

Idea and Stories From a VodkaHolic

By

Timothy McGee

The gloomy weather was more than befitting. Color day should always be coupled with the dreariness this morning symbolized. The gray morning skies grew steadily darker as Mac watched the increasingly ominous thunderclouds amass across the distant horizon, impatiently awaiting the Bunn to finish filling the carafe. Why the hell the engineers responsible for creating a contraption of such high repute did not design it whereby the true caffeine junkie had to wait until the entire pot was finished always exacerbated his already peevish early morning color day moods, but remaining loyal to the Bunn was the right choice as it had proven its worthiness and durability compared to other brands. Besides, the epiphany to first place a mug and fill it, containing the most evil of evil cardiac coffees, then placing the carafe receiving the diluted remainder had been stymied for ages by his childish verbal tantrums, all of which concluded with similar menacing threats such as, "I'll kick your effin piece of crap ass, you sorry ass coffee makin' mof!" It was firmly decided that this story of a seemingly brilliant yet mentally belated shortcut to caffeine, a hindered path replete with invective Bunn vitriol accompanied with flailing arms and projectile spittle, would be taken to his grave.

How all of these coffee tantrums escaped Jeanette's eyes was amazing. What didn't escape her eyes was at times this brilliant idea went terribly wrong; the times it was forgotten that the mug had been placed and coffee overflowing flooding the counter tops, drawers, and kitchen floor, creating an embarrassing scene requiring Mac to contain the nasty outburst and assume his sheepish behavior, and once again keeping hidden the ugly. Maintaining an even minded demeanor was important. Jeanette frowned upon an adult, didn't think too highly of an adult, who lost their cool when innocent human blunder intervened.

Mac would pour in enough water to fill the mug twice, and even though the second mug was weaker than the first, it was well worth it; for any addict will attest to the fact that the day's

initial impact of caffeine is intensified proportionately with an increase of the active ingredient. That first cup *had* to be killer, to be jokingly cardiac coffee, because Mac had known for ages that it was this first caffeine saturated mug that worked its neuro-transmitting magic of unleashing the ephemeral high so desperately needed, especially on color day. The caffeine rush provided by the first mug was inimitable.

Coffee being relatively expensive convinced Mac that the continued failed attempts of striving to repeat that first mug's magic was wasting money and he thereby established his goal of one mug of the strong stuff, one mug of the weaker stuff, and help Jeanette drink her risible excuse for coffee, or as Mac put it, brown piss when she was at Mac's place. Besides, the lack of money in the past had precluded many a grocery store coffee purchase thus enabling him to realize that caffeine, at least with respect to himself, was not physically addictive. In caffeine's absence of just on day the 'two o'clock shakes' never materialized as thought, as undoubtedly they would in vodka's absence. His latest "It's all in your head, jerk-off!" caffeine epiphany to save money by giving up coffee was ultimately put to rest knowing that glorious morning rush, that caffeine buzz responsible for sending emotions soaring, would be too greatly missed.

Establishing goals had become increasingly important. Mac's second DUI within a five year period sounded a personal clarion to admit to ugly truths, to make the necessary changes. Adapting to small changes, such as limiting his daily caffeine intake, were viewed as being essential to achieve long term goals; long term goals requiring a disciplined mind, a tenacious way of life adhering to behaviors conducive to building character, confidence and self-esteem, long term goals that could very well be met with the total cumulative positive effects reaped from small changes. But these goals being long term were distant and nudged aside temporarily to tend the urgencies this second DUI caused.

He thought his first DUI was tough. Of all the deserved punishment exacted from the second DUI the most daunting proved to be color day. Color day was sanctioned by the courts obligating the convicted drunk driver to place a daily telephone call, listen to the recording informing the caller as to that day's color. If that day's color is the offender's randomly assigned color the offender is further obligated to make themselves present that same day prior to midnight at the predetermined location and subject themselves to a breathalyzer test rendering a .00 BAC. Mac's color was purple. How the hell could a color for eons being associated with royalty, wealth, prestige, and power spiral downward to being associated with convicted drunks?

