

DELETED CHAPTERS – The Cleaner

Back to the future - Vietnam

I needed a miracle and another “carrot” to dangle!

I remembered the conversation I had with Steve Swanson, a former DEA agent. Engaged by Michael as our investigator, he provided an interesting insight and way to communicate with the government in clandestine areas. He visited me in prison on several occasions and always encouraged me to look for a way out. The government had a weak case against me, he would always say; however, in a trial with a jury composed of locals from Reno or Seattle, I would not stand a snowball's chance in hell! **If you have a chance to get out of jail, don't be a fool, take it! You have absolutely no idea what you are up against.**

Think! What did I have to proffer from the past? I immediately thought of John Clutter and the Lockheed scandal in Japan; assuming Clutter to be the CIA Station Chief, with payments made on instructions to Deak & Company from the US Consulate in Hong Kong. The government did not know what other potentially embarrassing information I may have. Let's do it. “Proffering” this information was a major turning point in getting Mueller temporarily off my back. It led to a debriefing I eventually had in Hong Kong with someone from the CIA.

What about the present? Steve said there was an individual on the way to Hong Kong who is very interested to meet me. Call him at home as it will impact on Mueller. It had to do with the “MIA” thing in Vietnam. What could this all be about? My instinct was to offer to keep my eyes and ears open on my trips to Vietnam for one purpose only-- simply in order to buy time.

Return to Vietnam

I was in deep thought of my past and present tribulations as my flight approached Ton Son Nhut Airport in Ho Chi Minh City. It was now March 1990.

My good friend and kindred spirit, Tim Milner, was thrilled to hear of the good news that I had been released from the clutches of the “monster” in America and had returned home to my family.

Reminiscing, we realized we had been through a lot together and our friendship was thicker than water. Friends like BD, Ray Cessna “Cito,” Tim Milner., Young Greg, John Langer, Mickey Howard, Steve Deutsch, Roger Slater, Ted Pope, Chuck Nordquist, and Dennis Mankini are rare. They were friends indeed because they were also friends in need.

I recalled first meeting Tim from the Deak days; and after Deak folded he stayed with my company, First Financial Services. He was coming to Hong Kong along with Charlie Green, a long-term Thailand resident and friend. They always stayed at a flea bag hotel called the Sunning House in Causeway Bay despite the fact that they could have afforded to stay anywhere.

Over time, I came to appreciate that a bit of frugality is wise because you never know when there will be a rainy day.

Tim had given me a lot of money over the years in Australia that I had the pleasure “*to make clean in the Deak magic washing machine,*” as did Cito and then BD after we had been introduced. Almost all of this “bread” had been washed through the Deak account at ANZ Bank, Pitt and Hunter Streets in Sydney. After the collapse of Deak & Company (Far East) Ltd. in 1984, the only way I could *wash* it was to carry it out in the golf bags. I often did. I liked the “golf bag” method best since I *rationalized* it was morally and ethically better than having to tell big lies at the bank.

Tim had been with me when I was arrested in Bangkok on June 8, 1989, while on the way to Vietnam.

Picking up where we left off before I was so rudely interrupted

Having returned to Hong Kong from Reno and having spent a glorious month on a holiday with my family driving around Europe, it was now time to contemplate the future. I had been through the inquisition by the persecutor in Seattle and I it did not go well. He threatened to have the indictments reintroduced and “have me put away” for a very long time.

I needed to find a way to earn a living again; however, a spark had been somehow extinguished in my ambition. Tim was very keen to get back to Vietnam so we agreed to meet in Bangkok and continue our trip to check out opportunities as we originally planned the year before.

Checking into the little Sri Guest House near Soi 33, I was heartily welcomed by Sompong, the Thai-Chinese proprietor whom I had not seen since the day of my arrest. He was shocked and surprised to see me. Flashing a big grin that expressed his happiness, he said, “*We never expected to see you again.*” “Water under the dam,” I said, “a bit like going to hell and somehow coming back.”

Tim arrived at the same time, having flown in from Phuket. It was to be the first of many trips to Vietnam that we would do together over the coming years.

Thanks, Nancy

Vietnam and America were still “enemies” of sorts during those days; there were a lot of bitter feelings that remained and disbelief over how America could have “lost” the war.

There we were the next morning flying to Ho Chi Minh City on a Viet Nam Airlines rusting old Tupelov. They were great planes really because they gave you the sensation of flying. Small and very heavy, they needed to obtain a very fast “rotation” speed before the damn thing could lift off from the runway. The pilot would gun it while keeping his feet clamped down on the brakes at the same time - and then “pop the clutch.” You felt as if you were in a jet fighter, not a commercial aircraft. But they had quite a poor safety record, so it was always best to say a prayer and drink a beer prior to boarding-- not necessarily in that order. The drawback to this

great Russian workhorse of a plane was that if it ever lost lift it would drop out of the sky like a rock. Many times it did. No one lived to tell the tale.

With my breakfast beer and boarding pass in hand while waiting in the Bangkok departure lounge to board, reading the *Bankgkok Post*, I happened upon a very interesting article. “Hey Tim, look at this! Some lunatic named Nancy Pelosi, a Representative from California (I had never heard of her at the time), just sponsored and had passed a bill prohibiting US citizens from flying on Vietnam Airlines.” Here I am on probation and breaking the law already? “Which way is San Francisco, Tim,” I asked, as we turned in that direction to give her the long-distance “finger.” America still punishing Vietnam...screw you Nancy Pelosi, whoever you are. Saigon, here we come!

“Ho Chi Minh” City

I seriously doubted whether Ho Chi Minh would have appreciated a city being named after him. The communists shot themselves in the foot here. Everyone in the world was intrigued by *Saigon*.

Tim and I had made a couple of trips back to “HCMC” in 1989 before the shit hit the fan. We always stayed at the old “Astor Hotel” on Tu Do Street,” which was now the “Hung Sen Hotel” on Dong Khoi Street. We always enjoyed the sunset and early evening at the roof-top bar, guzzling down a few beers while scratching our heads, thinking about what we could possibly do to develop some business. While Vietnam was opening up and becoming the flavor of the month, we were to learn the hard way that under such situations it is best to sit back and watch and leave the pioneering to others.

Nothing, I mean absolutely nothing, was going on in Vietnam at that time. They rolled up the sidewalks at 9:00 pm and you could hardly even find a cyclo! But Sunday night was totally different and something of an amazement. On Sunday night, out of the woodwork would come literally thousands of Vietnamese riding their motorcycles around and around a four-block radius: from the Saigon Cathedral in front of the post office, down Dong Khoi Street to the Saigon River, up Nguyen Hue Boulevard, and around and around again. The noise was deafening and the air pollution was overwhelming. It seemed all of Saigon was on motorcycles taking part in this amazing spectacle because, hey, there was simply nothing else to do!

Ms. Kim Kiosk

Other than the roof-top hotel bar, which by the way held particular nostalgia for me, one night we found a kiosk open on Nguyen Hue Street that played rock music from the 60’s and served beer and special smokes, which came already wrapped into a pack of cigarettes. After 9:00 pm on most nights, the only patrons were Tim and I and the proprietor, Ms. Kim. Foreigners that did stop by were Russians, Hungarians, and other Eastern Europeans, and occasionally Vietnamese from the North. We were all suspicious of each other. What were we doing in Saigon? In those days most people were trying to leave by boat to Hong Kong and Thailand.

Ah, the irony! Suddenly, when the Russian ships, mostly cargo freighters, docked at Saigon port, activity at Ms. Kim's kiosk picked up dramatically. What was in the boxes the Russian were selling besides caviar? Great Beluga Russian caviar could be bought for a song.

One night the cat was let out of the bag. Ms. Kim swore us to secrecy and confided in us that the Russians were selling nautical compasses on the black market. They were soon to find their way to all the Vietnamese boats filled with refugees risking their lives going to Hong Kong and other ports of call. There was a very big demand for nautical compasses and payment was made in gold.

Quan

By chance, one night while cruising around on our Honda 90's, Tim and I struck up a conversation with two young Vietnamese men in their early 20's. Both spoke fluent English. We became instant friends. One eventually went to California and became a lawyer. The other, Quan, became our "*assistant with nothing yet to do.*" If we had an idea, we would run it by him. He would pause for an instant and consistently shake his head "no."

Mr. Le Buu

Quan made an appointment for us for our next trip, which was circa October 1990. It was with a gentleman named Le Buu, who turned out to be a salty character, although likeable enough; however, also deeply suspicious of our intentions. Where did we meet? You would have never guessed. Le Buu was the Sports Director of HCMC. His office was the entire building on Pasteur Boulevard that, during the war, was the British Embassy. It was located directly across the street from the still-closed and boarded-up American Embassy.

In order not to lose face, Quan informed us that we must rent a car for the first meeting and drive up to the office in style. Have the car and driver wait. We could have walked the few blocks from the hotel, but hey, when in Rome.... We maintained this charade for the next two or three meetings until a deal was signed, and what a surprise deal it was. Le Buu was, after all, a former Viet Cong.

Marathon? You must be crazy!

Being an athlete and runner all my life, one day I said to Tim while obviously under the influence, "Tim, look at these people here in this city, how dull is their life. This place needs something big, an attraction, something to bring people here to spend some money and liven up the place. How about we suggest they hold an *international marathon*?"

The meeting with Le Buu was pleasant and brief. He informed us of his past, and I assumed he had been appointed to this nice position not so much for his past love of sports, but because of his exploits as a top Viet Cong commander. He had fought many battles against the Americans. Quan translated.

“Marathon, yes, what’s that?” he said. “Yes, let me think, I had heard about it--it’s that long run. You two must be crazy,” was his first reaction. “No one in their right mind would come here to run a marathon in this heat. Thank you very much and good-bye.”

On the way out he motioned to Quan and had a few words in private conversation while we were trying to wake up the driver in the rental car. “No problem,” we said, “Let’s dash back to the hotel and grab a few cold beers. Oh, by the way Quan, what was it he said to you?” “He said to stay close and keep an eye on you two guys. *‘Let me know what they are really up to!’*” We laughed heartily!

