

*Almost True*  
(Prologue)

Sometimes the best stories come from real life. This story has elements of truth mix with lots of fiction.

It was 1964, it was a time of turmoil and chaos. The Beatles had just invaded the US. JFK, and soon after his brother Bobby, were shot and killed. The US had entered a war in a far east country presumably to curb Communism. You could take any decade out of history and the story would be the same. Humans have been warring against each other since Cane killed Abel. Paul was just beginning his so called adult life. At the age of 17, he graduated from high school, started college with no clue on what he wanted to do.

Author's note:

My mother raised us kids as Catholics. One of the events in our religious life was Confirmation. As a devote Catholic and alter boy, I chose Paul as my Confirmation name. So I will use that as my character's name in this story. Confirmation is one of the 7 sacraments of the Catholic Church.

Here is the list: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation (Penance), Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony

I have done 5 of the 7. They should have added expulsion. Then I would have done 6. After years of studying all religions, I come to realize no one knows the truth. We will find out in the afterlife, if there is one.

To continue:

While still in high school, Paul joined the Navy. Why would he do that? His father had the foresight to protect him and his brother from the draft. Being drafted and sent to Vietnam was pretty much a death sentence. While still going to college, Paul and his brother spent 1 weekend a month at Alameda Naval Air Station advancing in rank. He was lucky that the base commander awarded him a strikers badge in electronics. If he hadn't gotten that, he would have spent his military career swabbing decks and painting the ship's

hull and deck. Instead, he joined the electronics group on board the ship.

After 1.5 years of college, Paul made one of the best decisions of his life. He quit college and started his active military duty. This was to the dismay of his mother. His brother had made the same decision and suddenly half her family was gone.

What prompted Paul to do this? He was only 18 years old and had signed up for Officer's Candidate School. This would result in committing his life to 4 years of school and 4 more years of military service. To a kid of 18, this amounted to almost half his total life. This was too much stress to deal with. How could he commit that amount of time at this early age? Just enter the service and get it over with. As a Naval Reservist, he only had to serve two years of active duty. He already had two years accumulated in the Reserves.

So at 19 years old, he started his military tour.

I will continue writing this as if I was really Paul. In other words, writing in the first person.

They always ask you where you want to serve your duty. I said, San Francisco, San Diego, or Long Beach. I had never been away from home. I thought these places would make it easy for me to visit my family. They sent me to Virginia. Before I got those orders, I spent 3 months waiting in Long Beach. I was assigned to the kitchen crew. Wake up every day at 4 PM. One day work all day until 6 PM, the next day work until noon. My job was to replenish the fresh milk machines. Each milk container weighed 25 lbs. After three months of doing this, my arm muscles bulked up to maximum strength. This would aid me later on in life.

I finally got my orders to fly to Virginia. I landed in Virginia and waiting there was a limo to take me to the pier where my ship was supposed to be moored. How nice of the Navy to arrange such luxurious transport. How naive I was. After dropping me off at the pier, the driver demanded \$20 payment. That was a lot of money back then.

When I reached the area where my ship was supposed to be, it was gone. On

sea trials I was told. The ship had recently been refitted and sea trials are used to verify all systems were working correctly. I had to wait for three days for the ship to return. What did I do for those three days? Swab the decks of the living quarters. Not a very exciting way to begin.

**Almost True**  
*(Chapter 1)*

When the ship returned from sea trials, being a newbie, I was assigned to the work crew bringing food supplies on board. Hauling packages and bags of heavy containers between decks for 8 hours further bulked up my muscles. Although, this did leave me with black and blue marks all up and down the length of my arms. Finally, the ship headed out for our six months tour of the Mediterranean. We were part of the Sixth Fleet. My ship was a guided missile destroyer. DDG 5. We were a support ship for the aircraft carrier. The ship pulled out of port right into a major Atlantic storm. Once again, I was assigned low level duty. For three weeks my daily task was to clean the bathrooms. Called heads in Navy slang. If I was prone to sea sickness, this was surely the worse job I could have gotten. Most of the crew were seasick, including seasoned officers. Having survived mopping the vomit off of the bathroom deck for three weeks, nothing would make me sick again unless it was self induced drunkenness. Picture the floor with water mixed with vomit swishing back and forth as the ship rocked as I mopped it all up in a bucket.