Since mandated to make the daily color line calls two months ago he had been very lucky not to have heard the color purple any weekend. Today was Sunday and the rare dismal, early morning July Colorado summer day grew dimmer. A color purple on Saturday or Sunday translated into a very long day; weekend waits for the next bus was at least twice as long than weekdays. He calculated the weekend bus odyssey from his apartment to the halfway house where the breathalyzer test was administered to be two hours each way. Four hours! In a storm! The Bunn having done its requisite caffeine duty buoyed Mac's spirits as the loathsome call was made. The annoying three death rings summoned the computer generated voice from parts of hell unknown. Jubifuckilation! Beat another weekend excursion! His luck was bound to end.

Chapter 2

Nowadays any person's first DUI per se is not good. The legal limit being .08 allows very little, if any leeway, for anybody to legally drive when that person has had three drinks in an hour. This national blood alcohol limit has been the result of decades of social pressures, many of them due to the dogged determination and efforts of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and have been effective, patently evinced by a declining road fatality rate involving under the

influence drivers. These social pressures coupled with stiffer penalties have worked. Gone are the days of an officer lecturing the inebriated driver to drive home slowly; gone are the 1960's to early 1980's television shows having most homes proudly and conspicuously furnished with, minimally, a small bar; gone are the movies hailing the leading besotted character. More firmly entrenched is the fear of being pulled over after knowingly having too much to drink; getting behind the wheel and receiving one's first DUI; the road vehicle checks putatively to nab drunk drivers; and the increasingly harsher penalties and fines doled out to drunk drivers, including the nasty work stigma and small town police beat opprobrium.

In the vast majority of states a second DUI racked up within five years of the first DUI conviction will bring the offender's life to an abrupt halt. The penalties, fines, opprobrium, and more than likely jail time in many cases precipitate this halt. Mac's first DUI was punished appropriately considering his .21 blood alcohol content as he was required to attend education classes designed to further indoctrinate all the drunk driving evils followed by the prescribed fifty-four hours of group therapy to deal with his possible alcohol problem and the automatic one year license revocation; the punishments being allayed by the state issuing a work permit allowing limited driving, and the presence within two blocks of his home a state sanctioned facility administering the required schooling and group therapy sessions.

Living in Colorado is living in a lot of carefree sunshine, endless beautiful summer days, and the summer of Mac's first DUI was no exception. The Saturday morning lessons and therapy classes were held late morning and the short nostalgic walks home, reminiscent of his boyhood walks home from elementary school, proved to be too powerfully enchanting, too winsome to the point Mac's adult inhibitions caved to childish impulses; convincing him puerilely that it would be justified to stop at one of three available liquor stores. Besides,

stopping to say hi with cash in hand to the liquor store owners, his best friends from Southeast Asia, strengthened his communal ties.

It was thirty six years before the law finally caught up with him, caught up with his drinking and driving, being what should have been well past the age to scare him straight to the point of not drinking and driving. The lessons to be learned from his first DUI were washed down and blurred beyond comprehension by countless fifths and indeed within five years of the first DUI Mac was driving home from what was hoped to be a harmless Sunday afternoon lunch and a couple of beers, and driving home rear ended a car stopped at a red light. Fortunately Mac was sober enough to be applying the brakes and the collision was minor, but realizing he was over the legal BAC limit, knowing he already had one DUI and the second would spell absolute doom, he panicked and fled the scene. Ignoring the still red light he sped off from the main thoroughfare taking the residential area streets the last few blocks home only to be arrested within an hour at his home as the police were quickly able to ascertain his present position certified with a car having a warm engine and bashed in front end.

The perceived eternity between arriving at his apartment and the police's arrival was a nightmarish ordeal of evil thoughts frantically swirling inside his inebriated brain. Notions conjuring a near future of abject existence replete with no car, no job, no nothing swelled the fear. His erratic pacing only exacerbated images of the nasty things certainly to befall him. "You idiot, you goddamn effin idiot! You've put yourself through a world of shit a few years ago! Now what!" were the immediate comments made to himself before angrily grabbing the phone to call Jeanette. His incoherent babbling made no sense to a completely bewildered Jeanette. She repeatedly pled to him to calm down and to slowly tell her what the hell was going

on. Her pleading was to no avail as heavy thuds ominously rapped on Mac's door portending an authoritative presence.

