

*To Tommy, my constant inspiration!*

# **A LESSON LEARNED**

*By E. King and Langdon Hues*

**1983, Honduras**

“Do you think we’re prepared for everything?”

The question, uttered friend to friend in a rattly single-engine seaplane, was about the only thing that could cover every possibility of what they were about to do.

The pilot of the plane is the one who asked. His name is Eke – pronounced like his initials – E.K. Who knows how he got the name. Eke didn't. He just talked shit about it, made up stories to compensate for the odd name. "My parents drank heavily when they named me that," he told people. His parents, though, didn't drink. Eke did. Or at least he used to. But that's a long story and part of it has to do with him being here flying with his childhood friend, Bill, over the Patuca River next to the Sierra de Agatta mountain range deep in the Central American country of Honduras.

Honduras. It wasn't like their homeland, back in Massachusetts. It wasn't Massachusetts, sweet home Massachusetts. No. This was different, very different. This was actually Honduras. Look. There it is. They looked. Yes, Honduras.

They'd dreamt of it for years. And now they were flying.

Bill smiled at Eke and answered the question the best way he could: "There's only one way to find out." And then he pointed down.

“There it is. That’s the bend way up there in the river. Take her down.”

“Here we go,” said Eke, as he tilted the nose down towards the river. “Looking for adventure.”

“That’s right, brother,” said Bill. “Looking for adventure. Whatever comes our way.”

“Amen to that.”

And the plane lowered towards the river. As it did, Bill, the bigger of the two, looked at the mountain next to the river that was to become their new patch of land. Paradise is a journey. That’s the thought. That and more. This was going to be an adventure. For the first time in their lives this was going to be a true adventure. Not a rock concert, not a fishing trip. They were looking for life or death. They wanted to really experience life. Yeah, something like that.

Dreams are funny things, how they can gnaw at you. For Eke it was like that his whole life. This idea of adventure had pulled at him. Barely 120 pounds soaking wet, he wasn’t the biggest guy in the world. But he had big dreams. Yeah, dreams that in the past had somehow been derailed. Somehow? Well, sometimes he drank his dreams away. And sometimes he was unlucky. And sometimes both.

But now? Now, he was flying into the junction of land where tropical forests, mountains, and pine-laced savannahs meet.

Honduras.

What the hell? That's how dreams are, though. This one was the biggest one of all.

Bill was almost a foot taller with the blue eyes of a Swede.

Reminiscent of a young Nick Nolte, his long blond hair was feathered back wildly like a lion's mane. He was loud and boisterous, social and strong-minded and always willing to share an opinion.

They were an odd pair, the two of them. One was tall and loud. The other was short and quieter. The tall one still watched cancerous amounts of cartoons. The shorter one was a dreamer in a different way. He wrote. Yes, Eke was a romantic dreamer, while Bill's head was grounded in the realities of every day life.

Yet they hit it off right away. They'd met way back when they were 14 years old – that impressionable age when the roots of youth compete with the wings of growing up – and they found common ground in their quest for entertainment. They rode bikes together, played baseball, went fishing, and then when they were older they partied a lot together, but their friendship wasn't just about

entertainment. They were kindred spirits – always seeming to want, somehow, something that they couldn't get.

And now: Honduras.

They got what they wanted this time but they, especially Eke who was more reserved and introspective, wondered if the old adage of “Be careful what you wish for” was true.

With the flaps lowered and the throttle maintained, the plane glided down with the nose tilted up. Eke had flown before, but not under these circumstances. His palms were sweaty. The plane sunk into the river's natural tree corridor and then past a set of rapids while Eke played with the rudder pedals to adjust his lateral axis and center the craft. Just past the rapids, 50 feet from the water, he disengaged the clutch and the engine purred idly as the plane lowered to the water and sent a huge splash up each side as it slowed and then finally settled in the toiling river.

Honduras. This really was Honduras.

They each opened the side doors to the plane and climbed out on the side floats. “That's one small step for man,” said Eke, smiling.

“And one giant leap for us.” Bill smiled back. “We did it. Can you believe it, man? We did it. Check it out.”

Eke, in a sense, couldn't believe it. He scoped out the scenery. Lush. Different than back home, that's for sure. And that, Eke knew, was the whole idea. Different than back home. Honduras. Yes, pretty much different.

Just then, the water broke. A fish jumped.

