

A DWI ON HORSEBACK AND A SHOW DOWN WITH THE LAW

I can't say this booze-drenched fellow's real name because he'll flat out try to kill me. He's the craziest Son-of-a-bitch I ever met. Make that sumbitch.

I'm going to call him Brewster, on account of how much he loves beer, especially Old Milwaukee, one of the cheaper kinds he drinks from cans while standing in his yard turning reddish purple from the sheer force of all that sauce abuse on his heart and organs. When I met him he was all belly, a not-bad-looking man (from 100 yards) straining to stand on his thin, wobbling legs in cuff-off shorts. It appeared as if any minute he'd collapse from the heat of summer and the cases of beer over the years.

I had the pleasure of his acquaintance one day while strolling my then baby girl.

"Hey," he slurred, waving his water hose. "Aren't you that old Nancy woman who writes for the paper?"

I wanted to be friendly and neighborly, but could smell him from two houses away. He walked toward me on those drinking-straw like legs, round gut shaped just like a Nike basketball blown to the point of popping. He had a nice smile and friendly face, and even though it was eggplant purple, there was a certain kindness and humor etched in his semi-toothless smile and pretty blue eyes. He had some sort of aura that forces one to stop in her tracks, even when her better sense and Mama's strict raising says, "Keep Moving."

It was as if a cloud of fairy dust floated from the sky for the sole purpose of mesmerizing and caused me to stop what I was doing and introduce myself. He had cast a spell with that Old Milwaukee in one hand and wriggling garden hose in the other. He didn't seem to be watering anything but his gravel driveway.

I should have waved and kept walking, but sometimes I just can't help myself. It is the weirdo magnet. Once activated, I have no control and slide smack into these creatures most normal people wouldn't give the time of day.

I'm attracted to kooks because they are natural-born storytellers, which I could listen to for hours. They are far more interesting than most men and women in suits and who wear Banana Republic on weekends. That's not to say I'd be attracted to or date this man...I was only planning to stop for a friendly neighborly chat. He was so different from what my husband refers to as the "Patty White Crowd," meaning the Country Club,

Junior League (God love, them), and other social-climbers who for the most part act as if cut from the same bolt of khaki cloth, all alike they are, forming a well-oiled machine of excruciatingly boring pretense.

Naturally, there are exceptions and I have friends, including a mother-in-law who frequents the country club, and quite a few (make that one) friend in the Junior League, in which I was never invited. Well, sugahs, no wonder. None of them would be caught dead talking out in full public view with Brewster, yet in my mind, people are people and if someone's entertaining, I don't care if he's half orangutan.

Give me the weirdoes and kooks. Forget the Junior Leaguers, bless their hearts for not inviting me to join. Why, I could have brought color and zest and energy into that organization. I could have taught them how to find Kate Spade bags at Goodwill and how to let their hair down and go wild. I might even give them verbal lessons like that Jenna Jameson Mega Huss, who wrote "How to Make Love like a Porn Star," only mine would be called, "How to Give Old Faithful the Ride of his Life: Even if it's Only on his Birthday or Christmas."

Which brings me exactly to what Brewster enjoyed – the ride of his life. And no, it wasn't provided by me.

For the record, in case he's still kicking around and comes searching for me, as he did the time the snapping turtle nearly bit off his eleven-inch trouser serpent (he says 11 inches, but believe you me...I would NOT know,) I'm not living in this country anymore. I'm in Guam. Not really but that's the information I want Brewster to have in his reddish-purple head.

He got mad when I wrote the story about the turtle going after his jibbly bob. Guess he was afraid the snapper would prevent him from ever entertaining another girl with his wondrous willy.

But let's not put the turtle before the horse. First, Brewster's horse-capades. Later, I'll tell you about his tango which led to near bloodshed and dismemberment with the massive-jawed snapping turtle.

Brewster's not particularly proud of what he did, and it took six months of stopping by his trailer, begging and cajoling to get the full story. He knew if he told it in bits in

pieces, once scene at a time, I'd keep stopping by, being the kind of journalist I was and wanting the full story.

One summer evening as he watered his tomatoes and gravel driveway and doused his brain with beer, it all flowed out like the keg he wished was on his porch instead of the old Sony TV with the picture tube shattered from what appeared to be a man's booted foot.

Brewster was a former Army veteran who likes to tinker with cars and grow his own fruits and marijuana, and that day while slurring his words, his clouded blue eyes going their separate ways in his cranberry-red head, he uttered, "Ain't nobody gonna ever forget my ass. I'll go down in history, just like Rudolph the red fucking nose reindeer,"

I was glad my baby girl wasn't yet two and prayed she'd forget his bad language. It may be a stretch, though, since she seems to pick up bad words faster than a bird can snap up seeds.

I'll never forget how I learned this little lesson. It was after my husband had come home from a late-night gig and baby girl was up in the middle of the night as usual.

