have a litter of pups in the near future."

"Dad, I didn't know dogs and wolves could interbreed?"

"It doesn't happen very often, but genetically they're almost identical, and the offspring would be fertile, unlike a mule, which is a cross between a donkey and a horse. They can mate, but the cross is sterile.

"Cool, so does that mean we'll be raising wolf pups?"

“Probably not, Star is a wild wolf, and would prefer a den to a house. I’m not sure how Lucky will provide for them, since he’s a domestic dog, and isn’t used to hunting. Maybe Star will wise up and mate with a wild wolf.”

Ron got right to his chores, and started cutting and hauling wood. Since they were cutting further and further away from the cabin, the hauling part became a bigger and bigger job. Ron wished they had an ATV to haul stuff. He could stack 3-4 logs on the dollies, and connect it to the towing hitch of the ATV, and use horsepower instead of Ron power to pull the logs. It was like using a chainsaw instead of an axe or buck saw. “No use complaining” thought Ron. He should be glad he had a chainsaw, or this would really be a bear. He spent the rest of the day cutting, hauling, chopping, and stacking wood. He was glad when his Mom told him dinner was ready, he was about ready to drop with fatigue. Right after dinner, Bill called, he had some more hunters to be picked up in Anchorage and flown to their lodge. Bill gave him the coordinates and the name of the lake, and Ron looked it up on his topo maps. When he located the lake, he took bearings from Anchorage and his lake, then wrote those bearings down. He would be glad when Bill called and told him his GPS was in - it would make planning trips much easier. All he’d have to do is locate the spots on the Topo maps included in the package on his computer, and transfer the data to his GPS unit. He told his parents he was flying hunters first thing tomorrow, and they said they’d take care of things on this end. Ron remembered to set his watch alarm again, since he was flying direct from his house to Anchorage. This would be an easy trip, since the lodge was between Allakaket and Anchorage, and he needed to stop in Allakaket on the way home to fuel up anyway. He went to bed early, since he had to be up before 0700 to be wheels up at 0800. Lucky had already sacked out next to his bed on his bearskin rug. Ron wondered what they’d do with the new bearskin. They didn’t have any room for another one, since all the available floor space near the beds already had bearskins on them, and both beds had caribou and bear skins to put over them for those really cold Alaskan nights. He thought Samantha might want one, but he’d have to ask his dad first, then Steve. It would be a real good idea to make sure Steve was OK with it before giving Samantha such a valuable gift. He went to bed thinking of Samantha, instead of flying or the Academy for the first time in his life.

His alarm went off at 0700 the next morning, and he got dressed quickly since it was cold in there. 5 minutes later, his mom knocked on the door, and asked if he had time for breakfast. Ron knew his mom could have the stove hot in 5 minutes, and she’d need to get the stove hot to make coffee anyway, so all it would take was an extra 5 minutes to make oatmeal. Ron said “Sure Mom, I’d love some oatmeal for breakfast. Could you make me some coffee too? I’m sure Dad would like some. Anne started the fire in the stove, and put the water on for the coffee and oatmeal. Ron walked over to his Mom, who turned around and leaned down so he could reach her cheek, so he gave his mom a kiss on the cheek. Until the other day, she was the only woman he had kissed. Ron felt confused, since he loved his mom, but didn’t feel the way he felt when Sam kissed him. Taking a chance, he decided to ask his Mom.

“Mom, I don’t understand something. Until yesterday, you were the only woman I kissed, yet when I kiss Sam, my heart races and I feel different - what’s happening?”

“Ron when you kiss me on the cheek, it’s affectionate, but not sexual. When you kiss Sam, there’s an undeniable sexual component to it. You’ve gone through puberty and read all about the biological responses to sexual arousal. What you’re experiencing with Sam is sexual arousal. It’s normal, but you need to keep it under control, or you might do something you might regret later.”

“By that, I can assume you’re talking about pre-marital sex.”

“Exactly Ron. Sex is great, don’t get me wrong, but its best with a marriage partner you’ve committed the rest of your life to. Every time you have sex, or make love to someone, you give a piece of yourself away that you never get back. The reason God ordained sex between a husband and wife is that relationship is special, and a once-in-a lifetime opportunity to become one with someone else. Having sex before marriage damages God’s plan for us to mate with one person for life.”

“What about Dad, he was married to Susan before you met, and I’ve got 2 half-brothers.”

“Ron, that’s different. Your Dad was married to Susan, he had two sons with her, and he loved her even after she died of cancer. He didn’t meet me until years later. Even when we were dating, we never went any further than kissing, although I wanted to.”

“Mom. I never thought of you being sexually aggressive.”

“Lots of women are - like Samantha. You are going to need every ounce of self-control you can muster not to give in to her sexual urges.”

“I know what you mean - the other day she tried to give me a tonsillectomy with her tongue, and when I had to leave, she grabbed my butt when she kissed me goodbye.”

“Ron that was a little more information than I needed, but I appreciate your honesty. Please spare me the details next time. If you notice, neither one of us discusses the intimate details of what happens between your father and I. Some things are meant to be private.”

“Sorry Mom. You need to rescue breakfast, the water’s boiling.”

Anne walked over to the stove, added the coffee and the oatmeal to the appropriate containers, and 5 minutes later breakfast was ready. They all sat down for a quick breakfast, and when he was finished, Ron stood and got ready to leave. Anne gave him a kiss, and Roy prayed with Ron for a minute. Ron grabbed his jacket and walked quickly out the door. He rolled the hangar door up, and did a quick walk-around, then climbed into the pilot’s seat.

Once he got the engine warmed up, he taxied to the lake, and gave Bill a quick call, telling him he was en route to Anchorage, and should be there by 1100. Bill told him which gate to expect the hunters at, and signed off. Ron configured the plane for take-off, and by the time he was at the downwind end of the lake, he was ready to fly. He turned upwind, and pushed the throttle to full, and watched the airspeed indicator. He pulled back on the yoke when it read 85 knots, and climbed until he was 500 feet AGL, then turned for Anchorage and cruise climbed to 2,000 feet. He arrived at the TCA, and called the tower. Since it was early in the morning, the traffic pattern was empty, and they gave him a straight-in approach. 15 minutes later he was on the ground and taxiing to the correct gate. He saw 3 middle-aged hunters standing there with a skycap to load their baggage. He coasted to a stop, shut down the engine and got out. Someone at the lodge must have told them to expect a young pilot, because no one said anything. He introduced himself, and shook their hands, then helped the skycap load the plane. He asked if anyone wanted to ride in front, and found out one of the hunters was a private pilot, so he volunteered. Ron taxied over to the fuel depot, and filled up, then called the tower for take-off clearance. They said he was #2 for take-off on the same runway he had landed on. He set the flaps and rudder while he taxied. And when he reached the end of the runway, called the tower again, and was given immediate clearance. He replied "Rolling" and advanced the throttle to full. Halfway down the runway, his airspeed indicator said 85 knots, and he pulled back on the yoke, and held it until he was 500 feet up, then set up for a cruise climb to his assigned altitude. Once he was straight and level at altitude, the hunter in the front passenger seat complimented him. "That was one of the smoothest take-offs I'd seen in a while, you just seemed to float off the runway."

"Most of it was the plane. This DeHaviland Otter is a very forgiving plane compared to the Cessna 185 Amphibian I learned on."

"You learned on an Amphibian?"

"Not many paved runways in Alaska. This is about it - any where else, you're either landing on a private dirt strip, or on water."

"Man, compared to you I had it easy. Long asphalt runways and no altitude restrictions on approach. The lodge told us you recently got your Commercial ticket, and you never held a Private Pilot license before."

"I was studying with my Grandpa for my license when he became medically disabled and couldn't fly commercial. The FAA director in Anchorage is a friend of his, and we went a couple of weeks ago to get my license. He saw my landing, and waived the check ride. I've got dozens of water landings and takeoffs under my belt, including at least a dozen on our home lake, which is so small it's just barely big enough to safely land and take off with the Otter. Don't worry; the lake your lodge is on is big enough to land a 747 if it were an amphibian."



“Glad to know that - I’d hate to make a steep approach to a small lake, knowing you didn’t get a second chance.”

“But it’s amazing what it does for your powers of concentration.”

While they were talking shop, the hunters in back were marveling at the scenery. An hour later, Ron spotted their lake, and pointed it out to the private pilot who said “It looks awfully small from here.”

“It will get bigger as we get closer.”

Ron set the plane up for landing, noticing the slight cross-breeze, he turned the nose into the wind, and set the flaps for max. Pushing in the throttle he said “Going down.”

The plane sunk to the lake like it was floating under a parachute, and Ron made a perfect water landing, and coasted to the dock, where someone was waiting to offload the passengers and cargo. He slipped a rope around the front cleat of the pontoon, and grabbed the back one as it came close enough. Ron turned off the engine, and said “Thanks for flying Allakaket Airlines.” When they had deplaned, the private pilot turned back into the plane and said “Here you earned this” and handed him a \$100 bill. Ron stammered “Thanks” before the hunter walked onto the dock and closed the door. The dock worker closed the back door when he had unloaded their gear, and closed then locked the door, and knocked on the door to tell Ron he was good to go. He unhooked the ropes holding him to the dock, and pushed him off with a pole. When he was far enough away, Ron started the motor, and taxied to the downwind end of the lake. Turning upwind, he quickly configured the plane for takeoff, and pushed the throttle to full. Minutes later, he was almost out of sight. He turned to approach Allakaket, and called the tower when he got close. He nailed the landing, and taxied up to the fuel pumps. While he was filling up, Bill drove up.

“Well Ron, you did it again - another satisfied customer.”

“Bill, the hunter in the front was a Private Pilot, and he gave me a \$100 tip.”

“Ron, he’s a Neurosurgeon, and he can afford it. He was really impressed with your flying skills, and was talking you up to the lodge owners. He couldn’t believe someone your age could be such a good pilot.”

“Any word on the GPS system?”

“Should be here in a couple of days. You can probably pick it up in Anchorage when you drop these guys off 3 days from today.”

“That’s a lot of money to spend on a 3-day hunting trip.”

“They take a week every year and come up here and hunt. If you keep this up, you’ll be so busy flying hunters during hunting season that you’ll wish you were twins.”

When Ron finished filling his tanks, Bill said Goodbye and got in his Jeep. Ron got back in the plane, and turned it around to taxi out to the lake and take off. 2 hours later he was back home again. He called when he was about 10 minutes out, and asked his Dad to open the hangar for him. When he got home, Roy told him Samantha had called, and wanted to know when he was coming over again.

## Chapter 76 - The Date

When they got inside the cabin, Ron asked his Dad what he wanted to do with the bearskin. "I haven't thought that far ahead yet Ron."

"Dad, is it ok if I give it to Samantha? I noticed they didn't have any rugs in their house. Maybe they're in an area that doesn't have a lot of bears?"

"Ok, Ron, just make sure it's OK with her Dad."

"Thanks Dad. Ok, guess what, one of the hunters I flew to their lodge was a private pilot and a neurosurgeon, and he gave me a \$100 tip, and when I landed in Allakaket, Bill told me that he couldn't stop talking about what a great pilot I was. Bill said that if that kept up, I'd be so busy during hunting season that I would wish I were twins."

"That's great Ron, just don't let it go to your head, and please be careful, because it can all end in an eye blink. Ron Fellows was a good pilot, and one little mistake cost his life, and almost mine."

"I know Dad, I'm very careful."

"You know Son, every time you get in that airplane, I don't know if you're coming back, so I just put it in God's hands."

"Dad, he'll take care of me either way. Don't worry about me."

Roy gave his son a big hug, then turned to go work in the garden with Anne.

When they left, Ron took that opportunity to call Samantha's house. She was surprised when he asked to talk to her Dad.

"Hi, this is Ron Williams. Steve, I need to ask you a question and a favor."

"Go ahead."

"Ok, first of all, I feel funny calling you by your first name - can I call you by your last name?"

"I'd appreciate that Ron. My last name is Stone."

"Thank you Mr. Stone. OK, here goes. We shot a bear the other day that was attacking us, and we already have more bearskins than we can use. I wanted to give it to Samantha since

we can't legally sell them. I noticed you didn't have any bearskin rugs, and assumed you didn't have any bears around there."

"Ron, you're right, I've never seen a bear around here in the 20 years I've lived here. I think giving us the skin is a nice gesture, and I'm assuming there are no strings attached."

"No sir, I just wanted to give it to Samantha - we're just friends remember?"

"Ok, anything else?"

"I asked Samantha if she'd like to learn to shoot my .22 pistol, and I told her I had to ask your permission first, besides it would give us something else to do when I was there."

Steve was quick on the uptake, and realized if Samantha was holding a pistol, she couldn't be squeezing Ron's butt.

"OK Ron, I think that's a good idea. Samantha also likes fishing too."

"Great, can I talk to Samantha now, Mr. Stone?"

"Hi Ron. I wondered what was taking so long."

"I just had to get your Dad's permission to teach you to shoot my .22 pistol. I need to check with Bill and see what my flying schedule will be in the next couple of days. Can I call you right back?"

"Don't keep me waiting - Bye Sweetie."

Ron called Bill next "Bill, its Ron, what's my schedule like for the next couple of days?"

"As far as I know, all you have is the return trip from the lodge you dropped off today in 3 days. Why, you got a hot date?"

"Not Funny Bill."

"Sorry Ron, just kidding - your schedule is wide open for the next couple of days. If anything changes, I'll call you."

"OK, if you need me tomorrow, talk to my Dad, he'll know where to reach me. If it's an emergency, he can get hold of me."

"Ok Ron, Have fun."

Ron shook his head - you had no privacy with 2 -way radios. It was worse than living in a small town, everyone knew your business.

He called Samantha “Sam, I’ll be over at 0900 tomorrow, OK?”

“I can’t wait - see you later.”

Ron was glad she didn’t call him Sweetie over the radio again, maybe her father was sitting there.

Ron asked his Dad if he could take a brick of CCI Min-mags over to Samantha’s tomorrow. Roy said it was OK with him. Ron went and checked on the Bearskin. It had already been brain-tanned and washed, and was almost dry. By tomorrow morning, it would be perfect. The only flaw with the skin was the 2 bullet holes in the middle of the skin. Ron hoped Samantha would like it. He remembered Samantha probably didn’t have eye protection either, and asked Anne if he could borrow hers. She said OK, and Ron added them to the pile of stuff he was going to bring over to Sam’s. When he finished, he got on his safety gear, and went to cut some more wood. He spent the rest of the day cutting, hauling and splitting wood, and stacking the stuff he split the other day. In a couple of weeks, they needed to hunt caribou to replace their meat supply. Since Roy wasn’t eating as much red meat now, they should be able to get by with 2 caribou instead of 3. Ron was glad, since that 3<sup>rd</sup> caribou made it tough to haul it all home. When Anne called him in for dinner, he was more than ready to call it quits. After dinner, he took a bath and started studying his books were he had left off. He remembered he needed targets to shoot at, and they had a bunch of old coffee cans they weren’t using for anything, since all their bear grease was in jars. He asked his Mom if he could take several of them. She said to go ahead and take all of them, they were just taking up room, so he added them to the collection. When he finished studying, he went to bed so he could be up bright and early.

The next morning, he was up at 0700, and Anne made them breakfast. After kissing his Mom goodbye, and his Dad praying over him, Ron grabbed all the stuff he was going to bring to Samantha’s house, and put it in the plane, then took the bearskin off the smokehouse roof. It was totally dry, so he rolled it up, and tied it with a piece of red ribbon his Mom gave him. He put it on top of all the other stuff, made sure he had everything, then did a walk-around and satisfied the plane was in perfect working order, got inside and started the motor. Once it had warmed up, he taxied out to the lake, and started configuring it for takeoff. When he reached the downwind end of the lake, he turned into the wind, and gunned the throttle, and was soon airborne. He turned to head to Samantha’s place, and was landing on their lake at 0850. He taxied right up to their cabin, and Samantha was waiting for him. This time she let him all the way out of the aircraft before she hugged the stuffing out of him and gave him a big wet kiss. When she finally came up for air, he said “I’ve got something for you Samantha” and walked around to the passenger side to get the bearskin out of the plane. She was surprised to see him carrying a huge skin.

“What is that?”

“It’s a bearskin. My Dad and I were walking to the lake the other day, when Lucky my dog started growling. We turned and there was this big bear not more than 30 yards away, it stood on its hind legs, and growled like it was going to charge. Since it was so close, we couldn’t take any chances, so my Dad and I drew and shot at the same time. Both of our .44 Magnum rounds struck him at the same time and almost knocked him off his feet backwards. We skinned and gutted it, and my Mom canned the meat for later. We have more bearskins that we know what to do with, so I thought I’d give this to you. I called your Dad yesterday to ask his permission to give it to you, and to teach you how to shoot my .22 pistol.”

“Thanks Ron, that was sweet.” Sam took the opportunity to give Ron another kiss, but since her hands were full, she was frustrated when he quickly broke off the kiss. When she turned around, she understood why - her Dad was standing on the porch. She carried the skin up to her Dad. “Look what Ron gave me.” she crowed to her Dad like he had given her a huge diamond ring.

She carried it inside, and unrolled it. When it was fully unrolled, Steve whistled. This was the biggest bearskin he had ever seen.

“That’s a mighty big bear Ron.”

“Mr. Stone, that’s one of the smallest ones we’ve shot around our place.”

“Now I see why you’re armed to the teeth. If that’s the smallest bear you’ve shot, you’ve got some really big bears around your land.”

“You should have seen the one my Dad killed 16 years ago. It was almost twice as big as that one.”

“Wow - glad we decided to homestead here; we looked at HelpmeJack Lake, and thought the lake was too small to land an airplane.”

“You’re almost right, I can just land safely with the DeHaviland, but the Cessna 185 thinks it’s landing at JFK.”

Steve laughed at that description, then realized that Ron had been landing the DeHaviland there almost since he was a student pilot, he must have nerves of steel.

“Mr. Stone, is there a good place I can set up so Samantha can shoot my .22 pistol? If you and your wife want to come along, you’re more than welcome.” Samantha nudged him in the ribs - she wanted some time alone with Ron.

Steve took him up on the offer, and they walked outside. Ron got the ammo and the coffee cans. Steve showed him where he thought it was safest to set up. Ron set up the coffee cans on stumps and on the ground at various distances from 15 feet to 15 yards. When he set up, he put on his shooting glasses, and handed Samantha a set. Steve produced 2 sets of shooting glasses, and handed one to Mary. He was about to put earmuffs on when Ron said “You won’t need those - this is a suppressed .22”

“How’d you get a suppressed .22 in Alaska?”

“I think it was something like low friends in High places. My Mom and Dad have one too.”

Steve shrugged his shoulders, and removed his earplugs. Ron unloaded his .22/45 and walked over to Samantha, and showed her how to hold, and aim the pistol. She was enjoying the attention and Ron’s inadvertent body contact. When she felt confident holding and aiming the pistol, and after he had given her a serious safety lecture, he had her dry fire until she had it down, then handed her a magazine, and had her load the gun. He stood right behind her where he could see where she was aiming at. It hit her all of a sudden that she really was firing a live gun, and she settled down and took something seriously for once. She followed Ron’s advice literally, and she blew her first round right through the center of the coffee can 15 feet away. She kept shooting at it, and all of the rounds hit the can. He handed her the 2<sup>nd</sup> magazine, and told her to aim at the coffee can 15 yards away on a tree stump. She missed her first two rounds, then Ron whispered “Steady Down, Sam, control your breathing, and line up the dot with the center of the can, and squeeze the trigger.” She settled down, and the next 5 rounds went right through the center of the can. She got excited, and the rest of the magazine hit the can, but her group looked like someone had shot it with a shotgun at 25 yards. When the gun locked empty, Ron asked Steve if he wanted to try it. Samantha handed Ron the pistol correctly, and Ron gave Steve the same safety and operating instructions as Sam. While he dry fired, Ron loaded 2 magazines for Steve, and handed the magazines to Steve. He loaded the gun, cycled the action, and aimed at another can 15 yards away. His first round went right through the center of the can, and he kept squeezing off a round a second until the magazine was empty. When he finished shooting the second magazine, Ron could see by his grin that he enjoyed shooting the .22. Ron asked him if he was in the Military. He said he was a Navy Corpsman in Desert Storm 1. Steve asked Ron what brought that up, and Ron told him he shot exactly like his uncle Steve. Steve knew that Steve Fellows was a Colonel in the Air Force, and went through 3 tours of duty as a Pararescue Jumper before he became the CO of the SAR command at MacDill AFB. Steve was kind of a celebrity in Allakaket, and he had followed Steve’s career through the local news. Steve handed Ron back his weapon, and Ron asked if Mary wanted to try. She grinned, since she saw how much fun Steve had. Ron suggested Steve talk Mary through the process, since he didn’t want to touch another man’s wife. Steve thought that was a good idea, since he had noticed Ron accidentally bumped into Samantha’s chest a couple of times while showing her the grip and stance, and correcting her body position. Steve took the pistol back, and Ron loaded the 2 magazines again while Steve showed his

wife how to shoot the pistol. Mary was thrilled, since Steve had never taught her to shoot before, and she always wanted to learn. Mary didn't complain, since Steve was definitely Old Fashioned when it came to "Me Tarzan, You Jane" stuff like shooting the food and protecting them. Since his only experience at shooting had either been self-defense shooting in the Navy, or hunting, he didn't realize that there was a recreational part to shooting as well, and his wife and daughter could enjoy something they could do together. Steve gave Mary the safety drill, showed her how to operate the pistol, how to stand, hold the pistol, and how to shoot. Steve was glad that Ron had suggested that Steve teach his wife how to shoot, since he bumped into his wife a couple of times as well. She just grinned and didn't say anything, but Steve knew that he was in for a long night. She dry fired a dozen times, then he handed her a magazine. She loaded the pistol exactly as Steve had told her, and cycled a round into the chamber. She controlled her breathing, and squeezed the trigger when the dot was right over the center of the can. She was rewarded by a bullseye, and she kept shooting just like Steve did. When the gun locked open, she had a big grin on her face too. Steve handed her the other magazine, and she aimed at a can 15 yards away. She put 10 rounds into it, but that was great for a first time. She handed the empty gun to Steve, then gave him a big hug and whispered "Thanks Steve, I wanted to do that for years." When she broke the clinch, he asked Ron to hold up a minute, he wanted to get his .45. Ron asked if he had some spare earplugs, since he didn't bring any. Steve came back with his Colt Officers model, a box of .45 acp practice ammo and a box of earplugs. He handed 2 to everyone, then unloaded the defensive JHP ammo from both magazines, and reloaded with practice ammo. Ron stuck his earplugs in, then showed Samantha how to put hers in. Steve checked that Mary had her earplugs in, then walked to the group of cans, and moved one back so it was 25 yards away, then walked back to the firing line. Ron nodded that they were good to go, and Steve stuck his gun in his holster, then drew it and shot 7 rounds right in the center of the 25 yard can. When he finished shooting, Ron told Steve that he was a good shot with that .45. He asked if Steve wanted to show Sam and Mary how to shoot it. He turned around and Mary was nodding her head vigorously, so Steve gave in, and motioned her up next to him. He explained that this gun will kick more than the .22 but she should be able to control it easily. He explained how the gun worked, and handed her a loaded mag after she dry fired a couple of times. She cycled the action, and set the safety, then held it at "low ready" until Steve was ready for her to shoot. When he was ready, he nodded, and she swept the safety down with her thumb, raised the barrel until it was pointing right at the target, and slipped her finger onto the trigger. As soon as the sights steadied on the target, she gently squeezed the trigger, and the gun roared and the first round struck the center of the target. Mary emptied the rest of the magazine right into the center of the target just like Steve had told her. Steve hoped he could get a good deal on another .45 because he could see his wife was hooked. When she was finished, Samantha said she would stick with the .22 for now. Mary gave Steve another hug, and he hoped that he would survive the night. He loaded the gun, and asked Ron if he wanted to fire it. Steve gave Ron the same lecture Ron gave Steve earlier, and showed him how the gun worked. After he dry fired a few times to get a feel for the trigger, Ron inserted a mag, cycled the action, and left the gun pointing in low ready. He looked at Steve, who nodded that everything was OK, and looked back at the targets,



selected one of the 15-yard ones that hadn't been shredded yet, and pulled the gun up out of low ready, and as soon as the sights steadied on the center of the can, he squeezed the trigger. The recoil was much less than he thought, and the first round drilled right through the center of the can. He quickly emptied the rest of the mag, and dropped the empty mag and left the slide locked back. He looked into the chamber to make sure the gun was empty, and handed it back to Steve barrel down, then handed him the empty mag.

"Thanks Steve, that was fun. The next time I come over, I'll bring some practice ammo for the .44 Magnum so you can shoot it."

"I'd appreciate it, I always wanted a hand cannon, but never got an opportunity to fire one." Steve took his earplugs out, and everyone else did too. Ron reloaded the .22 mags and noticed that one of the far cans didn't have any holes in it. He asked Steve if it were OK to shoot the .22. "Sure, it's your gun."

Ron made sure everyone was safely behind him, then loaded the gun and cycled the action. He raised the barrel, and as soon as the red dot covered the center of the can, he quickly squeezed off 15 shots. Steve stood there amazed, the entire group could be covered by a 50 cent piece. Steve realized Ron was shooting a gun with what amounted to a target barrel, no recoil, and no muzzle blast, that had probably been accurized on top of it. But still Ron's group was considerably smaller than his, and he shot it twice as fast. Steve remembered that it was Ron's gun, and he probably shot it hundreds or thousands of times to get that good. Mary said that she would have lunch ready in half an hour, and went in to make lunch. Steve thanked Ron for letting him shoot his gun, and went in to help his wife. Samantha finally had Ron alone to herself, but wasn't trying anything. Ron reloaded the pistol and handed it to her, and they spent the rest of the half hour taking turns shooting. When she finished, Sam gave Ron a big kiss, and said "Thanks" but didn't try to remove his tonsils or grab his butt. Ron hoped Sam had cooled down a little. Mary called them for lunch, and they walked hand in hand to the cabin, but this time Sam behaved herself, and didn't try to sit in Ron's lap. Steve noted approvingly, but didn't say anything. For all he knew, Sam might just be biding her time to attack him at a more opportune moment. After lunch, Sam suggested the Ron and her go fishing. Ron thought that would be a good idea, since he could actually talk to her. They grabbed the fishing gear, and Samantha took Ron's hand as they walked to the lake.

"Sam what gives, you haven't tried to attack me for over an hour?"

"Nothing personal Ron, it's just shooting those guns brought me down to reality. I was living an illusion, that If I looked and acted like those girls I saw on the movies, I could move to Hollywood and be a big star. Until I met you the only thing I wanted was out of here. Sorry about grabbing your butt yesterday, I was still living the fantasy. When we started shooting, I realized we live in a dangerous area, and I had better know how to defend myself, and survive if anything should happen. From what my Dad told me, your father is

kind of a celebrity around Allakaket for having survived out here a year by himself with nothing more than a knife, hatchet and a black powder rifle, then building a canoe and paddling down that river. I hope he had the chance to teach you some survival stuff, because I want to learn. I want to be your friend, not your lover, but I'll still want to kiss you from time to time."

"Sam, don't worry about grabbing my butt. Yesterday was one of the first days I went to bed thinking about something besides flying and the Air Force Academy. I really like you a lot, but I'm not going to do anything to mess up my chances to go to the Academy. Also, I really like the way you kiss. Thanks to my Mom and Dad, I know a lot about survival, and if you want to, I'll teach you everything I know."

When they got to the lake, Sam dropped her pole and the tackle box, and laid a very passionate kiss on Ron. When she finally stopped, he said, "this might sound like a stupid question, but what was that for?"

"Just because you're so sweet, you say the nicest things. I was afraid you'd be hurt that I didn't want to get physical with you."

"Hurt, I'm relieved - fighting you off is like wrestling with a python."

Sam gave him another kiss, and behaved herself. Ron helped her tie a lure onto her line, then tied one on his line. He let her cast first, then threw his lure way out on the lake, reeled in a few cranks, and sat down to wait. Seeing the fanny pack on his waist, she asked "What's That?"

Ron hoped his fly wasn't open, then realized she was pointing at his fanny pack. He handed her the rod, and took it off. He showed her the knives, and explained their use, then he started going through the bag, one item at a time. He took out the magnesium firestarter, the Bic lighter, and the BSA hot match and PJ saturated cotton balls. She asked why he had so much firestarting stuff.

"Sam, you always need 3 means to start fire. Fire is your most important survival tool. If you can make fire, you've got a way to stay warm, boil water in case you don't have any means of purifying water, it acts as a signal, and can keep some animals at bay. And when you're through doing all that, it can cook food. Trust me, broiled meat is much better than raw."

"Ew Gross."

"Sam, if you had to eat raw meat to survive, you do what you have to. Let's say you're in the jungle, being chased by the Vietcong, and if you start a fire, they'll find you torture and kill you. You haven't eaten for 48 hours, and you find a tree full of grubs. Trust me, you'll

eat them if you want to survive.”

“Ron, the probability of me being lost in Vietnam is about the same as me winning Miss America.”

“OK, let’s make it closer to home. You’re flying with me. I crash, and I’m killed in the accident, and you’re injured. The plane is a wreck, you can’t use the radio or anything to get help. It’s been 72 hours since you’ve eaten, and there’s a bunch of bugs roaming around, but you can’t get far enough away from the plane to start a fire without risking a gasoline fire. Now what?”

“Ron, you are so morbid.”

“Sam - It could happen. How do you think I got here. Ron Fellows was flying my dad to a caribou hunt when he crashed 100 miles off course. Ron was killed in the accident, and the only things my Dad had was what was in his fanny pack. He survived for a year by using what he had, finding more, and being very creative.”

“OK Ron, you’re right. I guess I’m still living in Fantasyland.”

“Nope you’re in Alaska, but you’ve led a sheltered life with a very protective father. By not letting you learn to fend for yourself, he’s not doing you any favors. What if he had been killed or injured in a hunting accident miles from home - would you and your Mom know how to survive out here. You can’t live year round on fish.”

“Ok...Ok. You’ve made your point. Tell me some more about the stuff in your bag.”

“Some of the stuff is first aid stuff that you need basic first aid training to use.”

“What’s this film can for?”

“That’s a mini fishing kit. My Dad used one for over a year to catch fish until he got a real rod and reel. The line is wound around the can, and the lures go inside. You tie a lure onto the line, unravel about what you want to cast, and take about 3 feet from the lure in your hand, holding on carefully to the can, and spin the lure, and launch it when it’s on its way up on the loop, by letting go with the hand you’re spinning the lure with. If you coiled the line properly, the lure will shoot out into the lake, pulling the line behind it smoothly. You pull the line in with one hand, and wind it around the can after you land the fish.”

“Cool, I didn’t know you could make a fishing kit so small. What’s in the other can?”

“That’s Petroleum jelly saturated cotton balls. You use 100% natural cotton balls, and slowly add petroleum jelly to it, until it’s saturated, then pack it into the film can. All you do

is pull off a small piece about the size of a dime, and stretch it until it's the size of a quarter. You lay it on top of your tinder - that's the smallest twigs you can find, and take either the striker rod of your magnesium firestarter or the flint rod from the Hot Match, and strike it with a knife blade to start a fire. Then you slowly add bigger and bigger wood to form a teepee over it." Ron saw some rocks that someone had formed into a ring, and gathered some small wood and tinder. "Here, I'll show you."

Ron opened his film can full of PJ saturated cotton balls, pulled a dime-size piece off it, and pulled it until it was the size of a quarter. He laid it on top of some twigs, and taking the striker and rod from the hot match, struck a spark and threw it into the PJ, and it burst into flames. He added twigs to it until they had a small fire going. Ron didn't want to waste wood for a demonstration, so he didn't add anything bigger. He turned to Sam "That's how you start a fire. If you wanted to keep it going, you would slowly add larger and larger pieces of wood. I don't want to waste wood, so I didn't add anything thicker than a twig, but you get the idea."

"That was so hot Ron."

"And that was the worst pun I've heard all week."

"Sorry Ron, I wasn't trying to be Punny."

<Major Groan from Ron> "One more like that, and I'm picking up my toys and going home."

"Not yet, you still have half your pack to show me."

"Ok, this wire is multi-use. You can make a primitive snare with it to catch a rabbit or squirrel, or you can use it to build something."

"Ron, I've got a lot to get used to - I can't see killing a cute bunny for food."

"If you don't have a gun, what are you going to use for fresh meat, you can't eat fish year round around here because the lakes freeze in winter. Besides, you can make stuff out of their pelts like slippers and clothing. My Dad survived most of the first winter on what he could shoot with a primitive black powder rifle, and what he could catch with snares."

"Like I said, I've got a lot to get used to. What's that trash bag for?"

"It can be used as a poncho, sleeping bag, or a primitive shelter. You cut arm and neck holes in it for a poncho, slip it over your legs and fill it full of pine tree boughs for a sleeping bag, or cut it open along one side and use it to make a primitive lean-to."

“How do you do that?”

“I don’t want to cut this bag open to show you, so I’ll tell you. I’ve got a Swiss Army Knife with scissors in my pack. If you open the bag all the way up, it has a side seam. Cut that side seam with the scissors, then cut open the bottom seam of the bag. Spread it out, and hold one end down with rocks, dirt, or something, then stick a stick under the opposite corner, and tie a string to that corner and tie a stick to the string and bury it, or make a primitive tent stake, and pound it in. Between the stick and the string, it holds the front corner up, and forms a lean-to.”

“OK, I’ve got it. Ron, I think you have a fish on the line.”

Ron grabbed his pole and started reeling it in. Sure enough, he had a big lake trout on the line. A couple of minutes later, Sam had one too. Ron took his Gerber tool, removed the hook from the fish, and threaded it onto the stringer. A couple of minutes later, Sam beached her fish too. Ron did the gallant thing and got the fish off the hook, and put it on the stringer.

“I think that’s enough for dinner. Let’s head back.”

Ron turned around, and taking his canteen cup, took some lake water and put the fire out, then repacked his fanny pack, and put it back on. Sam picked up the fishing tackle, and he carried the stringer of fish back to their house. When they got back to their cabin, Ron handed the fish to Steve, and Sam said “We caught dinner. Ron showed me how to use some of the stuff in his fanny pack - you should see some of this stuff Dad, Ron told me his Dad spent a year out here, and survived with what he had on his fanny pack, what he found, and anything he could make with it. Ron showed me how to build a fire. It was so cool.”

“Mr. Stone, I made sure the fire was out, I drowned it with lake water, and stirred it.”

“Thanks Ron, I’m glad you were so thorough about putting out that fire. You know, the only survival information I got was from the US Navy, and almost none of it applies to surviving here.”

“If you want, instead of just showing Sam, I’d be more than happy to show all of you. These Fanny packs are cheap, and they contain enough stuff to survive. You might not be comfortable, but you’ll be alive.”

“Thanks Ron, I appreciate it. Almost forgot, your Dad just called. You might want to call him.”

“Thanks Mr. Stone - I’ll run out to the plane and use the radio.”

Ron took off like a shot, He was hoping it wasn't an emergency. He opened the cabin door, turned on the battery, and turned on the radio, then switched frequencies to his home frequency.

"Ron calling Roy, Dad, what's Up?"

"Hi Ron. I thought you might be heading home by now, and thought you might have forgotten. Mr. Stone told me you and Sam were out fishing."

"Dad, we just got back - Is there an emergency or anything?"

"Nope, just thought you would be home by now."

"Do you want me to come home now, I was just talking with Sam's family about Survival and Preparedness."

"No Son, stay as long as you want, just be home before dark."

"OK Dad, see you in a couple of hours."

Ron turned the radio off, and the battery, then closed the door and walked back to Sam's house.

"Sorry about that, my Dad just thought I'd be home by now."

"It's OK - Ron how much would it cost to build 3 of those kits?"

"Mr. Stone, if you want to pay me for the parts, I can buy them the next time I'm in Anchorage and put them together for you. It would save you about half the cost. I'd estimate about \$50 per kit if you don't have the Swiss Army knives, since they are almost \$20 each."

"Ok, Ron, if you could build 3 of them, I'll pay you for the parts."

"Great Mr. Stone."

"Ron, it will be dark in a little over 2 hours, you need to get going."

"OK, thanks for having me. I'll see you in about a week - I have to fly some hunters the rest of the week."

"Dad, I'll walk Ron to the plane."

Sam helped Ron into all his gear, and made sure he had everything. They walked hand in

hand to the plane. “Sam I had a great time today. I’d like to see you as soon as I get a day off.”

“Ron, I’d like that very much - Thanks for everything.”

When they got to the plane, Sam realized she was out of sight of her Dad, and hugged Ron tight, grabbed him by the butt, and laid a seriously passionate kiss on him. Ron couldn’t help himself, and found his hands running up and down her back, but staying in “safe” areas just in case her Dad could see them. Ron started to get a little too excited, so he pushed her away very gently. “Sam, I can’t. Much as I’d like to, if I keep this up, I won’t be able to stop.”

Sam gave him a quick kiss on the lips “Me either. You’re a pretty good kisser too.”

Ron found enough strength and willpower to climb into the pilot’s seat, and waited until Sam was back on the porch, then started the motor, and while it was warming up, did his preflight checks. Finally, he waved goodbye, and Sam blew him a kiss from the porch. Ron turned the plane around and taxied toward the lake. He really had to fight to concentrate on his flying. Finally, he started reciting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. He had the plane configured and his pulse under control by the time he reached the end of the lake. He turned upwind, and pushed the throttle to the max, and was soon flying. He called his Dad as soon as he was airborne, and said he was on his way home.

## Chapter 77 - The Hunters Pt. 2

Ron flew home, and was able to concentrate well enough to make a good landing, it wasn't his best, but he had just got his motor seriously revved by Sam. He taxied up to the hangar, saw the doors were open, so he taxied on in. When he shut down, he walked outside, and there stood his Mom and Dad just like a Norman Rockwell painting. Lucky decided if he wanted to say Hi, he'd have to get to Ron first, and charged off the porch. Lucky wasn't a small dog anymore, and hit Ron like a freight train, and managed to knock Ron over and lick his entire face, destroying any evidence of anything that Anne might have gotten upset over. Ron finally managed to get Lucky off him, and walked up to his Mom and Dad, and gave them both a big hug. They went inside the house, and Ron sat down, more tired than he realized. He got up and poured several large glasses of water, then asked his Mom and Dad if they wanted any. They didn't so he sat back down to relax.

Anne asked him, "How'd it go son?"

"Great, Samantha loved the bearskin, and we all got to go shooting. Samantha and her Mom actually enjoyed the shooting, now Mr. Stone is thinking about buying Mary a Colt Officer's model like his. Sam seems content to shoot my .22, but I promised Mr. Stone that he could shoot my .44 magnum next time I'm over there, so I have to remember to bring some practice ammo. He let me shoot his .45. It was much easier to shoot than the .44 magnum, and his sights were pretty good too. Samantha finally cooled her jets and stopped trying to attack me. I hope she settles down, and just acts like my friend. After lunch, we went fishing, and I showed Samantha the gear in my fanny pack, and how to start a fire with it. Samantha was gushing to her Dad about my kit, and he said he wants me to make 3 more kits for them, and he'll pay me for the parts."

"That's great Ron - I'm glad you made some new friends. So when do we get to meet her?"

"It will be a while Mom, I barely know the girl, and her parents don't know me well enough to go off flying somewhere with their daughter."

Roy laughed and said "You've got a point there."

Without any warning the radio came on. "Ron, It's Bill - you there?"

"Go Ahead Bill."

"Those hunters are ready to go home tomorrow morning, and your GPS has shown up. I've got a load of groceries for Allakaket. If you could bring those back with you, I'll pay you for the gas, and have the mechanic install the GPS for you tomorrow afternoon."



“Bill, I promised Mr. Stone I’d build him 3 fanny packs - I need to do some shopping in Anchorage while I’m there.”

“What do you need, I’ve got good connections, if I call them now with the list, they could add it to my shipment, and save you all the running around.”

OK, Bill - here goes.” (Ron opened his fanny pack, and listed the contents) “I need 3 times the quantities I gave you since I’m making 3 kits. Can you order the bags in a subdued color?”

“Ron, I’m pretty sure I can have that list for you tomorrow. I’ll just charge you 10% over my cost, which would still be cheaper than buying it yourself.”

“Thanks, Bill - I need a receipt since Mr. Stone is paying me for the supplies.”

“No Problem - just make sure you’re at the lodge at 0800 tomorrow.”

“OK, see you tomorrow afternoon.”

Ron turned off the radio, and charged the battery. He put it back on Standby when he was finished.

Anne had started dinner while Ron was on the Radio. Roy was sitting in his chair. “Ron, that was a nice gesture offering to make them 3 kits. I think I have a few items around here that are extra that I wished I had years ago.”

“Thanks, Dad, I’m sure they’ll appreciate it.”

Anne announced that dinner was ready, and Ron washed his hands and they sat down to eat. After Roy said grace, they all dug in. Roy and Anne didn’t eat much anymore, but Ron was very hungry, and had 2 huge helpings of everything.

After dinner, Roy and Anne read their Bibles, and Ron had his nose in another Medical Book. Anne was amazed at how fast Ron absorbed the highly technical information. She thought that if he were interested in Medicine, he had the mental abilities that a good medical student needed, and he already passed his APT for mathematics, which included first year Calculus. Later that evening, he put the books down and took a quick bath and got ready for bed. Lucky had already sacked out on his bearskin rug, and Ron crawled into bed since he had to get up early tomorrow.

At 0630 the next morning, his alarm went off, and he got dressed, then ate breakfast, and was warming up the plane by 0710. By 0715 he was airborne, and made it to the lodge at 0759. The hunters were waiting, and the dock worker helped them load up and then shoved

Ron off so he could safely start the plane. The Neurosurgeon was riding in the front seat again, and Ron decided to talk to him this time. When he was airborne and headed for Anchorage, he turned toward the Neurosurgeon, and introduced himself. “I’m Ron Williams. Bill told me you are a neurosurgeon and a Private Pilot, but he failed to tell me your name.”

“I normally go by Doctor Richards, but you can call me Doc.”

“Thanks Doc. I take it you’ve been flying for a while.”

“I’ve been a private pilot for 20 years, and a Neurosurgeon for 30.”

“Which one’s harder?”

“They both require a lot of concentration, but I have more fun flying.”

“My Mom’s making me study her medical books, she wants me to have the equivalent knowledge of an EMT II or a Paramedic.”

“How Come?”

“Out here, there’s just one doctor, and I can get called to an emergency and need to stabilize a sick or wounded patient before I can fly them to the doctor’s clinic in Allakaket.” The nearest Hospital is in Anchorage, and that’s 2 hours by air.”

“Wow, I didn’t realize it was that remote. What books are you reading?”

“I started on the Merck Manual, and I’m working my way through Gray’s Anatomy, and she has some older books from when she was studying for her RN.”

“You’re Mom’s an RN?”

“She’s licensed in Texas and Alaska, but she hasn’t taken any CU courses in years.”

“Ron, if you’ve got the time, I have a couple of good books you can borrow, they’re about Wilderness Medicine. That’s a sub-specialty that is really needed out here.”

“I know, before my Uncle Steve, excuse me Dr. Fellows left Alaska to become a Pararescue Jumper, he ordered a complete Paramedic kit for her including all the drugs, since the MD that was replacing him in town was just a GP with no Emergency Medicine training. Steve did 4 years in the ER in Dallas Texas.”

“How long ago was that?”

“Let’s see, I’m almost 15, and they had it when I was born, so most of the stuff is 15 years old.”

“You know most of the drugs are expired. Have your mom contact my nurse at this number, and I’ll fill any prescriptions she feels she needs, and I’ll ship some books to you.”

“Thanks Doc, I really appreciate it. If you want to send anything to us, you need to send it to General Delivery, Allakaket Alaska - I don’t know the zip code, and put Attention Ron Williams for me, or Anne Williams for my mom.”

“You know Ron, you remind me a lot of me at your age, your whole life ahead of you, and you seem way more mature than I was at your age. I know I could have never have gotten a Commercial License at 14.”

“Doc, I didn’t have a lot of choice. My Grandpa Jim was the commercial pilot in Allakaket until Arteriosclerosis forced his early retirement. He can’t fly commercial since he could stroke out at any moment. And the drugs he’s taking are making it hard to do anything.”

“Ron, there are some new drugs for Arteriosclerosis that Jim’s Doctor might not be aware of with less side effects. Here’s my card, ask Jim’s doctor to call me next week.”

“Thanks Doc. Too bad this isn’t a dual control plane, or I’d let you take the stick.”

I’d like that, I don’t get enough stick time anymore. When I fly, I’m the passenger, and in a hurry.”

“Why are you in a hurry Doc?”

“In my specialty, I can be needed anywhere in the US for neurosurgery. You see, I handle mostly the difficult cases, or the ones other doctors won’t touch because of those damn malpractice lawyers. You can do everything right, and still lose a patient, and then some shyster has the audacity to sue you for doing your job, because he thinks he could make a buck. Problem is the insurance companies usually settle, and the lawyers know this, and whenever a difficult patient goes bad, they circle like buzzards fighting over the scraps. If it weren’t for the lawyers, Medicine would be a lot more fun. Now most of the tests you run are just CYA in case some lawyer sues you. Any idea what you want to do?”

“I’m going to the Air Force Academy when I’m 17 and a half. I want to be a Strike Eagle pilot.”

“You sound pretty sure of yourself.”

My Uncle Steve - the doctor, is a Colonel in the Air Force in charge of the Search and

Rescue wing at MacDill AFB. His General gave me a copy of a letter he wrote to my State Senator requesting an appointment to the Academy as soon as I'm old enough."

"Well, I guess that settles that."

"Pretty much. I'd really have to do something pretty stupid to blow it, and if I did, Steve would kill me, and my Dad would kill anything left."

Ron and the Doc both laughed at that. Ron noticed they were on the fringe of the Anchorage Control area, so he called Anchorage. Ron was amazed when they gave him a straight in routing, he never had to circle. He wondered if they didn't have his tail number on a hot sheet, and were giving him preferential treatment. Not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, Ron acknowledged the call, and started his descent. As he got closer, he cranked the flaps out, and lowered the landing gear. Once he was over the landing threshold, he cut the throttle to idle, and they floated down to the runway. Ron remembered to flatten his flare right before he landed, since he was landing on wheels. Once the wheels were solidly on the runway, he lowered the nose until the nose wheel made contact, then released the back pressure on the yoke. The plane rolled the rest of the runway, and Ron turned toward the correct gate, and when he saw the ground crew, followed their directions, and parked right on the mark. He shut down and got out. When Doc got out of the plane, he shook Ron's hand, and when Ron opened his hand, it contained 2 of his cards and a check. He didn't look at the check, but thanked Doc. "Make sure you call my nurse, and have Jim's doctor call me or my nurse. Thanks for the flight, I really enjoyed myself. I'll see you next year when I come out."

Ron helped unload the plane, then said goodbye to everyone, and got back into the plane. He taxied up to the fuel pumps, and couldn't stand the suspense anymore, and unfolded the check. There was a post-it note attached, and writing on the front and back.

Ron:

Thanks for a very enjoyable flight. You reminded me of my love of flying. I used to dread coming to Alaska, because the pilots were either drunks or egomaniacs. Flying with a young professional such as yourself who so enjoys flying reminded me why I got my license in the first place. Put this money toward your education, or buy something nice.

Sincerely,

Doc Richardson

When he unfolded the check, it was for \$1,000.00 Ron almost fainted. He wished he would have opened the note sooner so he could thank the doctor personally. Even the note without the money would have been perfect. He put the check in his wallet, and got out and filled

the plane, then taxied over to where he was picking up the delivery. He was met by the delivery truck, the driver, and a helper/loader. He checked the packing slip against what was being loaded, and signed for it. He was glad to note that his entire GPS unit had arrived, as well as the makings of 3 fanny pack kits. When he checked everything off, he handed the carbon to the driver, and kept the original for Bill. Attached to the original was a separate receipt for all the fanny pack components. It totaled \$140, he had done a good job of estimating the cost. He climbed back into the plane, and taxied to the runway, and called the tower for takeoff clearance. They said he was next to take off, and he taxied right up to the runway, called Rolling, and after double checking the plane was ready to fly, advanced the throttle to full, and was flying with half the runway left. He cruise climbed to 2,000 feet and turned toward Allakaket. 2 hours later he landed in Allakaket. He topped the tanks, and pulled forward to Bill's Jeep. He unloaded the groceries from the plane, and left Ron's GPS and the fanny pack stuff. Ron told Bill "Doc Richardson gave me a \$1,000 dollar tip."

"Ron, that's one heck of a tip, but Doc can afford it, they don't have any kids, and he's a multi-millionaire."

Ron showed him the note. "Ron - now that's special. It seemed you really touched him." Just as they finished, the Aircraft mechanic showed up. Ron showed him what he wanted, and the Mechanic said it would be done in an hour. Hearing that, Bill told Ron to get in, he could keep Ron busy for an hour, he was going to visit Jim. Ron's eyes brightened, He hadn't seen his Grandpa in weeks. They drove up to Jim's trailer, and Bill knocked. Jim looked rough, but his eyes brightened when he saw Ron. Ron gave his Gramps a gentle hug. He felt fragile. They brought in his groceries, then sat down and talked. Ron told Jim about his conversation with the Neurosurgeon, and handed Jim the card. Jim thanked Ron, and hoped that he could help. The side effects of this medicine basically kept him housebound, and he wanted to get out and do stuff. They talked for a while, when Bill looked at his watch, it had been an hour and 15 minutes since he dropped off the plane. Ron got up to say goodbye, and gave Jim another hug. "See you later Gramps."

They drove back to the airplane, and the antenna was installed on the roof of the cockpit, and the cigarette lighter connector and the swivel base was installed. Ron thanked Bill, and did a walk-around, then got in and taxied back to the lake, then flew home.

When he got home, he took the GPS unit and the software into the house, read the manuals, and stuck the CD-ROM into his laptop. He loaded the software onto his hard drive, and loaded the Topo maps of Alaska. He located Allakaket, The HelpmeJack Lake, Sam's House, and the houses of all the homesteaders he delivered to, and then he located all the lodges Bill had told him about. He made them waypoints in the system so the GPS unit would know the UTM coordinates of every way point he plotted. Now all he had to do was call up the correct waypoint, and the compass rose would point the way, and the display would tell him how far he was from the next waypoint. When he was airborne, it would tell him his true ground speed, altitude, and time/distance to next waypoint. True ground speed

used to be dead reckoning, but with GPS, he knew exactly how fast he was moving in relation to the ground, regardless of whether he was flying into a headwind, or with a tailwind, or some sort of crosswind. Time and distance were helpful so he would know when to descend in preparation for landing, and how high to climb between stops. Later he could program in secondary waypoints for unusual height restrictions like the ridge coming into and out of HelpmeJack Lake. When he finished, he shut down the computer and connected the charger, then started working on the fanny pack kits. He had all 3 ready to go by dinner, and after dinner, he worked on his Medical studies. He told Anne about the conversation he had with Doc, and Anne was curious to find out if Doc Richardson would really fill prescriptions for all the drugs she needed for a wilderness Paramedic kit. She made a list of all the drugs and solutions she needed, and decided to e-mail the list to Doc Richardson.

## Chapter 78 - A Minor Disaster

Ron woke up the next morning, got dressed, and walked over to the sink, and looked in the mirror. His Blood-curdling scream brought Roy and Anne on the run.

“Ron, what’s wrong?”

“Mom, what’s wrong with my face?”

Anne looked carefully at his face, then noticed it was covered with Zits.

“Ron, I don’t know how to tell you this, but its part of growing up - you’ve had one of the worst attacks of acne I’ve seen in a while. I’ve got some meds in the kit that will knock those pimples down. Don’t rupture the heads, or they might spread or cause acne scars.”

Anne came back several minutes later with several tubes of medicine, and some soap. “I bought these a couple of years ago just in case. Both Steve and I had bad acne growing up. Good news is with proper hygiene and the application of these medicines, the effects will diminish over time. I went through 6 months of looking like you do, then they disappeared and never returned. You’re lucky you’re going through it so young, since the older you are when you have your first attack, the more likely you are to develop scarring. If you follow Steve’s pattern, you’ll have to shave every morning in 6 months, or wear a beard like your Dad.”

“Mom, I think I’d rather shave, Dad looks like Grizzly Adams.”

Anne laughed, then said, “Yeah, but it tickles when he kisses me.”

Ron was thanking God he wasn’t planning on seeing Samantha for the next couple of days. He hoped the hunters wouldn’t laugh at him.

After the Minor Emergency, Anne made breakfast, then Ron and Roy went out to cut, drag, split, and stack the wood. Ron was so tired he didn’t think about what his face looked like. In the evening, Anne showed him how to wash with the special soap, and not to scrub too hard, since that might break the pimples. Ron was happy that the medicine was starting to work already, and had reduced the size of the pimples. Later that afternoon, Bill called and said he needed to pick some more hunters up in Anchorage at 0900, and fly them to a new lodge. Ron asked Bill if he had a map with UTM coordinates. Bill laughed, and said he had the same software Ron had, then read off the coordinates to Ron, who repeated them back to Bill, then after he signed off, punched them into his software program, and added the location as a waypoint in his GPS unit. His software allowed him to name all his waypoints, so he did to make them easier to retrieve. When he was finished, and turned off his laptop,

Anne told him dinner was ready. Ron helped set the table, and they sat down to eat. Roy said grace, and they ate dinner quietly. After dinner, Ron went back to his medical books, and Roy and Anne read their Bibles. He went to bed early since he had to get up early to be in Anchorage at 0900.

The next morning, Ron was up at 0600, and was airborne by 0700. It took an extra couple of minutes to plug in and set up his GPS unit, but he could save a lot more time in the air. Once the engine was running, he selected the Anchorage Airport waypoint, and taxied to the water, by the time he had reached the end of the lake, the engine was warmed up, and he had the plane configured for take-off. When he turned upwind, he pushed the throttle to full, and as soon as the airspeed indicator said 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke. He kept up this rate of climb until he cleared the far ridge. He glanced quickly between his altimeter, and the display of his GPS, and was glad they were within a few feet of each other. He turned toward Anchorage, and cruise climbed to 2,000 ft MSL. He was fascinated by the GPS display, the speed deviated from the airspeed indicator, until he realized the airspeed indicator read in nautical miles, and the GPS in statute miles. He'd have to see if he could change the display later to nautical miles to match his airspeed indicator. He brought the owners manual with him, but he wasn't about to mess with it in the air.

