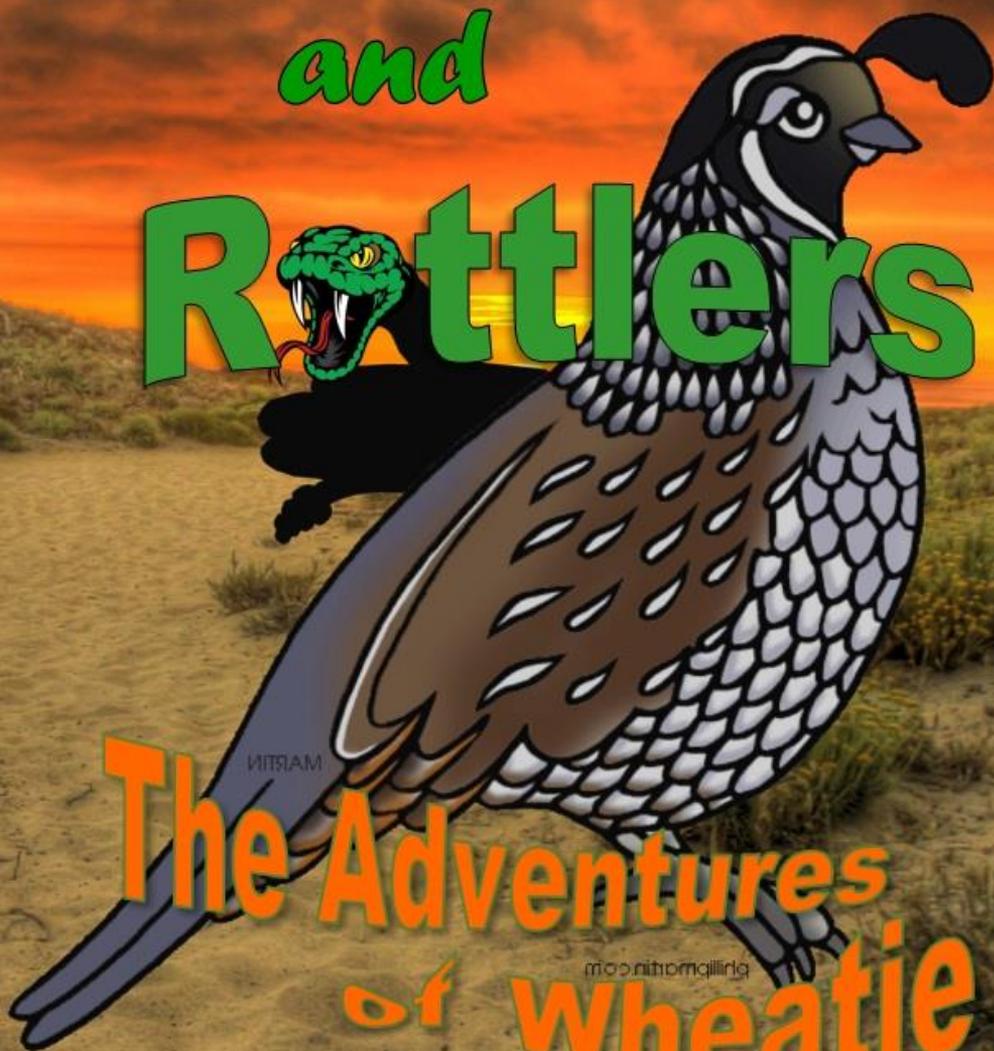


Quail

and

Rattlers



Kenneth M. Price, Jr.

Quail and Rattlers

The Adventures of Wheatie Book I

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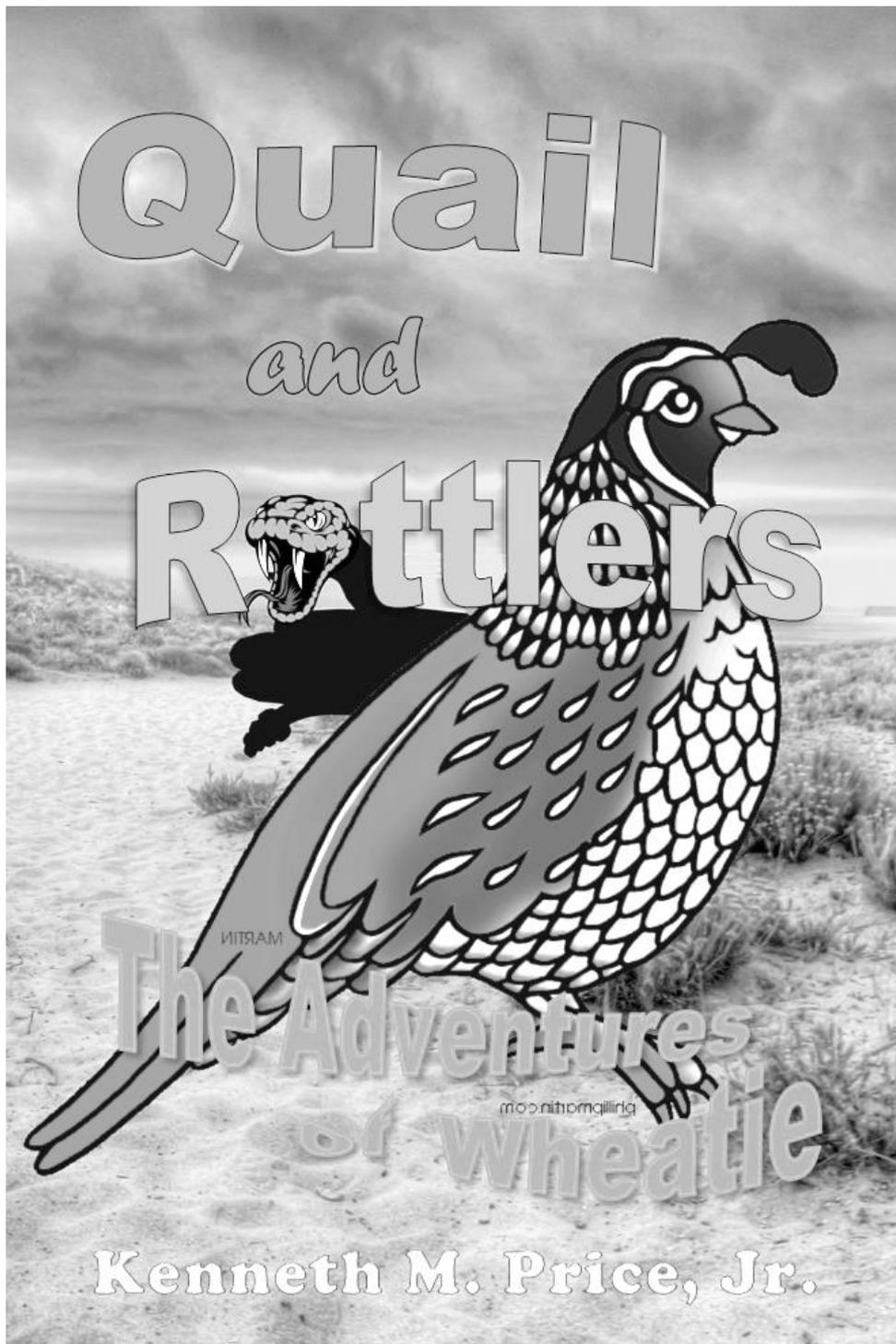
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The Adventures
of Wheatie

Kenneth M. Price, Jr.



*To my Mom and Dad,
Thank you for a great life!
To my brothers,
Thank you for being as patient with me as
you could and for coming up with the
infamous name Wheatie.
To Jennifer, Clifford, Scott, Greg, Kim,
Butch, George, Steve, Don, Nancy, Diane,
Art, Jeff, Errol and others,
Thanks for being my friend!
It has been my honor to grow up with such
great people.*

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Kenneth M. Price, Jr.

Cecil Price and
Lila Stevens

Charlie Smithwick
and Ruby Spencer

Kenneth Price and
Jane Smithwick

Ted, Charles and
Kenneth, Jr. "Wheatie" Price

The Roots of Wheatie

Wheatie is the nickname of the youngest of three boys born to two great parents during great times. Both strove to provide a sense of humor in place of anger. Wheatie was their acid test, and they passed with flying colors.

It is my great fortune, to look back upon this young man's life and relive many of his unique experiences. His adventures have been written using a third person. The third person is a grown up Wheatie. Well, sort of.



It was impossible to resist applying a humorous perspective to the situations, as many were so out of place with modern times you just have to hear the stories!

Wheatie did eventually end up with braces, for those of you who noticed.

Kenneth M. Price, Jr.

Garden Grove Days

The Place and Times

Wheatie was a baby boomer kid. Born in 1952 in Longbeach, California into a family with two older brothers, the ruckus and extra noise of three exuberant boys soon drove the parents to seek a larger house. So they moved to Beverly Hills with swimming pools and movie stars! Actually they moved to Garden Grove, which to Wheatie was even better. It was, after all, the perfect baby boomer town.



Courtesy: Pinterest

Garden Grove was constructed during the era of kiln-dried Oregon Douglas Fir lumber by World War II soldiers who if they returned, returned as heroes. They built the homes and towns to last and they arranged them in spread out suburban fashion that suited the western attitude and attracted conservative people.

Being located in Southern California meant warm weather and quick access to Newport Beach. Adding to this, Wheatie's new suburb had ½ acre lot sizes that were large enough to accommodate mature fruit trees and frisky pets.

It was this golden era of California life that spawned the development of what was to become the character the world would later fall in love with. Actually, this hasn't happened yet, but we have to stay optimistic.

The Re-Boot

This is where Wheatie's earliest recollections of his life began, and it literally was a point. Actually, Wheatie's earliest recollections didn't begin here, they were more like "rebooted" here. It happened with an unexpected fall from the top of a counter as he was lifting a cup off of the very top of the highest shelf. He almost had his hand on it when everything went black.

"Oh, so that's what it's like to get knocked out!" he found himself saying hours later while coming "to" in bed with a stethoscope on his chest. Then he noticed there was a doctor bent over him. Having now come fully back to life he asked, "Mom, how come you look so scared?"

Now, as you just surmised, this must have taken place a really long time ago as for a mom to be able to get a doctor to make a house call just because her son had knocked himself out falling backwards off a countertop. These days you'd dial that 'ole 911 number and take your chances with the trauma control group who showed up, and everyone on the street would know somebody had gone "down" at the Wheatie house.

Wheatie would have likely ended up at the hospital via an ambulance ride that was going to cost big money, which no one had. Not to mention he could have been hooked up to some kind of brain scanner, and who knows what they would have found with that!

Lucky for Wheatie, he came “to” in the presence of a fellow human being who was just glad to see that he could finally get back to his regular job. And since there wasn’t any brain treatment concoction in his bag to get Wheatie started on a drug of some sort, he was left with his mom “as was”.

Those were obviously safer days for kids. No worries about a diagnosis leading to mandatory prescriptions before a kid could go back to school. Not back then. But it makes you wonder what might have happened these days. There would probably be some serious post-knock-out tests involving memory recall and stuff. These may have led administrative “officials” to conclude Wheatie was a little too frisky (crazy).

Now, don’t get the idea that it was easy being a post war kid. Another potential trap in those days was to develop a hero attitude at too young of an age, the result of which was a term that would later manifest as “foolhardiness”.

Some of Wheatie’s foolhardy moves were undoubtedly lofted to a higher priority because of particular kid-tempting television shows that were on in the 50’s. During one particular black and white episode on the 10” x 12” screen he was mesmerized by a rugged western man who took a lever action Winchester rifle and turned it into a machine gun.

The name of the show was *The Rifleman* starring the stone faced iron framed Chuck Connors as a dad of a young boy Mark. As it turned out, this rapid fire demonstration came just in time to more than offset the “practical use and safety of firearms training” that Wheatie’s own dad was trying to instill in his son.