"Shit, that's got to be the cops," Mac mumbled these last words to Jeanette as he slowly placed the phone back on the receiver and with trepidation opened the door to encounter two of Lakewood's finest.

"Are you Kevin McGarrett?" asked one officer.

"Yes I am," please let me appear and sound sober Mac thought when answering.

"Is that your green Honda with front end damage parked in the lot Mr. McGarrett?"

"Yeah, that's mine." Mac replied, thinking, shit, they know who I am and most likely the prior DUI.

"Were you involved in an accident earlier today at Union and Alameda?"

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure I bumped somebody's car at the light," was Mac's lame answer.

"Why did you leave the scene?"

Why did he leave the scene? How the hell was Mac to answer this? Should he be completely honest and tell these fine gentleman that unknown to them he had earlier drank a belly full of vodka and beer, and then some, and being scared shitless considering his life had come to a screeching halt for possibly years to come decided to flee? Should he spew out the fantastical excuse that the alarming minor accident caused a nasty bowel movement precipitating an extremely embarrassing situation; the unspeakable, forever to be avoided faux pas of crapping in one's pants, the malodorous evidence being presently washed, himself cleaned, followed by an urgent need to replenish something which required walking to the grocery store, all of which conveniently transpired an hour's time? That something desperately needed posed a problem, for his sloshed thought processes could be only so quick and creative.

Choosing the truth or lying was obviated when an officer sternly questioned, “Have you been drinking Mr. McGarrett?”

Repeating the risible and clichéd response blurted out by countless drunks, “I just had a couple of beers earlier today officer,” Mac realized both officers knew of his drunken state most likely manifested by his red, glassy eyes.

“Why don’t you step outside here and perform some sobriety tests for us,” one officer demanded.

Saving the officers their time and himself from neighbor’s gawking and sniggering, Mac threw in the towel telling the officers to take him in and do what they had to do. At least the sniggering would be lessened, but neighbors’ gawking eyes are inevitable in such a juicy predicament, as he saw several blurry people witnessing the scene of himself being led handcuffed to the patrol car. Then Mac blacked out.

It being Colorado law to take into custody the drunk driver and transporting them to a quasi-flop house after booking them at the police station was not unknown to Mac, and to date this was his third drunk tank visit.

The first visit was 1995, eighteen years earlier, and should have resulted in his first DUI, but for unknown reasons the cop was content transporting him to the downtown Denver drunk tank, detox center, to sleep it off. The reason for the drunk tank overnight stay was Mac’s drive downtown to visit a couple of his favorite haunts that were quick and easily accessed by taking the interstate that he lived immediately off of at that time. Having performed this drive several times while legally intoxicated never was a problem but maybe the last vodka gulp before departing proved too much as control of the car was lost along the relatively easy curve on I-25 just north of University Boulevard. This stretch became part of the massive Trex construction

project that drastically altered this area's appearance and in 1995 situated here was nicely developed recreational land most likely belonging to the University of Denver. When the spinning car came to rest about twenty yards off the interstate Mac did not hesitate to imperil his life by crossing the six lane interstate then venturing into an apartment complex's parking lot and essentially commandeering somebody's cell phone. A Denver police officer arrived at the abandoned car just as Mac was out of sight making his own tow truck plea for assistance. The tow truck the cop dispatched was arriving as Mac used up another life, re-crossing the interstate, and approaching the officer, huffing and puffing, exclaiming, "Hey! That's my car!" Cops aren't stupid. Not only are they not stupid but they're trained to spot drunk bastards, and inherent to so many of their jobs, they see and deal with them daily. There was no doubt in the cop's mind that he was dealing with a drunk bastard. Without any delay after Mac's drunk confession the officer yelled back, "You're going to detox!" No further words were necessary from either party. Perhaps it was the fact that the officer did not pull Mac over while Mac was driving drunk that explains the officer's inability to arrest him.

The year 2013 and present drunk tank awoken in, located in Lakewood, a west Denver suburb, was much, much smaller than the Denver tank, and this being Mac's second stay there, was not as easy to free himself. Twenty years earlier and possessing a clean slate, save a couple of speeding tickets, the only thing required to spring himself the first time was some 'counselor cajoling' to assure his ten o'clock in the morning release. The Lakewood counselors had his jacket. They knew at a minimum they had with them an individual with one DUI conviction and most likely having a drinking problem. This knowledge and the present law allowed them to keep Mac under their supervision, within locked doors, until he was able to register a .00 BAC via a breathalyzer.

