

## The Hit

SUMMER 1978

Gus had been hit! One hot summer evening as he sat in his old worn-out second-hand easy chair in front of his television, someone assassinated him in the back of the head with a single twenty-two caliber bullet.

I met Gus as a frequent customer of Long's. He was in his late fifties but appeared much older. The years under the hot desert sun had not been kind to his dried-out wrinkled old skin.

Gus rode an old second-hand, beat up, paint-chipped and dented Honda motorcycle. The bike was poorly home-converted to simulate a Harley chopper. He ended up with a "Hardly" chopper. His worn out Levis and black leather jacket hadn't been cleaned in years and looked like they should have been discarded in the fifties.

We became semi-friends, more than just a customer-employee relationship.

Gus spent hours in Sambo's Restaurant across the street, drinking coffee and eating runny eggs while entertaining the regular stool group with his assorted stories and lies. Whenever I saw him, I always flipped him a fin or sawbuck.

One afternoon, while visiting my store, Gus told me about his adventures as a young soldier fighting the Germans during the Second World War. He mentioned he was shot fourteen times.

Disbelieving I stated, "Come on Gus?"

Instantly he pulled up his stained, previously white t-shirt. I was stunned at the fourteen bullet-holed scars starting below his left abdomen and continuing at one-inch intervals kitty-corner up his chest to his right shoulder. A German machine-gun toting soldier had shot him. The aging veteran gained my immediate respect. I now shared more than a passing sympathy for his slum-filled existence.

Shortly after this instance, we became closer and Gus divulged his next secret. He lived in an old trailer somewhere far out in the desert. He spent hours researching dry-pan gold mining and was convinced he knew where large caches of gold were deposited. I was not easily persuaded, though after seeing his bullet-ridden chest, I should have been more accepting of his stories.

He went on to explain how to set up a dry pan dredge system attached to a used Jeep engine. He did not have two nickels to rub together and offered me a full partnership in his operation if I wanted to invest a minimum sum in buying the needed used equipment.

He would not disclose where the gold was. I asked how much it would cost and told him I would think about it.

Two weeks later, I was watching the late news on television. Gus was murdered!

Noticeably shaken, I visited Sambo's a couple of times scouring the line of men trying to figure out who would have a motive for killing Gus. The regular coffee and breakfast clutch all appeared to be nothing more than lonely old men seeking camaraderie. I abandoned my investigation. The case went unsolved.

Less than two years later, the desert northeast of the Glamis sand dunes was fenced off. Behind the high-security, guard-patrolled chain-linked fence appeared a new gold mine. It stretched for miles on both sides of the two-lane state highway leading to Blythe. Giant wheeled graders and haulers could be seen everywhere carrying thousands of yards of sand and dirt. The massive operation is still running today almost forty years later

There are a couple of old trailers, far off the highway, just west of the gold mining fields. I often wonder if one of these had been Gus's and this was the location of his secret deposits. I suspect the old man might have told too many secrets; privy to overhearing ears in Sambo's restaurant.

There is not a day goes by that I am not grateful Gus and I never became partners and I had not been sitting in Gus's home discussing our gold mining plans on his fateful summer evening.