The time display worked perfectly, since the speed and distance displays were both in statute miles, so he knew exactly how long at his present speed and heading until the time he had to land. He landed 15 minutes ahead of schedule in Anchorage, and he knew it was due to navigating via the GPS vs. his magnetic compass. He taxied over to the gate, and the hunters were just coming out of the terminal. The skycap helped them load the plane, and Ron readied it for flight. He didn't want the hunters to get too good a look at his face. Once they were all aboard and locked in, Ron gave his "Welcome to Allakaket Airlines" speech, and turned to taxi to the runway. He had plenty of fuel to get to Allakaket, so he didn't stop to fill up. He called the tower, who gave him immediate clearance to take off. He reached the runway, set the plane up for take-off, and called "Rolling". Halfway down the runway, he was airborne, and re-set the GPS for the lodge. He turned to follow the GPS compass, and an hour later, the GPS said that he was at the lodge. He turned to look down, and there was the lake right below him. He did a gentle descending turn to line up with the lake and loose 1500 feet of altitude. He ended up at 500 feet AGL, and about a mile away from the edge of the lake. He lowered the flaps, and slowly reduced his throttle settings, until he was descending at the rate he wanted. He splashed down on the lake with a gentle bump, and taxied to the dock. He thanked the hunters, and the dock worker secured the airplane when the propeller stopped turning, and unloaded the aircraft. He slipped a \$20 to Ron, and thanked him, then buttoned up the aircraft, disconnected the lines holding it to the dock, and pushed it away.

Ron started the engine and taxied to the downwind end of the lake, and entered the waypoint for Allakaket, then set the plane up for take-off. He flew to Allakaket, and was surprised to find he overflowed the middle of the lake, instead of coming in like he usually did, then he



realized the GPS took him to the exact spot he had selected, the middle of the lake. He'd have to re-plot all his waypoints using the highest resolution map so he'd go to the right end of the lake. He landed ok, then taxied to the fuel pumps. Bill was waiting for him. "Ron, did you have a rough day, the hunters said you didn't say two words to them between take-off and landing."

"Bill, look at my face - I look like the Creature from the Black Lagoon."

"Is that's what's bugging you. All teenagers go through acne, or they get it as adults, I'd prefer getting it as a teenager, instead of my 20's. Get over it, most people don't even notice it."

"OK, Bill, I guess I was feeling sorry for myself, I won't let it happen again. Guess what, I learned something today. If I want to navigate with GPS, I have to use the high-resolution map images to set my waypoints. I flew over the middle of the lake at the lodge, and did the same over Allakaket, then I realized the GPS flew me right to the point I specified. If I want to fly to the upwind end of the lake, I need to designate the upwind end of the lake as the waypoint. On the large scale map, there's only a millimeter difference between the ends of the lake, but that can mean over a mile on the ground. I've got to use the 1:24,000 scale, or the 1:12,000 scale for setting waypoints."

"Ron, you're right, now all you need to do is reprogram your GPS. Glad you figured that out now."

"Do you know any way to convert the display from Statute Miles to Nautical Miles?"

"Why would you want to do that?"

"My airspeed indicator in the plane reads in nautical miles, and the GPS reads ground speed in Statute Miles - causes major headaches."

"Best guess, read the manual. If not, you might check out the manufacturer's webpage, or send them an e-mail."

Bill, can I use your internet connection in case I need to return it?"

"OK, I'm not doing anything for a while - make sure you call your Dad first, and bring your GPS and your manual."

Ron opened the cabin door, turned on the radio, and called his Dad, and told him he'd be at Bill's for a while resolving a problem with his GPS unit. Roy told Ron to call him when he was in the air, and said goodbye. Ron turned off the radio, switched off the battery, and took the ignition key. He grabbed the GPS, the box with the manual and the cable, and walked

over to Bill's Jeep. They drove over to his office, and Bill connected to the internet with his Satellite DSL. Bill had a 6 foot satellite dish, so he didn't need to mess with Directwave, and had a great connection. While Bill connected, Ron thumbed through the manual. The only thing he couldn't find was how to change the display from statute miles to nautical miles. Ron found the webpage address, and entered it. He found the FAQ section, and it mentioned converting the display, but didn't mention his model by name. Bill called the 800 number, and spoke to the head of Customer service, who said to follow the instructions for all the Meridian models. Ron looked up the instructions for the Meridian models, and followed the instructions exactly, then turned his unit off and on. The display came up in Nautical miles, and he was good to go. He thanked Bill, then remembered he was carrying that \$1,000.00 check in his wallet, endorsed it, and asked Bill to deposit it in his account. When Bill finished with the paperwork, he drove Ron back to his plane, and Ron took off. He called his Dad, and looking at his GPS, told him he was 45 minutes out. Roy said he'd have the hangar open, and said goodbye. Once he had the lake in sight, Ron ignored his GPS, and flew his usual approach. He landed gently, and taxied to the hangar, then shut down. He took his GPS, manual and box inside with him, and spent the rest of the afternoon re-programming his waypoints.

## Chapter 79 - Flying Again

Later that afternoon, Bill called up Ron on the Radio, they had another “hurry-up” contract tomorrow. Seems like pilots were canceling out left and right with mechanical problems. He had to pick up 3 hunters in Anchorage and fly them to the northern lodge at 0900 tomorrow, turn around, and pick up another load of 2 hunters in Anchorage for the southern lodge, then take the 3 he had dropped off the other day at the Southern lodge back to Anchorage, since they had all got their caribou and had arranged early flights to go home. Ron worked everything out on his map software, and determined that if he filled up in Anchorage between trips, he could do it easily, then fly to Allakaket on the way home, and fill up. He called Bill back, and told him what he planned to do. He thought that would be great, and would save 1 round trip to Allakaket off his routing. Ron said he’d call Bill tomorrow morning when he was wheels up. Ron set his alarm for 0600, and he knew he’d have to hurry, so he asked him Mom if he could have “breakfast to go” tomorrow, which meant some muffins and coffee. She said she’d pack a couple of P&J sandwiches too. Ron checked his waypoints on his GPS, and they were all there and properly loaded. He turned it off, and made sure it was connected to the charger. About this time Anne said dinner was ready. Ron went into the kitchen to wash his hands, and noticed his zits were less noticeable. He thanked God for small favors, and went to help set the table. They sat down, and Roy said grace. After dinner, Ron spent a couple of hours studying his books, then said goodnight since he had to get up early.

The next morning, his alarm went off at 0600, and he was dressed by 0615, grabbed his GPS, breakfast and lunch, and was out the door by 0630. He opened the hangar doors, put everything in the cabin, connected the GPS, and did a quick walk-around. Then he started the motor and let it idle while he performed his pre-flight checklist. At 0645 he was taxiing out to the lake, and setting the plane up to take off. He punched in the waypoint for Anchorage airport, and when he was at the end of the lake, turned upwind, made a quick check of his instruments to make sure the motor was warmed up, and pushed the throttle to full. At 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, and was flying. At 500ft AGL, he turned toward Anchorage, and cruise climbed to 2,000 ft MSL. He called Bill and told him he was en route to Anchorage, and should be there at 0900. At 0840, The GPS indicated he was close enough to call the tower, and got immediate clearance, and the gate number. At 0845, he could see the runway, and called “Final”. He touched down a minute later, and taxied the entire length of the runway, then turned to the correct gate. He was at the gate at 0850 waiting for the hunters. This time he got out, opened all the doors, and when the Skycap brought the bags, introduced himself to the hunters, and helped the skycap load the bags, then asked if anyone would care to ride up front. When they had all boarded, he made sure everyone was secured and the doors locked, then he started the motor, and turned toward his passengers, and gave them the “Welcome to Allakaket Airlines” speech. They thought it was funny, then he called the tower and requested permission to take off. They were given immediate clearance, so Ron hustled over to the runway, and set up while he was taxiing.

He got to the end of the runway, called the tower to advise they were on the runway. They said they were totally clear, and could proceed to 2,000 feet whenever they wanted. Ron thanked the controller, and pushed the throttle to full, and was airborne with half the runway left.

After almost 2 hours, his GPS said he was close enough to descend to 500 feet and prepare for landing. Looking out the windscreen, he saw the lake dead ahead, and slowed and lowered his flaps. He made a perfect landing, and taxied up to the dock. The dockworker secured the plane, and then opened the passenger side doors. Ron said "Thank you for flying Allakaket Airlines, enjoy your stay in Alaska." The hunters were cracking up as they stepped onto the dock. When they were out, the dockworker quickly unloaded their baggage. One of the hunters ducked back into the front cabin, said "You did really well son, here's a small tip" and handed him a \$20.00 bill. Ron thanked him, and told him he hoped he got a big caribou. The hunter had to get out, because the dockworker was ready to button up the plane, and Ron was on a tight schedule. Once all the doors were secure, the dockworker untied the lines securing the plane to the dock, and pushed him off. When Ron was far enough away, he started the motor, and taxied to the downwind end of the lake, set the GPS for Anchorage, then set the plane up for take-off.

As soon as he was above 500 ft, he turned for Anchorage, and cruise climbed to 2,000 feet. Ron thought that flying using the GPS was a walk in the park. He really didn't need his uncle's Pilot's Chronograph since the GPS clock was so accurate, but kept it anyway as a backup like his compass. Ron looked at his GPS display, and his ground speed was 10 knots slower than his airspeed - he must be bucking a headwind. 10 knots wasn't bad, but he was in a hurry, and pushed the throttle up some more until his ETA was under 2 hours. When he was 5 minutes out, he called the tower, and they were surprised he was back again so soon. Then they found his pickup listed on the arrival sheet, and told him which gate to taxi to, and that he had immediate clearance to land. He set up the plane for landing, and remembered to extend the landing gear. He came in a little hot since he was in a hurry, but compensated perfectly, and kissed the runway, then set the nose wheel down. He taxied the entire length of the runway without touching the brakes, then turned toward his scheduled gate. He got there a couple of minutes early, so he shut down and opened the cabin doors before the hunters got there.

This time there were only 2 passengers, and they decided to sit in back, since neither was that comfortable flying. He helped the skycap load the baggage, then did a quick walk-around, and climbed into the pilot's seat. After starting the engine, he turned and gave them the "Welcome to Allakaket Airlines" speech. They didn't seem to think it was too funny. He taxied to the fuel depot, and topped off both tanks, then making sure the caps were secured, walked back into the plane, and taxied to the runway while setting the plane up for take-off. He called the tower, and they said he was next in line. Finally, they said he was clear to take off right as he was turning onto the runway. He acknowledged, and pushed the engine to full. He lifted off as smoothly as he could, and made a gentle turn toward the

southern lodge. He then cruise climbed to 2,000 feet, and 2 hours later, the GPS said it was time to descend for landing, and he pushed in the throttle a little, and the plane went down so slowly they didn't even notice. 5 minutes later, he set the flaps for landing, and pushed the throttle in further. They touched down so softly that they didn't even know they had landed until they heard the pontoons spraying water onto the bottom of the plane. He taxied up to the dock, and the dockworker secured the plane, and opened the passenger door. Ron said "Thanks for flying Allakaket Airlines, Enjoy your stay in Alaska."

Once they were clear of the dock, the 3 returning hunters were loaded. When the cabin doors were closed, Ron started the motor and started to taxi to the far end of the lake, then turned in his seat. "Gentlemen, I wanted to apologize for last time. I didn't mean to be rude, I woke up that morning with the worst case of zits you had ever seen in your life, and I was seriously self-conscious."

The hunter in front said "Don't worry kid, you should have seen me as a teenager - They called me "Pizza Face" until after my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. You look a lot better today. I think the newer medicines work better." Ron got the plane configured for take-off, set the GPS for Anchorage, and when he had turned upwind, pushed the throttle to full. He was flying shortly, and turned for Anchorage. When he reached cruising altitude, he asked them about their trip, and they got into a 2-hour "hunting story" session. Ron checked the GPS, and he needed to call the tower. They gave him a direct route, and instructions to get to the right gate. He thanked the controller, and 5 minutes later spotted the runway, and called "final" He set the plane up quickly for landing, and remembered to extend the landing gear. He made a perfect landing, and taxied to the gate, then said "Thanks for flying Allakaket Airlines, hope you enjoyed the flight." They had a good laugh, and Ron shut the engine down, and opened his door as soon as the prop stopped spinning, then he walked around to unlock their doors, and helped the skycap unload the plane. The hunter who was sitting in front gave Ron a \$50 bill, and told him he hoped that they could use him when they came back. Ron said he hoped it would be soon, because in a little more than 2 years, he was going to the Air Force Academy. One of the guys in the back said his son just graduated, shook Ron's hand and wished him luck. They had to catch a flight so they were in a hurry, and Ron had to get back home before dark, so they said a quick goodbye, and Ron secured the plane and did a quick walk-around then got in the pilot's seat, locked the door, programmed the GPS for Allakaket, and taxied to the runway while setting up for take-off and getting permission to take off. He got permission right before he reached the runway, and when he turned onto the runway, called "Rolling" and advanced the throttle to full. The lightly loaded plane left the runway sooner than Ron expected, and he went with it.

When he was 500ft AGL, he turned for Allakaket, and cruise climbed to 2,000 feet. On his way back, Ron noticed that his ground speed was 20 knots faster than his airspeed. That 10 knot headwind was now a 20 knot tailwind. He took advantage of it, and reduced throttle to save fuel. He got to Allakaket at the same time, but saved several gallons of avgas. He reduced throttle when he got to Allakaket, and called the tower. 5 minutes later, he landed

smoothly on the lake, taxied to the pumps, and filled up the tanks. Bill drove up, and told Ron that he had only good news for him. He was going to be busy the next week or so flying hunters in and out of lodges. Bill handed him a list, and every day had 2 flights scheduled. At \$500 a flight, that was \$1,000 per day after expenses. He could easily make 10-20 thousand dollars in the next couple of weeks plus tips. He was glad he was going to be so busy, because that meant he had a built-in excuse not to see Sam. He really didn't want to see her until his acne got under control. He taxied back to the lake, and turned downwind, set the plane up for take-off, and brought up the waypoint for home. When he reached the end of the lake, he turned upwind, gunned the throttle, and was airborne. Once he had cleared the ridge, he turned for home, and set up a cruise climb, then called home. He told them when he would be home, and that Mom needed to bake some more muffins, because he'd be doing 2-a-days for the next week or so. When they disconnected, he switched frequencies and gave Sam the bad news. She took it pretty well considering, and he put it out of his mind.

A little over an hour later, the GPS unit said he was over the lake, and he turned onto his approach, and set the flaps, then reduced throttle until he was right on his perfect glide path to a 3-wire touchdown. The only difference between landing an amphibian on a small lake, and a carrier landing was you did it during the day, and there was no one critiquing your landing. However, you had the harshest critic ever - if you missed, you didn't get a go-around, you were a statistic. Some bush pilots acted like they clanked when they walked, and others just admitted they were exceptionally lucky. Ron was still one of the latter, and knew that a lot of the former didn't live to old age. He taxied to the cabin, and into the open hangar doors. Mom and Dad were waiting for him, and Lucky came charging all the way from inside the cabin. Ron was ready for him this time, and just got a major case of doggy slobber instead of getting knocked down and licked to death. Anne gave her son a hug, she said "I'm not going to kiss that drooled-up face." Roy hugged his son too, but a little more fiercely. Ron went inside and washed up, then Anne had him kiss her cheek. She noticed his skin was clearing up, and told him. Ron showed his parents his schedule for the next two weeks. While he'd make a lot of money in a short time, he'd just be home enough to eat and sleep. If he didn't already have his GED, Anne might have protested that he needed to study. Roy just told his son to be careful, and make sure he got enough sleep. Ron turned on his computer, located all the places he was flying to, and made sure the waypoints were loaded on his GPS, then shut down the computer.

"Ron, remember that neurosurgeon's card you gave me last week, well, I had Bill call, and she gave me a e-mail address, and I e-mailed her a list, she said Doctor Richardson told her to give us anything we wanted, and instead of loaning you his books on wilderness medicine, he told her to buy a complete set of medical books, including a current PDR. She asked if we wanted hard copies or CD-ROMs, since the PDR comes on disk, and most of the major books are in indexed Adobe PDF format. Since you're going to be using them, I told her I'd ask you."

“Dad, how are we fixed for power?”

“You know the solar panels will stop working during the winter once the roofs are covered in snow, but that Air-X we bought seems to work, and not ice up too bad in the winter. You should be good to go all winter unless we get an ice storm like we had 10 years ago.”

“Ok, Mom, please ask her to ship as many books that come on CD-ROMs as CD’s That will save a ton of shipping, and hopefully get them here faster.”

“Ok Ron, I’ll tell her, and I’ve already e-mailed her a list of the meds and supplies we need.”

The Solar/Wind power system they had installed several years ago was still working fine, and since the laptop came with a 12vdc Cigarette Lighter Adapter, they decided to build a small battery bank with 2 400Ah 6-volt Trojan Golf Cart batteries, and a small controller for the solar panels. The 400Ah battery bank was more than enough power to run his laptop, and charge the GPS unit. He had a little inverter to run his DSL internet connection. During the winter, the satellite dish tended to ice up, so it was harder to use during the winter, but he had good access 9 months out of the year.

An hour later, Anne announced Dinner was ready, and Ron went in to wash his face and hands. It seemed the medicine and the soap was working. He helped his Dad set the table, and they sat down. After Roy said grace, they had Ron’s favorite dish, Caribou Stew. After dinner, Ron studied for a while, and Anne baked some more bran muffins with raisins, since the doc said Roy needed the fiber, and Ron liked the taste. Ron told Anne he still had his P&J sandwiches from yesterday, so she didn’t have to make any more. Ron would only eat Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwiches if he was REALLY hungry. After studying for a while, Ron went to bed early, since he had to be up at 0600 again.

## Chapter 80 - The Friendly Skies

Ron got up at 0600, and was in the air shortly thereafter. He made 2 successful pickups and deliveries, and got a \$20 and a \$40 tip respectively. When he landed at Anchorage to pick up his final fare, the tower warned him that a very powerful thunderstorm was spotted in the vicinity of Allakaket, but it should be out of his flight path by the time he got there. They gave him clearance to take off, since he was still within VFR limits. If he wasn't so tired he might have used better judgment and stayed in Anchorage. But he had a fare that needed to get to his lodge, and the tower did say that it should clear out by the time he got there.

He filled his tanks, checked the oil, and did a quick walk-around. He got back into the plane, and gave his "Welcome to Allakaket Airlines" Speech. His passengers thought he had missed his calling, and should have been a stand-up comedian. He taxied to the runway and took off. He set his GPS for the lodge, and a little over an hour, made a textbook landing. The only way his passengers knew they were landing was the spray flying up from the pontoons. He taxied up to the dock, and the dockworker made short work of securing the plane and unloading the passenger's baggage. Meanwhile, Ron had set up the plane to take off again, and set his GPS to Allakaket. After the dockworker turned him loose, he taxied to the end of the lake, and took off. He made it halfway to Allakaket when the storm caught him from his blind side. He went from flying in clear weather to cloudy weather, and poor visibility. Suddenly the plane dropped out from under him. Realizing he was in a downdraft, he pushed the throttle to max to gain airspeed. 30 seconds later, he was out of the downdraft, but was dangerously low to the ground. He set the plane for max climb at his current heading, and didn't look out of the cabin until his altimeter said 2,000 feet. He was still in heavy cloud cover, and realized he was lost. His GPS was still working, but the heading to Allakaket was totally wrong. Ron got a grip on his fear, realized he was disoriented from the heavy weather, so decided to trust his GPS. He turned the plane until it was facing toward Allakaket, and called the tower for a weather check. "Allakaket Control, this is Ron, how do you read me?"

"Ron, you're scratchy but readable. You might be flying through the thunderstorm that just rolled through here."

"I just flew through a downdraft, but I'm OK. Where is the thunderstorm now?"

It's about 10 miles northwest of us."

Ron looked at the GPS, and he was about 30 miles Northeast of Allakaket. He looked at his fuel gauge, and he had plenty of fuel to make it home and back to Allakaket the next morning.

"Allakaket Control, is Jim there?"



“You can try him on 145.645Mhz.”

“Thanks Control, Switching frequencies now.”

“Jim, its Ron. I just flew through a downdraft. I can make it to either Allakaket or home and back on fuel, what should I do?”

“How are you feeling Ron?”

“Kind of nervous, but I’m OK.”

“Ron, I want you to land at Allakaket and spend the night here. I’ve got a spare room.”

“OK, Gramps, I’ll be there in 10 minutes. I need to call the tower.”

“Allakaket tower, this is Ron again, requesting landing permission and instructions.

“OK Ron, you’re cleared to land, be advised we are experiencing strong cross winds as high as 20-30 knots at this time.”

“Roger, thanks for the information.”

Ron turned toward Allakaket, and as soon as he got close enough to start to land, he reduced throttle and cranked out the flaps. He kicked in some serious right rudder to steer into the wind. As he cleared the rise, he edged the throttle in until the plane sank to the lake. Once he was safely on the lake, he said a quick prayer of thanks, and turned toward the ramp out of the lake, and deployed his landing gear. He taxied up to the fuel pump, and when he got out, Jim and Bill were waiting for him. Jim gave him a big hug and asked “You sure you’re OK?”

At that point Ron started to get the shakes, just as Jim thought. They carried him to the car, and dropped him off at Jim’s place. Jim called Roy and Anne, and said that Ron was staying there overnight, and he was OK. Jim had put Ron in his spare bed, and Ron fell asleep right after he went to bed.

The next morning, Ron got up, and was confused until he remembered where he was and why. Jim had breakfast ready for him, and when he was through eating, Jim asked him what happened.

“Gramps, it was scary. I was maybe 20 miles Northwest of Allakaket when the sky grew dark all of a sudden, and the visibility went from maybe 20 miles to less than a mile. Then the plane bucked and I looked at the altimeter, and it was unwinding fast. I was maybe 1500 feet above ground, and the altimeter was reading 2,000 feet. I shoved the throttle to max, and didn’t dive to gain airspeed since I was already falling faster than 1,000 feet per minute. I held the nose on the horizon and prayed I’m make it out of the downburst before I ran out of altitude. When I ran out of the downburst on the far side, I checked my altimeter, and it read 500 feet, meaning the ground was dangerously close, so I left the throttle at full, and pulled back on the yoke as much as I dared, and clawed my way back up to 2,000 feet. When I got back up to 2,000 feet, I had no ground references, and the GPS compass rose was pointing at 270 degrees, when my previous heading was 180 degrees. I was lost and disoriented for a minute, then I calmed down and realized escaping the downdraft had blown me off course, and the GPS was right, so I decided to trust the GPS and turned to a heading of 270, then I called the tower and got your frequency. You know the rest, except there was a 20-30 knot crosswind when I landed at Allakaket. I was never more scared in my life.”

“Ron, I’ve got good news and bad news. I heard the FAA weather report yesterday on my radio, and according to that, you shouldn’t have flown anywhere near Allakaket. The good news is you did exactly the right thing once you were in the downdraft; you maxed your throttle and held the nose on the horizon. Diving that slow-flying plane wouldn’t have gotten you out of the downdraft any faster, and would have eaten up critical altitude. If you were 1500 ft AGL, and your altimeter read 2,000 feet at the start, and 500 feet at the bottom, you were theoretically on the ground when you recovered. Even an extra second at that altitude could have resulted in a crash. Diving would have meant a fatal crash, since it would have increased your rate of descent. The reason I had you land at Allakaket should be obvious to you. You were shaken up from the near-crash, and were in no condition to land that big plane at your tiny lake. You have to remember this: 1) Keep your mind on Flying. 2) Always watch as much around your aircraft as possible, and keep your head outside the plane. 3) Avoid thunderstorms like the plague - they can affect air currents up to 20 miles away from the visible thunderhead. 4) NEVER fly in bad weather unless it’s a life-or-death emergency. Your passenger could have stayed overnight in Anchorage, or you could have returned to Anchorage yourself after dropping him off. Flying towards Allakaket was a deadly mistake, and you almost paid for it with your life.”

“Gramps, the tower said that the weather was clearing, and Allakaket should be clear by the time I got there.”

“Ron, the pilot always has the final say about whether it is safe to fly. Don’t rely on the tower, they’re not professional meteorologists. Always check the FAA weather forecast before flying. If necessary, they have a radio always monitored during business hours, and you can call them if you’re in doubt. Of if you’re radio can reach me, call me.”

“Thanks, Gramps - I learned my lesson.”

Bill walked in about then, and told Ron he had cancelled his flights for the next couple of days. Ron felt like he was being punished until Jim spoke up. “Ron, I told Bill to cancel your flights, you’re only 14, and you almost died yesterday. You need a few days to get your head on straight, and get over this. The weather is great today, how about if we go flying?”

“I’d love that Gramps are you feeling up to it?”

“That neurosurgeon’s nurse called my doctor and recommended some new medications. While I still can’t be the pilot, I feel 100% better.”

“Great, let’s go.”

The three of them got in Bill’s car, and drove them to the “airport”. Ron and Jim did a complete walk-around, checked that the oil and gas were full, and got in to preflight. Jim felt funny getting in the passenger seat, almost every time he got aboard his plane, he was in the pilot’s seat. Ron went through the pre-flight checklist, then started the engine, and let it warm up, and completed his pre-flight checks while the engine was warming up. Ron turned to Jim, who was nodding his head approvingly. Ron was very thorough checking the plane. With the engine fully warmed up, Ron taxied to the ramp, and slowly rolled down. When he was fully waterborne, he raised the landing gear to their fully retracted position, and taxied to the downwind end of the lake. Ron asked Jim “Where to?”

“Let’s fly up to your place.”

Ron reached over and set the waypoint on the GPS. Jim asked “What’s that?”

Ron decided to have a little fun with his Grandpa “It’s some newfangled gadget that tells me where to fly.”

“Real Funny Mr. Smart-aleck.”

“Gramps, It’s a Global Positioning Satellite Receiver, it’s what kept me from crashing yesterday. I programmed in all my stops as waypoints into the receiver, and as you can see, it gives me bearing, distance and time to the waypoint. If I get disoriented, the GPS knows where I am, and where the next waypoint is. If my Uncle Ron would have had one of these, I probably would have never been born, since as soon as he would have looked at his GPS, he would have known he was off course, and which way to fly to get back on course. The only drawback to these systems is they don’t warn you if there are any intervening mountains between you and the next waypoint, so you have to know what your safe altitudes are at all times, in case the GPS steers you right into a mountain. It works by receiving radio signals from a bunch of geosynchronous satellites that orbit over the same spot on the earth. It triangulates your position in 3 dimensions, and it does all the math to guide you to the next

waypoint you enter into the receiver. Some receivers are accurate to within 3 feet, and others to within 15 feet. As you can see, it even has a function to convert speed and distance displayed from Statute to Nautical Miles, so the display on my airspeed indicator is the same as the GPS's display of my airspeed. It calculates your speed over the ground, and can estimate how long it will take you at your existing speed to reach the next waypoint. If I speed up, the countdown time decreases, and if I slow down, it increases."

"How much did all this cost?"

"About \$500.00, but I've saved over \$100 in gas and time so far."

"I wish they would have had these 30 years ago, it would have made flying a whole lot easier around here."

"Gramps, if you start flying your Cessna again, I can easily afford to get you one, and have the aircraft mechanic install it for you. Bill and I both have the mapping software to program all your waypoints in advance. You could program in all your favorite fishing holes."

"Except then Bill would know all my secret fishing spots."

"Big Secret Gramps - I think everyone in Allakaket goes to the same fishing holes."

Ron reached the end of the lake and quickly set the plane up for takeoff. Jim was impressed by Ron's speed and confidence setting the controls. He could remember how tentative he was just a few months ago, now he could practically set the plane up blindfolded. Ron turned to Jim "Ready for take-off Gramps?" Jim gave him a thumbs-up, and Ron called the tower and received permission to take off. Ron pushed the throttle to full, and as soon as the airspeed indicator hit 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, and was flying. When he reached 500 feet AGL, he turned for home, and cruise-climbed to 2,000 feet.

During the flight back to the house, Ron and Jim caught up with each other. Ron related his experience of his first attack of zits, and Jim nearly laughed himself silly. Seeing Ron's hurt expression, Jim explained that he wasn't laughing at Ron, it just reminded him of an experience he had of having a major attack right before the Senior Prom. He wanted to go to the prom with a bag over his head. When he finally got to the prom, he saw Homecoming King and Class President had a worse case of Pizza Face than he did. Ron laughed as well, then the GPS beeped. "Time to drop down to 500 feet and get ready to land." Ron threw the plane into a banking turn to lose altitude, and came out lined up for the lake at 600 feet. He quickly got the wings level, cranked out the flaps, and took off 500 rpm. As soon as he cleared the ridge, he chopped the throttle, and he floated down to the lake as light as a feather. He barely splashed as the pontoons made contact with the water. He slid to a stop 75 feet from the other end of the lake, and taxied over to their beach, and deployed the

landing gear, then slowly rolled onto the beach, and taxied to the hangar. Ron was surprised that the hangar doors were open, since he'd forgotten to call home on his way in. Roy, Anne, and Lucky were waiting on the porch as they walked out of the hangar on their way to the house. Lucky took off like a shot, and almost succeeded in knocking Ron over. Jim gave Anne a big hug, and shook Roy's hand. They went inside for a minute while Ron was playing with Lucky.

Roy asked Jim "What happened yesterday?"

"Roy, I'm not going to sugar coat it, Ron made a error in judgment yesterday, and almost crashed when he flew too close to a thunderstorm and got caught in a downdraft. He did everything right after that first mistake, and I told him to land at Allakaket. He stayed there overnight since I knew he was in no condition to fly. He seems to have gotten over it, since he flew perfectly today, and seems to be his old self again, even teasing me about his new GPS unit. By the way, I think that GPS saved his life, since he got disoriented after getting out of the downdraft, and had to rely on the GPS to get him back to Allakaket. Bill's given him the next couple of days off, but I think he's OK. He learned his lesson, and I'm going to take him back up and have him do a few more landing and take-offs, but I think he's fine."

"Should he cut back on his flying?"

"No, I think he'd feel he was being punished. He can handle the 2 a day flights, but he learned a valuable lesson that getting a passenger where they want to go isn't worth risking his life or the plane. I doubt if he'll make that mistake again."

"Jim, It's funny you mention it, because the weather seemed pretty marginal when Ron flew me out here the first time."

"Exactly, he was too worried about losing a fare instead of his own safety - like I said, "There are old pilots and bold pilots, but very few old bold pilots.'""

Just about then Ron walked in. Roy and Anne both ran to his side, and gave him a group bear hug. Lucky just sat there wondering what all the excitement was for.

"Mom, Dad - I'm OK. I did something really stupid yesterday, and luckily I survived. It won't happen again."

Anne spoke up "Ron, until we talked to Jim, we were halfway tempted to ground you, but Jim explained how and why it happened, and realized that the only reason it happened was a momentary lapse of judgment, and that can happen to anyone."

"Yeah, like the time I chopped down that tree that fell on me. If I'd have checked it more

carefully, I would have realized it was old and rotten, and could have fallen on me, and I would have selected another. I just need to know that you've learned from this son, because something similar cost Ron his life, and left me stranded here."

"Dad, Jim and I have already been over this. The only time I'm going to fly in bad weather is a life and death emergency. I should have either told the guy I'd fly him out the next day, or returned to Anchorage and flown home the next morning."

Jim spoke up, "Ron you've got enough money in your account now - why not set up an account with the hotel we stayed at. They can arrange round-trip transportation from the airport, and bill your account. That way, you can get a commercial rate, and save some money. Also, you could put your passenger up as well, as a show of good faith, and it will increase your chances of flying them out the next day."

"Thanks Gramps, that's an excellent idea."

## Chapter 81 - Fall Already?

The next several months passed quickly for Ron, he flew twice a day for 2 months, then at least once a day until fall. He only saw Samantha when he made deliveries, and he was glad to see she had cooled toward him considerably. He didn't know whether it was his acne, or she'd found somebody else, but he was off the hook. Since he was busier than a one-armed paper hanger, he didn't even have time to think about missing her. His incident with the downburst made him a much more careful pilot, and he ended up staying in Anchorage twice, and once he paid for his customer's room. Word of that incident quickly spread through the lodges, and most of them wanted Ron flying their customers. They felt that anyone who would put their passenger's safety ahead of making money, then offer to pay for their rooms when bad weather forced them to delay their flight, was someone they wanted to do business with. Bill was ecstatic when a week later Ron was fully booked for next season. Thanks to the new meds, Jim got better and was soon flying the little Cessna 185 to his favorite fishing holes. True to his word, Ron bought another GPS unit for Jim, and had the mechanic install it. Ron showed him how to program it, then Jim borrowed Bill's computer, and after Bill showed him how to use the mapping software, Jim kicked him out of the room, and programmed all his favorite fishing spots, then copied the map page with all his waypoints to a floppy disk and didn't save it on the hard disk. Bill was laughing to himself, since he already knew all of Jim's "secret" fishing holes since they used to go fishing together all the time.

During his spare time, Ron studied the books the Neurosurgeon had sent. The CD-ROMs were installed in his laptop, and he preferred using them to the heavy hardbound books. The doctor even included a 2004 version of the PDR, with free updates. He also shipped almost 100 pounds of various medicines and supplies including pills, injectables, and IV solutions; most of which were unavailable without a DEA number. Ron sent an e-mail to the doctor thanking him for his generosity. They kept in touch infrequently over the next couple of years since they were both busy. Ron talked to Bill, who located a used ATV in Allakaket that had been in storage for the last couple of years, so Bill sold it to Ron cheap, along with 4 5-gallon gas cans full of Avgas. The aircraft mechanic was also a welder, and welded a hitch to the ATV, and Ron bought a used ATV trailer that could haul a couple of quartered caribou. In low gear, the ATV could pull a lot of weight, so Ron surprised his parents one day by flying the ATV, trailer, and the Avgas to the cabin. Roy thought it was a good idea, since he couldn't do heavy physical labor anymore; even pushing the cart while Ron pulled was out of the question.

Ron was surfing the internet, and came across a webpage with information on several Winter sports, including Biathlon. Ron felt the combination of cross-country skiing and shooting would be a fun way to pass the winter and would keep his shooting skills sharp. Roy and Anne bought cross-country skis as well, since snowshoeing was a young man's way of getting around. They'd use the snowshoes to get around the cabin, but Anne realized that

daily cross-country skiing would be great exercise for Roy. They placed an order for 2 cases of CCI Mini-mag ammo, and found some used florescent orange golf balls for targets on E-bay, and bought all the seller had (several hundred). Ron couldn't justify spending over \$3,000 on an Anschutz Biathlon 1827 Fortner. Instead Roy contacted his gunsmith, who said he could build a custom Ruger 10/22 with a suppressor for 1/3 the cost of the Anschutz gun, that he would guarantee to shoot a half-inch group at 100 yards. Ron picked it up in Anchorage on one of his last deliveries before winter. Once the lake froze, he'd have to take off the pontoons, and put skis on the plane.

Ron waited as long as possible to go caribou hunting, since he was busy flying. He picked one of the last warm days of fall to go. Anne insisted he carry a full backpack including a small tent and mummy style sleeping bag. The batteries on his GPs were fully charged, and he had a weeks worth of food. He set out early one morning with the trailer hitched up to the ATV, with a spare can of gas attached to the trailer. He made good time the first day, and made it all the way to the caribou hunting grounds. He stopped a mile short of the caribou grounds, and hiked in so he wouldn't spook the game. As he crested the ridge, he was relieved to see the meadow full of Caribou. He just needed 2 big males, and spotted 2 likely candidates. Dropping his pack, he crawled forward with his rifle to a good shooting position, and quickly set up. 2 shots later, both males were down with a single shot to the spine, so he hiked back to the ATV, and drove right up to the caribou. He spent the rest of the day skinning, gutting and quartering the caribous, so he decided to camp overnight, pitched his tent and started a fire before it got too dark. He had plenty of food, so he didn't cook any of the caribou. At first light, he drove home with the 2 quartered caribou and their hides secured to the trailer. He couldn't drive as fast with a loaded trailer, so he camped overnight about halfway home. The next morning, he drove up to the cabin, and Roy helped him unload. Ron told his Dad it was much easier hunting with an ATV, especially being able to use horsepower instead of human power to haul the carcasses back. They took the rest of the day smoking and canning the meat.

They now had plenty of meat, and they had already picked and canned the garden, so Ron used the ATV to help him chop and drag several dozen trees over to re-stock their wood pile. It took him 1/3 of the time to move the trees with the ATV as before, and by the end of the day, he had enough trees stacked by the sawhorse to take him a week to cut to length and split. He parked the ATV next to the snow blower in the metal shed. He spent the rest of the week cutting the logs to length, splitting and stacking them. Roy helped where he could, and they had the wood cut and stacked quicker than he remembered it taking. They filled every nook and cranny inside the cabin with firewood, and built up the windbreak, then drained and stored the water pumps after they filled all their indoor water containers. They now had almost 100 gallons of water in storage. The next day, Bill called to tell them to batten down the hatches, the first major snowstorm of the season was on its way, and would hit them early tomorrow. Ron checked the hangar to make sure the plane was OK, and started a small fire in the woodstove, then banked coals around it. He knew that would keep the hangar from freezing for at least 24 hours. He took the skins down from the smokehouse roof.



Lucky was wondering what all the fuss was for. He'd find out soon enough.

The next day dawned bright and clear, but the clouds to the west looked ominous. By 10:00, the wind had risen from 10 to almost 40 knots, and the clouds to the west were looking very bad. By noon, the snow had started falling fast and furious, and the wind was howling. Ron took Lucky out around 11:00, and hoped he could hold it a while, since he didn't want to go out in that storm. By 1:00, Ron had lost his internet connection, so he shut his DSL modem down to conserve power. Ron knew they could be cooped up here for days, and decided to make the best of it. He knew he shouldn't go outside as long as the wind was blowing as hard as it was. He made use of the time by reading the medical books the doctor had given him, and playing Flight Simulator. He kept checking the meter on his battery bank, and the Air-X was still making power. He knew that the solar panels would stop working as soon as enough snow covered them, and wouldn't start working until they cleared them off, and the sun was shining again. The Air-X wind generator was making more than enough power to keep up with his laptop, and his battery bank was big enough to run it for 12 hours without recharging. Roy had gotten Anne a treadle-operated antique Singer sewing machine years ago, and Anne spent the winter sewing and reading. They all were wearing their Caribou hide clothes and boots, which were the warmest clothes they owned. Anne was wearing the same dress she wore when she nursed Ron. She wanted to change the bodice from a lace-up to a zip-up for modesty, but Roy told her he liked the lace-up better, and she called him a "Horny Old Goat". Roy's attempt at imitating a goat made Anne laugh hysterically. Ron couldn't care less, and was used to seeing his Mother's cleavage since she wore the dress every winter since he was born. The female body held no mystery to him, since he had spent all that time studying comparative anatomy, and had a doctor's appreciation for the human body. He didn't have access to pornography and never developed a twisted view of women's bodies, so he thought that Anne's attire was perfectly natural.

When the storm abated, Lucky made it clear to Ron that he needed to GO. Ron grabbed his jacket and snowshoes just in case, and Roy helped him with the door. It wasn't stuck too badly, and while Lucky took care of business, they cleared the porch, and cleared a path to the outhouse, which they both visited. In deference to his father's older bladder, he let his Dad go first. Anne came out and decided she needed to use the facilities. Roy handed her a flashlight to check out the nooks and crannies just in case. Anne thought he wasn't very funny. When they had finished, the wind picked up and Ron realized that this was just a lull in the storm, so got back inside. Lucky beat them all in, taking full advantage of his "Four paw drive". He burrowed into a bearskin rug, and was quickly asleep.

Several hours later, Anne looked at her watch, and realized it was late afternoon, and started dinner. Ron had been busy all afternoon studying his books, and Roy occupied himself by reading his Bible. When dinner was ready, she called them to the table. Lucky was fast asleep, so Ron let him lay there, and didn't wake him up for dinner. They sat down and said grace, and had an animated conversation about what they were doing. Most of the medical stuff Ron and Anne were talking about was over Roy's head, but he remembered a lot of it

from his studies 15 years ago. He realized he needed to review as well, since he couldn't remember everything. They discussed his idea while they ate, and Anne suggested they study together, since Ron knew medical terminology and anatomy now as well or better than she did. After dinner, Ron picked up his Bible and read for a few hours, then kissed his mom and dad goodnight. Later that night, Ron needed his earplugs since Roy and Anne were making so much noise in bed. It wasn't any of his business what they did in bed, and was glad for the earplugs to drown out the sounds of passion.

The next morning dawned bright clear and cold. After breakfast, he got out his cross-country skis and poles. Roy and Anne decided to pass, so he strapped on his fanny pack and shoulder holster, then put on his parka over his caribou hide clothes. Funny how natural hides like caribou that were tanned with the hair on were warmer and more durable than any man-made fabric. He put on his daypack over his parka with his Camelback bladder, some food, and an emergency shelter. He checked the batteries on his GPS, and entered a waypoint for the cabin, so he could find his way home. He stuck the GPS inside his inside coat pocket where it would stay warm. Even the lithium ion batteries in the GPS were susceptible to cold weather. Ron whistled for Lucky, who looked like he'd rather stay in the nice warm cabin, then came trotting out. Ron stepped into the bindings of his skis, and set out. He established a good rhythm and was soon over a mile away from the cabin. They had only gotten a foot of snow out of the storm, so it didn't drift in, and he had pretty good skiing conditions. Not as easy as a groomed Cross-Country skiing trail, but he didn't have to break trail too often. After a couple of hours, he turned around and skied back in his own tracks, this was much easier, and he was home in little over an hour. Since he was nice and tired by now, he went inside. Lucky was glad, because he had it even tougher than Ron did - he didn't have nice smooth skis to glide home with, and was forced to bound through the snow to keep up. Lucky drank almost a gallon of water, and ate a whole bowl of dog food. Anne made Ron some hot cocoa, and he had to admit it hit the spot. Roy got a cup too, even though he stayed inside where it was warm. Just about then, Lucky nuzzled Ron, and made it clear he needed to water some trees. Ron opened the door, let Lucky out, and shut the door. 5 minutes later, he heard some scratching on the door, and Lucky was standing there like "What took you so long?"

Ron checked his kit, and realizing he had room in his daybag, and it didn't weight that much, he added his Whisperlite Multifuel Stove. He filled the 11oz bottle full of avgas, which would give him over an hour of boil time, and would operate below freezing, which was a good feature around there. He grabbed 6 pouches of hot cocoa mix, and put them in the kit as well. Before sticking it in his pack, he enclosed the fuel bottle in 2 gallon-sized Ziploc bags just in case it leaked, and packed the stove in its bag. The Coca mix, and a couple of chocolate bars, went in another Ziploc bag. Ron thought about packing some food for Lucky, but realized that if he fed Lucky before they left, he would be OK for at least 24 hours as long as he had enough water. The tent he carried was just big enough for him and Lucky, and would hold up to an Alaskan Blizzard, and it was smaller than his mummy bag which compressed to a size just bigger than Roy's fist when he rolled it up and stuffed it in

its compression sack. The tent, mummy bag, and stove with fuel added maybe 7 pounds to his pack, but the 3 items meant the difference between waiting out a blizzard in relative comfort vs. freezing his butt off, even if he could build a fire. Between the gallon Camelback and everything in his daybag, it weighed maybe 20-25 pounds. His fanny pack weighed maybe 10 pounds, and his shoulder holsters and guns maybe another 5-10. His entire load was between 35 and 40 pounds, which was a walk in the park for him, since he carried almost half of that wherever he went. He decided to ask Roy if he could put a handful of doggie treats in his bag to keep Lucky happy if not well fed. Roy thought that was a good idea, especially when Ron told him that he was building a kit in case he got stranded by a blizzard while out cross-country skiing. Roy thought it was such a good idea that he added their mummy bags and a tent to their day bags. He figured the 3 of them could share a stove since Roy and Anne weren't likely to go out skiing without Ron. Roy did add a small pot to his kit, and filled the pot full of dehydrated soup mixes that were heavy on calories and carbs. He added a Ziploc bag full of caribou jerky, which would give them some extra protein. Ron's and Roy's packs were within a couple of pounds of each other. Anne's pack was lighter because all she had was her mummy bag and an EMT first aid kit in a soft case, plus the gallon size Camelback bladder. Some may have thought that these kits were overkill, except they knew from experience that winter storms came up fast in Alaska without much warning, and if they were more than a mile from the house when the storm hit, they might not be able to get safely home, and would be better off taking the time to set up their shelters instead of trying to run for home. Ron thought that if they were all stranded together, he could set up the tents nose to nose, and use a piece of tarp to connect the two tents and act as a windbreak between them so they could cook without the wind blowing the stove out, and stay reasonably warm since Ron carried a 2-man dome tent, and Roy carried a 3-man dome tent for the extra room.

The next day Roy and Ron replaced the pontoons on the DeHaviland with the skis. It took most of the day, but was made much easier by using the chain hoist to pick up the plane. With the huge gear reduction, Ron thought he would have to pull on the chain forever, then finally the plane groaned and lifted off the hangar floor. They unbolted the pontoons, and bolted the skis in their place. Right before dinner, they lowered the plane back to the hangar floor. With the skis, the wheels weren't retractable, and always made contact with the ground. Even with the extra drag, taking off with skis required a much shorter runway than taking off with pontoons, and he gained 500 pounds of cargo capacity.

Since the weather was nice the next day, they went cross-country skiing; Ron kept the pace slow in deference to his Mom & Dad, but still made several miles by the time they got home later that afternoon. While they were out, Ron spotted several likely trails to check out and marked the intersection of the trails as a waypoint in his GPS. When he got home, he looked at the new trail with his Topo software, and the trail looked fairly flat, and was about 1 mile long. He marked the endpoints of the trail in his GPS as well, so he could check his progress along the trail, and navigate easily. He spotted several clearings where he could practice his .22 Golf and simulate the shooting stages of Biathlon. He had his .22 rifle by now, but

couldn't justify the weight when he was going long-distance. He thought he could use the 1-mile circuit in front of the cabin and set up a shooting stage in front of the cabin if he wanted to do some serious biathlon training. Lucky was seriously considering a name change request to Tired Old Dog, since he accompanied Ron on all his skiing treks, and was Dog Tired by the time he got home. Roy found Sam's old doggie booties and gave them to Ron when he noticed that Lucky's paws were starting to look rough. The booties reduced the dog's traction, but they also kept the ice crystals from forming between their toes, and kept the ice and snow from tearing up their pads.

The next day, Ron put on all his gear, and wanted to check out those new trails. This time he made sure Lucky was wearing his booties. He showed his Mom & Dad where he was going on the map, and when he expected to come home. He told them not to worry if the weather got bad, and he wasn't home, since he was carrying enough stuff on him to safely wait out the storm, at least overnight. Anne told him they were going to the lake and back, so they'd be back later that afternoon. They were only going to be maybe ½ a mile from the house, so they left the bags at home. Roy still brought his fanny pack, and his shoulder holster, since he didn't go anywhere without them. They both left about the same time, and Ron was quickly out of sight of the cabin, since there hadn't been any new snow since the last time he was on this trail and he made great time. His GPS beeped when he reached the intersection of the trail, and he turned north, to follow the new trail. The going was slow, since he was breaking new trail, but it wasn't too hard, since the snow was only about a foot deep. When he got to the end of the trail, he turned around, and stopped to check Lucky's paws, and give him a drink out of his canteen. Even though it was freezing out, Lucky used quite a bit of water since his tongue was hanging out panting. Roy still had half a gallon in his Camelback, so he didn't stop to refill his canteen since that would mean firing up the stove, and all the time that took. Instead he headed back home along the trail he had just blazed. Skiing home was much easier than breaking trail, and was soon back at the intersection. Ron didn't like the looks of the clouds to the west, so he turned for home, which was just a mile or so away, and picked up the pace. He checked on Lucky, and he was keeping up, so he maintained the pace. By the time he got within sight of the cabin, it was snowing hard, but the wind wasn't blowing, so the visibility stayed good enough to keep skiing. Half an hour later, he arrived at the house, and gave Lucky a big bowl of water, and a can of dog food. He drank a bunch of water himself, and Anne made him some hot cocoa. He collapsed in the chair, then he had a talk with his Dad.

"Man that was stupid."

"Ron - what do you mean?"

"Sometimes I think I use my head just for someplace to put my hat. I checked out that new trail, blazed a new trail over 1 mile, then turned around and skied back. I never checked the weather, probably because I was facing east. Anyway, I didn't see the storm clouds until I turned back for home, and I really had to push it to make it home. Poor Lucky was just

about exhausted when we got home, and I wasn't much better. On top of that, I had no really good way to water Lucky, and I know he was dehydrated when we got home, since he drank several bowls of water when we got home. I tried to give him some water out of my canteen, but I didn't have a bowl for him to drink from. Also on the way home, the storm rolled in, and I didn't have my headlamp with me. It would have made things much better. I need a way to melt snow without having to break out my stove."

"Ron, you've got a stove underneath your canteen cup, and 3 sticks of Trioxane fuel. All you needed to do was to light 1/3 of a bar, and you could have melted several quarts of water before it ran out. All you do is put the stove on the ground, break a piece off the bar and light it with your MFS, then fill the canteen cup 1/3 water and 2/3 snow, and set it on the stove. When it's melted, pour the water into Lucky's bowl and start over. Check with your Mom, I'm sure she has an old plastic bowl you can use for water for Lucky. As far as your headlamp, you just learn these things as you go along, so don't be so hard on yourself. Also, Stop, turn around 360 degrees and check the clouds every now and then. When you got to the intersection, if you had checked the weather, you might not have gone on that new trail today, and you would have been home way before it started snowing."

"Dad, you're so smart."

"Ron, hopefully you learn stuff as you get older, the trick is to remember it, and apply it."

Ron gave his Dad a hug, then went to repack his bag. He walked into the kitchen, and asked Anne if she had a small plastic bowl he could use for Lucky's water when they were out. Anne handed him a bowl, telling Ron she overheard their conversation, and found a suitable bowl. It was an old plastic soup bowl that he had used as a small child. Somehow Ron found it fitting. He put it in his pack, and added his headlamp, then put several spare batteries in his jacket pocket in a Ziploc in case they leaked. Ron hoped next time he'd be better prepared. By now, Anne had dinner ready, and they sat down to eat. Ron was hungry, and was working on his third helping when his Mom and Dad finished eating. He studied his medical books after dinner, then went to bed. Lucky had sacked out shortly after Ron fed him, and had no intentions of getting up any time soon.

## Chapter 82 - Stranded

When the storm blew over, Ron was getting cabin fever, and decided to go cross-country skiing. The storm didn't leave a lot of snow, so they had the porch cleaned off in no time. Ron fed Lucky, then told his parents he was going out skiing, and showed them where. Roy and Anne decided to stay inside where it was warm, so Ron and Lucky headed out after Ron put on all his gear. Outside the door, he stepped into his bindings, then stepped into the fresh powder snow. The new layer of snow was only a couple of inches deep, so Ron had no problem finding his old tracks, and soon had put the cabin out of sight behind him. Instead of turning north, he continued east on the track towards the caribou hunting grounds. He lost track of time since he was admiring the winter wonderland instead of paying attention to where he was. When he finally looked at his watch, he was way past his turn-around time, so he turned back to a clearing he had spotted a mile back and made camp.

First, he cleared the snow away from where the tent would be staked down, then put the tent up and staked it down heavily in case the wind came up overnight. Once he had the tent set in, he took the displaced snow and piled it on the lower third of the tent on top of the rain fly. He knew snow was an excellent insulator, and he would stay warmer in the tent if the lower 1/3 was covered by snow. He knew that the tent couldn't stand the load if he tried to turn it into an igloo, but burying the lower 1/3 would help. He almost smacked himself for not bringing his sleeping pad, then he remembered even his small one wouldn't fit inside his day bag. He looked around outside for some conifer boughs, but no such luck. He guessed he could rough it for one night, at least he had a good mummy bag and a tent. He dug a hole in the snow in front of the tent to protect the stove from the wind, and took out the fuel bottle, and attached it to the stove. Taking out his Bic, he tried to get it to light, and realized it was too cold for the butane to work. He stuck the lighter under his jacket between the sleeve and body of his shirt in his armpit. The lighter was cold, but in a few minutes, it was warm enough to work. He pumped up the stove, and set it to the Light setting, then tried flicking his Bic again, and this time it lit. The gas stove lit off with a roar, and he started melting snow. He gave Lucky all the water he wanted, and half the doggie biscuits. He melted some more snow, filled his canteen, then filled his Camelback. Finally, right as the light was fading, he made some hot cocoa. After he was done, he turned off the stove to save fuel, and vented the pressure. He turned his LED light to the constant on position, and hung it from the center of the dome tent, and carried everything inside. Not wanting to get caribou hair all over the inside of his mummy bag, he stripped to his polypro longjohns, and laid the jacket over the top of the bag, and rolled the pants up as a pillow. He called Lucky inside, and zipped the tent closed. He turned the setting on the LED light to the single Red LED setting, and left it on to give him some light in the pitch darkness. Lucky curled right up against Ron, and soon they were fast asleep.

The next morning they were awake at first light. Ron unzipped the tent to let Lucky out, and he came back 5 minutes later and gave Ron a big doggie kiss. He got dressed quickly, then

fired up the stove to make more water for Lucky, and cocoa for him. While the snow was melting, he ate one of his chocolate bars. He laughed to himself when he remembered an old wives tale that chocolate somehow gave you zits. The truth was they were caused by hormonal fluctuations, and clogged pores. By the time he was done melting snow and making cocoa, it was fully light, and he left the stove to cool while he broke camp. He rolled up his sleeping bag and took down the tent, then stored the stove. He hoped his parents didn't worry about him. After he finished his cocoa, he finished putting everything back together and got on the trail for home. When he got within about a mile of home, he could see his parents were out looking for him, so he yelled and waved, then kept on coming as quickly as he could. He could see by the looks on their faces that they were upset, so he thought he had better head any punishment off at the pass.

"Mom, Dad - I'm sorry if I scared you, but I lost track of time, and was too far out to safely make it home before dark, but I got to try out my equipment, and it all works great."

"Ron, we're too worried to get mad at you right now, but I don't know what to do, since you did the right thing by staying put in a safe location instead of trying to make it home in the dark and maybe hurting yourself."

"Dad, would it help if I had a radio on me? I could buy a Kenwood handheld 2-meter radio with about a 5-mile range and rechargeable batteries. That way if I had to stay out overnight, I could call you and let you know I was OK."

"That would definitely beat keeping us up all night worrying about you."

"Let me call Bill and find out which model he recommends."

They walked into the house, and after Anne set everything down, walked over to Ron, gave him a big hug, and broke down crying. When he realized how badly he had scared his Mom, Ron joined her, sobbing "Mom, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. I'm OK, and I'll make sure this will never happen again."

"Ron, I thought I had lost my son. Please be more considerate from now on."

"Mom, I had no way to let you know I was OK, and like Dad said, it was better that I stayed overnight in a safe spot instead of trying to make it home in the dark."

"What about your headlamp?"