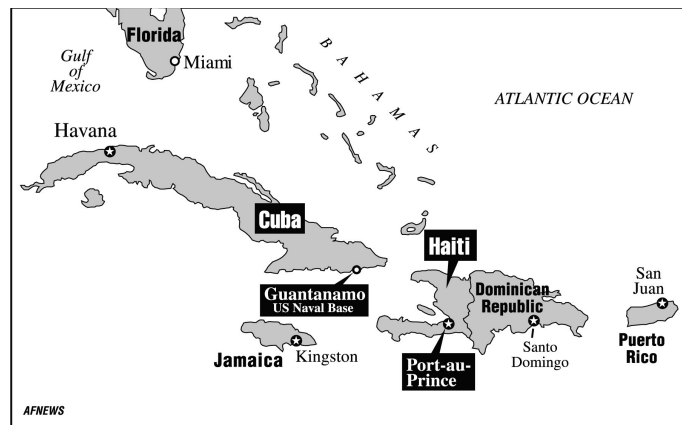


During that time, the food galley was almost empty. I even ate the sardine and tomato sandwiches while holding on to my sliding tray and cup.

Before full deployment in the Mediterranean, we needed to do some type of

combat and safety training. It took place in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. How was it that the US could do training there?

The United States first seized Guantanamo Bay and established a naval base there in 1898 during the Spanish-American War in the Battle of Guantanamo Bay. In 1903, the United States and Cuba signed a lease granting the United States permission to use the land as a coaling and naval station. It was also used to protect the Panama Canal.



GITMO was the acronym given to the base. It was the center of the movie “A Few Good Men” played by Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson.



I don't remember it being like this!

One thing I do remember was watching one of the USO shows. Like the kind Bob Hope always headlined.

Before deployment to the Med, we spent three weeks doing what they called “Combat Training”. I guess it was necessary, but it kind of seemed like a joke. One time they placed a broken vacuum tube on the deck and asked me what I would do. I said I would get the dust pan, sweep it up, and put it in

the trash. XXX wrong! You needed to put on a hazardous material suit because the tube was radioactive. My bad. I guess I didn't pass.

During my Navy service, I made two Med cruises. Even though this was during the Vietnam war, this area was fairly safe. There were some incidences some showed anger toward the US for its roll in the war. One time, while moored at a pier in Naples, an angry mob was shouting chants at us on board the ship. "Yankee go home" and the like. We shouted back. Gratzi Natzi. Then they started throwing rocks at us. Naples is a major US naval base and probably contributes lots of money to the local businesses. It wasn't long before the Italian police showed up knocking heads with belly clubs and tossing the protesters into the back of a police van.

They say join the Navy and see the world. For me that turned out to be a reality. Here is a list of places my ship went or I went on shore leave to:

Cuba, Galveston, Puerto Rico, St. Thomas, the Azores, Cannes France, Marseilles, Naples, Pompey, Rome, Florence, Livorno, Malta, New York, Athens, Corfu, The Bahamas, and Barcelona.

My years of military service allowed me to grow up, learn a trade, gave me the opportunity for further paid schooling all without facing constant danger as those who were sent to Vietnam. Most of my miss-adventures occurred off of the ship and were caused by my nativity or stupidity.

In a foreign country, while on liberty, we were always required to wear our Navy uniforms. Not so in the states. We could wear civilian clothes. Our ship had stopped in Galveston, Texas. Me, and a couple of my shipmates rented a motel room, for a couple nights. Galveston Island was a hot spot for tourists and also for us. They had nightclubs right on the beach with sandy floors. That was where I met the girl I thought was to be my future wife. She had come down from Houston on spring break. I spotted her on the dance floor and asked her to dance. Her name was Amanda. We hit it off and later took a moonlight walk on the beach. She was a stunning blue eyed blond. At 19, I wasn't bad looking myself. I had never been in any kind of relationship and this magical night was etched in my mind for all time as we

kissed with the backdrop of the Gulf behind us. My reverie was broken when three dudes, who obviously were drinking too much, came upon us. Oh look here! What a beauty! Can you share, as one started to grab her arm. My dad always told me, if you are going to get into a fight, throw the first punch. I took his advice. One down and two to go. I was holding my own, but not for long. I would have been overwhelmed if some of my own buddies hadn't showed up. With the extra help, the three dudes stumbled away down the beach. I didn't survive unscathed. I had a bloody lip and a purple bruise forming on my cheek. Amanda appreciated my defense of her honor. I didn't even mind the bruises as long as she was caring for me. We started up a long distance romance. It was hard to leave her as she departed for her home back to Houston and I reluctantly went back to my ship, which at that time was my only home.