The ability to drink a frightful amount of alcohol was natural to Mac as it is undoubtedly for most if not all people who develop the inability to stop drinking until they pass out once the drinking begins. Natural, not in the context that alcohol had been a major part of his family's customs, but natural in the context that he very, very much enjoyed the first altered state of mind and obviously could metabolize the alcohol efficiently as evidenced by the amount imbibed. Translation: booze played no part in his family activities but once he took his first sip of beer ever, the taste was developed and at the time the move to Denver occurred the accomplished boozing to date proved to be a mere warm-up.

The breathalyzer was administered beginning at eight in the morning and continued on two hour intervals. Finally, at four Monday afternoon his BAC registered .00.

“What time did the cop drop me off last night?” Mac asked the burly counselor, a counselor whose appearance suggested that of a rough and tumble past. The tattoos on his forearms of a slightly evil nature certainly were those of one who did not shy away from having too much to drink now and then on several occasions. Coupled with the natural glaring scowl and obsidian eyes Mac's personal prejudices swayed his thoughts to conclude this counselor definitely was no stranger to the ugly side of the legal system, but wisely chose to make no attempts to uncover his story, for he knew the quickest way to get the hell out of there was to agree with everything he asked and to ask questions sparingly, if any at all.

“It was about eight last night.” replied the counselor with a very smooth, calm and professional voice belying Mac's prejudices.

Knowing the routine of having to log the drunken driver's BAC upon arrival Mac asked what his was. “.34. Just shy of three and a half times over the legal limit. You were lit. You told me you drank maybe six or seven beers yesterday at Jose O'Shea's. Hell, I've been where

you're at and have been doing this for three years now. Took just a quick glimpse at you when you first sat where you're sitting now and knew not only did you have more than that to drink yesterday, but most likely had a lot to drink Saturday and probably Friday night. This BAC shit can be cumulative. Am I right or what?"

What was the use lying. This dude seemed cool, admitted he had past problems caused by drinking, and was sworn to secrecy. Secrecy, who gives a shit about secrecy! If a .34 BAC was registered here the law definitely had something as close as that registered, for the breathalyzer test being administered at the police station was the only thing Mac remembered between being cuffed and stuffed in the squad car and awakening Monday morning to this same counselor taking Mac's blood pressure as was strict policy. Strange how those black outs can work.

"I can see there's no use bullshittin' you. You're right," Mac confessed.

"Well, how much?"

"The usual Friday evening fifth, two Saturday fifths, and Sunday is beer day. Do you think Colorado will ever allow spirits to be sold on Sunday?"

The counselor didn't seem to be very amused with Mac's poorly timed humor. Why should he? He knew this was his second stay here and Mac's breathalyzer reading of .21 the first stay four years earlier followed by a frightening .34, clearly indicating an escalating drinking habit. Every day for almost three years this guy saw at least one person making the unfortunate return, for the worse off, their third and unbelievable fourth returns. The three years was plenty of time to have heard all the stories, all the excuses, all the fraudulent denials; but as would be expected the three years had not developed an icy demeanor, an aloof appearance, neither being an effective conduit to console an inmate seeking helpful advice.

Mac noticed the counselor's eyes quickly scanning an intake form and saw the counselor hinted at somewhat appreciating Mac's dry humor with a faint laugh. "Your name is Kevin, right?" asked the counselor.

"Yea, but everyone calls me Mac."

The counselor looked down again at the form and said, "Oh, short for McGarrett. Mac, I see this is your second DUI. The first DUI was less than five years ago. You blew a .34 this time. By Colorado statute, that's a mandatory six months jail time. You just told me how much you're capable of drinking, an amount that takes quite a while to get to. Either the jail time or your alcohol consumption better grab your attention because if neither of them do, I promise you your life is only going to worsen precipitously. If some sleaze ball Wall Street hot shot punk broker was selling shares of stock, each being part ownership of your life with the expectation the share price a function of your physical and financial well-being, I'd borrow every last damn share possible, short your ass, and eventually have money to retire comfortably."