"Mom, it's risky to use it in total darkness, since it doesn't show depth well, and the snow looks like a large flat surface under artificial light. I got the headlamp in case I was caught in a snowstorm, and I was close enough to make it home safely during the day."

Ron walked over to the radio, and switched to Bill's frequency "Bill, its Ron, how do you read?"

"Ron, read you 5 by 5, what's up?"

"I need a small handheld radio that has at least 10 miles of range, and operates on 2-meters with rechargeable batteries. Any suggestions?"

"Ron, I've got an old Kenwood TH-22AT with the PB-34 battery pack and the KCS-14 charger, and a speaker mic. I can sell the whole thing for \$50.00, and I'll program it with all our frequencies. If you can get FAA approval, I have an in-vehicle cross-band repeater that you can use with the hand held. If you're within range of the plane, it will re-transmit your 2-meter signal on the 440Mhz band at up to 50 watts. Even with the plane on the ground, that's enough power to talk to just about anyone within 25-50 miles."

"I'll keep that in mind, but all I need right now is the handheld. I don't want to make a special trip; do you have any deliveries scheduled in the next couple of weeks?"

"Now that you mentioned it, several homesteaders realized they were caught short, and could use another delivery if you're up to it. Tell you what, instead of paying you your usual fee for delivery, I'll trade you the handheld and the repeater with an antenna, and I'll throw in the installation, and pay for your gas."

"Bill, I like the way you think, that way I get the radio I need, and you get the deliveries done with no cash outlay. When do you need me?"

"The weather looks pretty good tomorrow, could you be in Anchorage around 10:00am, and that should get you home by 4:00pm?"

"Works for me. See ya tomorrow."

"Dad, did you hear, Bill's trading me a delivery tomorrow for the handheld and a repeater for the plane. I really don't need the repeater right now, but it will come in handy if I do any guiding, since I can have radio contact even if I'm away from the plane."

"Sounds like a deal Ron, just make sure you're careful tomorrow. If it even starts to look bad, set down somewhere and call us on the radio."

"OK Dad."

Ron checked, and his DSL connection was working, so he sent an e-mail to the FAA office in Anchorage, requesting permission to install a 50-watt 440 band cross-band repeater in the plane. He went on to explain what the repeater was, what it did, and that it wouldn't be



connected to any of the FAA-required aviation radios in the plane. He sent it urgent with a return receipt requested. 2 hours later he received approval, and called Bill.

“Bill, I’ll need a second battery installed in the plane, say about a 20Ah battery on a separate circuit, but charged by the plane’s electrical system, so I can disconnect the plane’s battery and still have power for the repeater.”

“Ron, I’ve got a 12vdc 40Ah gel cell here that I’ll add to the original deal for free. It’s smart to put a radio like that on a separate battery so you can always start the plane. You’ll love the antenna, it’s a 5/8 wave antenna, and it will work great since it’s a Rubber Ducky design so it’s totally airworthy. I’ll have everything tested and ready for you tomorrow afternoon when you get done. If there’s enough time, I’ll have him install the repeater, battery and antenna, as well as a switch to shut off the repeater when you’re in the hangar, since it draws some power even when it’s not being used. See you tomorrow.”

Ron set his alarm for 0600 tomorrow, since he needed to take the seats out of the plane. They sat down to eat dinner, and Ron told his Mom he was flying tomorrow, and he had to be out early so he could remove the seats, and still be to Anchorage by 10:00. Anne said she’d make some more raisin bran muffins after dinner. After dinner, Ron studied his books, then went to bed early.

At 0600 the next morning, he was up and dressed quickly. His mom handed him a couple of bran muffins and a thermos of coffee, and gave him a hug and kiss. Roy prayed over him for a minute, then he was outside. He didn’t need his snowshoes since he had kept the path to the hangar clear using the snow blower. He opened the hangar door, and opened the plane’s rear door, and grabbed his tool kit to remove the rear seats. 15 minutes later, they were on the hangar floor out of the way. He closed and locked the door, put his tools up, and walked around the plane checking everything. He got in the cockpit and started the engine. It was stubborn since it was just a few degrees above freezing, but finally it fired, and he performed the rest of his pre-flight checks while the engine warmed up. He entered the waypoint for Anchorage into his GPS, then checked the engine temp. He was good to go, and taxied out of the hangar and onto the snow. Then he realized he had little or no directional control on skis since he had no rudders on the skis, so he tried to steer with the nose wheel and he had some steering control, but he’d have to watch his throttle settings, or the plane would turn to the right from the torque of the engine. He kept the rudder over hard left until he reached the lake. It was frozen solid and at least 6 feet thick plus a foot of snow, so it would easily handle the weight of the plane. He taxied to the end of the lake, and turned upwind by unloading the rudder, and the engine torque turned the plane easily to the right. He set the plane up for take-off, and gunned the throttle. The plane started twisting to the right, so he added more left rudder. As the plane found its head, he found the nose turning left, so he eased the rudder back to a more normal setting. He reached 85 knots with over half the lake left. Not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, he pulled back on the yoke, and he practically jumped into the air. As soon as he cleared the ridge, he turned for Anchorage, and called

Bill. “Bill, this is Ron, I’m in the air en route to Anchorage, ETA...” He looked at his GPS, and it said he was 1.5 hours out of Anchorage at his present speed. “ETA is oh 9 thirty.”

“Ron, Roger, will relay ETA of oh 9 thirty to delivery driver in Anchorage. See ya when you get back to Allakaket. Keep me posted. Over and Out.”

Ron switched the radio back to Anchorage Control, since that would be his next contact in a little over an hour. He was amazed at the airspeed he had at this throttle setting, then remembered he didn’t have the pontoons on anymore. They must also have a lot of aerodynamic drag as well as weight. He was flying 30 knots faster at his cruise setting without the pontoons. He remembered there was no gear to lower with the skis, since the gear wasn’t retractable. He also remembered that he only had minimal nose wheel steering with this setup. He would set up the same approach that he used before, and remembered he needed to land light and pancake the landing on skis, either on wheels or on the skis, since they weren’t as forgiving as landing on water with the huge pontoons. About an hour later, he called Anchorage Control, and they gave him immediate clearance, and the gate number where the delivery crew would be waiting. Half an hour later, he performed a textbook landing, and coasted to a stop at the end of the runway. He remembered with the icy conditions he had no brakes, and kept his speed low. Once he got onto the taxiways, the road looked dryer, and he experimented with his brakes. They worked, but he realized they wouldn’t stop him in a STOL situation. Finally he taxied up to the correct gate, and the delivery truck was waiting for him. It was a relatively light load, and took 15 minutes to load. He verified that he had all the homesteads plotted as waypoints in his GPS, then mentally made up his route, and plotted the waypoints in sequence, and stored the route. He signed for the delivery, taxied to the pumps, and topped off the tanks with Avgas, and taxied to the runway. He received immediate clearance, and when he turned onto the active runway, he made another call informing the tower he was ready to take off, they acknowledged, and he double-checked the plane was set up to take off, then shoved the throttle to FULL, and was airborne less than halfway down the runway. He verified the GPS was set up for the first waypoint of his route, and arrived at the homestead a little over an hour later. It only took a few minutes to unload, and he was back in the air. He was finished with his deliveries by noon, so he called Bill and told him he was on his way to Allakaket.

Half an hour later, he called the Allakaket Control, and received permission to land. Remembering he was landing on snow again, he made a nice gentle landing, and taxied to the pumps to top off his tanks, then Bill showed up with the radios. 5 minutes later, the mechanic showed up, and Bill showed him what he needed to do. He said it would take less than an hour, and he’d call Bill on the radio when he was done. Bill asked Ron if he wanted to eat lunch. Since he only had 3 muffins for breakfast, he was hungry, and readily agreed. They went to the Moose Café, and ordered the daily special (Mooseburger, fries and a coke). Bill showed Ron how to work the radio, and Ron was impressed with the programming job he had done. He even programmed a channel for the cross-band repeater in the plane, with a CTS tone to keep the repeater from activating if there were radio traffic on that frequency, so

it would save power. He told Ron he had programmed a courtesy tone onto the repeater, so he would know when it was OK to transmit. Ron asked him about the speaker mike set-up, and Bill explained the Ni-Cad batteries wouldn't tolerate cold, and had to be kept warm, so you put the radio in your shirt pocket, and clipped the speaker mike onto your jacket so you could hear and transmit without getting the battery cold. As he switched frequencies, Ron was pleasantly surprised that the memory channels had names associated with it. The in-plane repeater channel was labeled "Plane" and the channel with his home frequency was labeled "Home". He explained that the in-plane repeater transmitted on the Allakaket common 440Mhz - band frequency, so he should only use the repeater for emergency or urgent calls, since it was a monitored and reserved frequency. Ron told Bill that if he ever heard him on that frequency, he could rest assured that it was either urgent or an emergency, unless he said "Radio Test" right after his name. Bill reminded him not to do radio tests outside of business hours, and to limit his tests to 1 per week. Ron said he probably wouldn't use the repeater except during hunting season, and only if he were away from the plane during an emergency. He asked Bill if he could locate another handheld radio and an in-plane repeater for Jim, and a couple of FRS/GMRS radios for his parents. If his Dad was out and about when he was gone, he might need to get in touch with Anne, or vice versa. Bill thought that was an excellent idea, since Roy never went more than a mile or so away from the cabin without Anne anymore.

After about 55 minutes, the mechanic called Bill and said that the radio was installed and ready to test. Ron switched the radio to "Plane" and pressed the PTT button on the mike. "Ron calling Tower, Radio Check."

"Allakaket Tower, read you, you're way strong and over-modulating big time."

"Ron, move the mike away from your mouth or talk more quietly."

Ron moved the mike ½" away from his mouth, and tried again.

"OK Ron, the overmod is gone, but you're pegging my signal strength meter."

Bill asked Ron for the microphone. "Tower this is Bill, we're testing a 50 watt cross-band repeater in a plane less than a mile away from you, please turn your receiver sensitivity down."

"Roger Bill, that explains why I'm hearing him on the 2-meter and the 70cm radios at the same time."

"Tower, this is Bill again, radio check how do you read me?"

"Read you 5 by 5 full quieting."

Bill handed the mike back to Ron. “Tower this is Ron, how do you copy?”

“Ron, I read you 5x5 full quieting.”

Bill took the mike back, “Tower, this concludes radio test, please reset sensitivity back to original settings, Over and Out.”

“Ron that in-plane repeater doesn’t have a power setting, so it always transmits on full power, which is good for emergencies. It draws about 2 amps on receive, and about 12 on transmit.” They got up, Bill paid the tab and left a generous tip, and they drove back to the plane. “Bill, there’s no rush on Jim’s plane, but if you could get the FRS/GMRS radios and a rapid charger for my mom and dad, I’d appreciate it - make sure it’s a DC charger, since I don’t want to have to buy an inverter.”

Ron looked in the box, and the rapid charger had been rewired for DC input by someone. It was kind of stupid to invert DC, then convert the AC back to DC to charge batteries, so everyone in Allakaket paid Bill to convert their “wall wort” transformers to DC power, since almost no one had AC power in their cabins. Bill had installed AC power in the Inn as a convenience to travelers, and to run the kitchen equipment, but it ran off a generator/battery bank/inverter set up. He was going to get solar panels, but they were too expensive when you factored in the shipping costs. When they got to the plane, the mechanic showed Ron what he had done. Bill’s gel cell was actually a 12vdc 60Ah battery, instead of a 40Ah, but it was the same size and weight as the 40Ah. The mechanic had wired a separate circuit to charge the battery for the repeater, and an on/off switch for the repeater, to save power when the plane was in the hangar, or when he wasn’t using the repeater. He also installed a second switch with a huge relay that would enable him to use the extra battery power to start the plane in an emergency, or if it were really cold out. He’d also installed a noise filter between the battery and the radio, to eliminate all sources of noise from the power line, and installed a fuse panel with ATO type fuses on the positive and negative leads. The antenna was permanently mounted to the roof, and wasn’t going anywhere. Ron thanked him, and got in the plane to leave, then remembered something, got out, shook Bill’s hand and thanked him for everything.

He climbed back in, and checked that everyone was clear, then started the motor and taxied to the lake. 5 minutes later he was airborne to Allakaket. He used the aircraft’s radio to call ahead and tell his Dad he would be home in an hour. 59 minutes later, he made a textbook landing, and taxied up to the open hangar doors. When he shut down, he made sure all the switches were off, including the Radio repeater. He asked his mom and dad to come out to the hangar, and explained what the mechanic had done, and what frequency the repeater broadcast and received on. Ron knew that the common frequency was already programmed into the cabin radio. They went back into the house, and Ron showed them his new radio, and explained how it worked, then told them he had ordered each of them an FRS/GMRS radio so they could keep in touch when he was gone, if Roy decided to go to the lake or the

garden without Anne. Anne hugged her son, and told him that was very thoughtful of him. Ron told her that his radio transmitted at 5 watts, so if he had line of sight, he could talk to them from anywhere on their land. Their FRS/GMRS radios had a mile or 2 range on the FRS side, and 5-10 miles on the GMRS side. He said that Bill should have them in a week or so. If Anne left her radio turned on and plugged into the charger, she could use it like a base station and monitor it in case Roy needed to call her. He plugged the radio's charger into his battery bank and stuck the radio into the charger base. The green LED told him that the radio was charging.

## Chapter 83 - Biathlon

The next morning Ron got up and wanted to try out his new radio. He told his Mom and Dad he was going skiing, and to keep the radio on, because he wanted to check the range of the radio. Lucky looked like he really didn't want to go when Ron put his booties on. Ron put all his gear on, and opened the door, then stepped into the binders of his skis, and skied toward the east. After a couple of miles, he stopped and turned the radio on, then keyed the mike "Ron to base, radio check".

Roy answered the radio "Loud and clear Ron, talk to you later."

Ron turned the radio off, and skied another mile, and did another radio check, he kept that up until he was 5 miles away from the house, and Roy still said he was reading him loud and clear. He was about as far as he would normally get from the house, so he saw no reason to go farther. He turned his radio on again, and told his dad he was on his way home. Gliding in his own fresh tracks, he made better time on the way back in, then he noticed Lucky seemed to get tired. Since his Camelback was over half full, he stopped, took Lucky's bowl out, and filled it from his canteen, and gave him several doggie biscuits. The water and biscuits seemed to revive Lucky, so Ron put everything back together, and glided home the last mile. He was home way before dark, so he decided to try out his .22 rifle. First he gave Lucky all the water he could drink, and fed him. Lucky took a nap on the bearskin, and Ron picked up his rifle and a bag with a dozen orange golf balls. Once outside, and far enough away from the cabin for safety, he slung the rifle, and started tossing golf balls as far as he could into the snow. They fell in a random pattern from 50-100 yards away.

Loading the 10-round magazine from a box of CCI mini-mags, he stuck the mag in the magazine well of the rifle and cycled the action. He slowed his breathing and pulse, then aimed at the 50-yd golf ball through the peep sight that the gunsmith had installed. As the sights lined up, he touched the trigger, and the golf ball jumped. He aimed at the 75-yd golf ball, and seconds later he was 2-2. By the time he was finished, he had gone 9-10 with a near-miss at a golf ball that was around 100 yards away. Ron didn't realize that shooting golf balls at 100 yards was the equivalent of the shooting skills necessary to shoot well in Biathlon. Ron didn't know if he skied fast enough to compete, but he was pretty sure he could hold his own at the steel plates. He put his rifle up, and resumed shooting with his Ruger 22/45. That was much more challenging, and his best run was 5/15 at 50-100 yards. He thought that if the balls were 25-50 yards out, he might hit more of them, since the red dot in his Optima sight was bigger than the golf ball at any distance greater than 50 yards. When he finished, he trudged out in the snow to retrieve the golf balls, and was really tired when he got back inside the door. He put his stuff back up, and remembered to put the radio in the charger base. He cleaned his guns and reloaded the mags, then hung the shoulder holster on the peg above his bed, and the fanny pack on the peg next to it. The daybag was too heavy to hang on a hook, so he set it on the floor below them.

The next day, Bill called, and told Ron the FRS/GMRS radios were in Anchorage, and Jim wanted to come up for a visit. Ron told Bill he'd go to Anchorage and pick Jim up on the way home.

"Mom, Dad, Jim's coming for a visit, and the radios are in. I need to fly to Anchorage tomorrow to pick them up, and I'll pick up Jim on the way home."

Roy and Anne were glad they were able to see Jim again, it had been several months. Evidently, his new medication was working better. Ron called Bill back, and asked him what time they'd have the delivery ready, and when Jim would be ready to go, so they'd have maximum daylight to spend time with him. Bill said the driver could be there at 0900 tomorrow, since he didn't need his delivery truck, and Jim would be ready by 1000. Ron said that his flight time from Anchorage to Allakaket was an hour and a half without the pontoons, so tell Jim he'd be there between 10:30 and 11:00 so he wouldn't be waiting too long. He'd call the tower when he was close, so if Jim could monitor the tower frequency tomorrow, he'd know when he was coming. Bill said he'd tell Jim and signed off.

Ron told his parents that the radios would be in tomorrow, and after he got them programmed and charged, they would be good to go.

He spent the rest of the day studying, and Anne gave him another quiz. She was starting to wonder why she bothered, he never scored less than 90%, she thought he had a Photographic Memory. After dinner, he read his Bible and went to sleep early so he could be in Anchorage at 0900.

The next morning, he got up at 0600, and was dressed by 0615. Anne made breakfast since he had time. They ate quickly, and he was out to the hangar by 0650. He did a quick walk-around, and started the engine to let it warm up while he performed his pre-flight checklist. He plugged in his GPS, and entered the waypoint for Anchorage. Once the motor was up to temp, he nudged the throttle and taxied out to the lake. He must have gotten used to flying on skis, since the nose of the plane wasn't wiggling all over the place. He did the same rudder trick to get the plane's nose into the wind, and double-checked that the plane was set-up to take off. He advanced the throttle to full and was soon in the air. As soon as he cleared the ridge he turned toward Anchorage. An hour later, he called Anchorage control for landing instructions. That early in the morning, the pattern was empty, so they told him to fly straight on in, and told him which gate his delivery truck would be waiting at. After he landed and taxied to the correct gate, he chopped the throttle to idle, and as soon as the prop stopped spinning, the driver opened the passenger side door and handed him a box with 2 FRS/GMRS radios, the dual-port rapid charger and the owner's manuals. Ron thanked him, signed for the order, and as soon as he was clear, turned the plane and taxied back to the runway. As he taxied, he set the plane up for take-off, called the tower, and got permission to take off as soon as he made the runway. He punched in the coordinates for Allakaket, and turned onto the runway. As soon as he was in the air, he turned to head

directly to Allakaket, and called the tower when he was 15 minutes out for landing instructions. Bill and Jim heard the broadcast, and started heading toward the runway. He landed on the lake, and taxied up to the “airport” then shut down. As soon as the prop stopped, Jim got in, and threw a couple of boxes in the back. Once he was safely aboard and belted in, Ron restarted the motor, and turned to taxi to the lake. Jim noticed the new black box, and asked Ron what it was. “Gramps, I’ll explain in the air, OK?”

He taxied to the end of the lake, while setting the plane up to take-off and programming the GPS to fly home. Jim noticed how smoothly he was handling the plane on skis, since most beginner pilots have serious trouble with skis due to the lack of control. He admired Ron’s “tap dancing” with the rudder pedals to keep the plane pointed straight. Once he settled down to taxi to the end of the lake, he saw Ron was pretty much leaving the pedals alone, since he was taxiing at low speed in a straight line. When they got to the end of the lake, he was impressed by Ron’s rudder trick to get the plane pointed into the wind. He unloaded the left rudder, and the engine torque snapped the plane smartly into the wind, and he recovered exactly facing into the wind. He called the tower and received permission to take off, and shoved the throttle to full, while adding left rudder to compensate. After a brief bumpy take-off roll, the plane wanted to fly, so Ron pulled back on the yoke, and the plane jumped into the air. He held the climb until he cleared the ridge, then climbed at max cruise to 2,000 feet. Once he was at altitude, he explained the recent modifications to his Grandpa.

“Gramps - I’ve been trying to practice for Biathlon when the weather cooperates. The other day, I didn’t pay attention to how much daylight I had left, and had to stay out overnight. I had a complete kit including a 2-man dome tent, my mummy bag, and stove, so Lucky and I were fine. As you can imagine, Mom and Dad were freaking out. When I got home, I apologized to Mom & Dad for scaring them, and Mom was upset since I couldn’t tell them I was alright, so I called Bill, and he had this 2-meter handitalkie laying around, and he traded me a delivery trip for the radio and all the accessories, plus a 50-watt 70cm (440Mhz band) in-plane cross-band repeater, the antenna, a 60Ah battery, and the installation. He even paid for the gas for my trip. The repeater is pre-programmed with a CTS tone, and retransmits my 5-watt handitalkie transmissions from 2-meter to the 70cm (440 MHz) band, and boosts the power to 50 watts. It transmits on the 440MHz Emergency frequency, so If I have an emergency, and I’m within 5 miles of the plane, but can’t get to the radio in the plane, I can reach a lot farther with the repeater than with the little 5-watt 2-meter handitalkie.”

“Ron, that sounds like an excellent idea.”

“Good, because I bought one for you. Bill said he could get it installed in your Cessna by spring, so if you’re out fishing, and have an emergency, you’re just a radio call away from help, since the radio will transmit 25-50 miles, even on the ground.”

“I wish it would have the range of the aircraft radio.”



“I know Gramps, but the FAA won’t allow you to have a remote repeater attached to your plane’s radio, in case it keys by mistake, and you keep someone else from using that frequency in an emergency.”

“Right, I forgot about that - can you afford all this?”

“Gramps, relax, I made almost 60 thousand dollars this hunting season, and Bill has me booked solid for next season. I’m a 14 year old kid, and I’m making more money than some guys with families to support. So I can easily afford it.”

“Holy Cow - I didn’t know you were raking in the dough like that?”

“I was flying 2 trips a day for the entire summer at \$500 a pop plus tips - you do the math.”

“You were making \$1,000 per day. Wow - I wish I was making that kind of money when I was flying.”

“Gramps, if you take inflation into account, your 20-30 thousand 20 years ago was probably equivalent, it sounds like a lot more, but money isn’t worth what it once was. Back then and nice house was maybe 30 Thousand instead of over 100 thousand.”

“You’re right Ron. How’s the GPS working out?”

“I’m saving literally hours per week, and almost 1/3 of my fuel bill, since I know exactly when I need to descend, and can fly exact headings from stop to stop.”

“Wow, 1/3 of your fuel bill means a lot more money in your pocket.”

“The GPS has already paid for itself several times over. OK, we’re getting close to home - I need to call in.”

“Dad, Its Ron, we’re about 20 minutes out, can you get the hangar open?”

“Roger, see you in 20 son.”

Jim was impressed; the GPS told him exactly how far away they were from Ron’s place, and exactly how long it would take at their present speed. He wished he’d have had this “newfangled gadget” when he was flying. 20 minutes later, they were ready to land at the lake. Jim noticed that Ron was coming in just above stall speed, then realized the skis had no brakes since he was landing on snow, and could easily slide the entire length of the lake. Ron touched down light as a feather, and slid to a stop 50 feet from the edge of the lake, then turned the plane and taxied up to and into the hangar before shutting everything down, including the repeater. When Ron got out, he helped Jim with his stuff, and grabbed the box

with the radios.

When they walked inside the house, Anne met Jim and gave him a big hug; Roy shook hands with Jim, and offered him some coffee. Jim said he could have a small glass, but he had to watch his caffeine since it could interfere with his medicine.

“Ron, I’ve got a surprise for you, Bill mentioned you were interested in Biathlon, so I did an Internet search, and located a guy in Anchorage who runs the local club, and he sent me a copy of the rules so you could set up your own training course out here. From what I read, the course is supposed to be 5km long, with a shooting stage at the end of each lap. Get a load of this, the targets are set at 50M, and the prone targets are only 4.5 cm across, and the standing targets are 11.5cm.”

“Gramps, I’ve been shooting golf balls from the standing position from 50-100 yards. 50 meters at a 1.7 inch target is a walk in the park especially from the prone, a 4.5 inch target at that same distance standing is even easier.”

“Yeah, but they’re doing it after skiing a 5km loop flat out. That gets your heart racing, then you need to shoot at little itty bitty targets while your rifle is making figure-8’s the size of a Volkswagen.”

“Point taken Gramps. Can you get in touch with this guy and get the Jr. competitor’s lap times from slowest to fastest, so I know what I have to shoot for - so to speak.”

“Ron, 5km is almost 3 miles. I’ll bet that by the time you’ve skied 3 miles you can’t hit the broad side of a barn. Seems to me the first thing you need to do is build up your stamina so you can ski 3 miles flat out then actually shoot. Not only that, but if I remember correctly the Junior Biathlon distances are either a 10km sprint, or a 15km Individual event, and you shoot once per lap. If you want to set up a course here, I’d suggest using your GPS to plot 2 3/8-mile legs close enough together that the turns are an 1/8 mile each, for a total of a mile lap. 3 laps around it will be close enough to 5km for practice. Your other alternative is an out and back track 1.5 miles long and shoot every time you get back in front of the cabin.”

“The out and back would be easier to set up. Let’s try that first.”

In the boxes Jim brought were not only the rules and regulations, but also the guy’s e-mail address if he had any questions. Ron sent him an e-mail requesting a supplier for a set of Biathlon targets with a remote reset, one of the small, and one of the large targets. He surfed the internet, and found a site that sold used equipment, and ordered a used double-shoulder sling that he could fit to the 10/22. With that out of the way, Jim, Roy, and Anne sat down to talk while Ron programmed the FRS/GMRS radios so they could talk to each other. He wished his 2-meter radio could talk to the radios, but they operated on different frequencies. When he was finished programming the radios, he plugged the charger into his battery bank,

and stuck the radios into the charger. That finished, Ron told his parents he was going to go out and set up a skiing track. He took his GPS, and set a start point out behind the cabin, then skied east until the GPS said he had traveled 1.5 miles east, then he stopped, marked the spot as a waypoint, and jammed a big stick into the ground with a piece of bright yellow fabric on it. He turned around, and skied back home. Jim was right; he was winded when he got home. He plopped down on a chair, and tried to catch his breath. Jim said “and that was only after 1 lap - imagine doing 3 of those back to back in a race, and still having to shoot.” Ron decided then and there that Biathlon was for the Birds. He’d much rather stay put and shoot at 600 yards, then have to run a mini-marathon, and still have to shoot. He still wanted the targets just to practice, but unless he got a lot more stamina, he was going to stick to the Shooting Team, and forget about becoming a World-class Biathlete.

Ron sat down to visit with his Grandpa for a while, and a couple of hours later, Jim said he had to be getting home, so Ron flew him back to Allakaket. On the way back Jim told him, “Ron, I’m real proud of you, you’ve settled down and become a very good pilot. It took me a long time to figure out flying with skis, and I know you haven’t done maybe 3 or 4 landings and take-offs with skis, but you seem to have it figured out. I miss flying, but I know I did the right thing now - flying commercial is a young man’s profession, especially bush flying since it demands such a high degree of concentration, eye-hand coordination, and extraordinary vision. I can still fly, but I don’t want to fly with passengers again. If something happened, I couldn’t live with it. I really love flying with you, since I can relax and enjoy the flight, instead of thinking about everything else. Maybe this spring before you get busy, I’ll fly up to your place, and we can go fishing.”

“I’d like that Gramps, thanks for coming up to see us; I know my Mom and Dad really missed you.”

When he got close to Allakaket, Ron called the tower, and was given immediate clearance to land, since no one was around. Right after he touched down, he noticed Jim was slumped over in his seat unconscious. He grabbed the radio “Mayday, Mayday, Mayday - I have a medical emergency, Jim’s unconscious. I just landed and I’m taxiing in - have the Doc waiting.” Ron did what he could for Jim while he taxied as quickly as possible to the airport. He loosened Jim’s collar, and tipped his head back so he could breathe easier. As soon as the plane stopped, he shut down, unbuckled, and gave Jim a quick assessment. He was unconscious, with no pulse or respiration, so he started CPR. 5 minutes later, Bill’s Jeep drove up with the Doc inside. They ran over, and while Ron kept up CPR, the doc did a more thorough evaluation. What he heard through his stethoscope wasn’t good. The two men grabbed Jim and threw him into the back of the Jeep, and tore off to the clinic. Ron wanted to be with his Gramps, but had the presence of mind to fill up the tanks and prep the plane for immediate take off just in case he needed to be evacuated to Anchorage. He turned the plane around, and Bill’s jeep came back for him.

“Bill, I prepped the plane in case Jim needed to be air evacuated to Anchorage.”

“Ron, I don’t know how to tell you this, but Jim just died. I thought you’d prefer to hear it from me instead of the Doctor. You did all you could, but the blood clot broke loose, and totally obstructed his heart. You were working on a dead man. I want you to stay with me tonight, and tomorrow we’ll fly back to your house to pick up your folks.

“Bill, he was just talking to me a minute ago, I can’t believe he’s gone.”

“Ron, unfortunately one of the side effects of the drugs he was on is that sometimes it actually causes a massive stroke or a fatal heart attack. A massive fatal MI is actually the best outcome of the two. He’s in heaven right now, and he’s feeling no more pain. He could have had a massive stroke, and survived in a vegetative state. That’s no way to live. I doubt if he felt anything, and was probably unconscious seconds after it happened. The doc said he never regained consciousness, so I’m sure he died peacefully.”

“Bill, we were just talking about how he loved to fly, and hopefully he could go fishing with me next spring.”

“Ron, Jim told me how much he loved flying with you, and how proud he was of you. Imagine a 14-year old flying commercial, and doing a better job than most pilots who have been at it for decades. Jim left some letters for you with me just in case, and a copy of his will. I think it best that we have the memorial service tomorrow right after we land with your mom and dad. I need to call your folks and tell them. I assume you want to be there?”

“Of course Bill - let’s go.”

They drove to Bill’s office, and Ron sat down while Bill broke the news to Roy and Anne, then Ron got on the air. He remembered they were on the air, so instead of breaking down and crying with his mom, he held back and said he was doing OK, and he’d see them first thing tomorrow. Bill got back on the radio, and told them to pack enough clothes for a few days, and to bring Lucky, since Ron would need a friend. When they got off the air, Ron gave Bill a bear hug and cried his eyes out.

Finally when he came up for air, Ron asked Bill if he could see Jim one last time. Bill called the doctor, and was told it would be fine to bring Ron over, since they weren’t going to do an autopsy, and the body was intact. Bill thanked God for small favors, then they walked over to the clinic. Jim was still laying on the examining table, and everything but his face was covered with a sheet. Ron walked up, held Jim’s hand, whispered “See you later Gramps”, then kissed him on the cheek. He walked out a minute later, and Bill was there waiting for him. “Bill he looked so peaceful, almost like he was asleep, but when I kissed his cheek, I new he was gone.”

“Ron, I need to make an announcement at the Moose Grill, you can come if you like, or you can stay in my office. All the well-wishers might be hard to take right now, but I’ll respect

your wishes.”

“It’s OK Bill, let’s go - they need to know too.”

They walked into the Moose Café/Grill, and Bill stood in the middle of the room. “I have some bad news. Half an hour ago, Jim Anderson passed away from a massive heart attack. The memorial service will be in the chapel at noon tomorrow for those who wish to attend.”

Bill and Ron walked back into Bill’s office, and sat down. He handed Ron New King James Bible, and asked him to pick out some verses he’d like Bill to read at the service tomorrow. Ron knew Bill was trying to keep him busy, but he was OK with Jim’s death. Like Bill said, the alternative was really no life. He told Bill that his favorite passage was the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Bill thought it appropriate, and asked Ron to come up with 3 more.

Re 14:13 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

Jn 5:24-29 24 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

25 "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.

26 "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself,

27 "and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.

28 "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice

29 "and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

1Co 15:51-55 51 “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--

52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

55 "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"

Ron showed his selections to Bill who smiled and nodded approvingly. Roy and Anne had done a good job educating Ron, and he had an excellent knowledge of Scripture for a 14-yr old. Bill asked Ron if he’d rather talk or read. “Bill, if it’s all the same to you, I just want to read the Bible for a while. Call me when you’re ready for dinner.”

Bill worked on his sermon and eulogy for tomorrow's memorial service. Around 5:00, he told Ron that they needed to walk over to the inn to eat dinner, since they served promptly at 5:00. Ron closed the Bible reverently, and got up. They walked silently to the Inn, and sat down at the dinner table without saying a word. Bill said a simple grace, then the food was put on the table, and conversation resumed as they passed the food. Except for conversation necessary to fill his plate with food, Ron was absolutely silent. After they ate, Ron read for a while, and then asked where he was going to sleep. Bill said they already had a room reserved for him at the Inn, so he went to the front desk and retrieved his key, said goodnight, and went to bed.

## Chapter 84 - Funeral for A Friend

The next morning, Ron and Bill ate breakfast quietly, then Bill drove him out to the plane, Ron did a thorough walk-around, then they got in and after pre-flighting the plane, he started the motor and let it warm up while he entered the waypoint for home. Bill was worried about Ron, since he seemed to be doing everything robotically, but as long as he was being careful, he didn't say anything. Once the engine was warmed up, Ron turned on the radio and requested permission to take-off, then taxied to the downwind end of the lake, and turned the plane into the wind and took off. They didn't say a word to each other during the whole flight, and 20 minutes before they arrived, Ron called his Dad and asked him to open the hangar door. Ron made a textbook landing and taxied right up to the hangar door, and inside. Once he shut down, they got out, and Ron made sure everything was off before he went into the house. The first person he saw was his mom, and Ron ran to her and gave her a big hug.

"I'm sorry Mom. I couldn't save Gramps." Bill realized that even though he had a lot of grown-up responsibilities, Ron was still a kid. Roy walked over to the two of them and joined in the group hug.

Finally when they caught their breath, Bill looked at Ron and told him in a stern voice "Ron, I talked to the doctor, and he told me there wasn't anything you could have done anyway - Jim was dead before you could do anything. Even a doctor could have done nothing for him, the coronary artery was totally blocked, and no blood was circulating even with the CPR. Even a massive dosage of a clot busting drug would have taken too long to work, and he still would have died. God decided that he wanted Jim in Heaven with him, and you're going to need to accept that - You'll see him again, I'm sure of it."

Anne knelt down and held her son. "Ron, I talked to the Doc last night after Bill called. What he's telling you is true. There was absolutely nothing you could have done to save him."

Ron looked into his Mom's eyes, and realized she was telling the truth. "I know Mom, but I miss Gramps, and I want him back."

"I know son, I miss him too." Roy gathered his family into his arms, and prayed "God, we need you right now, please send your Spirit to comfort us, and protect us under your wings." Bill was praying quietly for Roy's family. He had been through several deaths in the community, and even when the deceased was elderly and a Christian, it was hard to say goodbye. Bill realized his Ministry training was inadequate for moments like this. Instead of mumbling meaningless platitudes, he realized he could do more good praying quietly for God's grace on those involved, and to be there physically for emotional support.

When they had dried their eyes, Bill reminded them they needed to get back to Allakaket for the memorial service at noon, and it was almost 10:00. Anne had already packed Ron's suitcase, and they quickly put Lucky on a leash and led him to the plane. Ron and Bill got in front, leaving Anne and Roy to share the back seat with Lucky, who decided that it would be fun to lay across their laps. Roy didn't fight it, since he got the front half, and spent the rest of the flight petting Lucky. An hour and a half later, they landed in Allakaket. They checked into the inn and got dressed for the service. Lucky had to stay in their room, so Ron made sure he watered every tree in the neighborhood, and left him with food, water, and his bearskin rug. As they walked into the chapel, Jim's casket was there to greet them. Anne was glad that Jim had requested a closed casket service in advance. Looking at dead people gave her the willies. The rest of the service was a blur to Ron, and they endured the receiving line of well-wishers at the wake that the innkeeper had set up in the dining hall of the inn. Ron wasn't very hungry, so he ate a couple of deviled eggs, and asked his dad if he could go check on Lucky. Seeing how uncomfortable his son was, Roy said OK, and wished he could join him. Ron walked into his room and played with Lucky for a while, then fell asleep. In his dreams, he dreamed he was flying with Jim, and got the sense that Jim was at peace, and he wasn't to worry about him. In a way this was a better way to say goodbye to him than the funeral was. A couple of hours later, Roy knocked on his door and asked Ron if he wanted to come out for dinner. Ron was suddenly hungry, and got up and left Lucky in the room. Roy noticed the change in his son's behavior, and hoped the worst was over. He remembered when his grandfather died, and it had been pretty traumatic for him, since it was his first relative to die.

The next day, Bill called them into his office. "I've some legal matters to discuss with you, and some letters to give to each of you. First of all, here's the letters Jim left in his safe deposit box." He gave Ron 5 letters, and Anne and Roy got 1 each. "OK, that brings us to Jim's will. I'm not going to read it, since it's a bunch of legalese, so I'll give you the Reader's Digest version. Jim had a \$100,00.00 life insurance policy that matured 5 years ago. After funeral and burial expenses, that leaves 60 thousand dollars, which he said should be divided equally among the 3 of you since you were his only survivors. Ron, Jim was the sole owner of their flying business after Ron Fellows died in the plane crash. The business includes the DeHaviland, a 30,000 square foot commercial building and hangar that they owned outright. These are all adjacent to the Anchorage Commercial Airport on commercially valuable land. He's had a standing offer from the city of Anchorage to buy the buildings and the land for \$1Million dollars tax-free. Jim wanted you to have the business, and to do what you saw fit with it. Beyond that are some personal effects, including his pilot's watch, and his Randall Vietnam era Bowie, which is a collector's item, but I'm not sure of the value. Roy, Jim wanted you to have the watch, since it's exactly like Ron's watch, and he wanted Anne to have the knife. His house in Allakaket was rented, so the only valuables he had in his house was his personal effects. He had some firearms which he left to Roy to distribute as he saw fit." Ron couldn't believe it, he was a 14-yr old Millionaire, but he'd rather have his Gramps back. Roy asked Bill to drive them over to Jim's house so they could check out his personal belongings. He thought most of the stuff



could be donated to the village, and anyone who needed it could have it. He wanted to get a good look at those guns, because if he knew Jim, he would own some nice ones since he was a hunter and guide for years.

Bill drove them to Jim's house, and showed them where the guns were kept, and a pile of his personal belongings. Roy picked up the watch and slipped it on his wrist almost reverently. He handed Anne Jim's Randall Bowie, and looked through the rest of his stuff. There were his dog tags and other memorabilia from his service in Vietnam. Anne didn't know how Jim knew Ron, now she realized that they probably met in Vietnam. He told Anne he flew C-130's in Vietnam, and that's about all he told her. The pile of medals said something entirely different. Roy scooped up the medals, and placed them back in a shoebox with his dogtags. Just as he suspected, Jim had an excellent gun collection, including a 7mm Magnum rifle with a Leupold scope, several shotguns, and another Colt Anaconda. Roy and Ron picked them up along with the ammo and the accessories, and carried them back to the car. Bill said the rest of the stuff was clothes and furniture. Roy told Bill that they could donate the clothing and furniture to anyone in town who needed it, but to save anything that was either valuable or had sentimental value, and Ron would pick it up the next time he stopped in Allakaket. Bill almost smacked himself "That reminds me, Ron - the owner of that Cessna wanted you to keep it. He's never going to fly it again, and is pretty sure that he's going to be grounded in a year or two anyway. I can put it in Jim's old hangar for you, and have the mechanic mothball it for you." Ron was too numb to really respond, but said "OK Bill, that's fine with me, make sure you thank the owner for me." When they completed everything they needed to, Bill drove them back to the Inn, gathered their belongings and Lucky, and drove out to the plane.

Ron did a walk around, started the plane, taxied toward the pumps, and filled the tanks. He pulled a safe distance from the tanks and shut down again to help his Mom and Dad board, then handed them Lucky, and got back in the pilot's seat. After starting the motor again, and finishing his pre-flight, Ron gave his "Welcome to Allakaket Airlines" speech out of habit. When he turned around Roy and Anne were laughing hysterically. Lucky was looking at them like "did I miss something?" Ron taxied out to the downwind end of the lake, and turned for home. After he made sure the plane was set to fly, he pushed the throttle to full, and was airborne after a short but bumpy take-off run. They were back home in a little less than 2 hours, and Ron taxied up to the hangar, and inside, where he shut down, and switched everything off. They got out and unloaded the plane, then Anne asked if anyone wanted dinner. Roy suggested soup, and they all thought it was a good idea, so Anne made her famous vegetable and caribou meat soup.

The next morning, Ron talked to his dad after breakfast. "Dad, I need to be alone for a couple of days to think things through and read Jim's letters. Is it OK if Lucky and I go ski about 5 miles into the woods to that clearing about half way to the caribou hunting grounds. I'll only be gone a day or two, but I'll bring enough supplies for 5 days in the woods just in case. I'll call you every morning on the radio to let you know I'm ok."

Roy understood his son was still going through the grieving process, and knew he would be OK for a day or two in the woods with Lucky, so he gave Ron his blessing. Ron went to pack as Roy broke the news to Anne, who understood, but wasn't happy about it. Since Roy had already said OK, that was that, and Ron was going. She helped Ron pack and made sure he had plenty of food, including a large bag of dry dog food, since it was lighter than the cans. Ron took 5 days worth of food, and several changes of clothes, and added his sleeping pad to the pack. He brought a brick of 500 rounds of .22 ammo and a bag of golf balls for something to do. Roy had him pack a folding saw for cutting wood, and Anne gave him a large quantity of hot cocoa mix. He was wearing his Caribou skin clothes, and his parka, skiing gloves, and cross-country skiing boots. He packed his caribou boots for wearing around camp, and strapped his snowshoes to the outside of the pack. He was carrying his shoulder holster and fanny pack that had both his huge Bowie and his <skip> aboard, and a quart military canteen with cup and stove opposite on the fanny pack belt. He kissed his Mom, grabbed the letters, his GPS and his radio, then gave his dad a hug, and whistled for Lucky as he grabbed his skis. He knelt with Lucky once they were outside the door, and put his booties on, then straightened up, and Roy helped him into his pack, and he stepped into his ski bindings as Roy handed him his poles. Anne said "Take Care Ron." and he assured her he was going to be OK, and he'd call them every morning on the radio, but it would be off to conserve batteries otherwise.

They headed east, since Ron wasn't in any hurry they took their time. Ron admired the scenery, and Lucky either sniffed or watered every tree he came to. 3 hours later, he arrived at his campsite, and it didn't take him as long to set up his tent, since only a couple of inches of snow had fallen since the last time he had camped there. They were going to be there for a while, so Ron decided to build a fire and save his fuel for later. He took out his folding saw, and between that and the <skip>, Ron had a huge pile of wood, and a stack of kindling. He cleared a big area of snow downwind of the tent, and made sure there were no overhanging branches full of snow to douse his fire, then he set about making his fire. He had the time, so he broke out his flint and steel kit including a piece of flint, a hand striker of steel, and some char cloth that fit inside a large tobacco can. Hunting around his campsite, he found an old pine log that had rotted, and pulled a handful of powdery wood pulp out of the center. It was bone dry, and he knew that it would make excellent tinder since he could smell the pitch in it. Putting a piece of Char cloth in the center, he held the flint and the tinder in his left hand, and the steel in his right. He struck the flint with the steel, sending a huge shower of sparks into the char cloth. Ron held it to his face, and gently blew until he had a nice flame, then set it under a teepee of kindling. As the fire caught, he added bigger and bigger pieces, and soon he was adding branches that were an inch in diameter. He put his flint and steel kit back up, and sat down on a log to read Jim's letters.

## Chapter 85 - Letters from Nam

Ron opened Jim's first letter - it was labeled "Please Read First".

"Dear Ron:

If you're reading this, I'm dead. Hopefully you're at an age where you can understand that we don't belong here, and Death is just God's way of calling us home when we've finished our race. I left you the business so you could have financial independence. The city has been offering to buy the building and the land for over 10 years, since they wanted to build an industrial park on the site, and the FAA won't let them as long as there are hangars on the property. They can't use eminent domain for the same reasons, so they will have to give you more than fair market value for the buildings and property. Their last offer was 1 million dollars tax-free. By now they should be up to 1.2 or 1.5 million. You'll never earn a 10<sup>th</sup> of that renting the building as is, but it's up to you. I want you to know I am so proud of you, and wish I could have been there to see you grow up and become a man.

Bye for Now,

Jim

The next letter was in a sealed Envelope with Jim's name on it.

When he opened it, it read:

29Jan1968 Vietnam

To Whom It May Concern:

My Sergeant made me write this letter, even though I have no one to write too. I broke up with my Girlfriend shortly after getting assigned to Vietnam; she was yelling things like "Baby Killer" as she walked out of my life. My parents both died when I was young, and I was raised by my older brother and his wife. I always loved flying, and realized the Air Force was the best way to learn to fly and get an education. I knew I might get sent to Vietnam, but I figured since I was flying C-130 cargo planes that I would be safely behind the lines. Boy was I wrong. I'm flying support missions daily to front line firebases, and our favorite delivery methods are either a parachute drop or a LAPES extraction. Spending time on a runway under fire is a good way for your relatives to collect your GI insurance. I've already earned 2 Purple Hearts. My Sergeant calls them NVA target medals.

We're headed Northeast to the Cambodian border to support a SF firebase situated directly across the Ho Chi Min Trail. Sarge says that even though the US Army is standing down for

Tet, he's heard stuff from other sergeants and noncoms that the NVA and Charlie are planning a big offensive for Tet to break our will to fight and drive us out - fat chance. My Crew Chief was just talking to me, and told me they issued extra frag vests so we can sit on one, and wear the other. That's never happened before, and has a lot of us feeling uneasy. We're supposed to start flying at 1800 local, and keep it up until they say stop. The guys on the ground loading the birds are really going to be humping to keep up tonight. My Copilot is a real Hardcase, so they stuck him with the handle Case. They just call me Big Jim. Case says that we're going to see beaucoup VC tonight. My first load is several pallets of 105mm ammo. I hate flying ammo. 1 lucky hit and you're strumming a harp. Oh well, we all gotta die sometime. Later I'll meet with my crew chief and tell him I plan on a fast LAPES drop for the ammo, and he better be ready, since I'm not making a second pass. As 1800 gets closer, I can feel the tension in the pilot ready room rise, like the home team's locker room before the big game.

It's just about 1800, got to end this so I can give it to the Sarge.

By for now,

Jim

The next letter read:

06Feb1968 Vietnam

To Whom It May Concern:

Just a follow-up to let you know I survived. It was hairy down there. There were VC and NVA all over the place, and we were flying non-stop for 24 hours until they got a B-52 raid to break the attack. We were chased out of the area before the 52's came in, but we still saw and felt the blast of hundreds of iron bombs being dropped. One of my friends, Slim bought it on a LAPES run early in the evening when a ZSU caught him right after he dropped. The plane exploded into a fireball, but the Snakes orbiting the area saw the muzzle flashes and destroyed the Zoo with a volley of rockets. Right then I wished I were flying Spooky instead of a glorified garbage hauler, because I wanted revenge in the worst way. I would have expended every round on board, then thrown the brass at the VC and NVA.

On my last pass, I was hit again, and received what my CO called a "million dollar wound" which was severe enough to get me out of Vietnam without causing any permanent injury. I got called in for a Medevac since all the slicks were busy elsewhere, and I was the most experienced pilot available. I came to a stop on the runway with my engines turning, yelling at my Crew chief to get the wounded on board ASAP, because we were taking fire. Right then a group of 3 VC mortars picked that moment to land on the airstrip, close enough to wound me and Case. I told the CC that we were getting the Hell out right now, but he said

there were another 6 critically injured soldiers out there. The 2 minutes it took to load the wounded and get the Hell out of there were the longest 2 minutes in my life. Thank God the VC were either short on mortars, or didn't have their crews trained up, because a second volley would have blown us sky-high and taken the wounded with us. Finally, I heard the sound of the ramp closing, and I firewalled the engines and got the hell out of there.

2 days later, I woke up in the hospital with everything intact, with another Purple Heart and a Bronze Star pinned to my pillow. My CO told me they were processing the paperwork to send me home. I didn't argue, I had enough of Vietnam.

Jim

Ron read Jim's 4th letter as it was growing dark:

28Feb1968 Japan

I've been sent to the rehab hospital in Japan while my discharge papers are completed. I really don't need rehab for a wound to the butt, but I'm not arguing. The nurses are prettier, and I like it when they give me my sponge bath instead of the orderly who gave me my last one in Vietnam. I'm now sure everything is working thanks to that sweet nurse. She wished me well, and told me my paperwork would be processed in a week. Nothing like clean sheets and air conditioning. Now all I need is a cold beer.

My paperwork showed up today, so they have me scheduled for the next Freedom Bird as an Ambulatory patient, which means I can now drink beer. Great, they tell me I can have a beer right when I'm about to leave for the states.

Gotta Go, my ride home awaits,

Jim

Ron ate some jerky and drank some cocoa before going to bed. This time he was comfortable with his Thermarest sleeping pad underneath him. Lucky snuggled next to him, and soon they were fast asleep.

The next morning after breakfast, Ron read Jim's last letter.

01Oct2003 Alaska

When I got home in 1970, I went to College for a while, then finally chucked it all and moved to Alaska. All the women I dated in College were either radical feminists or drugged-out hippies. I'd seen enough drug abuse in Vietnam to know I wanted none of that. I got a letter from Ron Fellows asking if I were interested in going into business with him in

Anchorage Alaska guiding and flying hunters in Alaska. He knew someone with a restored DeHaviland for sale cheap, and I still had almost 100 grand left in my trust fund that my Brother set up when my parents died. He and his wife died in a car crash shortly after I was sent to Vietnam, but I didn't tell anyone so I could stay. His will stipulated that anything left from their estate should be deposited in my trust fund if they didn't have any kids. They never had any, so I got almost \$100 thousand, but I was totally alone in the world. Hooking up with Ron was a gift from God, since I had no where to go, and had become a total loner. I dropped out of College and moved to Alaska.

It was really weird, I met Ron about a week before my last mission, and never heard from him again until I got the letter from Alaska. I have no idea how he found me, but I was glad he did. Ron greeted me like a long lost brother, and my healing began. A couple of years later, Ron fixed me up with a barmaid from Anchorage. I lived with her for 6 months until I went to the doctor because we were doing everything right, but she didn't get pregnant. When she found out I was sterile due to the injury, she left and never came back. Losing her hurt so bad that I never dated again.

A couple of years later, Ron's parents died within a couple of weeks of each other, so he moved up north of Allakaket to raise his brother and kid sister. He still flew when I needed a guide, and I took over the freight and passenger flying full time. I remember the day he died like yesterday. For some reason he left his Colt Anaconda in his desk, and he never went anywhere without it. I got worried when he didn't come back when he was scheduled to, so I flew out to where they were supposed to be, but there was no sign of them, or any indication that they had even landed there recently. I flew a circle search, then called the FAA and reported a missing and presumed downed pilot. That got every pilot up and flying until the FAA called the search after a week. Your Dad would have been found if he were anywhere near where he was supposed to be. When they declared your Dad and Ron "Missing and Presumed Dead" the hardest thing I ever had to do was to tell Anne her brother was missing and probably dead. A year later, when Roy showed up in Allakaket with his amazing story, I didn't know what to say. I wanted to know why Ron died and your Dad lived. On the trip back to the cabin, we had a long talk, and when we stopped at Ron's grave, I knew that Roy tried to save Ron, but he was already dead, and your Dad was lucky to make it out of the plane alive. I flew him into Allakaket a few years later when the tree fell on him, and thought it was funny when Steve set them up so obviously. I hoped they wouldn't get hurt like I did, and I felt protective towards Anne, since I had always been "Uncle Jim" to her as she was growing up. When they announced their engagement, and set a wedding date, I was extremely happy for them, and honored when Roy asked me to be his best man. Later, when you were born, your parents asked me to be your surrogate Grandpa, and that was another red letter day. Every chance I could, I flew up to see you. Watching you grow up was almost like I was watching my own son grow up.

When you decided to take flying lessons, I knew one day you'd take over from me, I just didn't realize it would be so soon. Listening to you and Steve talk about what you were

doing at MacDill, I was so proud I could bust. I knew you were a good shooter, but I never realized how good. I could tell you were having the time of your life. When your Dad got sick, I was worried that you might fold, but you were made of stronger stuff. I wish I were young enough to do half the stuff you did that week.

When we went home and I saw the doctor, I thought our dream was over since I couldn't fly. I never imagined you would turn out to be such a mature pilot at such a young age. You took to flying like a duck to water, and you gained experience and learned much faster than anyone I had known.

Bye for now,

Gramps

Ron folded the letters, and put them in his backpack, then had a good cry. Lucky walked up to him, sat down and Ron wrapped his arms around Lucky's neck, and got it all out.

A couple of hours later, Ron got his radio out, and called home.

"Dad, I'm coming home - see you in a couple of hours."

"See you soon son."

Ron took his time re-packing his gear and breaking camp. Finally he shouldered his backpack, stepped into his skis, made sure the fire was out cold, and stepped over to his tracks. He whistled for Lucky, then set out for home. Several hours later, he arrived at the cabin, and Roy was waiting for him.

"How are you feeling Son?"

"Much better now - Dad, I've got a question. Jim suggested that I sell the business in Anchorage to the city - it's worth over a Million dollars, but I need someplace to keep the DeHaviland."

"Ron, kick off your skis and sit down for a while, I need to tell you something."

"While you were gone, Anne and I had a talk, and realized that I probably wouldn't outlive her. She told me that she couldn't live here without me, so she would probably move back to Allakaket, and work part time for the town doctor. She won't need the money, but it would give her something to do. She agreed that when I died, that I would will the homestead to you instead of her, since you'd use it before her, and if she had a medical condition that required her to go to a nursing home, the state might try and attach the homestead to pay for it. This way you are guaranteed to have the homestead to come home

to when you retire from the Air Force. Until then, you can always park the plane in the hangar, even after you leave for the Air Force.”

“Thanks Dad, that settles it, I’m going to sell the building and the land to the City of Anchorage, and I’ll keep the DeHaviland here.”

Ron stood up and gave his Dad a big hug. Then he walked in the door and gave his Mom a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Later he called Bill on the radio and asked him to handle the negotiations to sell the property to the City, and keep 10% for himself.

Bill called back later that evening and said the City offered 1.5 million tax-free for the building and the land. Bill made sure that the plane wasn’t part of the deal, and told Ron. Ron told him to take the offer, take care of the paperwork, and deposit \$1.35 Million in his bank account. Ron would have traded every penny to get his Gramps back.