So what was life like on board a Navy ship? Most of the time it was boring. Thirty days at sea, then a three day weekend in some foreign port. Then back out to sea. The sea days were fairly routine. Not really much to do. I tried hiding in the electronics shop pretending to be working. Three highlights to the day. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They did show a movie each night in the mess decks. (Known as the eating area.) Navy food wasn't bad, except after three days at sea, no milk, eggs, or fresh vegetables. They provided us with a lukewarm drink that looked like kool aid, but tasted terrible. We all called it bug juice. Something you would get if you ground up a bunch of beetles. Speaking about bugs. The ship was infested with cockroaches. While in line to get food on your tray, if you banged on the metal frame work, bugs would fall out underneath the panels. It never gave me confidence that they wouldn't end up ground up in my food.

The ship got its water from two evaporator boiler systems that converted sea water to fresh water. All too often one would break down. When that happened, the ship would cut off all the water until it was repaired. They never warned you either. So all of a sudden, you couldn't even get a drink of water. That always triggered the most desire to drink. Kind of a panic not knowing when the water would be turned back on. Sometimes it even happened when I was soaped up in the shower. I had to towel off without rinsing.

I spent two years of my life thinking that ship was my home. Actually, it was my home while I was in the service. The ship had a complement of 350 sailors. Our electronics gang slept in a 8'X40' compartment shared by the 15 of us.



This was typical of what it looked like except our bunks were stacked three high. I had the middle bunk. There was barely enough space to turn your shoulders over. Sometimes during rough seas, I tied my shoe laces to my bunk rail so that in the morning I could find them. We endured some heavy storms in the Mediterranean. Sometimes it was not safe to even walk between sections of the ship on deck. You could easily get washed overboard since the storm waves would break over the deck. I usually felt safe inside the ship except when we were taking 40 degree sideways rolls. Even in my bunk at night I could hear the waves slapping up against the sides of the ship. When you share such a small compartment with your shipmates, they become part of your family. I made lifelong friendships with many of them.

In addition to keeping the communication transmitters tuned, I had four other special duties. Being in the electronics group, I had to stand ECM watches. ECM stands for electronic counter measures. The equipment was essentially a wide band radio receiver. I remember listening to TV stations off of the coast of France. I knew they were westerns because I could hear Indians whooping it up, but the language was in French. Our task was to listen for enemy submarines. Various radars gave off distinctive sounds and broadcast periods. For example, I could identify the search radars from our own fleet. One time I thought I had heard the signature of a Russian sub. I called the

XO (Executive Officer) to report this. He listened, but the broadcast was not repeated. Another time I had come back off of liberty still a little drunk. I had the midnight watch. My stomach was a little queasy and I had lain down with the headphones on my head with my arm around a bucket in case I got sick. I had closed my eyes for just a minuet and when I looked up, there was the XO staring down at me. He didn't say a word and I immediately sat up straight.

While in a foreign port, I had to do sentry duty. Sometimes it was just walking around the perimeter of the ship. They gave me a rifle with no bullets. If we had been attacked, I would have been the first one to get killed and I couldn't even defend myself. In the states I had to do sentry duty too, but all I was doing was guarding the trash bins. No rifle needed. This seemed kind of ridiculous. We were at war though. I think the real reason for being on guard was to deter any fanatical bombers. Remember the USS Cole in Yemen.



Speaking about rifles. I was on the honor guard drill team. When we entered port our group formed a line and we did spinning rifle tricks. Stand with the rifle on the ground at your side. Kick the rifle with your foot and spin it around to catch it in what they called present arms. You ended up with the rifle in you hands holding it out in front of you.

The other duty I had was to pull the refueling hose over from the oil tankers. The operation went like this. It could happened any time day or night. We mustered on deck with our life jackets on and had to wait for about 45 minutes. A crew member would fire a ball with a rope attached over to the oilier alongside us. They would attach a heavy rope to the heavy large fuel

hose.



