

CHAPTER ONE

Hitchhiking is a religious experience. It forces you to beg God to help your ass!!! It teaches humility. I first hit the road to heaven, at the age of eleven. Jogging along, a note book by my side. Running late for the school bus one morning, I stuck out a virgin thumb, in a desperate attempt to flag down a ride.

I smile at the driver, while whispering a heartfelt prayer.

An angel named Mrs. Stoddard stopped to pick me up, in her brand new, white Chrysler New Yorker. Instant miracle. Felt like I died and gone to heaven, sitting in a luxurious new car surrounded by fresh white upholstery. Feels like I'm up in the clouds. I made it to the bus stop just in time, I couldn't stop thanking her. I jump out, close the new car door, wave goodbye. The nice lady smiles big and drives away. Wow what an amazing discovery! I love hitchhiking! Praise the Lord, transportation I can afford.

I caught the bus and made it to school, how cool...

From that moment on, I was hooked. I learned a very important lesson on the way to school that day. My first hitchhiking experience is a real spiritual awakening. Hit right between the eyes by the Truth.

Don't be dumb, stick out your thumb.

My first ride. The maiden voyage. Rescued by a maiden. I had it made. My thumb lost its virginity! Another hitchhiker is born! It saves time and leather. I like it, especially when a car stops and I get a ride.

From then on, when walking to the school bus, I hitchhiked as I walked. If I hear a car coming, time to start thumbing. I'd turn around and walk back wards. Offer up a prayer and stick my thumb in the air, smile at the driver. If they pass me by, I'd keep on walking. Hoofing out the private wooded road, a mile or so. Past boat docks and old summer homes along the lake. Marching off to the school bus stop.

It was 1963. My mother Shirley, had sent me to live with my father and his wife, Tim and Mary. They are both excellent professional actors. They moved an hours drive out of New York City, into the hilly countryside of New Jersey. The garden state. Tim and Mary bought a two-story colonial style house, built on a small island, on a nice size lake. Lots of lakes in New Jersey. Just to get my butt to school, poor me, I had to row a little boat to shore. Then walk a long mile to the school bus. No complaints I love it. Nice way to get going, rowing. The lake has two other islands, a house on each one of them. It's beautiful there, a lovely lake surrounded by hills covered with forest. I learned to sail on that lake, and learned to hitchhike, while walking the private road along its side.

Glen Wild Lake they called it. A wonder spot in nature, surrounded by wild life. Dad and I included. Sailing and hitchhiking came naturally to me. I took to the water like a fish and to the road like a dog. Wagging his tail down the trail. A natural born traveler, on the bounce since the word go. In the flow.

I'm a universal hitchhiker, hitchhiking from lifetime to lifetime. In this life I got let off an off ramp named Shirley. In the windy city of Chicago at 4:55 AM, February 23, 1952. All toll, my dear mother Shirlee gave birth to seven children. Fathered by three and a half different men. I'm the second oldest of her seven children. She gave birth to five boys and two girls. My older sister Laurie never met her father. He knocked up my mom, stole her car, a convertible, then drove off to Florida.

Eloping with my dear mothers best friend. That's why mom refers to that one, as "half a man".

I am my father's only child and my mothers one of seven. I tell people God is our father and Shirlee is our mother. Then there is all these Daddy's in the family, all mom's kids have different last names. We are supposed to be half brothers and sisters, though they all look whole to me, especially since we all share the same mother. My father, the Irish American actor from Chicago, has only one child. Me.

Out of seven, I am the only O'Connor. Tim O'Connor is my name. Just like my father and his father before him. A long line of Tim's. I'm the third. Third times the charm. Return to the farm. Farming is Charming. Just like me.

I went to twenty schools in seven states by the time I turned twelve. I became too wild for my mother to handle anymore. Mom had her hands full with the other kids I guess, she sent me to live with Dad and his wife Mary. I really missed mom and my brothers and sisters. It broke my heart to leave them.