## Chapter 86 - Poor Little Rich Kid

Ron kept himself busy, and later in the week, Bill called and said he needed to fly to Allakaket to sign the paperwork. Since he was a minor, his mom or dad, or both, needed to sign as well. When they hung up, Ron asked his parents if they wanted to fly to Allakaket. He explained that one of them needed to sign the sales contract since he was a minor. Anne asked if they could fly out first thing tomorrow, and then fly to Anchorage to do some shopping. Roy thought that would be a good idea, so Ron called Bill back. They would probably stay overnight in Anchorage, and Ron asked Bill if he could watch Lucky if they left him overnight. Since Lucky liked Bill, or anyone who would play with him, he didn't see a problem. They packed an overnight bag, and Bill called the Inn that Ron had the contract with, and booked 2 adjoining rooms for the next night. When the Reservationist heard Ron's name, she said they had a 2-bedroom suite that was vacant and they could give it to him at the same cost. Bill took the deal, since the rooms were bigger and nicer.

The next morning, they were in the air at first light flying to Allakaket. Bill showed them the contract, and they double-checked everything, including the stipulation that this was just a sale of the land and building, and that the plane remained Ron's. Anne read the contract, since her vision was better. Roy told her to go ahead and sign, then Ron signed below his mom, and Bill witnessed and notarized the signatures. He said that the City would wire transfer 1.5 million to Bill, who would deduct his 10% fee, and deposit the balance into Ron's account by close of business today. They weren't too worried, since Ron had almost \$100,000.00 in his account between what he earned over the summer, and his share of Jim's estate. Roy and Anne weren't paupers either, and both had over \$60,000.00 each in their accounts. Everyone had checks and American Express Credit Cards for shopping. With the paperwork finished, they got back in the plane, and were in Anchorage 2 hours later. Anne wanted to hit a fabric store, and Ron and Roy wanted to check out a sporting goods store, so Anne said she'd meet them at the hotel in 3 hours.

They took two separate cabs, and Roy asked the cabbie to take them to a really good sporting goods store. As they were walking around, Ron spotted a pair of Burris Laser Rangefinding binoculars and almost choked on the price. The salesman was there to help, and Ron asked if they had a demo with the batteries in to check it. He reached behind the counter, showed Ron how to use them, and Ron was amazed. He looked at an object, and when he touched a button, the range flashed in red in the bottom of the image. It was a 7x40 binocular and the image was tack sharp. He asked the salesman if he could negotiate on the price, he had an AMEX card with over \$100K available. The salesman almost started laughing until he realized that this was that kid he had read about in the papers, knowing how much the average bush pilot charged per trip to the hunting lodges, he had no reason to doubt him. He said he could take 20% off the marked price, which wasn't too bad, since it was marked at \$684.00. "So you'll sell a brand new in box unit to me for \$547.20?"

“You did that in your head?”

“Sure - discounts are a walk in the park compared to Calculus.” Do you have any Shearling jackets?”

“Right over here - what sizes were you looking for?”

“Probably a Men’s large for my Dad, and a Women’s Medium for my mom.”

The salesman kept the boxed scope with him, and walked Ron over to the Fashion Jackets. They had a beautiful bunch of Shearling full-length jackets on the racks. Ron spotted his Dad and called him over, and the salesman handed him a Men’s large. It was a perfect fit. Ron turned to his Dad, and asked him what size Mom wore. Roy told him to get a Woman’s Large since these jackets seemed to run small. While the salesman was busy looking, Ron spotted a Man’s small and tried it on - it was a perfect fit. Looking at the tag in the sleeve, his jacket was \$600, and he spotted the tag in his Dad’s jacket at \$800.00. His mom’s jacket was \$850. When the salesman handed him the other jacket, Ron asked him “Can you give me the same discount on these jackets?”

The salesman realized Ron was buying almost \$3,000.00 worth of merchandise, he agreed to the 20% discount on the whole order in a heartbeat. Ron, said “Cool, I got almost \$3,000 worth of stuff for \$2347.20 plus tax.”

“How do you do that?”

“I have no idea, I just see the numbers in my head.”

“Ok, the sales tax is 7% - what’s the total?”

“\$2488.03 - Right?”

The salesman whipped out his calculator, and was flabbergasted when the numbers matched to the penny.

“Kid, you’re amazing. Let’s go ring this up.”

They walked over to the register, where Ron surrendered his American Express Card.

“Don’t leave home without it - right Ron?”

“Yes sir, I’ve charged several nights lodging at the Anchorage Inn on this card.”

“I know you, you’re that 14-yr old kid that flies hunters around. I read an article about you

in the paper. You're even more amazing in real life."

"Thanks, but it's just God's Gift."

Ron signed the receipt for the purchases.

"Would you like these gift wrapped?"

"Sure, everything but the binoculars. Did you include batteries in it?"

"It's got a set of Lithium batteries built in, so they'll work well in Alaska."

"How long do they last - I live way out in the sticks."

"You might want to buy 2 spares - tell you what, I'll throw them in, I'll be right back."

The salesman walked over to the battery display and took down 2 of the freshest Lithium batteries he had in stock for the binoculars, then came back put them in the bag with the binoculars and gift wrapped the jackets, and handed the whole package to Ron, then helped him out the door. A cab pulled right up to them, and they got in, then said "Anchorage Inn, please."

10 minutes later, they arrived at the Inn, Roy had all the cash, so he paid the driver, and Ron waited for him. They got to their room, and Anne wasn't back yet. Ron looked at his Pilot's Chronometer, and she had only been gone 2 and a half hours. Half an hour later, Anne showed up with an armload of bags full of fabric and sewing notions. When she set the bags down, Ron handed her the box. "For Me?"

"No, I thought Lucky might like it - go ahead and open it Mom."

Anne opened the box, and saw the beautiful Shearling coat, set the box down and gave Ron a big hug and kiss on the cheek. "Thanks Son, you shouldn't have."

"Just consider it an early Mother's Day present. I gave Dad one too - let's see it on."

Anne took the jacket all the way out of the box, slipped it on, and it fitted perfectly. Roy and Ron modeled theirs as well. Anne let out a Wolf Whistle, and Ron blushed, but Roy grinned. Ron may have bought his mom a nice present, but Roy was going to get the reward. They boxed up their jackets again, and locked the door as they went out to dinner at the restaurant next door. Roy turned to Ron and whispered "Let me buy Dinner, OK." Ron knew what his Dad was up to, so just grinned. He'd need the earplugs again tonight.

The next morning, both Anne and Roy were grinning like idiots as they went to breakfast.

Ron was too nice to say anything, but thought “Man I hope I don’t look that silly when I get older.” After Breakfast, they checked out, and Ron put the room on his AMEX, then they caught a cab to the airport. Ron did a walk-around, then fired up the engine, and helped his parents aboard as it warmed up. When it had warmed up, Ron taxied to the runway, got permission to take off, and was airborne after a short run. His GPS was already set for Allakaket, and an hour and a half later, called the tower for permission to land. Bill called and said he would meet them at the fuel pumps to deliver Lucky. He landed perfectly, taxied to the fuel pumps, and while Roy and Anne stretched their legs, Ron filled the tanks and checked the fluids. Bill came driving up with Lucky, who tried to knock Ron down, but he was on a leash. Bill gave Ron the leash, hugged Anne, and shook Roy’s hand and said he had to get back to work. He turned and told Ron that he posted the 1.35 Million into his account last night. Ron said that was good, because a \$3,000 AMEX bill would be hitting his account in the next couple of days. Bill almost said something, then remembered that with almost 1.5 million dollars in the bank, Ron didn’t have to worry about money unless he went crazy spending it. Ron didn’t seem the type. Bill helped Anne and Roy back into the plane, and handed them Lucky, then closed the door. Ron waved, waited until Bill was clear, then started the engine, and turned and taxied out to the lake. Two minutes later they were airborne headed home. Ron landed about 2 hours later, and taxied right into the hangar. Roy and Anne piled out, then Lucky jumped, and they unloaded the plane. It was cold enough to wear their new jackets indoors, so that’s exactly what they did. Roy thought they could save on wood, and take advantage of Ron’s gift in more ways than one. Later that evening when it got really cold, Roy lit a fire in the fireplace.

## Chapter 87 - Biathlon

Ron spent the next couple of months skiing his 3 mile cross-country course, and his times slowly improved, as did his stamina. Eventually he was able to hit the broad side of a barn after skiing his course, and slowly improved, until right before the snow melted, he was able to ski a loop, shoot 10 shots standing, and hit all the targets. He never was able to find out what his competitors times were, and at this point, he probably would have been discouraged. Ron spent time with his mom and dad, when he wasn't training, ski touring and snow camping. Anne wasn't a big fan of snow camping, but figured anything that got Roy out and exercising was worth it. Roy made sure to pack their air mattresses, so Anne would be comfortable. They even got in a few rounds of .22 golf. Ron asked Roy, "If this is .22 Golf, where's the sand traps?" Roy said there were no sand traps, just huge snow drifts.

Lucky liked the snow camping and touring much more than Ron's training runs, since Ron was now going fast enough that Lucky couldn't keep up, so he waited on the porch. Ron made a couple of deliveries during the winter, but other than that, it was a pretty slow winter flying.

Ron got an emergency call on the radio one day "Ron, This is Bill, I need you to fly to Slim's place ASAP, he thinks he's broken his leg."

Ron acknowledged the call, yelled for his Mom, who handed him the Trauma kit, and said she was going with him, so they could bring the full kit. Roy would have to keep Lucky company, and maybe eat Spaghetti-O's for dinner. She put on her parka, and handed Ron his, then they hurried to the plane. Ron did an abbreviated walk-around, jumped in the plane, and started the motor while Anne secured the medical kit, and removed the back seats. As soon as the engine was warmed up, he taxied out to the lake, and took off for Slim's place. An hour later, they arrived, and as soon as the propeller stopped spinning, Anne was out the door with her trauma bag. She yelled to the house "Slim, you in there?"

"Yeah whoever you are, I'm laying on the floor and I think I broke my leg." Anne opened the door, and Slim had definitely broken his lower leg. He was weak and shocky but other than that, and a broken leg, he was OK. Anne put a Sam splint on him, and Ron grabbed his hand-held radio so Anne could talk to the doctor in Allakaket. "Dr. Miller, this is Anne Williams, I'm at Slim's cabin. He's got a broken tibia, and he's going into shock. I've splinted the leg with a Sam splint, but, he's old and shocky, so I wanted to start an IV."

"Ok Anne, 1 liter D5W on slow drip, monitor vitals, and transport ASAP."

"Anything for pain?"

"If he's in a lot of pain, give him MS 5mg IV."

“Roger, MS 5mg IV if in serious pain, anything else?”

“Call me when you’re half an hour out, so we can meet you with an ambulance.”

“Roger, We’ll call you when we’re ½ an hour out.”

“Ron, get over here and help me carry Slim to the plane.”

Ron grabbed the stretcher, and they gently log-rolled Slim onto it. Anne put the IV bag under his shoulder so it would keep flowing right, and they picked him up as gently as they could, and carried him to the back door of the plane. They slid him against the far wall, and secured him as best as possible. Anne climbed in after him with her stethoscope and BP cuff already out. Ron closed and locked the door, then ran around and jumped in the pilot’s seat. He started right up, and as soon as the motor was warmed up, he said “Hold on, the plane’s going to move.” Anne sat down Indian Style until he was flying straight and level, and held on to a strap. Once Ron had stabilized at 2,000 feet, Anne went back to work. Slim was stable, and the morphine had taken effect, so he was much more comfortable. Anne took her grease pencil, and wrote M5 1400 on his forehead, meaning she had given him 5mg of Morphine at 1400, so they wouldn’t accidentally give him an overdose. An hour and a half later, Ron called on the aircraft’s radio “Allakaket Control, requesting permission to land, and let Doc Miller know we’re ½ an hour out.”

“Roger, will advise, good luck.”

Ron set the plane up for landing, but kept his speed up to the last second. He floated the plane in to a gentle landing, and taxied right up to the waiting ambulance. Bill and Doc Miller hustled Slim out of the plane, and carried him into the ambulance, which sped off. Ron refilled the plane, and 15 minutes later Bill came back. “Slim’s fine, it was a simple break. Doc Miller was impressed by you two. He wanted to see you both to tell you personally - let’s go.”

They got in Bill’s car, and drove to the doctor’s clinic. Slim was resting comfortably with a cast on his leg. Doc Miller shook both their hands, then took them outside.

“Anne, I don’t want to know where you got the IV and the MS, but I think old Slim would have died without them. I wanted to personally thank you two, and tell you that I’m going to send a letter to the State Medical Boards recommending you both be certified as Paramedics, since you’re obviously capable. Also, I wanted to offer to replace any meds and supplies you use at State expense, and I can order all your controlled meds as your stock needs to be replaced.”

“Doc Miller, Thanks, that’s really nice of you. Steve ordered some stuff for us before he left, and most of it’s still OK, but if you could get another Trauma Kit for Ron to stash in his plane, he could take care of any emergencies that might crop up while he’s flying instead of having to fly all the way home to pick me up. I know in a couple of months, he’ll have enough book

knowledge to pass the EMT II or Paramedic test, but he can't get the practical knowledge out here. And I don't think the hospital wants a 14 year old kid hanging around their ER."

"Anne, you're right about that, but still having the book knowledge and the gear beats not having it. I'll requisition another Paramedic kit from the State."

Doc Miller shook both their hands, they checked in on Slim, and Bill drove them back to the plane. They got home right before dark, and Roy hadn't eaten yet, so Anne made dinner.

Ron spent the rest of the winter studying, surfing the internet, and playing with Lucky, since the snow was too slushy to ski. Finally the lake melted out, so Ron and his dad spent the day putting the pontoons back on. The next day Ron got a call from Bill that they had some deliveries to pick up and a couple of packages for Ron and Anne. Since he was already up, dressed, and had eaten breakfast, he grabbed his gear and headed out to the plane. Taxiing with the pontoons took some getting used to again, but he did OK. Once he was fully waterborne, he taxied to the end of the lake, entered the waypoint for Anchorage into his GPS, and took off. 2 hours later, he landed at Anchorage, and loaded up. The two boxes addressed to him and his mom were large and heavy. He filled the tanks, then requested clearance, and took off. After he finished his deliveries, he stopped in Allakaket to refuel. Bill said he would be waiting for him, someone wanted to see him. After he refueled the plane, Bill drove up and drove him to the Clinic. Slim was sitting there wearing a cast up to his knee and walking on crutches. When Ron walked into the clinic, Slim stood up and shook his hand saying "Young Man, I owe you my life. Thanks just doesn't cover it."

"Slim, my mom actually saved your life, all I did was fly."

"That's not the way I heard it son. Seem to me that even if your mom weren't there you'd have been able to handle it. I was talking to the Doc, and he said the State was making you guys certified Paramedics. If we'd have had you a couple of years back, my partner Eddie would be alive today. I'd appreciate if you could give me a lift back to my cabin."

"Sure Slim, it's right on the way."

Bill helped Slim into the Jeep, and Ron rode in back. When they got to the plane, Ron got out and helped Slim in. After he locked the door, he walked around the plane, checking everything, then jumped in the pilot's seat, and pre-flighted it. Once the engine was warmed up, he entered the waypoint for Slim's cabin and called the tower. He taxied to the end of the lake, and set the plane up to take off. He skipped the "Welcome" speech, and turned to take off. An hour later, they were at Slim's cabin, and Ron helped him inside, and helped him get settled. A couple of hours later, he said goodbye, got back in the plane, and headed home. Anne was surprised when she saw how big the packages were. They were full of gear, supplies, duffle bags, and grab bags. There was even a hard case that would mount to the bulkhead of the aircraft so Ron would have a complete kit wherever the plane was. One piece of gear that he couldn't figure

out was the 2 Nite Ize Pock-Its until he read the letter explaining that they were for holding their basic EMT tools including the shears, penlight, CPR Mask, 2 pair of gloves, wipes and a Gerber Multitool. They took the rest of the afternoon putting their kits together, and mounting Ron's kit to the bulkhead of the plane next to the back door. He slid his Go bag under the passenger seat, since his spares kit was under his seat.

They didn't have anything urgent for the next couple of days, and Anne wanted to make a shopping run to Anchorage, so they got up early the next morning, and piled into the plane. Lucky by now was an old hand and jumped right in the back. They made reservations at the Inn, so they could spend the entire day shopping and seeing the sights. 2 hours later, they were in Anchorage. Anne took off to the grocery and craft stores, so Roy and Ron headed back to the Sporting Goods store. The salesman greeted them like long-lost cousins, since the last time they were there, Ron dropped almost \$3 grand. His commission on that one sale almost equaled his salary for that month. Ron asked him if they sold any mountain bikes. Dave showed him the entire line, when Ron noticed the Specialized Rockhopper A1 FSR XC was on close-out for \$750.00. Ron asked if he could get it cheaper in the box, since they needed to ship it in their airplane home. Dave said that price included assembly, and they could reduce that price by \$50.00 if they'd take a bike in a box. Ron asked what accessories came with. He said that it came with 2 caged water bottles, and he'd throw in a wheel-riding speedometer/odometer. Ron asked if he had any Cat's Eye light kits, the 12-volt model. Dave said he'd look. 5 minutes later, he had an old dusty box in his hands containing a 12v Cat's eye light kit. It was marked \$100.00 but he'd sell it to Ron for \$50.00. The cat's eye system included a 12vdc 2Ah gel cell and a Xenon/twin white LED headlamp that rode on top of the battery, and an LED rear red light that was integral to the generator. Ron looked around and found a Princeton headlamp with a xenon/LED lamp that took 4 AA batteries. They wanted \$40.00 for the headlight, and Ron realized the extra weight and drag of the generator set wouldn't be worth the few times he'd need it, so he asked Dave to put the Cat's Eye back. He spotted a tool kit that would fit under the seat that included a patch kit, tire irons, and a dog bone wrench. There was a good air pump next to it, so he got that too. They had a set of open-end wrenches in a nearby aisle, so he added that to the pile.

He picked up the headlamp and 2 4-packs of NiMh batteries. Between headlamp and the batteries, the cost was the same. He smacked himself on the forehead when he remembered he already had a Princeton Headlamp just like it, but he still needed the batteries, since he only had alkalines. Ron told Dave to hold the bike for him, he had some more shopping to do. They wandered over to the firearms display, and Ron saw a very strange looking rifle. Since he was under age, he pointed it out to his dad, who asked the salesman if he could look at it. They looked at it together, and found that it was a Kel-Tec SU-16. The action broke in half right behind the chamber at the trigger guard, and only need a pin removed or replaced to either break it in half, or make it ready to shoot. Then the salesman showed Roy how the handguard folded down to form a bipod, and it also took inexpensive USGI M-16/AR-15 mags. Roy looked at the price, \$525.00 with 1 10-round magazine. Roy asked if the sales manager was handy, and 2 minutes later he was talking to Larry the store manager. "May I help you?"



“We’d like to buy this rifle, and the Rockhopper bike, and I wanted to know if you could give me a discount on the rifle.”

“Yes sir, Dave told me you’ve been spending some money here lately. I can give you a standard discount of 20% on all future orders. Here’s my card with the discount code on the back.”

Roy looked at his name tag, then said “Thank you Larry, I’m sure we’ll do more business with you in the future. Ok, I’ll take the rifle, 3 USGI 20-round mags, 1 cases of 5.56 NATO ball and 1 case of 55gr SPBT ammo for this gun, as well as a cleaning kit, and a hard Pelican case that will hold the gun collapsed, and the 3 loaded mags.”

“Sir, we have all that in stock, anything else?”

“Now that you mentioned it, I’d like a new smoke pole. What do you have in stock.”

“We’ve got Flintlocks, Percussion and 209 in-lines.”

“What’s a 209 In-line?”

“It uses a 209 Shotgun primer, with an in-line ignition system, for reliability and accuracy.”

“Cool, no more misfires or hang fires.”

“Not as often anyway. The action is essentially weatherproof once you load it, so it’s a perfect Black Powder hunting rifle system.”

“Can you shoot patched Balls or Sabots?”

“Most modern muzzleloaders easily shoot both, all you have to do is match the bullet weight to the rifling, and select the right caliber. Start with the recommended powder load, and experiment carefully to find the most accurate load for the round you’re shooting.”

“Great, can you show me some in-line 209’s?”

“Right this way.”

Larry showed Roy about 6-8 rifles in calibers ranging from .45 to .54. He liked the feel, balance and length of pull of the .50 Traditions Pursuit Pro. It’s stainless barrel and synthetic stock were a bonus for hunting in Alaska. Larry suggested .50 caliber sabots if he were hunting, and Minnie ball or round ball for target shooting. Roy asked what quantity the ammo came in, and he said they usually came 100 balls per box, or 500 sabots, and you get the bullets separately. He recommended the .45 JHP 200gr bullets for the sabots.

“I’ll take the rifle, 500 round balls, 500 sabots, and 500 of the 200gr JHP bullets.”

“Sir, you’ll need patches, primers, Pyrodex Pellets, starter, worm, synthetic ram rod, possibles bag, and a tool/cleaning kit.”

“Ok, set me up.”

Larry reached behind the counter, pulled 2000 rounds worth of 50gr. pellets and primers, and all the gear he would need. Larry suggested a Redfield 3x9x50 for extra light gathering. He could have it mounted and boresighted in an hour. Besides it would take that long to do the instant background check.

“Can you ring everything up here so I can pay on my credit card?”

“Sure - Can I have your card?”

Roy handed Larry his platinum AMEX card.

Larry rang up everything he had purchased so far, and then applied the 20% discount, and charged tax. He waived the background check fee. “Ok Mr. Williams - here’s your card and your receipt, everything will be ready for you in an hour. If there is anything else I can do, please ask me.”

“OK, where can we go to kill an hour?”

“Mr. Williams, we have a laser-tag room in the back if you want, or there’s a nice coffee shop next door. Feel free to use the laser-tag room.”

“Larry, I think I’m a little too old for that, but I think Ron might be game.”

“Ok, I’ve got a lunch break coming up - Ron, you want to play laser tag?”

“You got a sniper rifle setup?”

“We’ve got pistols and rifles - sniper is up to you.”

“Ok Larry you’re ON.”

Roy knew Larry might be in for a surprise, and decided to forgo the coffee shop.

An hour later, a much more humble and \$20.00 poorer manager was shaking his head, wondering how a 14-year old kid could shoot like that.

When they got back to the gun department, the scoped rifle was sitting on the counter waiting for Larry to sign the paperwork.

“Ron, I don’t know how you did it, I’ve been playing this game for 5 years and only lost once, and that was today.”

“How about a rematch next time I’m in Anchorage, I fly here almost every week.”

“You’re a pilot.?”

“Yes sir, been flying commercial for almost a year. That red and white DeHaviland Otter on space 54 is mine.”

“Didn’t that plane belong to Jim?”

Roy spoke up at this point.

“Jim died recently from complications of arteriosclerosis. He had to stop flying over a year ago, and Ron was learning how to fly. Jim was Ron’s “Grandpa” and when he couldn’t fly anymore, the FAA waived the age limit so we would have a commercial pilot in Allakaket.”

Larry grabbed a dolly to bring the heavy stuff out to the cab. Roy hoped the inn had a dolly so they could get the ammo to their room easily. They paid the cabbie, and a bellboy helped unload the cab with a luggage rack. Roy gave the bellboy a \$5.00 tip, and asked him to put it in their room. Anne wasn’t back yet.

Anne showed up with cases of food, 100 pounds of rice, 100 pounds of whole wheat flour, 10 frozen whole chickens packed in dry ice, several bunches of celery, a case of instant oatmeal, a 25-pound bag of raisins, Salt, Sugar, Cinnamon, Dry Teriyaki mix, and a bunch of other stuff. Ron was horrified because he knew that he’d have to load all this in the plane without getting paid for it. They went out to dinner, and went to bed early.

The next morning, they got up, raided the breakfast bar, and called a cab. The cabbie grumbled that they really needed a forklift for all this, and he called his brother to bring his pickup. Roy paid them another \$20 to load it, plus his brother’s gas. They pulled up to the plane, and before Ron could get out, they started loading the plane. Ron didn’t object. When they finished, Roy gave them \$10 each for a tip, and paid the cabbie what was on the meter. Ron double checked the plane, and they got in. Lucky jumped up on Roy and Anne’s lap for the trip home. Ron skipped the “Welcome” speech, and started the plane. Once everything was good to go, he called the tower, and was given immediate takeoff clearance. 2 hours later, He debated flying straight home, but his fuel gauge was below half due to the cargo, and he decided to refuel in Allakaket. After a brief fueling stop, and a pit stop for Lucky, they were on their way home. Ron grabbed the cart to unload the plane, Roy and Anne helped where they could. He was

really tired when he finished unloading the plane, so he waited until tomorrow to put his bike together. Anne got a look at what they had bought and was wondering what was in the Pelican case. Ron showed her his new Plane Gun. She thought it was cute.

## Chapter 88 - Disappointments

The next morning, Ron followed the directions to assemble his Mountain Bike. Just as he was getting ready to try it out, Anne spoke up. “Ron Williams, where’s your Helmet?”

“Mom, I forgot to get one.”

“No helmet, no Ride.”

“Mom, the nearest helmet is in Anchorage, and even if I order it, I still need to fly 4 hours round trip to get it - wouldn’t that be much more dangerous than not wearing a helmet until I get one?”

“Nice Try Mister. That bike stays put until you have a helmet on your head.” Roy overheard Anne and Ron arguing, but knew better than to get in the middle of this one, and made himself scarce. He thought Ron was right, but trying to argue logically with a Woman rarely worked, especially a Mother.

Ron put the bike up, and uncased the SU-16. “Where are you going young man?”

“Mom, I’ve been shooting since I’ve been 10 years old - what, now I have to wear a helmet to shoot?”

“Roy Williams, Get in here.”

Roy walked as slowly as he could. He knew what was coming.

“Ron you know better than to sass your Mother, now apologize.”

“Mom, I’m sorry. I won’t ride the bike without a helmet. Can I try out my new rifle?”

“Roy, you want to go with him?”

Seeing a way out of his predicament, Roy agreed in a heartbeat. Ron grabbed a set of ear and eye protection for his Dad, and grabbed a combat pack of the 5.56 NATO ammo, and the Pelican case containing his SU-16. He handed a set to his Dad, and put his on, then they beat a hasty retreat out the door. When they were well out of earshot, Ron asked his Dad what was wrong with his Mom.

“Ron, it’s in your medical books, Mom is going through menopause, and when the symptoms are really bad, she might act irrationally. Don’t antagonize her, but don’t patronize her either. That crack about helmets and shooting was just the thing to set her off.

I agree that you are doing stuff much more dangerous than riding a bike, but I don't let you run the chainsaw without protective equipment either. Helmets reduce risk, and are a good thing. You really don't need to ride the bike right now, and I'm sure Bill will have you make a trip to Anchorage in the next couple of days."

They hiked halfway to the lake, and Ron saw a tree trunk section that he had used previously for a target, so he turned it around and paced back 100 yards and drew a line, then back another 100 and drew another, then he carried the case forward to the 100-yard line. He laid down a tarp on the ground and opened the case. First he read the owner's manual, then he picked up the rifle, and re-assembled it. He opened the combat pack, and loaded the 10-round magazine, then made sure their ears were on, and went prone to check the zero of the rifle. He fired a 5-shot group, then put the safety on and pointed the rifle in a safe direction and walked over to check his rounds. They were 3 inches high, and 3 inches right. He came back to the rifle, and re-set the sights. Then he got back down prone, and fired another 5 shot group, and repeated the process. When he came back to his dad, he was visibly upset.

"Dad, this rifle's only shooting a little over 2 inches at 100 yards."

"Ron, I hate to tell you, but that's about average for a light carbine, which is what a SU-16 is. The military is happy as a pig in slop if their M-16's shoot a 2MOA group. Your Browning A-bolt with the BOSS is a precision rifle. Most rifle carbines like the AR-15, Mini-14, etc are very light with skinny barrels, and tend to shoot much bigger groups than a bolt-action precision rifle. A 2" group from something as light as your SU-16 is actually pretty good."

Ron backed up to the 200-yard line, and repeated the process. Either he was getting more familiar with the gun, or it was breaking in, because he shot a 3 inch group. He still wasn't happy about the accuracy, but realized that he couldn't carry his Browning A-bolt as a plane gun. He took it back home, cleaned it, reloaded all 4 mags and put it back in his case, then installed a second set of brackets high in the passenger cabin where he could reach it, and clamped the case into the brackets. He shook the case to make sure it was secure, and it was mounted solidly. Roy wanted to try out his new black powder rifle, so he and Ron walked back out to the spot where he was shooting. Roy had been reading the manual while Ron cleaned his rifle, and installed it in the plane. He carried a box of Pyrodex pellets, and sabots loaded with .45 bullets, and enough primers for the bullets he brought in his possibles bag. He had read up, and for what he wanted to do, 1 Pyrodex pellet was plenty. He ran a cleaning patch down the bore, then dry patches until they came up dry, then dropped a Pyrodex pellet down the muzzle, followed by a sabot bullet. He used his starter, then the ramrod to fully seat the bullet, then marked the ramrod like the instructions said. He broke open the action, and placed a primer over the nipple, closed the action, and shouldered the rifle. Since he was prone, the barrel was extremely stable, and he cocked the hammer and when the sights steadied on the center, he squeezed the trigger. He did that 3 more times, then they walked down to the log to check his target. Roy had shot a 1" group with his new

smokepole. Roy was really happy since the best group he had shot with his .54 Hawken flintlock was a 2" group at 100 yards. Roy decided to push his luck and try the 200 yard line. 3 shots later, he too had shot a 3" group.

Ron wanted to return his gun until Roy caught him, turned him around, and said "Ron, that SU-16 is performing exactly as designed. It's a difficult gun to shoot accurately, but it weighs ½ what your Browning A-bolt does, and it folds in half - How many guns do you know that can fold in half and still shoot sub-2 MOA groups? You want a tack driver, you already own 2 of them. You need to realize that sometimes practical accuracy is better than sub-moa accuracy. If you're a grunt on the ground, and your average contact distance is 50 yards, which would you rather carry, a 5 pound gun that can hit a man at 100 yards all day, or a 20 pound gun that can hit a man at 600 yards? Remember, you have to carry all your ammo and you need to carry enough to survive multiple firefights. That 600 yard rifle is useless in triple-canopy jungle where you can't even see more than 100 yards, and it's 4 times as heavy."

"Ok Dad, message received. Seems today is my day to stick my feet in my mouth. Sorry if I seemed ungrateful."

"I wouldn't say ungrateful, I just think you're spoiled by having access to all these tack drivers. Your average hunter is lucky to be able to afford even your Browning A-bolt. Your average infantryman has to make do with the M -16 or something similar. You better remember that practical accuracy is what puts meat on the table, or the bad guy down."

Later that afternoon, Bill called, and asked Ron if he could make a delivery run, the lodges were starting to gear up for their busy season. Ron thought "Saved by the bell" and asked Bill what time they wanted the pickup. Then he told Bill he had to stop at the Sporting goods store and buy a bicycle helmet, or his mom wouldn't let him ride his mountain bike. Bill said that would work OK, since the delivery driver wasn't busy, and there wasn't anything perishable in the shipment. Ron figured he'd only need an hour to go to the sporting goods store and get back to the plane. He asked Bill if the delivery driver could be there at 1030 tomorrow. Bill said that would be OK and signed off.

At 0630 the next morning, Ron was winging toward Anchorage. By 0830, he called the tower, and requested landing clearance. He was on the ground by 0845 and in a cab by 0850. The store opened right at 9:00, and Dave was eager to help him, even if it only was a helmet. By the time he left, he bought the helmet, 4 spare tubes, a spare tire, a lightweight set of riding clothes that had a padded seat, and a set of riding shoes with a steel shank to spread the pedaling effort through the foot. They also doubled as lightweight hiking boots in case he wanted to park and check out something, or he had to cross terrain that was safer to walk across than ride. He got back to the plane at 1015, and the driver showed up exactly at 1030. He taxied over to the pumps, and topped off the tanks. After he made his deliveries, he flew to Allakaket to fuel up, then went home. When he got home, he showed his mom

the helmet he bought, and she approved.

The next day Ron filled his water bottles, checked the tire pressure, and got dressed in his riding clothes and shoes, then put his helmet on. He was a little wobbly when he first started since he had never ridden a bike before, but got the hang of it quickly thanks to Dave's suggestions. Soon he was peddling madly from the lake to the house and back. Anne didn't want him going out of sight of the house until he was a much better rider.

The next day he added his shoulder holster and fanny pack and tried it again. It didn't affect his balance as much as he feared. Then he added the fully loaded camelback, and that definitely increased his difficulty balancing. Then he remembered what Dave had said about keeping his center of gravity low - he guessed that was why Dave wanted to sell him the \$100 pannier bag set. Maybe next time he was in Anchorage he would buy a set. When he finally got tired of riding, he put the bike up in the shed next to the snow blower, and went inside to change and work on his studies. He was almost finished with his medical studies, and next week was his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. The only thing he really wanted for his birthday was to see his Grandpa again.

Anne and Roy were going nuts trying to think what to get Ron for his birthday - I mean what do you get a 15-yr old Millionaire that lives in the middle of no where? A Ferrari? Roy had a hint when Ron was muttering about a set of panniers for his bike, so one day when Ron was out, Roy called Bill, who called Dave, and Dave said that Ron was looking at a set of \$100 panniers for his bike. Roy told Bill, who told Dave that Ron was complaining that his 30-pound daybag was messing with his balance. Dave said that would always be a problem, and the solution would be to get the bags. Roy ordered them on the spot, but asked Dave to be sneaky since it was for Ron's 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. Dave and Bill said they would work something out. Several days later, Bill called Ron and said he had some more deliveries, including a heavy box for his parents. Ron flew to Anchorage, and they loaded his plane, and he was back later in the afternoon, wondering what they had gotten him for his birthday - it felt like a weight set. The next time Ron went out riding, they opened the box, and took several boxes of bullets, Pyrodex, and primers out of the box. Dave had indeed been sneaky, since the bullets weighed a lot. The morning of April 11, Ron woke to a special breakfast, and his mom and dad singing Happy Birthday. Lucky decided that howling, even if appropriate, would get him banished to the shed, so he covered his ears as best as possible. Ron walked into the living room, and saw the panniers mounted on his mountain bike. He gave his Mom and Dad a big hug and thanked them

After Breakfast, he got dressed in his riding clothes, stuck his GPS and radio in his fanny pack, and loaded the panniers lightly to take it for a test drive. He was glad that they didn't get the front ones as well, since they increased the steering effort. The back panniers were a handful, but they were better than a heavy daybag. When he came back, he asked his Mom and Dad if he could load the bike up and overnight out near the Caribou meadows. He could easily cover 10 miles in an hour with his fully suspended Specialized Rockhopper. It would



only take him an hour or so to reach the meadow, maybe longer if he stopped to check the scenery. Anne suggested taking Lucky, and Ron agreed, since Lucky showed no tendency to chase or nip him on the bike, and trotted right along next to him about 4 feet away. They said OK, and he loaded the bike for an overnight trip, kissed his mom, and gave his dad a hug, and he was off. Lucky trotted right alongside, and Ron stopped halfway at the creek to refill his water, and give Lucky a rest and a drink since his tongue was hanging halfway to the ground. Half an hour later, they were moving steadily, and Ron dropped down to his small chain ring to climb the hill, but made it quicker and easier than walking. This early in the season, the meadow was deserted, but beautiful. He pitched his tent and gathered wood for a fire while Lucky took a nap. When it got dark, he boiled some ramen noodles in his canteen cup, and added several pieces of jerky. He took Lucky's bowl out, gave him half the dog food, then a canteen full of water. After dinner, they laid down in the tent and went to sleep. They packed up at first light, and Ron ate a chocolate bar, thinking he could eat when he got home. They stopped at the creek again, and Ron drank more water than he thought he had to, then watered some trees. Lucky had already watered half the trees in the forest by now, so Ron made sure he didn't water one Lucky already did, or he'd have to come back and re-mark his territory, slowing them down. They got home around 9:00 and Ron asked his Mom if they had saved any breakfast for him. Since the stove was still hot, she gave him a muffin, and made him some scrambled eggs and bacon.

Later that afternoon, Ron checked his e-mail. He had an E-mail from his uncle Steve. After he read it, he was whooping and hollering enough to bring his parents on the run. "Ron, what's going on?"

Ron pointed to the screen. "Steve sent me an e-mail. Barrett has a new prototype they want me to test at MacDill. Steve said I could stay with him at BOQ for 2 weeks to do a thorough T&E on the rifle, and the Air Force will fly me from Anchorage to MacDill in the General's VIP jet, and Steve got permission for me to fly right seat. They need me to leave tomorrow morning, since they need the prototype tested ASAP, because the military wants to order a bunch if they work."

Roy and Anne looked at each other, and shrugged their shoulders - what could they do? He did have a contract with Barrett to T&E their prototypes, and they were paying his way and giving him \$10K for 2 weeks worth of work.

Anne gave her son a big hug, told him to be careful, and have a good time. Roy was beaming with pride. "Son, just do your best, be scrupulously honest, and write a good report. Tell Steve I said Hi for me. Now go get packed."

Ron remembered something, so he called Bill. "Bill, I'll be in Florida for the next two weeks testing a new rifle. I won't be available for deliveries or flights."

"Ron, your schedule is wide open for the next two weeks. I'll tell anyone who calls you're

not available, and schedule them for 2 weeks later.”

“Bill, you better make that at least 16 days, to allow for travel time, etc.”

“Ok Ron, have fun and see you in when you get back.”

Ron spent the rest of the day getting ready, then sent Steve a quick urgent e-mail, asking him if he should bring the other Barretts to do a side-by-side comparison. Steve thought it was an excellent idea, and told him to bring the Barretts, and as much ammo as he needed. Lake City had done a huge run of the ammo, and they had 20 cases of the ammo for his gun on base. Ron replied that since the ammo was so heavy, he'd use their ammo. Steve replied that they could provide all the ammo, and to just bring the gun. Ron finished packing, and remembered to leave room in his luggage for his fanny pack and shoulder holster, since he highly doubted the Air force would let him carry a double shoulder holster or a 14 inch Bowie knife aboard the aircraft on his person. Ron checked around, and they had plenty of wood to last several months, and Lucky would be OK without him. When he finished packing, he had 1 suitcase, and the Pelican case containing the Barretts rifle. He had kept his BDUs from his last trip, and felt they would be the best clothes to wear on base, so he wouldn't cause any disruptions.

The next day, he was ready to fly at 0600. His Mom gave him a bag full of muffins, a thermos of coffee, and a big hug. Roy gave him a big hug, and prayed over him, then Ron was out the door. The Pelican case weighed a ton, so it took him a while to get it to the plane, and into the passenger door. When he finished, he did a walk-around, and then climbed aboard and started the engine. As soon as the engine was warmed up, he set the GPS for Elmendorf, taxied to the end of the lake, and took off. 2 hours later, he was landing at Elmendorf AFB. He taxied right up next to the VIP plane, and an airman checked his ID, then loaded his baggage aboard, being very careful with the Pelican case. Evidently his CO had told him if that case was even scratched, he would spend the rest of his military career in Reykjavik Iceland, which made Elmendorf seem like a tropical paradise.

The crew chief welcomed Ron aboard, and held the cabin door open for him. The pilot shook his hand, and told him to take the right hand seat. As soon as he was strapped in, and his headset plugged in, the pilot did the pre-flight checklist, telling Ron what he was doing while he was doing it. Finally, he said “Starting one” and a minute later “Starting two”. With the 2 big Rolls Royce engines turning, he quickly performed the rest of the checklist. “Ok Ron, we're ready to take-off, all we need is clearance.” He called the tower, who gave him clearance as soon as he reached the runway. Hearing this, the pilot bumped the throttles up to taxi faster, and when he got to the runway, he called the tower “Turning”. All he got back was a “Roger”. He shoved the throttles to full, and still had almost half the runway left when they were airborne. The pilot cleaned up the plane as soon as they were airborne, raising the gear and the flaps, and accelerated to over 400 knots. He cruise climbed to 30,000 feet, and set a course for MacDill AFB in Florida. As soon as they were straight and

level, he asked Ron if he wanted to take the controls. Of course Ron said yes, then as soon as Ron had his hands and feet on the controls, the pilot called “Co-pilot’s plane” and Ron replied “I got it.” For the next couple of hours Ron flew the plane, even though they could just as easily have engaged the autopilot. Finally the pilot called “Pilot’s plane” and then engaged the autopilot.

“Ron, you seem to be doing even better than last time.”

“For the last 8 months, I’ve been flying a DeHaviland Otter with a Commercial Pilot’s license.”

“You’re awfully young to have a Commercial Ticket.”

“I know, my recently deceased Grandpa used to do all the commercial flying for Allakaket Alaska and the surrounding hunting lodges, but he developed severe Arteriosclerosis to the point that he couldn’t safely fly, so the FAA waived the age requirement since I already had enough stick time to get my private pilot’s license, and there wasn’t anyone available.”

“You said Allakaket, that’s in Central Alaska. I guess you’ve made a lot of water landings.”

“I’d say 80-90% of my landings have been water landings, and my home lake is as long as the main runway at Elmendorf is wide.”

“You’re kidding, that runway is barely 500 feet wide.”

“Yup, Jim told me landing on water under those conditions is kind of like catching the 3 wire on an Aircraft carrier in the dark with no go-around.”

“How come?”

“Most of the lakes are surrounded by high ground. My home lake has a 500-foot obstruction less than a mile away from the runway.”

“Yikes, that would give me nightmares.”

“Flying bush is some of the toughest civil flying you can do, but the most fun. Almost all the bush pilots fly stick and rudder with a magnetic compass and an altimeter.”

The pilot looked around the cockpit, and imagined flying without all those instruments to guide him. He knew it would be fun, but very demanding.

“Last summer, I installed a hand-held GPS receiver in my plane, with an external antenna. It made things much easier since I can fly point to point as long as I enter the waypoints

beforehand. Magnetic compasses are notoriously unreliable that far North. Last summer, the GPS unit saved my life when I flew too close to a thunderstorm I never saw, and got caught in a downdraft, and flew off course into a low-visibility situation to recover some altitude. I was lost and disoriented. If it weren't for the compass rose display on the GPS telling me where Allakaket was, I might have gotten hopelessly lost and flew into a mountain."

"That sounds like a real scary event. I'm glad I have all this advanced navigation equipment. I've got a GPS unit too, but it's connected to the plane's computer, and shows where I am on a moving map display, and where I need to go, and even warns me of high terrain if I fly low enough for the terrain to be a threat."

"Wow, that sounds like a really neat piece of gear. Can I see it?"

"It's right in the middle of the console between us. The one that looks like a TV. The moving cross is this plane, and the terrain is moving underneath us. With this gear, I can safely fly right on the deck in IFR conditions if I have to."

"How much does that cost?"

"I've heard figures ranging from 10 to 50 thousand dollars each."

"I think I'll stick with my \$500 GPS."

"That's a good idea. You probably are very familiar with the area you fly over, but we can get assigned to fly anywhere in the world at a moment's notice, so we don't have the luxury of being familiar with the territory. This is only the second time I've flown to Elmendorf. We normally fly VIPs from DC to MacDill, or fly the JSOC to meetings with his European counterparts."

"That must be exciting?"

"It's about as exciting as watching concrete harden, but the pay's good, and in 10 years, I can get a job with a major airline making in excess of 100 grand a year."

"I made 60 thousand last year flying hunters and deliveries."

"You're Kidding."

"Nope, hunters pay top dollar to fly from Anchorage to their hunting lodges. I usually flew 2 round-trips a day from Anchorage to the lodges for the summer and early fall. I made 500-1,000 dollars per day."

“Kid, maybe I’m in the wrong racket.”

“If you’re a really good stick and rudder pilot, you can make a lot of money flying bush, but it’s a lot more dangerous than flying for United. My oldest uncle died in a plane crash when a downdraft flew his plane right into a lake.”

“In that case, I think I’ll stick to the friendly skies. So what brings you to MacDill?”

“I’m working on a T&E project for Barrett. Steve Fellows is my uncle.”

“You mean Colonel Steve Fellows?”

“Yes sir - that’s him.”

“That explains why they sent a VC-120 all the way from MacDill to pick you up. Must be nice to have low friends in high places?”

“Actually, it’s a two-edged sword. He’s greased the skids for me to go to the Academy in a couple of years.”

“No kidding, I’m an Academy Grad too - any ideas what you want to do?”

“I’d like to fly the F-15 Strike Eagle.”

“Me too kid, but there’s 10 times more applicants than planes, what would your backup plan be?”

“They want me for the Air Force Shooting team, that’s why I’m doing a T&E for Barretts; I’ve got this God-given gift for long-distance shooting.”

“Amen, I know what you mean; I know that my flying talent comes from God, because I could never do what I do on my own.”

“My Grandpa Jim told me a Pilot needs 3 things: 1) Faith in God 2) Faith in Himself and 3) Faith in his plane. If he loses any 1 of those three, he shouldn’t fly.”

“Exactly. Flying has definitely improved my faith in God. OK, we need to check in and get ready to land. MacDill Control, this is Flight #458, requesting clearance.”

“Roger, runway 27 left, taxi to VIP terminal.”

“Acknowledge 27 left to VIP terminal.”

The pilot flipped a switch, and the flaps deployed, and he reduced the throttles to landing speed. 15 minutes later, they made a perfect 2-point landing, and taxied to the VIP terminal. Steve was waiting with his Hummer, and the VC-120 taxied right up to it. The pilot shut down his engines, shook Ron's hand, and said "See you on the return trip. Thanks for the conversation, and good luck." The crew chief deployed the air stairs, and Ron walked down to the waiting arms of his uncle. "Ron, I'm glad you made it. How was the flight?"

"Great, they allowed me to fly right seat the whole trip." Steve knew this, but was glad Ron had a good time. The airman unpacked Ron's bags, and Steve was pleasantly surprised when Ron only had 2 bags: A suitcase and the Pelican case containing his Barretts prototype. Evidently Ron was here for business, just as Steve hoped. He drove to the BOQ, and Ron carried his gear into Steve's room. Someone had already set up a cot and footlocker for Ron, who saw the footlocker, and put his clothes in it, then he changed into his BDUs. Ron asked Steve if they could go to the range, and if the new Prototype was there yet. Steve said the range master had everything set all ready, and was ready any time he was. Ron said, "Let's go" and carried his cased Barretts to Steve's Hummer. They drove to the range, and Ron met with the Range master, and the Barretts tech rep who was conducting the T&E. He must have been forewarned about Ron's age, since he said nothing other than "Nice to meet you" and asked him if he were ready. Ron nodded his head, and the Tech Rep uncased the new prototype, and went through a canned speech about the new features. The main difference between the "new" and "old" prototypes was the addition of a suppressor. While it wouldn't suppress all the sounds of firing a hypersonic bullet, it did several things the military was extremely interested in: 1) It eliminated muzzle blast and signature, 2) It eliminated the recoil associated with the muzzle blast more effectively than a brake and 3) Modified the sound signature of firing to the point that unless someone was in a position to hear the supersonic crack, they might not recognize the sound of firing, and even if they did hear the crack, they would think the shooter was 90 degrees from where they actually were. Since the range of the BMG .50 Barrett's rifle is over a mile, it would make a very effective long range weapon since the suppressor did an excellent job of hiding the shooter's position. Shooting with the previous muzzle brake actually magnified the blast by re-directing it to the side, causing a large disturbance of dirt and dust around the firing position. The Tech Rep explained that this gun has only been function fired, and the scope boresighted. When he uncased the new prototype, Ron immediately noticed the scope mount was twice as high as the previous scope mount in order to clear the suppressor. He asked the Tech Rep about it, and explained the parallax problem would resolve itself well before the minimum effective range of the BMG 50 round since the bullet wasn't fully stabilized until it had traveled 200 yards, and by 300 yards, the parallax was negligible. Ron accepted the Tech Rep's explanation, but still wanted to verify it during testing. He asked for a chronograph with a remote display, and had the Range Master set it up 20 feet in front of his shooting position, and to set it up carefully so he wouldn't accidentally shoot the sky screens since the scope's line of sight was over 3 inches above the line of bore. Ron was glad to see the adjustable cheekpiece on the MacMillan stock, and took his time adjusting the stock to fit him exactly with the tools enclosed in the test kit. When he was satisfied with the fit of the gun, he dry

fired a dozen times to get a feel for the trigger break, then set the bipod and monopod so the scope was fixed on the bullseye 1,000 yards away. The tech rep handed him a loaded magazine of Lake City Match BMG 50 ammo, and the Range Master set up his high-power spotting scope. With the Bipod and monopod set-up Ron was confident his Point of Aim would be the same for each of the 5 rounds. Everyone checked their ears and eyes, and Ron keyed the microphone on his headset. “Gunny you set?” Ron looked over his shoulder, and the Range master gave him a thumbs up, so he chambered a round, steadied his pulse and breathing, and touched the trigger. The gun was maybe 10% as loud as the prototype. Gunny called him and said the first round was in the bullseye, but high and right 1 MOA from the bullseye. Ron didn’t touch the controls, and shot the other 5 rounds. They landed in the same area, but his group was almost 14 inches. As the target was replaced, he adjusted his scope so the next group should be in the bullseye, and the Tech Rep noted the changes. He checked with the Gunny, and chambered a round, then when the scope crosshairs were steady on the bullseye, he squeezed the trigger, and the Gunny yelled “Bullseye”. As soon as Ron settled down, he tried to put the other 4 rounds into the bullseye. 4 out of the 5 rounds were in the bullseye, but the 5<sup>th</sup> was a flyer. Ron knew that he was shooting bullseyes, and suspected the gun might have a problem. After the 10<sup>th</sup> round, he checked the printout of the Chronograph, and noted the velocities were 200 fps higher than his gun. He called the Gunny and the Tech Rep and pointed that out. The tech rep explained that all modern suppressors exhibit “freebore boost” from the smoothbore section of the suppressor, and the fact that the bullet is flying in a partial vacuum for a fraction of a second without the drag of the bore. Ron asked him what the twist of the barrel was, and he said it was 1 in 36. He asked what the twist of his prototype was, and the Tech Rep said it was probably 1 in 36. Ron tried not to sound like a know-it all when he told the tech rep that the extra velocity might be pushing the bullet beyond Lake City’s design specs, and could be inducing yaw, which would cause flyers. The Tech Rep asked Ron what the fix would be. The gunny chimed in at this point. “Lance, either you need to slow the twist or make the bullet heavier. Since messing with the bullet might cause other problems down line, like someone using the bullet in the wrong model Barretts, you’d be better off decreasing the twist to 1 in 38 or 1 in 40 to slow the rotation of the bullet, because the rotational speed of the bullet in rpm is a function of twist vs. velocity, and if the bullet is designed for 5,000 rpm, and you’re spinning it at let’s say 6,000 rpm, it could yaw or even separate the jacket in extreme conditions.”

Lance turned to Ron and said “Thanks, you’ve definitely earned your pay.”

“Lance, I’m not through yet - I think there might be a problem with your scope mount. It’s way high, and it’s just connected with 2 QD claws. Could you made a monoblock scope mount out of a billet of steel, with 4 claw mounts. Shape it like a Capital U, and leave just enough clearance in the hollow to clear the center of the scope, and make the mounting clamps as wide as possible.”

“Ron, that’s brilliant. I guess our engineers thought the existing mounts would be fine.

Your design would add less than a pound to the design, and there would be no way for the scope mount to flex, since the front and rear mount are one piece of steel.”

The Gunny spoke up, “We could fabricate something on base by tomorrow if Barretts gives its approval, otherwise it could take a week for Barretts to build and ship it.”

“Of course Gunny, I’ve got all the blueprints in my case. Let’s go to your machine shop and have them fabricate it. Ron, I’ll see you around noon tomorrow with the new scope mount. Gunny, I hope you’ve got the equipment to boresight this gun?”

“We’ve got the boresighter from the last prototype, the laser boresighter was a perfect idea.” Lance and the Gunny set off for their machine shop, and Steve asked Ron what he wanted to do. “Is Chief Simmons available?”

“I don’t know Ron, let me call.”

“Ron, he’s not only available, but told me to get you over there RFN.”

10 minutes later, they drove up to the gate of the SEAL compound. Chief “Bear” Simmons was waiting for Ron, who ran up to greet him as soon as the Hummer stopped. Bear wrapped Ron up in a bear hug, and lifted him off the ground. “Ron how the hell you doing? I’m glad you came back to see me.”

“Chief, I’m part of the T&E team working on the new suppressed Barrett rifle.”

“No kidding, wow - we were hoping someone would get on the stick and make a suppressed BMG 50 rifle.”

“Bear, it’s a real neat gun, but it’s not totally suppressed, since the round is almost hypersonic. All the suppressor does is control the muzzle gasses, reducing recoil and signature.”

“Even if it’s not totally silent, the enemy will never know what hit them, since the bullet arrives before the crack, and the suppressor will hide the shooter’s location.”

“I know, but the new gun has a couple of minor bugs. The freebore boost is pushing the Lake City rounds beyond their design specs, and inducing yaw; plus the high scope mount is causing some variation in the scope alignment. Gunny suggested they change the twist from 1:36 to 1:38 or 40. I suggested they use a monoblock scope mount.”

“Ron, that monoblock mount is ingenious. Some high-power target mounts are monoblock aluminum mounts, and they’re rock solid.”



“I’ve got until noon tomorrow - what you want to do?”

“I’m wide open, want to go diving?”

“I didn’t bring my trunks.”

“Not to worry, we’ve got everything you need.”

“Steve, is it OK if Bear and I go diving this afternoon.”

“Chief, can you have him back by 1800 for dinner?”

Bear saluted, “Aye Aye Sir.”

Bear saw Steve manhandle a huge Pelican case into the rear of the Hummer. “Ron, what’s in the case?”

“Last year’s Barrett’s prototype - they gave it to me. Want to see it?”

“You bet.”

Ron uncased the rifle and handed it to Bear. His eyes started watering when he saw the white feather. Ron asked him what was wrong.

“I met Carlos Hathcock right before he died. Someone must have really been impressed with you to paint the revered white feather on your stock.”

“I think Gunny the Range master had something to do with it.”

“Yeah sounds like him. How do you like the new rifle.”

“The suppressor is great, it takes the recoil from around my Browning A-Bolt .308 to my <skip> SU-16.”

“What are you doing with that poodle shooter?”

“It’s my plane gun.”

“You’re a pilot?”

I’ve been flying my Gramps DeHaviland Otter for almost a year. I got my commercial ticket 6 months ago, and I’ve been flying as an Alaskan bush pilot since then.”

“Holy cow Ron, all I did as a kid was steal cars.”

“I wasn’t too impressed by its accuracy either, but how many sniper rifles do you know that can fold in half, and weigh less than 10 pounds?”