We would pull the hose over to our ship. After attaching the connecting hose our duty would be over. This is an actual picture of the ship I was on.



*Almost True*  
*(Chapter 2)*

It's strange that my time in military service was just a small fraction of my entire life. But because it was so different, I can recall many moments in that time span, whereas all the other years of my life seem like a blur.

I remember exactly where I was when JFK was reported as being shot. I was watching live news on TV when Bobby Kennedy was shot. There were no video tape delays back in 1964. I was listening to Petula Clark sing the song "Downtown" while I was on watch in Long Beach harbor during Christmas 1965. I was doing my two week reservist duty before I went on active duty. It was one of the loneliest times of my life being away from my family.

I was also on a 4 hour watch in Naples harbor listening to my transistor radio when it was reported that President Johnson decided to not run for re-election.

While at sea, we didn't get mail too often. When we did, it was a real treat. I was doing another 4 hour watch and looked forward to reading Amanda's latest letter. As it turned out, it was a "Dear John" letter except it started out "Dear Paul". I should have expected that a beauty like her would not be waiting around for a love-sick sailor like me. She was a freshman at the University of Texas. They say "Distance makes the heart grow fonder". That may have been true for me, but the corollary of that is "Out of sight, out of mind". I guess for her, the later was true.

They write songs just for this type of moment. If I can remember it goes something like this"

"It's a heart ache, nothing but a heart ache. Hits you when it's too late. Hits you when you're down. It's a fool's game, nothing but a fool's game. Standing in the cold rain, feeling like a clown."

How appropriate, it was raining down on me as I stood there in the cold rain. At least the rain washed away the tears streaming down my face. This wouldn't be the first time a beautiful blue eyed blond let me down.

You would think military personnel would act with precision. Even though they are taken from the highest academic students, they are still human and subject to stupid mistakes. Here are some examples that happened during my Med cruises. We were anchored in the Azores. This is an island on the way to the Mediterranean where US ships could refuel. It was still 1500 miles

away from the entrance to the Mediterranean.



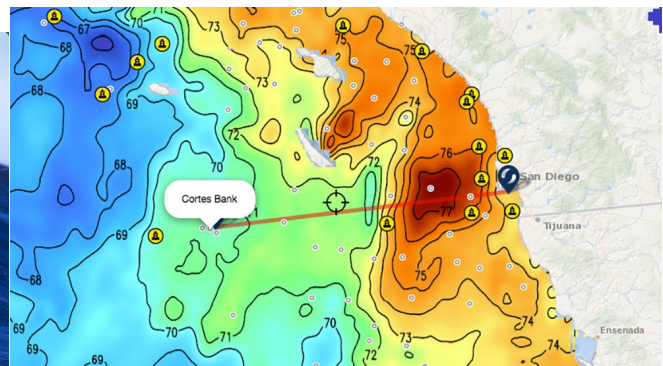
During times of war, the ship was required to maintain 80% fuel level. So our crew hooked up the fueling hoses and we took on oil anytime day or night. In the morning, an environmental disaster took place. Someone had left a valve open and instead of pumping the oil into our holding tanks, we had dumped all the oil into the harbor. Our Captain's solution to clean up this mess was to have the crew, including me, haul the buckets of oil skimmed off the water surface and dump it into oil transport trucks so they could take it to the open ocean side of the islands. At least I got new work clothes, because after doing this all day, my clothes were covered in oil. The second mistake affected me directly. Our Captain had to contact Washington to report what happened. We had three types of communication radios on board. One was UHF used for line of sight communication. The second was mid range transmitters. We couldn't quite reach the US so the Captain ordered us to increase our transmitter power beyond what was safe. Our message did get through, although in the process it burnt out one of our antenna couplers. These devices, also known as antenna tuners, match the impedance between a radio transmitter and its antenna to optimize power transfer.

I was assigned the task of climbing up the ship's mast, (a very dangerous job) to examine the damage and come up with a fix. The only fix was to replace the whole unit. The silver inside was virtually melted.

The third incident was more serious. We were doing target practice with our 5” guns. Meaning the projector shell was 5” in diameter.



