

Take a whiff of that one
broski...Silent but deadly!
That's right! Payback stinks.

Nice one! Is that Hamburger
Helper with a hint of
dingleberry? Well Done!

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE MIDDLE/LEFT

THOMAS E. BJELLAND

OBSER- VATIONS

from the
Middle/
LEFT

BY THOMAS E. BJELLAND

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OBSERVATIONS FROM THE MIDDLE/LEFT
BY THOMAS E. BJELLAND

RECOLLECTIONS and RUMINATIONS of a
CALIFORNIA SUBURBAN YOUTH and MIDDLE AGE

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intro

INTRO

You might notice the book you are holding is (extra quality!) paperback. Replete with photos, illustrations (for your added viewing pleasure) and evidence; anecdotal and otherwise, of the joys and possible afflictions of the family dynamics of one boomer-generation American family. It is not published in hardcover as a symbolic gesture to signify to any MATH is REALITY hardcores that it is satirical in nature and not to be taken too seriously—except perhaps for those who have suffered thine slings and arrows upon thine souls and/or conscience. Please use your imagination if necessary to get beyond all doubts that the events described within may or may not be fictitious, rhetorical, ironic, sarcastic, anecdote, or wholly accurate; but honest and generally in the ball park for a middle son’s recollections after decades of self-medicated (and fun!) Marijuana use (and don’t forget the boozin’—thanks Dad!). In some way it is a love letter from a middle son’s viewpoint to the halcyon days of growing up in post-hippy Southern California suburbia—I was still a boy when all that was going on, but there were plenty of good vibes still in the air—for those who sniffed them out when I came of age. If you are still with me after this first paragraph, hang in there and prudes beware, there may be salty language and opinions are rendered.

It’s a few days into 2018 California and Marijuana is FINALLY! legal here as I write to you from the townhouse owned by Mom (who’s currently eighty-seven and a Cuckoo’s Nest bird—she’s still got it boys—look out!—and I hope you’ll enjoy/share the pain of her peculiarities in chapter 2—love you Chirp!) in my hometown of Long Beach (why I’m here you might share a cringe in chapter 3—hey, it was good for awhile!). Kudos California voters! For any folks not familiar with pot or those who imbibe in “the gateway/evil weed” please take a trip to a dispensary and you will encounter every type of person; young, old,

professional and otherwise. You will see folks who look just like your neighbors, friends and acquaintances from all walks of life. Cannabinoid receptors are located in the body that accept pot as an anti-cancerous, healing agent. There are no receptors in the brain stem (like alcohol and opioids) so it is impossible to overdose and never has Marijuana caused cancer. I can fully understand that some folks can never change their mind about medical or recreational use period—whether through stubbornness or ignorance. That’s OK, but we all know that prohibition never has or ever will work. Could we then just get together and look at the benefits of reducing the importation and gang violence across the entire USA and focus on the millions of dollars in taxes California will reward itself with for voting for the future in this first year? Surely that’s enough to warm any Republican’s heart? If that’s still too much for some to consider (again, I can understand—but sadly disagree)—I’ll quote the words of LB friend from the baseball days Mike June (RIP “*the June Bug*”) “Fuck ‘em if they can’t take a joke!”

Amen brother.

Thomas E Bjelland 1/5/18

Look. Smile big and make it look like we like each other or its smuggy murphels and piggle-wiggles for you.

Again? Geez. You're gonna dick with me our entire lives. ain't ya?

Hell yes! I'll never change...

Crap. How about a couple noogies and a charley horse to boot then?

No problemo.

[PART 1]

**I'M OK
TO BE
THE
A'HOLE**

love, oldest

THE Ranch



The local favorite. Made from hand-picked wild Oregon blackberries. Sweet!

THE RANCH

Dad eased the big blue Buick off the two-lane highway onto a gravel-covered dirt road. The gravel crunched beneath the tires, a faint trail of dust floated up behind the car. The warm dry air carried the scent of dried grass. On the drive up to Oregon from Southern California we stopped for lunch at rest stops along the way, carved out of the endless sea of green Spruce. Dad prepared sandwiches directly on the warm hood of the car: cold cuts, cheese, Dijon mustard. A beer or two for him, us boys—my two brothers and I, drank cokes and snacked on beef jerky. Eric, youngest brother with the age apt sweet tooth, gave Dad inspiration for a classic family line in the rest stop bathroom while he stood drinking Orange Crush as he peed in the urinal. Dad chuckled “going in one end—coming out the other!” We stayed in motels over-night on the two-day trip. Of course it had to have a pool for us boys to swim in, and an ice machine for Dad to cool down the rest of the sixer. Any negotiations with motel managers were smoothed over when Dad pulled a couple bottles of Bjelland Vineyards from the trunk. Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Johannisberg Riesling, Gewürztraminer and the local favorite—sweet as heck—Wild Oregon Blackberry.

We drove down the dirt road past a century old barn, sparse young vineyards and the small house that Dad built himself with the help of local friends. No need for blueprints, (permits?) pour foundation, two-by-four framework left bare on the inside bedrooms (for shelving!), a pot belly stove in the small “living room” for winter heating. We crossed a dry creek bed on a small bridge formed by packing earth around large diameter corrugated metal pipes. Dad stopped the car noticing something down in the creek bed. He got out, opened the trunk and pulled out a 22 rifle. We piled out. He aimed down into the creek bed and fired. The rattlesnake’s head jerked backward, a



President and founding member of the OWGA. Sounds pretty high falutin'... Now, did I put that sixer in the fridge?

Lets see. Did I give Tommy four or five charlies?