“You’re right. The Military made a decision, which I don’t agree with, that a grunt is better off with a light short-range rifle that he can carry a lot of ammo for, instead of a heavy accurate rifle with less ammo. Seems the only service that emphasizes marksmanship is Uncle Sam’s Misguided Children.”

As they were speaking, another Hummer drove up to take them to the docks. Ron told Steve he’d see him for dinner tonight, and to please take care of his rifle. Steve cased the rifle, waved goodbye, and got in the Hummer since he had work to do. Ron and Bear drove to the docks, and jumped aboard the SEAL dive boat. Another SEAL was already aboard prepping the boat. Bear introduced him “Ron this is Hunter, Hunter, Ron. Hunter is the other dive instructor, and my swim buddy. If you’re OK, we were going to dive a deeper reef that’s much prettier. It’s just about 60 feet deep, but it’s got good stuff from 30 feet on down. You can’t stay down as long as 60 feet, but the view’s worth it. If you’ll get below, Hunter’s already laid out a pair of trunks and a 4/3 suit for you.”

Ron climbed down the galley stairs, and in the forward stateroom, there was a pair of SEAL trunks, and the same 4/3 suit he wore last year. 15 minutes later he was topside as they drove out of the harbor. He looked at his watch, and realized it was 10:00. He took it off, and was happy to note it said “Waterproof to 300 feet”, so he could wear it under water. Bear saw him looking at the watch, and recognized it. “Ron, is that what I think it is?”

“It’s my Uncle Ron’s pilot’s chronograph. I was checking to make sure it’s waterproof.”

“That looks like a Original Tag Heuer Specialist Pilot Chronograph.”

“Yeah, that’s what my mom said.”

“Take care of it, that watch cost more than most SEALs make in a month. We give every member of the Teams when they join a team the much cheaper diving version of that watch, and they cherish it, and I’ve known SEALs to pass their watches down to their kids in their wills.”

“My uncle Ron was wearing this watch when his plane crashed. My dad found it on his body when it washed ashore several weeks after the crash.”

“That sounds like a story I’d like to hear, we’ve got an hour before we arrive at the dive site.”

“OK, I’ll give you the Reader’s Digest Version” Ron told Bear the story of Roy’s getting stranded in Alaska by a plane crash, surviving the crash, and spending a year in Central Alaska all alone except for Oliver the wolf. Bear was impressed to say the least.

“I wish I’d have met your Dad, he sounds like a real man. I don’t think I could go hand to hand with a Grizzly Bear.”

“Bear, he just did what he had to do to survive. If he didn’t go hand to hand with that bear, he would have eaten him, and I’d never be here.”

“I’m glad he did then, because since I’ve known you, you’ve managed to renew my hope in today’s youth. I see all that goes on around the base, and the kids are lost, and don’t care.”

Just about then Hunter told them they had arrived at the dive site. They carefully anchored so they wouldn’t damage the reef below, and suited up. Bear helped Ron into his tanks and BC. Ron remembered everything, and they were quickly into the water. Bear reached up on deck, and grabbed an underwater camera, and handed it to Ron. “Here you go, enjoy. It’s a point and shoot underwater camera.” Bear put his regulator back in his mouth, and dove. Ron turned to follow, and after 20 feet, his ears hurt. He stopped, cleared his ears, then resumed his descent. At 30 feet, he had to stop again to clear his ears, and finally they reached 60 feet. This reef was totally different than the last one, for one thing, the fish were huge. Ron was taking pictures left and right, then wondered how many frames were on the roll when he shot his 24<sup>th</sup> shot. He spotted Bear and Hunter playing with a Manta Ray, and quickly got them in frame and took a picture. Half an hour later, he looked at his pressure gauge, and it was getting critically low. Ron got Bear’s attention, indicated he was low on air, and Bear gave him the “surface” hand sign. Ron added air to his BC, and started a slow ascent. 5 minutes later they were on the surface. Since they were only down ½ an hour, they were well within the no decompression limits. Ron surfaced within 30 feet of the boat, and swam over to the boat. Once Bear and Hunter joined him at the ladder, he let them go up first, handed them the camera, then Bear grabbed his tank to help him aboard. He practically lifted Ron on board, and he needed to climb fast to maintain his footing on the ladder. Bear helped him out of his tank and BC, then told Ron to go below and change while they rinsed off the gear. Ron showered and changed back into his BDUs, hanging the trunks and the wetsuit up to dry in the drip area that had obviously been built just for that purpose. When he re-emerged on deck wearing his BDUs Bear said that he looked squared away. Ron said that his uncle Steve had visited their cabin in Alaska, and he learned to blouse his pants and tie his boots with a knot from Steve. They talked all the way back to the dock, and arrived at 1530. Bear handed him the roll of film and gave him another bear hug, and said he hoped Ron could see him again. Ron promised if he had any more down time during this T&E session, he would look Bear up. A Hummer showed up to take Ron back to the Steve’s office, then they drove to the Officer’s mess for dinner. It was different than the VIP quarters, since everyone was in uniform. The food was good, but not as fancy as the food in the VIP quarters restaurant. Steve and Ron talked for a while after dinner, then went to bed.

## Chapter 89 - Trial by Fire

Ron woke up, got dressed, and joined Steve and his command for morning PT. He didn't lead the run this time, but ran along side his uncle. When they came back, he showered and changed, then they walked to the Officer's mess. After breakfast, Steve's cell phone rang. It was Lance, the Barrett Tech Rep telling him the monoblock mount was done, and Gunny was boresighting it. Larry asked if Ron could be at the range at 0900 instead of noon. Steve looked at his watch, and it was 0830, so he said "sure" and hung up.

"Ron, they've got the mount done, and are boresighting it, so they want you at the range at 0900 this morning."

"Great, I want to see if the new mount helped. Hopefully Lance contacted Barretts, and they are building another prototype with the slower twist, because I really want to fire the gun with everything right, and see just how accurate it is."

Steve drove the Hummer to the Range, and Ron was ready to go at 0850. Gunny was just finishing the boresighting, and explained to Ron how he was boresighting the rifle. Ron was fascinated, and as soon as he was done, Gunny handed him the rifle and 50 rounds of BMG Match ammo. They walked out to the range, and Lance was waiting for them. Ron set up, and loaded a mag, then put his ears and eyes on, and checked Gunny, who had his spotting scope set up, and was wearing his headset. Gunny gave Ron a thumbs-up, so he chambered a round. "Back to work" thought Ron. The scope was centered on the bullseye, so he touched the trigger, and was rewarded with a Bullseye. He pressed his PTT, "Nice Job on the boresight Gunny, the scope's dead-on." then he settled down and fired 4 more rounds. When he had safed the gun, Gunny said "Still got that flyer, I hope they hurry up with the new prototype."

Ron got up to talk to Lance. "OK, I think we've solved the scope problem, but it's still throwing a flyer. Any word on when you expect the new prototype in."

"They said they would have the new prototype in a day or two, so if you can hang around, I want your opinion of the new and improved Prototype. By the way, I talked to our Vice President in charge of Engineering, and he said you are definitely earning your keep. That suggestion about the monoblock scope mount saved us over a \$1 Million in R&D costs. If the new barrel fixes the flyer problem, they might make you a vice president."

Ron knew that Lance was kidding, still it was funny. Steve called Bear, and told him Ron had a couple of days handy, did he have any ideas. Bear asked Steve to give the phone to Ron. "Ron, it's Bear, Steve says you've got a couple of days handy. How'd you like to get your PADI open water cert?" Ron's smile could have lit a stadium "Heck yeah Bear, I'll have Steve drop me off."

“Steve, Bear’s going to get me my PADI open water cert, so I’m going to be with him for the next couple of days, so if you need me, you know where to reach me.” They jumped into the Hummer and drove over to the SEAL compound and over to the dock. Steve stopped right beside the SEAL dive boat, and Bear walked over and saluted Steve since he was still wearing his BDUs and rank insignia. “Colonel Fellows?”

“Chief Simmons, I’m leaving Ron with you for the next couple of days. Please leave a radio on in case I need to get in touch.”

“Sir, I have a cell phone as well with voice mail which might be a better idea.”

Steve and Bear exchanged Cell numbers, and programmed each other’s numbers into their cell phone’s address book. When they finished, Steve turned to Ron “Chief Simmons has my Cell phone number, and I’ve got his in case I need to get hold of you. Enjoy yourself.”

Chief Simmons saluted one more time, then they shook hands, and Steve got back in the Hummer and drove back to his office. Ron and Bear boarded the dive boat again, and Hunter was already working on the tanks, and getting the boat ready for departure. Once Bear and Ron were aboard, they made ready to cast off and get underway. Ron went below to change, and he heard the boat’s motor start, then accelerate as they pulled away from the dock, and into the channel to leave the harbor. Once he was dressed and topside, Bear started asking him diving questions. Ron was getting the PADI skills test, but Bear was administering it verbally since the rocking boat and spray made a paper and pencil test difficult. By the time they had reached the dive site, Bear had satisfied himself that Ron would have passed the written test. Now all he needed was a couple more dives. In order to maximize the number of dives, they had to be shallow, so he was going to several spots he knew that were less than 60 feet deep. They spent the next two days diving reefs and shallow wrecks. Ron had the time of his life, and when they returned to base 2 days later, Bear told him that he had earned his PADI open water certificate, and asked for an address to mail the certificate to. Ron gave him Bill’s address in Allakaket as a “Care of “ address, since none of the homesteaders had a mailing address. Bear then surprised Ron, and handed him the SEAL dive qualification medal, a pewter cast of an aqualung with the old dual hose regulator. He pinned it on Ron’s BDU, then gave Ron a big hug. Ron felt like saluting, but knew it was inappropriate. Instead, he said “Thanks Bear, I’ve had more fun and learned more in the last couple of days than you’ll ever know. I hope I get to see you before I have to go home again, but in case I don’t, please keep Steve posted if you get assigned somewhere else so I can keep in touch.”

Bear’s eyes watered up, and he wished Ron was going into the SEALs, but he knew it wasn’t to be, even though he was pretty sure Ron would have made a great SEAL. He was fearless, tough, and smart. Steve’s Hummer was waiting at the dock, and he noticed the SEAL dive qualified badge immediately. Bear was right behind Ron, and saluted Steve. “Colonel Fellows, nice to see you again. Ron is officially PADI qualified for an open water

cert, and since he also passed the SEAL dive requirements, I gave him my old dive badge.”

“As you were, Chief. Thanks for taking care of my nephew and helping him get his dive certificate.” They shook hands, then Bear gave Ron such a bear hug that he thought he might have bruised a couple of ribs. “See you later Ron, keep in touch.”

“Sure Bear, thanks for everything.”

Once they were back at Steve’s office, he gave Ron the bad news. “I know Bear gave you that medal, but you can’t wear it on a military base, since you’re not in the military. Could you please take it off and put it in your BDU shirt pocket.”

“Sure Steve, I understand.” Ron wasn’t happy, but realized a civilian wearing a Military insignia, even a dive badge, was a serious violation of military protocol, and he put the badge in his shirt pocket. Later that day, Steve made up for it by giving him a velvet box to put the decoration in. “Ron, I talked to Chief Simmons, and he said he would process the official paperwork for that dive badge, so once you graduate from the Academy, and become a commissioned officer, feel free to wear that badge.” That made Ron feel better. They went to the Officer’s mess for dinner, then before they retired, Lance called on Steve’s cell phone and told him the prototype arrived, so they would be ready for Ron at 0900 tomorrow. Steve gave Ron the good news, and they went to bed.

The next morning, Ron joined Steve’s command for PT, then showered, changed, and ate a quick breakfast at the Officer’s mess. They were at the range at 0850. Steve took Ron’s Pelican case out of the Hummer, and carefully set it on the bench behind their shooting position. Gunny was already set up, including a case of .50 BMG Match ammo next to the new prototype. Ron set the bipod and monopod, but didn’t have to make any adjustments, since the stock was still adjusted for him. He steadied his breathing, and started reciting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. When he came up on the gun and looked through the scope, the crosshairs were dead on the bullseye. He turned back to the Gunny, who gave him a thumbs-up. Ron cycled the action, and released the safety, concentrating on the target. He never realized he had touched the trigger, when Gunny yelled over the intercom “Bullseye”. Ron settled down, and concentrated on putting the other 4 rounds through the same hole. 5 minutes later, Gunny said “Ron, I think you just shot a 10-inch group. Let’s get some fresh paper, and see how far you can reduce that group size. Ron reloaded the 5-shot magazine, and each group got smaller, until he had shot an 8-inch group at 1,000 yards, the limit of the range. His next two groups were 9 and 10 inches respectively, and Gunny could tell that fatigue was setting in, since Ron’s group size was increasing again, so he told Ron that it was quitting time.

The 3 of them retired to Gunny’s office to write the T&E report. Since Gunny was the most familiar with the format, he was physically writing the report, but he put Ron Williams name on it as the author. He described the problems with the original prototype, and gave credit to Ron for suggesting the scope mount fix, and the group credit for the twist change

recommendation. He also included Ron's recommendation that they modify the other scope mounts for this prototype to a monoblock mount. The only other scope that would be mounted to the gun would be a 4<sup>th</sup> Generation night vision scope that they were working on. Unfortunately, it wouldn't be ready for a T&E until later that year, or early next year. For now, they would use the existing 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Night Vision scope, and alter the mount. Lance was so happy that he was practically jumping up and down. They had never had such a successful T&E session, where they found the bugs, and fixed them within a week. Lance was almost guaranteed a promotion out of this. Lance handed Ron a check for \$20,000 dollars, telling him the extra \$10K was a bonus for saving Barrett all that money in R&D cost. Ron was stunned, he had just received \$20,000.00 for basically 2 days worth of work, and a free trip to Florida. Lance said that they were officially finished, so Ron could go home any time he wanted. Ron thanked Gunny, and shook Lance's hand, then picked up his rifle and walked back to Steve's Hummer. "Finished already?"

"Yeah, and Lance gave me a 10 thousand dollar bonus for finding the problems and suggesting the solutions. He said I saved them almost a Million dollars of R&D work."

"I guess this means you'll be doing T&E for Barretts for quite a while?"

"Probably, I wouldn't be surprised if other manufacturers of sniper rifles didn't start calling."

"I guess that means I'll be seeing more of you."

"You might want to keep that cot in your room for a while."

They both had a good laugh, and Steve drove Ron over to the BOQ to pick up his bag. While Ron packed, Steve called the VIP transport office to tell them Ron was ready to go home. The officer in charge told Steve the bird was already serviced and fueled. They'd be ready to go in half an hour. 15 minutes later, Ron was packed and back in Steve's Hummer, headed for the VIP transport office. Steve presented the OIC the requisition for the transport, and Ron showed him his ID. Satisfied, the OIC had an airman grab Ron's bags, and carry them to the plane. Steve gave Ron a big hug and said "See you later." Then Ron walked to the plane. He was too tired to fly front seat this time, so he sacked out in the passenger cabin. When he woke up, they were landing at Elmendorf. Once the engines shut down, the Crew Chief lowered the air stairs, and Ron walked over to his plane, which had already been serviced and fueled. The maintenance Chief told him that they had changed the oil, tuned the motor, and filled the tanks while it was there since it gave some of the younger mechanics good experience working on a piston engine aircraft, especially an ancient WWII designed WASP radial. He said the service was courtesy of the US Air Force. Ron thanked him, and did a walk-around with the chief walking next to him. He was pleasantly surprised to see how thorough Ron was, just like a pilot who had been flying for 20-30 years. The airman loaded Ron's baggage, and when Ron arrived at the pilot's door, he turned and shook

the hand of the maintenance chief. “Excellent Work, Chief, please thank the maintenance crew for me.” He climbed in, started the motor, and it purred like a kitten. He gave the Chief a thumbs-up, and finished the pre-flight checks, then called the tower for clearance. They told him he was #3 for take-off, and to watch for jet wash and turbulence. He “rogered” the tower, and turned to taxi to the runway while he set the plane up for take-off, including entering the waypoint for Allakaket. When he reached the runway, he called the tower, who told him he was clear to take off, but to stay at or below 500ft AGL until he was 20 miles out, since the fast movers were out practicing. Ron decided that a take-off under ground effect was called for, so he set the flaps at minimum, and gunned the engine. Instead of hauling back on the yoke, he gently pulled until the wheels cleared, and he was 50 feet off the ground, knowing that there were no obstructions for several miles around the runway. At 1 mile, he climbed slowly to 500 feet at 180 knots indicated, and turned for Allakaket. At 20 miles out, he called the tower, and said “departing 20 mile restriction” and they told him that it was OK to fly at 2,000 ft MSL until he left their TCA. Ron cruise climbed to 2,000 feet, and an hour and 15 minutes later, he called Allakaket for landing clearance. When he landed, Bill was waiting for him. “That was fast. I wasn’t expecting you for another week.”

Ron handed him a check for \$20,000 and asked Bill to deposit it into his account. “I thought they were supposed to pay you \$10K?”

“They usually do, but in this case the extra \$10K is a bonus for quickly identifying and helping to fix several problems with the gun. Their tech rep said that I probably saved them over a million dollars in R&D costs to fix it.”

“Not bad for a couple of days work. OK, I’ll deposit this in your account. Are you OK to fly starting tomorrow?”

“Sure, by tomorrow I’ll be well rested.”

“Ok, tomorrow morning, you need to fly to Samantha’s house, and drop her off in Anchorage, she’s starting school there.”

“Anything else?”

“I’ll have some deliveries lined up for you when you arrive in Anchorage, so make sure you’re in Anchorage by 10:00.”

“Ok Bill, I’ll pick up Samantha, drop her off in Anchorage, and take a return flight full of groceries. I guess I should probably top off the tanks while I’m here.”

Ron filled the tanks, turned around and took off for home. 20 minutes from Home, Ron switched frequencies, and called his dad. “Hi Dad, it’s Ron, yeah I know I’m early, the testing session went great. I’m about 20 minutes out, could you open the hangar door?”



Great, I'll talk to you both when I'm on the ground. Me too, bye."

Just about 20 minutes later, Ron taxied up to the hangar, shut down, and unloaded the plane. Roy, Anne, and Lucky were there to greet him. Ron was glad that Anne had Lucky on a leash, because he was carrying a 20 thousand dollar rifle, and if he made Ron drop it, they'd have to change Lucky's name to Dead Meat. Once he put up the rifle, he kissed his mom, hugged his dad, and got mugged by Lucky "OK boy, nice to see you too."

Ron spent the next couple of hours filling his parents in about his trip. Ron was impressed that he got his PADI open water certificate. Anne was stunned when Ron told them he had shot an 8" group at 1000 yards. Anne's eyebrows went up a notch when Ron mentioned he was flying Samantha to Anchorage, but remembered that if his hands were on the controls, they couldn't be on Samantha, and if she wanted to land safely, she would have to keep her hands off him - Anne had heard from Jim about Samantha's escapades. Hopefully she'd meet someone at College, and give up on Ron. She just hoped Samantha wouldn't break his heart. Anne didn't know that she had nothing to worry about, Ron was more emotionally attached to Lucky than any girl. Roy was impressed when Ron told them that Barretts had given him a \$10,000 bonus. He wondered how long it would take the other gun manufacturers to find out.

The next morning, Ron was airborne at 0700, and at Samantha's by 0800. He helped her put her bags into the plane, then waited in the cockpit while she said a very emotional goodbye to her parents, then she climbed in up front. "Ron, I'm sorry if I've been ignoring you, I've only seen you once or twice a year, and now I'm off to college."

"Sam, don't worry about it. I'll always be your friend."

Sam said "That's sweet" and leaned over to kiss him on the lips. It was a soft gently friendly kiss, and Ron was greatly relieved that Sam had gotten over her "boy crazy" phase. He told her to buckle up and get ready for take-off. He taxied and took off, and 2 hours later, they landed in Anchorage. He helped her with her baggage, and this time she gave him a hug and a more aggressive kiss. This time he noticed she was braless, and hoped that she wouldn't have anything bad happen to her at school. She was a very passionate woman, but had led a sheltered life, and the combination could be dangerous around all those predatory males. He wished her luck, and taxied over to the gate where the delivery driver waited for him. He forgot all about Samantha, loaded the plane, and topped off the tanks, then took off to make his deliveries. He landed in Allakaket, topped off again, and flew home.

## Chapter 90 - What's Up Doc?

Later that afternoon, Bill called and told Ron that he was going to pick up Doc Richards at Anchorage tomorrow, and fly him and 2 of his hunting buddies to the hunting lodge. Ron was looking forward to the reunion, since he had stayed in touch via e-mail. The next morning, he was airborne at 0700, and landed in Anchorage at 0900. Doc's party arrived shortly after he landed, so Ron was able to get out of the plane and help load. "Doc, long time no see. I've got some excellent news for you. Those supplies you gave us saved an elderly gentleman's life. He broke his lower leg, and if it weren't for the D5W and morphine, he might have died from shock according to Doctor Miller."

"Ron, that's great news, but it was your skills that really saved his life."

"The best news was Dr. Miller put in a recommendation to the State that they make us certified Paramedics and supply us full Paramedic kits. I've got mine mounted to the bulkhead of the plane."

"Mind if I take a look?"

Ron took his kit down, and Doctor Richards looked at it with a critical eye, and made several recommendations. He said he would ship the meds and gear to them if the state wouldn't provide them. They put the kit back together, and Ron finished boarding them, and made sure the kit was secured before getting in the pilot's seat. Doc Richards got up front with Ron so they could talk. Ron taxied to the runway, called the tower, and received take-off clearance, then he programmed his GPS with the waypoint for the lodge.

"Ron, what's that - it wasn't here last time?"

"You're right Doc, that's a portable GPS receiver. I've got all my destinations programmed into it as waypoints, then as you can see, the compass rose display tells me which way to fly, how fast I'm flying over the ground, and how long it will take to reach my destination at that speed. It's saved me a lot of gas and time, plus once when I was lost after catching a downdraft, it helped me get back on course and land safely."

"How much does one of those cost?"

"Including the software and the remote antenna, I think I paid between \$500 and \$700."

"That's cheap. I was looking at a GPS unit from an instrument company, and they wanted several thousand dollars."

"If you don't need the moving map feature, the handheld unit with a remote antenna works

perfectly. All you need to do is have your aircraft mechanic install a cigarette lighter plug to power the unit.”

“Cool, I’m going to get one. Can you e-mail me the model # and where you bought it?”

“Sure, think you can afford it?”

Doc Richards realized Ron was teasing him, and they had a good laugh. He was looking around the aircraft, and noticed a new “black box”.

“What’s this?”

“That’s a cross-band repeater. I have a 2-meter handheld radio that only transmits at 5 watts. This repeater re-transmits my signal on the 440 band at 50 watts, so I have a 50-100 mile range depending on if I’m in the air or on the ground.”

“That would be a nice thing to have if I was near my aircraft often enough to use it.”

“My Mom used it to call Dr. Miller when Slim broke his leg, to get permission to start an IV and administer morphine for pain. She’s an RN, so that made it all legal.”

“That would be a really good use for an in-vehicle repeater, maybe I should get one too?”

“I’ll include the info on the repeater with the e-mail about the GPS.”

Doc Richards looked around, and spotted the case right behind Ron’s head.

“What’s that, you’ve got a bunch of new stuff since last time.”

“Doc, that’s what you call a “Plane Gun” in case I’m stranded somewhere, and I need something with more range than my .44 magnum. It’s a <skip> SU-16, it’s just like the AR-15 except it folds in half, and the foregrip becomes a bipod.”

“Well, I’ve had no use for guns, since I spend most of my time repairing the damage they cause, but I could see the need for one out here. You should see the hardware our guide carries. He’s got a revolver just like yours for bears, and a BAR 30-06. Makes me feel under-gunned with my little 7mm Magnum.”

“Actually, your 7mm Magnum has slightly better performance than the BAR, but they’re in the same class.”

“Ron you’re just a font of information.”

“Thanks Doc, but I just remember everything I read.”

“Wow, I wish I could do that. How’s Jim doing with his new medicine?”

Ron hung his head and looked like he would cry. “Doc, Grandpa Jim died a while ago, he threw a clot while he was flying with me. Dr. Miller said that the clot blocked his coronary artery, and he was dead in minutes. As soon as I landed a minute later, I started CPR, but the Doc said that he would have died regardless.”

“Ron, Dr. Miller’s probably right, a clot like that is usually fatal. Unless you can dissolve the clot in 6 minutes, he’s dead regardless of what you do, since without the blood circulating oxygen to the brain, irreversible brain damage results after 6 minutes without oxygen. I’m sorry it happened, but it’s one of the most painless ways to die, since you lose consciousness within 30 seconds from hypoxia, and you never wake up.”

“Thanks Doc, coming from you, that makes me feel a lot better. Oops, got to get ready to land.”

Ron cranked the flaps to full, and reduced throttle by 2/3, and they floated down to the lake. They touched down without a splash, and taxied to the dock. The dock worker tied the plane up, and as soon as the prop stopped spinning, he opened the doors. Doc Richards turned to Ron, and said “Ron that was the most enjoyable flight I’ve ever had. I think I enjoyed the flight more than I’ll enjoy hunting. I’ll see you in a couple of days.” He reached for his wallet, and Ron said “Keep it, you’ve done so much for us, I couldn’t take your money, besides Jim left me almost 1.5 million dollars in his will.”

“Wow, that’s a lot of money for a young man your age.”

“So far I haven’t let it go to my head.”

“OK Ron, take care and I’ll see you on the return trip.”

Ron waited until the dock worker closed and secured the door and released the rope holding the plane to the dock, then started his engine as the worker pushed him off with a pole. As he taxied out to the downwind end of the lake, Ron hoped Doc Richards would have a good hunt. He set the plane up for take-off, and set the GPS for Allakaket. After he took off, he turned for Allakaket, and when he was 15 minutes out, called the tower for permission to land. He taxied up to the pumps, and Bill was waiting for him with a big grin on his face. “Ron, Doc Richards was just raving about you, praising you to the rafters. I don’t know how you do it, but you can’t buy PR like that.”

Several days later, Ron picked up Doc and flew them back to Anchorage. They were all talking about their hunt, and when they landed in Anchorage, Doc Richards handed Ron a

sealed envelope, and asked him not to open it until they had left. Ron respected his wishes, and waited until they had entered the terminal and headed toward their flights home.

Ron opened the envelope and read:

Dear Ron:

I e-mailed the State Director of Emergency Services in Alaska about you, and he assured me that a more complete kit would be shipped to your location ASAP. He volunteered that it would be sufficient to fully stock both of your kits. I made several suggestions, and he agreed to upgrade kits statewide as soon as possible. Please continue your medical studies, even if you don't want to become a doctor, who knows, one day you might save my life.

Ron, I know you don't need the money, but my wife and I never had any children, and you're the closest thing I have to a son. Please accept this as a small token of my appreciation. Please keep in touch.

Sincerely,

Doc Richards

Folded in the envelope was a check for \$500 dollars, with a note attached suggesting that he do something nice for someone with it. Ron tried not to tear up, and thought that was a good idea. Since he was already in Anchorage, he taxied over to the FAA office, and asked to borrow the yellow pages. Dan walked up, and Ron asked him what the nicest restaurant in Anchorage was. Dan told him to try the Crow's Nest. Ron called and made a reservation for 2 tomorrow, then called the Inn, and booked 2 rooms for tomorrow night. He thanked Dan, and went out to his plane. He flew to Allakaket and gave Bill the check, then flew home. He told his Mom and Dad that Doc Richards gave him \$500 and told him to do something nice for someone, so he booked a romantic dinner for 2 for his mom and dad, and booked rooms at the Inn. They could spend the day in Anchorage, and he was paying for the trip and dinner. Roy hugged his son, and his Mom cried. They packed their bags, then flew to Anchorage the next day. They spent the day sightseeing and shopping, and when evening came, Ron put his parents in a cab, handed his Dad a couple of hundred dollars, told him to keep the change, and told the driver to take them to the Crow's nest. Ron walked next door to the restaurant, and ate dinner, glad he could do something nice for his parents. They met for breakfast the next morning, and Anne took Ron aside "Son, I'm really sorry I yelled at you the other day."

"Mom, it's OK, Dad explained your hormones are changing, and sometimes you have trouble with your emotions. I understand, and it's OK. Mom, I just wanted to tell you I love

you both, and Doc Richards gave me a good idea.”

“Remind me to thank Doc Richards later. That was the best present you could have given us. It’s been over 15 years since we were able to go to dinner by ourselves. Not that we don’t want you around, but sometimes a romantic dinner for 2 is just what we need.”

“Mom, any time you and dad need a night out, let me know. I can fly you to Anchorage, and staying overnight at the inn is cheap since I get the corporate rate.”

“Thanks Ron, you’re so sweet.”

They caught a cab back to the airport, and Ron loaded all the stuff they bought. Ron had spotted a deal on 5.56 JHP ammo, and bought 100 rounds. He had room in the Pelican case for all the loaded magazines, plus several boxes of ammo. Since the magazines were loaded with FMJ ammo, he thought the hollow points would be a good idea to shoot small game or 2-legged varmints, but the probability of that was about the same as him getting elected President of the USA. When they were all aboard, Ron got permission to take off, and headed for Allakaket. He topped off the tanks, then turned for home. After he got the plane unloaded, he reloaded his 10-round magazine with JHP ammo. Ron took his mountain bike out for a spin back and forth between the cabin and the lake, then they went fishing. Later that afternoon, Ron got a call from Bill. There were several packages waiting for delivery in Anchorage. Ron thought “why didn’t he tell me yesterday while I was there”, then remembered that if something came via Mail, it might have just showed up. He did say they were packages, not deliveries. He told his Mom and Dad that he had to fly back to Anchorage to pick up some packages tomorrow. Ron asked if there was anything they needed, and Anne said they had stocked up from the last 2 trips.

The next morning, he flew to Anchorage, and met the delivery truck. After they loaded the plane, and he signed for the boxes, he noticed a big huge box addressed to him. Since he already signed for it, he got out of his seat, opened the box, and there was another Barrett’s rifle, and a letter from the owner of the company.

“Dear Mr. Williams:

This is a token of our gratitude for not only an excellent evaluation of our prototype, but your efforts to solve the problems revealed. Thanks to you, our company saved millions of dollars in R&D costs, and was awarded a contract worth at least \$100 million for the new Barrett’s Suppressed 50. This letter transfers title to Serial Number 0001 to Ron Williams. We have decided to double your fee for all future T&E programs. The Vice President in charge of Product Development told me the new 4<sup>th</sup> Generation Night scope will be ready in 6 to 9 months. Please bring this weapon back to MacDill with you so you may test the new scope with the suppressed Barrett 50. Thank you and enjoy the new rifle.

ps: I enclosed another case of Lake City Match ammo so you can practice.

Sincerely,

Ronnie Barrett  
Owner, Barrett Firearms Manufacturing, Inc.

Ron read the letter, and felt like someone better show up quickly to pinch him. He now owned 2 Barrett's rifles worth more than most people paid for a new car. He packed the boxes back up, and was glad they had packed the rifle in a Pelican case, so he didn't have to worry about the scope getting dinged. He looked at the manifest, and entered the deliveries into the GPS as waypoints, then started the engine. He took off shortly after receiving permission, and made his deliveries. When he stopped in Allakaket, Bill was there to meet him. Ron showed him the letter and the rifle. Bill knew enough about rifles to recognize the Barrett's name, and realize the gun and scope cost over \$20 thousand. When Ron told him this was the second rifle Barrett's had given him, you could have knocked him over with a feather. Bill just shook his head and thought "Kid, you don't know how good you've got it." Ron put the rifle back in its case, and topped off the fuel tanks, then flew home.

He called his dad when he was 20 minutes out, and taxied right into the hangar. Roy was confused when Ron walked around the back to get the cart, and came back with a huge box.

"Uh Ron, what's in the box?"

"Dad, you're not going to believe this. I got a letter from Ronnie Barrett, the owner of Barrett Firearms Manufacturing. He gave me Serial # 0001 of the new Barrett Suppressed 50, with another Swarovski scope. Plus he gave me a case of the Lake City 50 BMG Match ammo in case I wanted to practice, except there aren't too many areas around here where I can set up targets a mile away. Also, they told me they would need me in another 6 to 9 months to T&E their new night vision scope, and they were going to double my fee."

Ron, you're right, I'm having a real problem believing it."

"Dad, here's the letter, read for yourself."

After reading the letter, Roy was still amazed. Ron earned \$10 Thousand for 2 days work shooting a gun that most people would have paid them for the privilege to shoot. Not only that, but they give him a \$10 Thousand bonus, plus give him the first production rifle and a new scope to boot. Roy was glad he was sitting down.

## Chapter 91 - Target Practice

Ron sent Steve an e-mail asking for help locating a long-range shooting area. Steve replied that Elmendorf had a 1,000 yard range just like MacDill. Steve's next e-mail told Ron he had sent an E-mail to the CO of Elmendorf AFB requesting permission for Ron and his family to use the rifle range for marksmanship practice. The CO talked to Steve's CO, and was assured that Ron was working on a classified military project that required him to practice shooting at ranges longer than 600 yards, which was the longest civilian range available. Besides, he was shooting military hardware in an ongoing T&E project. That clinched it, and the CO of Elmendorf AFB e-mailed Ron a letter granting permission for him and anyone accompanied by him to use the long range rifle range. Ron now had another reason to visit Anchorage. Ron made several copies of the letter, and stuck one in each Pelican case just in case.

2 days later, Ron received an e-mail from Gen. Gene Sheppard at MacDill, telling him that Gunny Richard Mathews was the range officer at Elmendorf, and he was cleared to know why he was using the range, and was willing to assist in case he needed a spotter, or other help. Ron replied to the e-mail thanking the General for his time and consideration. Ron called Bill and asked him if he had any business in Anchorage for the rest of the week. Bill said they had some routine deliveries, but they could wait. Ron told him he needed to go to Elmendorf AFB to test his new rifle, and could pick up the deliveries on his way back. Bill gave him the number of the delivery driver, and told him they needed a half hour notice for deliveries. Ron said he'd take care of it. Ron asked his Mom and Dad if they wanted to go shooting at Elmendorf. Neither one of them was really interested. Roy didn't have the energy, and Anne couldn't shoot that far, she thought her vision was getting worse, and was probably as bad as 20/40. Ron laughed, since most people her age would kill to have 20/40 vision. Ron asked them if it were OK if Bill went with him. They said sure, so he e-mailed Bill and asked him if he wanted to go shooting his new rifle tomorrow morning at Elmendorf, then called him and told him to check his e-mail. 5 minutes later, Ron received an e-mail in reply with only 2 words "Heck Yeah." Ron called Bill back and they agreed to meet at the airport in Allakaket at 0900.

The next morning after breakfast, Ron grabbed the cart and hauled the rifle cases and the ammo out to the plane. He hoped someone at Elmendorf would be nice enough to detail a Hummer to them. Just to be on the safe side, Ron sent an e-mail to the CO of Elmendorf advising him that he wanted to use the range today, and he referred to General Sheppard's e-mail. 15 minutes later, he got a reply that Gunny Mathews would meet them on the flight line with a Hummer, and be at their disposal all day. Ron thought, "I guess RHIP still applies, even to friends of VIPs." Ron knew he better not abuse the privilege since he was doing this as a favor to General Sheppard, since Ron wasn't even in the military. Ron grabbed his GPS and his gear, and went out to the plane. 2 hours later, he was landing at Allakaket. Bill got aboard, and Ron set the GPS for Elmendorf. Half an hour out, he



requested permission to land at Elmendorf. Evidently someone had told the tower about him, and he got the VIP treatment. As he pulled up to his parking spot, he could see a Gunnery Sergeant waiting next to his Hummer. When the Propeller stopped, Ron hopped out, and walked over to the Hummer and introduced himself. “Gunny Mathews?”

The gunny nodded, and Ron handed him his ID, and a copy of General Sheppard’s letter. “Mr. Fellows, this way please.”

“Uh, Gunny, this is Mayor Bill of Allakaket. I hope it’s OK if he comes along too.”

“No problem, the letter stated that it included you and anyone with you.”

Ron thought the gunny was a little stiff, and hoped he would loosen up when he got to know him. They unloaded the rifles into the Hummer, grabbed the ammo can and hearing protection, and hopped into the Hummer. He drove them to the range, and got out. They unloaded the Barretts rifles on the bench, and uncased them. Gunny’s eyes got as big as saucers. “So that’s what all the secrecy is about. I heard rumors that Barrett was working on a new BMG .50 rifle, but I’d never guess it was a Suppressed design.”

“Gunny, the rifle isn’t fully suppressed, the suppressor contains the muzzle blast and slows it down to the point that its much quieter, but it still exhibits the supersonic crack, so you need hearing protection. The military wanted the suppressor because it reduces recoil and masks the signs of firing so a shooter wouldn’t give his position away by throwing up a big cloud of dirt. I brought the other one for comparison, and I can tell you there is a night and day difference between shooting the suppressed version vs. the unit with the muzzle brake.”

“Cool.”

“Gunny, can we get some targets set at the 1,000 yard line while I get set up here.”

“Sure thing Mr. Williams.”

“Gunny, my dad’s Mr. Williams, I’d prefer if you’d call me Ron.”

“OK, Ron. I’d love to see you shoot this monster.”

“I assume you have a spotting scope, if you wouldn’t mind spotting for me, I’d appreciate it.”

“OK, any thing else?”

“Nope, I just came here to shoot. I appreciate you letting me use your range. I don’t have any 1,000 yard ranges anywhere else, and Ronnie Barrett gave me an extra case of Lake City

.50 BMG Match ammo so I can practice.”

Ron could see the runner returning, and Gunny broke out his spotting scope, then Ron made sure everyone had their ears on, and loaded a 5-shot magazine full of match ammo. He looked back at the Gunny who was giving him a “thumbs-up”, so he chambered a round. Ron took off the safety, and the bullseye was centered in the scope and not moving, just like before. He focused the scope, and made some minor adjustments, then got behind the gun and got ready to shoot. He took 3 deep breaths, and after blowing out half the 3<sup>rd</sup> one, held his breath and touched the trigger. He could see in his scope that he hit the bullseye, so he repeated the process 4 more times, then put the safety on, and left the bolt open to cool off the barrel.

Gunny said “Ron, I don’t know how you did it, but you just put 5 rounds in the bullseye, and I doubt the group’s much bigger than 8 or 9 inches. Let me send a runner to retrieve it so we can measure the group.”

20 minutes later (2,000 yards is a long way, even for a 18 yr old Airman) Gunny was measuring the group. The raw group measured 9 inches, and subtracting the bullet diameter (½ inch) Ron had just shot his second best group at 1,000 yards in his life. To say the Gunny was impressed was an understatement. “Ron, now I know why they’ve got you working on the T&E project, you shoot like Carlos Hathcock.”

“Gunny, take a look at the stock of the other Barrett.”

He opened the case, and saw that someone had painted a single white feather on the MacMillan stock. Ron explained, “They gave me that rifle almost a year ago, when as a 14 yr. old, I shot a 10-inch group at 1,000 yards in front of General Sheppard with that rifle.”

“Ron, talk about pressure. My knees would be knocking if I were shooting in front of a 3-star General.”

“I DID have to recite the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm twice before I shot.”

“Works for me.”

Ron shot 2 more groups that averaged between 8 and 10 inches. Finally, he asked Gunny if he wanted to try it. Gunny Mathews jumped at the chance. Ron was acting as a shooting coach, and helped Gunny adjust the unfamiliar gun to fit him. When they were done, Gunny got behind the gun, and looked through the scope, and everything was rock steady - dang this kid knew what he was doing. Ron handed him a loaded magazine, and stepped back. Gunny inserted the magazine and cycled the action, then released the safety. Looking through the scope, the image was dead still, so he moved his finger onto the trigger, and just touched it when the crosshairs coincided with the bullseye. Ron checked the round, and

there was a neat hole right in the center of the bullseye. Ron gave Gunny a thumbs-up, and Gunny kept shooting, with a huge grin on his face. He couldn't believe he had fired 5 rounds when the firing pin landed on an empty chamber. He locked the bolt open and set the safety. Ron was grinning too. "Gunny looks like you shot all 5 rounds in the bullseye, and I'll wager that group is 10 inches or less."

Gunny sent the runner again, who by now was tired of running. Eventually he came back with the target, and when they measured it, sure enough, gunny shot a 9.89 inch group. Ron said "Not bad for the first time with an unfamiliar gun." Ron looked at Bill, and asked him if he wanted to go. Bill said he was afraid he would embarrass himself, but Ron told him to shoot it anyway, it was fun. That convinced Bill, who got down behind the gun, and listened to Ron's instructions about adjusting the fit of the gun. 15 minutes later, the stock fit like a custom stock, and Ron handed Bill a loaded 5-round magazine, which Bill stuck in the magazine well, and cycled the action. Bill came through Hunter Safety instead of Military training, so he waited until he was ready to shoot to clear the safety. Bill looked through the scope, and the image was rock solid and centered on the Bullseye. He cleared the safety, said a quick prayer, and got into position. When he was totally comfortable, he did what Ron told him, 3 deep breaths, blow out half the third one, and just touch the trigger. The roar of the gun surprised Bill, but when he looked through the scope, he could see he hit the bullseye. He was amazed that he could hit the bullseye at almost 1,000 yards. He couldn't hit the broad side of a barn outside 400 yards with his hunting rifle. He remembered that the bipod and monopod effectively turned the rifle into a shooting rest, so it eliminated a lot of reasons for inaccuracy. His second through 5<sup>th</sup> rounds were on the fringes of the bullseye, but still when they checked it, he was amazed that he had shot a 12 inch group at 1,000 yards. He picked up Ron and gave him a big hug. "Thanks Ron, you're a really good shooting coach. I'll never be able to shoot like this again." Bill realized that 12 inch group was mostly the rifle, since it cost more than his Jeep Cherokee.

Gunny Mathews was all set to go brag at the Chief's club, then realized that this T&E project was classified. "Rats, I can't wait until this project gets de-classified so I can show the other chiefs my target." Ron took another turn behind the gun, trying to shoot smaller and smaller groups. His best group measured 7.5" He had fired almost 50 rounds when the Gunny suggested he pack it in, since his groups were growing again due to fatigue. Ron let the rifle cool, then repacked both rifles in their cases. Ron promised the Gunny he'd be back at least a couple of times a month, and he'd make sure the Gunny got to shoot the rifle, and he'd let the Gunny know as soon as it was OK to show his target to the rest of the Gunnys. They loaded the cases and the ammo case back into the Hummer, and then back into Ron's DeHaviland. The Gunny complimented Ron on his nice plane. Ron thanked him for letting him use the range, and Gunny said "Anytime". Ron and Bill got in the plane, taxied over to the runway, and requested permission to transit from Elmendorf to Anchorage. Elmendorf recommended flying a loop between the two airports that would add 20 miles to the trip, but would result in him being lined up for a straight-in approach to the main runway at Anchorage. Evidently, he wasn't the first person to request this transfer. When he reached

the end of the runway, he received permission to take-off, and contacted Anchorage Control, advising them of the transfer, and the route he intended to take. Anchorage acknowledged, and cleared him to land. Ron took off, and 20 minutes later, he landed at Anchorage, and taxied up to the correct terminal. Bill must have called ahead, since the delivery truck was waiting for him. They got loaded in record time, and Ron taxied over to the fuel pumps to fill his tanks, then called the tower for permission to take off. He programmed his GPS with the waypoints for his deliveries, and took off. When he finished his deliveries, he dropped Bill off at Allakaket, and filled his tanks. "This one's on me" said Bill, as he ripped up the receipt. Ron had filled both tanks with over 100 gallons of fuel, so he was surprised when Bill volunteered to pay for the fuel, but didn't argue. Bill said "You know Ron, this DeHaviland is going to need some major maintenance soon, so I'll have the aircraft mechanic make the Cessna ready for flight. He already installed the GPS you bought for Jim, and I'll have him install another radio repeater to match the one you have here. Even if it's out of the way, you should fly the Cessna when you can to save hours on the DeHaviland for when you have to haul heavy loads."

"Bill, you're right. Let me know when the Cessna is ready to fly, and we can coordinate so I'm only hauling passengers and baggage when I fly the Cessna, and hauling freight or other heavy loads with the DeHaviland."

"Ron, now you're thinking, between gas and maintenance costs, it's 2-3 times as expensive per flight hour to fly the DeHaviland as the Cessna. Like today, if you'd have had the Cessna, the entire trip might have used \$150 worth of gas versus almost \$300.00. Not only that, but your engine is due for an overhaul, and that will set you back several thousand dollars. The Cessna costs maybe 1/3 of the cost of overhauling the DeHaviland due to its much simpler engine. The Cessna can handle 3 passengers, and 500-800 pounds of freight or baggage as well. As long as the hunters aren't hauling a whole caribou back home, the skin, meat and head only weigh a couple of hundred pounds, depending on how they butchered and packed the meat. If they just packed the prime cuts, the entire package might weigh 150 pounds. If they made sausage of the leftovers, it might weigh 200 pounds."

"Good thing I'm a light skinny kid. That gives me another 50 pounds of payload."

Ron thanked Bill for the fuel, and got back into the plane, and got ready to take off. Bill was right, 2/3 of his trips could be made with the Cessna. The only problem with the Cessna was it was so much slower than the DeHaviland. Lightly loaded, it took 1.5 hours to fly from home to Anchorage with the DeHaviland. The Cessna could take over 2 hours per trip. That added a whole hour to his round trip, and if he made 2 per day, it added 2 hours. Still, with the GPS, he would make up time by being able to fly direct. He'd have to e-mail Bill and ask him to remind the mechanic to remove the dual controls from the cockpit, it would be bad form for a front-seat passenger to crash the plane by leaning against the yoke while he was trying to see out the windows. When he got back in the house, he found an e-mail waiting for him from Bill. He would be busy the rest of the week flying hunters in and out

of lodges. Tomorrow, he would be flying a group of hunters back to Anchorage, flying another group in to that same lodge, and fly another group from their lodge that afternoon to Anchorage, then pick up some packages for delivery in Anchorage. Ron would be busier than a 1-armed paper hanger for the next couple of weeks. Hopefully by the end of the week, the mechanic would have the Cessna ready to fly.

The next morning, Ron was up at 0600 and out the door at 0730 to get to the lodge by 0800. At 0759, he landed on the lake in front of the lodge and taxied up to the dock. They were waiting on the dock for him, and the dock worker broke several speed records getting them loaded and the doors locked, then untied the plane and pushed it off. Ron started the motor as soon as he was clear, then gunned the engine to a fast taxi to the end of the lake since he was in a hurry, and the engine was already at operating temperature. He pivoted into the wind, and punched in the waypoint for Anchorage, then pushed the throttle to max, and they were quickly flying, even with 3 hunters and 3 caribou. An hour and a half later, they landed at Anchorage with almost half an hour to spare. One of the hunters thanked him for the quick trip, and gave him a \$50 tip. As soon as the plane was unloaded, he turned and taxied toward the pumps, and when the tanks were full, taxied to the other terminal to pick up his passengers, while he programmed the GPS for the next lodge. He arrived at the terminal, and the hunters showed up five minutes later. He helped the skycap load the baggage, did a quick walk-around, and jumped in the pilot's seat. He gave them the Speech, and got clearance to take off, and taxied to the runway. Once airborne, he turned toward the lodge, and landed on the lake an hour later. He got another \$50 tip, thanked the hunter, and taxied to the end of the lake. 15 minutes later he was at the other lodge making a pickup.

1.5 hours later, he was back at Anchorage, dropping them off, then he taxied over to the delivery terminal, and the truck was waiting for him. One of the packages was huge, and addressed to him and his mom from the State of Alaska department of Emergency Medical Services. The rest of the packages were for people in Allakaket, so he could kill two birds with one stone. When he was 20 minutes out, he called Bill, and said he had packages for Allakaket, and he was going to be on the ground in 20 minutes. When he landed Bill met him, and unloaded the plane, leaving the box for Ron and Anne in the back. Ron filled the tanks while Bill unloaded, and when they were finished, Ron did a quick walk-around, and Bill told him he sent him another e-mail with his schedule for the rest of the week. Also the Cessna would be finished in a couple of days, and he could fly the Cessna while the DeHaviland was getting its annual major overhaul. Ron turned the plane around, taxied to the lake, and was airborne minutes later. He called his Dad when he was 20 minutes out, and taxied right into the hangar. He carried the box into the house, and when they opened it up, it not only contained the extra gear, but another complete kit and several Tyvek exposure suits and N -100 masks. Ron guessed that Homeland Security was distributing the exposure suits and masks, even though they weren't foolproof, they were better than nothing, and had no expiration date, unlike MOPP gear. There was enough gear for 1 complete set per kit. They even included another set of mounting brackets for the extra kit, so Ron could put the spare kit in the Cessna when he got it, so it would be quicker to switch planes, since all he'd

have to transfer was the plane gun, his spares kit, and his go bag. Looking at the supplies the state shipped, Ron realized he had enough to make another go bag, and asked his mom if she thought that was an idea. She told him to go ahead, so he made another entire go bag. Now all he needed to transfer between planes was the plane gun and the spares kit. He sent an e-mail to the Director of Emergency Medical Services thanking him for the supplies. He got an e-mail in reply stating that since he was a commercial pilot, he was authorized to bill the state \$100 per hour plus fuel and maintenance costs for any medical emergency flights he made. He would gladly make the flights for free, but if the state wanted to pay him, he'd take the money without complaining too much.

Ron got to bed early since he would be flying 2-a-day flights for the next couple of weeks. He remembered how tired he was last year, and decided to get as much sleep as possible. The rest of the week went quickly, then Bill sent Ron an e-mail that the Cessna was ready, so he flew the DeHaviland back to Allakaket and left it with the mechanic. Then he transferred the SU-16 and his spares kit to the Cessna. He took the GPS unit out of the DeHaviland, and connected it to the other unit from the Cessna, and with a few keystrokes, copied all the waypoints from his unit into the new unit, then tested it to make sure the waypoints were in the memory, and stuck the GPS back in the DeHaviland. Next he took out his 5-watt handheld radio, turned it on, and did a radio check with the tower. The repeater was working perfectly. Once he was satisfied that everything was working perfectly, he taxied the Cessna over to the fuel pumps and filled up. From practically empty to full only cost \$100, versus \$500 for the DeHaviland. He could get used to this. He called the tower and got permission to take-off, and flew home.

## Chapter 92 - Life in the Slow Lane

The next weeks dragged - literally. Ron had forgotten about the 60 knot speed differential between the Cessna and the DeHaviland. He felt like he should get out and push sometimes when he was flying the long legs back and forth to Anchorage. Finally, when the mechanic announced that the DeHaviland was done, Ron didn't care about the gas mileage, he decided that it was worth making less money on each trip to fly the DeHaviland full time and decided to put the Cessna back in the hangar, and just fly it enough to keep everything in flyable condition. He told Bill about his decision, and while he wasn't happy, Bill remembered that Ron didn't need the money, he had almost \$2 Million in the bank, and the mechanic had assured them the plane was airworthy. The overhaul had resulted in a slight gain in horsepower since the cylinders were all producing the same power, and the rings were fresh. Ron didn't care; he was tired of flying "Dumbo" as he had dubbed the Cessna 185. The first time he filled it up, he almost went back to the Cessna, then he remembered he had just about \$2 Million in the bank, and if he never lifted a finger again, he could live comfortably.

Right at the end of the hunting season, he was flying back from Anchorage with an empty plane, when he got an emergency call from Allakaket. "Allakaket Control calling Ron, Emergency."

"Control, this is Ron, go ahead."

"Ron, emergency divert, MEDEVAC needed at following coordinates..." Ron entered the coordinates into his GPS, and he was 10 minutes away. It must be hunters in the field, because it wasn't one of his waypoints.

"Control, Roger, ETA 10 minutes. Control, can you tell me what happened?"

"Ron, guide called with 3 GSW, 1 possibly fatal. Guide has basic first aid, and is attempting to stabilize. Doc Miller advises to transport immediately to Anchorage, since they probably need surgery."

At this point, Ron was glad he had the DeHaviland again, since the Cessna couldn't take 3 stretcher cases. He spotted the lake, and turned to land. "Control, I'm landing at the lake as close to the site as possible. Might lose signal on Aircraft radio, will try to maintain contact on 440 band Emergency frequency. If contact lost, will re-establish contact in the air en route to Anchorage."

"Acknowledged, will monitor emergency frequency. Tower out - good luck"

Ron needed to get down fast, so he slipped the plane into a steep right bank, since he needed to turn right to line up with the lake. 30 seconds later, he was flying above the treetops, cranking

the flaps out like mad, and chopping the throttle to idle. It wasn't one of his prettiest landings, but he was down fast and in one piece. A flash of light struck the windshield, and he hoped it was the guide signaling him, since he turned toward it. The lakeshore looked flat and stable enough to taxi up onto, and he was parked 50 feet away from the frantically working guide. He grabbed his kit on the way out and ran to them. He could see that one of the hunters was bleeding out from a thigh wound, he could tell by the color of the blood that the femoral artery was involved. He was ashen, and probably already lost too much blood. One of the victims had a non-life threatening gunshot wound to the left shoulder, and the other one had a critical gunshot wound to the chest. He grabbed a Thoroseal and a Heimlich Valve, and told the guide to put the thoroseal on his back, and the valve on his front, and tape them in place, but make sure he didn't interfere with the valve. He grabbed a piece of 1" rubber tubing, and tied it above the wound as high on the thigh as he could, at this point, the choice was the leg or the life. He had never inserted an IV before, but remembered his mom's instructions to aim for the center of the vein, and when you feel the pop, you're in. He slid the catheter into the vein at the elbow since it was the easiest to hit, and got it right the first time. He quickly attached the other end to a bag of Ringers, and set the flow to wide open. He stuck the bag under the victim's shoulder, and went to check on the guy with the punctured lung. He was breathing better, but Ron went and grabbed the oxygen. He would have loved to set it to FLOOD, but they had an hour ahead of them, so he set it to 4 liters per minute, and placed the mask over his face. By now the guide was bandaging the shoulder wound. The guy was in a lot of pain, but conscious. Ron asked "Are you allergic to anything?"

"No, but it hurts like HELL."

"I know, I'm going to give you a shot of morphine, and you'll feel better." Ron took out a 5mg syringe of Morphine, and injected it in his opposite shoulder muscle. He capped the syringe, and threw it back in his bag in a red plastic bag they had provided. Ron only had 1 stretcher, so the leg wound got the stretcher, and the other 2 were helped into the plane. The guide jumped in the back, and Ron handed him a preloaded syringe of morphine for the guy with the leg wound if he regained consciousness. He would have loved to give it to the guy with the sucking chest wound, but remembered that it suppressed respiration, and he was having enough trouble breathing as is.

He handed the guide his Trauma kit, and told him that he'd have to take care of the hunters while he flew the plane. He objected telling Ron he wasn't qualified. Ron turned to face him and told him "You're all they've got. I'll talk you through it."