My Dad's wife, Mary Foscett the actress, is a regular on a daily TV soap opera called Secret Storm. Mary did the show live for seven years, she's great. My father kept flying out to LA once in an awhile for a couple of weeks at a time. To be a guest star on TV shows made out there. Then one day my Dad got a big break out in Hollywood. He landed a part as a regular, on a new prime time television series. The first night time soap opera. They called it Peyton Place. Suddenly we're moving to Los Angeles. After two fantastic years living on a lake in New Jersey, time to give the dog away and put the house up for sale. I'm going to miss this place, my friends, our dog Step. All my life, I'm always moving.

I'm used to it, I've been on the bounce since the word go.

I bounced into Hollywood in 1964. We moved into a rental house up in the Hollywood hills. Hilarious and precarious, toenails perched on the side of a little mountain, over looking the city of Los Angeles. Total view of the smog capital of America, Hollyweird, tinsel town. Our marvelous house in the Hollywood hills, hung by a thread, sticking out over a steep hillside. The rear end of the house held up by what appears to be a couple of thin looking flag poles, attached to the bottom of the house, with a few fat rusty bolts. The bottom ends of the flagpoles are frozen, in a pile of cement, on the side of the hill, way below us. It's slightly horrifying. When the cars drive by our home, roaring up or down, the steep winding road in front of our house. I feel it swaying a little. Our domicile looks wild, incredible panoramic view of Hollywood, truly awesome. Even so, the last place I want to be in an earthquake, ain't LA famous for earthquakes I ask my father? I think all three of us were thinking about that, a stimulating first week in that house. Dad and Mary buy me a new bed. I help Mary put brand-new sheets on the mattress. A fresh feeling, that brand new smell. Clean Sheets.

Everything is brand new to me. Dad got absorbed, working at his new job, the part of Elliot Carson. Starring in a new life, in the town of Peyton Place. What a trip! Dorothy Malone plays Dad's wife, their daughter on the show, is played by Mia Farrow. My father's character spent 18 years locked up in a prison. He just got paroled and returned to Peyton Place, to find a new job at the town newspaper. His daughter, don't know, he's her father. Her mother kept it secret didn't want her daughter to know her father is a x-convict. The plot thickens...

I begin my new life in Hollywood, I enroll in a Catholic School on Sunset Blvd., Blessed Sacrament. The big church right next door to the Crossroads of the world, I attended their school for one month. Then we moved again. To a different, more secure dwelling, up in the Hollywood hills, way on top of the world, by the famous Mullholland Drive.

I change schools, another Catholic School, St. Ambrose. Located at the corner of Fountain and Fairfax. We wore uniforms, of course. My Irish Grandmother and my Aunt the nun, Sister Timothy she's the fourth, she insisted that I go to Catholic School and attend Mass on Sundays, of course.

Just like I did, back in New Jersey.

My first day at St Ambrose, I made brand new friends, during our lunchtime out on the playground. There we all stood less than a meter apart. I found myself surrounded by the toughest kids in school. We stare each other down. Oh shit, here we go again. I'm an expert new kid. When all of the sudden, Peter Daly threw a football at my balls as hard as he could, point blank. To our complete amazement, I didn't flinch an inch. Lucky for me, the football bounced off my pelvic bone. Located just above my dick bone. I just stare at them and grinned. I'm in. Peter shouts to everyone all across the playground, he's got balls of steel. We became instant buddies, its official I'm in the seventh grade. After school, two eighth graders, Steve Barrack and Phil Wagner, show me where they live. Steve became my best friend. Steve and Chris McKnight, he sat at the desk behind me in our class. We always hung out together.