The machine gun concept reached its apex when Wheatie was able to shoot off 300 caps in under a minute. That was a nice supplement to gun safety! No one knew that years later it would rebirth itself under the guise of a new term: “assault weapon”, and most who had seen *The Rifleman* were destined to get one.

Now adding to the programming of a young budding mind were full screen surf movies like *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* and later *The Endless Summer* which tantalized Wheatie’s yearnings for a tropical environment where bikini-clad goddesses became the ultimate prize for the crazed wave riders.

What took Wheatie even further down the road was the iron-behemoth battles magically depicted in World War II movies. *The Halls of Montezuma* scored a direct hit on Wheatie’s patriotic heart. *The Frogmen* with Richard Widmark left him believing he could be a hero as a scuba diver. Stage II of Wheatie’s life was anything but a done deal.

Anyway, back to that brain scan scenario; might not have been the best thing for Wheatie. His brain aura might have appeared more as a wasteland of broken war machinery rather than a standard Edison light bulb. So maybe he dodged a bullet there. Too bad he didn’t dodge a single bullet when he got to the dentist.

The Dentist

Now these were “mind forming years” for the young Wheatie so you have to pay close attention to what’s going on. You see in the early days of Wheatie’s existence doctors were making nothing but great strides in dentistry and medicine. So on the day he complained to his parents about a toothache on his right molar, they scheduled him in to see a Dr. Dentist as soon as possible.

For some odd reason Dr. Dentist turned out to be Dr. Budd. Was this a precursor to Wheatie's future college days? You probably have to think too deeply to get that one. But just what is in a name?

Wheatie later coined an expression: "Dr. Bud's my name and drillins' my game." Actually he was afraid to think about it as this became the modus operandi for the next several months following the big "checkup". That's when the sad fact became known; Wheatie's mouth was full of cavities.

As you can guess this was not the best of news, as now not only would Wheatie be confined to a dentist chair for several hours per month, he would have to endure the after effects of mercury fillings. Problem is, it wasn't until years later, when he learned the reason why mercury was mixed into the silver. It was done in order to liquefy silver at a low enough temperature to allow packing it into a tooth without producing the smell of charred nerve tissue.

Of course this seemed like a real breakthrough back then, but it would haunt Wheatie going forward in his quest to become somewhat normal. Let's just say, he could've done just fine without the added metal soaking into his brain at the time.

It's like eating from aluminum pots, cooking from fluoridated non-stick fry pans, breathing car exhaust laden with lead and eating can goods with soldered seams. The price in IQ that Wheatie paid for living in America at the time perhaps turned out to be less than the price paid by most, but we will never know the cost to his developing brain.

Perhaps he was just relegated to the same field as most of the other kids and should therefor not question. However, the truth of the matter is, Wheatie might have been destined to be the chairman of Ford and General Motors!

We will never know.

Dogs and Homing Pigeons

“Dad never had a dog that was nice looking. We always had those weird dogs---and not real duck dogs either---more the pheasant hunting types.

We took them to different fields---he'd plant a pigeon wrapped in nylon stocking --place it in some bush or brush and send the dog out. None of them ever did very well. They ran wild and couldn't find anything! I don't remember any of our dogs even responding to basic commands like sit and come---much less find or retrieve a bird!”

Mr. Wheatie had a separate area out back along the left side of the house where he kept a brown German short haired pointer. It was tough being this dog. It had to take long trips down to the Salton Sea and retrieve ducks out of the near frozen brine.



Aside from that, the poor untrained canines had to perform “field exercises” better known as bird-retrieving drills on a not-often-enough basis. The skills required to find the

hidden bird rivalled the skills of *Lassie* and *Rin-tin-tin*. Back in the late 50's those two dogs were so talented they had their own TV shows.

As for Mr. Wheatie's dogs, far from ever being on TV, they got to hang out in the back yard some more and wait until the next big hunt. Luckily they didn't know such a time could be months to a year off!

The dog in the picture looks just like Brownie would have looked at the Salton Sea. That's if he had ever retrieved a duck, that is. Wheatie's not sure on that one. He knows the dog didn't get much loving. And as a result whenever somebody came around to see him he was a bit over-anxious. And since he was anxious he wanted to jump up and put his paws on ya.

This didn't help him make immediate friends with Wheatie. Fortunately for Brownie there were two older brothers. The middle one took to the dog a little better, and he would later go on to work with horses and pack animals. It will never be known if Brownie helped set the stage for that, but since he didn't set the stage for much else, it seems like a reasonable bestowal.

It was about this time that the family across the street from Wheatie's house got some chickens for their backyard. Well, they were sort of chickens. The girl in charge, Jennifer, said they were pansy chickens (or was it Banty chickens?) Wheatie never was sure. They sure looked like pansy chickens to him.

One thing really strange that Wheatie noticed about Jennifer was that she seemed to actually have some kind of emotional attachment to her birds. He was almost shocked by her affection for an animal as he had hardly considered that such a relationship between humans and animals existed. That's because to him most animals, other than cats and dogs thankfully, were strictly viewed as game to be eaten.

Now, these pansy chickens, small as they were, ended up starting a big competition amongst other neighbors. It began when the Hudsons down the street decided to get some birds of their own. Then things really went haywire when in place of pansy chickens they got Homing Pigeons instead!

What an idea! Real birds! And soon they began letting them fly around the roof tops of Wheatie's neighborhood! But now hang on! Remember, Wheatie and his brothers were the game experts on the street. One of them had even shot and killed a duck. So it was natural for these male bravados to regard themselves as the true experts concerning birds; especially ones that had a resemblance to game animals they cooked and ate for sport.

So when the new neighborhood pigeons continued to invade the skies above the Wheatie home the three game slayers devised a comeback. The plan was to over-power the small cage birds with superior numbers of large cage birds.

What took place next was the conversion of Mr. Wheatie's former chicken coop into a voluptuous walkin cage with room for 50 homing pigeons or more. It had a large door that allowed the chicken tender to walk right in holding his head high, even with a cowboy hat on.

A day later found them down at the farm and barn store. Here they could pick out an assortment of homing, or carrier pigeons in a variety of colors and species. The farm and barn even stocked birds that could tumble. Why exactly the tumbler was so coveted, and sold at a higher price was hard to figure.

Yes, they were fun to watch fall out of the sky backwards every so often and recover. But were they worth extra money or were they just crazy birds? He didn't know at the time this would pose a similar paradoxical question in his own life's existence down the road, when he started to categorize

girlfriends by pigeon type. In this analyses, Tumblers turned out to be worth the extra money.



By each of them buying a couple of birds, it wasn't long before they had close to a dozen. And in the meantime, Wheatie and Brother Two had figured out an additional way to supplement the total numbers of pigeons in their coop. That law-breaking story is coming up next.

At this point in the operation weekly birdseed consumption had ballooned to 10 lb. per week, an amount Wheatie could hardly carry in his basket. And as luck would have it, all this cargo carrying via bicycle, in the end, merely served to build better muscles in what could turn out to be a fine man. You believe that one, don't you?

Now, comparing what the Wheatie group had to the neighbors; stilted cages 3 feet off the ground with a chicken wire door, there was no contest. When they desired to let their pigeons fly they opened the bird-sized door, went around the back of the cage and attempted to shoe them out.

In contrast, the three game hunters merely had to open the human-sized door, walk to the back of the coop and shoe them all out the opened door. As a result, almost every

Wheatie-related pigeon flew out as voraciously as bats from Carlsbad Caverns at dusk.

These Garden Grove hunters enjoyed showing off a bit in those days and in this case it was their “big cage” advantage. Yes indeed, they could release a lot of pigeons very quickly. It’s therefore no wonder the Wheatie flock established itself as the neighborhood vigilante for pigeons, becoming a flying “mafia” that swept up flying vagrants.

Let’s take for example a typical homing-pigeon release, 5 to 10 birds would be shoed out of the cage by the “friends” down the street. But once they flew over the Wheatie coop a few times they would set into motion an automatic seek and destroy protocol for all vagrant pigeons in the area. In other words, the Wheatie group would immediately open the “barn” door and release their entire squadron.

The superior hunter-brained boys knew that the smaller pack couldn’t resist teaming up with the bigger packs mis-assortment of seasoned beauties and tumbling “show birds”. No way was it gonna be the other way around. Five to 10 suburban birds weren’t gonna somehow lure a whole squadron of loyalty-tested veteran birds back into their cage.

And thusly the smaller pack would soon be following the larger pack right through the same one-way-wire door that led into the Wheatie pigeon coop.

An hour or so after all the pigeons in the air had disappeared, and after some extra time had elapsed to set in a little worry, Wheatie; “commander of the allied forces of neighborhood pigeons” would collect up the captured birds, put them into a carrying cage and walk them over to the neighbor’s house.

No worries were intended to befall the neighbors, none at all. Wheatie was much too subtle in his approach. Yes, he knew and his neighbors knew that the Wheatie group were quite used to cutting open game and dressing it out for dinner in

short order. So when he got to the neighbors, Wheatie made sure to return the birds cheerfully to them.

Then upon being parted from them he would start to act sad as he walked away, and mention being really hungry for something to eat for dinner. It was these kinds of tactics and subtleties that kept the Wheatie group on top of the pyramid of wannabe Daniel Booners.

Having a reputation for eating real game had its advantages!

Groves and Barns

Most people have no idea what kind of crops California sun can grow. During the early 1900's a farmer just needed to plant trees and give them water. If they used grafted rootstocks, in the Southern Californian sun they had themselves a grove of trees in three to four years.

As a result, prior to the days of Wheatie, there were indeed groves of orange trees all over the county. And what was the name of that county? Orange County, of course!

In the actual era of Wheatie there weren't as many but there were still a good number of groves, one of which was within bicycle riding distance from his house. This massive heavily fruited forest of dense trees turned out to be more than a darn fun place to go "exploring".

Aside from the sheer excitement of sneaking in and then wandering around completely alone and undetected, there was the farmer's barn which sat amongst near endless rows of trees. It was tucked so deep within in his plot and rim of oak trees that he didn't suspect a couple of kids might be lurking around. Or did he?

Why would anyone have been lurking around? Because it was there! Not to mention they soon became fascinated by the inside of a genuine cedar barn. Wood-pegged construction and rusty iron gate hinges spoke of a 100 year old past. Strewn-about was used farm equipment, some of which looked like it had been in service since the Civil War.

While snooping around they found pigeons roosting in the upper sections of the barn. Since you just read the previous chapter you know how expedient this lucky find was.

Now, keep in mind, these were the bullish “America-won-the-war” days of the 50’s. To Wheatie this equated to a boldness that made it ok to sneak in to steal a few chicks. As you might have guessed, he never got caught.

Nope! If he’d been got caught, he’d have seen Cyclops. And once any kid saw Cyclops, they didn’t go into the grove again, much less his barn!

The good news is: the pigeon’s chicks they stole and snuck out of the barn flourished in their new pen. Wheatie thoroughly enjoyed watching how the other pigeon moms took in their motherless relatives.

And now you know how the Wheatie group managed to accumulate so many pigeons, thus to dominate the neighborhood flying arena.

Orange Wars and Cyclops

If there’s one sure fire way to piss off an orange farmer it’s to start an orange fight in his grove with a bunch of other kids and use his oranges as ammunition. This is what Wheatie and his band of trespassers had nonchalantly planned. That was before they experienced the unforgettable day when the farmer demonstrated how to derail any attack on his oranges.

The boys didn't know it, but it was already too late for them to escape unscathed! They'd snuck in like before, formed into teams and spread out to start an attack. They picked about twenty of the farmer's prized oranges. In the process, overconfidence came at the price of a little too much noise.

It was time for the attack to begin. Wheatie reared back with a semi-green orange in his hand and launched it at a target lurking behind a tree. Suddenly a football-sized clod of dirt came crashing down to his right, missing a knockout bulls-eye by inches! "Hey! Whose throwin chunks of sod?" he dumbfoundedly wondered.