He closed and locked the back door, then saying a quick prayer, climbed in the front and started the engine, then turned and taxied for the end of the lake. He switched the waypoint for Anchorage, as soon as he reached the downwind end of the lake, shoved the throttle to full, and left it there. As soon as the airspeed indicator indicated 85 knots, he pulled back on the yoke, climbed to 500 feet, and cleaned up the plane. With the flaps retracted, the plane quickly accelerated to 180 knots indicated, and he held it there, watching the engine temps like a hawk.



Obviously the mechanic knew his stuff, and the engine didn't heat up more than 20 degrees. He picked up his radio mike, and since he was still in range of Allakaket, advised the tower that he had 4 passengers, and he was en route to Anchorage. Next he flipped the radio to GUARD, and keyed the mike "This is Ron Williams from Allakaket with an Emergency Medevac flight. I have 3 GSW on board, 2 critical, requesting emergency landing clearances at Anchorage, and have the paramedics standing by."

"Roger Anchorage Control, acknowledge your medical emergency, Paramedics called and en route. Please advise your ETA."

Ron looked at his GPS, and it said he was 45 minutes out.

"Anchorage Control. I'm 45 minutes out, at 500AGL."

"Roger, maintain altitude, you have Emergency Clearance for Runway 1"

Ron yelled to the guide "We're 45 minutes from Anchorage, how are they doing?"

"Ron, I'm Jim, the leg is still with us, the chest is having problems breathing, and the shoulder is unconscious but breathing."

"OK, get a pulse and BP on the leg if you can without disturbing the chest, or moving the leg."

"Ok Ron, I'll let you know."

A couple of minutes later, Jim said "Ron, BP 60/90, pulse thready but there."

"OK, Jim, we've done all we can for the leg, concentrate on the chest wound. Make sure the injured lung is lower than the healthy lung, we don't want him bleeding into his good lung and compromising his breathing."

"Ron, his right lung was the one shot, and he's practically laying on his right side."

"Great, keep him comfortable, but don't let him lay on his left side."

"Anchorage Control, 10 minutes out."

"Roger, Ok Ron, we've cleared the airspace around you, come in straight and hot, you've got 3 miles of runway to use."

"Control, I've never flown a fast approach."

"Roger - I'll talk you through it. Come in at 50 feet AGL, Don't touch the flaps, when you're over the runway, chop your throttle, and keep the nose on the horizon; you'll sink right down to

the runway as the speed bleeds off. Don't let the nose drop, and don't pull back or you'll stall and crash."

Tower, Acknowledge. Lowering landing gear now, 5 minutes out."

Once the gear was down and locked, the plane slowed slightly, and he dropped down to 50 feet AGL. Once he had cleared the fence, he looked for the landing threshold of the runway, and as soon as he was over it, he chopped his throttle to idle, and held the plane straight and level. Just as the Air Traffic Controller told him, the plane mushed down to the ground, flew in ground effect for a second, and as he lost even more speed, it settled on the runway. He didn't touch the controls, just kept the plane in the center of the runway. He was still fast enough that if the prop was spinning instead of providing drag, the plane would be flying. Finally the speed dropped below 80 knots, and he eased the nose forward so he had steering control. As he reached the end of the runway, he saw a huge mass of flashing lights, and raised his toes up on the rudder pedals to use the brakes. The plane slowed to a stop 50 feet from the emergency vehicles, and the propeller spun to a stop. The plane was mobbed by paramedics and firefighters, who packaged the injured and hustled them out to the waiting paramedic ambulance. One of the firefighters was talking to Ron, when he remembered something. He grabbed one of the paramedics and told him the guy with the shoulder wound was given 5mg of morphine IM.

"Who the hell are you?"

Ron pulled out his wallet, and his State of Alaska Paramedic card.

"Hi, I'm Ron Williams, and those guys are my patients - take good care of them."

"Roger, you got them here alive; we'll take it from here."

The City of Anchorage Paramedic Department has Advanced Life Support capabilities, and the gunshot victims were treated with the latest ALS gear available. The senior paramedic was wondering what he would do without all the advanced gear in his paramedic ambulance. The IV looked crude, but it worked. What really freaked him out was the kid with the paramedic card couldn't be more than 17. He wanted to talk to his supervisor, and see if they could get this kid some better training. He had saved 3 lives with minimal training and gear, and he wasn't sure that he could have done any better, even with his 20 years of experience. Thinking ahead, he called the fire department, and asked them to transport the pilot and guide to the hospital in their vehicle, just in case. He knew they were fine; he just wanted to talk to them when he wasn't up to his eyeballs trying to save someone.

As soon as they got the call, the Scene Commander said that they had to go to the hospital. Ron felt fine, but didn't argue. He pulled the plane forward into the nearest parking spot, secured it, and carried his trauma bag with him to the truck. A fireman/EMT drove them to the hospital,

and when they got there, the Senior Paramedic was waiting for them.

“Ron, sorry about yelling at you back then. You guys saved all 3 of them. Do you have a minute; I’d like to debrief you.”

Sure, I’ll tell you everything that happened, but Jim took care of them before I got there, and monitored them once we were airborne. I think he belongs there too.”

“Ok, let’s all go to the conference room right over here - you want anything to drink?”

They both said “Coffee, Black with sugar”

The seats in the conference room were comfortable and they all sat at a big table.

The senior paramedic came back with 2 coffees, put them on the table, and brought out his microcassette recorder. “OK if I tape this, I take lousy notes.”

They both said OK rather reluctantly.

“OK, let me start by saying my name is Steve, and you’re not under investigation here. I just wanted to know what happened, since I’m the senior paramedic for Anchorage. I have a few ideas for a training program for rural paramedics, and your incident report just might be the thing to convince the county and the state to come up with the funds to implement my plan.”

“OK, first of all your names for the record. OK, Ron, you first.”

“Ron Williams, Commercial Pilot and Paramedic, Allakaket Alaska.”

“Jim Roberts, Guide, Allakaket Alaska.”

“OK, from the top. Jim, you were first on scene, what happened.”

“These 3 hunters were chasing the same caribou in heavy brush, and it turned back into the brush. 2 hunters were on 1 side and the other was on the other side. They each heard movement, and thinking it was the caribou, shot at the sound, striking each other. I was maybe 50 yards away, looking at another caribou when I saw them shoot each other. I ran up to them and did what I could with my limited knowledge and first aid kit. 10 minutes later, Ron shows up with his Paramedic kit, throws 2 chest seals to me, and told me to put the one with the valve on the chest, and the other on the back over the bullet holes. I cut off his shirt and applied them just like he told me, and the guy’s breathing started getting better. While I was doing that, Ron was working on the leg wound.”

“Ok, Ron, you tell us about the leg wound.”

“After I tossed the thoroseal and Heimlich valve to Jim, I turned to the leg wound. He was pumping bright red arterial blood out of the leg, and I knew the femoral artery was compromised. I knew it was the leg or the life at that point, so I used a piece of 1” surgical tubing above the wound as a tourniquet to stop the blood flow to the femoral artery. Then I started an IV with Ringer’s Lactate. He was unconscious, I skipped the morphine, since I didn’t want to make a bad thing worse. I knew with an hour or more back to Anchorage, he was expectant, so I turned to the guys I knew I could save after I’d done all I could for him.”

“Ron, had you ever started an IV before?”

“No Sir, My mom is an RN, and I had some really good medical texts. I saw her give Slim an IV of D5W when he broke his leg, and was going into shock, but other than that, just what I read and what my mom told me.”

Steve was impressed; this kid never had a chance to practice on patients, and had gotten it right the first time. They described the rest of the treatment and packaging the patients, and the flight to Anchorage.

“Ron, if I can get you some advanced training, and real-life practice, would you be interested?”

“Sure, as long as it didn’t interfere with my flying. I’m the only bush pilot for Allakaket.”

“Jim, would you be interested in more training, I know guides are required to have First Responder certificates, but as you can see, it leaves you unprepared, and facing life-threatening injuries with minimal training, and not even basic gear.”

“Steve, I’d love it if the State could set up advanced first aid training for guides, especially if they gave us half the gear Ron had with him. We don’t need the drugs, but those chest things saved that one guy’s life, and I’m not sure if I’d want to be responsible for sticking a guy with a needle.”

“OK, thanks both of you. By the way, you saved all their lives. The guy with the femoral artery might even keep his leg.” Steve got up and shook both their hands. Ron looked at Jim, and he was as wiped out as he was. “Jim, if you want, I’ll put you up in a hotel tonight and fly you home tomorrow, I’m too wiped out to fly.”

“Ron thanks for the offer, but I have a girlfriend in Anchorage. I could still use the ride home though.”

“OK, meet me in front of the FAA office at 0900 tomorrow.”

“Thanks Ron, see you then.” Jim shook Ron’s hand, and turned to leave.

Steve turned to Ron, and said “I’m off duty in an hour if you need a lift into town.”

“Thanks Steve. I need to dispose of the used Morphine Syringette, and if you could spare some supplies, I’d appreciate it.”

“Ron, just show your Paramedic ID at the desk over there, and they’ll help you.”

5 minutes later, Ron caught up with Steve. Suddenly Steve’s beeper went off. “Ron, you want to tag along, I’ve got a call.”

Ron followed Steve out to the rig, and he jumped in the back seat of the 4-seat cab. Steve’s partner jumped in the driver’s seat, fired up the engine, and took off like a NASCAR racer with the siren screaming and the lights flashing. When they got to the location, it was another “no code” call. Since the elderly on Medicare couldn’t get into the Emergency room unless they were transported by ambulance; they often fabricated emergencies when they just had a minor illness or injury so they could get a ride. The city had to respond to all calls, and it torqued Steve off since more than once, there was a true code call, and someone had died because their unit was busy on a “no code” call. If Steve had his way, the city would prosecute people for false calls, but the city did the politically correct thing, after all, you couldn’t throw an 80-yr old granny in the slammer for a stubbed toe turning into “chest pain”. They drove to the hospital more sedately, and after they handed the patient over, their shift was over, so they drove Ron over to the inn in the rig. Steve told Ron he’d like to talk to him some more, so Ron gave Steve his e-mail address, explaining they didn’t have phone service in Allakaket, just a 2-way radio. After dropping Ron off, Steve shook his head in wonder as they drove back to the barn.

Ron checked into the inn, and asked to use the phone. He called Bill, and gave him the Reader’s Digest version, telling him he was going to stay overnight, and fly the guide back to Allakaket tomorrow morning. Bill told Ron to save his receipts, since the hotel room should be reimbursable. Ron asked Bill to call his parents and tell them he would be flying back to Allakaket tomorrow. Bill said he would, then Ron said goodbye and hung up. He turned to the clerk, told her to bill his room for the call, and he needed an itemized receipt, since the State would reimburse him for his expenses. He walked next door, had dinner, then came back to his room and went to bed since he was exhausted. The next morning, he met Jim at 0900, and flew him back to the hunting area first, to gather his belongings, and those of the hunters, then flew him back to his lodge. Finally Ron flew back to Allakaket, and filled up the tanks, then flew home. He spent the rest of the day talking with his parents about what had happened. Anne was impressed that her son would try an IV without any formal training. He told her that the guy would have died without it, so he didn’t have any choice. Anne knew he was right, but what a way to learn. Most med students and nurses practiced on old drunks in the ER until they got it right. After they ate dinner, he went to bed, since he was still exhausted.

## Chapter 93 - Back in Training

The next morning there was an e-mail waiting for Ron when he turned on his computer. It seems their report kicked over a hornet's nest, and the Director of Emergency Medical Services was under tremendous pressure to upgrade care statewide, and had authorized Steve's program to provide training to Rural Paramedics that was a combination of Hospital training for hands on, and training by Air Force personnel in field-expedient medical care, since a Gun Shot Wound didn't care if it happened in a hunting accident or a firefight. The military had a couple of tricks up their sleeves to treat mass casualties in the field, and bring them home safe.

Also, the Registered Guides would be receiving advanced medical training at the state's expense. They could be trained to the equivalent of an EMT, with the statutory minimum of a First Responder certificate. They would then be issued kits that were appropriate for their skill level. Since the oil companies had recently expanded the Alaskan Oil Fields, the state was rolling in money, and could afford the program.

In Ron's case they waived the age requirement, but they had set requirements for a Rural Paramedic, including 18 years of age when certified, pass an extensive written test, pass a 2-week training period in a major hospital, and the written approval of the hospital's Director of Emergency Medicine. Ron replied to Steve's e-mail, telling him he was too busy during hunting season to take two weeks off. Steve sent a reply back, telling him that Ron and his mom could do their two weeks in Anchorage after hunting season, and the state would pay all their expenses, including 2 hotel rooms, a rental car, and Ron's usual fee for a round-trip from Anchorage to their home in Allakaket. Ron sent a reply telling Steve he'd give him as much notice as possible, but it would be at least 2 weeks after the official end of hunting season, since some hunters stayed at the lodges for a couple of days and went fishing, then flew home. Steve e-mailed a copy of the test to Ron, and asked him to make a copy for his mom. He explained that this was designed as a closed-book test, so he would trust them to follow the rules. Ron printed up two copies, and handed one to his mom, along with a copy of Steve's e-mail. When she finished, she saw that Steve had included his snail mail address as well, so she addressed an envelope to Steve and put a stamp on it, but didn't seal it, since Ron could use the same envelope. 2 hours later, Ron was done as well, so they stuck both tests in one envelope, and Ron would give it to Bill the next time he saw him to include in the next outgoing mail bag. Among his many hats, Bill was also the postmaster of Allakaket.

Ron was back to flying two a day flights, and continued for the rest of hunting season. Luckily nothing dramatic happened. Two weeks after the end of hunting season, Ron and Anne flew to Anchorage for 2-weeks of On the Job training. It was a refresher course for Anne, but it was much more difficult for Ron, but he gutted through it, and they both passed with flying colors. At the end of the 2 weeks, Steve handed them their Alaska Paramedic pins, patches, and badges. Ron didn't want to sew a patch onto each shirt he owned, so he pinned the pin on his shirt, and slid the badge into his wallet. The badge was actually a plastic ID card with a magnetic strip

across the back, with his ID number encrypted into it. Anne's badge had the additional line on it certifying her as a Flight Nurse, since she was still an Alaskan Registered Nurse. Naturally the press was there at the ceremony, and they got their pictures in the paper. The associate editor of the Anchorage Press was there with a photographer, and cornered them for an interview after the photo op. They agreed to sit down in his office for an extended interview. 2 hours later, Scott had the story of the year. Next week's edition of the Anchorage Press would be a feature on Ron Williams, and his amazing story. Anne and Roy were featured prominently when Scott asked Anne a couple of background questions, and got more information than he bargained for. He went to the archives, and found out that this story had never been covered in any Alaskan newspaper or magazine. If he milked it correctly, he would have a syndicated column at several majors. He loved Anchorage, but the newspaper couldn't pay what the big eastern papers could. If he landed a syndicated column, he could stay in Anchorage, and earn a 5-6 figure income just off his column.

Scott e-mailed them copies of his stories as they came out, and Anne couldn't believe the reaction of native Alaskans. She thought that their life was boring and ordinary, but most residents of Anchorage still had the Big-City mentality, and were fascinated by things that occurred in the rural central Alaskan wilderness.

Ron finally got an e-mail from Ronnie Barrett at Barrett Manufacturing; they were ready for him to test their new 4<sup>th</sup> generation Night Vision Scope. He contacted Steve, and made arrangements for him to fly from Elmendorf to MacDill. Ron told his mom and dad he had to fly to MacDill for a couple of days to do another T&E session for Barrett, and went to go pack. He hoped MacDill had a good supply of LC .50 BMG Match ammo, because he had almost shot up his whole supply from practicing so much. He was now able to shoot 10 consistent 7-8 inch groups at 1,000 yards without tiring. He packed his suitcase and his new Barrett rifle in its case, and flew to Elmendorf the next day, where he was met by another VC-120. This time he elected to ride in the passenger compartment and catch up on his sleep since they needed to test the new Night Vision Scope at night.

Later that afternoon, he arrived at MacDill, and Steve drove him over to the range, and after shaking his hand, Gunny took the new rifle, removed the daylight scope by releasing the 4 QD dogs, and installed the NV Scope, then boresighted it. Ron was amazed. The NV Scope had a 120mm Objective lens, and the rear lens was offset almost 3 inches using a Porro prism. The tech rep from Barretts explained that the exit pupil would be unacceptably high with a standard in-line arrangement, and their optical engineers came up with a couple of tricks to reduce the image losses from the prism. Ron said he needed to shoot it first. Larry said, "Exactly - the only testing this scope has been through is our shock/vibration torture chamber. It's never been fired from a live gun." With the scope boresighted, Ron checked the cheekpiece adjustment, and it was surprisingly close. Once the gun had been trial fitted, Larry said he would see them back at the firing range at 2100. Since it was 1300, Ron had some time to kill, and asked Steve if Chief Simmons was around. Steve made a few calls, and found out Chief Simmons was off-base on a training exercise. Hearing that, Ron decided he'd take a nap. At 1800, he met Steve

for dinner at the Officer's mess, then they drove over to the range. Gunny had arrived moments before, and 10 minutes later, Larry showed up. "Alright since everyone's here, let's get the show on the road." Gunny handed Ron a set of red-lensed goggles so his eyes would start dark adapting, like they would if he had been out in the field all night. No one used white lights from there on out. Gunny picked up the cased rifle, and Steve and Larry both grabbed a case of ammo. Gunny already had a target set up down on the 1,000 yard line, and several runners standing by. Gunny was using his daytime spotting scope, since the objective was almost as large as Ron's Night Vision scope, he was sure he could see the target. Steve and Larry set the boxes down, and started filling magazines while Gunny set up his spotting scope, and Ron set up the bipod and monopod for the Barretts. One nice thing about the suppressor was that the muzzle flash from shooting a rifle at night would wreck the night vision of the shooter. With the suppressor, there was no muzzle flash, so the shooter could shoot repeatedly without ruining his night vision.

Once Ron was set up, Gunny made sure the range was clear, told Ron to close his eyes and keep them closed, then he fired a red flare into the air as a precaution in case someone was downrange that he couldn't see. When the flare went out, Gunny told Ron it was OK to open his eyes, and take the goggles off. Ron took the lens caps off the scope and pocketed them, then he pressed a recessed switch on the scope, and it came on with a slight hum. He slid in behind the scope, and looked through a Night Vision scope for the first time. Everything was monochrome green. "Gunny, the screen's green." Realizing that Ron had never used a Night Vision scope before, Gunny hurried to his side, and showed him how to use it. After Ron adjusted the contrast, the image on the screen improved greatly. He turned another knob to focus the image, and the target jumped into sharp focus. It was easier to see the target at 1,000 yards through the NV scope than the regular daylight scope. Ron realized the contrast setting was improving the contrast of the image, but sacrificing detail to do so. He noted that there was a huge range of adjustment for contrast, focus, and magnification, so that the scope would work in all conditions. Obviously this scope needed to be field tested by trained snipers in field conditions, and he knew he wasn't qualified to perform those tests. He could however, determine the practical accuracy of the scope before it went to field trials. After double-checking his settings, he turned to Gunny and yelled "Ready to fire." Gunny yelled back "Clear to fire." and Ron cycled the action, chambering a live round. The lit chevron was sitting right below the X-ring of the 1,000-yard target. Ron was glad for the lit aim point, and the fact that it wasn't crosshairs, which would obscure too much of the target in the dark. He cleared the safety, took 3 deep breaths, and let half the last one out, then touched the trigger. 2 seconds later, Gunny's excited voice came over the intercom "Bullseye". Ron fired 4 more rounds, then a runner was sent to retrieve the target. After Gunny measured it, he told Ron that he had shot an 8-inch group, and the first round was right through the center of the x-ring. Ron turned to Larry, and said "Congratulations, the scope is nice and accurate, and I see no accuracy problems with it. I'm going to check for repeatability issues, so it's going to be a long night."

Larry said that he had slept all day, since he didn't want to miss this. Once a fresh target had been put up, Ron grabbed another loaded magazine, and loaded the gun. After getting



permission to fire, she shot another 5-shot group, and this one measured 7 inches. Ron asked Gunny if he could try dismounting and remounting the scope to see if the QD attachments worked OK. Gunny and Larry said "Sure" and Ron carefully disengaged all 4 QD dogs, took the scope off, walked around for a minute, then laid down and put the scope back on the rail. It locked down just like it was supposed to. "Now the moment of truth" thought Ron, "let's see if this baby can shoot a 7 inch group at the same point of aim after being dismounted and re-mounted." Ron picked up another 5-shot magazine, and loaded the weapon, then asked for permission to shoot. 5 shots later, they brought the target back, and the POA had only shifted  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch, and it still shot a 7-inch group. Ron realized a  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch shift at 1,000 yards was infinitesimal, so the scope and mount worked perfectly. He repeatedly dismounted and remounted the scope, shot a 5-round group, and it never deviated more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the previous point of aim. He did notice that the groups were arranging themselves counter clockwise like the numbers on a clock. He thought that was odd, and assumed it was a harmonic. Still he remembered it for the report. At 2400, they finally ran out of ammo, and Larry called it quits, they had more than enough data. They conferred briefly to compare notes, and gunny also noticed the strange distribution of groups with repeated mount and dismount of the QD mount. They felt it was important enough to make the report, but had no idea what was causing the pattern of groupings since no one had done this before. Larry photographed the targets in sequence, then rolled them up in a map tube to let the R&D engineers figure it out. Anyway, they were happy with it, and a  $\frac{1}{2}$  deviation at 1000 yards was nothing anyone would complain about. Larry said they would meet at 1200 tomorrow to write the report, and they would be finished.

Steve and Ron returned to their barracks, and Ron skipped morning PT for once. He was up around 0900, and hoped they were still serving breakfast. He lucked out, and sat down to eat breakfast when General Shepard walked in. The most senior Noncom present bellowed "Attention on Deck" and everyone including Ron stood at attention. General Shepard walked right over to Ron, and said "At ease". Ron remembered to stand at parade rest, one does not sit with a 3-star general standing in front of them. "Mr. Williams, I spoke to Colonel Fellows, Well Done." He extended his hand, and Ron shook it. "Thank you General - I had fun."

The General sat down in front of Ron, "Son, you are doing your country a great service. The new developments to the Barretts rifles will save soldier's lives. I'm told you were personally responsible for suggesting the re-design of the scope mount, and helped Gunny resolve the flyer problem."

"Yes Sir, but I had a lot of help."

"Ron, I talked to your Senator and the Commandant of the Academy. Son, you are going to the Academy as soon as you reach the minimum age for enlistment and enrollment. I'm assuming you'd like to continue shooting even if you become an F-15 Strike fighter pilot?"

"Yes General, I love to shoot even more than I love to fly, thanks for arranging permission for

me to shoot the Barrett at Elmendorf's 1,000 yard range."

"I hear the Gunny is going out of his tree, because the weapon is still classified and he can't tell the rest of the Gunnies about the group he shot. Then I understand you served as shooting coach not only for the Gunny but another civilian whose only shooting experience was shooting caribou with a 7mm Magnum at 300-400 yards, and his first group was 12 inches at the 1,000 yard line."

"Yes General."

"Son, did you realize you might be more useful to the Air Force as a shooting instructor?"

"No General, I never considered that."

"Ron, they are going to be phasing out the attack aircraft, especially if that SOB Kerry gets elected. Your career as a pilot might be very short indeed. Just make sure you keep your options open."

"Thank you General, I'll keep that in mind."

Ron was wondering what all this was about, 3 star Generals don't usually chew the fat with Civilians. Maybe someone put a bug in his ear about his coaching skills. As the General stood up to leave, Ron stood as well, at attention. Ron felt like saluting, even though it would be a violation of protocol, so he just stood there ramrod straight until the General nodded and smiled, then turned to leave, when an aide whispered something to him. The General turned around, walked back over to Ron and spoke quietly "Ron, you might be expecting a very heavy package from Barretts sometime soon, I understand you've shot up all your match ammo in practice."

"Yes, General, that's what the note I got told me to do."

"Good for you Ron, see you later."

With that the general turned and marched out of the building. Ron's food was ice cold, so he dumped it and went back for some more. Just as he finished eating he heard "Attention on Deck" so he stood at attention again, but it was just Steve coming for him. As soon as Steve sat down, Ron sat down as well. "I heard the General was really impressed with you. He told me you were definitely going to the Air Force Academy. I'm really glad for you Ron, and I know you'll do well. Just be ready for a really rough first year."

"What do you mean Steve?"

"You're entire first year at the Academy, you're a Plebe, and the Upperclassmen will

continuously harass you to weed out the people who don't really belong. It's all a bunch of BS, and you'll get through it. You're in excellent shape, squared away, and academically I doubt if you'll finish out of the top 5%. Just remember your goals, and you'll get through it."

"Steve, the General was just dropping the hint that I might better serve the Air Force as a Shooting Instructor. If I Remember Correctly, the Air Force prefers shooting from 5-10 thousand feet, and usually 25mm rounds."

"He does have a valid point, it looks like Kerry will be the next president, and if he is, the Military will be a shadow of it's former self, and the first thing that goes will be any "Attack" squadrons, since attacking your enemy isn't politically correct."

"Steve, it seems to me the solution isn't to get rid of the military, but to get rid of the corrupt politicians."

"Ron, you hit the nail on the head, but don't repeat that to anyone else."

"How come?"

"Views like that can get you dismissed from the military, since the Admirals and Generals are more worried about their retirement benefits or next promotion than their men."

Ron realized he might have made a mistake choosing the military for a career, but it was too late to back out now. They got up and walked to Steve's Hummer. The next thing Ron knew, they arrived at the range. Gunny and Larry were already there, and as soon as they got seated, they started writing the report. They were finished an hour later, so Steve called VIP transport, and they said they'd be ready to fly in 30-45 minutes. Steve drove Ron back to BOQ to pick up his gear. The rest of the trip was strangely silent. Ron didn't talk because he was afraid he would blurt out what he was thinking, and Steve was thinking about a Personnel problem. When they arrived, Ron was checked through, and Steve gave him a hug, and told him to take care, and he would see him later. Ron quickly boarded the plane, and sat in the passenger section again, he had some thinking to do.

## Chapter 94 - Business as Usual

After a couple of days, Ron had forgotten all about what Steve had said, and was busy flying deliveries, since the Homesteaders wanted to get all their supplies in before winter, since you could get snowed in for weeks on end in some parts of Alaska. When he finally got a chance, Ron went Caribou hunting. He took his .308, since 400 yards was a chip shot for the Barrett, and most of the caribou he killed were between 200 and 300 yards. Besides the Barrett weighed a ton. Roy and Anne didn't want to come along, so Ron hitched the cart to the ATV, and drove out to the caribou hunting grounds. He stopped a mile away on the far side of the ridge like he did last year, grabbed the gun and his tarp, and hiked over the hill. As soon as he crested the hill he knew the caribou were still there because he could smell them. He made it 2/3 down the other side when he found an excellent shooting position. He laid down his tarp, loaded the rifle, then laid down in a military prone position. He used his rifle scope to glass the caribou where were standing there munching away. He selected 2 large males that were close together, released the safety, and quietly cycled the bolt. The crosshairs settled on the neck/shoulder region of the first male, and the gun went off, then he quickly cycled the bolt and shot the second male.

He got up, unloaded the rifle and hiked back to the ATV. The noise of the ATV coming over the ridge spooked the herd, and he drove right up to the 2 downed caribou. He made short work of skinning and gutting the animals, and then brain tanned each hide, and washed his hands. Anne said they needed more sausage, so butchering the animals took a little longer, but he still had several hours of daylight left, so he set out for home. It took part of the first hour just climbing over the ridge, but from there it was fairly flat, and since Lucky wasn't with him, he sped up to 20 miles per hour, which was as fast as he dared go with a full trailer. He might not have made it if it weren't for his headlight, since the last mile all he could see ahead of him was what the headlight lit. When he got home, it was too late to process the meat, so he backed the trailer into the smokehouse and closed the door, then parked the ATV in the shed next to the snow blower. Anne said he missed dinner, but she saved some food for him. Ron thanked his mom for saving dinner, and apologized he was so late. It took longer than he thought to skin gut and quarter 2 caribou. Roy nodded understandingly. He could remember trying to skin, gut and quarter 2 caribou by himself almost 20 years ago. "Was it that long ago?" Roy thought, "Let's see, Ron's almost 16, We were married almost a year before he was born, and it was 2 years before we were married - yup almost 20 years ago." Ron washed up, said grace, and ate dinner. After he read his Bible for a while, he went to bed.

The next morning, Bill called saying there was a huge package addressed to Ron waiting in Anchorage from Barrett. Ron said he knew about it, and asked if Bill had any other packages to be delivered. Anne said she could use a case of lids and rings for her canning jars. Bill said that he had a case in stock in Allakaket. Bill asked Ron if he were going to Anchorage anyway if he'd mind picking up some stuff for delivery to Allakaket. Ron said he would do it today. He turned to his mom, who said she needed the lids to can the caribou, so he might as well go

now. Ron told Bill he'd be in the air in half an hour, so tell the driver he'd meet him in 2 hours. Bill thanked Ron and said the lids and rings would be waiting for him in Allakaket. Ron grabbed his stuff, kissed his mom, and was out the door. As soon as he got the door open, he started the engine, and as soon as it warmed up, taxied out to the lake and took off.

He landed in Anchorage right on time, taxied up to the delivery truck, who backed his gate as close to the plane as possible. The driver complained the whole 2 minutes it took to load the 1 heavy box and the 10 lighter ones that he'd need a truss after this trip. Ron was glad the wheeled cart was almost the same height as the plane's door. He secured the crate as best as possible, then taxied toward the fuel pumps and topped off. Once he filled the tanks, Ron did a quick walk-around and climbed into the cockpit and started the engine. He programmed Allakaket into the GPS, and called the tower for clearance to take off. Once he got clearance, he turned onto the main runway and took off. He called Allakaket when he was 20 minutes out, and Bill said he would meet him at the runway. Ron landed on the lake, and taxied to the main runway. Bill was waiting for him with the case of lids and rings. He told Ron that the case was no charge since he dropped the packages off at Allakaket. Ron topped off his tanks, and flew home. He called his dad 20 minutes out, and the hangar door was open when he taxied up. Ron handed Roy the lids and rings, and walked around to get the cart, and wheeled the cart over to the plane. Roy heard grunting and groaning, then Ron came out of the hangar pushing the very heavy cart. He wondered what Barrett had packed in the box that weighed so much. He got it to the porch, but try as he might, he couldn't get it onto the porch, and finally he just opened the box with the blade of the <skip>. Inside were 6 ammo boxes full of Lake City .50 BMG Match ammo with the same lot number stamped on the boxes as his previous ammo. Next to it was a smaller Pelican case and a note was taped to it.

Ron:

Thanks for the outstanding evaluation. Our engineers were scratching their heads over the change in Point of Aim until they realized the QD dogs (the moving part) were all on the left side of the scope. We alternated left and right dogs on this new mount, and it should solve the problem. I sent you 6 cases of ammo so you can test the new scope mount. Enclosed is a new night scope with the new mount, and a check for \$20,000 dollars, since this is technically a new evaluation. General Shepard told us it was OK for you to conduct the tests at Elmendorf AFB instead of flying all the way back to Florida. Please e-mail me the results as soon as you can.

By the way, the scope is yours to keep.

Sincerely,

Ronnie Barrett

Ron thought he was dreaming. Seeing the look on his son's face, Roy read the note. He walked away shaking his head. Ron definitely led a charmed life. Ron put the ammo cases up

individually, since they were much easier to move by themselves, then carried the scope inside the house like he was carrying the Crown Jewels. Ron told his parents he needed to fly to Anchorage tomorrow, and asked them if they wanted to come along for the ride. He'd have to stay overnight, since he had to test the scope after dark. Anne thought she could get the canning done today, and didn't have anything else to do, so they said yes. Ron sent an e-mail to the CO of Elmendorf requesting permission to use the range tomorrow night, and to ask the Gunny if he could be there at 1600 tomorrow night. His carbon copy to the gunny came back immediately with a "heck yeah."

10 minutes later, he received an E-mail from the CO authorizing him to get on base with a cased rifle and military ammo. He said that he'd leave instructions with the guards that the contents of the cases were to be considered Top Secret, and they were not authorized to open, inspect or otherwise delay him. Ron sent a reply asking if he could land directly at Elmendorf, offload the military equipment at the Armory next to the range, then meet the Gunny later that night. The CO's reply agreed that would be best, he didn't want Anchorage's Finest to open the case and have a coronary. Ron made sure he had his FAA ID in his wallet, and printed 2 copies of the letter, and attached one of them to the Night Vision case. Roy and Anne spent the rest of the day canning caribou meat, and making sausage out of the rest. Ron caught up on his sleep, tomorrow would be a long day.

Ron slept in the next morning, and wasn't up until 0800. Roy and Anne were in no hurry to get up either, so it worked out well. When he finally got up, Lucky was standing next to the door like he was saying "I need to go NOW." Ron got to the door as quickly as possible, and Lucky was out the door like a scared cat. He made a beeline for the nearest tree, and spent the next couple of minutes thoroughly watering it. Lucky trotted back inside with a grin on his face like "What a relief." Anne had made a shopping list, so Ron and Roy decided to see if there was anything in the Sporting goods store they had missed in the last 3 trips. Ron would repeat his last trip, except this time he would drop the rifle, ammunition, and scope off at the base armory, then fly to Anchorage and park overnight, since Roy and Anne didn't have military ID on them.

Around 10:00, they packed into the DeHaviland and took off. 2 hours later, they received permission to land at Elmendorf. When Ron reached his assigned spot, 2 Hummers were waiting for him. 1 was Gunny's, and the other was Air Force Police. He guessed someone was taking the CO's orders seriously, and decided to give Gunny an escort. Gunny transferred the cases to his Hummer, and followed the flashing lights of the AF police Hummer to the Armory, where he locked them in the vault. Ron taxied back to the runway, and received permission to transfer to Anchorage. 20 minutes later, they were on the ground. They walked through the commercial terminal, and took a cab to the Inn. After they checked in and stored their bags, they took separate cabs. Ann wanted to go shopping at the local case lots store, while Ron and Roy were going to drool over the toys at the sporting goods store. When they got to the Sporting Goods Store, Dave and Larry welcomed them like long lost relatives. Ron thought "I guess if you drop \$5 grand at a store in one month, it tends to really improve the Customer Service." They spent the next couple of hours strolling through the store. Ron spotted some

interesting gadgets, and had Dave hold them for him at the counter until they were ready. He bought a Sure Fire Aviator light with the Blue LED, since the red LED didn't show blood very well, and a box of the batteries for it. He was bummed when Dave explained the battery the Aviator took was only available in non-rechargeable lithium, but someone was working on a rechargeable that would work. Roy saw how bright the light was, and liked it, so Ron bought one for Roy and Anne as well, then decided he should have one in each kit, and did a quick count and asked Dave what the price would be if he bought 8 of them. Dave said he'd give them an additional 10% off the marked price before the 20% discount, for the lights and batteries. Ron bought an extra case of batteries, it wasn't like he could go to the 7-11 down the street and buy spares. Dave made sure the cases of batteries were the freshest in stock, and even went in the back room and checked to see if there were fresher batteries, and came back with 2 cases that were just delivered last week. He explained the batteries lasted a long time in these lights unless you used the Xenon bulb a lot. Ron thought about it, and bought 8 spare xenon bulbs.

He spotted some multitools, and realized Anne's kit didn't have one. They had a good price on the Gerber 800 Multitool that Ron had in his kit, and he added it to the growing pile. Roy bought several boxes of Pyrodex pellets, a case of Sabots and Corbon .45 acp JHP bullets for the sabots, and several boxes of patches in cleaning solution, and a case of #209 shotgun primers. Roy might never use that many in his lifetime, but wanted to make sure Ron had enough in case he couldn't buy them later. With that thought he doubled his order. It's a good thing they were flying in a private plane, because that quantity of primers and powder required a HAZMAT label and extra shipping to ship anywhere. Ron spotted a cool Spyderco knife with a patient-safe serrated blade that clipped into his shirt pocket. It was called the Rescue Jr. and the Florescent Orange handle would make it easy to find in an emergency. He drooled over the Mel Pardue auto-opener next to it, but didn't think it was worth \$300.00, besides, the auto opener just made something to go wrong. He saw the Benchmade display, and was drooling over the AFCK 806, with the axis lock. When he noticed it was made of D2, he was sold. Ron told Dave to add it to the pile. Ron walked over to the gun rack and bought 4 more 20 round magazines for his SU-16 and a case of 55gr soft point ammo. If he was going to keep his "poodle shooter" he might as well get enough ammo for it. He now had a case of 55.gr fmj, a case of 55 gr. Soft points, and 500 55gr. JHP rounds.

Since it was starting to get cold, the store was having a sale on winter gear, and at the rate he was growing, Ron needed a new parka. Dave recommended a new "high tech" parka that was a third of the weight and bulk of the old styles, and completely water and wind proof. He bought several pairs of polypro longjohns, and a new snowmobile suit, even though he didn't own a snowmobile, the bib overall design was perfect over a pair of polypro longjohns for Alaskan winters. They had a pair of "moon boots" that looked cool, and were easy on/off, and marked down under \$100. He bought 10 pairs of knee-high polypro socks, and 10 pairs of wool extra-thick hiking socks that came up just below the knee like the moon boots. He bought 2 pairs of gloves, liners, and mittens as well. They had a heavy duty duffle bag made out of orange ballistic nylon that the entire kit fit into with room to spare. Dave realized Ron was a pilot, and

figured out that Ron was putting a winter survival kit together, and made several suggestions. He asked Ron how old his sleeping bag was, and Ron told him it was his Mom's and it was at least 10 years old. Dave walked over to the tents and sleeping bags, and showed him a mummy bag and a Tyvek Bivy sack. He told Ron the mummy bag was rated to -50F by itself, and -100F with the Bivy sack. Best of all, they both compressed down to the size of softballs, and only weighed a pound or two each. Ron took one of each. Ron looked at his watch, and realized he had to get back to the hotel and get some sleep, so he told Dave to ring up the order, and Ron handed him his AMEX card. Ron almost choked when he saw the total, then realized he had a couple of million in the bank, and signed the receipt. Dave called a cab for them, and helped the cabbie put all of their stuff in the trunk. When they got to the hotel, they had a bellboy haul their loot into the room, and Ron laid down for a nap, setting an alarm for 1700, giving him an hour to get to the Air Force Base.

Two things happened at 1700, Anne came in telling Roy how much food she bought, and how cheap it was, and Ron's alarm went off. He got dressed quickly, kissed his mom and dad, and hurried to the lobby. 5 minutes later, a cab pulled up, and delivered him to the Air Force Base. Since the cab couldn't enter, he dropped Ron off, who walked up to the guard shack, and presented his ID, asking them to call Gunny Mathews and tell him Ron Williams was at the gate, and needed transportation to the range. 10 minutes later, Gunny Mathews showed up with his Hummer, and drove Ron to the range. Gunny was cracking up about something, so Ron asked what was so funny.

"You should have seen the looks on people's faces when a 16 year old kid comes on base for a top-secret project."

"Gunny, I doubt this is classified anything more than Confidential - I don't have a clearance."

"Wanna Bet? Once you started this T&E project, Colonel Fellows vetted you for a Secret Clearance, since you can't get anywhere on base at MacDill without at least a Secret, and some areas require a Top Secret."

"Just call me James Bond."

If the Gunny hadn't been driving, he would have fallen off his seat laughing. When they got to the range, it was deserted, except 1 runner sworn to secrecy. Gunny had threatened to assign him to KP for the rest of his military career if he said one word to anyone. There were already 3 targets set up at the 1,000 yard range, and Gunny handed Ron a pair of red-lensed goggles. Ron put them on to let his eyes adjust, and Gunny took everything out, set the night scope onto the rifle, and boresighted it, then he started loading mags. When he had finished, and turned off all white lights, he told Ron it was OK to take off the goggles. He handed Ron a red-lensed flashlight to use from here on out if he needed to see anything. Ron set the rifle up, and when he was ready to go, Gunny told him to put the goggles back on and close his eyes, because he was about to fire a red flare to warn anyone they couldn't see that they were about to commence



firing. Ron heard the shot and the lighting of the flare. 1 minute later, Gunny told him it was OK to open his eyes and take off the goggles.

Gunny set up his spotting scope, and Ron got set behind the gun, then he pushed the PTT and asked Gunny if it was ok to commence fire. Gunny said Go Ahead, and Ron fiddled with the scope for a minute to optimize contrast, magnification and focus for the conditions. When he got everything all set, he was amazed that he could see the 1,000 yard target like it was sitting 10 feet in front of him. Ron cleared the safety, and when he confirmed his sight picture, he touched the trigger, and Gunny's voice came over the headphones. "Bullseye, and I believe x-ring, looks like that practice has been paying off Ron." Ron fired 4 more rounds, then Gunny sent the runner to retrieve the target and put up a fresh one. Gunny measured the group, and almost fainted. Ron had shot a 7" group at 1,000 yards. As soon as the range was clear, Gunny told Ron to shoot another group to confirm, then proceed with the testing procedure of shooting 5 shots, taking the scope off and re-attaching it, shooting 5 more until he had shot 50 rounds. This was going to be a long night.

After the 3<sup>rd</sup> group, Ron was convinced the fix for the mount worked. He could remove and re-attach the scope without changing the point of aim more than 1/4", and there was no pattern to the groups this time. Finally Ron asked Gunny if he wanted to try it. Gunny practically flew over to the Barretts rifle. Ron wasn't sure if Gunny's feet had touched the ground in the intervening 50 feet. Ron coached Gunny through setting up and getting into an ideal body position to shoot. Gunny was amazed how visible the target was, it was like someone was shining a spotlight on the target. He realized that between the huge 120mm objective lens, and the 4<sup>th</sup> generation electronics, the manufacturer was smart to install controls to manually limit the image intensification, and a safety override to protect the electronics in the event of a bright flash nearby that might overload the electronics and damage them. Ron had walked back to the spotting scope and donned Gunny's headset, while Gunny put on Ron's set. Gunny sighted the target, cleared the safety, and when the sight was directly below the x-ring, he touched the trigger. 3 seconds later, Ron was yelling that he hit the x-ring. Gunny had never scored an x-ring shot outside of 600 yards before. He settled down and fired the 4 remaining rounds in the magazine, then locked the action open with the safety on, and sent the runner down to collect the target. Gunny measured the target, and almost fainted when he realized he had shot a 9-inch group from an unfamiliar gun with a prototype Night Vision scope at 1,000 yards. He shook Ron's hand, then they retired to his office to write the report.

Their glowing report would make Ronnie Barrett very happy - the scope worked as advertised, with no bugs found. Gunny Mathews put in a short paragraph describing his shooting experience with the gun and new sight. It would later turn out that Gunny's report was what convinced the Pentagon to replace all their night vision scopes with the new Barretts prototype. Gunny was an experienced shooter, but had never shot a Night Vision equipped rifle before, and had never shot for score beyond 600 yards. They figured if "Gunny could do it", anyone could. When they finished, Gunny drove Ron back to the hotel in his personal Hummer since they had his rifle, scope and the remains of the case of LC .50 BMG Match ammo with them. Since he

was staying in his own room, they didn't have to worry about waking up Ron's parents, so Gunny came down to Ron's room carrying the rifle and the box of ammo. He sat down on the seat, and they talked for a while.

"Ron, I understand you're going to the Air Force Academy. I hope you're planning on shooting with our interservice team, they need the help."

"Gunny, I was planning on that, also I want to be a fighter pilot and fly the F-15 Strike Eagle."

"Ron, If Kerry becomes the next President, you might be better off on the shooting team. Rumor has it that Kerry plans on gutting the military to pay for more Socialist BS. And he plans on eliminating anything to do with offensive power first, so all the Attack and Fighter squadrons will go first. There are going to be a lot of pilots looking for jobs at United after he gets elected."

"Gunny, if things are so bad, why are you still in?"

"Good question, I've got 5 years left until I can retire after 20 years. I'll move down to Alabama where I'm from and live like a king on my retirement and savings. Don't get me wrong, the military is a good life, and you're doing something worthwhile. It's just whenever the Democrats get in charge they screw everything up, then if we don't get in a war, it takes 10-20 years of Republican administrations to get things back to where they belong, and then the democrats just screw it up again. I know you're too young, but during the Reagan Administration, the military was at its height, by the time Carter got in there - it slid downhill, and Clinton finished the job. George I and II tried, but Congress was controlled by Democrats who would rather pay every crack-addict whore to have 5 kids on Welfare than pay the military a decent living wage. You know that during Bosnia and DS 1, more military families were on food stamps than any other time in the history of the US?"

"Gunny, why do the people let them get away with it?"

"Ron, I know you've led a sheltered life, but stuff has been happening behind the scenes since the Kennedy Assassination that the Major Media either covers up or ignores, because it doesn't fit into their world view. There are two kinds of very rich people in this world that control most of everything. The Rich Conservatives by and large are the people who earned their wealth through hard work and shrewd investments. The Rich Liberals or Socialists are the descendants of the Rich Conservatives who did nothing to earn their wealth, and loathe their wealth for the guilt it gives them, but not enough to stop the trust fund checks. They go to all the right colleges, and meet all the right people, who believe the same things they do, that if everyone was equal, we'd all be better off. Except George Orwell said in "Animal Farm", "Of Course, some are more equal than others." and they want to set themselves up as the rulers of the world. The owners of the Major Media, and most of their employees, and all their major reporters share the world view of the second bunch - the Rich Socialists. If they were Poor Socialists, they'd

have no influence, but they have no problems turning the rest of us into Poor Socialists with them in charge. It's their basic arrogance that they really believe that they should be in charge that gets me. Luckily I won't live to see the final downfall of the United States. We're already sliding down that slippery slope, and unless something drastic happens, we'll be another 3<sup>rd</sup> World Socialist country in the next 20-30 years."

"Wow, I never knew that - what can we do?"

"The best you can do is get yourself in a position to either resist, evade, or join the New World Order. Some have already joined, some are planning on resisting, and people like us are best situated to evade. There's millions of miles of Alaskan Wilderness where a man can hide, live and never be found. One thing I would do between now and when Kerry get elected is buy as many rifles, ammunition and supplies as you'll need to either resist or evade them."

"Thanks Gunny, I hope you're wrong, but I plan on preparing just in case."

"Exactly Ron, Pray for the best, plan for the worst."

"You're a Christian?"

"Been one all my life, that's also why I'm planning on evading, just in case the Book of Revelation is about to come to pass. If it is, Christians, Orthodox Jews and devout Muslims world wide will be the targets of the One World Government."

"Why? We've never done anything to the Government?"

"If the One World Government turns out to be the one predicted by the Book of Revelation, it will be run by Satan, and the only people who won't worship him will be Christians, Orthodox Jews, and devout Muslims. That will immediately make them targets."

"Thanks for the advice Gunny. I've got to get to bed, I need to fly my parents to Allakaket tomorrow."

Gunny gave Ron a "guy hug" then stood back and saluted him. Ron returned it since no one else was there. Gunny turned and walked out of the room without a word. Ron fell asleep reading the Book of Revelation. What he read scared him half to death. If Gunny was right, things could go from bad to worse real fast. He decided to talk to his Dad tomorrow, and went to sleep.

Anne and Roy were up early the next morning, and ate breakfast, then they decided to read for a while, guessing that Ron didn't get to sleep until after midnight. A very tired looking Ron showed up around 10:00, ate a couple of cinnamon rolls and several cups of coffee to finish waking up. Lucky was glad he stayed in Anne and Roy's room last night, or he might have had

an accident. The taxi driver, and his brother with the truck showed up around 11:00, and between them and both bellboys, got both vehicles loaded. Roy gave each of the bellboys \$10.00, and when they got to the airport and got the plane loaded, paid the fare plus a \$5 tip, and gave the truck driver \$20. Ron's back hurt just from looking at the pile of canned goods and other groceries he'd have to unpack.

## Chapter 95 - Revelations

They were home 4 hours after they left, with a stop in Allakaket to fill up and stretch, and Ron used the cart to unload the plane. Later that afternoon, Ron and Roy sat down on the porch. “Something troubling you son?”

“Last night I had a very interesting talk with the Gunny. He’s convinced that the Wrath of God is right around the corner.”

Roy started to laugh, then told Ron “People have been forecasting the end of the world ever since Christ left the world almost 2,000 years ago. Christians were SURE they were in the “end times” during the persecution of the Emperor Nero in like AD 125. It turned out Nero was just another power-mad evil man bent on world domination, and persecuted the Christians for 2 reasons: 1) They refused to worship him, and 2) He needed a scapegoat for Rome’s failing economy. Rome was in the middle of its long decline, just like the US is now. That doesn’t mean we’re in the Final Tribulation. I’ll tell you a flare-lit tip-off. If a meteor ever hits the planet, and destroys over half the population, be on the lookout for the rest of the Biblical plagues. Until then, try and live your life as best as you can.”

“Thanks Dad, I was afraid Gunny was right, and in that case, the last place I’d want to be is in the Air Force. What about Kerry becoming president and ruining the military?”

“Son, there is a lot of time between now and November 2004, and GW has a few tricks up his sleeve. I’d be seriously surprised if he weren’t re-elected. One thing we should do is buy all the pistols and rifles we want between September and January.”

“Why’s that Dad?”

“The Assault Weapons Ban is due to sunset, and there’s a 90-day window of opportunity for civilians to purchase high-capacity magazines for their pistols, and certain rifles the Congress decided to ban because they looked military. Naturally it had no effect on crime, but it was a test by the gun banners in Congress to see how much the American People would tolerate. They found out the people had become a bunch of sheep. That’s why you hear survival/preparedness types referring to the average American as Sheeple.”

“I get it dad - Baaaaaa. OK, is there anything we should buy?”

“Only if you want a high-capacity pistol with relatively inexpensive magazines. Remember that P-14 that Steve had? Magazines cost over \$60 each for it right now, but come September, they could be as cheap as \$20 each.”

“Dad, I fired Steve’s P-14 Limited, I think it was very accurate for a pistol. I can afford to buy several of them and bunch of mags, and several cases of ammo if you want.”

“Ron, I wouldn’t worry about buying me one, I intend on dying here, I’m really getting old, and starting to feel my age. Anne on the other hand could live another 30 years easily. I’ll buy 2 of them, 1 for each of you, and a dozen magazines, and 2 cases of Cor-Bon 200 gr. “Flying Ashcan” JHP ammo. I’d store them somewhere, since you won’t need them up here, in case you need it later.”

“Dad, could you buy an extra one, and another dozen mags. If I’m a fighter pilot, they have some leeway with purchasing their personal defense weapon, and I’d love a P-14 in a cross-draw shoulder holster as a personal defense weapon.”

“Sounds like a good idea son, and we can easily afford another one. Let’s check the magazine prices the next time we’re in Anchorage, or maybe I’ll send an e-mail to my gunsmith in Washington and see what his prices are. He’s done well by us over the years, and if the magazine prices are coming down, he wouldn’t charge us more than he should.”

They walked inside, and Ron logged onto the internet, found Roy’s gunsmith’s webpage, then got his e-mail address. Roy typed a brief message, and the next day, he received a reply with a quote for 3 Para-Ordinance P-14 Limiteds in Stainless Steel, with 36 14-round magazines and 3 cases of Cor-bon 200gr JHP ammo, and 3 case of 230gr FMJ practice ammo. He included 3 cleaning kits, and a spare set of springs and firing pins for each weapon. He quoted them 10% over his cost on the P-14’s, \$15 each for the 14-round Para Ord mags, and cost for the ammo. Roy knew he couldn’t beat that price, and asked him how he would ship it. 10 minutes later he explained the ATF was cracking down on interstate shipment of weapons, so he needed an FFL in Alaska to ship to. Roy found Larry’s card at the Sporting Goods store, and sent him an e-mail asking him what he would charge to do an FFL transfer. Larry recognized Roy’s name, and decided to waive the fees, since he would probably get more business out of them later. Roy replied to his dealer’s e-mail with the address of Larry’s store, his FFL number, and an e-mail address and phone number in case he needed it.

Several days later, Roy received an e-mail that the guns were in and ready for pick-up. Anne decided to stay home, so Roy and Ron flew to Anchorage and back. Larry talked them into purchasing holsters and accessories while they were there, including a DeSantis style cross-draw shoulder holster with Kydex holster and an off-side dual-mag carrier for Ron, and 3 Blade-tech Kydex IWB holsters, and 3 BT dual-mag carriers. Ron purchased a clip-on Surefire light attachment that fit a rail machined into the front of the receiver with a rear-cap momentary button. It took the same battery as his Aviator, so he was set for batteries. He hoped he never needed it, but saw the usefulness in case he ever did. Roy signed the paperwork and handed Larry his credit card, and 15 minutes they were out the door and headed home. Since Anne didn’t want to shoot her gun, he took one of his empty 50 cal steel ammo cans, wiped all the metal surfaces of the gun and the magazines with a fine coating of gun oil, wrapped them in clean rags, and packed as many boxes of Cor-Bon JHP ammo that would comfortably fit with the gun, 12 mags, the IWB holster and dual-mag carrier, the cleaning kit, spare parts kit, and a handful of desiccant pouches. He wiped the seals with a silicon wipe to make sure they would

seal tight, and closed the lid tightly. He put a Capital P on the lid using a red permanent marker so he would know what was in there, but no one else would know. Ron test-fired his gun, cleaned it thoroughly, and packed it the same way he had packed Anne's. The remaining ammo fit into a 50-cal ammo can with room to spare. Thinking quickly, he added an "A" after the P on Anne's case, and marked his with a "PR" since he had a shoulder holster as well as the IWB holster. Since there was no restriction on the Springfield National Match rifle, he was in no hurry to buy one, besides, he was pretty sure GW would get re-elected.

Ron and Roy went fishing for the last time that season, and spent the afternoon talking and fishing. Anne made Caribou Stew for dinner. Since Lucky was getting older, he spent more time with Roy and Anne than Ron, since they sat down more and had more time to pet him. He didn't knock Ron over anymore, since he was starting to get arthritic and it hurt to stand on his hind legs. He still tried to lick Ron every time he came home, but Ron had to crouch down so Lucky could reach him. Ron's bicycle and skiing trips were solo trips now, since Lucky couldn't keep up. Ron flew a couple more delivery flights before winter set in, then as the lake froze solid, he swapped the pontoons for skis, and waited for the snow to start. He took the pumps out and stored them after having filled every water container in the house. He stayed home more this winter, because he realized his parents could easily become snowbound without him if there was a bad storm and it drifted against the front door. Still, he made a couple of overnight cross-country ski trips, but mostly skied his course in front of the cabin, and shot his rifle at his new official Biathlon targets. He had modified them so when the last target on the right was hit, the panel would reset. He passed the winter studying, skiing, and reading his Bible. Using Anne's study guides, he developed a more mature understanding of Revelation and other books of the Bible, and his faith grew. As the snow melted, Ron had a chronic case of cabin fever, since he couldn't ski in slush, but he really shouldn't switch the skis for pontoons until the lake melted all the way out. He slogged out to the lake several times, and called Bill. Allakaket Lake was clear, but his lake was still ice clogged. Finally they had a week of warm weather, and the ice melted, then flowed downstream, clearing the lake. That morning, Ron walked out to the hangar and replaced the skis with pontoons. He called Bill and said he was all set to fly again with his pontoons on.