The cable

Fast forward a good two months later. I had left some running magazines with Le Buu, pointing out that marathons were run everywhere: in the heat of Havana, in the cold of Moscow, in the mountains and in the desert. Every country of any substance had one!

One thing that always remains the same in my life is my post office box, which I rented in 1975. My address was GPO (General Post Office) Box 11685, Hong Kong, British Crown Colony, and it still is today, except BCC is now “China.” I put the little key in the lock one fine day, and in between the usual bills was a very strange looking thin green envelope, a cable from Vietnam. Cables were used because you could not even place a phone call to the country in those days.

It was from Le Buu and said, *“When are you coming to organize the first Ho Chi Minh City Marathon?”* Stop. Somewhat in shock, Tim and I were pleased because this meant we would have rare, multiple-entry visas to go back and forth, and perhaps even find some real business to do.

Much more importantly, I had found a reason and I had found a place to disappear should I need to avoid any negative potential fallout coming out of the mouths of the prosecutors in America.

Characters and scammers from all over the world were starting to descend on Vietnam like locusts, and most all were walking out with nothing but burnt hands. We knew nothing about organizing a marathon, but we were willing to give it a try. I contacted the Association of International Marathons and Road Races (AIMS) in London, and they were thrilled to have this new race on the calendar. It would take place in February 1992 when the weather in Saigon was “cool.” The course would have to be measured and certified. Enter the organizing committee of the Bangkok Marathon, a very “well-run” and established event that provided all the advice and assistance we could possibly need.

Still, organizing a marathon is a very complicated thing to do, with thousands of details about which we had no idea. It soon took over Tim’s life and my life. We split the tasks well and complemented each other. Tim, a keen yachtsman his whole life, handled logistics of all sorts. I handled the public stuff like PR and sponsorship. First task was the money. Who would pay for it all?

Sponsorship was the key and we were blessed indeed to announce and invite the world some months later to the *San Miguel Beer Ho Chi Minh City International Marathon!* A beer title sponsor! We saw no conflict. The Saigon Floating Hotel would become the official hotel

sponsor, providing bands and putting on an amazing pasta carbo-loading party the night before the race, thanks to its manager and our dear friend, James Spurway. Hill and Knowlton would do the PR, and Star TV, joining with HCMC TV, would film it. I still have the tape!

Famous former Boston Marathon great Bill Rogers was enlisted to join as our elite runner, for a fee. *Suddenly I had a flashback to a premonition I had years earlier while on holiday with my family in Japan. We happened to stay at the hotel housing elite runners for the next day's Tokyo Marathon. There was Bill Rogers standing right in front of me in the lobby. We did not speak; however, I had a very strange feeling we would meet again one day. It was so outlandish I dismissed it outright, that is, until now.* Other sponsors were Pepsi and the Australian telephone company Telstra.

Lee Buu gave us our own office, just off the entrance of the HCMC Sports Department, and hung up our sign "Sports Asia Ltd." "Just to keep an eye on us" as he had mentioned to Quan. It was fine with us. Tim, being a British passport holder, was inwardly very pleased to be working out of the old British Embassy. *Who would have ever believed it!*

Occasionally, it dawned on me with a feeling of satisfaction that, while still on probation I could be considered as doing business with the "enemy." I had no enemies, so it did not matter.

In time, we developed a good trust with Le Buu and he turned out to be an excellent organizer. He planned an amazing entertainment spectacle of song and acrobatics for the enjoyment of the citizens at the finish line. This happened to be the large iconic grounds at the Presidential Palace, right at the gate made famous in the picture of the North Vietnamese tank crashing through it when Saigon fell on April 30, 1975.

Around the same time, never far from my mind....

Michael said I would be in a better position if "I limited your exposure to a few years in custody rather than the 25 years in custody."

I agreed, of course. I wanted to follow his sound advice very much; however, in this case I believed I better follow my instinct. In Seattle, I believe Michael said that they *do not* want to go to trial. The leverage I have is that I believe they do not want to go to trial. There may be room for further negotiation.

I said, "I am also very concerned about not agreeing on such a very important strategy. I hope you feel my view has merit and you will be able to give me the best defense possible."

Michael wrote to the government and told them we are prepared to go ahead with a hearing and that they not attempt to revoke the plea bargain. "In effect I agree with you that there is more room for negotiation and that is exactly what I have proceeded to do.

"Please rest assured that I have had disagreements with clients before, but it has never affected the diligence and strength with which I have defended them. In essence I am recommending a conservative approach to avoid exposure to the longer term in custody. You have every right to reject that approach because you are correct in that it does mean that there is a greater chance you will do the smaller amount of time in custody. This disagreement will not make me any less vigorous in my defense of you." *I felt great comfort in his words.*

“At this time, the only violation I know for sure the government will allege will be misstatements concerning Brian Merrill. However, Peter Mueller informed me by telephone that he believes he found many other examples of your failure to be truthful.

“If you are successful in the hearing, then you will be in the position you were prior to the hearing. *If you are unsuccessful, the Judge will incarcerate you for some period up to 5 years at the conclusion of the hearing.* The court has made it clear that there will be no further delays in your sentencing because of the numerous delays that have occurred so far. One way or another, this matter will now be resolved.” *The thought again occurred to me that staying in Saigon was another realistic option.*

I am badly in need of that carrot to dangle!

I did my best not to cause any pain and suffering to anyone I knew, due to what was clearly to me a “witch hunt” on behalf of the government. There were no “criminals” involved in any transactions that I had ever assisted to date, with perhaps the exception of payments made for and on behalf of the US government itself by Deak & Company. There was no pang of conscience that bothered me. I kept recalling how the hypocrites held me, without bail and against my will on two of the most absurd assumptions: that I was a “flight risk” and a “danger to society.”

At the same time, I knew that I was in a very precarious position. The risk of me losing at the hearing was one that I was just not willing to take. The hearing had to be avoided at all costs. What to do?

Steve said, “If I had kept one ace in the hole, now was the time to use it!”

Vietnam was proving my saving grace. I could talk to anyone about Vietnam at length and still say and do nothing. It would buy me a lot of *probation time*.

Enter my good friend and fugitive Tom Sherrett. Mueller had indicated many times to Michael Pancer that he was salivating to receive any current information on Tom Sherrett. Tom had simply vanished into thin air. Mueller had run out of patience and was demanding that the hearing be scheduled. I had produced nothing and had done nothing to help!

However, I did have some very confidential and well hidden information to discuss with Michael Pancer on the phone, and now was the time to do it.

Tim and I had made several trips to Saigon to work on the marathon. I never told anyone that I had met Tom Sherrett one day, almost a year earlier, in June 1990. At that time, Tom was aware that I had been traveling to Saigon. He located me by checking for my name at Vietnam Airlines every day until I had arrived. This was not difficult as few Americans, if any, were visiting Vietnam at that time.

One morning the phone in my room rang about 7:00 am while I was in the shower. I picked it up and immediately recognized Tom’s voice. He was calling from the hotel lobby.

Over coffee and breakfast, we shared each other’s serious concerns. I was happy to see him; however, it was not a happy time. Tom was tired. Being a fugitive takes its toll. He was looking for solutions but was facing a nightmare indictment and a very long prison term. Tom had heard what happened to me. He knew that the government had interviewed me, and that the

government could not be trusted and was full of leaks. I assured Tom truthfully that I knew nothing and said nothing about any knowledge that I had of his Vietnamese wife and brother-in-law being involved in his business or in carrying money to Hong Kong. That said, while on probation I was also in a sensitive position should it ever be known that we had met earlier.

Now, after almost ten more months of “dragging Mueller along” and not having seen Sherrett again since that day, informing the government of the meeting was the only carrot I could dangle in front of them in order to buy time, and at the same time do no damage to Sherrett. I was sure that Tom was long gone ages ago from Vietnam. *He would understand.*

I spoke to Michael, gave him the information, and asked him to pass it on. He did. The effect was electric!

Did we hit a “Mueller” nerve! He wrote....

“On April 29, 1991, you called me and indicated that Bruce Aitken had recently acquired information which he believes might be useful in apprehending a DEA fugitive whose name you provided me. You asked whether, if Mr. Aitken provided that information, we would in return agree to finally dismiss the prosecution against him in Criminal Case No. 88-189C presently pending in Seattle, and the remaining counts in Criminal Case No. 87-55HDM in which he was indicted in Reno.

“We are very interested in apprehending the fugitive in question and would like to receive Mr. Aitken’s information as soon as possible. We would agree to the final dismissal of the above-mentioned Seattle and Reno charges if the information Mr. Aitken provides results in the apprehension of the named fugitive. To this end, if Mr. Aitken is in a position to provide proactive assistance (pretext telephone contact, arranging a meeting, etc.) we would be happy to receive it. However, if Mr. Aitken provides such information or assistance but the fugitive is nevertheless not apprehended we are not willing to agree to the dismissal of the above-mentioned charges. In short, we will agree to provide the consideration you seek in return for results and not merely for information.”

Dear Michael, dear Peter, dear me!

Mr. Mueller’s letter did not even warrant a reply in my estimation. Requesting proactive assistance? After all we had been through he still didn’t understand my vibe. I felt complete exasperation.

Michael replied, “You proposed that Bruce Aitken return to Reno and be sentenced pursuant to the plea agreement. He would then meet with the agents and give them whatever information he has concerning the major fugitive in which you are interested. If that fugitive is apprehended, then the only charges Bruce Aitken could possibly face would be a false statement charge in Seattle.

“I have stated that in fairness, if you want to proceed in this fashion, Bruce should be in no worse legal position if the government moves to revoke the plea agreement after May 30th. I explained to you that that meant we would agree to withdraw the plea if you attempted to both violate the agreement and try Bruce in Seattle and Reno on the underlying indictments. I also

stated that we would not attempt to withdraw the plea agreement if you indicated you did not intend to try Bruce on the underlying indictments. Bruce Aitken and I do not want to risk incarceration while trying to defend two major indictments.”

Michael said if we lose at the hearing, Peter Mueller may seek to indict me for making a false statement and reinstate the original indictments. However, he does not think he would do all of that.

