

No girlfriend for me, despite a few abrupt immature efforts

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One day, Tom's brother's girlfriend popped in, just came walking down our road. She was looking for Tom, wanted to ask him if he knew where his brother was. No phone lines, recall, while cell phones and the internet wouldn't be available for years yet.

I was standing outside, working in the goat pen, when she came striding along. I reluctantly informed her that Tom wasn't staying with us anymore. She shrugged this off, took a quick break inside, and went on her way. I have always wondered how that went. A beautiful young lady, apparently all on her own and hundreds of miles from her (likely) home. Or it now occurs to me, was there a car parked discreetly down the road somewhere?

Actually I did see Tom's family once more, down in Tucson, however the topic did not come up. So much 20/20 hindsight, why didn't I ask? Tom wasn't there, and if we did discuss it, I have no memory of that.

I recall other visitors (more friends-of-friends) who stayed in the Big House longer, such as a couple we dubbed Chris and Chris. A young American man and his Scottish girlfriend, the first Scot I'd ever really known.

They brought along their dog, a large German shepherd. Almost immediately, as I was bringing Jenny out of her pen, the dog saw her and rushed over, barking madly. I was worried, however it turned out, had no need to be. Jenny sported six inch horns, and did not flinch, rather butted the dog about ten feet through the air. Literally. It ran away, yelping piteously, and gave our goats a wide berth from then on.

Scottish lass Chris came back about a year later, on her own, and stayed with us again. She was friendly, did her share of the chores, and was a most welcome guest. Aside from my massage therapy expertise, she had no personal interest in me.

So! No girlfriend for Paul, despite a few abrupt immature efforts, but for my sisters it was the other way around. My being a couple of years younger might have twenty years, as far as the local ladies were concerned, while any such age difference didn't bother the men, when it came to my sisters.

Elaine and Marilyn were indeed friends with some of nicer local guys, but nothing serious or lasting. It wore on them, also the lack of buddies their age. Finally they signed up for the local public high school, which wasn't local at all. More like a long walk into Whitethorn, then a bus to South Fork High, which is along 101 north of Garberville. At least 25 miles away.

They soon arranged to stay with a family much nearer the school, and moved in. I probably met those folks, I'm sure mom did, but I never even saw that school. Anyway, a smart move on their part.

Marilyn was having another sort of hard time, some occasional strange behavior. I recall her having an injured foot, which became seriously infected; yet for unknown reasons she didn't take care of it, not for a long time. (She did heal okay.)

I also heard about her vanishing, and then found hiding in a closet at their host's house, for no particular reason. No one realized, until a year or two after that, it was the onset of Bipolar Disorder, then known as being Manic-Depressive. We can never know, were there any triggering factors, such as drugs? Marilyn did not drink, had explained to Elaine she realized it would be too tempting.

But that is the usual age for such things to manifest, no matter what else, if they are medically going to do so. This nasty psychological illness would plague Marilyn all the rest of her life.

We had another brief visitor, Shorty the horse. Horses are worth a lot of money, and for reasons I now realize were sketchy, some friends-of-friends gave us this one. It was obviously old and tired, and we had no experience or preparation.

I made a little overhang near the Big House, so Shorty could be out of the rain, and somewhere we got a bale of hay. Otherwise, he (or she?) could graze the local pastures with our goats. He wasn't much to ride, anyway we had no saddle or anything, so he just relaxed in the shade.

And then, after a couple of weeks, Shorty died. I have to suspect those guys knew what was coming. Anyhow, it was what it was. So I can honestly say, I have buried a horse. Solo, by hand. Dug a huge pit, in the damp soil near the creek where the poor old guy fell over, pushed him in and covered him up.

For a while we'd been taking in Peter and Andre's seafood catch, filleting some of that fish (still a useful skill, on occasion) and sharing them with the neighbors. So I'd already been digging pits for the fish guts, and you do want that kind of pit to be plenty deep.

One time I wrote a short and critical letter to the *Eureka Times-News*, about a local issue, and being hassled by those sheriff's deputies. I now wish I'd been more conciliatory, and mentioned their help with finding Karl. But it was brief, a bit harsh, and they did indeed publish it. The blowback even reached my sisters, at South Folk High School. Ouch.