"How's Daddy's little darlin'?" Tidy asked, getting smack dab in her face.

"ASS!" she said. "ASS! ASS! ASS!" What a smart baby, I had. "I'm gonna whup yo' ass." That's what Tidy gets for letting a toddler watch Eddie Murphy movies all day instead of "Blues Clues."

"Try to watch your language, Brewster," I said, cocking my head toward my child. "She's like a Pest Strip about catching cuss words and retaining them."

Brewster grinned, a few dark holes in his mouth where most of the molars had evacuated, and then he started telling the whole story about what happened in the mid 1980s when he made North Carolina history – on horseback.

"I'll get to that in a minute," he said, knowing I was waiting on that full story like a starved animal staring at a caged bowl of raw hamburger. He wanted to tease me with his other tales first. Wanted to tell me his entire life's story.

I sat on a large rock, ready for his long and winded string of escapades. The conversation turned to his past. Seems he had lots of careers, and before he'd tell me about what happened on that horse he beat around the bush and stalled to keep me hanging on.

“I was an orderly in the Army,” he said. “And it was my job to shave up all the vaginas before we’d take out the uteruses.” Oh My Lord. Here was a MAN talking about va-gee-gees and Uteri, if that would be the plural of uteruses, but probably not.

I was stunned. “Orderlies can’t take out uteruses.”

“They sure can if there aren’t enough doctors. We were in a war here. Vietnam. It was rough and women wanted them out for this and that reason or another. It was my job to soap them up real good and squirt Betadine all over them and shave them beavers bald. Then if a doctor could be found, he’d use the salad tongs and pull the thing out.”

I was transfixed, watching him drink, smoke and turn redder by the minute. “Did you know?” he asked with more seriousness than I’d seen him exhibit, “that the uterus is a pear-shaped organ?” Oh, me. Why couldn’t he just talk about his own organs like all other men fixated on their swelling, bothersome prostates and PSA levels?

After he spoke of yanking uteruses out of suffering women, he bragged about going to Jamaica and working as a naked dancer. He also told me he passed out in the middle of the ocean after scuba diving and lay on top of the water for eleven hours without drowning, even while surrounded by sharks. He’d been hitting the tequila that day.

I didn’t know what to believe, but once he got onto the story about the horse, I checked it out with the police and arresting officer and it all panned out as the gospel truth.

On that famous day in North Carolina history, Brewster woke up hung over as usual and made a breakfast of eggs and Old Milwaukee. Maybe a bit of toast. As the day progressed so did his drinking, and by nightfall this colorful character was ready to go rebel rousing. Only his mother, who lies and says she’s 42, which is younger by 10 years than Brewster, stood in the road in her housecoat and wouldn’t let him drive one of the many half-broken down cars scattered about his property.

“You ain’t a’goin nowhere, buddy,” she said, spitting a wad onto the ground. “You’s drunk as a drowned rat and I’ll lay in this road like a suicidal possum, and you’ll have to kill me if you think you’re hitting up the dives and pool halls tonight.”

It all stemmed from beer and loneliness as he sat home that fateful night, clock ticking toward the hour when most brush their teeth and slip on their jammies. Instead of

going to bed, where he definitely belonged, he'd gotten a notion to visit a Patton Avenue watering hole, which is real close to downtown Asheville.

“Rather than driving the truck,” he said, “I thought it would be better to saddle up my stallion than drink and drive.”

He saddled up Ol' Smokey, all right, but it was more of a mule-looking thing than a stallion, though you have to realize all men love to use the word “Stallion” every chance they get. “Hey hon, wanna check out my stallion tonight?” “Oh, baby, my stallion's been thinking of your sexy body all day.” And so on.

Somehow, a very drunk and staggering Brewster managed to guide the horse down Hooper's Creek Road. But even in the darkness, he recognized a familiar face coming toward him, moon flowing through her white nightgown and giving her the appearance of an apparition, one of Heaven's more menacing angels.

“You better get home with that horse before I break me off a switch,” his mother growled, her moon-lit face set in that Lord-help-me look mothers of wild boys often wear. I tried to imagine her switching a 52-year-old man.

Brewster ignored his mama, and waved goodbye like the Lone Ranger with a full tank. He figured Ol' Smokey would be a decent designated driver; plus, the horse had a good sober brain and knew the way back home. “He's just like a human being but smarter,” Brewster always said of the stallion that truthfully, looked like a mutant and gigantic brown goat. “He used to help me with my math when I was calculating costs to lay tile and build rock walls. He knew good tile from bad, too, and would pick up a piece that was flawed in his big old teeth and whinny until I got it from him.”