Sharpenin' my pencils. You're next E!

Goin' in one end, comin' out the other! That's right!

direct hit. He retrieved the reptile, cut off it's head and buried it—for the safety of other Ranch animals—so they wouldn't eat it and bite into a fang full of poison—the headless body still writhing in the dirt, a gentle death rattle. I've had plenty of snake dreams over the years since, fortunately subsiding over time, but the occasional serpent still visits.

So began the first memory of many summer visits spent at "The Ranch." Mom and Dad were divorced when we were young—Eric an infant still. Dad moved up to Oregon, a country atmosphere more befitting his Erskine Minnesota upbringing. They had both moved to California upon graduating from college and Dad's short military stint as many other young adults did then to start careers and found teaching and education jobs readily available in the burst of growth on the west coast where if you had any professional skills, you could find employment.

Back then—the late sixties to mid-seventies, video games, computers, ubiquitous electronica designed to ward of the desperation of free time with nothing to do of today's youth—not even on the radar yet. We were three boys with no sisters for any softening levity. We ate Hamburger Helper, toaster oven snacks and drank endless gallons of milk at home in our pleasant middle class SoCal suburban track neighborhood in Long Beach, a burgeoning aviation industry bolstered development second only in size in the U.S. to neighboring Lakewood at the time. Our pleasant tract neighborhood had Jacaranda, Evergreen Pear or Carolina Cherry trees, one per parkway. Three bedrooms, two baths, hardwood floors, the one story floor plan repeating every four or five houses along the street. New for twenty-five grand, now worth half a million, even fifteen miles inland from the coast. California real estate is the single best investment you could ever want. Period. We played on Little League teams at nearby El Dorado Park, whiffle ball in the front yard, customized bikes or made up other games for entertainment to pass the long melancholic days of youth. Mom remar

Dad and his sons. Tim, Tom and Eric Circa 74? Dad was instrumental in the founding of The OWGA - Oregon Wine Growers Association and was one of many feathers in his cap as an organizational administrator and salesman.

Precious and few (on second thought – let's stay together!) are the moments we two can share...



Dad pours the juice. As the winery days were before my time as adult conniesuer, (thank God he's tipping a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon—in my book there's that ethereal Red and then every other variety—if you want to even consider Whites! Yuck!—and at just the moment of one of my favorite sounds too boot—when air fills the neck of a 1.5 mil bottle in those first hi-pitch glugs), I never got to appreciate the State Fair Medallion winning vintages but think they were pretty good. Modest bottlings, too expensive to drink at home in the quantities consumed on the Ranch. He spent decades in those pinstriped overalls, largely commando—swinging free! It was pretty funny to hear him tell how once he had to get a tick removed from under his nut sack, and the time he had to get a muscle-relaxer shot in the arse to offload an entire block of sharp cheddar he consumed in one sitting. Good Stuff!

ried—an awesome step dad Marshall for us. Dad also found a fine companion up north, fellow Tenmile, Roseburg teacher affectionately “Red Snapper”-“Mother Mary.”

Summer trips to the Ranch exposed my brothers and I to a whole new world. Indian Guides, Little League, and Gray-Y back home were now augmented with guns, mini bikes and bow hunting. We shot 22 rifles and 410 shotguns, eradicating the digger squirrel population and anything else that moved in a couple seasons. Exhausting milk carton size BB containers with crank or pump BB guns, tin can target practice—entertainment for the day. Hunting quail, grouse, joking whose buckshot was crunched on when eating the exquisitely cooked game. Dad loved fishing and would pick us up from Mom's house when he came down for his visits that might involve a trip up to Big Bear in the local mountains for the weekend or Idylwild where his brother, Newport Beach principal uncle Earl Bjelland had a cabin. And it would be best to avoid Marshall for his own safety as they naturally had their conflicts. He would trade wine to fisherman friend Frank for fresh caught large-mouth bass from Lake Tahkenitch in Oregon and grill to perfection, or smoke salmon when he could get it. We swam in the pine shaded “swimming hole” on hot afternoons, formed by damming the creek that ran year round through the property; garter snakes skimming across the surface, orange crawdads in the clear cool water, a tasty snack boiled later if you could catch one. Shetland ponies roamed the “back forty” to be called in daily for a dinner of oats, “Come horse, come horse, come horse!” while Peacocks cried their song for help. New were the endless chores of country life; feeding cows, goats, roosters, chickens and collecting their eggs. Thrills could be found; one day I took the mini bike on an Uncle Toads Wild Ride when I careened down the steeper than I thought dirt “back road” frantically digging in my tennis shoes in a desperate attempt to slow down, barely hugging the lip at every corner and astonished to find myself in one piece at

the bottom. Fresh picked corn from the big garden, grilled with butter and salt. Dad contentedly pulling huge bunches of garlic fresh from the earth in the small garden off the screened porch; enjoying the simple pleasure in life of sorting out which delicious meal he would incorporate them into.

One lunch in particular stands out, Dad grilling an olive oil slathered steak on a small hibachi out front of the house overlooking the vineyards and mountains that bordered and were included in the two hundred acre property. The beef had been raised on the Ranch, butchered and frozen for winter stores, smoke rising from the grill into the pristine cerulean sky. Dad looked out across the property at his years of labor (later his trade off for a somewhat lonely end game—sans sons for company), vineyards, winery, rickety PVC plastic water system that always needed mending and exclaimed, “It doesn’t get any better!” For him—true. For me, I’ll never eat a finer steak in any five-star restaurant. Dad even gave a shot at opening a hoity-toity “French” restaurant (despite never going there or having formal training—but legit, where bro Eric mentioned having his penultimate steak one day) on the coast in Bandon to serve the seasonal tourists, but *Château Splendide* didn’t catch on. I always thought he could’ve just made the stuff he made at home like BBQ chicken and handmade cornmeal tacos along with his delicious steaks and regular folks would have loved it. Our classic dessert; large bar Hershey’s roughly broken in pieces, divvied out with Planters dry roasted peanuts. Sweet and salty (don’t even try to pass off-brand store-label nuts and waxy volume chocolate!) Jeez—missed the whole point!