It smelled different too. Rich. That's what Eke smelled. Earth. Rainforest. Lush.

Really rich, as Eke quickly learned. A mosquito landed on him. He flexed his muscle to try to get the bug caught helplessly in his arm, but all he really did was attract more mosquitoes. They were having a party and he was their keg. Welcome to the tropics. Great.

He swatted his friends away and then climbed back in and guided the plane towards shore. Then he cut the engine. It glided while Eke reached into a compartment in the back of the plane for a chainsaw. He then sprayed himself with mosquito repellent and lit a cigar. Bill, meanwhile, hopped onto the float and began using a pole to push the plane the final feet to shore.

Eke made the small jump to land, then started the chainsaw. As he did, he thought to himself, "Let the revolution begin." What a funny

thought. He laughed at himself. And then he began attacking the brush with the blade. Vrrrooom.

Soon, sweat poured down his body. This was a new kind of humidity. Thick. Whew. He looked around and everything was so...so green. Vrrrooom.

After a few minutes, he stopped and wiped his brow. Bill came over. "Hey, give me a hit of that cigar," he said. "Shit, I didn't know you brought cigars."

Eke handed him the blunt. "This stuff's thick, man," he said, pointing to the brush. "I don't know how we're going to get all the way up the hill to the clearing."

Ah, the clearing. The magic clearing at the top of the hill was the place of their destiny. A hillside cabin in the rainforest was to be the dream project.

But just getting there would be a bitch.

"Don't worry about it," said Bill. He smiled. He knew that was the phrase that Eke had grown up worrying about the most. Eke's mother had always believed that when someone said 'Don't worry about it', it was time for concern.

Eke smiled.

Back then, there was nothing really to worry about. But she worried. Led Zeppelin. She worried about Led Zeppelin. Why? Only because the two boys secluded themselves away for a playing of all nine albums – a Zeppelinathon of epic proportions. And she was worried that the boys were in there doing drugs or something. She had nothing to worry about. The boys were in there eating mass quantities of magic mushrooms that make your stomach quiver and your mind float effortlessly but that wasn't anything to worry about. Was it? All these years later, Eke wondered.

The jungle lay in front of him. Jimmy Page's magic guitar sang and then roared in his internal memory while he started up the chainsaw. He pretended, for just a moment, that it was an instrument, playing with the engine speed. Back in the day, he thought as he started carving at the trees, woods meant partying. They would go and party in the woods. What times they had. What times. Vrrrooom. Now, they weren't talking about dreams and this wasn't a party. They were trying to carve out a campsite and a path up to the eventual site of their hilltop cabin – which they had to build from the forest around them.

Back in the day when Robert Plant was spinning a yarn about a stairway to a couple of young men on mushrooms, the stairway seemed like it could have been, well, right here in the heaven that is Honduras. Heaven? This jungle? Back then, who knew? It's how dreams happen – unreal visions. And John Paul Jones' driving bass backed by John Bonham's manic drumming all added up to something bigger than four men with instruments and microphones. The sum was greater than the parts. That's how it was and, listening to them, that's how it felt to Eke and Bill. Together, they could do great things. Vrrrooom.

Eke continued to clear and sweat and think all this through. They'd been running together since they were 14. Even during the decade that Bill was married and Eke was drinking, they still managed to get out fishing, hunting, partying and talking crazy dreams. And, as happens, eventually crazy Bill got divorced and the old friendship resumed, just like in the old days. Except by then, of course, Eke had to quit drinking.

That's when his dreaming became bigger. Instead of drinking, he'd write, and write, and write whatever came into his mind. Then one day he had this idea about evolution, past, present, and possible

future- he then wrote what came into his head. Though it was self-published, it was picked up one day by someone visiting his hometown bookstore (the owner was a friend and agreed to put five books on the shelf) who happened to write a science column for an academic magazine. The columnist hailed the book as written by a non-academic with an interesting academic idea. And though his fame didn't go much beyond the world of evolution fanatics, it made him enough money to finance this dream move to Honduras.

Evolution. Vrrrooom.

He and Bill remained friends and continued to talk about adventure. It had always been a common theme for them. When they were both in high school they were going to volunteer for the Marines but just then the Vietnam War ended. Unlike many of their generation, they wanted to go to war. But when the war ended the chance disappeared - the chance for real adventure seemed to have vanished forever. But now they were in Honduras.

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