

Waco Native, Vol. I

by Craig Cunningham

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Craig Cunningham

For Brenda, who comes and goes.

1. Disappearing Texas

A few casualties of the internet:
meaningful relationships
getting lost in Dallas
private detectives
face-to-face breakups
walking into a business to see if they're hiring
finding out a restaurant is bad by eating there
relying on paper maps for directions
being truly awestruck by a photograph
oil-stained recipe books
bullies you can punch in the face
men reading newspapers in the airport
the elusive female genitalia
independent thinking and living
the difference between Texas and everyone else
that grows thinner every year
and is on pace to disappear.

2. Five-Gallon Buckets of Rattlesnakes

The Lake Waco Park booth operator called the sight into the police and none could blame her for being terrified at the woman who walked past the window with a yellow python draped around her neck and dragging a two-liter of Coca-Cola on a dog leash.

The police tracked the snake woman down without difficulty and asked what she was up to, the single question maniacs fear most.

She told them nothing just want to wash my hands in the lake but of course they couldn't leave her there with children in the area.

With a few more questions they realized her mind was mashed potatoes because she couldn't recall her name or the year or her hometown.

Along with the snake and the two-liter she also had a set of keys to a '94 Dodge pickup they found smashed into a ditch and still running.

Inside that Dodge were a long line of sticky notes with reminders like *'Your name is Caren'* and *'If you find me dead call Bill Parker'* and somewhere else would be Bill's phone number that actually belonged to a cable television hotline about upcoming programs.

To make a long story short the sheriffs found a five-gallon bucket filled up with live diamondback rattlesnakes, a snapping turtle, illegal species of killer frogs and matching samurai swords.

In a moment of clarity, she confided to one of the officers that she was being drugged by a snake charmer who worshiped the devil.

Even though they believed her, she was taken into custody and to my limited knowledge the snake charmer is still at-large.

3. Gary Loved the Weather Woman

Don't be such an animal, said Marjorie
when she realized Gary intended to take
the guacamole with him as a parting gesture.
She asked him to leave and never show
his face again on account of his ongoing obsession
with the News Channel 25 weather girl.
The night before they hosted Marjorie's sister
Deanna and her husband Bo for dinner and board games.
Marjorie made about a gallon of spicy guacamole.
Well, Gary ruined the whole night when the weather
girl came on and he said shh shh everybody shutup and
fell into a trance while watching the television.
Marjorie had been on edge for a while now
because she busted Gary printing photos of the girl.
Prior to the weather gig this hussy had been a swimsuit
model or at least had a few photos leaked online.
Gary claimed the computer went berserk and disobeyed him
because he meant to print some important business reports.
So when she discovered that Gary recorded the weather
Marjorie said that's enough you pervert get out.
Gary said it's inevitable that it would come to this
and without a word took that gallon of guacamole
from the fridge and the printed photos of the weather girl
and there he went.

4. Pickle Juice in Summertime

The smell of pickle juice reminds me of July,
summer camp, Apaches and Comanches,
a swimming pool diving competition, college girls
in one-piece bathing suits called camp counselors,
receiving my activity schedule heavy on horses, water,
and weapons – trail riding, archery, skeet shooting,
canoeing, bobber fishing, water basketball –
Mom and Dad’s suburban peeling out of a dirt parking lot,
over-excited greeters, a campfire story about a blind
bandit who hid his gold and followed the Colorado River
back to civilization, raiding the chow hall for cookies at midnight,
barfing after eating too many cookies, receiving
a single letter from home when some of the wimps
got two or three per day and boohooed about being homesick,
Lee, Jake, Brian, Brady, Jad, Rustin, Matt, Clay,
a counselor sitting down with me at night and asking a long
list of questions like was I enjoying my time and had I
taken a dump, my brother Matt being named Comanche Chief,
the amphitheater where the band played Christian songs,
pizza day, the bobber pulled underwater by a great catfish,
some guy whose job was to squirt pickle juice
into the ears of everyone who exited the swimming pool.

5. *An Invitation to Gulpaboth*

Don't tell Vance aliens don't exist
because he's seen one face to face,
albeit by accident in the summer of 1989.
The event occurred at 3 o'clock in the morning
outside the Mitchell Manufacturing plant.
Vance took a nap behind some empty boxes
and his buddy didn't wake him up as promised
and so the cleaning crew locked him inside.
Panicked, he finally found an unlocked window
leading to the truck yard, where, under moonlight,
standing all alone, was a four-foot green woman.
Vance says that's the night he was reborn
in a way that only evangelical Christians understand.
At first he thought she was a newly planted cactus,
but on approach the alien lady turned and asked
if he would like to take a trip to Planet Gulpaboth.
Vance fled in terror and stayed that night in a hotel
in case the aliens wanted to follow him home
or had put a tracker on him while napping.
Lying in bed with hot whiskey breath he fantasized
about the little woman and the way she said *Gul-pa-both*.
To this day he hasn't forgiven himself
for saying no.

6. *Lazarus 2050*

The flyer read “Join the future governor’s inner circle.

No pay and must be expected to live at least 30 years.”

JB pulled a flyer because of his great ambitions, and so dialed the telephone number and on the other end a message said this is Lazarus, and I’m no longer in the air conditioning business so please find another provider in the area.

JB referenced the flyer and got a call back at once from Lazarus who asked if he’d like to be a part of the future governor’s circle.

JB said indeed he would be interested and had plenty of time for campaigning, be it on weekdays or weekends or even nights.

This duo spent the better part of the afternoon talking and once Lazarus trusted JB he unleashed the campaign slogan that he believed would resonate in the hearts of all Texans:

I’VE HAD JUST ABOUT ENOUGH!

Lazarus planned to list all of the items he’d had enough of and try to strike a heavy chord with unhappy citizens.

I’ve had just about enough of taxes! or whatever else.

JB got fired up over the potential and asked when the election would be held, and Lazarus said not for thirty years amigo, because you and me are playing the long game.

7. *Dustups*

To kick off the Friday evening ritual Marv dipped
his fingers in a bowl of white vinegar and rubbed it
through his chest hair then circled the rims of his nostrils.
That stinging smell woke him up alright
and after a long day of towing parking violators
he needed a boost if he was to hit the town.
Marv stood before the bathroom mirror
stark naked smelling of vinegar and daydreamed
about confrontations with strangers he'd meet in the bar.
Some guys liked meeting women
but Marv liked hunting for dustups with strangers.
For instance, he'd spill a drink down a man's back
and claim he'd been bumped by *that over guy there!*,
fleeing the scene once the real events were discovered.
He'd fall into a pool player during a game-winning shot.
Sometimes he'd trip onto a woman in front of her date
or maybe pull the fire alarm before the band's encore song.
On the best nights someone would threaten to punch
his lights out, and very rarely did anyone follow through,
although he was once hospitalized by a karate master.
More than one bar put him on the blacklist –
don't let that maniac who smells like vinegar in here!
From far off you could hear his tow truck rattling
and then you'd see the painted blue flames
and Marv grinning through the windshield.