During one of those summers at The Ranch came about the scariest day of my life. I seem to recall that younger brother Eric was not there that year for some reason, two-year older brother Tim and I were in our middle teens. All brothers growing up have their fights. There were more kids in Tim’s grade in our neighborhood—enough to have opposing Gray-Y teams,

BJELLAND VINEYARDS
ROUTE 4, BOX 931
ROSEBURG, OREGON 97470

No. **365-40** Date **8-23** 19**76**

Name **Tim Bjelland, Tom, Paul Eric**

Address **Long Beach, Cal.**

SOLD BY	CASH	C. O. D.	CHARGE	ON ACCT.	MOSE REID.	PAID OUT
QUAN.	DESCRIPTION				PRICE	AMOUNT
1	Shares in					
2	Bjelland Vineyards					
3	Tim					113 -
4	Tom					195 -
5	Paul					69 -
6	Paul Eric Bjelland					
7	Tom Bjelland					
8						
9	<i>Red Bjelland</i> Chairman - Board of Directors					
10						
11						
12						

Customer's Order No. _____ Rec'd By _____

KEEP THIS SLIP FOR REFERENCE
5H 527 Rediform

Dad’s receipt #365-40 for shares owned in “The Ranch” determined by how many letters were written by his sons the rest of the year between summer visits (no email back then!) Clearly I’m in the lead as confirmed by mine and Eric’s signatures. My favorite part is Dad’s title below his autograph—Chairman—Board of Directors of exactly two members—he and Red Snapper (love you Mary!). Classic! I never did cash in those shares! Mom changed Eric’s name to Eric Jon after she decided the given name Paul Eric was a bit much. It probably had to sting Dad (although having heard Mom say Tim’s empathy deficiency is “The same as his father’s!” he maybe was un-fazed?) some when Eric named his first born Marshall out of love for our stepdad after his mesothelioma diagnosis and not any spite for Dad while he was still around.

including next door neighbor Greg Thomson, (who would later become a great surfing buddy for me) but was on the Braves rather than Tim's Colts. I was on the Jets with school friends from my grade and had only Darrel Fong around the block—whose parents were young Americans of Chinese heritage who were not so far removed as to include and enjoy authentic foods, etc. in their house. Looking back, that exposure—little as it was—gave me one of my first experiences of being interested in and accepting of other cultures all through my life later. My favorite snack they shared was Le Hing Mui—sweet, salty dried plums you'd never find in Quigley's at the nearby plaza stores. My oldest friend Scott McIntosh lived three blocks down on Ostrom Avenue, far enough that he wasn't in range for hanging out in the early days. One of the main themes that always seemed to be included to some degree whenever Tim and any other friend got together was: "Let's fuck with Tommy." I can clearly hear to this day family friend's older brother Bob Hesson when he was with Tim at their house and I was in younger brother Randy's adjoining bedroom "Tommy and Randy are such pussies"—for no frickin' reason!

Tim was a tough customer, his first-born overbearing competitive nature was then and continues to be the main driver in his life, including the time he needed to physically wrestle and win a fight with our step-dad Marshall in the back porch next to the washer/dryer/outside freezer area as a senior at Millikan High. He and his friends took it pretty far—with seemingly never a break—grinding me to outrage like the time I got the long curved-blade "genie" knife out of the kitchen drawer and chased him and family friend Stevie Strong over the brick wall that separated the Thomson's backyard from ours. I pursued them through the yard, around the lemon tree and caught Stevie before he could get out the wooden gate on the other side. What was I going to do—stab him? Jeez! I, in turn, worked four-year younger brother Eric. My particular twist of the



Yours truly, aka "mot" standing tall outside the (fairly creepy inside) 100 year old barn up near the house as a young man with unfettered idealism and the world at my feet. I used to lay on my back as a young boy and draw pictures on the underside of the coffee table, signing my name backwards, mot.



A little one-armed swagger from "Big E" with a couple bottles of BJVIN champagne and a fresh cast from laying his Kawasaki 750 down going around that bitchen curve one time to many. Thank god he had his brain bucket on! Eric still loves the occasional RPM thrill on the Holton, Kansas backroads.

knife was being a lifelong artist I added illustrations to the evil notes & stuff I teased him with for an extra emotional jab. Wish I could see those now! (I saved some of my son Sean's drawings which he did of me when he had to take sides in my own painful divorce, but that is a whole 'nother story for a different time—chapter 3!). I can honestly say that my tortures to Eric (and I hopefully estimate they were less than half of what I got if that's any solace—sorry E!) were a direct progression of the family dynamic of people repeating what they knew as normal experience growing up and it's not nearly as much in my nature although we all know, no one is ever innocent of all malice.