Business slowly picked up until his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday on April 11<sup>th</sup>. His Mom and Dad made a big deal about it, and Lucky was too tired to howl. He got some neat presents, including a new faster more powerful laptop computer, since his computer was almost 10 years old by now, and basically obsolete. Roy bought some more solar panels and another Air-x wind turbine, and added 2 more batteries to their bank, and their "gadget desk" slowly filled up. He started flying to the lodges as they got ready for hunting season, then he was into hunting season, and again was flying 2 flights a day between Anchorage and Allakaket. One day he stopped in Anchorage to pick up some building materials for a delivery, and was about to take off when he saw a familiar face waving at him. It turned out to be Samantha. Ron guessed she was home from school for the summer. He got out of the plane and walked over to her. She gave him a big hug and said "Long time no see." then asked him for a ride home. By now she was a beautiful 19-year old woman, and there was no way Ron could say no. She packed her bags in the back of

the plane, and he noticed she was wearing the fanny pack he made for her family many years ago. When she was loaded up, he opened the front passenger door and helped her in. She was totally capable, but Ron was smitten by her beauty. Once she was seated and belted, he closed and locked the door, and walked around the aircraft to check the plane out, but also to get his pulse and breathing under control. Once he could talk coherently, he climbed aboard, started the engine, did a pre-flight, and called the tower for clearance. He entered the waypoint for Samantha's house in the GPS, and taxied to the runway. It took longer than usual to take off, he was heavily loaded with rebar and other building materials. Finally the air speed indicator told him he was flying fast enough, and he pulled the yoke back into his lap, and they were flying.

Halfway to Samantha's place, he noticed smoke coming from the engine compartment, right about the same time the fire warning horn started blaring. He reached down to pull the fire extinguisher handle that flooded the engine compartment with CO2 and fire retardant. By the time the fire was out, the engine sputtered and died. "Sam, we have to land now. Look out your window and see if there are any lakes or any clearings we can land in. They have to be ahead of us and close." Ron was looking out his window when Sam yelled "Lake 1 o'clock low about 2 miles."

"Sam, how big is it?"

"About the size of my lake, and the land's flat around it, just a treeline between us and the lake."

Ron turned the nose of the plane with the rudder only so he could see the lake. It would have to do. He looked at his instrument panel, and they were all dead except his GPS which was running on battery power, and his emergency altimeter, which was fairly inaccurate. The GPS said 1500 feet, and the altimeter said 2,000, so he went with the GPS. He knew the DeHaviland loaded like it was had the glide angle of a rock, but he did what he could to improve it. He had 1500 feet to lose inside 2 miles, so he pushed the nose over to gain airspeed, and increase his glide range. "Sam, you need to brace for impact, this is going to be rough. Take your glasses off, and put your face on a pillow or something soft and bend over with your hands protecting your head. I'm going to try and land on the lake. Wish me luck."

Ron ran out of airspeed and altitude right as he crossed the threshold of the lake. He dropped 20 feet to the water, coasted to the other side, and grounded on the opposite shore.

"Sam, get out now, the plane could catch fire - get at least 100 feet away."

Samantha turned grabbed her book bag, and broke her previous best attempt at the 100 yard dash. Ron grabbed the 2 bags closest to him and ran out of the plane. After 15 minutes, the plane didn't catch fire, so he told her to stay put and he'd check out the plane.

First they removed all the survival gear, including the medical kits, then they started unloading



anything remotely useful. Half an hour later, Ron opened the engine cowling, and what he saw made him want to cry. The engine was wrecked, and all the wiring was melted by the fire. He guessed that an oil line had let loose, spraying oil all over the hot engine. The resulting fire gutted the engine compartment before the fire extinguisher could put it out. He tried both his radios, and neither worked. He took his GPS unit out of the plane, and it still worked. Thinking fast, he took a pencil and small notebook out of his fanny pack, and copied their coordinates in case the batteries ran out on the GPS. He showed them to Samantha, as well as how to operate the GPS in case something should happen to him. He remembered his handy talkie, and pulled it out of his bag. The batteries were fully charged, so he switched the radio to the designated local 2 meter emergency frequency and started broadcasting “Mayday, Mayday, Mayday. This is Ron Williams. My plane is down and unflyable. My passenger and I are fine, but stranded.”

He released the PTT and didn’t hear anything. He decided that in order to save batteries, he would transmit once an hour for the next 12 hours starting in 3 hours when someone would realize they were missing, then once a day at 0900 until the batteries ran out.

“Sam, looks like we’re going to have to stay overnight, or maybe longer. We need to set up camp and find some food, since the contents of our fanny packs won’t last more than 3 days.”

“Ron, if I didn’t know any better, I’d think you did this on purpose, but I know you’d never wreck your plane, even to be alone with me.”

“Not likely Sam, you’re a nice girl, and a total babe, but I’m waiting until I’m married.”

“Why, sex is so much fun.”

“Sam, premarital sex is against God’s laws. He calls it Fornication. It’s not because God’s a Party Pooper, but he wants what’s best for us. Sex is designed for a husband and wife to share as something special only they can share. Every time you have sex with someone, you leave a piece of yourself behind. I’d rather wait to share it the first time with my wife.”

“OK, I guess that means we’ll have to find something else to do while we wait to be rescued.”

“Sam, I want to take that rebar and those tarps and build a big tent, it’s going to get cold tonight, and I just have my mummy bag and my Bivy sack.”

“Ron, I’ve got a Mylar bag in my kit, and that means you have 1 too.”

“OK, if I let you use the Mummy bag, and I use the 2 Mylar bags and the Bivy sack, I should be warm enough.”

“That’s awfully Chivalrous of you. We’d be a lot warmer in the same bag.

“Nice try Sam, even though we’d be much warmer, the temptation would be too great, and I’m sure we’d wind up having sex.”

“So what’s wrong with that.”

“Sam, you weren’t listening earlier, I wasn’t kidding.”

“Ok, ok, calm down, I won’t bring it up again.”

“Thanks Sam. Let’s get the tent set up.”

They got the tent set up, and moved all their supplies inside, then Ron made a fire ring on the down wind side, and started hauling wood. Sam decided that she would help, so Ron told her to only pick up the downed wood for now. Ron found an evergreen tree with fresh boughs, and he decided that if he chopped it down, the boughs would make lying on the ground much more comfortable. 15 minutes later the tree was down, and he was limbing it. He dragged the limbs over to the tent, and started making beds for them, then covered the boughs with another tarp to keep the sap off them. Ron started calling every hour on the hour, then realized that they were over 100 miles off course, because no one knew he had picked up Samantha, and her house was over 100 miles north of where he was delivering the construction supplies. He stopped transmitting, since he knew they wouldn’t be looking for him so far north. He decided to just transmit at 0900 each morning, or if a plane flew over. He took out his fishing kit, caught a couple of trout, and lit the fire and broiled the trout for dinner. They went to bed shortly after dark.

Around midnight, Ron was wakened by Samantha screaming at the top of her lungs. Thinking there was an emergency, Ron pulled his .44 and his flashlight, then said “Sam what’s wrong?”

“Ron. Is that you?”

He realized she was having a nightmare and quickly put the gun back up, and flipped the much softer LED lights on. “Sam are you OK?”

“No I’m not - That SOB raped Me.”

“Sam what are you talking about, I haven’t touched you.”

Sam rolled over to Ron wrapped her arms around his neck and started sobbing. The story came out in bits and pieces. She had joined a Sorority her freshman year, since it was the cheapest place to stay on campus. During Rush week, the pledges and sisters of her sorority were invited to a frat party. There were a bunch of kegs of beer and everyone seemed to have a good time. She had a few beers, but was OK until one of the senior frat members offered her another beer. Half an hour later, she was woozy and staggering, and he practically carried her upstairs to his

room. She didn't remember anything except waking up in her clothes, and feeling sore all over. The next day the senior sisters were telling her she was a real "Party Animal" and she was now a member of the sorority. Not realizing what had happened, she thought they were complimenting her. 2 weeks later, she started burning when she went to the bathroom, so she went to the school nurse. She diagnosed her with a STD. She didn't understand, she thought she was still a virgin. The nurse asked her bluntly if she had been to any frat parties in the last two weeks. When she said yes, the nurse just shook her head, since she knew what had happened.

Ron saw her far away stare, and realized that she couldn't remember, but she needed to know it wasn't her fault. "Sam, I've got something important to tell you. Part of my medical studies included drugs that included tranquilizers. You were probably given Ruphian in your drink, It's a powerful tranquilizer with some side effects including loss of short-term memory, and stupor."

"So what you're telling me is that SOB slipped me a Mickey, and when I was in a drug-induced stupor, he had sex with me."

"Basically, legally it's date rape and a felony. The important part you need to know is that you were a victim, not a willing participant, since you were practically unconscious."

"So I'm not a Slut?"

"Why would you think that?"

"My dad said I dressed like a slut, so I thought I was."

"Sam, no woman deserves to be treated like that, regardless of what they are wearing. I don't think you're a slut. I think you're a very nice girl, who led a sheltered life, made the mistake of going to a frat party, and was assaulted at that party."

"Oh God, I wish I'd never slept with all those guys at school."

"What do you mean Sam?"

"After the party, someone put out the word that I was a slut, and soon I was the most popular girl in school."

"Sam, I'm sorry, is there anything I can do?"

"Ron can you hold me?"

"Sure, I've always been your friend. I'll help you through this, but I'd highly suggest switching

schools next semester.”

“Where to, I don’t have the money or the ability to switch. There aren’t any other Nursing schools in Alaska.”

“You’re a nursing major - I might know someone who can help. I’ll have to get hold of him when we get out of here.”

Sam and Ron slept in each others arms the rest of the night. It was exactly what Sam needed, the closeness without the sexual demands.

Ron woke up at 0800 the next morning, and gently untangled himself from Samantha. He started the fire again, and got some water boiling for hot cocoa. When it was hot, he woke Sam up and gave her a cup. She sat up in her sleeping bag, and Ron was glad she wore her shirt to bed last night. She thanked him for the cup, then remembered what had happened last night, then remembered that Ron had held her all night without anything else. At 0900, he picked up his radio and transmitted without any contact. He shut the battery off, and stowed the radio in his bag. When she finished her cocoa, Samantha spent the rest of the morning talking to Ron. Slowly it dawned on her that Ron really did care about her, but wasn’t in love with her. In a way she was glad, since right now the last thing she wanted was a sexual relationship.

She told Ron she needed to use the bathroom, so Ron handed her a pack of Kleenex and told her to make it last, because that was all there was, and to make sure she checked her surroundings before she took off her pants, and to go at least 150 feet away from the lake. Ron handed her the .22, which made her feel better, and she trudged off into the woods. When she came back, Ron handed her a tube of Purell to wash her hands, then she rinsed them in the lake, but downstream from where Ron had used his Voyager to draw water from the lake to refill their canteens and his camelback. She handed him the .22 back and thanked him, then decided to give him a big hug, but not a kiss. “Ron, I forgot to thank you for being a friend instead of trying to sleep with me.”

“Sam, right now what you need is a friend. Later, you’ll find some guy and fall head over heels in love with him. Please try and wait for the right guy to come along.”

“How will I know he’s the right guy?”

“First of all, you’ll have a “love” reaction to him, and then you’ll find other things you like about him. The important difference is he won’t want to sleep with you right after he meets you. Guys who want to sleep with you before you’re married or at least engaged are only after 1 thing.”

“Thanks Ron, you really are a friend.”

“Sam, I always will be.”

That deserved a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Ron appreciated the gentle kiss on the cheek and the hug more than any of her previous attempts to strangle him and simultaneously give him a tonsillectomy with her tongue. They spent the rest of the day doing things to make it easier for someone to find them, including cutting open one of the orange trash bags and tying it to the wings of the plane with wire from the construction supplies. Ron made flags out of the other orange trash bag, drove rebar into the ground, and tied the plastic onto it at various strategic locations around their campsite. If they didn't see the orange plastic on the plane's wings, they might see the orange plastic flags flapping in the breeze, since the human eye is attracted to movement. To help pass the time, Ron spent part of each day teaching Sam about survival, and how to use the gear in her pack. She learned to start, feed and put a fire out, how to fish with the emergency fishing kit, and how to make stuff with the various materials around. He taught her how to use a map and compass, how to signal for help using the mirror and whistle. Ron transmitted every day at 0900, and after 2 weeks he was getting discouraged, and started considering the very risky proposition of hiking out, when on the 17<sup>th</sup> day, he heard a faint response to his calls, and repeated it. This time the response came in loud and clear. It was a radio operator aboard an EC-130, and he had a rough fix on their position. A couple of hours later, he could hear them much clearer, and when they were in his transmission range, they asked if he had his coordinates. He had his notebook out and read the UTM and Lat/Long coordinates of where they were. The operator said a Jolly Green would be there in a little over 2 hours. Ron ran to tell Samantha the good news. She grabbed him and gave him a deep kiss on the lips. Ron was glad they were getting rescued soon, because his will power was just about gone. Another week and he would have wound up having to marry her.

They spent the rest of the time breaking camp and getting ready to get evacuated. 2 hours later, Ron heard the distinctive roar of a helicopter, and signaled it with a signal mirror. Ron told Sam to get under the wing and shut her eyes, since the helicopter would kick up a lot of dust landing. As soon as the whirlybird landed, and the dust settled, Ron was amazed to see his Uncle Steve running toward him. Steve swept his nephew off his feet, “Thank God you're OK, they had almost called off the search when the EC-130 picked up your signal, and relayed the frequency and general bearing to the listening post just north of Anchorage. The listening post got a better location on you, and the EC-130 was up today flying a circle search over your suspected transmission site. When you transmitted this morning, the listening post gave them a better bearing and distance, and they flew right at you until they could hear your transmission. Once you gave them the coordinates, and they checked, they alerted the rescue team with the Jolly Green.”

Just then Samantha made an appearance, and Steve got a good look at her, and turned to Ron “Are you sure you want to get rescued?” Ron's pained look told Steve all he needed to know. He walked over to Samantha “Hi, you must be Samantha. You're parents are worried sick about you. Let's get you home young lady.” Ron and Samantha collected their personal gear, and 15 minutes later, they landed at Samantha's place. Once the reunion was over, Ron and

Steve reboarded the chopper, and Ron asked if they could sling lift his plane back to Allakaket or Anchorage. Steve asked the crew chief, who asked Ron how much the plane weighed, then turned to the pilot, who nodded his head. They flew back to the crash site, rigged the plane for transport as a sling load, and flew it back to Elmendorf. They put it in an unused hangar, and one of the private pilots from Allakaket that was working with the Air Force SAR mission flew Ron back to Allakaket. The doctor checked him out, and said it was ok for him to fly home tomorrow. When Ron flew the Cessna home, his mom and dad looked like they had aged 10 years each.

## Chapter 96 - High Friends in Low Places

Ron spent the next couple of days with his parents, reassuring them that everything was OK, that he'd come through the crash OK. Roy took Ron outside and asked him point blank if he'd had sex with Sam.

"Dad, you know me better than that - the last couple of days I was really tempted, but we were saved in the nick of time. Sam's been through a really rough experience as school, and the last thing she needed was a sexual relationship. Matter of fact, I need to get hold of Doc Richards to see if we can get her transferred to another nursing school."

"Why don't you sit down and tell me what happened to her."

Ron gave his dad the Reader's Digest version of what Sam told him had happened to her at the frat party and afterward. Roy was madder at her father than anyone else. "I can't believe that any father would treat his daughter like that - If he hadn't said what he did, her victimization would have ended at the frat party. Since he planted the idea in her head, she probably felt she deserved it, and went along with acting the part. I hope I never run into him, I might end up spending my final years in jail."

They went inside, and Ron sent an e-mail to Doc Richards. He gave Doc the same Reader's Digest version he gave his Dad, and several days later Doc sent a rocket back. He was livid, wanted to know which fraternity it was, etc. He wanted justice. He said he knew the deans of several good nursing schools on the East Coast, and a letter from him could get her transferred in a heartbeat. He'd even arrange a partial scholarship, supplemented by a work-study program at the local hospital, and a trust fund he'd establish for her to pay her living expenses. Ron felt he needed to talk to Sam, so he called her on the radio, and Steve answered. He put her on, and Ron said he had some good news, and needed to talk to her. She told him to hurry up and fly up there. Hearing the tone in her voice, he told his Mom and Dad something was wrong at Samantha's, and he needed to get up there right now. Roy knew it was serious when Ron checked his guns before walking out the door to the Cessna. He was at her place an hour later, and Sam ran out to him. "Ron, let's get the hell out of here, my Dad's gone nuts. He's calling me every name in the book, and he's hit my Mom twice."

Ron was all ready to rush in to the rescue, but realized that Steve was armed too, so he jumped into the plane, opened the passenger door, started the engine, revved it to max and was out of sight in seconds. As soon as he was airborne, he switched frequencies to the Emergency frequency, knowing that Steve couldn't monitor it, and requested an armed response to Steve's house, since Ron felt Steve's wife was in mortal danger. Bill came on the radio and said they had no Sheriff or posse for law enforcement. The nearest armed response was in Anchorage. Ron wished he had the DeHaviland, but he only had the Cessna, and that could only carry 4 people at a time, and 3 people couldn't overcome an armed man. Bill called the US Marshal's

office in Anchorage, and they said they could have an armed team there in a little over an hour. That was faster than Ron could safely land at Allakaket and return, so Bill told Ron to fly Sam to Allakaket, and he'd place her in protective custody until the Marshals sorted things out. Sam was worried about her mom, but was glad she made it out alive. Ron landed in Allakaket, and stayed with Bill and Sam until things got sorted out. Ron sent his Dad an e-mail, then radioed him to get him to check the e-mail account since he didn't want to say what he had to say over the air, especially since Steve might be listening. 3 hours later, the Marshal's Huey landed, with Steve in cuffs. Sam and Ron were deliberately kept away, and the senior marshal talked to Bill. What he heard made him fall to his knees and weep. When he regained his composure, Bill and the Marshal met with Ron and Sam.

Bill broke the bad news to Samantha. "I'm sorry Samantha, but you're Mom's dead. She was found bludgeoned to death, and your father was covered in her blood."

"Bill, he's NOT my father and I'll take a DNA test to prove it."

Bill and Ron looked at Samantha with shocked looks.

"My mom's dead already, so I can tell you the truth. She was dating my dad, but got knocked up by one of her cousins. She's from a small town in Tennessee, and it happens sometimes. She named Steve as my father, but I think he suspected. When I turned 14, he started making advances toward me, but I refused, and Mom stopped him. She kept him from doing something horrible with me, but he treated me like trash. Mom stayed married to him since she didn't know what else to do, and she was attracted to him, but he had a violent temper. I knew it was only a matter of time before he did something like this. I told my Mom what had happened at School, and he must have overheard, because he was yelling and screaming, calling me every name in the book, and threatening to kill me. When Ron called, Steve was distracted, and Mom grabbed the shotgun and held him at gunpoint until I could get out the door. I hope she got off at least 1 round before he killed her."

"Sam, your mom's body was found next to the shotgun, and it had discharged, but Steve didn't have a scratch on him, just her blood all over himself."

"Bill, if you'd let me take Ron's pistol, and give me a clean shot, I can save the state the cost of a trial."

"Samantha, he might be a monster, but you don't want his death on your conscience."

"Bill, trust me, my conscience wouldn't bother me in the least."

"Not right now, but what about later. Police have to deal with taking another life, even if justified, and they pay for it all their lives. Killing another human being takes something out of you."



Ron composed another e-mail to his dad, and called him again to have him check his e-mail.

10 minutes later, Roy called back and approved.

When he received his Dad's e-mail, Ron put his plan into action. He e-mailed Doc Richards gave him an update on the situation, and he replied that they would love to have Samantha stay there for the rest of the summer, and go to school nearby in the fall.

Ron showed Sam the reply to his e-mail, explained what he had been up to, and Sam squealed in delight, hugged the stuffing out of him, and laid a liplock on Ron that almost made him pass out from lack of oxygen, and this with Bill standing right there.

"Ron, you've saved my life 3 times in the last couple of weeks, and you've asked for nothing in return - I know I'll never forget you."

Ron had enough money in his account to buy Samantha a one-way ticket to North Carolina, where Doc Richards lived with his wife, so he had Bill call Alaska Airlines and arrange a flight tomorrow. The next one left at 3:00 tomorrow afternoon, so Ron asked Sam if she'd like to go shopping in Anchorage first, since she left with the clothes on her back, and he didn't want her to have to face that house again. Sam gave Ron another hug and a kiss. Ron said "Sam, if you don't stop that, I might never let you go, but that would be wrong."

"What do you mean Ron?"

"Sam, I'll always be your friend. At the same time, you're a beautiful woman, and I'm sexually attracted to you, but I don't have the feelings for you that a husband should. Besides, my destiny is different than yours. We might have fun for a while, but it wouldn't last."

"Ron, you're pretty smart for a 17-yr old. I don't love you either, but I'm so grateful that I could stay with you as long as you wanted."

"Thanks, Sam, I appreciate it, but we'd be together for all the wrong reasons. I'll fly you to Anchorage tomorrow, we'll go shopping, and I'll put you on the plane to North Carolina."

"Ok Ron, but be ready for the "goodbye kiss" of you lifetime."

"Maybe I better bring some oxygen with me."

They both had a good laugh at that. Ron took his overnight bag out of his plane, and Bill got some scrubs for Samantha to wear. He got them separate rooms on opposite sides of the inn just in case. They slept as well as possible, and were up at 0800 for breakfast. After breakfast, Ron said "Sam, we better go, it's two hours to Anchorage, and your flight leaves at 3:00 pm."

“Ron, that’s six hours from now.”

“Exactly. My Mom could never take less than 2 hours to shop.”

“Ron you’re such a man sometimes.”

“Guilty as charged - let’s get going.”

Sam wore her scrubs, since her clothes were dirty, and she’d rather make a clean start. She managed to keep her hands off Ron as they drove to the plane, and this time, she got in by her self just fine, thank you. Ron taxied forward to the pumps, topped off the tanks, then taxied toward the lake. After getting permission to take off, he turned upwind and was airborne seconds later. He turned toward Anchorage, and Sam asked him how he knew which way to turn.

“Sam, this thing on my dash is a GPS receiver. It triangulates the signals from geosynchronous satellites orbiting earth over 25,000 miles up. They are stationary relative to the earth, and they act as fixed transmitters for the receiver to triangulate signals from. It can locate us in 3-dimensional space with accuracy up to 3 feet. I knew the coordinates for Anchorage before we took off, and programmed it as a waypoint. I tell the receiver that I want to fly to that waypoint, and it tells me which way and how far. It even tells me how fast I’m going, and how long it will take to get there.”

“Ok Professor, I ask a simple question, and I get a doctoral dissertation.”

Ron looked at the GPS, and told Sam they’d be in Anchorage in an hour and a half. Instead of asking Ron again, she looked at the instrument. It was reading their speed in knots, and had a countdown for their ETA. She could barely see his airspeed indicator, and noticed his airspeed was faster than his ground speed. She thought that they were heading into a headwind. An hour and 15 minutes later, Ron called for landing clearance. They received clearance, and proceeded right in. Ron landed the plane, and since she had no baggage, and he was going to say goodbye to her, he left his shoulder holster, fanny pack, and knives in the plane, and locked it tight. Sam asked Ron if he clinked when he walked. He didn’t get the joke, so they kept walking. As soon as they were through the terminal, they found a cab. Sam asked the driver to take them to the mall, and 15 minutes later, they were at the main entrance to the mall. Sam looked like she had died and gone to heaven; Ron looked to see if there was a Sporting Goods store around, then realized he’d have to go with Sam, since he had to pay for everything. She stopped in a few boutiques to buy some highly fashionable clothes, then went to a department store to buy some “Girl Stuff” and things to put it in. After they checked out, Ron whispered “Sam, I don’t want to embarrass you, but you forgot to buy bras.”

“That’s because I don’t wear one.”

“No kidding, every time I hug you, I have to fight not to get aroused.”

“Nice to know I have that effect on you.”

“Quit kidding Sam, you might want to buy a few, Doc Richards is old, and you don’t want to give the old codger a heart attack.”

Sam had to agree with his logic, and they went back, and she bought a couple of sexy bras.

“That’s not exactly what I had in mind, but it’s a start.”

She got jeans, shorts, shirts, shoes, toiletries, socks, and Ron bought her a small bottle of perfume as a going away present. Right after they paid for it, she put some of it on, and Ron was looking around for a fountain to jump in to cool off. Finally she was done shopping, and stopped to pack her bags. Ron asked her if she wanted lunch, so she walked over to a Chinese fast food joint, and ordered for both of them. Ron liked the food, even if the tastes and smells were different than what he was used to. At 1:00, he said he had better get her to the airport just in case. She walked by a bookstore, and asked Ron if she could buy some books for the flight. Ron noticed she had 3 romance novels in her hand as they checked out, but didn’t say anything. Finally he got her out of the mall, and flagged a cab to the airport. They handed her tickets to the agent, who exchanged them for boarding passes, and Sam stuck her fanny pack in her checked luggage, then let them check it through. She kept a purse and a small carry-on with her. They cruised through Security, and Ron sat with her until her flight was called. They stood up, and Sam gave him the most passionate kiss she ever had, then turned and walked away without a word. Ron stood there with his mouth open, watching her sashay through the gate. If he’d have said anything at this point, he knew he’d regret it later, because what he was thinking was “Forget the Air Force. What a Woman.” As she walked out of sight, she turned and saw him standing there open-mouthed, waved and blew him a kiss. You could have knocked Ron over with a feather, and he stood there for about 5 minutes until her plane was pushed away from the gate. When he was finally able to think a conscious thought, he realized he was standing there like an idiot with his mouth open, staring into space. He knew one thing, she wasn’t kidding about that Goodbye Kiss.

He finally snapped out of it, and walked to a pay phone, and using a calling card, called the number Doc Richards had given him, and described Samantha. Doc said “Sounds like you let one get away.”

Ron, always the one for the bad pun said “You ain’t just whistling Dixie there Doc.”

“One more bad pun out of you young fellow, and I’m hanging up.”

“Sorry Doc, take care of Sam, she’s special.”

“Don’t worry, Bert’s already planning on mothering her.”

“Doc, what she really needs is a friend and a mentor, she just lost her mom because her father killed her. He would have killed Sam if her mom hadn’t held him at gunpoint so she could escape with me.”

“Ok Ron, we’ll take it from here. My Pastor is a really good therapist as well, and has worked with women with sexual abuse before.”

“Thanks for everything Doc, keep in touch.”

“See ya later Ron.”

After they hung up, Ron made the long lonely walk to his plane. He was praying for Samantha all the way, and hoped the rest of her life would turn out OK. When he got to his plane, he put his fanny pack and shoulder holster back on, then spotted a note on the passenger seat, with a lipstick kiss mark on it. He opened it and read:

Dear Ron:

I can’t tell you this in person, but I wish I had slept with you. You’ve been the nicest person in my life. I’m pretty sure I love you, but I can’t stand in the way of your dreams.

I hope you have a nice life, and keep in touch.

Love Always,

Sam

Ron broke down and cried. He realized he really did love Sam, but now she was gone. He had a plane to fly, so he got his emotions in check. Still he knew Sam would always be his first true love.

## Chapter 97 - A Homecoming (of sorts)

When Samantha arrived at the Charlotte North Carolina airport, she went to baggage claim, got her suitcases, then saw a liveried driver holding a placard that had said Samantha, but had been crossed over, and SAM written in its place. Samantha knew that the driver was for her, because only Ron called her Sam. She walked up to the driver “Hi, I’m Sam.”

The driver said, “This way young lady” and he walked away without another word. As he walked out the door, they were met by a couple in their mid-50s to early 60s. He was a kindly gentleman and said “Hi Sam, I’m Doc Richards and this is my wife Bert, it’s short for Bertrand, but she feels that’s too stuffy. If you’ll give Nelson your bags, we can talk in the car.”

Nelson the driver took her bags, and then opened the passenger door of the stretch Lincoln limousine. He offered his arm to Samantha, Bert, and then Doc. Bert and Sam sat in the back seat, and Doc took the jump seat riding backwards so he could talk to Samantha.

“First of all Sam, I go by Doc. I appreciate first names. Ron told me you prefer Sam, so I’ll call you Sam unless you’d rather have me call you Samantha.”

“Doc, please call me Sam, even if it was the name of Ron’s Wolf pup.”

“Ron had a wolf for a pet?”

“That’s what he told me. Evidently his dad Roy befriended a lone wolf when he was first stranded in Alaska, and he called him Oliver. Later Oliver met a wild wolf named Francine, and they had 2 litters. The second litter contained a runt, and Francine dropped him on Roy’s doorstep. They bottle fed him, and Ron wound up being his best buddy. Years later, Ron was surprised by a bear, and all he had on him was a .22 pistol, and Sam died saving him. Ron fired over 30 rounds into the bear, and the 28<sup>th</sup> round finally killed it.”

“No wonder Ron liked calling you Sam. He was really attached to that wolf.”

“Doc, Ron said you are a Neurosurgeon?”

“That’s right, I’m a senior professor of Neurosurgery, and I spend most of my time flying around the country consulting on the toughest cases.”

“Wow, I bet that took a lot of education.”

“The neat thing is I’m still learning. Also, it’s deepened my faith in God.”

“How’s that, I though all scientists are Atheists?”

“Nope, just the more vocal ones like Carl Saegan. The rest of us vary from Deists to Christians.”

“I don’t get it; the Big Bang Theory said we were an accident of Nature.”

“Yes my dear, but it’s just a theory, just like Evolution. But the schools teach it as though it were fact.”

“Obviously I missed something somewhere.”

“You lived in Alaska all your life; did you ever get to look at the stars at night? Or how about the Miracle of Birth. Or how about just plain Medical Miracles - I’ve witnessed hundreds in my career. People who should have died, and survived. They had no hope medically of living, then all of a sudden, their problem goes away, and they’re fine. It takes a sense of wonderful Awe to realize how great God is.”

“If God’s so great, why did all this rotten stuff happen to me?”

“It could have been worse; you could have AIDS, or be dead, or pregnant without a husband. I know for a fact Ron really cares for you. Sometimes bad things happen, but God puts good people like Ron in our path to help fix the damage, and lead us to him.”

“I know for a fact Ron’s good, I threw myself at him so many times that I swore he was Gay. Finally I realized he just loved me too much to use me like that.”

“Exactly Sam, Ron may not be “in love” with you, but he definitely loves you, and wants what’s best for you. He went through all the effort to contact me, get you on a plane, and get you here where you can start over. Right now, you have a rare opportunity miss; you have a completely blank slate. No one knows you, knows your past, or has any preconceived notions about you. I only know enough about you to try and help. When you feel up to it, I’d like you to meet with our pastor, he’s a trained counselor and therapist, and he specializes in some of the stuff that’s happened to you. He has some answers that will help make sense of all that’s happened to you, and help you get going on your new life. By the way, I phoned the dean of the University of North Carolina’s School of Medicine. You have been accepted for the fall semester, and all your units from University of Anchorage will be transferred. Bert and I are picking up the tab for your tuition, but you’ll be expected to work 20 hours a week in the University hospital to pay for your books and incidental expenses. I have an old Carman Ghia in the garage I haven’t driven in years. It’s yours to use while you’re here. There are a few house rules, and there are no exceptions. 1) No Smoking - Anything. 2) No Drinking 3) No Male visitors outside of the kitchen and parlor. No Male visitors after 10:00 without special permission from Bert or I. If you need to have a man with you at the computer when you are studying, the door will be open at all times. 4) These rules are not negotiable.

“Doc, what is this - prison?”

“No dear lady, these rules are for your protection. Drinking got you in trouble before. Keeping men out of dangerous areas like your room will minimize temptation. Smoking is bad for you, and I don’t think you smoke anyway, so it’s probably the other rules that are bothering you. My dear Sam, Bert and I are devout Baptists, our religion doesn’t permit the consumption of alcoholic beverages, and we expect you to respect that.”

“OK, since you’re being so nice to me and putting me up for the summer, and paying my tuition, the least I can do is give up drinking.”

“That also means no bars, frat parties, or anyplace else alcohol is consumed.”

“Ok Doc, if you say so. You obviously have my best interest at heart, or you wouldn’t have offered to let me stay here.”

“Sam, you’re going to be too busy to miss it all. I’ve an idea. Your last name is Stone, correct? You can’t be a granddaughter, but how about I introduce you as my niece. Most of my family isn’t from around here, and it will avoid any awkward questions. You can still be from Alaska, because someone is going to locate your transcripts, and you can say you transferred to UNC to stay with us because the housing costs were too high, and UNC is a better college anyway. Any problems with that story?”

Samantha realized that she had to tell people something, but she didn’t want to lie. Still, it was most of the truth, except she didn’t know Doc Richards from Adam.

“Ok Doc, if we’re going to pull this off, I need to know something about your family. I can assume they will ask about my parents, etc. You didn’t have a relative that had kids, and recently died did you?”

“Nope, I’m the oldest of 4 siblings; I have 2 sisters and 1 brother. Both sisters are on the west coast, and I haven’t seen them in years. The brother is a big New York Lawyer, and a total jerk. I don’t even speak to him. Both of my sisters have kids your age; you might be able to pull this off. Besides, you only need to do it for 4 years.”

“What if I decide to go to medical school?”

“Sam, don’t worry, by then people won’t give a rip what happened to you in Alaska, because they will know you from here. If you want to go to medical school, and you’ve got the grades to get accepted to our medical program to get an MD, I’ve got the money. But the money is conditional on you following the rules, and keeping your grades up.”

“Don’t worry about that Doc. The only reason I wanted to be a nurse was I couldn’t afford to

become a doc. I really want to specialize in Emergency Medicine.”

“Good for you Sam, there is a great need for more ER docs.”

Doc Richards walked into the parlor, made a phone call, and was back in a minute.

“Sam, if you want to see him Reverend Whitaker is free this afternoon.”

“Good idea Doc, the sooner I get past this the better. Lead on McDuff.”

Doc walked into the parlor again and was back in a minute. “Nelson is bringing the car around.”

10 minutes later, Doc and Sam were shown into Rev. Whitaker’s study/office. Doc shook the Reverend’s hand like an old friend. Sam looked like a person facing a firing squad.

“Sam, I’m Reverend Whitaker, but you can call me Bob if it makes you feel better.”

“Thanks Bob, as you can imagine, I’ve never been inside a church before, or met an actual Reverend before. My Dad was an Atheist, and Mom never was much of a church-goer.”

“Sam, I understand, I know from talking with Doc that you’ve had a couple of really bad experiences, including the recent death of your mother, and a sexual assault at college, is that correct?”

“Bob, also the time in between wasn’t a picnic either.”

“OK. Doc, will you excuse us please, I think Sam and I can take it from here.”

“Sam, when you’re finished, have Bob call the house, and we’ll send the car. Reverend, thanks for everything.”

Doc walked out to the limousine, and Nelson drove him home.

Bob spent the next couple of hours using conventional psychotherapy techniques, since she wasn’t ready for the Christian approach. Finally she blurted out, “Reverend, why do you think this happened?”

“You mean why did God allow this to happen to you. Well for one thing, God allows us free will, and unfortunately people chose to do evil rather than good, and those choices have consequences. I’m not talking about punishment here; I mean if you stick your hand in a fire, the natural consequence is you get your hand burned. What happened to you was evil beyond measure, but you have to understand that drinking, while in itself is not evil, when you get



drunk, evil things can happen to you, since in your intoxicated state, it's easier for evil people to do things to you, or you might drive since at the same time your judgment is impaired, and either hurt yourself or someone else. That's why Baptists don't drink. It's not that the Bible is against it, matter of fact alcohol in moderation, like a glass of wine with dinner, really won't hurt you. But since we as fallen people lack self-control, we decided not to take that first drink."

"OK, Reverend, I understand why you don't drink, but that still doesn't answer my question, why me?"

"Another truism of Christianity is that God can use evil for good. He doesn't cause the evil, we do, but he can use those evil circumstances for good. When you got back, you met Ron, right?"

"Of all the people I could have met in Anchorage, he was the one person I needed to meet to stop what was happening to me. He loved me, but refused to have sex with me. Instead, he took the time to hold me, listen to me, and help me put my life back together, then 4 days later, he saved my life again when my Dad found out and went berserk. He risked his life to save mine. And Mom sacrificed her life to save mine."

"Sam, I want to read one verse out of the New King James Version of the Bible."

Sam nodded, and he opened to John Chapter 15 Verse 13 and read "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."

Sam started to cry, and finally Bob asked her "Sam what does that mean to you?"

"What I already knew, that my Mom loved me enough to die for me."

"Did you know that someone else died for you almost 2,000 years ago, and he loves you even more than your Mother?"

"You're talking about Jesus?"

"Sam, you remember the story of Genesis, and original sin?"

"Yes, I've heard it before."

"Sam, it says that the wages of sin is death. Thanks to Adam and Eve, sin entered the world, and we were all under a death sentence. Jesus loved each of us so much that he couldn't stand the thought of spending eternity without us, so he took on human form, was born as a man, and sacrificed his own life on the Cross. He didn't have to die, he was God after all, and with a thought, he could have been back in Heaven, not suffering an excruciating death. A perfect God took our place, and God's sense of Justice was satisfied. He paid the price for each of us,

and set us free.”

Sam broke down and cried, and in her tears she realized that all this pain had a purpose, and she would never have had the opportunity to become a doctor in Alaska, and that a very strange series of coincidences got her here. The probability of that happening by random chance were 10 times the chances of winning the lottery without buying a ticket. Maybe there really was a God. And if Reverend Whitaker was telling the truth, there was a way out of this mess.

“Bob, I’m tired of living like this, what do I have to do?”

“Ok, you’ve made the first step, you realized you are powerless to run your own life. How about letting God run it for you. He has your best interest at heart. All he wants to do is love you.”

“You mean like Ron?”

“Sam, Ron’s love has limits. He’s human. God is Eternal and Omniscient, meaning he is all-powerful, and can do anything. Best of all, he loves you even more than Ron does.”

“OK, at this point I’ll try anything.”

For the next two hours Reverend Whitaker led her through the process, one step at a time, and when they were finished, Sam gave her life to Christ, and the transformation was amazing, like the transformation of Mary Magdalene from a demon-possessed Prostitute to a loving disciple of Christ. Sam just glowed. She realized that everything that happened to her in her past was gone, destroyed, and buried under the blood of Christ.

“Sam, I think we can dispense with any further Therapy, but I’m sure you’ll want to talk with me for spiritual counseling.”

“Of course Reverend.”

Reverend Whitaker took a leather bound New King James Version of the Bible out of a cupboard and wrote in it, “Happy Birthday Sam. June 1, 2005 God Bless, Reverend Whitaker”

Sam wanted to hug the stuffing out of him, but realizing she was braless, she was embarrassed. She remembered what Ron had said, and decided then and there that she would dress more modestly. Luckily, Ron had some say in what she bought in the mall, and none of the clothes were what Steve would call “slutty”. She thanked the Reverend, and asked that he call the house, she was ready to go home. That thought struck her - she was HOME. When she got home, she asked where her suitcases were, and was shown to her room. She closed the door, and changed clothes, and for the first time in her life wore a bra. It took her a while to put on. Finally Bert knocked on the door. “Sam are you OK?”

“Bert, I’m having problems with this bra.”

“Is it OK if I come in and help you?”

Sam’s need to dress modestly overcame her fear, so she said “OK”. Bert came in, and helped her adjust the straps, hooks etc.

“What a lovely bra dear.”

“I’ve never worn one before, Ron made me buy a couple so I wouldn’t give Doc a heart attack.”

“I did see him reaching for his medicine.”

“Sorry Bert, I just didn’t know any other way - My Dad treated me like dirt, and called me a little slut when I was growing up. After I was raped, I thought I deserved it, so I started acting the part. Now that I gave my life to Christ, I don’t want to act like that anymore.”

“Good for you dear. Later if you want we can go shopping.”

“I’d like that, I still feel a little too sexy wearing this bra.”

“Sam, that bra was designed for display instead of coverage. If you look in the mirror, you’ll see it accents your cleavage more than if you were braless.”

Sam didn’t want to be topless in front of Bert, but she didn’t want to wear this bra anymore.

“Bert, do you have any bras that would fit me?”

“Sure dear, we’re about the same size. I’ll be back in a minute.”

Bert came back 5 minutes later with a more modest bra that still looked like a young woman would wear it. It had a pretty lace pattern.

“Sam, I wore this years ago, hopefully it fits.”

Sam tried it on, and it fit perfectly, and she felt better because this bra didn’t expose most of her breasts. She put her shirt back on, gave Bert a hug, and almost said “Thanks Mom” then started crying, remembering what happened to her mom. They both sat on the bed with Bert holding her in a motherly fashion. When Sam finally stopped crying, she explained why she was crying.

“Sam, I can never be your Mom, but I can be your friend.”

“I’d like that Bert.”

“Want to go shopping?”

“Sure, I’m going to need some new shirts and bras at least.”

Bert gave Sam a hug, dried her tears, then they walked to the parlor, where Bert told Doc they were going shopping. Doc noticed Sam wasn’t braless anymore, and if his memory served, she was wearing the bra Bert wore when they were married. In a way, it was fitting, because Sam was starting a new life as well. Doc called the limousine, and Bert grabbed her purse.

They came back 2 hours later with a whole new wardrobe for Sam. Overall, it was much more conservative than the clothes she bought with Ron.

Meanwhile, back in Alaska...

Ron had made it to Allakaket, filled up the tank on his Cessna, and flew home. When he landed, he held his Mom and cried like he had lost his best friend. He hoped going to the Academy would help him keep his mind off her, then he got the shock of his life when Steve reminded him that he had to be at least 17 and a half to enter the academy, and no waiver was possible. Ron was stuck here for another year, and he was miserable. He felt like running to Samantha and chucking it all, and wrote a letter to Doc telling him how he felt.

2 days later he read Doc’s reply:

Ron:

Sam says Hi - I didn’t let her read your letter, but I told her you wrote.

What you did was a noble thing, and the right thing. Sam wants to become an ER doctor, and we can afford to put her through Medical School. She was studying to be a Nurse because she realized she couldn’t afford to go to Medical School, or she’d be in debt for the rest of her life. Thanks for helping get her out of that miserable situation. I’ve got great news, the other day, Sam gave her life to Christ, you should see the transformation - She’s a new person.

“If you love something, set it free.” I know you miss her now, but if you followed through on your plans, you’d destroy both your lives. While she’ll always be grateful, she’s not in love with you, and if you were to get together, it might be fun for a while, but the results would be disastrous.

Please don’t write another letter like that, or you might undo all the good you’ve done. Sam’s been accepted to the UNC Medical School in the fall.

God Bless,  
Doc

## Chapter 98 - Good News - Bad News

Ron flew to Anchorage the next day to pick up some packages. When he got within radio range of Anchorage, he was told the Maintenance Chief at Elmendorf wanted to see him about his DeHaviland, and he could divert to Elmendorf if he wanted. Ron said “OK, will divert to Elmendorf. Please advise the Chief that I am 15 minutes out.”

“Roger, Anchorage Control out.”

Ron switched frequencies to Elmendorf’s tower, and received permission to land, and which space to taxi to. He pulled into his assigned space, and the Maintenance Chief met him.

“Ron, I’ve got good news and bad news. First of all, your DeHaviland will never fly again; the main spar broke between landing and sling loading it here. But, the Aerospace Museum has offered \$100K for it as a static display. Seems your DeHaviland has some historic value. I did some checking, and the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) has several Grumman Gooses for sale. They’re military surplus, and I know the Maintenance Chief at the Wing 19 AMS at Vancouver Island in British Columbia. All their surplus planes have been mothballed, covered in plastic, and the engines and avionics have been pulled.”

“What good is that going to do me?”

“Patience Young Skywalker, I’m getting to it. Allison designed and tested several turboprop engines for the Goose to upgrade them in the 1950’s. When the military obsoleted the Goose and most other flying boats, they modified the engines to use them in the C-130. I know that they have 2 engines sitting there with less than 500 hours on them, with the reversible pitch props. They’d probably let you have them for next to nothing. They’re in storage as Military Surplus with all the controls and everything you need. If I contact my friend at the RCAF, he can pull the Goose that’s in the best shape, install the Allison turboprops, and a full avionics suite for less than \$250,000.00.”

Knowing that if he sold the DeHaviland, he could buy the Goose and get it fully restored and airworthy for less than \$150,000 in cash Ron told the chief to get a quote from everyone involved. He asked the Chief where the DeHaviland was, he had some personal property to remove. The chief went with him and helped him remove the GPS antenna and the radio repeater, plus all the brackets for his medical and survival gear since they were not DeHaviland or Civil Aviation modifications, and the museum would have to remove them anyway. They could fill in the small holes in the roof when they restored it. Ron was sad to leave his old friend behind, but was glad that he was getting a much bigger, faster, and newer plane in exchange for only 150 thousand out of his pocket. He put the box in the Cessna, then gave the chief his e-mail address so he could send him the quotes. He flew to the Anchorage airport to talk to Dan at the FAA office.

“Dan, I’ve got a problem. I crash landed the DeHaviland when I had an engine fire, and it will never fly again. But, the Maintenance Chief at Elmendorf has a deal for me. The RCAF has several Grumman Goose airplanes in mothballs at their airbase on Vancouver Island. He knows where he can get his hands on several Allison Turboprops that they built for the Goose, but never installed since the military got rid of them after the war. Anyway, the long and the short of it is if everything comes together, I’m going to have a new twin engine plane in time for hunting season next year.”

“Ok Ron, you’re going to need several new licenses and ratings to fly that plane. If I remember, it’s a twin engine 8 passenger sea plane. That means you’re going to need your IFR, Sea, Twin and a couple of other ratings. You might be better off getting your Airline Transport Pilot rating, which will cover all that, and if you petition the FAA, I’m sure they’ll grant you a commercial route from Anchorage to Allakaket. That way you can fly passengers from Anchorage to Allakaket, then transfer them to smaller float planes if necessary to fly them to their lodges, and you can own the whole thing, and make money whether you fly or not.”

“OK Dan, where’s the nearest place to get my ATP?”

“We can handle that here, we have an IP that’s certified for everything you need for an ATP. Since you already have your commercial, VFR, and Sea ratings, it should only take a month and maybe 5-10 thousand dollars to get your ATP. If you want, I can start the paperwork now for you.”

“Go ahead, I can’t fly anything but 3 passengers at a time with the Cessna, and it’s so slow I want to get out and push.”

“Ok Ron, I’ll put in the paperwork.”

“Can I borrow your phone?”

“Sure - local call?”

“I wanted to call the Chief at Elmendorf and tell him to expedite getting that plane.”

Dan handed Ron the phone, and he dialed the chief’s direct number “Chief, its Ron. I talked to the FAA, and I need you to expedite getting that Goose put back together and get and airworthiness certificate on it.”

Once he got off the phone Dan said “Ron, you forgot to tell me it didn’t have an airworthiness certificate.”

“Ok Dan, here’s the rest of the story. The RCAF 19 Wing Aircraft Maintenance Service will be restoring and certifying the plane.”

“Ok, we can accept a RCAF certificate. Just make sure they put FAA approved avionics in it.”

“My understanding is that the plane is gutted, and they have to install new avionics anyway, so I’m going with a full FAA approved Avionics suite including a glass cockpit set-up.”

“That will be great.”

Suddenly the phone rang, it was the Chief for Ron.

“Chief what’s up?”

“He’s got 3 Gooses on the line that all have low airtime, and can easily be restored for the prices I quoted. He wanted us to fly down and pick one. There’s a VIP plane here that needs to get some airtime, and they said they’d love to fly to Vancouver.”

“OK, let me call my parents, and I’ll be right over.”

“Don, I need to call Bill - they want me to fly to Vancouver to check out the planes.”

“Ok - here you go.”

“Bill, its Ron. I’m in a hurry. I need you to tell my parents I’m flying to Vancouver BC with the Maintenance Chief from Elmendorf to check out a Grumman Goose to replace my DeHaviland. I’ll probably have to stay in Anchorage tonight, so I’ll see them tomorrow. Thanks.”

As soon as Ron hung up the phone, he thanked Dan and was out the door. He jumped in his plane, started the motor, and called the tower for permission to transfer back to Elmendorf. Next he radioed Elmendorf and got landing instructions. 20 minutes later he taxied up next to the VC-120 that the Chief was standing next to.

“Hurry up, we’re burning daylight.”

“Ok, Chief, right behind you.”

Ron ran up the air stairs and plopped into a seat. The crew chief pulled up the air stairs, and as soon as they were locked, the pilot started the engines and taxied to the runway. 4 hours later they were landing in Vancouver. Chief Smith walked down the air stairs first, followed by Ron. They were met on the runway by the Maintenance Chief of the RCAF 19 Wing AMS, Chief Nichols, who saluted in the British fashion. Chief Smith returned the salute, and they hugged like long lost buddies, which wasn’t too far from the truth. Chief Nichols turned to Ron and said “So you want to buy a Goose?”

“Yes Chief - I need one for now, and if my plans come together, I’ll need another one. I’ve got over \$2 Million in the bank, so I can easily afford to do this. I’m planning on starting a short-haul rural airline in Alaska, called Allakaket Airlines.”

“Well, the Goose is definitely the bird for the job. I like Chief Smith’s idea to replace those radial wasp engines with turboprops. They will just about double your horsepower without any extra strain on the mounts, plus the reversible pitch props will really improve the STOL capabilities of the plane. You’ll be able to take off shorter, and land on a postage stamp sized lake.”

“How would that be?”

“Ron, the reversible props allow you to stop short. Once you’re down on the water, reverse the pitch, and increase the throttle, and you’ll stop like you threw out an anchor. With the high wing, there is no chance of damaging the props with this maneuver.”

“Cool - what does that do to my speed and payload?”

“With the Allison turboprop engines, lightly loaded you should be able to fly as fast as the C-130 or about 300 knots. Your payload should go from 2000 pounds to over 3500. You’d only be limited by the strength of the frame.”

“Why didn’t they build the Goose with a loading ramp like the C-130?”

“Good question, why don’t you ask Grumman? I don’t know why anyone designs their planes the way they do. My guess is it was designed as a Miniature Catalina Flying Boat, and it doesn’t have a ramp.”

Ron wondered how tough it would be to design an amphibian with a cargo ramp like the C-130.

“So you want to see the planes?”

They got into the Chief’s jeep, and drove down the flight line. Finally they drove to the boneyard. There were A-6 Intruders, Buffalos, a couple of F4-U’s and at the end of the line 6 Grumman Goose all wrapped in plastic with the engines removed.

Chief Nichols told Ron, “They’re well preserved, and after we install the engines and avionics, we’ll do a second inspection and issue the airworthiness certificate.”

“Chief, could you do me a favor and inspect the airframes before you start, and select the 2 that are in the best shape first. I really don’t want to pay for a plane that has less than 10 or 20 years left in it.”



“Ron when we’re finished, the only reason these planes couldn’t fly anymore is if you couldn’t find parts to maintain the engines. Chief Smith told me he has a line on 6 complete Allison Turboprop engines that were designed for the Goose but never installed since the military declared them surplus before they finished testing the engines. The engines are fully FAA certified, but they were never installed, since most civilian pilots like the easier to maintain Wasp engines. Since you’re using them for commercial applications, and have the money, it would be worth the extra expense to gain the speed and payload.”

“Chief Nichols, you’re sure you can install the engines and all the avionics including the Glass cockpit for under \$250 thousand?”

“Easily. The plane costs \$50 thousand as surplus, the engines are another 50, and the avionics and labor should be way less than 100. I’d say we could do them for \$220 Thousand delivered, with the 30 thousand in reserve in case we come across the unexpected.”

“OK, if you can do it for less than \$250 thousand each painted, with an Airworthiness certificate the FAA will accept, and a full avionics suite and a full interior, you’ve got a deal.”

“What do you mean a full interior?”

“According to the spec sheet, the plane is capable of handling 8 passengers, so I need 8 FAA spec passenger seats, all the hardware and essential interior equipment to use it as a passenger aircraft. I don’t give a rip about a commode or anything, since it’s going to double as a freight hauler. I don’t want a VIP interior; I do need easily removable FAA spec seats.”

“Ok Ron, the seats are extra. Do you want cabin lights, etc?”

“Just what the FAA says I have to have. I don’t want fancy fixtures, or anything that sticks way out, or any overhead compartments, since this is also a freight hauler.”

“Ok, if I remember correctly, all you need is the FAA spec seats. I’ll add an easily removable carpet runner that will come out with the seats. I can still do it for less than \$250 thousand.”

“OK, e-mail me a contract not to exceed \$250 thousand, and I’ll sign and send it back.”

“Any preferences to paint color?”

“How about basic white. I’ll e-mail you with the tail number the FAA gives me, and you can stencil it on when you paint it. Is there anything I’m forgetting?”

“Parachutes?”

“Real Funny Chief Nichols. We’ll be flying below 5,000 feet most of the time, so the only

thing a parachute would do is to soften the splat and make a smaller stain.”

“Ok, no parachutes - that will save you \$50.”

“How soon can you have it done?”

“A month or 2 after Chief Smith delivers the motors. I can get the avionics at cost, and I know exactly what you’ll want. Radios up the wazoo, a GPS Moving map navigation system, digital altimeter, air speed indicator, artificial horizon, all the engine instruments, etc.”

“Did you include a fire suppression system?”

“Can’t get an airworthiness cert without it. I’m going to upgrade the system from Civilian to Military grade for a little overkill. We’ve got surplus stuff lying around like you wouldn’t believe.”

“Can you install a cross-band radio repeater I have?”

“Have Chief Smith send it, and we’ll install it no charge.”

“Nice doing business with you Chief Nichols.”

The three of them drove back to the VC-120 for the ride home. Chief Smith was full of questions on the return trip, and was taking extensive notes. Ron had a checkbook on him, so he wrote Chief Smith a check for the engines, and asked for a receipt showing what he paid for them. He’d pay Chief Smith’s actual cost, plus shipping and a 10% finder’s fee. Chief Smith was happy to help, and the \$5,000 dollars would help too. When they landed, Chief Smith made a few phone calls, and said the engines were being shipped to Vancouver as they spoke. Ron handed him the cross-band repeater, and asked Chief Smith to ship it to his buddy for installation in the plane. Since it was getting late, Ron asked Chief Smith if he wanted to go out for dinner. He had to turn Ron down, his wife had dinner waiting, but he’d give him a ride into town. Ron grabbed his overnight bag out of the Cessna, and walked to Chief Smith’s truck. He dropped Ron off at the Inn, and Ron checked in. They had a room available, and he threw his bag on the bed, and went next door for dinner.