8. We Sure Missed Don

Don quit the football team during two-a-days
because he never saw eye to eye with discipline.
Sometimes coaches pick a kid they're going to hate
and Don was everyone's unanimous choice.
A young man will only endure so much before he tips over
the water jugs and threatens to strangle the coach.
That's a shame too because Don was aggressive as hell
and would tackle a rhinoceros if you put an opposing jersey on it.
A year and half later he took his revenge on the program
by streaking naked across the field as they announced
the homecoming queen, all those girls lined up right there,
all those girls standing next to their dads in suits.
He made it from one endzone to the next in ten seconds flat
and leapt over a waist-high chain-link fence without slowing down,
displaying the kind of raw athleticism we had been missing.

9. Open Road Volleyballs

The newspaper made a big deal out of it but all he did was a kiss a girl on the lips, which has been done all throughout history by men older than him and younger than her, although you'd never know it by the way the columnists savaged him as a dangerous pervert.

Hell, in the old days an 18-year-old may have 2-3 kids and already be on her second or third husband.

A YouTube star called him for comment and Ozzie figured that's it, I'm packing up the van with my volleyballs and hitting the open road where no one can find me.

His sand volleyball training empire began by a stroke of luck almost twenty years prior, when he found out the girl he brought home from the bar was a former Olympic alternate.

Over time, as Ozzie built his brand, this alternate turned into a gold medalist, and he turned into her beloved coach, and their one-night stand turned into a storied romance.

Anyways he signed up high school girls as his primary clients – they always came to the training sessions wearing bikinis – and every few years one of the older ones made a proposition.

As he barreled down the interstate at 80mph thinking of all that had gone wrong in his life, a deer ran across the road and Ozzie swerved like hell, cutting through the median.

Somehow the back doors of the van popped open, and out went the volleyballs.

10. Mermaid

Through the blinds he saw the boyfriend's pickup truck
back away and turn up the road towards the highway.
Flynn hustled through his RV and towards the fridge
taking out a six pack of tallboys, then whipped off his shirt
to showcase the fake tattoo of a mermaid he applied that evening.
If not for his fear of catching hepatitis from a tattoo needle,
(his cousin contracted it from a parlor in New Orleans)
he'd have already gotten the real thing, being he loved redheads
and so why wouldn't you want a redhead on you all the time?
He opened the door and looked both ways through the RV Park
to make sure no one was looking and then knocked on the camper
closest to his, where a redhead wearing short cotton shorts
and a tank top opened the door and said while lighting a smoke
"Can I help you?" and Flynn held up the six pack of tallboys
and said these are about to go bad and I'd hate to drink them
all alone and figured I'd ask if you wanted to help me.
She said I'm Barbara and I'm thirsty.
But the second Flynn swaggered into that trailer a pit bull
ran out from underneath the bed and lurched at his neck
while Barbara screamed no Beanie no he's not a stranger!,
and all Flynn could think as he clawed at the dog and struggled
for air was yes I am.

11. Chubby's Tall Tales

Chubby fought in Vietnam and broke an enemy soldier's neck with his bare hands in the jungle during a rainstorm.

At least that's the story he shares with curious nephews when they gather the courage to ask about the war.

According to Chubby, he and 'Charlie' ran smooth into one another at a dead sprint, each of them out of ammo and charged up on hallucinogenic drugs that provided fortitude and stamina in a war where no one knew up from down.

They battled in the mud and eventually Chubby got the upper hand and choked 'Charlie' to death, blood filling his eyes.

'Charlie' provided some last words that Chubby said were magical, and that he must carry them to the grave to protect the fate of Earth, and it was these words that led him to reject the offering of a bronze star of courage, he even skipped the ceremony.

This story provided a good deal of prestige for Chubby until one of the nephews got suspicious and interviewed a few guys in Chubby's unit for a school project who were happy to correct the record and said all Chubby did for three years was wash bed sheets and complain about missing his mother, that he was a real head-case.

12. Mission Man Dan

If you put diced cactus into a white man's food an explanation will be required which frustrates Dan to no end and actually inspires him to take more culinary risks, all at the expense of the high school students who visit his campground in Mission and stay in bunk beds while serving the nearby Mexicans with Bible schools and church-painting projects.

Dan likes to spread culture especially to those who don't know how much they want it.

In between meals he gives tours of the nearby grapefruit orchard and teaches fellow gringos about the history of such a lowly yet resilient fruit - say *la toronja, gringo*.

The group thins out pretty quickly as the guys and girls sneak off to get better acquainted in the privacy of the orchards before the next voyage and worship tunes, etc.

Dan has a file of all the complaints he has received about the food and he says you can shove it up your rear end, because he's going to keep putting hot sauce on fruit and sneaking cabrito into the mashed potatoes until the day someone pries the spatula from his cold, dead hands.

13. *Buster's Floating Gas Station*

The lake rose all spring with record rainfall and the county had no choice but to close down public boat ramps. None felt the effects of the shutdown more than Buster, who operates a floating gas station on the north end. He kept the business going with loyal patronage from the families who dock their boats in the marina. The slowdown gave him time to earn an online degree in psychology without missing a single episode of *Jeopardy!* When questioned about the lake he said the business wouldn't be setting any world records but could keep the lights on. In July a group of teenagers asked if he could break a \$100 and Buster made the mistake of saying hell yes I have a bunch of cash that I've been meaning to deposit. They came back that night and raided the joint not expecting to find Buster sleeping on his cot with a shotgun across his chest. He racked that shotgun and said, "Think twice, kiddos."

14. Billy Busts a Stripper

No one told Billy he could be a Texas Ranger
but at the same time no one said he couldn't be.
He found a lookalike uniform on the internet
and a case of blank cartridges for his 9mm.
What he never anticipated was witnessing a crime
in progress at the local sex shop store while
searching for a pair of authentic metal handcuffs.
A chubby stripper snuck a feathered thong
inside her jacket and Billy spied her clear as day.
He tailed her to the car and just as she unlocked
the door he hollered "Freeze hussy!"
Seeing his Texas Ranger uniform and the drawn 9mm
she begged forgiveness and tossed the feathered
underwear into Billy's waiting hand.
That was just the surge of power he needed
to send him over the top.

15. Naked Newspaper

Barry finally called the police after suffering three months of the same heinous offense, when Mr. Mike Anderson on 1932 Blue Angel Lane ran out of his front door butt naked demanding the newspaper *at once* or else he would go rage crazy. The first time it happened Barry slowed down in the cul-de-sac and reached for a newspaper in the passenger seat when just like that he looked up and Mike stood in front of the car, dangling around and hollering for the newspaper to be delivered "*at once!*". Barry dropped it on the pavement and sped away, determined to find a new job by the end of the week. He failed to land a new job and kept on throwing newspapers, braving the cul-de-sac on Blue Angel Lane, knowing full well he might be assaulted by nude Mike charging out the front door. Barry changed his schedule to throw Mike off his scent but no, Mike stayed naked all day long staring out the window in wait. As soon as he saw the Taurus round the bend, he made for the door and came out hooting and hollering and waving his arms in rage. Barry once made the mistake of hitting Mike in the face with the paper, and Mike said tomorrow morning when you come I'll cook you. Barry took the threat seriously and instead of the Taurus the next morning Mike saw a pair of police cruisers coming for him. He bolted up the street butt naked and eventually they captured him. This is all to say that police have one tough job.