They trotted down the two-lane, horse clomping and tapping like a clogger onstage. When he made it without incident to the bar, some three miles from his house, he tossed the reins of his fine goat/steed to the doorman, also known as the bouncer. “Make sure no one dents my Jag,” he said, winking and going in to wet his brain with draft beer.

“While I was inside drinking and having a good time,” Brewster said, “the doorman was letting different girls get on Smokey and walk him around the parking lot, and all over the neighborhood behind the bar. Some asshole up yonder ways spotted the horse churning up his lawn and musta called the police.

“I had no idea of this,” he said, face beginning to explode in sweat bubbles instead of just rolling down his cheeks and neck. He continued with the story that made history, as he was the first, and maybe ONLY man in North Carolina to get a DWI on horseback.

He keeps saying he’s not proud, but I could tell he was getting a huge kick out of telling this wild incident. A few beers later and the rest poured out of him like his hose on the gravel drive.

“It was closing time,” he continued, “and I was ready to go home and so was Smokey. We left the bar, and both of us were hungry so we went right on through the McDonald’s drive-in window and I ordered a Big Mac with fries and Smokey had a Happy Meal because he likes the toys, especially them Beanie Babies. I sure as hell wish you could have seen the look on that woman’s face when she saw me and Smokey and I told her, ‘Go head and put the handles of that there Happy Meal directly in his mouth. He’ll know what to do with it.’

“We galloped on out of there and a few minutes later I seen the flashing blue lights all around and my ears rang with pain the siren was so loud. I wasn’t about to stop, but was trying to find a quiet place for Smokey and me to have our picnic.”

The blue lights spooked the calm out of Ol’ Smokey, and Brewster held on for dear life as the horse let loose and tore through town as if he were in the Kentucky Derby and its rider a drunken jockey. They fled through the ritzy and sleeping neighborhoods of Asheville, both holding on and not wanting to drop their burgers because if Ol’ Smokey could keep his in his Happy Meal in his teeth during all of this, then Brewster could too.

“It was a wild chase that lasted over an hour,” he recalled, popping the aluminum tab on another can of beer.

Brewster thought he’d lost them at one point when he hid in the woods near the Holiday Inn Golf Course. For 30 minutes he and Smokey laid low, dipping their fries in ketchup, eating their burgers and catching a breather before taking off again into the kind of night where the moon is too full to stay up high and sort of sinks low and yellow, like it could hit the ground at any minute.

“Another mile and I’ll be home free,” Brewster thought. But as soon as he got back on his road leading home, the lights of five patrol cars bathed him in troublesome blue.

Behind the wheel of one of those cars was Lt. Leroy Barnes, a sour-faced sheriff's deputy.

“How they hell you gonna stop that there horse?” boomed the voice of a fellow officer over Barnes's police radio.

Barnes couldn't resist being funny. He picked up the microphone and said, “I guess I'll just have to yell, ‘WHOA!’”

Using the public address system built into the patrol car, the officer took himself seriously and hollered “‘Whoa!’” loud as he could. But Brewster and Smokey kept going until they came to a dead end where their journey was over. They were trapped, ketchup on their lips, cheese stuck between Ol' Smokey's chompers.

“I kind of got cornered by a house, fence and all the cars,” Brewster said. “Smokey was hysterical and his stomach hurt from the cheeseburger, I could tell. He was pretty upset the prize was the duck-billed platypus and not the zebra or pink flamingo because he just loves them there pink birds. He was on his hind legs with his front ones in the air, and I was having a time hanging on. I saw several guys get out and I thought we were both going to be shot.”

Instead of taking a bullet, they took Brewster to jail where he was fingerprinted, photographed and arrested for driving while impaired and failing to heed the blue lights and siren. Lt. Barnes hauled the tired, but otherwise healthy horse to a safe place for a little R&R.

“It was a very expensive night,” Brewster said. “It cost \$90 to get out of jail, \$100 for Smokey the horse, and \$800 for a lawyer who lost the case.”

“Whatever happened to Ol' Smokey?” I asked as he handed me a brown paper sack filled with tomatoes, a very neighborly thing to do, I might add. He explained that Barnes, being a good lawman, brought Smokey home a few days after the arrest.

“He knew he was home,” Brewster said. “He started whinnying, and when we got him out of the trailer, I've never seen such a happy horse. He ran to the other horses, so glad to see them. He stood on his hind legs, going ‘Whee-oooo, Whee-ooo’ and then ran around and cut a few flips. He's the only horse I know that can do gymnastics better than some of them girls on the Olympics and a lot better than the one who's now selling sanitary napkins on TV since her career is over.”

I tried to form a mental picture of the horse but couldn't see it.

“My sweet Smokey laid down on his on his back, all four legs pawing the air. After he calmed down, I went and hugged his neck and gave him a new Beanie Baby and told him I was glad he was home. With those big eyes, he looked at me and I swear he said something very close to, ‘Meeeeee, tooooooo.’”