Michael called his bluff....

Concerning the status of Bruce Aitken, his plea agreement, and sentencing procedure, *according to Mueller:*

1. Mr. Aitken will promptly provide to the government information he currently possesses which he believes may be helpful in apprehending a specific DEA fugitive whom you have named. If assistance is feasible, Mr. Aitken will provide it at such time that the agents with whom he will be working decide would be most productive.

2. Mr. Aitken’s sentencing will proceed as scheduled on May 30, 1991. The government will agree to his being placed on probation at that time as called for in the plea agreement.

3. Mr. Aitken realizes that the government believes he has violated the agreement and agrees that the government may ask the court for a hearing to establish such violations and to revoke probation at a later time.

Michael informed me...

“We have agreed to go forward as per the last letter from Peter Mueller. You are not giving up anything and they are not giving up anything. You are both reserving all of your rights, but they will not allow you to escape responsibility for past misstatements.”

Most importantly, “*On the other hand, you are not going to face a hearing next week that at its conclusion could find you incarcerated for five years and facing trials in two cases.* In addition you are only going to speak to him about one subject. Nowhere does it say that you have to testify against anybody.”

Michael said, “Bruce, we have made the best deal we could. God knows I tried for better, but Peter Mueller was intent on incarcerating you. Possibly when we are all in Reno, I can negotiate further.

“All of your Reno co-defendants have been sentenced. All of your Seattle co-defendants are cooperating with the government.

“Bruce, when last we spoke on the telephone, you said we would proceed as planned. If you are changing your mind, call me.”

The decision was easy....

I was mightily pissed off at Mueller. I had enough of his vindictive bullshit over nothing material. I was beginning to hope that he had a stroke. I would take the next step into the abyss

based on Michael's advice, which would thankfully commence the period of probation and dismiss the superseding indictment. This very big and important development was in my favor!

Like in a boxing match I had to win the fight one round at a time. Slowly but surely, I will win the war of attrition using the defensive strengths I learned in tai chi. Let them expel their energy but give them little or nothing in return!

The Hearing in Reno... Let's do it!

Returning to Reno for sentencing was not something I relished doing. I remember the day well. Present were Judge McKibben, Michael, the prosecutor Sullivan, and a menagerie of spectators and government types waiting to hear the proceeding and my response.

Strictly procedural, I listened intently as Judge McKibben read and accepted the plea agreement and sentence. I responded in the affirmative. Next, to finalize, he asked me if I had any statement to make. This was it; at last my chance to say something, to make a profound statement. Well, you could have heard a pin drop. All ears were open and all eyes were focused on me.

It was the only time I spoke in court since the first bail hearing and I uttered only eight words, *"No, your honor; I have nothing to say."*

Cat and Mouse – The Big Stall

I realized I would still have to keep my wits about me. They were expecting something "concrete." It was simple. Should I run into my friend Tom Sherrett again, I would simply tell him what I told him when we met, much to my surprise, earlier in Saigon. "Don't get caught! If you do, they will throw the book at you."

Not long after, the shit hit the fan – yet again!

Mueller then "ordered" me to meet DEA Agent Conklin, the friend of "Corman the snitch" in Bangkok. I refused. He just could not get it through his thick skull that I would not lift even one little finger "proactively" to help him. Foaming at the mouth like a rabid dog, he wrote to Michael:

"My instructions to Mr. Aitken concerning his meeting with Mr. Conklin could not have been more explicit. Instead of following them, Mr. Aitken has evidently unilaterally chosen to disregard them and leave on his trip (to Vietnam) without making the arrangements I desired,

"In my view, this is simply another instance demonstrating his duplicitous intent and his failure to cooperate with the government as required. It is not his prerogative to decide with whom he will meet or where in fulfilling his obligations to the government.

"The meeting with Conklin was required for sound operational reasons which are neither his business nor yours. Furthermore, contrary to your letter, it was not 'decided in Reno' that communications on this matter would be through your office. In fact, I encouraged him to contact me directly if necessary.

“On June 17, 1991 I spoke directly to you and told you I wanted Aitken to call Conklin and make an appointment to meet him. You assured me you would have him do so. The fax that Conklin sent to Aitken to contact him was sent on my instruction when Aitken failed to contact Conklin as promised.” Michael had cleverly stipulated that communications would be via his office.

Mueller continued, *“I am quite unhappy with Mr. Aitken’s evident uncooperative attitude and am nearing the end of my patience in dealing with him!!”*

The sneak...and the threat

In fact, after checking my travel plans Mueller made a special unannounced trip to Bangkok at a time when he knew I would be returning there from Saigon after a marathon organizational meeting. I met him briefly at the Ambassador Hotel coffee shop. Puffing away on one of those strong Thai cigarettes, Krung Tip, I wondered if he knew the dangers of smoking tobacco, but I could not get in a word edgewise over his ranting. He was furious that I had absolutely nothing to report about Sherrett in Vietnam other than I told him I supposed he was now long gone. In frustration he told me not to get my hopes up for the Saigon marathon planned for February 1992. *“Most likely by then you will be back in prison!”*

By this time....

I was seriously considering taking my family and moving to Saigon on a permanent basis. My mental reply to Michael for Mueller, *“Tell him to go to hell!”* was not going to go over well.

It was now August. The Seattle prosecutor’s office sent two photographs of Sherrett and simply asked that I show them around Ho Chi Minh City. I showed them to Tim Milner.

“Tim, have you seen this fellow in town recently?” Tom dutifully replied, *“No, not me; never saw the guy before.”*

I reported back in to Michael in late August *“no developments.”*

I fervently prayed to God for a miracle. How long could this go on?

Then suddenly after some weeks of silence I heard from Michael....

The passing of time was my best weapon and eventually something would have to give. Something would have to turn in my favor and it finally did. Suddenly, out of the blue I received a big surprise. I could hardly believe it. A miracle happened!

We knew the government had to show their cards soon. Michael sent me a wonderful fax:

“Our war of attrition seems to be turning somewhat in our favor. The government did not wish to keep our trial indefinitely on calendar in Seattle. Hence, they are willing to dismiss the case as long as you waive your rights to a speedy trial and to any statute of limitations arguments.

“I strongly advise that you do so since they can just continue to keep the indictment on calendar. However once it is dismissed, it is my understanding that they would have to re-indict

the case to prosecute you and that would be an impediment to their ever going forward with the case.

“Hence please sign the enclosed waiver as it is greatly to our advantage to do so.”

The document was pleasing to my eyes. For the first time since the plane took off from San Francisco, on my way home to Hong Kong I felt a bit of peace.

DISMISSAL OF INDICTMENT

United States District Court Western District of Seattle, US A, Plaintiff v Bruce Aitken, Defendant

Pursuant to Rule 48(a) of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure and by leave of court endorsed hereon the United States Attorney for the Western District of Washington hereby dismisses the:

SUPERCEDING INDICTMENT

Against: **Bruce E. Aitken**, Defendant

Dated this 9th day of September 1991

Mark Bartlett

The New Year 1992...what would it bring?

I was looking forward to the New Year. Jenny and I had spent New Year's Eve at home, having a quiet dinner. Our sons were doing well in school. I was living on savings I had squirreled away; however, the pot (cash that is) was getting lower all the time and I seriously needed to find a way to replenish it.

There are not too many job offers in the classified ads for former money launderers, especially ones who had a felony conviction. I felt a slight sense of panic at the thought of being broke one day and unemployed at the same time!

Hanging over my life was the thought of probation until 1996 and my concern whether the nightmare would return again and continue to raise its ugly head. Little could I have imagined that Mueller had in fact scheduled a deposition in Seattle just three weeks before the big Saigon marathon! It was to have potentially dire consequences.

The mental marathon was to take no pause while the physical marathon was about to begin. I would have to run both at the same time!

Marathons are Mental

The Ho Chi Minh Marathon 1992

The day of the big race finally came. It was February 16th, 1992, and the temperature at the starting line at 5:00 am race time was a pleasant 22 degrees C, rising to 27 C later. Over 200 foreign marathon runners joined at the start, plus local Vietnamese who were dreaming to win the prize money. The total package was a massive US \$20,000, with separate categories for local runners in VN Dong.

What happened over the next several hours was a spectacle. It was, in a word, “awesome.” In addition to several thousand foreign tourists and press that came to watch, it seemed like the whole population of Saigon poured out onto the streets to watch. Throughout over 42 kilometers along the course, spectators were twenty deep. Children of all ages, old ladies, and old men...the government estimated that well over a million spectators watched the race. The course was beautifully laid out to cover the best streets and landmarks, ending at the Presidential Palace right after running past all the old embassies.

It was a thrill to watch and even more of a thrill to run in. I know, because in addition to being the organizer, I trained well and completed the race myself. I soaked up the amazing atmosphere. I was met at the finish line by my two young sons, Matt and Doug, who were 12 and 10 years old at the time. The memory of that one moment is one that I will always cherish!

Everyone survived the race as we were well prepared with extra water stops just to be sure. It was indeed a great day! The skeptics, and there were so many, thought sleepy Communist Vietnam could not pull it off. Were they surprised! Le Buu and the HCMC Sports Department, the HCMC Police, the Ministry of Culture and Information, and Saigon Tourist without exception did a fantastic job. Vietnam, after years of isolation since April 30, 1975, had opened up to the world in amazing style!

Vets on wheels

One of the most poignant moments surrounding the HCMC Marathon took place because of a last minute development. In spite of all the difficulties organizing such a major race under such difficult circumstances (in Vietnam it had never been done before), the old saying, “You can please some of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time” rang true. With only a few weeks to go before the race, there were many detractors from America who could not wait to see it fail, and journalists who could not wait to write negative reports about it. The Goddamn war was over. But no, it was not yet over for some from America.

Since returning to Vietnam, one of the most amazing experiences I had was to see the pragmatic attitude of the Vietnamese. I mean, who would know what to expect. Anything could happen.