That summer day at the Ranch, I can't recall what the situation was (did it ever vary much?) that had me frothed up to a point of rage. Tim was walking down towards the winery after once again needing to dominate me, and I was up by the house with a .22 rifle in my hands. I knew I could hit him in the shoulder—not kill him—but finally show the bastard what's what. Slightly elevated on the driveway near the house, about seventy-five yards, I knew I had the shot just as I had previously squeezed off the single shot right between the eyes of a vineyard marauding deer during a night-time hunt the previous summer. The deer's eyes were frozen and glowing in the spotlight that mother Mary held on it. I sighted the scope, pulled the trigger—lights-out! Dad took it out on the back road (off season?) hung it from a tree, and cleaned it for the delicious foods it would provide, including my all-time favorite Ranch snack that he made—oak wood smoked venison jerky. I remember thinking if I did just graze him, then what? I was in a precarious psychological state that thankfully I have never had to return to since that moment. A fucking lifetime of being badgered. What ever it was of free will power that caused me not to do it came from a place so deep down I never want to go anywhere near again. Although I have had many a close call when challenging myself in big surf—that is an entirely different exercise in fear. To think

back of that situation is undoubtedly the single most intense and scariest thing I have ever experienced.

Later days there were of course continued tussles. One time when he was a senior at Millikan and I was a sophomore, I was pissed at Tim for something/everything and put the front hose with sprinkler attachment inside his Vdub Bug parked in the front driveway, but he caught me before I could turn it on. His retaliation the next day (still pissed and needing to always win) was to find my bike in the school parking lot and loosen the front wheel fork nuts so I would eat it on the way home, but I detected the wobbly ride starting out and avoided any serious injury of going over the handlebars. Why did he have to go to that extent of physical harm? It was good when he finally went to UCLA on a baseball scholarship and I could finish out high school in relative peace dealing with the ubiquitous social pressures of adolescence, although I'm not sure of Eric's view of that time or what he ever did to exercise any hurts from being the youngest with no one else to pass on the grief. One thing I did was to unintentionally destroy the two surfboards Tim had left at home. I rode one until it broke, cut the other down and re-glassed it into a bellyboard. Was it some kind of—at least unknowingly at the time—retaliation? I AM a surfer, there is the world-class surf break Malibu in easy striking range of the UCLA dorms—he ain't no real surfer if he left 'em home anyways. Tim was always the star of baseball teams and leagues growing up, I fully expected to be bringing dates to free box seats to see him play in the big leagues. At Millikan, Coach Artie Boyd came to my P.E. period one day and put me in at third during JV practice to scout if there would be two Bjellands to make a name there, but I was all over the place and I could stick to my surfing and art. When bro suffered the career ending injury in competition for the shortstop position with teammate Mike Gallego turning a double-play as the opposing runner slid in hostile with cleats exposed, Gallego turned out to be the one

[ART/CONTENT TK]

who did make it to the show and he didn't. (His son even plays pro!) One could surmise (having been exposed intimately to his adult behavior in all situations handling the recent family difficulty of Mom's dementia you'll soon hear about) that since he was forced to follow a different path other than star athlete and entertain an albeit very hard-worked successful career in sales; it seems like that all encompassing competitive nature in combination with a life-long chip on the shoulder is going to make everyone Tim encounters in business (and unfortunately otherwise) pay for it! Allegedly!

Some of the competitive nature instilled in this dynamic upbringing has served me well as a surfer; as catching the best waves in good conditions (or on an everyday basis) means years of experience and outmaneuvering everyone else who is trying to do the same thing. Opposite some non-authentic media portrayals—surfers don't hold hands and sing *Kumbaya* while frolicking in the sun. I remember catching a few of the best set waves of one of the biggest swells in a string of good summers; one in particular which was about 50 yards outside and about 25 yards behind the normal outside takeoff zone. This day I had seen a few break way out there, so ventured out to sniff around and found I was the only taker. I caught the behemoth way out there and rode it backside (my back to the wave rather than facing the wave as determined by which foot is forward in stance), and carved it all the way to the inside. Exhilarating! Then I learned I was the session standout as the respected surfer/lifeguard Jeff Kramer who was watching congratulated me when I came in for "Best wave of the season!" at the now world-famous Lowers Trestles spot in San Clemente. I mentioned it to Tim, the feat held no purchase; apparently as it was not something that could be written on a scorecard or officially added up to conclude a "win." It didn't happen in a contest. MATH is REALITY. If it doesn't add-up it is irrelevant!

A fun example of our different point of view came when Tim,

friend Randy Speer and I enjoyed a stay in their family time-share on Maui for a week and the first huge winter swell of the season hit Honolua Bay and was triple-black-diamond. We had rented boards earlier in the week when the surf was small and surfed a few fun days at Hookipa—me on a longboard, so when Tim and I drove to Honolua after Randy returned home early I did not have the correct board to attempt a big surf and no one to paddle out with for camaraderie as I probably would have at least challenged myself to venture out from shore in the relatively safe channel to at least have a look around. I erred on the side of safety and with my tail between my legs, completely dejected, we drove back to Lahaina Harbor to check the surf there. Lahaina is a south facing break and even a small wave on the right swell can be fun as we had gotten one day earlier in the week. But this large swell was north direction and was big enough to have a wrap of energy even come in here, but since it was the wrong direction, the waves were small and without any pep and I had to pass and lick my wounds meandering around Front street and settle for a shave ice and “I’d get ‘em next time.” Tim gave it a go, and when he came in he proudly exclaimed: “Rode 12 waves!” For him, it “added up!”