16. *Rev. Starmichael Changes Policies*

The most notable change to come out of the annual meeting for Reverend Starmichael's Traveling Town-to-Town Healing-X-Stravaganza was that the afflicted ones chosen from the audience should no longer touch the part of their body that needed to be healed while screaming *Heal!* In Killeen a man came on stage and Starmichael said touch the spot and cry out to God, *Heal!* This fella grabbed his crouch and hollered *Heal pecker! Heal pecker! Oh, God, heal pecker!* Reverend Starmichael rushed to shut him down and in the process touched the wounded pecker. This accident would be the first stone in a mountain of allegations to come against Starmichael, who went on to be accused of every form of assault. Other than that, the annual meeting went well.

17. Rodeo Arenas and Strip Malls

Someone has to make a case for the preservation of the arena
and popular opinion says it should be Tim since he's got nothing to lose.
A few developers want to put up a strip mall on the land
and say it's going to make a big impact on the local economy,
so arguing on behalf of a once-a-year rodeo bonanza is tough sledding.
But you can't pay Tim to give a hoot and his conscience is paper-thin.
His mentality has always been self-preservation at all costs,
and if the rodeo dried up he would too because that's what keeps him going.
If someone dug closer to the truth they'd find he couldn't care less about riding bulls
and hasn't since the summer of 1996 when he was almost gored to death.
The once-a-year bonanza draws people from all over the county
including his wife and daughter who are barrel racers but won't speak to him.
At least he gets to watch them ride and if someone wants to build a strip mall
they had better be prepared to die over it.

18. *Building an Alien Library*

The neighbors gathered in front of Vance's house and watched as one book after another came flying out of the windows and landed in the front yard. Mrs. Hughes said she'd volunteer to check on him and so rang the doorbell and carefully approached Vance in his whitey-tighties rushing through the hallway with a stack of books reaching to the tip of his nose. An avid reader, Vance broke stereotypes of factory workers, but now he was extracting these volumes from his home. After his encounter with the alien he had determined that earthly knowledge was an outright waste of time, and any efforts spent advancing medicine and science would be futile since we could go right to the finish line by understanding the *essence* of alien technology. Ever since his encounter with the four-foot alien woman in the truckyard of Mitchell Manufacturing, Vince purged everything from his life that did not lead him closer to understanding our neighbors from the sixth dimension. He found a few authors on Amazon - unrecognized by Harper, Brown, Scholastic, Penguin, Hachette, and other suppressors of truth - and needed precious shelf space for his incoming order. "Are you having a book sale?" Mrs. Hughes asked, hoping. "I'm making room for books about aliens," Vance replied, and then hurled the stack of books out the window.

19. International Steakhouse

A strange sight indeed is thirty-five Japanese tourists stopped on a winter afternoon, descending upon the salad bar buffet at the establishment known as the International Steakhouse with the paved parking lot on the north side of Sonora along I-10. Early on in the history of the restaurant people made cruel jokes about including 'International' in the title of the place and said the only internationals would be Mexicans illegals who would never ever pay \$12 for a steak and shrimp combo. The restaurateur ignored the naysayers and followed his dreams. Maybe the Japanese were headed out to California to see the sights coming by way of New Orleans but who could say? He spied on the Japanese through the doorway leading to the kitchen and asked Charline to take them a few orders of free mozzarella sticks. The whole reason he got into the international restaurant business was for exciting moments like this one which he could share with his children for years and years to come during the holidays. Mustering the same courage he used in naming the restaurant, he gathered all the Japanese together for a photograph with himself in the center and to this day you'd see it in the entrance of the restaurant if it was still open.

20. *Marlboro Jacket*

For years everyone warned Carlton that smoking would kill him,
and for years he said I don't care if it does so leave me alone.
At least part of the reason he kept on smoking after the cancer
diagnosis is because he was *this* close to trading in his carton coupons
for a red leather Marlboro jacket that would drive his step-daughter crazy.
He planned to wear the jacket to Christmas dinner and stuff his cracked
face with turkey and gravy and make her look at that jacket and know
once and for all that he could not be controlled by a non-GMO fitness Nazi.
He stacked the cartons up in the hallway and one night woke up
to take a leak and tripped, tumbling to the floor and breaking his neck,
dying in a freak accident that validated everything she'd warned him about.
At Christmas instead of him wearing the jacket they decided
everyone could finally laugh about the irony that cigarettes killed him.

21. *Mixed Drinks*

Lincoln didn't take the job for the free drinks
but quickly found out that could be a benefit
as long as he was careful not to be seen by his jerkoff manager
named Todd who liked to make examples of people.
Being just 20 years old, buying booze was hit or miss
but now as the busboy he had as much as he could handle
so long as he didn't mind sharing other people's germs.
Here's what he did: when a table stood up and someone
left a little of their drink behind - be it a beer or margarita
or whatever else - he would pour the leftover into a thermos
and then take it home and shake it up with Sprite and Red Bull.
Halfway through that thermos he would be drunk as a skunk
and looking for a fight, but the main concern was hangovers.
Still, Lincoln could take that thermos to a party and girls
might say what are you drinking, to which he'd reply
oh just a mixed drink I whipped up.
They'd drink it too, sometimes.

22. *Crowds and Gatherings*

Nothing good comes as a result of people gathering together, which is the time-tested philosophy Randy built his life around. Working in the service station at the entrance to Big Bend National Park can be a steady career for a man with that kind of temperament because he sees maybe ten or twelve people every day during the slow season. Once the clock strikes noon he has been given permission to drink beer from an unmarked cup so long as he doesn't get depressed or foulmouthed. The television hasn't worked for six months but all the better for Randy because he doesn't have to endure the news of gatherings gone wrong. Sunday morning church services, riots in the streets, parades, public school, companies with more than five employees – all an equal risk in Randy's opinion. When I stopped in for a jug of water Randy was three paragraphs deep into the front-page story of the newspaper about riots in Baltimore. It was a perfect case study for his philosophy and indeed proved the merit of his ideas that the more people in a room the higher likelihood of bad behavior. The violence and buildings engulfed in flames could have easily been avoided if people would mind their damn business and tend land in the wilderness. He told me I could have the paper for free because he couldn't stand the sight of those headlines one second longer or he'd barf on the counter. I guess you can be all the way right and still be all the way unhappy.

23. Longhorn Riding Alliance

Beyond Clifton on the right-hand side heading southbound is the paved road leading to the homestead of the late Annais Cooper, a longhorn enthusiast and the originator of the Longhorn Riding Alliance. His tragic death had nothing to do with the beasts and everything to do with a drunk driver in the winter of 1981. The longhorns were purchased from a cowboy in Waco who saw no use for them, but Annais was a man of vision. The first time he saddled a longhorn it didn't go anywhere, but the second time he was vaulted into the ride of his life. He invited his friends over and they took turns drinking yellowbellies and riding Fred, the great-grandfather of the longhorns who now populate the field on the west side of the homestead. One of the early club members adopted a portion of the highway hoping the organization might finally gain some national credibility. Some people still drive out there to look but mostly they see the highway sign and shake their heads and say people are crazy.