The ship was firing at targets on a small island. On the back side of the island was our carrier group. I happened to be walking through CIC (Combat Information Center) and I overheard the Admiral, who commanded the carrier, yell over the radio. WTF are you doing? A misfired shell could conceivably sail over the island and hit the carrier. As bad as this was, it can't compare to what the Captain of one of our nuclear subs did at the Cortes bank. The Cortes Bank is an underwater mountain peak hundred miles or so off the coast of California. It is, depending on the tides, only 6 feet below the surface, but never visible. It is the sight of some of the biggest waves ever recorded and big wave surfers come from all over the world to try their luck.



So this Captain of the nuclear sub wanted to see the underwater mountain top. Boy did he get a good look! He ran right into it. Of course he was stripped of his command.



In between my two Med cruises I took a couple weeks leave in the states. Leave is the Navy term for vacation. Military service has lots of benefits. You have to buy your uniforms and work clothes, but you get paid regularly, free medical and dental, room and board with everyday meals. Not bad for a 19 year old. There is no real need to spend money either. Even though the pay is not high, you can save if you want. My starting salary was \$35 every two weeks. By the time I got out, it was \$105 every two weeks.

I was not done with Amanda yet. I needed to see her face to face. I was not sure if she would even meet me. She did agree to meet. I flew to Houston and met her at a restaurant. I wasn't sure how things would go. The lunch we shared was the last time I saw her. Not only was she engaged, but she also had a child. Definitely somewhat of a shock and a let down. We parted friends, but can your heart be broken twice. Music always seems to have some lyrics to fit the moment.

The Bee Gees provided the right words.  
And, how can you mend a broken heart?  
How can you stop the rain from falling down?  
How can you stop the sun from shining?  
What makes the world go round?  
How can you mend this broken man?  
How can a loser ever win?  
Please help me mend my broken heart and let me live again.

When you are young heartaches seem impossible to endure. As you get older, not sure if you build some armor around your heart or you just mature with the experience. I moved on.

Reminds me of when I graduated from 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I had a crush on one of the girls in my class. She basically did not know I existed. Still, with summer break approaching and me going to another school, how could I live without her. That is the kind of emotions young people have until they mature.

The truth be told, I wasn't really qualified to be on the Electronics Tech group. All the other techs had attended school at the Navy labs in Great Lakes. I had picked up what I could during my two prior years as a reservists. Due to my lack of experience and knowledge, I almost got myself killed. One of our electronics room was called the TACAN room. It housed the TACAN console. TACAN stands for Tactical Air Navigation. It had quit working and was blowing fuses. Me and a senior tech were supposed to find out what was wrong and fix it. I was by myself sitting on a metal ladder between decks outside of the room using an OHM meter. I was checking to see if any of the fuses where open. I never should have tried to do that while the circuits were live. The meter was in my lap and I was probing the fuses while watching the meter. My hand slipped off of the fuse and I touched the live voltage. This was not the typical house voltage of 120 VAC. This was ship's 440 VAC. Four times stronger than house current. When I made contact with the fuse holder an electrical shock went through my body and my whole frame jumped. I should have been electrocuted right there. Someone must have been watching over me. My senior partner wasn't much better than me. His solution was to keep putting in stronger fuses to see which circuit was causing the problem. Each time he put in a stronger fuse, it blew again. That happened until a transformer inside the cabinet exploded and hot oil sprayed all over the place. I was out the door and down the ladder in 2 seconds. Eventually we had to call a contractor to come out and fix the equipment.

I almost forgot about this incident. We were in port and given the task of painting our sleeping compartment. Not really too much effort to do this. Unfortunately, the air flow system on the ship was also undergoing

maintenance service. This led to a somewhat dangerous situation for all of us painters. We were breathing paint fumes for several hours since there was not adequate air flow. I started to feel faint, so I left and went up on deck to get some fresh air. One of my best friends stayed down there much longer. Later he complained that he was having trouble breathing. I escorted him to the medic center. The Corpsman there told him there was nothing he could do for him and that he would die. Of course my friend was in a panic. I sent for an officer to get a second opinion. I explained what had happened and he said, not to worry. Just get him out in the fresh air and let him calm down and breathe slowly. He did recover a short while later. What the heck was wrong with the Corpsman to tell him that. His designation should have been "Corpseman" instead as in dead body man.