Brothers can be complete opposites as Tim and I surely are, partly due to my need of pursuit in success in anything different from him and fortunately my interest in art and culture fits the bill. One day my son Sean was reading Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby* for a school assignment and had the book along for a dinner at Tim’s. Tim picked it up and forced himself to read a paragraph and pointed out to me that it was: “Just a bunch of fluff!” Just like all literature. Any fiction worth reading needs to have an established author’s name larger than the title so we know we will be getting the correct formula. The story begins with a somewhat familiar cast of characters—the plot thickens with suspense in the middle and is all solved/tidied up at the end. It has to add up damn it! Allegory, innuendo and rumination be-

yond closing the back cover—ridiculous! *Blazing Saddles* is just weird! When he mentioned that recently after catching part of it on cable as an “adult” it tarnished one of my fondest memories of when we were getting along well, which was mostly the case later as young men. He had just gotten his driver’s license which was a major step towards freedom in those days (I was astonished when Sean took his time to get his permit, etc., in today’s electronically “connected”—the folks will drive me times) and we (two youths, brothers—sans any parental accompaniment!) took Marshall’s grey Thunderbird coupe—the last bastion of his bachelorhood having been divorced before marrying Mom and instantly gaining a family of sons that was perfect for him since he couldn’t have kids and did a great job—to see the film at the Bay theater in Seal Beach. To experience this first ever in-your-face, stereotype satire when there was nothing nearly as “inappropriate” on the big screen previously was awesome. Campfire farts, racial jokes with lead actor Cleavon Little being a brother, the immutable genius Gene Wilder; Harvey Korman and Madeline Kahn supporting—what’s not to like! Mel Brooks, you are OG, *Young Frankenstein* being the second best comedy ever made (Terri Garr—yes, I would certainly like to take a roll-in-zee-hay!). Family Guy (my favorite toon) take a bow—there’s only two camps—people love it or they don’t get it. Just seems to beg the question: intellectually who’s more advanced?

Thankfully there are millions like me who enjoy creativity—something comes from nothing! And there is relief in the notion that the richest woman in the world—JK Rowling—made up a story about kids and wizards and amassed her fortune by people across the globe loving what she created rather than some white collar trading wizard who climbed to the top manipulating numbers or breaking middle-class people’s backs by gentrification in the name of the almighty dollar. Dick! Greed is good. Greed is God, and God is American! Jesus didn’t intend



Bjelland Family, Long Beach, CA 'round about '62 or '63. Youngest E is not in the picture yet, Oldest is already over it! Dad looks irritated and Mom's puttin' on a brave face. I'm oblivious to the possible underlying discord floating about the picture—and the dark image matches the sentiment. Mom was pretty sturdy in a lot of the difficulties she must have faced with three little dudes and the big split. Thank goodness for Marshall joining the family not long after!

for us to be poor! Winners are winners, losers—tough crap! We need both types in the world and there is of course rightfully argument for both, unless you were to ask Tim. Could he possibly conceptualize the thought that if everyone was “just like him” how could he ever make a single deal and climb above the rest of us peons? It's not my job to have friends! When Dad passed away Eric and I were completely exhausted having spent a weekend in Oregon with him to visit Mary & kin and spread Dad's ashes after he first had to be talked into going due to his difficult feeling towards Dad, and then enduring his conclusive “correct and only” way of seeing every idea and situation non-stop for three days. Crikey! In a dose tolerable, beware of anything further.

He one time mentioned at one of the many generous family dinners at their place he doesn't like to brag in front of me about his country club golf victories as if I could really give a crap if you can hit a ball around a lawn filled with holes better than the next upstanding citizen in any fine town like Costa Mesa. Being a youth Little-leaguer, slo-pitch enthusiast and World Series fan (I don't watch until then, and many a Fall I've had the good fortune to catch it on my annual trip to the North Shore where in Hawaii it's three hours later so games start in the early afternoon and you can have a couple beers and still make it through any extra innings. Fun to check in with Tim then too). I can appreciate a good swing and Tim's long drive is indeed a beauty. A line drive that floats higher as it slightly slows the further it goes on it's trajectory before starting descent. Nice! Good on ya, but it ain't the Pro tour, get over it! No risk of life and limb as in surfing. Don't even think he didn't email everyone (replete with photo attachments) to let us know he finally reached the holy grail of a hole-in-one on the local course, and which stores to look for when we drove by on Harbor Blvd., so we could reference which hole the great event took place. Whoop-De-do! What a pissar! It was really fun the



best wave of the day or surf a nice wave in front of your bros, you have to have ego—but the fun is not dependent on any final ranking. And the endorphin high from a successful (safe!) surf session is not to be missed.

Our family dynamic established by “Oldest” is such that no mercy can be shown in any type of friendly competition in order to survive. Don’t even think about letting a kid nephew enjoy a “game” of croquet in the backyard, knock him out on the first available shot! It’s kinda fun still? It was a real bummer to hear nephew Marshall (named after our step-dad) tell me how when he had tried to communicate in addition to his high school football successes, his school-record baseball dinger to Tim, instead of congratulations or bonding, he belittled it.