The next morning, Ron drove over to the Airbase, got into his plane, and flew back to Anchorage, then walked into the FAA office. Dan said “Back already?”

“Ok Dan, the plane will be ready in two months. How long will it take to get my ATP cert?”

“I talked to the DC office. Normally they don’t issue ATP certs to anyone under 18. When they found out you had been flying a DeHaviland as a commercial pilot for the last 2 years, and landing on postage stamp sized lakes, they decided you were qualified. You have to pass a

written test, and I found an IP with 2,000 hours in the Goose who said it would be easier to use the Goose to teach you. You've got 2 months to study this stack of manuals."

Dan handed him a stack of manuals almost 3 feet high. Ron knew what he was going to do this winter. He carried the books out to the plane, taxied over to the pumps, filled the tank, and called the tower for permission to fly home. Since he wasn't flying anywhere soon, he set the GPS for his home, and was home 3 hours later. After he unloaded the plane, he told him Mom and Dad what he was up to.

He sent Bill an e-mail, and he thought it was an excellent idea. Making Allakaket a travel hub would increase business for the entire town, and he would need to install bigger fuel tanks. He read Ron's e-mail, and saw that the plane used jet fuel, so he sent Ron an e-mail making sure he ordered the right type. Ron sent an e-mail back telling Bill that the Allison turboprop engines used JP-4. Bill had a 5,000 gallon tank that he wasn't using, so he would order enough JP-4 to fill it when Ron got his plane. His fuel supplier could deliver 5,000 gallons per trip, so keeping Ron's plane full wouldn't be a problem. Ron kept in touch with Chief Nichols via e-mail while he was studying for his ATP license. He was pleased that there were no complications, and by swapping out the old rusted military spec fuel tanks, that were designed to stand up to .50 caliber fire with the FAA spec fuel tanks, he was able to greatly extend his range. The Allison engines slid right in like they were built for the plane (which they were), and they had almost finished the structural work. The plane would be ready for inspection and certification as soon as they got the avionics in and got the plane painted. 2 weeks before the plane was to be delivered, Ron e-mailed Dan at the FAA office, and told him he was ready for his written test. Dan told him to fly to Anchorage tomorrow morning, but to be prepared to spend all day at the FAA office, and he might want to stay overnight. Ron packed his overnight bag, and got plenty of sleep. The next day he flew to Anchorage early in the morning. Ron would be glad when he got his Goose, this low and slow stuff was for the birds.

When he got to the FAA office, Dan told him to have a seat in the testing cubicle, and brought him 4 #2 pencils, the test booklet, and a simple calculator, explaining that the FAA was very strict about what he could use to pass the test. Dan said he had 8 hours to complete the test. 6 hours later, Ron turned his test in. Dan was amazed; most people needed the full 8 hours. He stuck the test in the scoring machine, and 2 minutes later he received a 95% score. Since 80% was passing, Dan gave Ron the good news. Now all he needed was his "behind the wheel" training. Ron went shopping, and stayed overnight then flew back home the next day. He gave his mom and dad the good news, but they didn't seem too interested or concerned.

A week and a half later, Chief Nichols sent an e-mail to Ron telling him his Goose was done. Ron forwarded the message to Dan at the FAA office, and asked him if the IP would be available tomorrow to pick the plane up at Vancouver Island. Dan replied saying the IP was available. Next Ron sent an e-mail to Chief Smith asking if he could get a lift to Vancouver Island to pick up the Goose. Chief Smith replied that a VC-120 would be available tomorrow morning. Ron copied it to Dan, asking if the IP could meet him at Elmendorf tomorrow

morning at 0900. Dan said he'd make sure the IP was there at 0900. Ron copied everything to Chief Smith, who said that the plane would be ready at 0900. Ron packed an overnight bag just in case, and told his Mom and Dad that he was going to Vancouver Island to pick up his new plane, and he was leaving early in the morning. Anne made some more muffins, and had a thermos of coffee ready to go the next morning.

Ron arrived at Elmendorf at 0850 the next morning, and was glad he was getting his new plane, this low and slow stuff was really getting old! He secured his Cessna, and at 0900 sharp, they were wheels up en route to Vancouver Island. 4 hours later, they arrived at RCAF 19 Wing AMS, and were greeted by Chief Nichols, who drove them to the plane. When Ron saw the Goose, he thought he had never seen a more beautiful plane. Chief Nichols had painted the plane basic white, with a blue stripe down each side, and Allakaket Airlines in blue flowing script above each stripe. The FAA assigned tail number NA17539 was stenciled on both sides of the tail in the same color of blue. Chief Nichols opened the cockpit door, and Ron stepped into the pilot's seat, and Nick (the IP) stepped into the co-pilot seat. Chief Nichols pulled up a chair behind them, and talked Ron through all the controls. Since this was a remodel instead of a restoration, they relocated the twin throttles on a console between the pilots, and installed the moving map display right above it. The pilot and co-pilot had a multi-functional display in front of them displaying the Artificial Horizon, Airspeed, Heading, altitude, and time to next waypoint.

Once Ron and Nick were familiar with the controls, Chief Nichols talked then through the startup and pre-flight checks. With an on-board APU, the engines were easy to start. Once the engine gauges were in the green, Chief Nichols switched the radio to the RCAF tower and requested permission for a familiarization flight. Since the pattern was wide open, the tower approved, so they advanced the throttles from idle, and the propellers started spinning. Ron was amazed that the engines and propellers were so quiet inside the cockpit. Chief Nichols handed each of them a headset, and put one on himself so they could hear each other, and the radio. As they taxied toward the runway, Nick talked Ron through setting the Goose up to take off. He said as lightly loaded as the plane was, it should take off at around 70 knots. When they reached the runway, Ron turned onto the runway, called "Rolling" so the tower knew they were on the active runway, and advanced both throttles to full. 10 seconds later they were airborne. They flew several big circles around the field, and when they were satisfied that everything was as it should be, Ron called the tower for permission to land. Nick told him the plane could land at any speed between 50 and 80 knots depending on how he configured the flaps, and the angle of attack. The plane could also make an emergency high-speed landing at 120 knots in the event the flaps didn't work, but they needed a smooth runway or flat water, it would be rough but it would work. Since they were landing on a runway, Ron lowered the landing gear, and set the plane up for an 80-knot landing. He kissed the runway, bounced slightly, and settled down to taxi off the end of the runway. Nick said "Not bad for a first landing with this big of a plane.

They taxied up to the fuel depot, and they filled the 500 gallon fuel tanks. Chief Nichols signed the receipt, and then Ron handed him a check for the balance on the plane. Chief Nichols

handed him a huge folder and a box full of paperwork including the manufacturer's manuals and everything he needed to know about the plane, and a ton of FAA paperwork he needed to file. Ron was glad he knew the UTM coordinates of Elmendorf AFB, because he needed to program the nav computer since it wasn't loaded in the memory. He'd make sure he'd remedy that situation as soon as he got to Elmendorf and got his portable GPS unit. The plane's paperwork said it had a fuel capacity of 500 gallons of JP-4 in the main tanks, and 50 gallons in an auxiliary tank for the APU. Nick asked Ron if he were ready to fly back to Elmendorf, and Ron showed Nick where he had already programmed the moving map navigation unit with the UTM coordinates of Elmendorf AFB. Nick thought this kid was really smart. Ron called the tower and received permission to take-off, and advised the tower their destination was Elmendorf AFB. The tower assigned them an altitude of 10,000 feet until they contacted Elmendorf when they entered their airspace. They were told they were next for take-off.

Since he had a long over-water flight, Ron didn't push the throttle so far this time, and took off at a more sedate rate, and slowly climbed to 10,000 feet, where he engaged the autopilot. He really didn't need one, but it came with the instrument suite he ordered. Once the autopilot was engaged, they were heading NNW at around 250 knots, which was their best fuel economy cruise speed. He could have pushed it to 280, but at that speed, his range went from 2,000 miles to 1500, and it was almost 1200 miles to Elmendorf, and he'd rather not arrive at Elmendorf bingo fuel. He turned and talked to Nick for the rest of the flight, and learned some interesting quirks about the Goose. With the reversible turboprops, it could land on smaller lakes than the Cessna, and it's climb rate was twice that of the DeHaviland. The downside of this was the twin Allison turboprop engines gulped fuel at a prodigious rate, and required maintenance 4 times as frequently as the Wasp engines it replaced. But, it had a top speed over 300 knots, could cruise at 250 all day, could take off and land in half the runway distance, and could carry almost double the payload when configured as a cargo plane. The standard Goose top speed was only 184 knots, which was the same as the DeHaviland, and it only had an 800 mile range with the small 140 gallon tank.

Ron left Nick in charge of the plane, and went back to the passenger cabin to check out the accommodations. The seats were nice, but not brand new, which was OK by him, since most of the passengers would be hunters and fishermen. He was pleased to see that they had followed his instructions, and not included all the extra creature comfort items that a dedicated passenger plane came with. The cabin was fairly quiet, so they left the interior sound deadening materials in place. Ron walked back to the cockpit, and got back in his seat. He told Nick that Chief Nichols had done a really good job outfitting the plane. He had paid only \$220 Thousand dollars in total for the plane, and the Aerospace Museum had paid him \$100 Thousand for his DeHaviland, so he was only out less than \$150 Thousand for a plane that was faster, newer, and more powerful than the one that it replaced. 4 hours later, he called Elmendorf AFB, since they were almost into their airspace. Since they didn't have a radar transponder, he gave them his tail number and altitude. "Elmendorf Control this is Allakaket Airlines Number NA17539, requesting permission to land at Elmendorf AFB.

“Roger Allakaket Airlines, descend to 5,000 feet at 50 miles, then 2,000 feet for approach. Clear to land on Runway 27 Left. Call on final.”

“Roger Elmendorf, 5,000 at 50, 2,000 on approach, call on final for 27 Left.”

Nick said “Great radio procedure Ron, you confirmed their instructions, but didn’t waste their time. We can stay on this heading for another 75 miles, then we’ll have to turn to 270 degrees for approach.”

75 miles later, Ron turned so the plane was heading 270 magnetic, and descended to 2,000 feet, then lowered the landing gear. He called the tower when he was 5 miles out and set up to land “Allakaket Airlines on Final for Runway 27 Left.”

“Roger Allakaket, clear to land.”

Ron came in and landed smooth as glass on runway 27 Left, then taxied to the space assigned to them.

“Ron that was a prefect landing. Let’s go flying tomorrow, then I’ll sign off on your training, and refund half your fee. See you back here at 0800 tomorrow.”

Ron shut down the Goose, and locked up, then caught a ride to the main gate where he caught a cab to the Inn. He ate dinner and went to bed early, since he had to be back at Elmendorf at 0800 the next morning.

The next morning, Nick had Ron practice single-engine flying, stalls, and emergency procedures. Nick knew that Ron was a seasoned pilot, and could handle the aircraft, so they landed at Elmendorf, and he signed off on the ATP training. Ron left the Goose at Elmendorf, flew the Cessna back to Anchorage, and turned the paperwork into Dan, who issued his ATP endorsement. He told Ron the new ATP license would be in the office in two weeks if he wanted to pick it up. Ron asked him if he knew a private pilot who could fly his Cessna back to Allakaket, and he would fly him back to Anchorage that day. Dan said he was a pilot, and would love to get out from behind the desk. He forwarded the phone, called his supervisor and said he would be out of the office for the rest of the afternoon for a check ride, then Ron flew them back to Elmendorf. Ron remembered to fill the Goose full of JP-4, and top off the APU’s fuel tank, then Dan filled the tank of the Cessna full of Avgas. Ron and Dan both got permission from the tower to take off, and Ron kept his speed down to 180 knots so the Cessna wouldn’t be too far behind. When he got close to Allakaket, he called the tower. “Allakaket Control, this is Allakaket Airlines Number NA17539 requesting permission to land.”

“Ron, what kind of joke is this?”

“Tower, look to your northwest, it’s No Joke, I’m flying a Grumman Goose, and My call sign is

now Allakaket Airlines, since the FAA approved my application for a Rural commercial route, and I'm now a Air Transport pilot."

"Roger, Ron - Holy Cow. That thing is almost as big as the Catalina. OK, you're clear to land."

"Thanks Control, see you on the ground."

Ron flew an 80-knot approach, and coasted to a stop with plenty of room left without having to reverse his props. He turned and taxied toward the ramp, then extended his landing gear as he transitioned from water to land. Bill was waiting for him when he landed. Ron shut the big plane down, in time to see Dan land the Cessna. Dan must have kept his hand in it, because he made a textbook water landing. He taxied up to Ron, who pointed him to his parking space. Don shut down and climbed out. "Dang, I forgot how much fun a water landing was."

Ron introduced Dan and Bill, then asked Bill if he could borrow his radio. He handed Ron a handy talkie, and told him he had installed a repeater in the tower so anyone could talk on a handy talkie in Allakaket. Ron reminded Bill that his dad wasn't listening on the Allakaket frequency, so they jumped into his jeep for the quick drive to his office. Ron tuned Bill's radio to his dad's frequency. "Dad, this is Ron, do you read me?"

"Loud and clear son. What's up?"

"How would you and Mom like a ride in my new plane?"

"Sure son, where are you?"

"We're in Allakaket, and we'll be there in an hour. Meet us by the lake, since I'm pretty sure I can't turn this thing around by the cabin."

"Ok Son, see you then."

Ron turned the radio back to the frequency Bill had it on, and got a ride back to the plane. He got in the pilot's seat, and Dan took the co-pilot seat. He didn't need to fill up, since he only went maybe 300 miles, and he had over a 1500 mile range. Ron taxied back to the lake, and as soon as they were waterborne, retracted the landing gear and increased his taxi speed. When they got to the end of the lake, Ron told Dan to strap himself in because he was in for a thrill ride, and he shoved the throttle to full. When the airspeed indicator said 80 knots, he pulled the yoke into his lap, and zoom climbed over the ridge. Once he was clear of the ridge, he eased back on the yoke for a more sedate climb to 2,000 feet. 45 minutes later, they were at his lake. Dan looked down and said "There's NO way you're landing on that postage stamp."

"Dan I bought this plane especially for it's STOL capabilities, it has reversible pitch props, and

can land on a dime and give you 9 cents change. At full flaps, I can land at 50 knots, which is about the same as my Cessna. Once I hit the water, all I have to do is reverse the props and take the throttle to 1/3 power, and I stop like I threw out an anchor.”

“This I gotta see.”

Ron descended to 500 feet, cranked the flaps to full, and slowed to 50 knots. As he cleared the ridge, he touched the throttle, and the plane floated all the way down. 5 feet above the water, Ron pushed the nose over so it was on the horizon just like Nick told him, and they were down with a slight bump. Ron reached over and pulled the propeller pitch lever to Reverse, then brought the engines up to 30% power. Just like Nick said, they stopped like he had thrown out an anchor. They were bobbing in the middle of the lake, so Ron turned toward his parents’ cabin, and set the pitch back to the normal setting, and the throttles to the taxi position. Ron was whooping and Hollering. Dan was pretty excited too, but he left out the Whooping and hollering bit. This Goose was an amazing plane. It could fly at almost 300 knots, yet landed in half the distance of a low and slow Cessna 185. When he got close to shore, Ron deployed the landing gear, and taxied onto land. Ron decided to leave the Goose at Allakaket, and fly his parents back to home in the Cessna, because the excitement of landing like that might be too much for them. When Ron shut down, he walked back and opened the passenger door and extended the air stairs. Roy, Anne and Lucky were waiting for him. “Welcome Aboard Allakaket Airlines, watch your step.” Ron escorted them to their seats, and told them to buckle in. Ron walked back to the door, pulled in the air stairs, and secured the door.

When he got back to the cockpit, he started the engines, then flipped the switch on his headset to PA. “Welcome to Allakaket Airlines. This is your pilot Ron Williams. We offer non-stop service to Anchorage Alaska. In preparation for take-off, we ask you put your seats in the upright and locked position.” Dan looked at Ron and shook his head. Once the engine instruments were in the green, he pushed the throttles out of idle, then used the right engine to turn the plane around, by leaving the left engine at minimum, and the right throttle to ½ power. The plane turned easily, and he pulled back on the right engine until they were both at slow taxi until they were fully waterborne. Once they were waterborne, he retracted the landing gear, and advanced the throttles to fast taxi. When he reached the end of the lake, he made sure the navigation system was set up for return to Anchorage, then quickly set the plane up for take off. Once he was set, he advanced both throttles smartly to max, and pulled back sharply on the yoke as soon as the airspeed indicator read 80 knots. He held the climb until he cleared the ridge, then set the plane for a cruise climb to 2,000 feet and 250 knots indicated. An hour later, they were ready to land at Anchorage, so Ron called for permission, lowered the flaps and set the plane up for an 80 knot landing and lowered the landing gear. He made another textbook landing, and let the plane roll, since the runway was very long. He taxied right up to the FAA office to let Dan out.

“Ron, that was the best example of flying I’ve seen in a while. It was a pleasure to fly with you. Take care, and see you in 2 weeks so you can pick up your permanent ATP license.”



Ron looked at his watch. They had just enough time at 250 knots to make it home before dark. He walked back and asked his mom and dad if they'd rather fly home now or stay overnight.

Roy said, "If it's all the same to you, I'd rather sleep in my own bed."

Ron shrugged his shoulders, ran back up to the cockpit and taxied to the fuel pumps, and filled the plane with JP-4. He did a quick walk-around, started the engines and taxied toward the runway while configuring the plane for take-off and calling the tower for permission to take off. He got permission right as he reached the runway, so he acknowledged the call with "Allakaket Rolling", and was flying with 2/3 of the runway left. He climbed to 2,000 feet and 250 knots, and was calling Allakaket for landing clearance before he realized he was there. Since the lake was so huge, he set up for a 80-knot approach and set the plane down as smooth as glass. He taxied to his new parking spot and shut down. Lucky decided to make a pit stop during the transfer, and they all piled into the Cessna. It took much longer with the Cessna to get home, but Ron was sure Roy would have a heart attack if he did a short-field landing with him aboard. They taxied up to the house and into the hangar, then they walked into the house. Roy was so tired that he almost fell asleep in the rocking chair before dinner.

## Chapter 99 - The Teenage Tycoon

Ron, now that he had an airline, e-mailed Bill for advice. Bill replied that Ron would need insurance and needed to file Incorporation paperwork. Ron asked Bill what he should do when he went to the Academy. Ron suggested hiring other pilots to fly the Goose and fly smaller planes to serve the rest of his routes. Ron could fly the Goose between now and when he went into the Air Force. He also needed a reservation service, and baggage handling from Anchorage. He suggested contacting Alaska Airlines, since they were the major carrier in Alaska, and ask them for advice. Surfing the internet, Ron found the name of the CEO of Alaska Airlines, and sent him an e-mail with a scanned image of his FAA paperwork for the Rural Route. The CEO wrote back, saying he might be interested in using them as a feeder airline, and if that relationship were satisfactory, he would have access to their reservation system and baggage handling system in Anchorage. Ron replied with a request for details about the feeder airline relationship. The CEO responded that he would mail a huge package of paperwork to him in Allakaket. Ron suggested he pick it up in Anchorage, and if the CEO had the time, he'd like to give him a ride in his new Grumman TurboGoose. Ron also found out with his internet research that the CEO was a big fan of WWII Amphibians. He sent Ron a reply that he would love to, and his Secretary would make the arrangements in his schedule in the next couple of days.

2 days later Ron was winging to Anchorage to pick up William Ayer, the new CEO of Alaska Airlines. He called ahead, and the airport manager diverted him to a private terminal for Alaska Airlines. As he taxied up, he saw row upon row of corporate executive Gulfstreams, and a few PBY Catalinas painted the corporate colors. As he shut down, the head of Corporate Security was waiting for him, and he had a little black box in his hand. Ron let him aboard to sweep the plane, then he closed it after himself and waited at the foot of the air stairs for Mr. Ayer. Ron saw him walking toward the plane with a huge grin on his face. "Ron Williams, nice to meet you, I've always wanted to fly in a Grumman Goose, and now you've done exactly what I would have done with one. I'm assuming those are the mythical Turboprops Allison made for the Goose but never installed?"

"That's correct Mr. Ayer."

"Ron, please call me Bill."

"Ok Bill, would you like to fly in the co-pilot's seat?"

Bill's reaction was the same as if American Airlines wanted to sell their entire airline to him for \$1. "You Bet."

Ron walked around, opened the door for Bill, and Bill slid into the co-pilot's seat. His eyes bugged out at the modern avionics suite. "You did a complete remodel didn't you?"

“Yes sir, I brought the avionics up to current FAA state of the art. As you can see, it has a moving map navigation system, the glass cockpit setup, and an autopilot, although I can’t imagine needing one very often, but it did come in handy when we flew it back from Vancouver.”

“This was an RCAF Goose?”

“Exactly, it had been mothballed, the engines, avionics, and even the gas tanks had been removed. Without the Allison turboprops, it never would have flown. The Allisons greatly improve the STOL capabilities of the Goose, increased the top speed to almost 300 knots, and doubled the rate of climb and payload capability. I’m ordering another one built next year. I already have 2 more complete engines.”

“Ron, you have an excellent plane for this kind of route, what about the numerous bush pilots?”

“I plan on hiring several of them when I set Allakaket up as a rural hub. It’s centrally located for the interior of Alaska, it has a huge lake you could land a PBY Catalina on, and the Mayor has already installed most of the infrastructure to build it into a major rural hub. Between the Goose and the bush pilots, we can fly all of your passengers from Anchorage to any location in Central Alaska, and return them to you.”

“Ron, you’ve just described a feeder airline. It’s basically a mutual back scratching club. Since we’re the only major airline that services Anchorage, the relationship would really benefit Allakaket Airlines too.”

“Bill, do you want to go flying or talk business?”

Bill started laughing, and Ron handed him a headset. Ron started the turbines, and called the tower for permission to take off.

“Where to Bill?”

“I’d like to see Allakaket.”

“OK, but you have to remember, it’s only potential right now, it needs some work.”

“Ron when I started in the Airline business, it was all potential - I like getting in on the ground floor, and if you want, I could make suggestions that will save you time and Money.”

“Ok Bill, one question, Are you a Christian?”

“Funny you should ask that, most of the time being a Born Again Christian is a deal-breaker, but I don’t hide my faith, and I see you don’t either. Yes, I’ve been saved for almost 20 years

now.”

“Well that solves the trust issue. Ready to go flying?”

Ron reached over and programmed the nav system with the coordinates for Allakaket. They taxied over to the runway, and as soon as Ron received permission to take off, set the throttles to full, and soon the airspeed indicator indicated 80 knots. He did a max-performance take-off, and held the rate of climb until he was 1,000 ft AGL, then he eased off and climbed to 2,000 feet while turning toward Allakaket.

“Dang this baby really climbs.”

Ron set the Goose to cruise at 250 knots, and set the autopilot. Looking at the nav display, he saw that they would be in Allakaket in an hour.

“Would you like to fly it, or talk business?”

“Let’s talk, I can fly it later. You’ve got all your ducks in a row with the FAA, but I noticed you didn’t have any incorporation papers filed, or an insurance policy. If you want, I can help you with both, since I know a good commercial insurance company that writes policies for airlines, and I know the secretary of state personally. I think you might want to file a Subchapter C incorporation, since you don’t want to deal with stockholders. You’re going to need officers and board members. I’d suggest people you trust and can work with. Here’s the card of our corporate lawyer. He will know who can do your incorporation paperwork fast and inexpensively. You have to have your insurance in line before you fly paying customers, so get that next. Once you’re incorporated and insured, contact me again and we’ll process the paperwork to make you a feeder airline for Alaska Airlines. That will let you use our baggage handling facilities in the terminal, and our reservation system. You’ll need to hire a ground crew to load and unload, maintain, clean service and fuel the aircraft. The cheapest way to go is to contract those services. I’ll give you the info on our contractor, and you can call them. From what I’ve heard, you already have a lock on most of the lodges in your area. With the 8-passenger aircraft, you could double the number of lodges served, and grab the rest of them. I’m not sure if you’re required to have a co-pilot, but that is something you should check on to keep the FAA happy.”

“I asked Dan at the FAA about that, and as long as I’m flying under VFR, I can fly solo. But if the conditions dictate IFR rules, I must have a co-pilot.”

“That’s good to know, since 99.9% of your flying is going to be VFR, you are going to save \$\$\$.”

“Exactly. Paying a copilot means less profit.”

Ron looked at the Nav display, and noticed they were 15 minutes out of Allakaket, so he called for landing clearance. "Allakaket Control, this is Allakaket Airlines Number NA17539 requesting permission to land."

"Pattern Clear NA17539, come straight in."

Ron switched frequencies. "Bill, you might get to the flight line. I have someone here you'll want to meet."

"OK, Ron, I'll be there in 15 minutes.."

Ron flew an 80 knot approach, and landed smooth as glass on the lake, then taxied to the ramp, deployed the landing gear, and transitioned to the land. Bill was waiting on the far side of the flight line, so Ron taxied up and shut down. Ron and Bill Ayer got out the plane at the same time. Bill recognized William Ayer from the stockholders prospectus, and walked over to him and shook his hand. "Mr. Ayer, it's a pleasure to meet you, I'm glad you were able to turn Alaska Airlines around, my stocks were taking a beating."

"You own stock in Alaska Airlines?"

"Sure do, bought 1,000 issues when it was still less than \$10 a share for preferred stock."

"Did you say you own 1,000 shares of preferred stock - why haven't I seen you at a stockholder's meeting?"

"Never thought to attend, I didn't realize I had enough stock to qualify."

"Ron, talk about a small world, I fly over here to check out the site, and run into a stockholder. Bill would you please give me the grand tour?"

"It would be an honor."

"Mr. Ayer, Bill is the Mayor of Allakaket, as well as the postmaster, banker, minister, and a couple of other hats I'm sure I'm forgetting."

"Sounds like a couple of small towns I know. Bill, I'm really interested in the infrastructure, Ron wants to turn Allakaket into a rural air travel hub, and I want to turn Allakaket Airlines into a feeder airline. Travelers need certain goods and services, and there has to be adequate fuel and maintenance facilities here for the planes. So far, you have an FAA approved tower, and I saw the hangars and the fuel tanks. How would you like to double your fuel capacity?"

"I'd love to, but can't afford to."

“How about Aircraft Repair facilities?”

“We have one FAA Master Aircraft mechanic, and two technicians.”

“Any of them certified on Turbine Craft?”

“Just the master mechanic.”

“Do you have an Inn or lodge?”

“I’m part owner of the 10-room lodge right down the block. We’ve got a café called the Moose Café and the Lodge serves 2 meals a day, mostly for guests, but several residents have made arrangements to eat there.”

“Any problems getting food or supplies?”

“We used to have Ron’s DeHaviland, but now with the Goose, he can carry twice as much if he removes the seats.”

“Sounds like you’ve got a basic setup. After Ron gets his paperwork completed, I’ll authorize approval of his application to become a feeder airline for Alaska Airlines. I’ll pay to have a 10,000 gallon tank of JP-4 flown in, with the necessary equipment. I’d suggest doubling your capability to store Avgas, since those Bush pilots are going to be busy. How many of those rooms are available on the average.”

“Depends, some days we’re empty, others we’re full up.”

“How tough would it be to double the size of the inn if I could guarantee financing?”

“Could you bring in enough customers to keep it full?”

“Hopefully or there won’t really be a point in making Allakaket Airlines a feeder airline.”

“Ron if this takes off, you might have to buy that 2<sup>nd</sup> Goose sooner than you planned on. What kind of timeline do you need?”

“It took the RCAF 19Wing AMS 2 months from start to finish.”

“That’s fast. Great. You get the paperwork and insurance done, and send your application to my attention. Ron, are you ready to fly back to Anchorage?”

Ron guessed Bill Ayer was on a tight schedule, and couldn’t take too much time off at any one time. Bill drove them back to the airplane, and this time Ron talked Bill through the take-off

procedure. Bill took off perfectly, kept climbing until he was at 2,000 feet, and turned toward Anchorage. He hand flew the plane all the way back, and Ron called Anchorage, and got landing permission. He talked Bill through the landing procedure, and he made a textbook landing.

“I guess you’ve been flying for a while too?”

“I haven’t flown a twin in a while, but it was fun. Thanks for the ride Ron.”

They taxied up to the private parking area, and Bill got out of the aircraft after he shut it down. They talked as they walked. “Ron, if you’re interested, I can get you a membership in the Christian Businessman’s Association of Anchorage. We meet once a month on Saturday morning for a prayer breakfast. I’d recommend you get a suit, since they tend to wear suits at this meeting. Also, you should join the Chamber of Commerce, and the ATA. Give my lawyer a call, and he’ll get stuff rolling for you. See you later Ron.”

Bill Ayer shook Ron’s hand, then turned around and left. Ron jogged back out to the plane, taxied to the fuel depot, and filled the tanks full of JP-4. Seems the Goose wasn’t any more of a gas hog than the DeHaviland. Once he secured the filler caps, he walked around the plane, then got in, set up to fly to Allakaket, called the tower, and minutes later, was flying to Allakaket. Ron switched the Goose for the Cessna, or “Dumbo” as he called it, and flew home.

Later that afternoon, Ron discussed his plans with his parents, Ron thought they would be upset, but strangely they were very supportive. Ron asked his Mom, “What Gives, I thought you’d be mad if I didn’t go to the Academy?”

Anne said, “Ron, the only reason you wanted to go to the Academy was to be an officer in the Air Force, and fly the Strike Eagle. I was never that keen on it, because I knew it was 10 times more risky to fly military than civilian. Now that Jim gave you enough money to not only live comfortably, but to start your own airline, you don’t need to go to the Air Force to fly. Steve will be upset, but if you still don’t want to go when you turn 18, we’ll support that decision too. Most people get an education to earn the kind of money in a year that you can earn in 3-6 months flying here, and have the rest of the year basically to do whatever you want. Your father and I would love to be officers in your corporation, and we have a huge pile of money between us that we’ll never need, so if you want us to, we can invest \$50 Thousand each.”

“Mom, thanks for the offer, but money is not a problem right now, I still have over 1.5 Million in the bank, even after buying the plane. And I’ll bring in \$60-80 Thousand easily this year with the new plane, and I’m thinking of buying another Goose, and equipping it just for passenger use, since it will only cost another \$10 thousand to upgrade the interior to a much plusher interior.”

“Where are you going to get the pilots?”

“If the government guts the military like I think they are going to, there will be tons of qualified pilots out there in a couple of years.”

With his parent’s backing and blessing, Ron sat down to fill out the paperwork. He e-mailed the corporate attorney for Alaska Airlines, who was extremely helpful. He gave Ron a list of insurance brokers, rated for helpfulness and cost, and he took care of filing paperwork to list Allakaket Airlines as a Limited Liability, closely held corporation. Since the Secretary of State was a personal friend of Bill Ayer, they processed the paperwork within a week that normally took 6 months to a year. That afternoon, he received 6 offers for Corporate All-risk insurance. He was amazed at how expensive it was, but knew that any uninsured claim against him would result in bankruptcy. Two offers were within a thousand dollars of each other, so he took the one from the higher rated company. He had a rider e-mailed to him that afternoon. He was covered. When he finished the paperwork, he scanned and e-mailed all of it to William Ayer’s attention. 2 weeks later Allakaket Airlines was an official Feeder Airlines. Bill told him to fly to Anchorage, and wear a suit for the PR unveiling of the new relationship.

Ron flew to Anchorage the next day, and Bill said that they had a surprise for him. They had the plane’s exterior detailed, and the Alaska Airlines logo painted on the plane right over the rear quarter. It fit perfectly, and then Bill and Ron walked to the podium where Bill read a prepared speech, and presented Ron a check for a Million dollars. Ron was stunned, there wasn’t anything in the paperwork he read about a million dollar payment. After the media had disbursed, Bill informed him that the Board voted the payment as a show of good faith. Ron still owned his own airline, it’s just that the board thought that having Allakaket Airlines feeding passengers into their system directly would increase their business at least 5 million dollars the first year. Not that the fares would increase that much, but synergistic effects in the market would result in a 5 million dollar increase in the first year. They had agreed not to charge Allakaket for baggage handling or reservation services for the first year, and then to just charge their increased costs for the following years. Ron had contracted the same company that Alaska Airlines used for loading and unloading, and fueling the plane, and they made him a sweetheart deal.

2 weeks after the announcement, the lodges saw the writing on the wall, and were calling Bill asking Allakaket Airlines to service their lodge. Ron had retained Bill as a Business Manager for the Airlines, and paid him an annual salary worth double what he was making before. Allakaket Airlines bought the fuel farm from Bill, and Alaska Airlines hired a large helicopter to fly in a 10,000 gallon tank for JP-4, and another 5,000 gallon tank for Avgas. They cancelled the contract with the fuel company that was serving Allakaket when they found that the fuel company that was serving Alaska Airlines could deliver fuel 50% cheaper, and year-round, including JP-4, Avgas, Diesel, and unleaded regular or Kerosene if they wanted it. Bill received funding at a ridiculously low rate to remodel and expand the inn from 10 to 20 rooms, and to expand the kitchen and facilities, including its own self-generation capability courtesy of a military surplus 400KW diesel generator and a 5,000 gallon tank of diesel. There were plans later to expand the power systems of the community to include a year-round wind farm, and a



seasonal solar generating and hot water capability. Bill approved the designs, and construction began immediately. As lodges signed with Allakaket Airlines, the small pilots who were servicing them found themselves without a lodge to service, and turned to Allakaket airlines to earn money. Ron and Bill designed a very efficient system where the big planes brought the travelers to Allakaket, and the smaller planes flew them out to their lodges, which were usually within a half an hour to an hour of Allakaket. Even the guides relocated to Allakaket, since their customers could fly direct from Anchorage to Allakaket. That opened up a lot more of the interior of Alaska to hunting and fishing, because their smaller planes didn't have the range to fly all the way from Anchorage to the deep interior of Alaska efficiently. The effects snowballed, and soon Ron was forced to purchase a second Goose just to keep up with the volume. He moved from his parent's house as soon as it was apparent that he was flying 4 hours each day just to sleep and eat there. Bill rented him Jim's old house for a dollar a month, and Ron was much happier.

At the end of the first year's hunting/fishing season, Ron had earned \$100,000.00 after expenses, including fuel, insurance, paying the pilots, and maintenance. Between the payment from Alaska Airlines, and the additional \$100K, he was now worth almost 3 million dollars.

Roy and Anne were alone for the first time in over 17 years, and enjoyed the quiet and the togetherness. Ron made sure they had plenty of wood, food, and anything else they needed. Lucky was getting positively ancient, and spent most of his time sleeping on his bearskin rug. Roy and Anne spent time in their rocking chairs, fishing, gardening, or reading. They were now fully retired. They had done an excellent job raising Ron, and he was very proud of them. Ron spent what little spare time he had visiting his parents. When things settled down in the fall, he went hunting and got them a caribou, since they didn't eat a lot of meat anymore, but Roy still liked the taste of it, so Anne made mostly stews and other dishes that were mostly vegetables.

Ron was glad he took delivery of his second TurboGoose, and hired an ex-military pilot, who found the Friendly Skies weren't so friendly now that there were literally hundreds of out-of-work Air Force pilots. Seems Congress had decided to cut the military budget anyway, and George Bush had an idea. He would return all the Cargo and Transport planes back to the Army, since the Air Force started as the Army Air Force, and decommission all Air Force fighter wings that couldn't be used by the Marines or the Navy. Since the F-15 Strike Eagle didn't come with a tail-hook, what pilots couldn't find a job with the Marines soon found themselves RIF'd and their planes mothballed. There wasn't that much of a cost savings, except for closing the overseas Air Force bases, particularly Rhamstein AFB. It gave GW great pleasure to close that base, not because it was an Air Force base, but the Germans had been gouging us for basing rights since WWII, and now the local German economy was going into the tank. Some of the money went to improving our Special Forces capabilities, but not nearly enough. The United States would need a massive call-up of Reserves to fight a major battle, or even defend itself.

## Chapter 100 - Adjustments

Bill Ayer called Ron and asked for a meeting to review their contract. Since Ron wasn't busy, he asked Bill if he had time today to see him. Bill said to come on in; he'd make the time to see him. Ron flew the Turbo Goose to Anchorage, and was escorted to Bill's office. Bill was impressed that Ron had taken the time to change into a suit. He shook Ron's hand, and said "Ron, I've got some good news. We reviewed our costs, and basically we aren't experiencing any additional costs that can't be justified by the extra volume of travelers. I'd like to extend our agreement indefinitely to waive baggage and reservation services fees, subject to annual review." Ron breathed a sigh of relief, he was afraid the big airline would charge them for the cost of baggage handling, or at least reservations.

"Ron, I've got some really good news for you, it seems we forgot to include a profit-sharing agreement in your contract with Alaska Airlines. Since we give every other feeder airline 10% of the profit generated by their airline, we unilaterally modified your contract to match, and here's a check for \$100 Thousand dollars."

Ron nearly fainted; he was expecting the worst, now they were throwing money at him.

"Ron, one thing I'd like you to review would be ticket prices. If you could reduce ticket prices 20 %, you'd make the money back in volume with the extra passengers."

"Bill, I'll have to get with my accountant, and if he says we can afford it, I'll reduce fares 20% across the board. That will hopefully increase both our volumes, but I don't see being able to lower it much lower in the future, since the fuel costs are still going up."

"I noticed that too, I'll talk to the fuel supplier, and see if they can give us a better rate, since we're his primary customer."

"Anything Else Bill?"

"Yeah, your membership in the CBA and ATA have been approved. Our next prayer breakfast is next Saturday. If you dress like you're dressed now, you will make a good impression on them."

"Bill, why are you being so nice and helpful, not that I mind?"

"Ron, my honest answer is two-fold, the more Allakaket Airlines grows, the more money Alaska Airlines makes, and the more I make. Second of all, you're a young Christian Brother who could use a mentor and the kind of help I could have used when I was an up and coming entrepreneur. A lot of people are only going to be interested in what you have to offer them, and will try to get their hooks in you. I'll help steer you clear of them, and help you navigate

the sharks that lurk in the big business waters. Whether you know it or not, you're now in the big leagues, and there are a bunch of predators who would like to do nothing more than make a buck at your expense."

"Bill, I have to trust someone, and you seem trustworthy. I can definitely use an advisor and mentor."

"Ron, let's pray over this."

Ron walked toward Bill, who put his hands on Ron's shoulders and started praying over him like his Dad did. When they finished, Ron knew he was doing the right thing, and shook Bill's hand, then left. They were both busy people now.

Ron walked back out to his plane, which he saw had been washed, serviced, and fueled. A note on the cockpit door told him that the fuel and service were no charge, and had Bill's signature on it. Ron had an idea and taxied over to the FAA office.

"Dan, would there be any problems installing a Sat phone in the plane?"

"Not if it didn't interfere with your FAA required avionics. Matter of fact I've got a list of FAA approved systems. I'm really glad you and Bill are becoming friends. I've known him for 10 years, and he's always been a straight shooter, and he's a member of our church."

"Dan, he invited me to the Christian Businessman's prayer breakfast Saturday. How about if I stay overnight and go to your church Sunday morning?"

"Ron that would be an excellent idea. You need a break or you're going to burn out."

"OK Dan, see you Sunday." Dan gave Ron the address of his church and the time for the Sunday Service. Ron asked him if he'd be overdressed wearing a suit. Dan said that almost everyone at least wore a tie, so a suit wouldn't be too overdressed. He knew Bill always wore a suit, but being a CEO the only time he wasn't wearing a suit was when he played golf because the jacket interfered with his swing. Ron asked if Bill were into guns. Dan nodded vigorously, and that gave Ron an idea. He thanked Dan and walked back to his plane and flew home to Allakaket. Ron packed an overnight bag and a garment bag, and flew to Anchorage early Saturday morning, and met Bill at the Alaska Airlines offices, and they drove over together in his corporate limousine. They had a good talk on the way over, and Ron told him he could comfortably reduce ticket prices 20% since Bill got the fuel company to renegotiate their contract, and reduced their fuel costs 30%. It seemed the President of the company was unaware that one of his Vice Presidents wasn't holding the line on fuel prices to Alaska Airlines and Allakaket Airlines. They had plenty of profit from their retail distributors, so they didn't need to bump their price 30% when their costs had only gone up 10%. The vice president was now looking for another job. When Bill pointed out they had a fixed price contract, their fuel

distributor was nervous that they'd cancel their contract and they would basically be out of business. Bill suggested they extend the agreement to their feeder airline, and the president agreed in a heartbeat, since they were their second-biggest customer. He e-mailed a fixed-price contract to Ron's attention, and Ron forwarded it to his accountant. He entered the numbers into a spreadsheet, and the worst-case scenario would be a 20% reduction in annual profit from \$100 Thousand to \$80 thousand. Ron could live with that. The best-case scenario would be an increase in profit to \$120 thousand depending on how much the volume increased. Since reducing ticket prices would basically be profit-neutral, he authorized a cross-the-board reduction in ticket prices by 20%, effective next season.

When he got to the meeting, Ron recognized several movers and shakers in Anchorage. They had a rotating schedule of ministers delivering the message each meeting, and then a period for testimonies and prayer requests. Eventually they got down to the serious business of networking, and finally they ate. Ron thought the Episcopalian minister who delivered the message was exceptionally good. When it came time for Prayer requests, all he could think of was to ask for God's blessing and guidance in his life and his business. Several senior members were nodding in approval. Afterward, Bill was introducing Ron around, and he was handing out plenty of business cards, and collecting one from each member. Ron was amazed at how many business owners were Christians in Anchorage, and later Bill told him that only 1/3 were Born Again, but the rest were really good people who he could trust. Ron took out his stack of business cards, and asked Bill which ones were born again, and he put a BA notation on their cards. Bill didn't ask why, and Ron didn't volunteer. Ron asked Bill if he liked Long range shooting. Bill asked "How Long?" Ron said he had a rifle that could shoot a 12" or better group at 1,000 yards. Bill's eyes bugged out - he'd heard about the Barretts Light 50, but he never had an opportunity to shoot one. Ron told him that he was working on a T&E project for Barretts and JSOC, and had 2 Barrett's rifles. He told Bill that if he wanted to shoot them, he could meet him and fly to Elmendorf AFB which had a 1,000 yard range. Bill almost said "how about tomorrow", but decided that missing church wouldn't earn him any brownie points with Ron, and he probably didn't bring them with him. He made a note to have his secretary check his schedule, and block out an afternoon next week if he could to go shooting. Bill asked Ron where he was staying, and the limousine dropped him off at the inn. Bill suggested another hotel in downtown Alaska, but Ron said this one was fine, since he couldn't see the décor while he slept. Bill had to laugh, but reminded Ron that if he ever needed a business meeting in Anchorage, or to put a VIP up, the other hotel would be a better idea. Ron agreed, and thanked Bill for everything. As soon as he got to his room, he got out of the monkey suit, and into comfortable clothes. He had a day to kill, and decided to spend part of it at the Sporting goods store, since Larry the manager was at the meeting this morning.

Ron took a cab to the store, and Larry was there to greet him. "Ron, I didn't know you were a Christian?"

"Larry, that makes two of us."

“What are you in the market for today?”

“Just looking really, I need to kill some time.”

“OK, if you need anything, either Dave or I will help you.”

“Thanks Larry.”

Ron looked around, but didn't see anything he really needed or wanted. He asked Larry if he were up for a rematch. Since it was slow at the store, he agreed. Two hours later, Larry couldn't believe he'd been beaten twice by a 17 yr old kid, and he'd been practicing. Ron refused to take his money this time since he was playing for fun. Larry suggested a couple of places Ron could go that afternoon, so Ron was able to comfortably kill the rest of the day playing tourist.

The next morning after breakfast he got dressed in his best suit and tie, and caught a cab to the church. He spotted Dan, and he motioned to Ron to come sit with his family. He introduced the wife and kids, then they made small talk until they started the service. Ron spotted Bill entering the church 5 minutes before the service started, but there was no room to have Bill sit next to him. Ron did notice several young lovelies in the congregation, but didn't pay that much attention to them. After the service, Ron met the pastor, and it was the same guy who was at the Christian Businessman's prayer meeting. Ron said “Small world Reverend Jones.”

“Don't I know you from somewhere?” When Pastor Jones looked up and saw Bill Ayer, he remembered when he had seen Ron before. “You're Ron Williams, I saw you yesterday at the Christian Businessman's Prayer breakfast. Don't you own Allakaket Airlines?”

“Yes sir, thanks for remembering. I really liked the message you gave yesterday.”

“Why thank you Ron. I try especially hard at the Prayer meetings, because that might be the only chance I have to witness to some people.”

“Reverend, I'd like to come to your church more often if you'd like. I don't know if I can make every Sunday since I have to fly in from Allakaket, but I can be here at least twice a month.”

“Ron, just come whenever you can. Bill tries to make it several times a month, but business meetings and stuff sometimes take him out of town for the weekend, so I understand.”

After getting introduced to the pastor, Bill took Ron aside. “There are a whole bunch of single women in this church, but I found out early on that several of them are wolves in sheep's clothing, and only wanted to become “Mrs. Alaska Airlines” and they'll probably do the same to you. I printed up a list of the ones to watch out for, and a list of the ones you might want to get to know. Other than that, you're on your own buddy.”

“Thanks Bill, I noticed several women giving me the eye during the services.”

“Those are probably the ones to watch out for.”

On the way out, Ron took out his checkbook and wrote a check payable to the St. John’s Episcopal Church, and dropped it in the offering box.

Since Bill had his limousine handy, he offered Ron a ride back to the inn, which he gratefully accepted. Several female barracudas noticed as well.

Ron packed his bags, then checked out of the hotel. When he went out to catch a cab, he noticed an unfamiliar vehicle, but it was driven by one of the women from church that Bill had ID’d as one of the Female Barracudas. She flounced out of the vehicle, and put on her best “sexy” routine. Ron wasn’t buying it. “Need a lift Ron?”

“No thanks, they already called a cab.”

“I can take you anywhere you want to go.”

“Sorry sister, but I don’t want what you’re offering.”

Realizing that Ron was no dummy, and realizing she was beat, she stomped back to her Corvette and burned rubber. When the cab arrived a minute later the scent of burnt rubber still lingered in the air. Ron got in, told the cabbie to take him to the private Alaska Airlines terminal. The cabbie was curious but drove. Why would anyone with any business there take a cab?” The gate guard stopped them, but when Ron rolled down his window, the guard waved them through. Ron told him to pull up next to the Amphibian with the Allakaket Airlines logo on it, then the cabbie recognized him, and wondered why the owner of Allakaket Airlines was riding in a cab. Ron got out and paid the cabbie, then carried his bags to the TurboGoose. Again there was a note on the cockpit door. Ron was going to have to tell Bill to skip the notes, and if he felt like servicing the aircraft, just go ahead, otherwise he would gas up on the way to the runway. It wasn’t like he was ungrateful, it just irked him that Bill would stick these notes on his plane telling him all the nice things he was doing for him. After all, it was only \$100 worth of fuel, and a plane wash was only \$20 dollars unless they hand detailed it.

Ron looked at his watch, and realized he had all of Sunday afternoon free, and decided to visit his mom and dad, so he programmed the Nav system for the coordinates of his parent’s house. For all intents and purposes, he had moved out of home, even though he was still several months short of his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. His parents appreciated the privacy and the solitude, and he appreciated the ability to come and go as he wanted. His house was small with a kitchen, small living room, and a master bedroom with a master bathroom. He kept it clean, but it wasn’t spotless by any means. He did his laundry at the town Laundromat once a week, and drove a small diesel pickup that Bill wasn’t using anymore back and forth to the hangar where they kept

the Goose. Ron was glad that the hangar was so big, with the 50 foot wingspan, 40 foot length and 12 foot height. Ron used the pickup as a mule to tow the TurboGoose into and out of the hangar, which was safer than starting the engines inside the hangar and risking the prop tips on the door clearance, which was only a foot higher than the prop tips. 15 minutes away from his parent's home, he called his Dad and said he was 15 minutes out. Since he couldn't taxi the big plane all the way to their house and turn around again, he'd have to beach it and walk, so it would take about half an hour for him to get to their front door. Ron made a textbook short field landing, but didn't reverse the props as hard since he had plenty of room. He taxied to the lakeshore in front of their cabin, and extended the landing gear so he could have the plane on dry land since he was still wearing good clothes. He hiked to his parent's house, and Anne greeted him with a big warm hug. Roy got up off the rocker to hug his son, then sat back down. Ron saw that his Dad really didn't look to good, but thought it was just old age. Lucky's greeting was to sit up to let Ron scratch behind his ears, then he laid back down on his rug. Ron spent the rest of the afternoon talking to his parents and visiting, making sure everything was OK with them. When he was ready to go, Anne walked him outside.

"Ron, I'm sure you noticed your Dad's condition. He refuses to see a doctor, and says he's lived long enough. You better go in there and say anything you want to say to him, because I'm not sure he'll live much longer."

Anne stayed outside to give them some privacy, and when Ron came back out, Anne could see he was crying. "Thanks Mom, I'm glad I got to say goodbye."

"Ron, he's going home. You shouldn't be here when he goes, or he might hold on long enough for you to leave, so be prepared for news that he died. He's already told me he wants to be buried here next to Oliver. There's enough room next to him for me, so when I go, bury me next to your father."

"Mom, I hope that's going to be a really long time."

Mother and son held each other for a while as she contemplated life without Roy, and he contemplated life without his Dad. They both were crying when they heard a gasp and a groan. By the time they got back into the cabin, Roy was dead. Ron checked for respiration and pulse, but his dad was gone. They fell to their knees in prayer, asking God to take care of him, then Ron rolled Roy into a caribou skin as he had requested, dug a deep hole next to Oliver, and gently laid his dad to rest. After Ron filled in the hole, he laid a simple marker on it:

Roy Williams  
1930 - 2004  
John 3:16  
RIP

Ron asked Anne if she wanted to stay at the cabin or go to Allakaket. She said she would rather

do her mourning in private, and she'd call when she wanted Ron to move her to Allakaket and close up the house.

Ron made the loneliest walk of his life. He spent the walk thinking about his Dad, and all the things he remembered. When he got to the plane, he turned to face his dad's grave and said "Vaya Con Dios, Dad." then he turned and climbed aboard the Goose and flew back to Allakaket. When he landed, he told Bill that Roy died that afternoon, and they buried him next to the cabin, right next to Oliver just like he requested. Bill gave Ron a hug, then said "Ron, I have something to give you, can you come with me?" Bill drove him to his office, and unlocked the door, then opened a safe and extracted a large manila envelope. It simply said "Ron Williams". Inside was his father's will, a final letter, and his savings passbook. The letter read:

Dear Ron:

If you are reading this, I'm dead and in heaven. The cabin and the property around it are yours, do not sell it for any reason. You will want to keep it just in case. If your mom wants to live there, let her live there as long as she wants. Enclosed is my savings passbook. I've already transferred enough money to Anne's account to ensure that she will live comfortably for the rest of her life. Hopefully I lived long enough to see you grown up. I know you will be a good man, because you were a good kid. I'm so proud of you. Take care of your mother.

Love,

Dad

Ron broke down and cried all over again. He'd rather have his Dad back than the money. He opened the passbook and the last entry showed a balance of half a million dollars. He looked at Bill, and said "Just how much money did my Dad have?"

"When he left instructions a few years ago to split his passbook between you and Anne, he had a little over a million dollars in the account. He made some very good investments over the years, and really made his money work for him. Between her money and half of Roy's account, your mom has over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a million in the bank, and that will last forever up here, she could live on the interest, and never touch the principal."

"Bill, is there any land around Allakaket for sale that I could buy with this money and build a new house. I'm pretty sure my mom wants to live in town after she's done mourning for dad, so I was going to give her Jim's house."

"Ron, there's 10 acres of prime real estate on the edge of town that backs into a forest, and it would be a prefect building lot. How big of a house do you want?"



“Just to be on the safe side, let’s say 3,000 square feet, 4 bedroom, 3 baths, full basement, two-story with fireplaces, a solar roof, and a full AE system. I can pay cash for anything, but I need it built quickly.”

“Ron, there are plenty of out of work builders in town who would love to earn the money, and would work fast.”

“Bill, who owns the forest behind the lot?”

“It’s state land, so you could buy it cheap.”

“How big is the property behind it - I was thinking of buying the whole thing.”

“There’s 100 acres back there of heavily wooded forest that would make excellent wood for a fireplace or to build a house out of.”

“Work up the numbers, and let me know. I want to buy it all, and I need a house built with a septic system, running hot and cold water and electrical service.”

“Ok Ron, it’s your money, but I can tell you right now, what you have in mind will cost between 100 and 250 thousand dollars.”

“Here’s 500 Thousand, put the change in my account.”

Ron turned and walked out and spent the rest of the day wandering around Allakaket. He walked out to the property, and it was beautiful. He would have a nice large house, with plenty of room for kids, a garden, and enough trees to keep it warm for 100 years.

2 weeks later, his mom called to tell him Lucky died. He flew up there to bury his dog next to Sam, and check on his Mom. She was as OK as could be expected, so he flew back to Allakaket later that afternoon. Ron approved the plans for his new house, and 90 days later, it was done. It had Solar panel roofing on the southern exposure, a half-dozen Air-X wind turbines, a heliostat water heater backed up by a wood burning hot water heater, and 4 interconnected stone masonry heater fireplaces. Each room was bigger than some people’s houses, but they didn’t mind since Ron had the money, and they were making a good living building Ron’s dream house. They put the AE system in the basement, as well as a 10KW backup diesel generator. They buried a 2,000 gallon diesel tank deep outside below the frost line, and treated the diesel so it wouldn’t freeze or go bad. His battery bank was big enough to run the house for 24 hours with no other inputs, and he bought all the inverters and gear from Outback Power systems including a 20KW inverter bank, controllers and everything else he needed. He even put in a deep well in an insulated well house so he could have year-round hot and cold running water. He had a wood cook stove attached to the masonry heater in the kitchen, but the rest of the kitchen was totally modern including a commercial stove/range that

ran on propane, a huge refrigerator, and several freezers . They built another insulated building to house a 2,000 gallon propane tank. Ron had located a supplier for propane that was crazy enough to fly a tank full of propane from Anchorage to Allakaket. The reason for the huge tank was that they would only deliver during the summer, since it was too dangerous during the winter. The basement consisted of storage, and several gun safes that were bolted to the floor, and enclosed in their own rooms. Now all he needed was a wife.

**The End**

**Continued in the next book “Allakaket Airlines”**