But as I've said, the hippie counterculture element soon prevailed in Humboldt and Mendocino counties, for better or worse. So my effort was a harbinger.

Another serious fire occurred, but not to my family. I'm not sure of the exact timing, but the event itself was vivid enough. Andre and his buddy Frank were building a large new house, down the Yellow Dirt Road. One night, while Andre was away, it somehow caught fire. There was a big storm, and no one even realized, until morning. The place was gutted.

As it happened, Andre came up to my cabin first, before going home. So he had no idea, and it fell upon me to inform him about the fire. Whew! Later, he told me, it was even harder for him to phone Frank with the awful news. A lesson, or at least a hard-knocks experience, for each of us.

My fraught relationship with the ladies was not over. Ray R lived near that unlucky house, and while he and his wife were elsewhere, a young friend K-- lived there.

One evening I went over there, upon request, to give her a tarot card reading. This went smoothly, and then we just chatted for a while. Eventually I got a bit antsy, excused myself, and walked back up to my cabin. I now realize, K-- was doing her best to seduce me. In a classically feminine style, with little hints then big hints.

Which my nerdish, and perhaps spiritually influenced, self just did not catch on to. I still saw her around, and she never mentioned it. She may have concluded I was gay or something, a difficult mistake that was later made by several gay men I worked with.

Anyhow, K-- and I barely knew each other, and for me, a one-night fling could not possibly have been satisfactory. Even then, from reading and various spiritual teachings, I had an idea it would be possible to meet a lifelong soul mate. Better to wait for such a monumental step, and I had no clue: that wait was going to be a very long one.

Why would someone think I was gay? I still wasn't shaving, had a high pitched voice and abundant blond hair, made even lighter by the sun. Also, I wasn't interested in aggressive activities, or league sports, rather I was decorating my own cabin.

I've been tested and have plenty of testosterone, but perhaps I've got a touch of what they call

Testosterone Insensitivity Syndrome. Even in my 60s, I still have a high voice and a full head of hair. Heck, I even like show tunes. (These may sound like dumb cliches, however if so, I first heard them directly from gay friends.)

I did not mind watching action movies, liked James Bond and others. The one movie theater in Garberville sure knew its potential customers. One time they showed the 1971 Woodstock documentary, to what may well have been a full house.

In November of 1974, they showed a new release, The Trial of Billy Jack. I'd seen the first Billy Jack in 1971, and really liked it, hippies and all. Again a full house, and this time, with its school hassled by redneck cops, the movie's plot struck us all too close to home. Knowing Havasu Falls close up, that scene also stirred fond memories. (Much later, one of the unseen actors, a martial arts expert, would teach some of my friends in Phoenix.)

Our school wound down, but soon the locals in Whale Gulch would establish another, which continues to this day.

Sometime in 1974 mom and Jan moved out completely, if unofficially, and established a place in Eureka. That made me the only Carlson in the Big House, though the place was still full of friends. As usual I kept mostly to my cabin, and thank God there were enough responsible people to keep things running pretty well.

That was nearing the end of my stay at the Big House, and many adventures waited to unfold.

Mom and Jan had found a place on the Eureka waterfront, downtown, right across from the harbor. Not just any place, but a set of upstairs rooms, in a very old two-story building with an unusual history.

They rented the place from an old timer named Norton Steenfot, Not sure of the spelling, but who could forget a name like that. They sublet each room to students from Arcata State University, a few miles away. The kitchen, in the rear, was a common area.

Mom found out about the unusual history when a local man came up the back stairs, pulled open the kitchen window, and clambered into the kitchen. Hard to say which party was more surprised. Turns out the place had, until then, been a well-established brothel! So the man was no burglar, rather, exercising the usual discretion. Except for one thing, he'd missed the news about the place closing down.

I stayed there a couple of times, in an unrented room, but kept to my ridge-top cabin until the very last. That end came rapidly. I was eager to get going, to look for something a lot bigger. Meanwhile, without a birthday party, I turned eighteen.

Whether by improbable and oft-repeated coincidences, or by some divine hand, I was unencumbered and intellectually prepared. I had avoided ordinary life paths, and conventional religious or ideological commitments, and attachments on any level with women.