On weekends, we hitchhiked barefoot to the beach together. Sometimes all the way out Sunset Blvd., hitchhiking down the Sunset Strip with its glamor and glitz, Billboards and all the wanna be stars, stretch limos and classy cars. Hitching out past the stately mansions of Beverly Hills. Passing by UCLA, the San Diego Freeway, winding our way, through Brentwood, Pacific Palisades, pass by Yogananda's Self Realization Fellowship center, the famous SRF lake shrine. A garden with a little pond and a windmill dedicated to all the religions of the world. Around that long corner, at last we reach the Pacific Coast Highway. Climbing out of the car, thanking the driver for the cool ride. At the same time make sure we didn't leave our beach towels on the back seat.

The sparkling blue Pacific Ocean is such a wonder to behold, the beaches in Southern California are some of the best in the world. Especially true back in 1964 Their bikini power is totally overwhelming. California girls, Surf City, the Beach Boys, funny cars, skateboards, Wolf man Jack, howling on my little transistor radio, a cherry coke and fries at Thrifty's.

Sometimes we would hitchhike down Santa Monica Blvd. We'd walk up to the biggest stop light, with a bus stop. They provided room to pull over for the cars. If the bus came by, before we got a ride and we had money, we would pay the bus driver and get on the bus. If we didn't and we saw no police lurking nearby. As the bus pulled away from the bus stop, engine roaring, smoke pouring, out its ass. We would jump on, onto its giant back bumper. Pained toes barely gripping a hot sharp rim, the tips of our fingers cling to the top of the advertisement sign, on the back of the bus. Hang on for dear life, or as long as we could. Book a free ride, at least part of the way. We jumped off before the police came usually. Once Peter Daly and I made it the whole way to the beach on the back of buses. Dangerously and illegally, though regally, enjoying the most riotous time with wild boy Peter. I prefer Hitchhiking.

Hitchhiking is legal in California, only if you obey the rules. I just have to remember. No hitchhiking in the street, not even with one foot on the curb and the other one in the gutter. Both feet have to be on the sidewalk, out of the street, then you're street legal. There's no pedestrians allowed on the freeway, if you hitch the freeways. Though technically speaking, as I have been so informed, on many occasion by the Highway patrol. I must hitchhike in front of the freeway entrance sign, otherwise I risk getting a hitchhiking ticket. I must hitchhike on the freeway on ramp, at least standing clearly out of the road, before the pedestrian prohibited sign. Hitchhiking in LA, I learned the finer points of city hitchhiking. Naturally among other things, my father and Mary did their best to mold me into a little gentleman.

I'm really lucky to have two actors for parents, they allowed me freedom, and showed me how to have a real good time. Like once at Disney Land, where I saw my mentor Louis Armstrong play his trumpet live in person. I used to watch him on TV on the south side of Chicago at my Irish grandparent's house. He is my first musical inspiration, one day grandma O'Connor gave me a toy trumpet, I used to play it on her back porch for hours, watching the trains roll by. My mother's brother, Uncle Billy, he played trumpet professionally. On the road in a big band, after fighting in Europe during World War Two. Uncle Billy saw a lot of action. He quit the band when he got married, they settled down in Chicago. Uncle Billy always encouraged me to take up an instrument.

I smoked my first joint with my friend Steve. Around the same time, my stepmother Mary brought home a portable record player and a new 45 single for me, a Bob Dylan record. Like a Rolling Stone, and Masters of War. My mind gets blown, like never before. Like most of us, I became deeply effected by Bob Dylan. I'd smoke a joint and listen to Bob. My life changed forever, my cool stepmother Mary the actress, turned me on to Bob Dylan. My father bought me my first guitar, I am 13, he took me to Sears. He bought me a "Silvertone" acoustic steel string. It had F-holes. Dad found a Guitar teacher, at a little music school, on Fairfax, just south of Santa Monica Blvd., I took lessons for a few months. I lost interest, because I didn't find music theory interesting. Though I loved to play and fool around with the chords, making up my own combinations that sound good to me. I learn a little guitar, like millions of other 13-year-olds, I learn to play Pipeline, Gloria, and a theme song to the Outer Limits TV show.

Then the hippie scene took off and so did I...