24. *Yoyo Team*

Our elementary school probably got the short end of the stick when it came to funding in our district.

On very rare occasions, maybe once per year, they sent out entertainers for the school assemblies held in the gymnasium where 99% of the time we climbed ropes and jumped ropes and did other rope activities.

We suffered through a Cherokee storyteller who mostly tried to sell us the book of short fables he printed up at Kinko's, and after him came a lady who played patriotic trumpet solos.

Other events included a sock hop exclusive to fourth graders and the annual fall festival where the big draw for families was Principal James in the dunking booth followed by the cakewalk.

But the one time they hit an entertainment homerun was with the husband and wife yoyo team who mystified and bewildered all of us with their high-energy comedy and aerobics performance.

Like the Cherokee they mostly wanted to sell yoyos.

The husband promised we could do all of the same tricks from the show if we bought their VHS tape collection of yoyo secrets and tips.

Years later I spoke at a school assembly for the exact same elementary school and that goes to show how dim my future felt at the time.

25. A Sheep's Lament

The puppet show received terrible reviews on Yelp but Lonnie couldn't figure out how to take them down, even after following instructions he found on the internet. The one-star reviews could easily be explained because those moms were real downers with unreasonable expectations. When you hire a local puppeteer you better understand that he's an artist at heart, and he'll continue to be an artist whether hired for a children's birthday party or not. Currently, the storyline of his show was centered around a sheep who contracted an embarrassing disease and was expelled from the flock, ultimately leading him to consider ending it all. Lost for solutions Lonnie created dozens of email addresses and signed up for Yelp accounts to offset the bad reviews. One of the moms caught on and identified all of the fake accounts, saying in all of her years she'd never believe a puppeteer would go to such insane lengths. Then again, she didn't consider he was a professional puppeteer.

26. Jim Goes Off the Rails

Twice a month his route demands him to travel
right through the heart of Perla's neighborhood
where he assumes she still lives with the man who ruined
a marriage that lasted sixteen years and produced four kids.
As a train conductor, Jim spends most of the year on the rails
and like a bad movie he busted her in bed with a ponytailed man
who works as a night-shift clerk at the closest gas station.
To make things worse Jim caught them in an exotic position.
The train route puts him in her neighborhood around four
in the morning and he holds the horn down like a maniac,
waking everyone and their dog for a twenty-block radius as he
drinks powerful energy drinks and bangs his head to Metallica
and hollers curse words and bad luck charms out the window.
Company metrics identified a distinct pattern to the complaints
they have been receiving twice a month so Jim had to explain.
After a talk about all he had endured
his supervisor agreed to look the other way
and so that horn keeps on blowing.

27. Billy Unholsters His Weapon

At the dry cleaners Sue Anne asked if Billy was a Texas Ranger and without thinking he said of course, I have a uniform. He spilled a carton of French fries and ketchup on the uniform and this poor girl was left to deal with her imagination that tough Billy killed a criminal and needed a quick wash. A few days later Sue Anne checked the tag of the uniform and saw that it was made by Zippy's Costumes and Party Supplies. When Billy came in she tried to set a trap and asked him to explain where he was trained, how long he'd been on the force, what kinds of laws the Texas Rangers enforced, and if Billy had ever shot a bad guy with the gun on his hip. Billy turned red and said she had no right to know the answers, and if she kept on pestering him he'd consider gunning her down. Sue Anne called Billy an outright imposter and threatened to telephone the real police, and Billy unholstered his 9mm and fired two blanks at her chest, and Sue Anne crumpled like a sack of potatoes. Billy grabbed his Zippy Costume off the counter and there he went.

28. *Marv Tails an Author*

Banned from the bookstore, Marv waited in the parking lot for the author to come out of the signing so he could tail him. While waiting Marv opened his container of vinegar and dipped his fingers and then gently rubbed the rims of his nostrils. He had the newspaper clipping that read LOCAL AUTHOR HOLDS BOOK SIGNING TONIGHT. FREE ADMISSION! The article also included an author photo so Marv could spot him. Sure enough at 9pm the guy came out and got into a Civic and Marv followed along in his tow truck all the way to Applebee's. He let the author go inside and after a few minutes followed, finding the guy sitting at the bar by himself having a beer. Marv sat next to him and said are you the writer Thomas Toole? Flattered, TT said yes I am are you one of my fans? Marv said oh no, not me, I just came across your photo in the newspaper, but I did sit down and read a few of your *little* stories. He snuck the word in there to discredit Thomas's work, then Marv excused himself to go and use the bathroom, where he applied another shot of vinegar to his hair and nose. On return he said yeah, your little stories almost entertained me, and the good thing is they don't take much thought to understand. Marv made slight jab after slight jab and finally paid for Thomas's beers and climbed into the tow truck and went home, feeling just right.

29. *Antiki Heaven*

A real risk for rich and retired men is that their wives propose opening an antique store on Main Street.

It's a guaranteed loser no matter how happy people seem when browsing the cluttered aisles while licking ice cream cones.

My friend Bernie knew all about the inherent risks and denied his wife when she told him a space had opened up for lease.

He told her the reason the space opened up is because the previous tenant went bankrupt selling the same items she wished to sell.

Bernie's wife argued by showing photographs of her catalog – cute sayings on wooden boards, expensive scuffed up furniture, candles, gift books, spice packets, and one line of boutique fashion blouses.

Bernie said that's the same junk in every store on Main Street, and after the newness wears off we'll be fools, Mary, fools!

She fled the conversation in tears and Bernie went to the golf course.

That night at dinner she presented the lease agreement fully filled-out with the lone exception being his signature and date.

She was going to name the place Antiki Heaven and serve wine in Hawaiian tiki cups that could be recycled upon exiting.

He signed the papers and turned on the television.

30. The Wrong Suspect

The AC fan belt broke and woke Flynn from a dream about mermaids taking turns breathing into his mouth. As he came to, he realized it being July he had a problem. Flynn stripped down naked and stuck to the bedsheets. Now ticked off and still in a dreamlike condition he went outside, climbed up the side of his RV, and laid on the roof where the summer breeze cooled him off and returned him to sleep. About 9AM he awoke naked on the roof since his alarm clock was still inside, and to make matters worse the park manager was strolling around to make sure everyone was safe, being that there had been reports of a pervert in the area who whipped open unlocked doors and flashed his weenie. Flynn waited until the guy had his back turned and jumped off the roof, but the thud made the manager look his way and so Flynn bolted into the woods naked and they hunted him until nightfall.

31. *The Undertaker's Letter*

"If ever there existed a thankless job it is being a funeral director in this godforsaken town where everyone is about to die."