That was when he spotted the farmer and that farmer was coming directly for the kid who had just thrown one of his oranges. Making matters even more terrifying was the fact he was picking up huge clods of plowed sod and heaving them directly at Wheatie!

To Wheatie this fully activated man in brown coveralls looked more formidable than the 20 foot tall cyclops he'd read about in a comic book. You know, the ones who ate children for dinner? He'd never been that scared before.

Wheatie thought to himself he could probably outrun the cyclops. That was if he could just get his legs moving in proper time. Time went into timelessness. It seemed days were going by. Wheatie couldn't seem to swing his arms other than together thus making it impossible to get into a stride. Visions of a hapless gazelle being chased down by an African cheetah flashed through his mind.

Wheatie must have been making some progress as more clods landed nearby but missed smashing some sense into him. Meantime his heart was ready to explode from sheer terror of being CAUGHT!

Actually, the farmer wasn't really interested in pounding the young man into rubble nor grabbing him and tying him up

for eating later. In fact he probably had made sure to miss the terrified Wheatie and laughed his #ss off in the process. That's how people were in those days. Most men were dads themselves. This attitude was what allowed Wheatie to get away with crimes as their good graces were taken advantage of. Doesn't that make you sick?

On a positive note, Wheatie had learned what it was like to be really scared. He thus vowed to never sneak into a farmer's orange grove again. And this decision may have saved him from one day serving 5 years in the poky for trespassing and stealing oranges.

Newport Beach Days of Tar

From Garden Grove, the nearest ocean shore with a beach, waves and a pier was Newport Beach. This was a place that had it all and in Wheatie's heyday it was the perfect playground for a sand loving kid.

Here kids could wade out into the clear bubbly whitewater and look down at a variety of small fish that were in countless schools. The site of fingerlings swimming alongside was so common Wheatie didn't even stop to think about them. That was just the way it was then.

All these little fish! They were growing up to be big fish some day. One day Wheatie put on a mask and dove down into some deeper water offshore. He fell in love with the scene immediately; fish were seen swimming all over the place! And many of them were swimming in the same kinds of organized schools as the much smaller fish. We're tajkin' eating size fish, you understand!

And then there was just the pure joy of swimming and surfing in the waves. On any given summer day the winds, tides and

water temperatures stirred up unique conditions. Sometimes the larger waves brought colder water with them. They could also bring warmer waters from the tropics during the spring and fall.

Generally speaking though, when the big swells came to town they brought water temperatures down into the low 60's. It was a brilliant way to separate the wheat from the chaff; either you were tough enough to take the cold water or you weren't tough enough to surf the big waves.

As for Wheatie, he loved the larger waves, if for nothing more, for the way they tossed him around when his ride ended and they broke over him. The surf somehow always provided enough free water to keep him from hitting the bottom. Put in simple/stupid terms; it was a safe way to experience a total wipeout.

At Newport, Huntington and Laguna beaches, beautiful blue waves broke 50 yards off shore atop giant beds of sand. A kid could swim out, wait for a big swell, take off from the bottom and get pulled to the top of the wave just as it broke; then taking him down again into a powerful froth of energized water. Wow! It was great.

After Wheatie and his beach friends got thrown around by the larger waves and whitewater for an hour or so, their bodies would begin to shiver. Now there just happened to be a remedy to the shivers, and that was to dive into hot white sand. If it had been gleaming in the sun for hours and gotten hot enough to burn people's feet, it was perfect for a shivering Wheatie!

Since Wheatie had not yet kissed a girl, hot-sand-diving was probably the most divine feeling he had ever experienced. But hold on! All was not perfect in sand paradise as in addition of clear water and hot sand then there was this yucky tar!

The result was anyone who frolicked in the water and sands of Newport and Huntington beaches got a horrible concoction of crude oil and skin adhesive on virtually every swimming occasion. Wheatie wondered what the heck it was and where it had come from.

Back then beach people hadn't had an Exxon Valdez or Deep Water Horizons kind of spill on a large enough scale to cause any worry, less get their attention. In fact people liked oil companies and even had their favorite gasoline, as if it made any difference.



Huntington Beach sometime before 1953. Courtesy: City of Huntington

The question of where the tar balls came from was finally answered one day when Wheatie and crew took a drive north through Huntington Beach and onward to Seal Beach. Here they laid eyes on the remnants of an oil boom wasteland. What an unbelievable mess! You would never know this was once an untouched shoreline. Now it was as if there had been nothing but a desert beforehand in which to erect their endless oil derricks.

For a little historical perspective; what had happened there was this: Huntington Beach, a wooded shoreline paradise, was founded during the oil boom in 1920. Forget the value of the trees, ocean views and property value; it was reputed to be the largest California oil deposit known at the time.

Who could refute that claim? If the oil companies said it was a large deposit, then everyone accepted that drilling was to follow. As if World War 1 was still going in full swing, crude oil wells began springing up. In less than a month the town grew from 1,500 to 5,000 people.

And that was just the beginning. Crude oil production at Huntington beach continued to expand all the way up until 1953. This was just one year after Wheatie was born. What that has to do with the story of the tar balls at Huntington Beach, is more than coincidence.

But it was just after this that the city's fire department began clearing out oil derricks within the downtown and along the coast. This cleared land made room for one of the largest pre-planned subdivisions built to date in the United States. These new homes helped to house the population explosion that took place from the late 1950's and on through the 1970's in California.

Scads of families from back east moved to Huntington Beach during this time, helping to make it the fastest growing city in the continental U.S. And it all happened on what was before prime wooded coastal property and later a toxic oil field.

Years later for Wheatie, he would hear the story about how his grandmother had visited the area in the 20's and commented that shoreline property could be purchased for \$100 per acre. But no one was interested in California beachfront property in those days. Hearing that story was one of those few occasions that made Wheatie cry.

Oh well, at least the tar mystery had been totally solved.

Plywood surfboards

It was the summer of '59 when Wheatie got to learn another skill of Mr. Wheatie, and that was that he could somehow make surfboards out of plywood. But first we need to understand why this skill was for most, considered to be more of an oddity than an act of engineering brilliance.

In those days any kid who came from the Wheatie house had to prove himself before he got a new factory pair of skates, fishing pole with reel, shotgun, hunting knife, etc. In simple surfing terms; if a kid wanted his dad to fork out for a new Hobi, he was going to do some time on the plywood first.

Wheatie's parents weren't Hawaiian natives or even close, so it wasn't like Mr. Wheatie resembled a native surfboard builder. And because many of the neighbors had already seen the many examples of his work, such as boats, camper tops and go-carts they assumed Mr. Wheatie would come up with another boxy design. They turned out to be right.

Now don't get the wrong impression. Although these surfboards were built out of common 1/4" plywood, they were as cleverly constructed as a New England dory. They resembled flattened pontoons, which on closer inspection highlighted the skilled craftsmanship employed in the curved sides, pointed bow and slightly rounded bottom.

With two coats of paint the 6 foot long versions were still light enough to carry under one arm. Being totally hollow on the inside, there was a cork plug in the back to let any water that leaked in drain out.

But of course there were those who found the hollow plywood boards with their frames and fasteners to be more

bizarre than innovative. For these trendy dads it was akin to comparing a 1955 Belair to a 1965 GTO.

The Wheatie group was after all bucking the trend toward the star material of the day. That material was Styrofoam. With a glossy coat of fiberglass over a hand crafted shape, any dare devil surfer had a light board that was fast.

You needed about 100 bucks to get a professionally made board like a Hobi. That got you an invitation to display some extreme courage, if you were willing to be dropped 10 feet straight down while standing upright on a fiberglass rocket.

Down you went toward the blue water beneath the mighty waves! And if you were lucky and did everything just right, your board pulled up at the bottom. For many, their ride ended deep underwater.

But make no mistake about it; the hollow plywood surfboards more than just worked! Both of the older brothers learned to catch waves and stand up on them. Still, at this juncture, the length of the ride was not the issue; standing up was. That was an accomplishment in itself!

Now, a person on a plywood surfboard was ill advised to take off on a very large wave. If a plywood surfer were to crash at the bottom of a large enough swell, he could be sucked up and over the falls, then be tumbled around with a loose plywood object.

As for Wheatie, he did manage to go over the falls when he was too far back on his woody while at the same time pearl diving straight into sand. Luckily it was only a 3 foot wave but it left the young plywooder partially impaled over the back end of his board. Although mostly uninjured, this event helped steer him more toward spearing fish (or as could be said hunter-gatherer mode) rather than surfing (as could be said girl-gathering mode).

Pier fishing

The days of the early 60's were some of the best days of California. Part of the reason was due in no small part to the fishing paradise that was right off its shores from Crescent City all the way south to the tip of Baja California. As it was, living in Southern California at the time, wouldn't you think that everyone in their right mind would be down on the beaches or out in small boats catchin fish 24 and 7? That's how Wheatie felt about it.

But not that many others did, and why not? Was it the smell of fish? Was it the fact that you had to gut them out? Or were the times in California during the 60's really so good that there were plenty of other things to do than fish?



Due to the near perfect year round climate, sports on the weekend were a very big event for parents wanting their kids to play little league, Pop Warner football and other organized

sports. That probably kept a lot of them off the piers down in Newport. That suited Wheatie just fine.

Fish were this plentiful 1959: when Wheatie's pa took the boys down to the pier to fish on Friday or Saturday night they would be sure to take along an empty peach crate for all the fish they were sure to catch. The hardest part was keeping all of the smelt and mackerel off of your line before you were able to hook a more substantial prize. Put in stupid simple terms; if you could put bait on a hook, you would catch fish on every cast.

What made pier fishing such a blast was it was so cheap Wheatie could afford a couple of 5 cent candy bars. These he would gnaw on throughout the evening like chewing tobacco. As a side note, Wheatie never did take up chewing tobacco. He never dropped chewing candy bars either.

Farther out toward the end of the pier there was always more excitement. Then again, sometimes it was the fishermen closer in who were pulling Croakers and Corbina out of the whitewater that got the most attention. There was so much action going on that people from the sidewalk would venture out onto the pier just to check out the latest "mystery" fish. Any time something over 2 feet in length was landed it was sure to draw oohs from the many onlookers.

Wheatie noticed that there were usually a dozen or so pier veterans who held the strategic positions out on the very tip of the pier. The sky was the limit as to what a skilled fisherman could hook up with from there. Those who could cast out with a float could bring in sea going delicacies such as Yellowtail, Tuna, Bonito, Barracuda and gobs of other species that swam in schools. If you put on a 2 ounce sinker and sent your bait to the bottom you could hook into Halibut, Sanddabs, Crab, Sculpin, Octopus, Sharks, Sea Bass and who knows what else!

The more serious pier anglers had a ringed net they could lower down, thus to pull the largest fish all the way up to the top of the pier when in fact they would have exceeded their line strength. This is how plentiful the fish were along the coastline of Southern California in the late 50's. Now look at it! Thus, few people will believe what is written here about those former times. The fact is, the generation that preceded Wheatie went on to deplete a bountiful fish population in a few decades.

The way Wheatie found it, when he cast out a bait into the Pacific Ocean, he was soon going to encounter a predator trying to swallow it. There were few moments when the fish weren't biting. There was some kind of fish that was always biting. Not to mention that each bite brought the possibility of hooking into a rare species, lunker or monster fish!

And all this was available just by walking out on this long beautiful man made wonder known as Newport Pier.

Wheatie didn't know at the time that he was part of the last group of kids who would ever experience the full glory of an ocean teeming with all the life it was designed to support. He does know, however, how to proceed in the future. That is to be part of the return of gigantic schools of fish.

And the return of great fishing!

Wheatie in the Desert



The Mojave National Preserve in 1960. Courtesy: Pinterest

There are three warm deserts that exist in California, Arizona and Mexico. They are known as the Chihuahan, the Sonoran and the Mojave.