Such are the tribulations of siblings, and the passing of time can heal if not at least hold a bandage on old wounds. One of

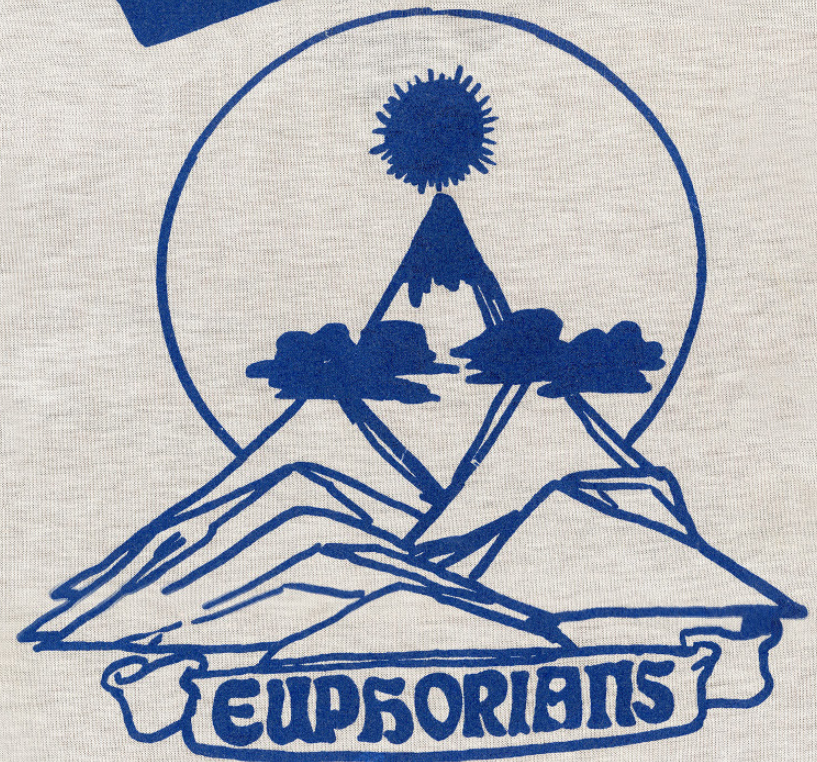
above: Thomas and Timothy (with pistol/holster for fun—he doesn’t really need to be sheriff every day!) Dad’s been fishin’ with his son(s)! right: Eldest hits 5 with Mom’s faithful home-made cake. How about my sexy jumper? Shiny!

one time my brother-in-law Hiromi visited from Tokyo and we all participated in Tim’s passion by playing the *Bjelland Open* as brothers though. I sorted out later why in particular I’m not an enthusiast as it’s a bit too mental of an exercise for eighteen holes. My best hole was the ninth where I teed-up and birdied in an effort to get into the clubhouse for lunch with as little delay as possible. Didn’t even think about it. Bing, bang, boom, lunch! Not that surfing at the highest level does not demand dedication and unwavering confidence, in fact you better be sure you want to catch a big wave or payment will be rendered, (it will be anyways—but best to mitigate if possible) but it’s a different kind of mental intensity, challenging yourself and nature rather than beating “an opponent.” Surf competitions aside (I have never been in one), of course it feels good to catch the



the funnest things I enjoyed during college and beyond for around a decade was playing on a slow-pitch softball team with a bunch of bros from the hood. We were called the Euphorians (of course Tim was the guy on the team who didn't smoke weed as most everyone else did as customary for our generation and hence our name) for our general appreciation of a good buzz! Mom would flip if she knew one of the brothers from a Christ Lutheran Church family where we brothers were all confirmed grew it up North as our general supplier and a Euphy team member kindly distributed it. We drank tap beers and played shuffleboard in the local dive *The Annex* after games. We dressed up in costumes for the game during Halloween week and waxed opponents in comical fashion. One year after a few key bros had moved out of Long Beach, I was actually voted co-MVP the only year we won the league championship (*we did have a ringer named Freddy for that season—Tim hadn't played for a few seasons by then—I can't recall why but possibly had some residual effect on me being able to competitively go to that higher place). I was in the zone for the entire season buoyed by the fact that I loved the guys who were gone from the team. I would walk to the plate and mentally dare the pitcher to put it anywhere near the strike-zone and I would rip a line-drive through his skull or in fair territory. My one technique was to always wait a fraction of a second longer than when the impulse came to swing and hence drive the ball faster than my normal swing would allow, even earning the nickname: "Hammerin' Hank." This one's for Thomson. Gush! This one's for Matt-the-Cat. Gush! This one's for Willy. Gush! I wasn't as dependable as an outfielder but had a good arm if I did have a play to throw to. A few seasons earlier during a game, a long fly sent me running back to retrieve it in right and I ran out of field and hit some sidewalk near the bathrooms, my cleats slipped on the smooth surface sending me flying on my back. Tim immediately sprinted from his pitcher position all the way out to see if it was as bad as it looked and see if I was OK. Fortu

Euphorians



RIP to the AWESOME Mr. JOESPH PLUMMER • "Grandma" ala Halloween FUN

Euphy Blue til' the day I die! Front jersey logo and back print: Jake's Peak (4:20 p.m.)

nately I was fine. I know that he loves me in his way, difficult as he is. A'hole! (Allegedly!)

My last solo trip—during summer of my first year of Junior College at Long Beach City, I visited the Ranch for a three-month stay. I grew a goatee like Dad's, worked in the vineyards and winery, drove the John Deere (sans trucker hat) and participated in most of the endless chores of maintaining the Ranch. I had the luxury of youth to be overtly idealistic—ready to follow whatever path life could reveal—perhaps even a country life. I enjoyed lunchtime wine drunks with local vintner-hippy friends of Dad's who would visit, followed by the obligatory afternoon nap. He thought of himself (and was rightly so when occasion arose) as a high-brow intellectual—with the attendant self-centered ego to be above others—yet it didn't stop him from being good friends with every type of local yokel—which I love about him—but is sorely absent with bro Tim who also shares his elitist compassion deficient tendencies. When they drove off in their VW bus, I envied their simple life of living off the land—country style insulated freedom—hard work and advanced home brewing. Dad was old-school, frowning on any kind of "drug" usage, all the while slowly pickling himself (and indulging in his own first rate cooking) into early/old age diabetes. He told me one day with great relish how he and the boys would sneak out back behind a haystack for a few snorts of whiskey back in their day. So I had to sneak a few puffs of the small amount of herb that I had brought up with me down at the swimming hole. Relaxation and clarity of thought, then I had to stay there for a couple hours until it wore off, lest be detected by Dad when he awoke from his afternoon lunch/wine slumber. This slow pace of life, where the afternoon mail delivery is a big event, later would calm me on restless nights; rumination of the serene but banal, hot, dry Oregon afternoons, a good sleep aid.