That's the line he used to start the letter to his sister who was living high on the hog in the Westlake Hills of Austin with her cheeseball husband and their fat kids and Corgi dogs. He once saw a photo of those dogs riding in a stroller with matching collars.

"Beautiful women always have a chance for their lives to be flipped for the better but ugly men have to seize the world like savages."

Another line, and this one he was really proud of.

They started under the same roof and carried the same genes but she was swooped up by a divorcee with a yacht and a housekeeper, while he succeeded their father in the family business of undertaking. Just recently he met a single woman at the Founder's Day Parade and saw the way her eyes shifted when he revealed his grim occupation. She agreed to coffee that afternoon but didn't show up and the number she gave him belonged to someone else who'd never heard of her.

"That's why some people go crazy and kill everyone," he wrote,

"because there's no place to dump the rage and it swallows you alive."

Luckily they opened an MMA gym down the street and he signed up for a yearlong membership with plans to compete against real opponents.

32. Slow Me Down Because Here I Go

I'm just about sick of the perverts and politically correct grandstanders and the guys who can't bench press a kitty cat and the dopes who think we should ravage nature with a hardy-har-har we're the kings of creation! and all the combover lawyers, the defeated deacons, the social media giants, the brand ambassadors, influencers, the career complainers and the bozos who go from one steak dinner to the next selling selling selling all the products they don't even care about because if only they could hit that bonus boy they'd be on an airplane to Maui! Jamaica! Miami! Vegas! LA! Buenos Aires! Not too far! I've had about all I can handle of the iPhone zombies and doctors pushing pills on people who just need vitamins. Don't you dare get me going on restauranteurs with low standards or bullies or line cutters or hotshots. You better reevaluate, amigo, because death is knocking on the door and before too long he's going to let himself in.

33. *Ed's 90th Birthday Party*

Ed Streetman invited me to his 90th birthday party held across the street and hosted by four generations of family members who flew in from all over the nation. As you might expect his mind was going to applesauce and for the past couple weeks he'd been coming outside in his underwear at dawn and applauding the birds roosted in the big oak tree in my yard. They flew off in terror and he went back inside. We developed a lifelong bond when I noticed his yard needed mowing and the regular crew of dope-smoking high school kids never showed up. I mowed the grass myself and he gave me and my wife a gift certificate to Manuelo's, a Mexican joint that closed down a few years prior because of health code infractions. At the party making small talk with his great-granddaughter the underwear model I told her she came by the trade honestly and explained Ed clapping at the birds every single morning wearing nothing but his whiteys. She took offense and said 'all-timers' was no joke and I took offense because the disease is called Alzheimer's. She stormed off and called me a bigot, of all things. Ed saw the interchange and grabbed my wrist, saying he never trusted car mechanics and this broad was no different.

34. Ozzie Bribes the Groundskeeper

In the breezeway Ozzie squirted ketchup and mustard on a hot dog given to him for free by the kids running the concession stand at the volleyball tournament because they figured he was a homeless fan in need. They weren't all the way wrong because Ozzie lived in his blue and white 1988 Chevy Beauville conversion van. Not long ago he rented an apartment before the (unproven) allegations forced him to pack up and hit the highway. 597 miles in the rearview mirror was a father who promised he'd strangle Ozzie to death and sink his body in the lake. Anyways, he heard about the local tournament on the radio and figured he'd try to get back on his feet with new clients. Already he had located a park with a volleyball court, and he gave the groundskeeper a sack of dope to make sure no one else could reserve the court on weekdays from 5-6. As the girls came out of the tournament with their parents Ozzie passed them flyers advertising his private coaching, labeling himself a former trainer of an Olympic gold medalist. A few parents asked a questions, but not one of them tipped him off to the glob of mustard on his chin.

35. JB Scares Off a Potential Voter

Among the campaign signs at the corner of Valley Mills and Waco Drive was the hand-painted cork board which read:
LAZARUS 2050 - IVE HAD JUST ABOUT ENOUGH!!!!!!!
BET YOU HAVE TOO! REMEMBER TO VOTE LAZARUS 2050!!!
Further still and hiding in the bushes was JB in camouflage, sent by Lazarus to do campaign research on opponents. Lazarus wished to know every detail, including but not limited to the cutting of a driver's eyes, any hint of road rage, the honk of a horn, traffic violations, odd looks between drivers of varying races and ethnicities and sexual orientations - all details that could be helpful in a few decades when Lazarus unveiled his campaign platform and made the final push for Governor. A woman passing on the sidewalk with a stroller paused to read the sign about Lazarus and then spotted JB in the bushes. She ran like hell, and JB made a note.

36. Propane Love Triangle

With Dallas over forty-five miles away it took some real courage to call the company Dallas Gas and Propane Specialists. The building is now vacant with a For Sale or Lease sign stuck in the overgrown grass closest to the highway. The realtor has had a few serious inquiries but the conversation stops when she has to reveal the reason the company went out of business. Less than a hundred yards away is the high school cafeteria where the owner set up a booth on career day and hired a summer receptionist. She was thin and pretty and he started to fall in love with her. Unfortunately the competition for her affection grew fierce by the end of July. A propane salesman closer to her age also fell in love and even took her on a date to see a private fireworks show at the Lake Buchanan marina. The owner found out because his wife mentioned she saw something on Facebook and so he called the girl's dad who coached at the school. Her dad showed up to the office with a baseball bat and things got heated and he hit the propane salesman in the face and killed him in front of everybody. The receptionist girl still hasn't returned to school and her teachers all suspect she's going to move to the city a year before all the other kids do. Anyhow the realtor not only has to reveal the murder but also that more than one person has reported seeing the ghost of the propane salesman.

37. *Zander DiZon, Sommelier*

A prophet is never accepted in his hometown, something Zander had been repeating on the flight from New York City back to his family home in Mansfield, where everyone would call him by his given name: Zane. He was convinced that renaming himself Zander DiZon helped reinforce his brand as one of the finest sommeliers in the nation, and perhaps, if one certain blog could be trusted, in all the *world*.

Zander's father Zane the First had just retired after fifty years of service to the United Credit Union and damn if they weren't throwing him a black-tie party as a sendoff. Zane the First pleaded for his Master Sommelier son to come home with his special sword and slice the top off the first bottle of champagne that would be served to guests. Zander agreed, and debated whether or not he should call back and demand they pay him a fee out of respect to his status. In the end he figured his accountant could declare it a write-off. At 7 sharp, Zander DiZon stepped forth and withdrew his blade raising it high in the air as the crowd awed his showmanship. "Tonight is all about you, Dad," Zander declared, and swiped that sword towards the top of the bottle, taking off his thumb in the process. That thumb rolled across the floor and came to a stop at Zane the First's feet.

38. Showtime Club

From the front porch of our house you could see the twinkling lights of the Showtime Stripper Club off La Salle Avenue.

Rumors abounded about the strippers inside missing limbs or 8 months pregnant or who took off their clothes and turned out to be men doing the ole tuckaroo.

Every town has a joint like this from what I understand but faceless perverts keep them in business year after year.

The strangest people on earth walked the streets in front of our house in route to and from the club and some of them were truly dangerous.