Walking down the quiet streets of “Saigon” in 1988, on my first trip back since ’75, I marveled at both the changes and the reception. Saigon had been a bustling city, literally a beehive of activity from dawn until late at night. The contrast was perhaps the greatest I would ever witness in my life. Nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing, was happening. Gone almost in total were the cars, the commerce and all the people. Some type of reeducation had definitely taken place. Money lost its significance because there was nothing to buy. In fact, money that was being moved from one bank to another was not transported in a Brinks armored truck with shotgun toting guards. No. Stacks of it three feet high were being transported in an open cyclo, pedaled by an old man right down the middle of the street in broad daylight without anyone giving it a second glance.

Back to the point. Walking around the streets of Saigon during those days was an experience indeed. There were so few foreigners you soon found yourself attracting a small crowd of followers walking a few yards behind you. If you stopped, they stopped. The children

giggled. The Vietnamese curiosity finally got the better of one who summoned the courage to ask, "Where you from?" When I said "Hong Kong," they reflected a startled look of disbelief. "You not Chinese?" "No, American." "American! You American, that great you American! Oh, you please come back Vietnam!"

There was never one word of animosity. The war was over, at least here in Vietnam. It had been a terrible war, and for what? For "sweet f*ck all" as the G.I.'s would say. Memories flooded my mind from the war days and the US bases I had worked on, and I thought of the tragic and sad "Wall" of names I had once visited in Washington, DC. The handful of Americans I had met from time to time who were "officially" back here in Vietnam were looking for POW's and looking for bones. This was sad. So was the double standard.

What about all the Vietnamese America had killed? Who was mourning for them? Who was looking for *their* bones? Who was constructing a wall with their names on it that would probably encircle Saigon? Who dropped Agent Orange and napalm on them and then reneged on paying the compensation promised? Were some captured Viet Cong actually thrown out of helicopters after interrogation, as was rumored? The pity is that nothing has changed. USA foreign policy hypocrisy is a terrible sickness. Just ask any Palestinian!

Three weeks before the Marathon

I was suddenly, out of the blue, contacted by representatives of US Disabled Veterans who wanted to come and race. Fantastic, was my first reaction. What a wonderful opportunity to mend relationships. Then they popped the question. "Why is there no marathon disabled race?"

"Why no wheelchair race?"

Why and why not?

It was simple. Because we were inexperienced, no one had thought about it. They said that they were coming anyway, "whether you have it or not." A bit taken aback by their demand, I told them we certainly would love to have a race for the disabled, but perhaps it would be better the next year. Send me the details anyway, come to Vietnam; your visas will be there for you upon arrival; no one is excluded.

Speaking to Le Buu via Quan by fax, he was put in a terrible quandary. "No, no," he said. "How can we do this? There is no time, I am so busy, and besides, the streets of Saigon are full of pot holes in so many places. It's a disaster. It's embarrassing. But, yes, of course they are welcome to come and visit."

Pragmatic to a fault, Le Buu came up with a compromise. There would be a separate wheelchair-disabled race starting downtown in front of the Rex Hotel and all along the beautiful downtown boulevards, totaling around 6 Km in all.

Around a dozen US Army vets arrived to participate and what happened next was truly wonderful and amazing. Led by vet Andy Anderson from California, joining them were several dozen disabled North Vietnamese and Viet Cong former soldiers. The day came. The crowd

looked on in awe. There were tears in all eyes. You could have heard a pin drop. All the participants shook hands.

“They’re off!”...as the shot of a pistol started the race! The American vets, all with state-of-the-art equipment--titanium light racers--took off like lightning and whirled around the course at great speed and with ease. The Vietnamese vets with their old and heavy wooden racers, many with bent wheels, “clanked” along the streets falling instantly far behind. It did not matter. That was not the point. How I wished the world could have witnessed it, and even more so what was to happen next.

HCMC Ministry of Veterans Affairs

That night, all the disabled vets met for dinner at the Ministry to rejoice. The Americans, as a gracious gesture, agreed to leave some of their wonderful racers as gifts to the local vets. Things got downright personal! Through interpreters, all the vets started to share their experiences with each other. “What happened to you, *brother?*” “Where were you, *brother?*” I knew then that the wheelchair race was to become a permanent part of any future marathons.

Suddenly there was a great deal of excitement! The conversation of a US Army vet and a Viet Cong vet got very personal. They compared notes and dates. *Could it be true??* Yes! They had both been injured on the same date. Yes! They had both been injured at the same place during the same battle when a Viet Cong unit waited in ambush of an American Army patrol just south of Saigon in 1968. There they were, re-living the time that they had been shooting at each other. There they were now, having met once again, embracing each other as brothers. Needless to say, there was not a dry eye in the room.

Full speed ahead

Le Buu did a great job. The government rewarded him with a trip to Italy to meet with sports associations there. Tim M. and I were met soon after the race by the directors of the Hanoi Sports Department asking us to *please* come and discuss organizing the next marathon there! We were exhausted but happy. A marathon in Hanoi made great sense. It is the nation’s capital; it is an extremely lovely and ancient city, and it has a cold climate in winter. Perfect!

With one eye on the Seattle prosecutor

The next year was spent commuting back and forth, almost on a monthly basis. We saw potential but we also learned the hard way that “pioneering” is not profitable. The handwriting was on the wall. There was a complete lack of commercial sense existing in the government and in the communist mind. Vietnam was a poor country and, after all, the war had taken its toll. Everything was expected to be given for nothing. We invested our time and money and if we broke even we were very lucky.

With Le Buu away, we applied for a new visa (they did not have multiple visas yet) to his assistant, Mr. Kiet, since there were a lot of loose ends to wrap up. The reply came, “*What do*

you want to return to Vietnam for? The marathon is over.” It was an insight of things to come. We would consider organizing the race in Hanoi next time!

But before I could even think or exhale, just when I felt the worst was over, much to my shock and chagrin, while I was having a beer at the roof-top bar at the Hueng Sen Hotel Jenny called *unexpectedly*. *Her voice reflected deep concern. I felt sick.*

I had just received an urgent fax from Michael.....

Sparrow who??

Another unexpected development!

Michael: “Peter Mueller telephoned me today. He has unfortunately *not forgotten you*. He told me that the little information we supplied to him about Tom Sherrett has proven to be *totally worthless*, and he is apparently preparing to take some further action in your case.

“He tells me that an individual by the name of Philip Sparrowhawk has told the government he gave you money on numerous occasions on behalf of various persons who were associated with an individual about whom you gave false information.”

Part of the transcript Mueller sent!

“I, Phillip Sparrowhawk of the Metropolitan Correctional Center, in the City of Miami, in the State of Florida, state that:

From 1979 I usually traveled under the alias ‘B. MEEHAN.’ I obtained a false Irish Passport in that name in 1979.

I have known Bruce Aitken since approximately 1984. I was sent to his office by Kimball to deliver \$75,000 cash, which represented the purchase price of the 3 and ½ ton shipment of cannabis going to Australia. I have visited (with cash) Aitken’s office at 1415 Connaught Centre, 1 Connaught Place, Central, Hong Kong on approximately 10 occasions, and have also met Aitken in Bangkok and Toronto. Aitken told me that he was an American citizen who operated several financial and investment businesses in Hong Kong, including First Financial Services. Aitken is known to have the nickname ‘Brubaker’ from Kimball.”

“Mr. Sparrowhawk is scheduled to be returned to Canada and hence a deposition to preserve his testimony had taken place on January 21, 1992, at 10:00 am. The deposition took place by telephone conference call.

“Mr. Mueller said it would be the government’s intention to use this deposition **at a hearing in Reno to revoke your probation and at a trial in Seattle where you will be prosecuted for giving false statements to government agents.**

“He did not mention reinstating the indictment that was dismissed in Seattle. As you know that was the greatest fear in terms of a legal action that would expose you to a long period of time in custody.

“In any event, I need all the information you could supply concerning Phillip Sparrowhawk. The government is going to send me his prior statements, which I will fax to you.”

“The mother of all depositions” and the fallout

“The deposition of Phillip Sparrowhawk took 4 hours and 45 minutes. Peter Mueller is without question the most thorough lawyer in the world. The deposition was also taped and I will send you a copy when received.

“I told Peter Mueller he was required to tell me exactly what charges were being investigated by use of this deposition. He said the charges are false statements and the particular statements referred to are as follows:

- *Repeated statements by you that you terminated business in 1986.*
- *Statements indicating that the closing of accounts were not accurate.*
- *Statements concerning associates of Richard Kimball and Howard Marks that did not mention Sparrowhawk or a guy who came to visit with funds for Richard Kimball.*
- *Statement that you did not know who delivered the false passport of Richard Kimball.*
- *Failure to disclose knowledge of facts relevant to the Vancouver case.*
- *Failure to reveal Wylie as false identification of Richard Kimball.*
- *Denial of facts or knowledge of Denbigh’s involvement in drugs.*
- *Failure to disclose a \$1,000,000 transaction with Sparrowhawk in Canada.*
- *Failure to disclose knowledge of the Sparrowhawk bank account.*

Who the hell is Sparrowhawk?

“*Sparrowhawk*” is squawking about some large transactions that I allegedly handled for Kimball. I’ll have to listen to almost 5 hours of tape and read hundreds of pages of transcripts in order to refresh my memory!

Of course, I was worried about Mueller’s intentions. Just when I began to see the light at the end of the tunnel regarding my prospects for the future, presto, “another Merrill” appears out of the woodwork trying desperately to save his ass.

I responded. *“Michael, only now do I know that this person named Sparrowhawk’s real name is ‘B. Meehan!’! Sure, I remember him. I wouldn’t lie to you. I always thought he was a nice guy. I would never snitch on him!”*

The tapes arrived and I still have them to this day. I spent hours listening to them and locating holes in them wherever possible. This fellow Sparrowhawk had an amazing memory - like an elephant. I assumed Mueller must be frothing at the mouth with all this information spewing out against me. I needed yet another miracle. *God must be tiring of me asking!*

Just when I thought Mueller was down for the count, up again he jumps at the count of ten. I was secretly beginning to have a hidden respect for his tenacity. When we met in person he seemed not a bad sort, just unhappy and dour with some kind of a massive chip on his shoulder. I felt sorry and even a bit of pity for him as a human being.