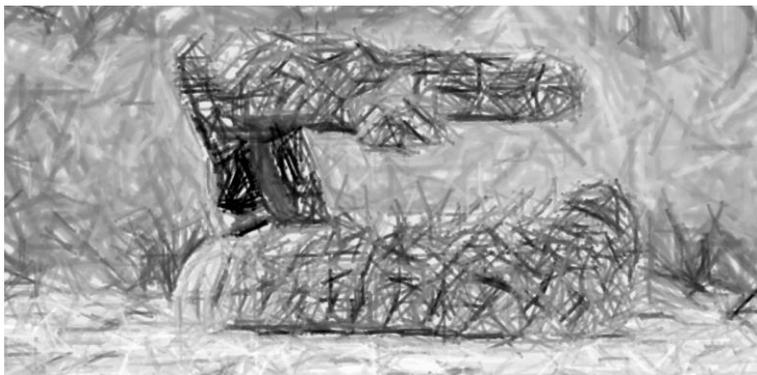
The Mohave Desert is the farthest north and encompasses places like Death Valley, Ransburg, Las Vegas and Barstow. It sits just below the Great Basin Desert, which is basically in Nevada.

Snakes in the sand!

As for the name Death Valley; yes there were prospector-killing rattlesnakes there, but they were not the main reason so many prospectors met their death. That had more to do with the lack of water across a vista of sage and cactus that stretched for hundreds of miles beneath a blistering sun.

But even as it was, a kid lookin for the time of his life couldn't go wrong in the rolling, dry, shrub-dotted wasteland of a southern California desert. Wheatie ventured out onto these plateaus of sage brush and gained a view of the world few people got.

There he was again, this time in the golden glory days of the Mojave with all of its wild flowers, wild animals and breathtaking vistas. Wheatie quickly fell in love with the open, endless prairie. He also learned how to dodge Western Diamond-backed rattlesnakes!



What beautiful diamond patterned skin you have! Courtesy: Pinterest

Now, normally, when a human sees a rattler, the wiggly is down on the ground in front of them on the trail just

slithering along. Once spotted, you immediately halt your forward movement and let the critter slither away. Right?

Now, if a person or animal got too close, the fearsome reptile would transform itself into a coil of cold ground-holding determination. Put in stupid/simple: If you ever saw a rattlesnake from the point of view in the picture above, you were pretty much screwed!

And so, yes, the Mojave desert had a sordid past and it was rendered into public view via its innumerable failed goldmines and lost prospectors. Decades after these old prospectors left behind their heavy rock-crushing gadgets, a curious kid could study them for days and still be curious.

Actually, Wheatie was fully occupied just watching for snakes! The hot dry desert air would give rise to a dry and thirsty mouth in short order, and if a scorched guy wasn't careful heading back to camp for a drink, and if he was thinking ahead too far and not watching the trail, guess what? He might just "step-onna-rattler!"

That was a run on word Wheatie had heard a hundred times. Seemed every time he left camp some stubborn adult would utter, "Don't step-onna-rattler"! By the way, if a desert hiker got bitten, the standard modus operandi of the day was to have someone cut a hole in their leg, have someone suck their blood for 20 minutes, then get packed in ice and driven to the hospital anyway.

It was a day-wrecker for sure, and there was never a guarantee of a full recovery. Still Wheatie failed to give any of the adults credit for a warranted warning, figuring instead that it was a lot more fun exploring around in the desert than lying in a bed writing out his will. So he did in fact watch his steps.

Against the odds and thanks to warnings by others, there never was a rattler that Wheatie didn't see first. That almost sounds like the makings of a good song; *"And there never was a*

snake, that was born with a venom goo, that ever sunk a fang in Wheatie's shoe". What do you think?

And now you know why smart folks wear boots in the Mojave, even though in that heat their feet and socks were smellier than three bears in the same cave!

Ransburg

Right up 395, about 100 miles east of Bakersfield, was the abandoned town of Ransburg from the 1930's. It shut down when the government set gold and silver prices arbitrarily low making it impossible to mine them at a profit. As if overnight, everybody just picked up and left.

When Wheatie got there, thirty years of dry desert sun had taken its toll on the wooden and iron mining equipment. Upon seeing it, he felt the plight of these former men who came here willing to dig dirt and rock, day in and day out, for a chance to make a life-changing discovery. The scenes nuanced his own dreams of becoming a miner for years afterwards.

Actually, it appears that he never got them out of his mind. To this day, Wheatie refuses to be a miner.

In the process of hiking around Ransburg, Wheatie saw dilapidated mining shacks, sifting machines, concrete furnaces, heaps of tailings and small caves that went inside the mountains. Only by hunching down and walking a hundred feet or so back into one of these mines would a person every have an inkling what it was really like to be a miner. It would have taken nerves of steel.

He remembered the tragic story of how his grandfather had died back in the 20's of pneumonia while he himself was a mine owner. Wheatie's mom had even lived near the

infamous silver mine that her daddy was part owner of for a few years. This isn't made-up stuff. Without the remains of the former era lying about, it would have been difficult for Wheatie to have believed it otherwise.

Now all that remained of many a prospector were the purple/blued bottles that had been in the sun so long the manganese within the glass had changed into a pristine hue. And it was that same desert sun that cooked the bones of steers and cattle to a bright bleached white in less than a season.

Looking at their skulls, Wheatie vowed to never let himself run out of water in the Mojave.

Smoke and Fires

At this point in these memoirs of Wheatie, it is prudent to explain some of the reasons why he ended up with such an uncanny ability to set piles of shrubs and rotten wood afire. Certainly one of the reasons was because he prided himself on not only his ability to live off the land using fire to cook but also his ability to use fire to impress.

That was problem one. Problem two was the fact that Wheatie took fire-building a bit too seriously. In fact you could say that when he was out in the desert amidst free dry fuel, his preoccupation with it redefined the word pyromaniac.

Now on one particular campout, they had invited their neighbors across the street to come along with them in the Mojave Desert. Since the neighbors didn't know they'd be sleeping amidst desert rattlesnakes and scorpions, they said "Yes!"

It was gonna to be a kid's dream trip. They were gonna get to see the Wheatie group fire a 22 caliber rifle and scare up doves and rabbits as if to hunt them. Special treatment would be given to the one young girl along. By her own request, she would not have to witness any small animals being blown apart while in normal flight.

However, later in the evening, she most definitely got a "taste" of the great outdoors, and this was in no small part thanks to Wheatie. Have you ever smelled burning sagebrush? From one fire it ain't so bad.

At sundown the camp's first and only legitimate fire was dutifully gathered up and put into action by Wheatie. It was built out of scrounged sagebrush and broken twigs, of course, giving it that distinct sagebrush smell and filling the air above with yellow sparks that the burning dried leaves produced in abundance. Many didn't know at the time it was to be the first of many.

No gasoline had been necessary. With a little dry grass and a paper match, an instant fire was practically guaranteed. It was the desert after all, truly one of the driest places on earth! Dried branches and a pack of matches made Wheatie feel even more powerful than when he carried his BB gun around.

The evening soon became dominated by smoke and lots of foul air. Still, he felt there were enough people standing around to warrant a second fire. No need to ask, Wheatie built another.

No one had any idea he would find some weird reason to build a 3rd and a 4th. You're not going to believe this, but later Mr. Wheatie testified to the fact that at one time his fire protégé had as many as 10 different fires going!

The rest of the story gets sort of fuzzy (probably because of a smoke-damaged brain). No one could remember the motivation; not even Wheatie. Was he trying to light the

place up so they could bring in a UFO or craft that flew out of Area 51 to the North? Was he doing a reenactment of *Gone With the Wind* when they burned all the croplands? Was he trying to sort of accidentally set the entire valley on fire?

Or maybe the entire earth? You had to keep a close eye on this guy Wheatie.

Lake Havasu

One of the most enjoyable lakes on Earth that Wheatie ever swam in was Lake Havasu. The water was never cold. The weather was always hot and dry. It was the Colorado river valley and it was more than just a laid back place.



"all in favor of quiet... say Evinrude"

You've got to love this photo! Take a close look at the girl's face and hair. See how she's just been pasted onto the body! And we all wanted a girl on our boat that looked just like her! Courtesy: Evinrude

It was so hot, just hanging around in the shade for a while on a typical summer day would leave you with about as much energy as a reptile lying on a glacier. So any excuse to drink a fresh soda pop or dip into the cool murky brown water was always welcome.

People from all over and all walks of life were there for the extreme heat and the cooling water. For sun lovers it rivaled Hawaii and Acapulco, although most had never been there and didn't appreciate it as such. That's because most of the folks who came there brought along their water toys. These included flashy looking high-powered flat bottomed speedsters that could lure a couple of chicks off the shore faster than a Ferrari could tempt valley girls off of Beach Blvd. in downtown Fountain Springs.

These car-engine-powered speed boats didn't have V-drives; just a straight shaft to a propeller. You started the engine and you were off. If it was a souped up engine it probably had a faster idle. Wheatie learned to react fast whenever he heard one of these things anywhere near him.

These flat bottomed overpowered boats were fast, especially if the engine started. They didn't always. Some of them ran out of gas, some of them lost their spark. And some of them went crashing into a mud bank that was right out in front of the Wheatie group's camp site.

Wheatie could have waved a red flag to warn them, but it was too fun to watch all the various high-powered "skier's dream" boats keep plowing into and stalling their engines in a torrent of mud. Most would stall out and be left drifting. Wheatie didn't care at the time.

In addition to the near-flying boat show there were skiers, inner tube riders and everything imaginable in-between. They were up and down the banks of the sandy beaches

enjoying the relentless hot sun, rejuvenating cool water, high speed daredevil rides and unlimited sodas.

The Mighty 7 1/2

And now into the scene enters the Wheatie's group with their plywood boat powered with a 7 1/2 horsepower outboard motor. It could hardly troll more than two bass lures at the same time, much less a skier. Yes, the Wheatie group had to get a lot more down-to-earth in their approach to such a water paradise.

That meant either disconnecting from the tourist scene, or, competing against the speedsters with gear that more resembled what only a hillbilly would be caught dead with.

They did the best they could. The Wheatie vessel came in on the top of a homemade plywood camper and it made for quite a sight. In reality, it was a turnkey operation ingeniously disguised as a migration of poor folk.

For starters, the Wheatie boat sat outside overturned all year long while other's sat inside heated garages. The Wheatie engine had to be lifted, carried and mounted to the stern, while more stately watercraft were backed in on trailers padded with better carpeting than what they had in their living rooms.

The Wheatie boat was built with 3/4" pine frames, sheathed with plywood and covered with two layers of fiberglass cloth. Others were built inside a perfectly smooth mold using multiple layers of mat and cloth for a hull slicker than a mossy rock.

These molded hulls of glass were built with as little freeboard as possible and sometimes barely floated above the surface

of the water. Wheatie's boat had 2 foot sides making it quite seaworthy amongst waves and chop, and more than visible.

It was the engine that made trips across large bodies of water so exciting. The boat always did fine, but oh how the trio joked about the old outboard motor with the green pearl-shaped cover that looked like it had been around since the roaring 20's. They should have shut up, knowing they were lucky to have a motor at all.

Remember, Mr. Wheatie had been through World War II and experienced depth charges and torpedoes. For him, to be floating with a sputtered-out engine for awhile on an open lake was about as stressful as cutting a bruise off a peach.

Perhaps it's time for a side note? Just what was it like on the U-boat? Wheatie would find out later that these sailors had to change out cylinder liners while underwater and evading depth charges!

The liners in these giant diesels would crack if they dove too fast and flooded them with cold water. If they didn't dive fast enough, an attack plane could nail them with a torpedo bomb.

The real genius of Mr. Wheatie's continued reliance on the 7 ½ Evinrude design was that it allowed him to demonstrate the value of staying cool and knowing your engine. No better way to do that than to get 5 miles from shore and have an antique contraption conk out. Thus on that afternoon, when the mighty 7 ½ outboard motor went from pp pp pp pp pp pp pp pp p pah pah pah pah pooshsh..... Mr. Wheatie did not go into a panic.