Once at 3AM our doorbell rang and we found a couple of gals in the yard gathering and huffing down old smoked cigarettes.

The girl at the door was probably a beauty queen in high school but methamphetamines can wreak havoc on a fair complexion.

She wanted a ride to the grocery store where a friend of theirs was going to pick them up and take them to Disney World in Florida, she said, her eyes red with blood and smoke.

My liberal friend herded up the strippers and put them in his Suzuki and they asked if he was the President of the United States.

Finding someone to blame for brokenhearted strippers in bad neighborhoods is a tough task because you probably have to go back a long way.

39. *Vance Is Alone*

The more Vance learned about aliens from Gulpaboth,
the more he talked about aliens from Gulpaboth.

The more he talked about aliens from Gulpaboth,
the less anyone wanted to be around him.

But the more alone that Vance became,
the more time he had to learn
about aliens from Gulpaboth.

40. Barista of The Year

She clenched his hand beneath the dinner table
indicating that the time had come to share the news
that he had been named Barista Of The Year,
and was under serious consideration for night manager.
Dad sat at the head of the table gnawing on a ribeye steak,
Mom was frustrated by a ding in the China, and Ray sighed
because he was under stress due to a case going to court.
“I’ve been named Barista Of The Year at work,” declared Lewis.
Dad dropped the steak and wiped his hands directly
onto the white tablecloth, so Mom said For God’s Sakes Tom!
Dad said Lewis should repeat himself but this time louder.
“I’ve been named Barista Of The Year at work,” said Lewis.
Dad made him say it one more time, but this time louder.
“Did I pay two hundred grand for you to get a Barista degree,
or am I misremembering something?” Dad asked. “Hmm,
maybe I’m finally going crazy honey buns but I remember
paying two hundred grand for Lewis to get a marketing degree
and make something out of his life so he could prove us wrong.”
Under the table, she squeezed his hand again, and Lewis said,
“I’m also under consideration for night manager.”

41. Thanksgiving Traffic

His busiest night of the year is the Wednesday before Thanksgiving because all the drivers traveling down the interstate are backed up in traffic and search their telephones for alternate routes, which happens to lead them past his church. Multiple magazines and other credible publications have listed it as one of the most beautiful examples of stained glass in the entire state, but unfortunately being listed in famous magazines or on the internet doesn't translate to local attendance or generosity to the tithing box. During that season the sun sets early so he doesn't have time to go home and plans for a long workday, even bringing his dinner in a cooler. From the roof he can see the long lines of cars going north and south and boy his heart races at the possibilities! Once the sun is down and the world goes dark he flips on all the lights so the drivers will see the great panels of stained glass on the two-story church, a terrifying but impressive depiction of Jesus denying the devil during his 40-day stint in the wilderness. Last year he asked the secretary to stay and help manage the crowds but only one couple stopped because their kid peed his pants. The rush ends around 10PM and the headlights start to spread out between the places where they're going and where they're coming from. No one stopped but maybe they will next year.

42. *General Store*

On weekdays they don't serve up a full menu,
just ham sandwiches and microwaved pizza pockets.
The official town population is seven but that number is outdated
and has probably doubled and possibly tripled since 2012.
There's no joy whatsoever in selling a ham sandwich with Kraft cheese
to someone you have known since the day you were born.
According to the owner of the General Store the weekends are wild
and people come from all over to eat barbecue and drink cold Lone Star.
The only indication this is true is that a dozen white plastic chairs
are scattered next to a barbecue pit and a few stacks of split mesquite wood.
He also sells camouflaged Lone Star merchandise inside the store
but most of the hats are covered in dust and the shirts are still in plastic wrap.
If you were to pass through on a weekday I'd bet my life savings
all you would see is the owner sitting with his four friends
on the front porch and drinking Old Crow whiskey from paper cups.
One of the friends has a dog named Trevor Brazille after the famous
rodeo cowboy, and this dog can climb trees faster than a squirrel.
He'll scream out *Squirrel!* and the dog goes insane barking
and goes vertical up the trunk of whichever tree is closest.
Maybe the big successful barbecue weekends are a lie
but I've seen that dog climb twenty feet high with my own eyes.

43. *FlynnMakesRain*

Short on cash Flynn decided to start an investment firm.

He held a meeting at the pavilion near the RV Park where he explained his vision for investing in the stock market and also how everyone could ensure they wouldn't lose a penny they invested with him.

Flynn came to this idea all by himself: he'd invest money from people, and then keep signing people up to invest and then pay the people who already invested with that money.

He announced that it didn't matter whether the stocks did well or not, because the sooner you invested and the more you put in the more you could guarantee you'd make.

All he asked in return is that no one send his name to the FBI and he would be able to take the first ten percent, just like God takes the first ten percent of fruits in the scriptures.

The whole key was to get your family and friends signed up, too.

Flynn got himself a username on eTrade - FlynnMakesRain and went to work buying and selling stocks from his RV.

Most of the day was spent reading about companies and projecting on how important they might be tomorrow, not today.

He bet the house on an upstart cell phone manufacturer and by day's end the money was gone and so was he.

44. Sweet Potatoes

Turner got himself tangled up with gun running and steroids and was on the verge of death by overdose when he decided to move into a state park without telling anyone in his family about it.

He lived in a cave for six months of pious Bible-reading before the rangers captured him and took him back to the city with a few trumped-up felonies and misdemeanors about unlawful use of state land, as if that was real.

Old habits die hard and the drug cycle continued until recently he escaped to some family land where he lives in a cabin that has no electricity or cable television or anything at all, really.

He works for his room by burning trash and clearing out the old barn and killing snakes and rats so they can build a new house for the family to enjoy during the holiday season.

Turner eats nothing but boiled sweet potatoes in his cabin and it turns out this is the addiction that may actually kill him.

45. Delante's Business Cards

Rudy has seen nearly every type of business you can imagine ever since he was promoted to the Officer of Business Cards at the Fed Ex Kinko shop on Valley Mills Drive.

His crowning achievement came when he impressed the owner of a Chili's franchise so much that the man sent a handwritten thank you card and a ten-dollar gift certificate to his establishment.

Rudy wrote him back and they became pen pals for almost a year.

A week ago the police came in and spread a few cards on the desk that read 'Delante's Intense and Erotic Massage Therapy'.

Rudy recalled that Delante said erotic massage was studied at Harvard.

The police asked why on earth he printed up the cards, and detailed how Delante had been going around town and drumming up business.

Apparently Delante hovered around beauty shops and pestered people coming and going to pay him seventy-five dollars an hour.

Rudy felt betrayed.

For the first time,

he questioned his future.