Mac was awed. Here sits a dude more wont sporting an outlaw motorcycle gang jacket, yelling at his old lady to keep the bong filled and booze flowing, yet conversant with Wall Street lingo describing the concept of short selling, not to mention being learned enough regarding Colorado law to scare the shit out of him.

"Six frickin' months, no way! You gotta be shittin' me!" exclaimed Mac.

"No, I'm not. I'm sure you recall as a consequence of your first DUI conviction that you were ordered by the courts to visit with a counselor who assessed your drinking, and all other possible problems, in order to recommend x hours group therapy on top of the required twenty-four hours of education. The community service hours you will undoubtedly have to complete, the possible fines imposed by the judge, and likely probationary period tops off the court's

punishments. I'm sure you recall losing your driving privileges after your first DUI? You may have been granted a restricted license then but you can kiss that possibility bye-bye after blowing a .34, and after the automatic one year driving license revocation you will more than likely have to have installed in your car the breathalyzer device requiring the total absence of alcohol to start the car. Considering the fact you rear ended another car and fled the scene it may take you years to earn your privilege to drive; that is if the high risk insurance is affordable. What do you do for living Mac?"

Son of a bitch! It's not Sunday, it's Monday! Monday going on four thirty in the afternoon, the time Mac leaves for the day from the company currently employed at! Somewhere lost in his latest bender was the concept of time, a blackout. Previous benders could be the source of such jubilation-when regained consciousness lies by convincing Mac it being a dreaded Sunday and his emotions skyrocketing when to the morning paper proves it to be a beautiful Saturday. But, of course, the previous benders were usually the source of emotions plummeting knowing it was only Saturday morning, the entire weekend awaiting, and seeing the paper's thickness sorrowfully bemoaning the unmistakable sign it being another hated Sunday.

The hated Sunday, they had become quite frequent. The blackouts leading his sense of time astray were rare, and the looming Sundays usually dawned without any confusion it being Sunday, but more often with a brain lacking normal sleep and slowly recovering again from another alcohol induced endorphin depletion. Whether it being an accustomed pristine summer day, a brilliant and crisp autumn day, a wintry day normally ensuring happiness, or the first warm and rejuvenating spring day, the Sundays of late were those of deep depression. The mind and its thoughts at its nadir, an inescapable haunting abyss posing the only solution being to do nothing but remain trapped amongst the laughing demons while groping for any stimulating

thoughts to no avail. Mac's solution to this Sunday's day of gloom was to visit the always welcome Jose O'shea's, enjoy a nice lunch accompanied with 'a couple' of beers.

His alcohol muddled mind having been convinced it was Sunday precluded any necessity to call work. The counselor's questioning his occupation alerted him again of work, and his ability to realize it was Monday.

"Damn, I need to make a call! Where's a phone I can use.....what the hell's your name anyway?" questioned Mac.

"Joe."

Joe the counselor. Joe the burly, tattooed counselor seemingly possessing business acumen, legal wisdom, admonishing words, who with ease could bench press three hundred pounds. Could it be a stage name? Why the hell would this guy need to adopt a stage name for? He would tear to shreds any home invader. His inherent glare forewarning any idiot that screwing with me was at your own peril. Mac concluded that perhaps one too many trips to the 'Gentleman's Bar' without Jeanette's knowledge preconceived this silly stage name notion, and besides, this dude looked the regular bad ass intelligent Joe counselor.

"Listen Joe, you questioning me about my line of work got my head out of my ass. I forgot it's Monday. I thought it was still Sunday. I need to call work. This is the time I'm usually heading out the door for the day. The place was cool dealing with my first DUI, but shit, a second one? I gotta to be toast!"

"Out the office door, go left, first room on your right. Dial nine to get out."

Mac began to take a shine with Joe the counselor. His words of wisdom must have been spawned by experiencing a world of shit known to Mac; a world of shit into which Mac once

again had hurled himself. The alacrity responding to Mac's urgent phone call plea intimated Joe having to place a similar call at one time. Joe the counselor was someone Mac could relate to.