Eventually the summer wore on and the end of my stay finally

General Bjelland

B.S. M.A.

An experienced authority, authoritative voice
* OPINIONS RENDERED *

Old Cadillacs, table wine, wine grapes, scotch whiskey, gin, racing forms, wars, Colt 45's, manure, dictatorships, quelling uprisings, stuffing ballot boxes, jamming computers, burying dead horses, floods, snow, skiing, taming tigers, Administering schools (any level), French Restaurants, U.S. Marines, gourmet foods, snails, beer, herbicides, pesticides, washing dishes, big cities, small towns, Champagne, busting dams, cat work, power boats, sommeliers, golf, tennis, basketball, SEX, wild life, Late Wagon, Best Man, Regents, CLC Regents, TALB, CTA, PDK, NEA, OWGA, Greatest of the Grape, viticulture, enology, back aches, BOYS, T.V., speech making, dramatics, Wine Festivals, Norsk, Minnesota, Oregon, California Public Relations, Investments, OLD AGE, Seniors, Religion, Logging, Butchering, smoking, crabbing, clamming.

P.O. Box 747

Roseburg, OR, 97470

Fee \$125 per hr.

plus expenses

Dad's hand-written Opinions Rendered declaration. It did make it into his remembrance brochure. \$125 pr hr. plus expenses—a real pissar! Nice!

approached. I had tried to hitch a ride back with cousin Mer-idee and her husband Paul passing through a few weeks earlier as the boredom was getting the better of me, but they were already packed tight with kid and dog and stuff in their truck. We drove the couple hours in Dad's blue vintage caddy from Roseburg to Medford, I boarded a flight home to Orange County (now John Wayne) airport.

I gathered my duffel bag from the then outdoor baggage claim expecting Mom to pick me up for the short trip home (in those magical cellphone-traffic-less freeway days) up to Long Beach, where my part-time job at Lakewood Nursery and fall semester awaited. Rounding the corner of the terminal building, to my surprise I was greeted not by Mom, but by next-door neighbor, Greg. Not only did he have a big smile, he had my board and wetsuit in the back of his carpet van! After a quick stop at the bank where Greg charmed the cute teller (back to the world of cute girls!—if there ever was a name befitting character Greg-gregarious was it.) We hit the 405 south to Trestles.

In the parking lot, Greg pulled his custom order Bruce Jones—yellow bottom and rails, clear-glassed deck diamondtail singlefin with blue and red chevrons tapering parallel the rails from the nose to mid point, from the van and draped his springsuit over the rail. (We carried boards tail-first in those wide-nose pintail days.) I did likewise, a profound saying for us surf buddies struck true—nothing feels quite like putting your arm around a clean stick or a pretty girl. We headed down the blacktop trail carried along by the scent of sagebrush and eucalyptus, above us an overcast grey sky. Upon reaching the beach, head-high swells peeled right across the low tide Uppers cobblestones, a slight onshore breeze ruffling the ocean surface.

We suited up, and gingerly crossed the barnacle-encrusted rocks, the cool water baptizing my feet; my nostrils filled with saline seaweed aquavescence, no longer a creature confined to

land. As soon as the water was deep enough, I flipped my board over deck-side up and gently pushed off into the inside section. A moderate crowd was out. I caught a few waves, each ride looser than the previous. Soon banks became carves. Climbing, dropping, roller-coaster roundhouse-cutback. I was one with the elements, I was Jonathon Livingston Seagull; I was Wayne Lynch backside, one with the universe; a Surfer—home.

Greg caught a right as I paddled over the wave's shoulder, from behind his patented bank off-the-lip with arms folded framing his head—same as it ever was. It's fun to see someone surf months, years, even decades on and see the same style characteristics pop up. Towards the end of the session, a guy paddled for a wave, missed it. Turned to paddle back out, cursing himself or the other guy who had caught it deeper and rode past him. I looked at the twisted expression on his face, thought to myself "How could anyone possibly be bummed out surfing a good day of a good summer of a good year in the prime of his life?" We say in surfing that the surfer who has the most fun is best. That day confirmed conclusively who I am and would be for the rest of my life. No doubt I was the "best" surfer on earth that afternoon!

I made it back to The Ranch only twice after, a short trip with brother Eric; father, husband, singer, Care Facility Administrator and country hot-roddin', gun-shootin' Kansan (a little like Dad!) and was a fond memory in one regard. Since Dad didn't raise or know us well, he assumed we wouldn't want to get too close to each other and had me bunked out in the delivery van with Eric up in the "apartment" above the winery. It was friggin' freezing in that metal tomb and I joined E upstairs and slept on the floor next to the bed. Next morn Dad was stoked to learn his sons were tight for the most part. Then a final visit with both brothers mentioned earlier; Tim—father, grandpa, husband, golfer, salesman, UCLA shortstop, to spread Dad's ashes there. But I've surfed Trestles many hundred times more...



Are you thinkin' what I'm thinkin'?
Or am I thinkin' what you're thinkin'?
It's pretty fun being two by the way!