As for Sparrowhawk, he was soft-spoken and likeable. I considered him a friend. I could only despair that he must have been put under great pressure and was very desperate; otherwise, he would never have said anything against me. I could forgive this transgression.

Could I pray for yet another miracle?

Think! I told myself. How the hell am I going to get out of this one? This time I am in very big trouble. I kept a suitcase packed in order to make a quick exit. *I will stay in Vietnam.*

Almost two months passed and then I heard back from Michael. *I spent most of that time in deep prayer.*

He wrote, "I have not heard anything from Peter Mueller and I like it that way. It would be most unfortunate if we did anything that brought your case to the attention of Peter Mueller or the court. If I hear anything, I'll let you know." I breathed a silent sigh of relief.

Then on May 13, 1992 –We learned why Mueller was so quiet....

Michael received a call from Mark Bartlett. It was his hope that the reason we had not heard from the government was that they had decided to put my case to rest. *Unfortunately, this is not to be the case.*

Mark informed Michael that Peter Mueller was involved in a very serious automobile accident two months ago. I felt no personal joy in hearing this news. He has been out of the office for that period of time. He is due back in the office in one month. He informed Mark Bartlett that he intends to prosecute you for false statements when he returns unless you have provided information of some importance to the government.

On the plus side, it does not appear as though they intend to reintroduce the Seattle indictment. That, of course, would have presented our most serious problem.

Two more months passed until Mark Bartlett called Michael again, on July 24th, 1992. Apparently he was being prodded by Peter Mueller to take some action in my case.

He offered three alternatives:

- *The first alternative was to go to Seattle and plead guilty to having given a false statement to a federal official. You could receive a sentence of up to 5 years in custody for that count.*
- *His second alternative was to do nothing and be indicted for numerous false statements.*
- *His third alternative was to come back to Seattle and finish your debriefing and correct any misstatements and tell the whole truth.*
-

Michael explained to Mark that I recalled events of many years ago as best I could and any inconsistencies in my testimony were based on failure to recollect rather than intent to misrepresent.

Michael said, "Of all the alternatives, I like the third alternative the best."

The torture never ends! August 1992

My feelings were quite clear. Because I made it a point since my involvement with Deak in the 70's not to inquire or ask questions of my clients, it appears now these factors continue to work against me. I saw no point to have another interview because my recollection was even less now as time goes by. My poor memory was exacerbated by the government's decision to kidnap me by defrauding the Thai government.

"Please tell the government that my feelings are that any doubts are due to poor recollection *on my part*, and a totally distorted picture of me *on their part*. I feel that I have paid in full with the time I was incarcerated in Reno, and denied bail!"

The month of September

Michael replied that he conveyed my concerns to Mark Bartlett. "I have also told him we assume that if they start debriefing, that they will not be seeking to prosecute you. The reason I made a case for debriefing is that the government is considering two alternatives: (1) debrief, (2) prosecution."

Given that those two alternatives are on the mind of Peter Mueller, I decided to push for alternative "1." Of course, Michael was absolutely right.

Suddenly all goes quiet again....

Several more anxiety-filled months passed, slowly destroying more of my brain cells. Michael wrote, "I have not heard anything recently but it is hard for me to believe that Peter Mueller will let you slide." And so ended 1992, a year in which success could only be positively measured by my ability to stay out of the United States and stay out of jail!

Early in 1993, Michael and I corresponded....

"I get nervous every time I receive a fax from you. I haven't heard anything from the Seattle U.S. attorney's office, but it is difficult for me to believe that they are going to forget you. Peter Mueller just doesn't seem like the type of person to forget anything."

Funny I also get nervous every time I receive a fax from you! Although it has been silent, I completely agree with you about Peter Mueller and I am always prepared for the worst.

Then suddenly on April 2, 1993 – a letter arrived from Mark Bartlett....

Dear Mike:

I wanted to write you a brief note concerning your favorite client and my favorite "cooperating" witness, Bruce Aitken. Although Mr. Aitken has consistently withheld substantial amounts of valuable information from the government in violation of his Plea agreement, he is like "a cat with nine lives" that always gets one more chance.

In this instance the chance to avoid prosecution in the Western District of Washington comes not from our office but from the Western District of Oregon. As you may know, AUSA

Charles Stuckey is proceeding to trial this year on defendants being prosecuted in the Western District of Oregon for the Sherrett conspiracy. In the upcoming weeks, AUSA Stuckey and his investigators will be traveling to South East Asia to speak with various witnesses. They would like to meet with Bruce during their visit.

I view this as Bruce's last chance, a chance that in all honesty, he does not deserve. If Bruce, however, undergoes a change of heart and provides truthful, honest and complete assistance to the District of Oregon prosecution, our District will forgive his past sins.

Michael's response to me.....

"Please find enclosed a letter I received from Mark Bartlett. While you may not think so, this letter is good news. I honestly thought that there were no conditions that would prevent Peter Mueller from going after you. He put quite a bit of work into building a false statements case and I didn't think he would abandon it.

"But apparently there is a good chance that we can put the whole matter behind us. I am trying now to find out who is being prosecuted in Oregon. It is quite possible that your 'truthful, honest and complete assistance' will be easy to give, hurt no one and as a result as Mark Bartlett says 'our District will forgive his past sins.'

"I will write to you as soon as I have heard from Mr. Stuckey."

April showers bring the flowers....

"The names of the individuals indicted with Tom Sherrett in Oregon were Mr. and Mrs. Vo Minh and Dr Vogui. I will let you know when I hear from the government again."

I immediately felt relieved and happy because.....I can now tell the truth and return the "favor" to my good friend Tom Sherrett.

I informed Michael I am aware of the indictment filed before the statute of limitations against Tom Sherrett's girlfriend, Mrs. Vo Minh, and her brother Mr. Vo Qui.

I was asked about them before by Mueller, and stated clearly and truthfully that I only saw them in Hong Kong on two or three occasions socially when they were here with Sherrett. *I am not aware* of any business that they did, and I had *no* business relationship with them.

Happily, my comments will *only help them* in their defense!

August 18, 1993...Michael's sound advice

•
"We are on the verge of truly concluding your case. Please go out of your way to satisfy Al Santos. While I know you have nothing to tell him, the appearance of being eager to help can be of great benefit to us.

"I consider it most fortuitous that the government has not tried to revoke your probation or charged you with making false statements. It really is out of character given the tenacious nature of the Seattle United States Attorney's office.

"So let's do everything to make sure they have no reason to go after you. What it takes to put this matter behind is that there is something that you need to do. Please attempt to be as friendly as possible.

“A lot of times prosecutors will help someone who has not helped them just because they like the individual. If you can convince Mr. Santos you really want to help but just don’t have any information regarding those individuals, he will report back to Seattle that you appeared to be cooperative.

“If he senses your distrust, he may believe you are withholding information for that reason and it would make our job in Seattle more difficult. Basically the purpose of this letter is just to try to inspire you to put your best foot forward.”

I told Michael

Not to worry! This time I will definitely put my best foot forward. That’s a promise!

In late September Al Santos visited Hong Kong. He was not a Mueller. He was decent. I told him straight up and politely that I had no knowledge of Tom Sherrett’s Vietnamese friends other than having met them briefly socially.

To say the least, I was glad to see the back of 1993. It had been yet another year living with a Mueller sword hanging over my head. I was aging very rapidly!

Spinning the Vietnam “Wheel of Fate”

Picking up the pieces, there were lessons to be learned about the realities of life and about human nature and self-survival. We live this life of ours believing that we can control our destiny, but I have serious doubts. Is there such a thing as fate? You be the judge.

It’s about the money stupid.....

Crime does not pay if and *when you get caught*. The smugglers of weed and art and those who launder the proceeds were in it mostly for the money; non-violent good folks for the most part, and friends. The karma was harmless.

The government, for the most part, created the criminality and the parallel cottage industry that underpinned it--the judicial system, the booming business in prison construction, and the agents. All were after the same thing, *the money....* Some friends did time, others lost their lives. Meanwhile, life must go on.

But with the passage of time and some reflection, I had at least gotten all the resentment out of my system. I felt no bitterness towards anyone personally. My family had suffered, and that is what really hurt. I realized that I myself bore most of the responsibility for this state of affairs. I would have to make it up to them in the future.

Mental and physical

Alternating between HCMC and Hanoi, we organized what were probably some of the world’s best marathons in terms of crowd numbers and excitement. The runners loved it, and the sponsors loved it. Adidas supplied the equipment, thousands of pairs of running shoes donated

to runners; however, we had to insure that the goods showed up at the race, otherwise Adidas would hold us accountable. In Hanoi this was not a problem. In Saigon, this was a big problem. The Sports Department wanted the shoes to be cleared from customs and delivered to them before the race. Word was out that a certain large portion would be sold into the market before the race. With Le Buu retired, Mr. Kiet, his replacement, could not have been a more unreasonable pain in the ass, doing all he could to sabotage our work; so much so that the whole event was being put in jeopardy.

In the midst of all the difficulties, our ace in the hole was our very capable friend and local “staff” by the name of Lam. “Dr.” Lam was from Hanoi. He and his lovely wife, Due, appreciated the effort we were making and felt that we should be helped and not hindered. But alas, Lam was from Hanoi and this was Saigon. Due, a very impressive lady, was also an extremely high-ranking official in the government, being a Director of the Office of Government.

We thought a friendly compromise had been reached. The shoes would be stacked in their brightly colored Adidas boxes at the start/finish line to be collected by all the registered runners either before or after the race. Most Vietnamese were running in the short 10 km race. Adidas was happy with the arrangements. The night before the race, however, a government representative, completely unknown to us, smelled a rat.

Tim and I were getting stuck into a few beers at the roof-top bar at the Heung Sen Hotel when suddenly we were approached by a young man named “Mr. Vuu” who introduced himself as representing the Ministry of the Interior in Hanoi. This came as somewhat of a shock to us. We hoped we had not done anything wrong. He had been educated in America, and he spoke fluent English. Much to our relief, he said he was there to help insure that the race went well, and we should not hesitate to call on him if we needed anything.