Wheatie's pa set to work pulling off the engine cover. Now for some unexplainable reason Wheatie didn't like seeing his beloved Evinrude coming apart. Now devoid of exterior shine were the bare bones of an oversized chain saw engine, except this one looked to be past its time.

The exposed contraption was not an encouraging sight. Then Mr. Wheatie removed the spark plug and pulled on the starter cord and listened to the engine go fsh shf fsh shf fsh shf, etc. It was the sound of air going in and out of the open spark plug hole. That made about as much sense to Wheatie as eating liver once a month. So at this stage, he figured the 'ole 7 ½ was a gonner.

Does anyone out there know about blowing excess fuel out of the crankcase when a piston engine is flooded? Anyone ever have to pull out a sparkplug and clean some carbon gunk off of one? If you did these things and just put the spark plug back in, did your engine start?

It started. The story of the temporarily disabled fishing party in the middle of Lake Havasu was over. Safety was confirmed once Wheatie heard the rap, pap, pap, pap, pap then pp pp pp pp pp. Score another win for Mr. Wheatie.

As a side note, many a boat were left adrift on this playground in those days, since their dare-devil owners didn't have all the bugs worked out of their souped up V-8 powered flat bottomed flyers. It seemed one or two of them flew by Wheatie's boat about once every minute.

But Wheatie just watched them calmly thinking, "So what if an engine stalls out every so often?" As long as you can fix it, no problem. Oops! Their mighty 7 ½ conked out again just before they reached their camp across the lake.

As a result of having no power, the Wheatie party had to make a paddle-in-landing, like they were being sneaky or something. Luckily there was no one else in the back of the cove to get scared out of their wits by their silently sliding up alongside their abode.

At least they were cut off from civilization, and that's what paradise was to Wheatie. They pulled the gear out of the boat and set up camp a few yards from shore. However, over the

next two days they learned that this particular spot did not seem to have many regular visitors. On the other hand, it proved itself five times over to be a campsite with rattlesnakes as regular visitors.

Riding Logs and Catching Carp

During the heat of the day just about anything that would give a person a reason to get into the cooling water of the Colorado River was considered. One of them was the use of downed, floating logs that could be found along the shore. You just had to be looking for a ride. Call it the billy-billy of the old West, a person could straddle one and with a stick for a paddle actually go across coves, or, out into deeper sections of the river.

You had to be pretty comfortable with insects, though. Centipedes, termites, wood beetles and the like would often come out of small holes to get to higher ground after you mounted your log and started to paddle away. This was also a reason many a log was abandoned in mid use.

It was by paddling on one of the less bug-infested logs that Wheatie discovered there were very large carp, upwards of 3 feet in length in Lake Havasu. He spotted them schooling around off the tip of a cove where the water had a good current and it was shallow enough to see the bottom.



There were two things Wheatie knew about carp. One, you didn't eat them. This turned out to be a wrong assumption later, but there weren't any Asian, Japanese or Philippine people around in those days to tell him otherwise.

The other thing he "knew" was that they would forage for food at night. There was something special about fishing at night for a monster-sized fish, so he decided to give it a try.

After a meal of hamburger, beans and canned boiled potatoes served on paper plates, Wheatie got to work setting out a bait composed of dried fish guts into the middle of the cove. And before his beans were half digested, under the light of a spark-producing sage brush fire, his pole suddenly bent over accompanied with the scream of line being pulled off fast! What music!

The clicker was singing its "fish-on!" song and everybody in the campground was so alerted they instantly dropped their game of five card stud, not even bothering to pick up their bounty of match sticks.

Wheatie grabbed the staked-in pole and started reeling in the unidentified scavenger at the end of his line. Sure enough, a few minutes later they had a large carp lying on the beach in front of their campground.

This was not necessarily a brilliant move, considering the coyotes would all be homing in on their campsite now. One of Wheatie's brothers thought it was extremely amusing. The other assumed he was watching a typical Wheatie idea going down in ball of flies and stench.

That was the way it was meant to be. Wheatie couldn't win over both of his brothers most of the time, and this was no exception. Only one of them would see it as "manly action". The other would see it as "stupid action". Few of the things Wheatie did ever appeared as brilliance, and the catching of a hapless carp was no exception.

Kenneth M. Price, Jr.

As to whatever happened to that fish? That is one of many questions in Wheatie's life that to this day remains unanswered. He knows it wasn't eaten. Not by a "white man", that is.

Wheatie at the Rodeo

“Do you remember where Dad and you used to go roping?”

No. 1: “Yes, I do. Primarily at the Les Jones Arena---Santa Fe Springs---near the Norwalk store---Carmenita off ramp of the 5 Fwy I think---headed north a few miles.”

Where can a guy go to rope a steer?

So let's say you've got a couple of horses, a trailer and some gasoline. Where are you going to go to rope steers in an amateur rodeo? As it turned out, the Les Jones Roping Arena was located about an hour's drive east from Garden Grove going toward Anaheim and then north toward Santa Fe Springs. In the 50's and 60's it was the place to rope!

Now Wheatie didn't have a clue where this livestock arena was. He wasn't in to map reading and he didn't much pay attention to the roads they used to get to their destinations. Wheatie thus imagined it somewhere near the Ponderosa Ranch.

Actually, the closest he would ever get to anything associated with the Ponderosa would be Indio which is near Lake Hemet. It was this reservoir near Mount San Jacinto State Park that was pictured in the opening scene of Bonanza during the first season. Isn't that fascinating!

In the previous chapters you were given a look at the effects of Wheatie's having been re-booted, fed mercury, scared out

of his wits, sunburned repeatedly, wiped out, trained in rattlesnake phobia and suffering the indignation of an outboard motor that backfired and quit in the middle of a giant lake. No question, these experiences were indirectly responsible for the “quirks” in his behavior acquired up to this point.

Having to hang around the back section of a popular roping arena is not to be left out. This came about because when the “men” weren’t hunting or fishing, they used their livestock in rodeo events. Can you believe that?

Each time they drove up to the Les Jones arena, where Mr. Wheatie and No. 1 roped steers, they parked their truck, trailer and camper in the back section of the grounds. Once the roping started, Wheatie was pretty much on his own to either walk around or hang out at the camper.

At lunchtime he got to eat a peanut butter sandwich amidst a halo of manure flies. This he often did with the other brother who was not yet old enough to rope steers.

Wheatie soon found out that riding a horse in a rodeo was not to be taken lightly. There were serious ropers and horsemen there as well as the amateur-level folk like Mr. Wheatie, who roped steers strictly for sport. Not to mention he was using the same livestock that he took packing up into the high Sierras.

That meant Mr. Wheatie’s “pack” animals were highly trained. They had to be fast, be able to do a jump start and come to a stop immediately, and, be able to back up! It was that last one that was most difficult.

Mr. Wheatie used to show off his “pack” animals to others on hunting trips by having them back up with the touch of his reins and a gentle squeeze with his legs. Whenever a person saw him do this, they knew they were not in the company of a mere deer hunter.

Wheatie the Farmer?

As if the times weren't confusing enough, picturing himself working on a farm went beyond his imagination. After all, his teachers had told him he was a smart student, and thusly he had a prejudiced idea that "smart" students didn't end up as farmers. So when he was on genuine farmland amidst genuine farm animals he felt out of place.

And there were a few distractions along the way, like the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, that nuanced his visions of the future. Was this a big deal or a not? It was sloughed off by the press as no big deal. But we have to consider that when a young boy is shown pictures of bomb shelters and people being blown away by 500 mile per hour winds, it does make him wonder if he really needs to get his homework done the night before.

Just how traumatic was the effect on Wheatie? How about the fact that years later whenever he saw bleached cow bones out in the desert he saw his own nuclear-charred remains lying there. Poor traumatized kid.

Yes indeed, the nuclear age, with its bomb drills and Russian espionage had a marked effect on Wheatie's life. The trauma didn't pass until years later when Wheatie discovered girls, and then it didn't matter anymore. Actually, nothing else mattered anymore!

In the meantime, what was gleaned was to apply more passion to the present and less confidence to the future. For Wheatie, these concepts, when put into simple/stupid terms meant to act less law-abiding and a bit more reckless. As you will come to read, this was not the best period of his character development.

Real Cowboys

What do you remember about roping? Was it exciting? Did you like it? Was it scary being on such large animals? What was it like roping with Dad?

No. 1: "I loved the roping--thought I wanted to be a cowboy--loved the team roping with Dad--we did okay--did a few local rodeos--I don't remember us winning anything big, but we had some good times in the competition and overall good times, too.

Now if a farm setting made Wheatie uncomfortable because he was feeling like one of those high nosed persons, then what do you think his impression of the back section of a roping arena would be? But to his good fortune he found amongst the dirt floors, wooden rails and dusty stalls a variety of people that were real.

That is to say, these weren't people Wheatie "thought" he had seen on TV played by actors. Here he found the actual people; tanned and scarred from working under the sun. They were keenly focused on a particular function and had obviously worked around animals for some time.

Horses may look unarmed since they don't have horns. However, it only takes a fraction of a second for a defensively-thrown hoof, by a 900 pound animal, to dismantle a human. Wheatie observed that the men made all the right moves and none of the wrong moves. This was in order to actually handle Horses and bulls as a regular job.

Put in simple/stupid terms: Cowboys either knew what they were doing or they got their "nuts and bolts" kicked in. Anyone still willing to handle stock after that became part of the "club", as long as they could still walk.

Was it courage or was it faith in God that kept these guys from disaster? To Wheatie it looked like they needed a good

dose of both. They humbled him with their ability to climb on top of such large animals and take command. He noted their boots and levis; they were used, used, used. It was all too genuine.

They put every hero he had seen on TV to shame. They made him realize that he himself was growing up to be a wimp alongside boys who could really handle stock. That was a major revelation for sure!

And so it was: Wheatie got exposed to cowboys at too young of an age; too young of an age to end up as a normal TV-watching kid. He now knew what true manliness was. For most, it was too soon to depart from their false actor heroes. As for Wheatie, he had little choice.

And thus Wheatie became more comfortable with the idea of becoming a farmer. To nail down the concept, he broadened out his TV-watching to include *The Real McCoys* and *Wagon Train*.

The rodeo did a lot for Wheatie. Sci-Fi cartoons and girl/boy sitcoms were gone forever. Still, he hadn't figured out why his father had taken him to the roping arena in the first place. He actually thought it was because his Dad liked to rope steers.

The first Horse; a Donkey

This subtitle may read as a contradiction to some, but the fact is, the first thing a kid needs to learn about riding a horse is how to fall off of that horse. Guess what is one of the first things a kid needs to learn about riding a donkey? How to fall off that donkey? What a brilliant guess!

Which one do you want to fall off of in order to get the experience of falling off? Is it the taller or the shorter one?

Take your pick. Just don't try to tell Wheatie that you're not going to fall off.

Now you understand why Wheatie's Dad one day "out of the blue" bought a Donkey. Once again, he was way ahead of his time. The only one else who knew it was Mrs. Wheatie. She'd already made it clear to Mr. Wheatie that she didn't want to raise a bunch of wimps.

When you pet donkeys they are wonderful animals. When you ride donkeys they are rambunctious animals. When kids ride donkeys they rambunctiously demonstrate the full extent of their character. When too many kids ride them they buck them off faster than a Brahma with a rat on his balls.

That's about all Wheatie can remember about his family's first "horse". They kept the jenny down at the ranch that was adjacent to the roping arena. And, sure enough, during the year or so of ownership, all three of the trio managed to get bucked off a couple of times. Success for Mr. Wheatie!

Looking back on it, Wheatie figures it was maybe one of the smartest things his pa ever did. He got everyone over the idea of falling off a horse simply by having them fall off a donkey and then telling them to get back on. And it only took a \$50 donkey!

Now there were of course experiences other than falling off that a donkey can provide its owner. One of these was having the animal swing its head back and bite you on the leg. Wheatie got to experience this in preparation for when he would be riding a horse.