ME, myself and I

[So What if I've Got Problems!]



Look. That's my story and I'm stickin' to it... "F"em if they can't take a joke!

ME, MYSELF AND I

I had a pretty-good-luck-run of things my whole life up until 'round middle-age when things went a little South so I can't really complain too much. The stuff you've hopefully enjoyed of brotherly "love" along the way were par for the course. Pardon my expulsion of the personal goings-on from *LE DIVORCE* and all; but at least you know something of how that went down, so here's a fun story of the accumulation of grief from separation and the elimination or misconception of every ideal that I thought existed until that point.

We're at Jackass's house in Naples the first winter after filing documents. I don't feel in anyway celebratory and didn't want to be there in the first place, but Mom had made such a fuss as usual and had invited my cousin Meridee and her hubby Paul, so I couldn't bring myself to tell her No thanks. In Naples, they have a yearly small boat parade for the Holiday season, which, unlike the full-on Newport Bay Lights regatta I've enjoyed once or twice (although it is always too long—get me off this friggin' cruise!) being much smaller is kinda like the Do-Dah Parade in comparison with the New Year's Rose Parade in Pasadena. Mom, by the way, as a tip of the cards to her wacky and grandiose new view of things, had also given me a "permission note" to be in attendance with the house owner's name and address lest anyone try to stop us or question our presence for being in the upscale neighborhood. Koo-koo Marlin! It ain't gated—who the heck is going to ask? Tim and Diane are picking me and Sean up at the house for a carpool so I had lubricated early with a couple glasses of Cab S. The canals are crowded with revelers, I'm continuing with the wine sedative, it's a bit of a let down that the party fare is some kind of strange crockpot concoction with plastic utensils for such a grand event, why not order in something good if it's too much bother to grill or whatever? Mom, by the way, made some great meals in her love

lil' tommy makes his case—or is it baby Winston Churchill?

of hosting get-togethers over the years. Like the spaghetti pie she made for Sean as a personal take-home dish-of-love—and although he is a single child and could not be called selfish—was so good he wouldn't part with even a slice! She was very good at effecting recipes and had a vast collection, but couldn't be called a cook of the manner that has a personal style or comes up with things from culinary leanings out of thin air. Like my friend Kenny, who is already thinking about what next delectable meal he can make from the leftovers while cleaning off the table. We are out on the patio, adjacent the canal, of course I had seen a mixed couple family as referred to earlier which always is a jab, and a few single girls from out of the neighborhood stop and say hello. Something to perk a little interest for me in the otherwise strained affair. Do you have any wine for their thirst-racked souls? Heck yeah, follow me inside. Oops! Opened the bathroom door instead of the door to the hallway/kitchen then on the second try wandered in to find all the bottles gone from the counter and well, see you later. Someone from the family had removed the store—I admit I was already a bit sloppy—but can't a guy have some fun? Some other stuff happened, which I just admitted I don't have full recollection of, but now I'm fed-up with all this crap, this family pressure when it's the last thing I need and didn't ask for. I stand-up on both arms of the flimsy plastic-molded patio chair—the pop-out stackable kind—and reach to my full extension and with one hand, swipe the holiday light bulbs arrayed in a heart that is on the roof (It was Jackass's special yearly display of love, Love, LOVE—except if it involves parting with any cash—ha-ha) and nearly make it back down in the chair, but at the last part tumble and roll safely onto the patio. A surfer knows how to wipe out! Seriously—I stood up on the flimsy arm chairs (at fifty!) and nearly pulled it off! I dust myself off and sit back in the chair in resignation, a neighbor comes over to question me: “Don't you know this is Jack's house, and he's a nice guy, and blah, blah, blah?” And me, as calm as can be, “Sure I know buddy, my

Mom's his girlfriend and the light display is only for people who aren't single!” Love—that is. Happiness. Contentedness. Not for me now, anyways. Not looking good in that regard. Eldest gives me an earful of my inappropriateness on the drive home: Not your house to invite strangers inside—way out of line swiping the lights. Well-no-shit! I didn't want to go, now I feel like crap for a couple days and thanks for the invite Mum! Had to call Jackass and apologize and offer to reposition his display, which thankfully he had already had someone do. All lame—and all me! I did mention to Sean who had witnessed my fine display that if he wanted to be an actor—around that time he had been singing J-Pop and stuff, and had a talent for entertaining like the Johnny Zucko he did eventually star as in his senior year play of *Grease* at Estancia High—“You have to have some life experience if you want to be good.” Kinda spot-on, but not my best example of Father.

One other time was really lame and for exactly the same pressures. Nearly the same. Mum had made a big fuss over Jackass's upcoming birthday celebration, was it 90? The big 9-0? She had planned for months with him, a gondola ride with family members through the canals followed up with dinner at the Mexican chain restaurant Acapulco nearby in Marina Pacifica (I ordered the seafare plate and the tiniest cut of halibut that ever wiggled its tail forlornly nestled-in next to the rice and beans). It happened that the big event was also on the day of Sean's junior-high graduation from Asahi Gakuen—the Saturday's Japanese school he had attended every year since starting in pre-school at Suika Yochen in Torrance. He's bilingual and although American, is Japanese too. He even attended the neighborhood school in Katsuhika-ku, Tokyo on summer visits to (*Obachan's*) grandma's house! Which was special since he could converse with Fumiko (who's English was limited, but also made a great effort sending Mom a hand-written card on birthdays and such—she would look-up phrases and dutifully learn/copy them, bless her heart), they had a great relationship too. By the way,