46. *The Arsonist Strikes Again*

Eight houses and a few buildings have gone down in flames but still the arsonist is at large and a real threat to strike again because the papers are turning him into a legend. The motivations remain unclear but no one asked me, because I know the motivation is that sometimes people like to burn things down and some people are outright crazy. That answer won't satisfy the Waco Fire Department (an organization I'll never forgive due to their strict adherence to jurisdiction as my house burned to the ground and we lost all of our family photos, keepsakes, baseball card collections, and much more) and they've hired a few cutthroat detectives from Oklahoma City to find the guy but apparently he's unpredictable, a real ghost. The first fire was supposedly spread by a raccoon whose tail caught fire and then ran into a dried-up cornfield and *voom*. At the recent fire they found a soda bottle cap but anyone who thinks that's a legitimate clue doesn't understand the arsonist. With Christmas around the corner the fear is that he'll hit a church to make a big political statement but like I said I think we're dealing with a guy who just likes burning things down. We have to accept that some people are crazy and don't need explaining.

47. Jerky Paradise

If not for the perverts Jerky Paradise might
have been a dream come true.

Rodney always dreamed of selling dehydrated meats –
elk, deer, beef, antelope, giraffe, you name it.

For the better part of a decade he made inroads
with ultra-exclusive jerky makers and livestock ranchers
with the ultimate goal of opening the world's finest
consumer jerky destination and experience.

Only Dallas could be prepared for such a business,
with the hunters and millionaires and experimental family men.

Rodney bought ten acres and named the shop Jerky Paradise.

You wouldn't believe the pony-tailed curios who showed up.

Not one of them wanted a thirty-dollar bag of horse jerky.

48. You Have to Watch The Puppet Wedding!

With the Royal Wedding madness at its height, Lonnie made a few puppets that resembled the prince and the duchess and reenacted the entire wedding from beginning to end, filming the ceremony on a video camera borrowed from his next-door neighbor. His plan was to start a YouTube channel with a big hit, and what could be bigger than puppets playing out every single detail of the Royal Wedding? He returned the camera to the neighbor – Gladys – and made a trip to the grocery store for a celebratory meal of pork chops and honeydew melon. He came home and checked his feed only to see the headline: You Have To Watch The Puppet Wedding! Lonnie clicked the link and sure enough Gladys had posted the video since he didn't clear the card on her camera, and now the video had gone viral. Lonnie made a telephone call seeking the hosts of Good Morning America so they could rectify the situation, but no one ever called him back. Gladys never answered her door and moved within a month.

49. Ellis Eats Free Pudding

For a free chocolate pudding some visitors to La Playa restaurant will lie about their birthday.

Ellis Campbell is the greatest of the offenders.

Some of the servers give him a pass because he's in his 80s and told the hostess he'd been diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

But Carlos watched the old man slurp his chocolate pudding one too many times and they almost came to blows.

If it was just pudding no one would mind – it comes from a can – but the servers also have to stop what they're doing and deliver the pudding with a custom song that requires vigorous clapping.

One night Carlos slipped him a note that read if you keep this up I'm going to break your hip, you old thief.

Ellis started ordering multiple dishes, spending hundreds of bucks a month and demanding Carlos serve him just so he could forget to leave a tip.

50. Scout Master Thornton

He feared the sleepless nights might continue indefinitely, and each time Scout Master Thornton awoke in a cold sweat discussing dead beavers his wife consoled him and went for warm buttermilk. The terrors began almost immediately after the incident, when Scout Master Thornton took 12 scouts for an overnight camping badge challenge. Well, a rabid beaver snuck into camp and bit Ashton, taking a chunk of the boy's hand back to the forest. Scout Master Thornton hurled a stone at the beaver, and the other 11 scouts followed his lead. They pursued the beaver all the way to the river but the rabid creature never made it that far and died a death by repeated blunt force trauma at the hands of the boys who celebrated and took iPhone photos. Scout Master Thornton skipped the badge ceremony and is very seriously considering donating his life savings to a beaver conservation group he plans to start.

51. Fighting by The Lake

\$18 bought him a prank caller's board from Texas Pawn Limited, and the cashier felt sorry for all the people Marv might harass. You could hook this prank board up to a landline and then hit buttons that made the person on the other end of the line hear a catalogue of farts, quotes from famous movies, and other absurdities. Marv roared home in his tow truck with blue flames and first thing's first rubbed white vinegar on his nose. He sat before the phone book picking names at random, but half the people he called didn't answer on account of the unknown number. That's when he remembered some yahoo named Lazarus who was going around saying he would be governor of Texas in 2050, so Marv dialed him up. "I'd like to make a contribution (fart), if only (fart), you would admit (fart), that you're a huge dipshit." Lazarus got hot and said he would be sending a guy JB to punch him in the balls, and Marv said let's fight by the lake. Neither JB or Marv showed up.

52. *Lazarus.biz*

Governor Michaels traveled about the state holding town halls on what might be done to address all the different crises at the border. Lazarus and JB figured this classified as must-attend, and they dipped into the 2050 campaign account to pay for gas, Burger King, and collared shirts. With a seat on the front row, Lazarus waited until Gov. Michaels was five minutes into the speech when he hollered, "I've had just about enough!" JB stood up in the back and clapped, waving his arms, and said, "Let's listen closely to this patriot!" Lazarus fled from the coming security guards and relayed to the crowd that he was running for Governor in 2050 and wanted to count on their votes, and contributions could be made to Lazarus.biz for all the patriots who had had enough.

53. Rooster Cream

At American Tavern north of town they sell something called Rooster Cream in a black, unmarked jug next to a framed and signed photograph of Tila Tequila. The bottle costs \$800 so no one knows what it is. Keep in mind this is the kind of bar where girls sit down at the bar alone and drink a 24oz. Budweiser in the middle of the afternoon. Ambitious lovers walk through the doors with all but a warranty that they can convince someone to tangle up. A product labeled Rooster Cream in a bar seething with such erotic energy is provocative indeed, especially considering all the colored bras hanging from the exposed rafters. In this same bar a man going by the name John Cobra slinks in on Thursday afternoons to hustle people at 8 ball. The barmaid Carly lets him get away with it because they signed a contract to split the winnings 70/30. Last week a European traveler walked in barefoot and sat cross-legged on a stool at the center of the bar sipping vermouth. Transfixed by the Rooster Cream, he offered the \$800 in cash pulled out of a secret pouch in the waistband of his underwear. The European sniffed the opening of the bottle then hailed a cab and no one ever had the opportunity to ask him what it was.

54. Business in Boquillas

The most trusting businessmen I've ever encountered cross the border from Boquillas and enter Big Bend to sell their trinkets made of colorful bent metal as well as carved walking sticks to appeal to American hikers. Rather than manning a post they leave everything on the ground next to a cardboard sign with the price written in black marker and hardly legible to the untrained eye. A big seller must be metal scorpions because those are more expensive than all the other metal bugs and critters. Along with the merchandise and price board is a plastic bucket where customers are supposed to leave their money, and at the end of the day the businessmen cross back over and check the buckets to see their daily haul. Once me and my friend Nate met a few of these Mexicans along the path and like a bad cliché their pants were wet to the knee from walking across the Rio Grande. Nate tried to be friendly and casually asked about local wildlife but these international businessmen were in a hurry to collect the money buckets and hustle back to Boquillas before dark.