Another was to get scraped off the animal's back by it deliberately going under a low tree branch. The donkey delivered on that one as well.

As for actually riding the donkey, it would probably have been a smoother ride on a camel. Donkeys prefer to trot.

They can gallop but it is sometimes impossible to goad them into it. Wheatie's donkey seemed to be willing to gallop but it was only to buck people off or get to the straw bin sooner.

And low and behold it wasn't a month later that Mr. Wheatie announced that he had purchased a horse, and this time it was a horse. Wow! Was it ever tall. Wheatie was at this point thinking his pa might be pushing the family toward large animals too fast.

Even after several months of trotting around and falling off the donkey Wheatie was still amazed at the sheer size of a horse. But by hook or crook it wasn't long before he was up there riding so he could the sooner experience his first time falling off a real mount. And after getting back up on repeatedly over a period of a few months, it was believed by some that Wheatie was growing up into a fine, something.

Though there exists a historical connection between donkeys and mining, nevertheless Wheatie knew his future did not lie in prospecting for gold. The donkey only reinforced his earlier conclusion that gold prospecting lead to places like Death Valley and he had already seen the bleached bones there.

Bottle Collecting

Wheatie was not just becoming more hip to animals, but he was beginning to notice things about other people too. One was that his father never seemed to run out of steam or enthusiasm. No matter what the time of day or what were the plans ahead, he always had plenty of energy to unload horses from a trailer or refill troughs with straw and oats.

All this, even though he worked many hours Monday through Friday, down at his markets. Not to mention that he had two separate locations.

So sitting around was not something the Wheaties were encouraged to do nor normally did. Thus when an opportunity to actually earn some money presented itself he decided to give it a try.

It happened after finishing a can of Craigmont carbonated grape “drink” taken from the Styrofoam ice chest, when he went to throw his can away. And guess what Wheatie found there? A couple of REAL bottles (like a major brand in returnable glass)! In those days they were worth 2 cents each!

This was the 50’s, and soft drink bottles were built thick and to last. It was an era when “bottle collectors” were legitimate professions for inexperienced and/or under aged workers. This was all brought about by the fact that just about every family drank soda pop back then, and 90% of the time it came from a bottle.

Note, in those days if you preferred to not purchase soda in a returnable bottle, you paid a lower price, and you received a lower line. These included brands like Craigmont, Kroeger, Albertsons, etc., and it came in 3 piece steel cans. So you could avoid bottles. But you became a cheapster.

Within the Wheatie group, accepting a cheap brand was no problem, because everyone knew they were darned lucky to get anything beyond warm water from a WW II canteen. So what if it was made of steel and had a soldered seam. People would be drinking out of brain-deadening aluminum cans within a few decades anyway, and not think anything of it.

At this juncture in history, glass was truly the first class way to go. Most persons had watched TV, seen the adds, and thus “chosen” to go the first class route. And so it came to be in 1958 that a person willing to dig through the trash, place

bottles back in their cardboard cases and take back to the store was a hero. We'll get more to that comment in a little bit.

One thing Wheatie noticed though, was that there was no other competition. Perhaps it wasn't a big enough park to support the more serious scavengers. He also wondered if the last kid who had been collecting all the bottles had maybe been kicked in the nuts by a horse or steer. At any rate, Wheatie was able to begin his working career absolutely clear of competition, book keeping and permit fees!

He didn't know it, but Wheatie also dodged the mafia since his income remained just below the money-snatching level of organized crime (less than \$1.00/day). Without them on board, bottle collecting remained a tax free bonanza!

And the rewards continued! Just a few weeks after Wheatie got his skills tuned to the point where he could locate 24 return bottles a day, bottle deposits went from 2 cents to 3 cents each! That meant that for the same amount of clawing around trashcans and back corners, his earnings increased by 24 cents per day, overnight! And still his taxes remained at zero!

Not only was this a huge 50% windfall, but it had happened just by letting another day go by. As time went on, it became a winning component of Wheatie's future "modus operandi" (Give things another day to ripen and produce fruit).

Sure, he might be collecting mere pennies for a living, but Wheatie also was quite familiar with the story of Abraham Lincoln. He confidently reasoned that a famous person could be poor and still end up on the face of a coin, not to mention that the service he provided might qualify him to get elected some day, himself. Elected to what? Wheatie had no clue.

Still, if nothing more: Wheatie may some day go down in history as one of the early pioneers of glass recycling. If you believe that, then this is the perfect place to end this section.

Horse and Cow Baptism

It took Wheatie a long time to get over being terrified of the size of the horses and steers. Realizing that even rodeo animals are smart enough to recognize real cowboys, he started to understand his predicament. Try to picture a horse as a 900 pound chicken walking around inside the barn. You don't want to be around a 900 pound chicken with a bad attitude, do you?

Both chickens and horses strutted around inside the barns and they both had a peculiar attitude toward Wheatie. He realized he needed to look and act more like a real cowboy. But it was gonna take time.

Now, many people don't know this; but horse and cow manure are not a bad thing. If you have mingled with it and mingled with the alternative, then you are not one of these people. Wheatie already knew the alternative, thanks to the one guy on his block who trucked in untreated chicken poop to cover his lawn each year. It was a high price to pay for stimulated grass growth.

Back then Wheatie figured the guy must have gotten a really good deal on the chicken poop, because from a distance of over 100 feet it smelled worse than a ruptured sewer in downtown Tijuana! After that experience, it was practically an honor to shovel horse or cow manure.

Little did Wheatie know at the time, the chicken experience was the perfect primer for what was to follow at the roping and riding arena. This occurred once the bottle-collecting smoothed out. It was then that Wheatie decided to try out the calf-riding event which took place at the end of the day.

It wasn't too tough to enter the event. A kid just had to show up and stand in line for a turn. No forms. No waivers. No \$20,000 insurance bond. Nothing required other than a crazy desire to be helped aboard a sturdy 2 to 3 month old roping calf and be turned loose into the arena. He would soon find out why they saved things such as calf riding for the very last.

The rules were pretty simple: If a kid chose to ride, then whatever calf came down the shoot next was his baby. It turns out that Wheatie's ride on this day looked like a small bull instead of a hapless calf. Actually what that meant was instead of the calf being a piddly young 2 month old he had a hefty seasoned 3 month old!!

Wheatie got on and put his hand around the rope strap that went clear around the young steer. He figured he had the strength to hang on for a good while as they went bounding across the arena. Unfortunately it had been raining on and off the week before and there were soft spots in the middle of the arena. And just what do you think was in those soft spots? How about pure horse poop!

Actually, horseshit sounded a lot better. That's really the only thing anyone who wore a Stetson hat ever called it. But now take a guess at what the calf ran for? Of course! Straight for the giant swamp of liquid manure, and at top speed.

Just when it got there, the calf darted to the left and Wheatie went right. Oh, you didn't know a calf could dart like that did ya, eh? This is what Wheatie was thinking just as he went straight into a 20 foot diameter vat of muck, I mean shit. "please forgive the language".

As for the experience itself? Wheatie has evaluated it for what it was; a grand and honorable way to prove to his mom that he could get dirty beyond a point that anybody of the opposite sex would possibly attempt to outdo.

He also learned that after an hour or so his clothes had dried out to the point he hardly noticed the crusty brown coating nor the smell of a stockyard following his every move. And thusly this experience would prove to him that even being coated with pure excrement could in certain ways be a good thing!

And there would be those futuristic days when he had his own horse and the Wheatie trio would have to clean the corrals and dispense manure up the hill to the lawn that surrounded the house. He was prepped for that now. And still Wheatie thought his pa just really liked to rope steers.

The story would not be complete without knowing some of those inevitable times when Wheatie would doubt his Dad and the whole backward-looking dirt-based system this eccentric family embraced. Those thoughts were completely put to rest as soon as some of pa's old post war friends from the city came for a visit and brought along some of THEIR kids.

Wheatie in Cowan Heights



“The Big Valley”

It wasn't but a few months after Wheatie's infamous rodeo baptizing that the family moved from Garden Grove to a more rural setting. The area was about 16 miles east and nestled against the boundaries of a giant expanse of private undeveloped land.

Anybody trying to find the location today just needs to look up “Peter's Canyon Regional Park”. To Wheatie, it was a cross between the *Ponderosa* and *The Big Valley*.

Actually the area where Wheatie stomped around was named after oilman and developer Walter Cowan, who bought an 800-acre walnut, cattle and citrus ranch there in 1942. Does that not sound like a miniature Garden of Eden?

Going back in time as far as 1920, Cowan Heights was horse country, having little to do with cows other than them being on the dinner plates of most horsemen about five nights per week. And there were public stables with lots of open acreage in which to ride.

By the time Wheatie got there in the 60's the stables were gone but his pa was able to purchase a home with a large enough lot to keep horses right on the property. They used green branches from Eucalyptus trees to construct the posts and rails for the corral. It looked very rustic.

Better yet, the horses didn't like to chew Eucalyptus! This meant they did not eat the corral, which would have typically been built with 2 x 6 rails of Cedar or Redwood. The use of Eucalyptus saved enormously on rail replacements, making more modern corrals look as out-of-place as a plywood surfboard at a custom Styrofoam shop.

Part of the Cowan Heights 60-ish laid-back attitude was do to the fact that schools were still entwined with a high concentration of farm-based people. As a result many had not yet embraced the more progressive "new wave teachers" that were being pumped out of liberalized universities that were following the latest federal guidelines.

It is also pertinent to note that America had "won" the Big War only a decade and a half before. On top of this, such an attitude had been reinforced by weekly TV shows depicting bold men enforcing a divine sort of "western" laws.

But the best part was the fact there were few administrators carrying around "Educational PhD's" or "Dr. of Psychology" degrees, and thus there were few "problematic" students who were receiving "special assistance". That made those days safer for any spry kid wanting to be drug free past the age of 16.

This guy Walter Cowan

For sure Cowan had the perfect name for the new mini “Ponderosa” subdivision he founded. Half of the topography was a sage-covered pastureland that had been rounded into friendly shaped hills by grass eating cattle. The other half was covered with larger brush and shrub trees that were native to the area.

Some of these shrub trees were so large Wheatie could crawl underneath the outer limbs and hide out within a natural cavern made of branches and leaves. In another stroke of gardening genius, there were rows and rows of Eucalyptus trees that had been planted for lumber production during a bygone era.

Starting in the 1870s, the first large-scale commercial planting of the blue gum eucalyptus began. This was a mid-sized eucalyptus that could reach 150 to over 200 feet tall. They were planted all over southern California in rows and groves and at one time there were over 100 companies involved.

However, by 1920 the plan failed when it was found that there in California eucalyptus trees grew with a twist in their trunks. They claimed that unless the trunks were 70 years old or older they would be useless as lumber.

By the time Wheatie moved to Cowan Heights there were extensive groves and rows of mature eucalyptus trees. These tall mature giants broke up the land into football field-sized lots, providing picturesque boundaries. During the seasons of the Santa Ana winds, when the cold air from the high desert poured down upon the warmer coastlands, the eucalyptus trees stood against the roaring winds like giant reeds.

These towering Eucalyptus trees were just flexible enough to survive the strongest gusts, which could top 50 knots, but

also stiff enough to make strong lumber and rails. Wheatie didn't know it at the time, but they were the ultimate wind deflector.

As long as we're on the subject of the Santa Ana winds it should be noted that the Wheatie residence was susceptible to wind-speed-pressure drops. When the winds sped over his rooftop the pressure drop sucked the air out of the attic, and when the air got sucked out of the attic, it got sucked out of the house.

The way the air got from the house into the attic was through three drop in ceiling lights. And so it was that when a 40 knot or higher gust of wind went over the top of the house it sucked air into the attic causing the ceiling panels to vibrate like oversized kazoos.