"Hi, Randy Mitchell please." Mac knew that the receptionist Alicia knew it was his voice, him finally calling, and Mac, without a doubt being noticed as absent by others and the news having reached Alicia no later than midmorning, thinking what scandalously juicy gossip Alicia's torpid mind must be aswirl with. The poor woman sits there hour upon hour with no other duties other than to answer the phone cheerily, promptly directing the call as she beams a welcoming smile to the infrequent company visitor. There are moments when several employees question the company's existence as the main telephone line, audible to those having workstations nearby, remains silent for the proverbial eternity. Twiddling her thumbs and leafing through senseless garbage is frequently interrupted by this and that employee with the time to deeply immerse themselves within the corporate grapevine, or the grapevine of any nature.

"This is Randy."

"Hey Randy, this is Mac."

Christ, what the hell to say now? It's four thirty Monday afternoon, the day is over. This is the same Randy to whom an identical phone call was placed four years ago. Well, almost identical. This was the second of its type, and when the type is bad any repeat of the bad type of news is always taken more bitterly, especially when the second round of the same type of bad news is much, much worse. The guy ain't stupid-it's four thirty Monday afternoon, no phone call as yet-the alcohol factor certainly entertained his mind by now. Just tell him the basics, leave the gore for tomorrow.

“I got another DUI yesterday. Do I still have a job?” Mac timidly asked, not even betraying a hint of selfishness.

“Ouch! Another one? Damn Mac, what are we going to do with you? Kinda figured you got into some trouble, keeping my fingers crossed it wasn’t booze related. You home now?”

“No, I’m at the same detox center on Wadsworth I was last time.”

There was no use lying, the place’s number already registered at work.

“Doesn’t sound so comfy; as far as I know you still have a job here. Try and get some sleep tonight and we’ll see you tomorrow morning, ok?”

“Sounds good, we’ll see you in the morning.”

Mac’s spirits were lifted a tad after hanging up the phone. Randy was a good boss, only three years older than Mac, and very much enjoyed an occasional stiff drink after returning home from work. That was what Mac respected the most in Randy. Randy enjoyed a stiff drink-singular, not plural. When he and Mac and at time other employees would frequent a bar close to work celebrating a work related success, Randy would faithfully contain himself to one Long Island Iced Tea. This stiff drink would last him the entire time, the minimum time being about two hours. This Mac found perplexing, amazing. Mac figured that Randy being married with two teenage girls demanded Randy to practice and display the responsibility important to nurture and cultivate success, and Mac figured correctly, for Randy’s reputation was the solid reputation earned by an individual who practiced lofty habits.

What confused Mac was Randy’s ability, and the majority’s ability, to be satisfied with the minimal amount of alcohol. To stop, per se, Mac found amazing. The unfortunates, including Mac, could not stop. Each a fortunate and an unfortunate drinker initially sober consuming equal alcohol content satisfies the fortunate drinker yet commences the unfortunate

drinker to drink oneself unconscious became Mac's unsolvable riddle. The idea to stop drinking, the source of such euphoria, knowing continuing the action could and would lengthen the euphoria, became unfathomable to Mac and so many others.

"How was it?" Joe asked.

"Randy, that's my boss, he's a good guy. Took the news calmly, told me to get some rest, and he'll see me in the a.m. That's him though, the news will make it to the powers that be, then I'll know how it truly went."

"You're running out of chances Mac. The drinking is obviously escalating, second DUI, this one involving an accident and you fleeing the scene, it's time you seriously think of changing now for the better or stay way you're at an ultimately end in a premature grave. You ever think of going to AA."

"I have."

"What do you think is keeping you from attending a meeting?"

"No, I mean I have gone to handful of AA meetings in the past. Matter of fact, not far from here, on Kipling."

"What happened?"

"Well, first of all, too many chain smokers. Stunk like a filthy ashtray after every meeting. The old timers admonished the newcomers to sit and keep their mouths shut and just listen for the first sixty meetings. The stench of an icy reception was a perfect excuse for me to quit going and start drinking again. And I did, and here I am."

"I gave up on AA myself," Joe told him. "The first group I got involved with were, to me, a bunch of holy rollers touting the goodness of Jesus this and Jesus that, couldn't stand it.

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