55. *Expired*

He forgot to clean out the van before volunteering to take the entire team to the volleyball tournament in Austin. Halfway there while fumbling with his Jimmy Buffet Famous Hits cassette tape, Ozzie glanced in the rearview mirror and saw the girls in the last row of the van looking down giggling. Being seventeen years old this could mean almost anything at all but then Ozzie recalled all of the items that could be found in his van: back issues of *Razzle Dazzle*, marijuana paraphernalia, rubbers, failed crossword puzzles, Happy Meal sacks, used Band-aids, and most worrisome, articles about his indiscretions in Amarillo. Ozzie flushed and announced abruptly that they better stop and take a whiz or dump before running into traffic on I35. The van stormed into an abandoned parking lot by a vacant store, and he instructed the girls to go around back and do their business. They protested, but the second they disappeared around the corner Ozzie launched himself into the back seat and to his horror saw a prescription pill bottle filled to the brim with expired Viagra. Could he continue to coach, with his virility in question?

56. Wayne Invites Me Over

One of my elementary school friends named Wayne called while we were opening presents on Christmas morning to see if I wanted to come over to his house for the first time and watch him take down his stocking and eat candy.

My mom couldn't believe something like that could happen but then again when you grow up going to a country elementary school anything can happen and the friends you make have a spectrum of values that can season a man for the rest of his life.

Eventually my mom did take me over to Wayne's house which was a mobile home down a long dirt road and his shirtless dad met us on the porch drinking straight out of a Crown Royal bottle and trying to find cigarettes where his shirt pocket was supposed to be.

The place was a rat's nest but Wayne took me back to the bedroom and showed me some pistols he'd inherited from his grandmother who died of lung cancer.

After seeing the place my mom sat in the driveway for half an hour then said a family emergency came up and I needed to leave. She let me stay awhile because she knew without friends like Wayne I wouldn't have any friends.

57. Road Rage

Friday a car darted into the lane without a blinker and Delwyn laid the horn on thick then trailed the offender for at least twenty-five miles.

He figured driving a prison van might cause fear in the offender but Delwyn carried no prisoners on this day since it was Friday and he had taken the vehicle for its 3-month oil change.

Delwyn had been driving prisoners around for nearly five years and they got a big kick out of his rantings and ravings on the road when offenders sped past or cut him off or he looked down and busted them texting.

Sometimes Delwyn could be egged on to roll his window down and curse the offender's out – something the prisoners cherished that made him a beloved figure and source of free entertainment.

The car finally pulled into a gas station and Delwyn crept past at a snail's pace until he met the lady's eyes, and then he burned rubber in the opposite direction he needed to go.

58. Puzzle Pieces

If he discovered the puzzle piece in Merna's purse
he planned to telephone the police without delay.
Mother told Perry that he ought to go back to the basement
and quit accusing her Bible study friends of sabotaging
the puzzles he covered with white sheets to protect while absent.
The puzzle in question – a 5,000 piecer of the Millennium Falcon –
was missing a single piece in order to be finished and framed.
Perry tore the basement apart and faked a sick call
to work saying he came down with a nasty strain of flu.
It wasn't anywhere to be found, not anywhere, Mother!
She hosted ladies for tea and discussion on Tuesdays
and once, peeking through the basement door, he made eyes
with Merna who smirked and continued sipping her tea.
Ever since the piece went missing Perry suspected
she snuck down into the basement while he was at work
and stole a piece, then all the ladies laughed at his expense.
Every single one of them knew what she had done.
Perry heard the old hens cackling again and he emerged
from the basement swinging a broom with Merna in his sights.

59. Online Chat Lawyer

Billy called ahead to the gun range and requested they put up targets resembling real human beings. He wanted to test his mettle for a real-life showdown. Just recently Billy acquired his CHL which meant he could legally carry and draw his silver widow-maker without any fear of legal repercussions or lawsuits. At least, that's the way Billy interpreted the laws. Billy hired a lawyer on the internet to chat with him for \$50 an hour, and this lawyer warned Billy to play safe and not be sorry, and don't go around drawing pistols unless your life or the lives of others are directly threatened. Billy said yes, and also to prevent crimes from happening, and the chat lawyer switched to all caps saying NO BILLY. The range manager apologized on Billy's arrival and said they had a policy not to let customers shoot human-shaped targets. Billy took the news in silence, but under the counter his hand twitched for cold steel.

60. Palm Trees Off 317

Up on the hill off 317 is the house Carlton the postman refers to as the 'drug lord's mansion' though the evidence he's collected to support this theory is thin and controversial among his coworkers. In fact, the Postmaster told him to back off or else he would be reassigned, so Carlton moved all the evidence into his own personal garage at the risk of his wife leaving him over the loss of her parking space. Mostly the evidence boxes consist of photographs of the palm trees that stick out like sore thumbs next to the mesquites and oak breeds. But a few smoking guns exist among the innocent photographs, most notably the sealed packages from Mexico that come in bulk when the homeowners return for a few weeks at a time during the spring. One of the packages felt heavy as stacks of cash and one had the faintest hint of white powder that Carlton sent away to a lab to be tested. The results were negative but then again everyone can be bought off. Most of the year the place is empty and the mail is reduced to advertisements, which gives Carlton time to sleuth around and take photos of the trees. What kind of legitimate Texan goes out of his way to build a stucco mansion surrounded by red cloth cabana roofs, a sex pool, and thirty different palm trees? Several phone calls have been placed to the FBI but no one seems to care about the legwork he has been doing to bust this cartel cat from Guadalajara. Only once did he see the lady and she was walking topless from the cabana to the pool and waved to him with slender fingers and slipped into the water. He snapped a quick photo and it's there hiding in the garage boxes with everything else.

61. *Investigating a Break-In*

Someone broke into Lonnie's outdoor puppet shed but didn't steal anything, a very curious fact that Lonnie detailed at length with the police when they suggested the thief didn't know what was inside the shed and when he realized it was filled with handmade puppets either didn't want them or feared the owner to be a madman. Lonnie confided to the lead investigator that his collection had been valued by an impartial analyst at three figures. This so-called investigator said that detail reinforced their theory on multiple levels, and Lonnie should simply buy a new lock. Lonnie took offense and thought if even the police, even *they* lack respect for puppeteers, then there's no way in hell his art form could resurrect society as a whole, a society, by the way, that needed resurrecting. And if his daring work couldn't create widespread change, then what the hell was he doing with his life?

62. Jerry and His Canoe Dealings

He first acquired the 25 canoes in a trade involving 18-foot trailers and a trained miniature donkey named Colonel Jasper Poole. Losing the donkey almost broke his heart but he knew the beast had lymphoma and probably wouldn't survive another winter. Since then Jerry has raised a family on the canoe rental business which was a lifelong dream after growing up along the Brazos River. Better yet, canoes don't rent out for six months out of the year and he can spend his free time as a coveted donkey trainer. Spring Break marks the beginning of the busy season for rentals and Jerry loads up groups in his minivan and takes them to the dropoff point and warns everyone about dangerous turns on the river, all while fielding telephone calls about disobedient donkeys. Between the canoes and the animal training the sky is the limit.

63. The Revolution

Tell me,
what happens
when all these men
have had enough?