But Wheatie loved being in the groves of eucalyptus trees when the Santa Ana winds were blowing. There he could stand encapsulated within the roaring noise of a zillion vibrating leaves. Though the limbs were often stressed by hot gusts of wind, the leaves somehow managed to hold fast even while violently shaking.

One sort of sad note is that Wheatie was not always the best forest manager, and in fact tended to shirk this future responsibility. As a result he regarded eucalyptus trees as fair game for treehouse building. That meant driving into their trunks a lot of really big nails. You would not believe some of the nails Wheatie managed to scrounge! They were somewhere between a 16 penny and a railroad spike!

Now a mature eucalyptus tree was way too tall to build a treehouse in, and if you did, you'd be sorry when the Santa Ana winds came through and ripped it apart. But if you had four good sized trees that were each eight feet apart in a square, then you had it made.

With four trees as a foundation, as long as you didn't try to build too high, you could connect the planks from one trunk to the next using 2x8's. "Luckily", Wheatie found just this kind of lumber "lying around" at some of the construction sights that just happened to be at the framing stage.

Those were such boom days that the construction crews didn't even seem to care if you lifted lumber from their projects. Wheatie grabbed "spare" lumber right in broad daylight; (after the construction crews had gone home of course). How much would you bet that no one ever remembers Wheatie going up to a construction boss and asking for free lumber?

But honestly, no one seemed to mind Wheatie's lawlessness. Ya right! And if you believe that then you are gonna really be in for a ride in a story coming up.

The Irvine Ranch

"The Irvine Ranch was assembled by James Irvine and two partners in 1864 from Mexican and Spanish land grants. In 1876, Irvine bought out his partners, and continued farming the land. When he died in 1886, his son, James Irvine Jr., inherited the land at age 19. In 1894 James incorporated the land holdings as The Irvine Company." goodplanning.com

Thanks to Wheatie's pa having moved the family to one of the most unique subdivisions in the entire state, there was lots of private land around. That private land was known as the Irvine Ranch and their home was located right on the edge of it.

Since its inception the ranch had produced a rich history. In Wheatie's day the land was no further developed than open grazing land. The entire expanse of hills and green grass seemed to be perfectly groomed for a kid's perchance for

near endless exploration; 92,000 acres of exploration! Besides, 'ole lady Irvine was dead and possibly gone.

It was paradisiacal; this Irvine Ranch. Aside from it being completely undeveloped the topography included several lakes, remote valleys and shrub covered hilltops. So much for the compelling discussion of trespassing and feeling guilty. In Wheatie's eyes, valleys and shrubs equated to rabbit and quail hunting.

A kid with a hunter's attitude could walk to the fence line where nobody cared if they slipped through the barbed wire. Once across a fella could walk onward into his own "happy hunting grounds" carrying a fishing pole or pellet gun.

There is little question that one of the reasons Wheatie turned out as he did was because he grew up in an area that was to some extent as noted above, unpoliced. Now this would have been postwar, so there was by no means an absence of laws in existence that people were expected to follow, of course.

As it was, during the Cowan-Heights-Era of Wheatie's growing up, certain of these "laws" could be rendered "inapplicable" such as in special or unique situations. Let's take this paradoxical situation as an example: the times when they were on private land but the private land owner didn't know they were on that land. It would turn out later, that assuming the land owner would never know they were on their land, afforded them too much creative supposition.

And thus their interpretation led to "guiltless trespassing" excursions leading them to venture onto private land as if it were their own. Now you would think that would bring up another question, that being; was it stealing to hunt and take game on private land?

“Rich in history, the Irvine Ranch land is considered a precious and nonrenewable resource, an asset not to be sold or squandered for short-term gain, but to be held onto and used in ways that are carefully planned to benefit those who choose to live and work here.”

The Irvine Ranch Project

After all, the rabbits and quail roamed amidst vast meadows of sage and shrub, which all seemed to be growing itself in such abundance that nobody would ever notice. Thanks to “creative supposition” there was no remorse felt for game taken.

As a result of the various outdoor activities unique to Cowan Heights, when Wheatie got released from school he generally came home, grabbed a pole and headed out to his “private” lake. How many kids living in America came home from school and went hunting or fishing on any given day during the 60’s?

It needs to be reiterated; this was not 1760 nor was this chapter intended as a continuation of the Daniel Boone story. It was a full 200 hundred years later; 1960.

Wheatie’s growing preference for a country atmosphere would play out later in life similar to episodes of “*The Beverly Hillbillies*”. And it all occurred within a mile from home.

Bicycle riding

Oftentimes when Wheatie returned from school he would hop on his bike and head off over to a friends, and from there to a field. To get to a field they rode on streets most of the way and on trails part of the way. Over time a maze of trails were laid down by the riders that connected them with all of the lots and open spaces.

In order to ride these trails you needed a bicycle with at least 2 inch wide tires. That meant you were riding a pretty stout hunk of iron if it was a full size bike built to the standards of the 60's. The 20" wheeled "Stingray" came along about this time and became a hit with the off road trail-riding group. In those days the next hottest thing in the dirt was a motorcycle.

Bicycle motocross had not even been dreamed of much less put into action back then. The way kids ride motocross bikes today is light years beyond the stunts Wheatie and his friends were pulling off. It mainly consisted of surviving the trip from one location to the other without ending up thorned with cactus or entrapped in brush.

The biggest threat of all to a bicyclist was getting up too much speed when going down a long hill. Most of the bikes back then just had one rear brake operated by backing on the pedals. These worked fine until you got into an emergency because somebody stopped in front of you. If you were going fast enough to have your hair streaming back, all you could do was skid the back tire and prepare for a collision.

There were a few who got brand new English and French made 10 speed bicycles for a birthday or as a Christmas present. In Cowan Heights, with its huge one acre lots and open space, dogs could roam lose. Sometimes they just happened to see a kid speeding down the hill toward their house.

Unfortunately, these lighter bikes were defenseless against errant dogs running out just when the riders were crouched down and up to full speed! Whenever a good sized dog collided with the wheels of these bikes the poor rider got a new set of scabs to show off to his friends.

At one time Wheatie endured extensive facial and body scrapes from a horrible slide on the pavement. This unfortunate incident happened at Irvine Park when he got up

too much speed going down a long hill, hit a bump and lost control. For a month his face rivaled the best of the Hollywood monster creators. He definitely confirmed during that time that scabs were not helpful for making girl friends, or any friends for that matter.

In those days, too few kids were in to wearing protective gear and Wheatie was no exception. After all it was southern California; the land of shorts and suntans. The solution was to stay in the dirt and risk riding into a ravine or grove of cactus, rather than ride fast on the street and risk a ride on the pavement.

Tire rolling

There were lots of other kids who came home after school for the opportunity to roam the hills and countryside. During sun-warmed afternoons this gave rise to gatherings, and these gave rise to hill climbing contests.

Quite often Wheatie and his friends would roll an old discarded truck tire all the way to the top of a sagebrush-covered hill. It was a lot of work and it was all done all for the purpose of turning one sunbaked hunk of rubber flying back down the hill.

They loved to watch in awe as it gained speed and smashed its way through the giant shrub trees, sometimes bouncing off a solid branch and flying high over the top of the entire barrier of vegetation.

Now, if one of these heavy tires had enough energy and got through the shrubbery, it could wreck havoc with anything in its way. If a spinning tire crossed the open fields, their next targets would often be within the residential sections. This practice insured the Wheatie group was not only in excellent

physical shape from hiking up hills toting truck tires, but also running from neighbors who has just had one slam into their house!

Now it may appear that tire-rolling went down as just another lawless act that the Wheatie group was able to get away with, and they did so by treading on their neighbor's good graces. The good graces came from parent's attitudes that "boys will be boys", which they tended to embrace (God Bless 'em).

And so when a tire went smack into a peach tree and dislodged 50% of its adolescent fruit to the ground, rather than reacting "I want to kill you for this!" neighbors in those days were more inclined to retort something like, "I hope you boys learned your lesson from this!"

Think about it: These days a rolling tire headed toward a neighborhood would more resemble a terrorist's plot to eliminate a family than a kid's science experiment "to study the effects of momentum and rotational energy on a moving object."

Hill sliding

Hill sliding may not sound like much, but there were many steeply-graded slopes in Cowan Heights. There was so much construction going on that hardly a week went by that a new fresh dirt slope wouldn't be cut and compacted.

Some of them stretched over 100 feet downward extending further onto an existing hill. A fella with the right contraption for supporting his hind end could ride one of these slopes even longer than a good wave at Huntington Beach!

Around this same time Mr. Wheatie was running a sales promotion in one of his grocery stores that featured a six foot plastic rowboat filled with Halloween candy. After the sale,

he brought the durable-looking contraption home for the boys to use down at the beach.

They never did like using it down at the beach, since after all, they were used to plywood surfboards and a bit more speed. So Wheatie got the bright idea to use it for hill sliding. That meant it had just weeks left in its future before the bottom would be totally worn out.

But oh what a grand couple of weeks it was! Hillside after hillside Wheatie and some other neighbors climbed, dragging the fast-sliding off-road bobsled. They'd wear themselves out getting to the top just for a short downward thrill.

With a couple of guys aboard and hanging on for dear life, they would launch themselves off the top. The added weight guaranteed added speed. Sometimes they went right over cactus. Sometimes they went flying through sage brush and mustard weeds. Sometimes they went sideways, tipped over and flew out onto the grass and sagebrush.

Indeed, this was hill sliding at its best! The soil was mostly ground up sandstone, so if you landed in it, you had it made. Otherwise it was sagebrush and cactus. Sometimes cactus stickers had to be pulled out using plyers. That procedure somewhat resembled an old Apache Indian "torture test to enter manhood". Actually, it was the closest Wheatie ever got to having a real one.

Hill sliding in a plastic boat went down as the best substitution to high tech European bobsledding that California could offer at the time. And it seemed to satisfy any and all of the potential Olympic bobsled aspirations the Wheatie group might have otherwise demanded.

Epilog to the story: As the gouged-out tracks from the bobsled and bicycles met with downpours of rain later in the fall season, giant ruts were carved into the otherwise perfectly

packed slopes. This caused the replacement of countless tons of soil that had flowed down into adjacent lots.

What the final costs totaled up to, after all of the ground was finally covered over and accepted as somebody else's property, has never been calculated. At the time, Wheatie figured it was just the result of a particularly rainy winter.

What could have possibly been wrong with a bunch of kids "playing"? After all, nobody from the Wheatie group was ever arrested or jailed.

Run and get Killed

This was just a wild and bizarre procedure; run and crash into a mob of human beings and see how far you could get before you got killed, or actually "tackled".

Runners who waited for their turn took up their start position at the top of a small hill. This way the "flying human projectile" got to run downhill to thus gain lots of speed before crashing into the human wall.

Playing it was like playing a 3 card gut game verses 5 card stud. It was over very quickly. As the runners ran wildly down the hill toward the wall of humans they only had the width of about 6 feet in which to dart left or right as they hit the line.

It was a "just plain crazy" game, and that is the only explanation as to why everyone loved it. Call this writer under the influence, but he would still swear there was something special about a mass of boys running full speed towards one another and ending up in a heaping mass of grassed asses.

Wheatie thought it was the perfect preparation for anyone considering playing real tackle football. Actually, it was found later, due to the high possibility of injury, it was not the right preparation for anyone considering football.

The one thing it did do was give the little guys a better sense of reality as to what could happen to them if they really squared off against a larger person, or better yet, if the larger person ever squared off against them! Put in simple/stupid: it made smaller kids appreciate the good graces of those who had much more powerful bodies.

Down the road, after physical education class, when Wheatie found himself in the shower rooms with these larger individuals, he knew not to mouth off. And this is because the feeling of getting slammed against steel lockers by a guy twice his weight could be visualized mentally beforehand. He didn't have to experience the smashing force against steel and concrete to have the proper picture.

This is the only reason why this subject was included in this book.

Ditch 'em

If you liked to run like hell out into the black of the night, Ditch 'em was the game for you! The size of the playing field was the size of a golf course. On warm summer nights ditching friends became the most exciting thing to do under the cover of darkness.

