

## Wide Ride

WINTER 1982

My wife and I arrived home early January 1 after partying away New Year's Eve with friends at a local El Centro nightclub. Our two young children were spending the night at the day care center.

As soon as we entered our front door, my wife's attitude towards me turned one-hundred-eighty degrees. I thought we had a great evening of fun, dining, drinking, and dancing. Now home and alone I had expected our fun to continue.

She had expected me to stay out of her sight while she retired to our bed. We forgot to share our New Year's resolutions; I had no idea that hers did not include me.

On Friday morning exactly one week later my wife phoned me at work and asked if I was free at noon to take her to lunch.

We went to a very nice and one of the most expensive restaurants in the area. My wife and I talked and laughed through the extended lunch hour. I suggested we make an every Friday lunch date.

She was non-committal, "We'll see."

She seemed to be having a good time but I hadn't really known her for at least a year. Almost every time I arrived home from work, she needed to see her Mary Kay mentor or conduct a home demonstration show. There were continuously Mary Kay events or disasters that required her attention away from home.

Later that Friday afternoon, I was sitting in my office talking with a department manager and a clerk. I glanced out my window overlooking the sales floor. A woman, marching with purpose, was coming down the front aisle inside the cashier's stations. She was looking at my office. I assumed she was a sales person desperately needing to secure a last minute purchase order.

This woman entered my office without knocking and interrupted my meeting, "Are you, David Whalen?"

"Yes," and she handed me a thick Kraft envelope, pivoted and left. I peeked in. I was served!

I instructed the two men sitting in front of me to shut the door on their way out.

Spreading out the envelope's contents across my desk, I started scouring them for understanding. First was her attorney's county filed and recorded divorce paperwork. I perused every word. I could not understand the listed reasons for the divorce. I certainly understood the words, but not how they applied to me.

The next issue was a judge signed restraining order. It stated; I was not to go home or have any contact or be within five hundred feet of my children or wife.

This was a little extreme. We had known each other for more than twelve years and been married for almost a decade. We lived through three childbirths and a death together and now she can't talk to me?

She evidently had been planning this for a while. At lunch together less than two hours ago, she could have said, "Oh, by the way..."

I immediately phoned her. I hadn't expected her to answer. I am sure she was at Mary Kay emergency.

I walked to my empty darkened home and packed some clothes before walking to a local hotel. It was a long sleepless night; tossing and turning, up and down, head spinning in confusion.

The next morning I went to work as usual. Longs Drugs still held to their archaic work hours. All their management and clerks were required to work a forty-four hour week, five full days plus a half-day. Saturdays were my half day and I was off on Sundays.

At noon, I was called to our garden center. When I walked out my store's front doors, I saw my wife and children standing on the sidewalk waiting for me. I continued past them to the end of the walk stopping at the edge of the garden department's fence away from any foot traffic entering or leaving the store. I turned facing them and stood dazed in incoherent silence as they approached me. My wife started with standard lies, "I'm sorry. I tried to tell you yesterday at lunch. You can see your children anytime. There is nobody else."

I wasn't buying there wasn't anyone else? No matter how good or bad a marriage, it always endures until a third party enters the scene. By human nature, a man or women will not change their situation unless there is a perceived better offer.

She went on to say, "Come home until we find you an apartment."

Hadn't she read her own restraining order? We both knew it was bogus. Now she unwittingly admitted it offering to overlook my unchecked temper and threats of violence; broken bones, torture, rape, murder, or worse, with, "You're welcome home, honey."

I stayed in my house with all the amenities including sleeping in my bed for the next three weeks, before moving to a small one-bedroom apartment the first day of the following month. I rented it from an older US Custom's pilot with whom I regularly played racquetball.

My soon-to-be ex's lawyer office was half way between Longs and my apartment. I left work early one afternoon and stopped by, on my walk home.

Her representation I chatted for a few minutes. I explained we were going to have an easy uncontested divorce while we simply split our assets fifty-fifty. If he wanted to write up the paperwork, I would sign and it would be over.

Apparently, our plan would have cut his bill below his standard of living. He told me I needed to retain my own attorney and asked me to leave his office. I do not know how she found this legal thief.

After a few days, Mark and I went for a drink. The lounge was sandwiched in a continuous building between Denny's restaurant and a Holiday Inn hotel. We consumed more alcohol than I was accustomed to.

Mark parked towards Denny's end of the lot and upon leaving the bar, he insisted on giving me a ride back to my apartment. Mark only lived two blocks down the street. I certainly hadn't wanted to be responsible for him driving me across town and back drunk, besides I needed some air.

We stood at his truck having a cigarette and talking. Finally, I said, "Good night."

He opened his vehicle's door, but before getting in, he looked around. In this parking spot, we could view part of the back lot. Mark said, "Hey, isn't that your car?"

Sure enough, there was my former vehicle parked against the cement wall in the back lot.

I went inside to the restroom before my hike home. When I returned Mark, was gone. I looked back at my car. My wife was not in the bar where we had been and looking through Denny's large front windows, I confirmed she wasn't there either. That left only one option even though she still maintained there was never another person.

I decided to confirm the vehicle identification by walking around the building past the parked car before taking the delivery alley out to the street. I always knew there had to be a man! I should have walked directly home.

I almost made it, but halfway to the alley past the doors my wife and her boyfriend emerged from the hotel. As soon as they spotted me, they ran for his, puke-green VW Vanagon. After watching their Buster Keaton performance, I kept walking and turned the corner into the alley.

It stunned me when they came around the corner behind me. I never understood why they hadn't just driven away through the main exit on the other side of the building. He stopped; his bumper inches of my legs. I pointed my index finger at his face and shook it from side to side. That should have ended it, but my wife started screaming, "GO! GO! Run him over! Just drive!" He hit the gas!

The delivery alley was narrow though I should have hugged the building wall and let him by. Rather, I instinctively jumped onto the bumper grabbing the Vanagon's front-mounted spare tire. We bounced down the alley face to face through his windshield. She was screaming. He was picking up speed. I was hanging on.

I desperately needed off. At the end of the building, he slowed to make the right hand turn into the street. That was my chance. I certainly had not wanted to go bouncing all over El Centro on the front of a Vanagon.

I dove for the grass boulevard between the blacktopped parking lot and the asphalt street. I missed the grass and landed hard in the street. I staggered to my feet as they disappeared into the night. My arms scraped and bleeding, my shredded pants absorbing oozing blood. The only thankful outcome, my head missed the curb.

I staggered home. After cleaning up, I went to bed. Sleep needed before clothes shopping the next day.