The very next morning, call on him we did! There were all the Adidas shoes still stacked at the starting line. No one was taking them! What’s happening, we asked Quan? “Shit,” he said. “Kiet announced in Vietnamese that no one should touch any of the shoes; we don’t want them!” No one touched them.

Time was of the essence; marathons must start on time and early in Saigon, before the weather gets too hot and runners may be in danger of dehydration. Race starting time was 6:00 am sharp, at first daylight. The runners were ready! It was now approaching 5:45 am on the large digital clock conveniently placed over the road! The police jeeps stationed at the starting line were ignoring my requests to start the race. Panic was about to kick in!

Suddenly, off to the sidelines, out of nowhere, appeared our young friend Mr. Vuu. The Ministry of Interior is by far the most powerful Ministry in the country, and the one that no one wants to run afoul of. *It is dreaded and feared.* Seeing our distress, he rushed over and asked, “What do you want?”

What do we want? “*Shit! To start the race, now!*” He rushed over to the two yellow police jeeps waiting at the starting line with the policemen lounging in them as if they had not a care in the world, and in front of several hundred anxious runners, he flashed his ID, yelled a few quick commands, and promptly commandeered their jeeps! Sirens blasting, he instructed them to immediately start the race, thus averting a major disaster and huge embarrassment just in the nick of time.

The Saigon Marathon '94, however, was very special

Six weeks before the 1994 marathon, back in Hong Kong having a drink at the opening of a local Vietnamese restaurant, I happened to bump into a friend, Michael Hosking. Michael ran a slick concert promotions company called Midas Promotions with his partner Dale Rennie. "Bruce," he said, "I hear and see you are doing some great events in Vietnam. Listen, I'm promoting the Bryan Adams Asian Tour; we just had a cancellation, I believe it was in India. When is the marathon? Why not bring Bryan to HCMC for a concert on the same day?" "Great idea," I said, "but you must be joking. The time is too short. I will look into it anyway since I am going to Saigon the next morning."

Bryan Adams – first Western artist to play in Vietnam

The Ministry of Culture and Saigon Tourist people listened to the tapes of Bryan Adams, and presto! To our pleasant surprise, the permit was issued immediately. The venue, however, was another problem. The only possibility was a 2,000-seat movie theatre near Chinatown, Cholon. Done! On the one day there would be a marathon in the morning and a Bryan Adams concert at night.

Midas took care of the sponsorship, and maybe even made some money on the gig. Matthew Kan, a pleasant soft-spoken chap from Hong Kong, represented Maxell Tapes, the main sponsor. Pepsi, tagging along from the Bangkok concert sponsorship organized by promoter B. Marcar, took a minor sponsorship; however, this sponsorship was to lead to a major confrontation and a lesson learned about so-called "ambush marketing." The theatre was going to be packed! The "buzz" around Saigon was building for several weeks and was soon reaching gigantic proportions!

Bryan had arrived two days earlier and caused an unbelievably hilarious scene at Ton Son Nhut Airport, one that I shall never forget. More about this later!

We arrived at the theatre, Tim and I, along with our Title Sponsor, Maxell's Matthew Kan. It was around 6:00 pm with the concert scheduled to start at 8:00 pm sharp. What we saw was amazing. Here was Maxell's lovely signage that we produced, totally dwarfed by huge and numerous *unauthorized* Pepsi signs! We were livid! Matthew Kan was much more than livid, he was mightily pissed off!

We summoned the lady manager of the theatre, Miss Hung. She was at a loss to understand what the problem was. "I don't understand," she said. "Pepsi came here and paid me a lot of money to put up all their signs! What is the problem?" Well, to her disbelief, I said all the signage must come down right now. They are not the main sponsor. She refused. Okay, we said, in that case there will be no concert tonight until every Goddamn Pepsi sign is removed!

A quick call to the Chairman of the People's Committee of HCMC and the Ministry of Culture, and presto, within minutes all the signs came down. The "damage," however, had already been done. It was done twice as the crowd waiting in the queue outside was enlisted to join in and help us tear down the Pepsi signs. With looks of amazement, they could not understand.

With the theatre packed, Tim and I spent the entire concert on the stage just out of sight behind the curtains. We enjoyed an amazing event. Bryan Adams was electric, particularly his hit song “*Everything I do, I do it for you.*” His “band” members were equally terrific-- great musicians each and every one, and humble as well. I hope Bryan will record the song again one day and add one very important word: Lord. “*Everything I do, I do it for you, Lord!*”

Bryan arrives in fanfare

Prior to the Bryan Adams concert, pirated tapes of his music could suddenly be heard being played over Saigon in the shops, restaurants and bars. The buzz was taking on a feverish pitch all of its own!

A huge welcoming crowd was expected to meet his arrival at Ton Son Nhut Airport on the Thai Airways flight from Bangkok. Tim and I decided to go out to the airport early just in case something was overlooked. We had already met with the esteemed airport manager, Mr. Minh. He ran the place like a little general.

We had been in constant contact with Bryan Adams’s manager, Vancouver-based Bruce Allen Talent. Bruce was a descent enough chap. He and his staff very professionally looked after all the interests of Bryan and the band. Nothing was left to chance. Security was important, although Bryan was to relish the fact that he could walk around Saigon, travel by cyclo, and not be recognized.

To our surprise, when Tim and I arrived at the airport at least two hours before the flight, Bruce Allen his manager was already there. What was to happen next, however, was to be a classic showdown of wills and cultural differences. I wish I could have filmed it!

“Bruce,” said Bruce to me. “Are all the arrangement made? How is it going to work?” I had no idea. “Here, let me introduce you to the airport manager himself, Mr. Minh.” So far so good! “Mr. Minh this is Mr. Allen, Mr. Allen...Mr. Minh.” Bruce Allen proceeded to take the initiative and give a lot of instructions to Mr. Minh. Mr. Minh listened, seemingly a bit annoyed. He turned and left. Time passed. Watching from the airport observation platform, we watched the Thai flight on final approach. Bruce screamed to me, “Bruce. Do something! What is going on here! The flight is arriving! How the hell am I going to meet it?”

Suddenly Mr. Minh appeared, just in time. At the very same moment, looking down on the tarmac there appeared an old Russian limo and a bus. *This bus must be for the band and the limo for Bruce Allen.* But how can this be? The bus is already full of lovely young Vietnamese ladies! With panic setting in, Bruce Allen turned to Minh and demanded an explanation!

“Oh! There is no problem at all, Mr. Bruce,” said a smiling Mr. Minh, not having the slightest clue what all the fuss was about. “The busload of ladies will meet the plane. There will be flowers and photographs. Then, they will walk all the way back and the band and crew will board the bus and come here to the V.I.P room for a press conference, some snacks, some Vietnamese hospitality and a dance performance.” “What about the black limo?” “Of course, Mr. Bruce, the limo is for me and Mr. Bryan. Who else? He is the V.I.P so he must ride back with me.”

“Oh no, no, no! This is totally unacceptable! I am the manager of Bryan Adams and this is *not* the way we do things!” Turning to me, “Bruce! You are the Goddamn Saigon promoter--do something!” “Do what?” I said. “Do something! This is my band and I am the manager!”

Mr. Minh, now understanding the situation, interrupted just then. He stared at Bruce Allen for what seemed like several minutes, pointed his finger to the tarmac and raising his voice, slowly howled,

“That may be your band, but this.... Is.... MY.... AIRPORT!”

And that is how it happened--the arrival of Bryan Adams in HCMC!

Chapter 39

Miracle at China Beach

Probation was never very far from my mind.

Traveling back and forth, I truly believed the Vietnam-Hong Kong commutes were keeping me out of the USA limelight, and were beginning to pay dividends in terms of making good friends and contacts, while bringing some really great sports exposure to the country. It was, however, exceedingly difficult and becoming more so to justify the time and effort for the remuneration we were generating. We carried on because intriguing new challenges continued to appear.

One memorable event started from a conversation I had in Hong Kong with a good friend, Dave Garcia. You see Dave was a decorated Army vet, who in fact spent a couple of years as a POW in Hanoi. Still, he fondly recalled all the great days he spent surfing on the beach in Danang, the famous “China Beach.” One night we were having a chat about Vietnam over a few beers at the Foreign Correspondent’s Club in Hong Kong. “Bruce,” he said, “I have a *great* idea!” Which is? “Please! Would you organize a world-class surfing event at China Beach in Danang! It would be out of this world amazing! *If you can’t cover the budget let me know and I will help.*”

Placed in touch with the World Tour, the thought of having a 4-Star US \$60,000 prize money event at China Beach was purely electric. Sports Asia had done it again, establishing another *first!*

Here we go again, Tim and me. This will be even more interesting than a marathon. The Danang Sports Department and Danang Tourist were thrilled at the thought. They had a beautiful old hotel right on the beach a couple of kilometers from downtown. The occupancy at the time was 10 % on a good day. Nothing, I mean absolutely nothing, was happening in Danang.

Miracles needed and miracles provided

The first miracle after officially registering the event was signing up participants and setting the date to fit the *Tour*, as most of the professional surfers would be coming to Vietnam either directly after an event in France, or from the USA. We thought the biggest miracle would be finding the sponsorship.

In the first instance, no one seemed interested; however, as “luck” or fate would have it, a Japanese executive working for the parent company of the Saigon Floating Hotel had heard about the event from our good friend and Saigon manager of the hotel, James Spurway. James, although not a surfer himself, mentioned it to Nakayama-san, who had been working for the company in Sydney and who was hooked on the sport. Presto! For the \$60,000 prize money, the

“Danang Pro” was established, sponsored by the Saigon Floating Hotel, to the incongruous disbelief of all.

It was to become a full-on carnival event, with Hong Kong rock band *Mind Your Head*, coming from the FCC in Hong Kong for nightly concerts on the beach after each day’s competition.