I had signed up in the Navy while still in high school. After 1.5 years on the ship I passed the four year mark. I added a stripe to my sleeve. Some on the ship ridiculed me saying you are only a 3<sup>rd</sup> class and you have been in for four years. I explained, I was a reservists for 2 years and I only have 6 months left on the ship and I am out. How about you? That usually shut them up. There was still some resentment toward me. It showed up when I was up for a promotion if I passed the test. Somehow my test got lost and I had to wait another 3 months. Very suspicious to me.

I was never in a war zone, although there were some dangers in roaming around foreign ports. The first time I set foot in Naples, a group of kids surrounded us asking for money. They were bumping and pushing us. Actually they were experienced pick pockets. I lost some money and a pack of cigarettes. I didn't smoke but cigarettes were worth more than money when bartering. An old lady was selling religious articles. I declined to buy any. Then she opened her coat and displayed a collection of switch blades. I bought one for \$2 and a pack of cigarettes. When you pushed the button, an eight inch blade snapped out. Somehow I even managed to smuggle that back to the states when I got out.

Before I came on board, our ship was a mixed-man ship. What that meant was it was crewed by NATO crewmen. French, Italian, and Americans together. Because of this former history, our ship was invited to some ports

that others were denied. We anchored off of Italy and we shuttled to a small private island. We spent a day at the beach drinking Italian beers. Peroni was the beer. It wasn't the best tasting. I had drank beers from all over the world. Heineken from the Netherlands was one of my favorites. Lowenbrau from Germany was good too. How about San Miguel. Popular in Spain and the Philippines.

There were a couple other incidents that could have turned out really bad for me. At 19 years old, I was fearless, naive, and stupid. Me and my buddy almost got beat up because we were dancing with local Italian girls in a bar somewhere deep in the back streets. The bartender advised us to leave. We took his advice. When we left the bar, we were lost. We flagged down a horse drawn carriage and he took us back to the ship.

One time, my ship was anchored in New York Harbor. I was robbed while wandering around New York City. That is a tail for another time.

Our ship was scheduled to arrive at a port in Istanbul, Turkey. I was looking forward to seeing that place, but my time was short. I only had two weeks left of my duty. I had gone out on liberty in Barcelona, spent all my money, and returned to the ship. I was supposed to get paid that day. They told me I was getting out the next morning and they had closed up all my paper work. No money for me. I spent the last two weeks essentially broke.

I was always a wise guy, but not in a bad way. I just always liked to joke around. Every morning our group would assemble at 8 AM for muster. We would salute the raising of our flag and our chief would announce any special instructions. So on the morning I was scheduled to depart the ship he announced that I was leaving. He asked if I had any departing words. So the wise guy I was, I stood in front of the crew dressed perfectly in my dress blues and told them that they looked sloppy. That I never looked like that when I was on board. You all should straighten up and fly right. After muster, they all jumped me and took off my pants. I had to run back through mid-ship to my locker in my shorts to get redressed.

Walking off the ship felt like I had just gotten out of prison. Even though

these years helped me grow up and see the world, I never liked not having a choice of what I would do or where I would go.

They flew me from Barcelona to Rota Spain. I spent a week there doing exit health checks while they arranged transport back to the states. I borrowed \$5 from a friend. The only thing I needed to spend money on was snacks. To watch a movie, it only cost me 50c. I even remember the movie I watched. It was "Bonnie and Clyde". I remember leaving the theater stunned by the closing scene of their graphic demise.

I boarded a military transport to Frankfurt, Germany. There I was transferred to a flight back to the states. They had chartered a jet from Caribbean Airlines. Very strange indeed. We made one stop in Keflavic, Iceland. I did not get off. Eventually, after 17 hours, I arrived at Andrews Air force Base where I spent another week transitioning out. They offered me a lot of money and a promotion if I wanted to stay in. No way Jose. I wanted out.

While in the Navy, my parents had left California and moved to Parkersburg, West Virginia where my dad had moved in to his childhood home after his father had passed away. I flew to Cincinnati, Ohio and took a bus to their home. I remember walking from the bus station carrying my sea bag dressed in my Navy uniform to their home. I spent three weeks visiting. My mother wanted me to stay, but I had been raised in California and that was where I wanted to return to. I stayed with my Aunt in Whittier, California until I met another beautiful blue-eyed blond. We married four months later and the rest is history.

**The End**