With the date of the event fast approaching, a host of tasks needed to be addressed. Visas to Vietnam were always a hassle. We had to collect applications and photos from all participants so that visas could be waiting there for them upon arrival at Saigon Airport. Arrangements needed to be made to clear customs and transport many surfboards from Saigon on to the flights to Danang. *What about the weather?* And special requests, what we called the “party rider?” Just like Bryan Adams had a “rider” that included French beer, our hippie guest list (a proverbial throwback to the “make love, not war” movement) plus some of the surfers, required at least a carton of the already-rolled *special smokes!*

What about the surf?

Tim and I had worked hard over several months trying not to leave anything to chance. Of course, totally out of our control were the weather and the size of the surf. But, hey, this is China Beach. It must have great surf or what the hell was all the fuss about during the war?

We checked the weather. Nothing special.... There was, however, quite a big typhoon brewing in the South China Sea south of Hong Kong and east of the Philippines. This gave us some hope at least for some surf. The “Tour” organizer had told us the surfers were already having a dismal year, with some events taking place on one-foot waves. They were coming to Vietnam in a very mean spirit and with very high expectations!

Always check the “signs” and the “signage”

Dave Garcia introduced a close friend of his, Norm Innis, who happened to be the president of the great sportswear company, Quiksilver. He offered no cash but plenty of surfing gear and clothes. The Danang Sports Department introduced us to a pleasant old man, Mr. Truc, who, although over 80 years old, was their official sign painter. We supplied all the logos for the sponsors’ signage that would surround the surfing event and hospitality tents in grandeur. Beautiful signs were made for the Saigon Floating Hotel, Telstra, Pepsi; however, we did not have the artwork for Quiksilver, choosing instead to leave one of Norm Innis’s *business cards* with the Sports Department to pass on to our old sign-maker to copy the logo.

We *thought* we had thought of everything. From experience in Vietnam, we also realized that the devil is in the detail. The devil appeared the day before the event.

Tim and I flew to Danang a couple of days earlier to check everything out. We stayed downtown for free at the Sports Department Guest House. It was nothing special, but was clean. Everywhere we traveled we stayed at the sports guest houses for free and were treated like VIPs.

“Let’s go check the signage!” Tim said, as we jumped onto our rented Honda 90’s for the pleasant drive out of the city, across the main bridge, and along the coast of some of Vietnam’s

finest beaches. We thought about the 30-odd surfers who were already on the way, flying into Vietnam from all around the world. The weather was so calm. We hoped and assumed it *must* be different along the coast.

The first shock! In actual fact, what was to happen next pointed out all the difficulties of dealing in a newly opened country like Vietnam, and the degree to which preparations need to be managed. Riding south from Danang, approaching the left side turnoff road to the beach hotel venue and the beach, we felt excited with anticipation to see the preparations and the waves. Our anticipation grew as we got closer and closer, because the lay of the land is such that we could not see the beach or the venue until it was almost right smack in front of us. The view was blocked by the natural sand dunes between the road and the beach.

Our jaws dropped at the same instant in disbelief! The signage looked great, however with one exception! Quiksilver... There they were! A dozen beautiful signboards, all perfectly painted replicas of Norm Innis' business card! The huge signs read "Norm Innis, President, Quiksilver," complete with full details of address, phone and fax. We held our breath when Innis first laid his eyes on them. He looked at them in amazement and then to our relief burst out laughing. We burst out laughing too.

"Now I can appreciate what you maniacs are up against!"

Not all were so gracious. Sensing the first opportunity to make a bit of money in almost 30 years, the local prices of everything doubled. Some folks from Hong Kong even complained they were getting "ripped off," although whatever the Vietnamese charged it still amounted to peanuts. Cheapskates! They would do the same of they were in the locals' shoes, since the last time they had a chance to make a dime was 20 years ago. Just look at the joy and smiling faces of the locals who sold you the cold beer for \$.50 instead of a quarter!

The biggest shock of all

With two days to go before the event, the heat we were facing was a lot hotter than the weather. Shit, we were too busy dealing with one problem after another as the system was starting to break down. We were in very big trouble and getting frantic calls from Quan in Saigon. "Bruce," he said, "*we* are in very big trouble, what to do?" The surfers had arrived and were due to fly up to Danang the following morning. Good, so what is the problem? "Shit, f*ck," said Quan, who could swear fluently in English. "The surf boards are all too big to fit into the cargo hold of the Vietnam Airlines jet used to service Danang!" I repeated Quan's expletives! "Yes we are truly screwed! Find a solution, this is Vietnam! Call me back."

Several hours passed, and I was on my third breakfast beer when the phone rang. "Bruce, Vietnam Airlines is allowing each surfer to bring only one board. They are all in a panic and having a fit. *It is chaos here!* I have arranged for a truck to take the rest of the boards up to Danang and it is about to leave right now, ETA in 24 hours." "Well done, Quan, you are a genius. That should calm them down." It did. It worked. It must have been quite a sight--the small Tupelov would have been full of passengers, including large-size foreigners, with all the aisles stacked up with surf boards.

All aboard! Fasten your seat belts; but first if anyone has to take a pee, better do it now!

We had forgotten all about the surf!

In all of the excitement, we had completely ignored the biggest problem we were facing right up until 48 hours before the start of the event. The surf “Tim,” I said. “Bruce,” he said...we are in deep shit. We must have been crazy to hold this event, *based on what? There is no surf!*” The shock of the Quicksilver signage paled in comparison to what we saw when we gazed out from the beach over the South China Sea. Tim said, “They made a mistake. This should be called the South China Lake!” Very funny! The sea was calm as glass. The surf was about 6 inches high--absolutely zero! This is a big joke!

What to do, they are all arriving the next day. With a twinge of serious contemplation, we considered that we still have twenty-four hours. Let’s just get the hell out of here, let’s just leave! But our better sense prevailed, and we decided to have a few more cold beers instead. Where the hell is that typhoon that was supposed to be heading this way? It was our only hope. *Pray!*

That night, sleeping restlessly at the Sports Department guest house, around 3:00 am I was suddenly awakened by the slamming of the shutters on the windows! The wind had picked up *dramatically! Hallelujah, thank God!* I could hardly wait until daylight to ride out to the beach and check the waves.

The offshore typhoon had arrived just in the nick of time. When Tim and I arrived at the beach we could hardly believe our eyes. Surf! Magnificent surf had arrived, from 2 inches to over 12 feet high overnight. It was indeed yet another miracle! When the surfers arrived, all pissed off, they saw the surf and the massage parlor and suddenly all in life was good! As a footnote, the event and concert were amazing, and a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The typhoon wiped out a bridge south of Danang, so the truck with the other surfboards never did arrive. No matter. The China Beach Pro, filmed for ESPN TV by Dynocomm out of Los Angeles and shown later in America, had produced the best waves and the best event on the World Tour!

Say Good night literally....

The concert with “Mind Your Head” was fabulous. By the numbers! China Beach had not been ‘rockin’ and rollin’ like that since the US departed; ganga smoke permeated the air, it was a beautiful full moon night and everyone was happy. Suddenly, right in the middle of the “antiwar-famous” song, “War,” (What is it good for?) “War, yea, what is it good for -- absolutely nothing,” it all came crashing down. The lights suddenly went off and the music suddenly stopped! “Shit, what happened?” We informed the Vietnamese that the concert would start at 8:00 pm and last for three hours. You guessed it. Exactly 3 hours later at 11:00 pm. a little old man working at the hotel followed instructions and pulled the plug on the electricity. It was all over in a flash. The only light left was the moonlight! Astonished, the locals could not comprehend what on earth all these foreigners were complaining about! *Weird!*

On the other hand....

This reminded me of another unusual incident when I had arrived at Immigration at Tan Son Nhut Airport in Saigon. I had worked late and I took the late flight from Hong Kong, arriving

after midnight. Immigration had changed the rules yet again. Suddenly, two photographs were required for a visa on arrival. I had a multi-entry visa so it was no problem for me.

I soon found myself in the queue behind a Singaporean Chinese in a state of panic; he had no photographs. The immigration officer pointed to the newly opened photo kiosk across the hall where two photos could be obtained for the outrageous sum of \$10. The kiosk opened at 8:00 am. “What can I do?” said the Singaporean. “Wait,” said the immigration officer.

Thinking quickly, I was able to find the “Vietnamese solution.” “Here,” I said to the immigration officer. “He needs two photos, right?” “Yes.” “Okay, then he can have two of mine.” Done! “Thank you very much!” It made no difference that I had a beard and was twenty years older. Rules were specific, and the rules said two photographs, please!

Back to the beach....

At the end of the event we took stock and marveled at our luck. The big waves lasted 3 days. The Danang Pro lasted 3 days. On the morning of the 4th day the surfers checked out. By afternoon the South China Sea had returned to the South China Lake!

Enter the RHKYC

Sports Asia carried on trying to establish events that could potentially turn a quid, especially ones that had recurring potential. The final major event we did worth mentioning was a fantastic yacht race between Hong Kong and the beautiful beach resort in Central Vietnam, Nha Trang. It was always one of our favorite places. We were assured by the Race Director, Mike Sinfield, of the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club, of always seasonal excellent wind conditions for that time of the year; and fortunately this rang completely true.

Establishing such an event in Nha Trang, however, took on mind-boggling obstacles that were really not appreciated by many. Vietnam was being held up to the highest international standards. Mr. Loc, the director of Nha Trang Sports, was one of the kindest and most generous people we had ever had the chance to work with. He did his level best to do everything we asked. Our great partner Lam in Hanoi and his wife Due worked behind the scenes, and in fact worked miracles.

You see, the Vietnam Race, as it came to be known, was initiated with a lead time of over a year prior to the event.

This length of time would also see me through almost to the end of my probation. Plenty of time, right? Not for Vietnam.

The permit

People I knew in Saigon who supposedly had great connections with the government in Hanoi were reporting back to me. “Listen, Bruce, you and Tim are really wasting your time *this time*. I hear there is absolutely no way in hell you will get the permit for this event.” Coupled with this thinking were the constant requests from the RHKYC as to what is happening. *When* will the government issue the permit? The yacht captains need to know *now!* They need to come

from South Africa or Australia; what the hell is going on? Is Sports Asia for real? They were beginning to get on my nerves!

“What the hell was going on” were major discussions between the military, the navy, the Ministry of Culture, and Customs and Immigration – Nha Trang is not an open international port. There are no customs and immigration. This would all have to be imported from Hanoi.

It appeared hopeless until one day with only about 6 weeks left before the event we got a call from Lam in Hanoi. The government has issued the permit based on instructions from the top military general in charge in Hanoi. The race is on! The Vietnamese could not then understand, however, why the yachts were not coming from far away exotic places like Africa. They are *now* permitted and most welcome! We told them they were yachts, not hydrofoil! It went over their heads.

Needless to say, it was a great event. My family was booked into the amazing villa hotel on the peninsula overlooking beautiful Nha Trang Beach. It was formerly the summer palace of the Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai. I could not help feeling the spirit and history of the place. Jenny and the boys loved it.

The only hitch in the beautiful race was that the Hong Kong Race Director, on the morning of the race, changed the course, which turned out to be the most idiotic decision imaginable. Here were thousands of people standing on the beach. All the yachts sailed by about 100 yards offshore and it was beautiful! But then, instead of circling around over and over, off they headed straight out to sea, not to return to the finish line until hours later. The Vietnamese were livid!

The Peoples Committee was asking me what is happening. The military and customs were up in arms. It appeared to all that the yachts were leaving the country. The crowds were losing interest.

Suddenly the yachts on the horizon appeared to be getting bigger. Yes, they were indeed returning. I thought, at least the Vietnamese did not have a monopoly on lack of common sense!

Back to the “real” world...still on probation!

All this happened while I had been under great personal pressure. I was still on probation. Several former associates were still coming out of the woodwork ready to do deals with the government and testify against me in exchange for lesser sentences. It seemed to be one disaster after another!

Much to our shock, BD’s brother, John, had decided to strike out, I believe on his own, pick up a load of weed from Thailand, and sail the yacht back to California. We heard the news one day. He did not make it. Instead, of all places, he had sailed to close to Vietnam! Shit! He was captured in Vietnam and imprisoned somewhere in the South. We made discreet inquiries but got nowhere. What could we do? Surely we would try to help if we can find him. I was concerned that any such contact could result in the revocation of my parole. Tim and I could do nothing. Surely any such contact would result in a visit from the Bangkok based DEA!

It had now been four years since I was released from the prison in Reno. At times, I almost wished I had stayed in prison rather than being constantly threatened by the government that wanted to revoke my probation. Time was definitely on my side.

The last straw!

I suppose the straw that broke the camel's back as far as our illusions with Vietnam was the decision Tim and I made to invest in an upcoming property development just outside HCMC. We had great partners; Loan, a Vietnamese lady who was honest and smart and who ran the best ad agency in HCMC; and the Chairman of the People's Committee in the District. They had no money. We had some and had some from our friends. It was a sweet deal and made sense to everyone.

Pooling other people's money, we had the lawyers do the paperwork that existed at that time, and remitted in US \$200,000 to VietCom Bank to secure the deal. It was a gutsy move, but it made great sense and would yield a nice steady income for all. For the first time, the new law made it attractive to investors. The property market was heating up.

But it wouldn't be long before the government would change the rules again, and in the stroke of one decree totally destroy the market and set the country back several years. No land transactions were allowed until certain feasibility studies were completed.

With the deal "off" we applied to Vietcom Bank for approval to remit the funds back to Hong Kong. To our shock, "no way" was the answer! What? Yes, you can remit dollars into Vietnam; however, you cannot remit them back out. What a scam, what bullshit! My wife, who trusted my judgment, will surely kill me. In fact, as always she was calm and stoic. The investors, obviously, were livid!

The alternative was to withdraw the cash dollars there in Saigon; and that, much to the authorities' shock, is exactly what I did. "Give me the cash."

Phoenix rising

By a major stroke of luck, I had a conversation with a friend of mine in Hanoi, who I knew had a similar problem moving money and who was to give me the solution. Go to Cholon, he said. Talk to the Chinese! This is exactly what I did. Soon I was explaining the problem to a contact I received. Here I go again. It cost me 3 % this time; however, it was worth every cent. Two deliveries of the dollars were made over two days while waiting on the phone for confirmation in Hong Kong and all the money was magically returned. What a relief!

Departing Ton Son Nhut Airport the following day and saying good-bye to my friends, with only hand-carry luggage, it was clear the money had somehow been magically moved yet again, in what was to be my last laundering transaction.

Vietnam had served a purpose and had been my saving grace as I walked through the mine fields of probation and the mine fields of life. Vietnam, during the war, was the beginning of my "education" and also, many years later, the end of the line for "Mr. Clean."

I was grateful and blessed to have come out of the mine fields and the “mind fields” with my family intact and a keen appreciation for my freedom. Indeed, I had so much to be thankful to God for.

In retrospect

Tim and I had put quite an effort into Vietnam. However, the result reminded me of a runner on a treadmill. As in running a marathon, we had “hit the wall” and it was a brick wall at that.

But for me, it was all worth it, giving me the “carrot” to dangle in front of Mueller in my effort to escape possible re-incarceration.

The decision was simple. Vietnam did not have international schools and my family could not move there. Making something out of Sports Asia commuting back and forth from Hong Kong would require spending more and more time there and less and less time in Hong Kong with my sons. It was a simple choice in the end.

By then, I felt a bit like a fish out of water. Instead of living the life I had imagined with a decent bank balance and two wonderful sons to watch grow up, I had somehow lost my compass direction. Every business investment I tried turned into a pile of rubbish. I seemed to be living on borrowed time and on past earnings. This could not last forever.

I discovered painfully that there are few trustworthy businessmen in the real world; and of course, like the world over, there are a lot of people just looking to take your money from you if you are foolish enough to let them. I was far too trusting and learned the hard way that, ironically, integrity seemed to exist only in the minds of people who were involved in activities that required total trust, where everything was done on trust and on a handshake. Ah, the business of laundering money. *Pure nostalgia!*

Not long after, Tom Sherrett was arrested in Switzerland. Arriving in Amsterdam on a flight from Geneva, his passport was checked upon arrival. It was a German passport. Problem was he doesn't speak German. His luck had suddenly run out. I suppose it was inevitable. I wished it had not happened and I silently wished him well.

As for me, time did pass and I could only look forward to ending the probation, and to demand from the government that all my documents be returned. Michael was never too positive about that prospect; however, I was tenacious about it because I felt that a part of me was still somewhere in a storage room in America. There was no closure. It would not be over until it is over, until the proverbial “fat lady sings.”

Probation

The probation ran for five years from the date of sentencing, less credit for the time I was in custody.

Michael said there are no formalities when probation runs out. Unless the government takes some steps to stop probation from expiring 5 years from the date of my sentencing, the passage of time in itself will cause probation to be concluded. Only then could we apply to have your documents returned.

The year of 1995 was quietly spent filing out the form each month for the probation officer, Wayne Momerack, in Reno, stating my monthly income which, by the way, was steadily on the decline. The months passed uneventfully until the day I had been waiting for finally arrived, to wit:

The end of my probation, January 30, 1996 – “V Day!”

United States District Court

District of Nevada

Probation Office

JANUARY 30, 1996

Re: TERMINATION OF PROBATION

Dear Mr. Aitken:

Thank you for your monthly supervision report for December, 1995. We would like to confirm that your expiration date from supervision was December 6, 1995. You have completed the supervision term as ordered by the court and we would like to express our congratulations. Best wishes in all future endeavors.

Sincerely,

(s)

WAYNE L. MOMERAK

Senior U.S. Probation Officer

Michael was very pleased to see that my probation had been terminated. There were steps that the government might have taken to prevent my termination; however, they chose not to. But to my consternation and shock, Michael said, *“I would like to be able to tell you that this means the matter is totally closed. This is not the case.”*

“If you will recall, prosecutors in Seattle were threatening us with a ‘false statements’ case. Given the passage of time, I believe that case is probably dead. However, they may wish to have you testify in one of the other pending cases and may attempt to use those potential charges as leverage. Or they may just subpoena you to testify. Our greatest ally in all of this is the passage of time.

“When all of the prosecutions in Seattle are over, I believe I could then tell you that the matter is totally behind you.”

Of course... I too was pleased that the probation was terminated, and agreed that the passage of time is our best ally. From the beginning, there were no circumstances under which I would testify against anyone in any case. I would prefer, like B. D., to be held in contempt. They did not yet water-board people back in those days!

Fast forward

The end “of the end” had finally arrived. The passage of time had in fact been my greatest ally. There was no one left that the government could lie about in my name, and I felt comfort knowing that no one was hurt due to any intention on my part. The damage had been done several years before, in 1987 to be exact, in the ill-fated attempt to launder \$7.6 million through the fake “casino-in-Reno.”

Many lives had been affected. For all, the experience had been traumatic, resulting with the loss of some millions of brain cells due to the drama of it all, as well as the loss of some millions of paper dollars.

Most players had been comrades in arms, survivors who would pick up the pieces of life and carry on, hopefully wiser for the experience.

As for myself, I had a lot to reflect upon and a lot to be thankful for. But, sadly, the edge was no longer there. The certain innocence of youth “happy-go-lucky” type of life had moved forever into the past due to the weight of “The United States of America v. Bruce Aitken.”

Oh, by the way, I must mention that my persistence paid off! One day, circa 2000, while sitting in an office shared with a friend, holding my head in my hands and facing a bleak future as an unemployed money launderer, *while wishing I had some money to launder*, the phone rang.

It was the United States Consulate, Hong Kong. I could not believe my ears. “Yes, Mr. Aitken, that’s correct. We have received 17 boxes of documents from the United States addressed to you.” *Seventeen, I thought in amazement. That is far too many.* “Where do you want them delivered?”

The boxes arrived and what a treasure trove it was. Not only were all my documents there, the clerk who packed the shipment was kind enough to include all the FBI reports, DEA reports, DEA handwritten notes, CIA reports, “snitch” hand-written notes and reports, *and more.*

Ah.... One day, I will have to write a book!