Ditch 'em was basically a grown up version of hide-and-seek, but the home team had to guard the jail. Anyone who got tagged was detained in "jail". And it was truly a "big game" owing to the fact it required a big number of people; up to 10 per side.

While the home team huddled the “free” team ran off into the darkness and hid themselves amidst the eucalyptus and orange trees. After ten minutes had elapsed the home team would start looking for people to tag and capture.

Because of the natural aspects of the arena, Ditch ‘em was one of the most fun and exciting games a person could imagine. This was due in no small part to the playing area being so vast a person could hide in groves, shrubbery, eucalyptus trees, ditches, culverts and just about whatever.

If you got spotted, you could make a good run off into the dark before cutting behind a hedge or tree line, double back and hide again! Then again, you could be hiding perfectly still and be right next to some one who was in stalk mode.

Wheatie learned lots of sneaky ways to hide without being detected; to become “one” with the tree or shrub was his specialty. And that’s what made it fun, unless you were the “easily spooked” type, that is.

Normally a good game of Ditch ‘em would go on for a couple of hours until the teams had swapped positions and ran themselves out. At this point, by the amount of sweat each had produced, they would generally agree they’d all had a good time.

And then there would be one who had a different take. They were the ones who came back to camp looking as if they had just seen a ufo.

The Irvine Ghost



OLD LADY IRVINE, 1885

“Ms. Irvine was young, tall and striking from any distance, with locks of raven black hair peeking from beneath a bonnet that framed a slender sad face. Dressed in black pleated wool, it highlighted her white skin and silk lace, making her one of the most audacious looking woman of her day.”

Anonymous

The story of Wheatie’s experiences while living adjacent to the Irvine Ranch would not be complete without a discussion of the remnants of ‘ole Lady Irvine herself. She was no doubt the scariest re-incarnation of a cold blooded heiress that was ever dreamed up!

Put into simple/stupid terms; Ya didn’t go onto the Irvine Ranch after dark. Wheatie knew that darned well. He’d heard plenty of blood curdling stories of a midnight ghost that guarded the ranch after midnight. “She rides around in a black one-horse buggy!”, the typical story would start out. One of them went something like this:

There was this young couple, see. And they were out driving in their car on the Irvine Ranch after dark, see. And one thing they didn’t know about the Irvine Ranch is that you didn’t venture onto the ranch after dark because people had been chased out of there by ‘ole Lady Irvine in her horse and buggy.

Ya see, Ole Lady Irvine was a jaw-dropping sight, appearing just when you least expected it. If caught alone it was said her image was so spine chilling it had on many occasions turned grown men into cowering wimps so scared they could not even run away. You got that?

And there were some folks, see, that hadn't heard the stories, and it was from these poor misinformed souls that one night 'ole Lady Irvine found this young couple parked on her land making out. Let me know if you're not getting scared at this point as I might think you have already passed out.

OK. So guess what happened to that young couple? Everything seemed to be going fine until later that night when the young man needed to get out of the car and relieve himself. Oh my God for the girl, because as she waited there in the dark car, she wondered if he would ever come back. Well, he never came back! You got that? He just left her there alone.

Now as the night went on the wind was picking up and these sharp branches from the trees kept scratching the top of the boyfriend's car. She kept listening to the branches and the creepy screeching sounds they made on the paint. Still, she was too afraid to get out and go look for her boyfriend.

If only the branches would stop moving so much, she hoped. Hope was all she had as she waited, which was all the way until morning after the sun came out. Only then, by looking outside and around, was she able to get up enough courage to open the door and step out of the car.

Catching something out of the corner of her eye, she turned back toward the car. It was then she realized her boyfriend had been hung by a rope from a tree limb that was directly above it. His shoes had been torn off so that only his toenails were scraping the top. It was the toenails she'd been listening to all night while her boyfriend was dying. You got that?

And thus we conclude a typical Lady Irvine ghost tale.

There were some, who by day, sluffed off the stories. These people became very quiet, however, when they were actually caught out in the dark at night. And you would see the same ashen look on all the silent faces of the young and old amidst the flickering fire, while some dodgy character recited another episode of the “baroness in the buggy”.

Neighborhood Vigilantes

For Wheatie, being allowed to grow up, as if living a country life of decades ago, was the main advantage to living in Cowan Heights. As you have read, they came up with innumerable methods to enjoy the outdoors, and each added a new spice to their overall experience.

And as time went by in Cowan Heights, high school came into the picture for many of the more motivated kids, who went out for sports. This left a “home gang” of sorts, which over time digressed into the vigilantes of the neighborhood that sorta resembled bandits in a Hollywood western.

As you will read in the next chapters, Wheatie was breaking trespassing laws almost every day and thinking nothing about it. Today, such an admission would get a person labelled a narcissist and put on psychoactive drugs at a minimum. But back then it was totally cool.

The small town atmosphere was only occasionally made more complicated by things like the Viet Nam buildup and the Kennedy assassination. So what if both of these events changed the plans of a growing youth from being at peace vs. thinking he would soon be going to war.

It does need to be mentioned that Wheatie’s initial lawlessness did in fact manifest itself in a negative way,

especially on Halloween nights when innocent pumpkins owned by innocent people would get reduced to carbon by an unknown attacker (Wheatie the burner). In a vigilante state of mind and armed with fist sized balls of carpet rubber, clouds of thick black smoke would be produced by dropping them into lighted pumpkins.

It was done in the same fashion as the dropping of hand grenades into tanks during the Battle of Normandy. That had to give the victims a good feeling about the neighborhood, eh? Today it would be labeled as terrorism, treated as a hate crime and Wheatie would have been a caged villain.

So we should not make the improper conclusion that the vigilante life was better than living more by the law, but at the same time we must consider that others of his same age were reading paperbacks and watching cowboy movies in order to have any inkling of what lawlessness was!

And once again, because of the good graces of the people and the times, Wheatie slid off easier than an ice cube on a waterslide. There would be a payback period, though. He would face difficult times honing his character from a rudimentary, lawless and uncivilized punk into a character of truth and loyalty dedicated to a just society.

And so it didn't happen for another 30 years! Now remember, you were warned earlier about the need to be patient.



Peter's Canyon Reservoir and farmhouse: 1966 Photo courtesy Orange County Archives.

Peter's Lake

"Poaching has been defined as the illegal hunting or capturing of wild animals, usually associated with land use rights." Wikipedia

If ever there was a lake that was made for a young upcoming hunter, it was the one just up and over the hill from Wheatie's house. Known as Peter's Lake, it provided everything for anyone wanting to go back in time to when men were men and land was land.

In the case of Peter's Lake, even though it was just a small lake in Southern California, it seemed as untouched to Wheatie as did San Francisco Bay when Sir Frances Drake first came ashore in 1579 to claim it. Drake claimed California for Englanders. In like fashion, Wheatie claimed Peter's Lake for Cowan Heighters.

As mentioned before, Wheatie lived on the outskirts of the barbed-wire-enclosed Irvine Ranch and this lake was within

it. For him, the three strand metal fence was never meant to protect innocent property from thieves and crooks. No, not at all! It was merely a filter to keep the gutless-sissy-types out and let the more courageous game-hunters in.

By a stroke of geographical genius Wheatie's favorite cove was all the way across the half mile expanse of water opposite the farmhouse where the farmer lived. He was the proprietor, watchman and enforcer. As long as the boys kept an eye on him, protection from being actually caught was assured at Peter's Lake.

Well most of the time. As for the farmer; even with a good pair of binoculars it was difficult for him to spot the Wheatie gang through the trees when they were at the back of the cove. On the other hand, the fishermen (invaders) could look out through the branches and leaves and watch what was going on at the farm. They could see him, but he couldn't see them! What kind of sneaking (poaching) beats that?

If they just paid attention to the farmer's black pickup truck; as long as they could see it was parked there, they knew the over-all clad watchman was still at the barn. And with a couple of guys along, there was sure to be one of them alert and watching to see the truck start to drive away. What could possibly go wrong?

Actually, it wasn't that cool and calm of a fleeing-the-scene-experience as you might have envisioned. The fact is, when they did see the truck roar off from the barn in a cloud of dust, it was time to speed reel, break down the pole and split for the fence.

However, there were times when one of the young men (poaching gangsters) looked up and in horror realized the truck was gone, and, **NOBODY KNEW FOR HOW LONG!**

It took about 3 seconds to realize the prospect of actually getting caught was now a concrete reality. The only option was to attempt to save their skins at any cost.

In the fleeing melee, prized fishing lures were snapped off at the reel and left floating in the green lagoon. Others were lost at the end of a long line of monofilament which came streaming off during the mad dash for freedom. Lost line was not a disgrace. A meeting with the farmer was total disgrace.

When this happened, whatever the farmer was as a character, he scared the @\$% out of the Wheatie group, plain and simple. And as it turned out later, he wasn't mean nor did he carry a shotgun. It was just that deep down Wheatie knew he was guilty as hell, having fled the scene repeatedly after all.

And so on that infamous day, when Wheatie finally got caught red handed, he was simply turning around to greet a small collie that came running up to him. It was the farmer's dog! That's when he knew he was gonna have to come face to face with the persistent man in denim. That prospect felt worse than having to face a firing squad.

The farmer gave the boys a stern dissertation. He made it very clear that what they were doing was not lawful and that the law could and would be brought into the picture if need be. But in the end, he was just another American farmer with more heart than most. He watched the boys walk back home on their own. He didn't even take their poles away!

And so at this juncture we leave Wheatie and the fact that he had been to other areas of California with private lands and he knew what trespassing on private land was. He was still getting away with lawlessness, but at least he knew what it was like to get caught.

And that was indeed almost as frightening as hearing Irvine Ghost stories while camping out in the dark!



Poaching? We were Poaching?

It was obvious at this stage that Wheatie had some understanding of the law when it came to climbing through a barbed wire fence and sneaking out onto someone else's land. And now he knew what it felt like to get caught. But the consequences of actually breaking the law had never really set in. Not until the day a real lawman caught him!

In the past Wheatie had managed to escape by watching the old farmer on the other side of the lake. And he was watching the other side of the lake like a hawk the day he was outflanked and outsmarted by an official Irvine Park Ranger who drove right up behind Wheatie as he was lookin out to sea, so to speak!

There it was. An official ranger jeep with an official person in an official ranger uniform; just waiting between Wheatie's two person gang and the fence. Being at the back of the cove, they could either head away from the fence and run toward

the farm house with the farmer still inside, or they could face the uniformed man. They decided to face him and play really dumb.

Wheatie already had a fake name thought up to give the man. No way was he going to give him his real name and end up on the ranger's clipboard of former offenders. And he felt pretty confident with this plan until the ranger sent the other boy away to stand at a distance. He then turned to Wheatie and asked: "What is your friend's name?"

So much for the fake name idea, they were really in deep @#\$\$% now. They had heard from a friend a similar story. In it, this official ranger had given out official tickets with an official fine! Wheatie figured they weren't getting off scot free this time!

The only possible ploy left was to act like they didn't know climbing through a barbed wire fence was trespassing. "Weren't those fences put up to keep the cattle in," Wheatie asked? That's when he found out that even a seasoned park ranger still has a sense of humor. He laughed so loud it sent a flock of swimming ducks into the air from the back of the cove.

It was a pretty rough interview after that. There were lots of questions and there was lots of sweat from both fishermen (trespassers). But somehow the two boys managed to pull off just getting a warning rather than one of those expensive tickets. However, in the process the park security ended up with enough information about the two boys to fill a manila file at the FBI's Office of Domestic Investigations.

And still, Wheatie's future actions would have nothing whatsoever to do with the consideration of stealing as being a result of trespassing. He simply vowed to never get caught again. As you might be guessing, this story is far from finished.

Skate Boarding in Olden Days

Some of the really old geezers who lived on the West Coast during the 50's might remember where the term "skate board" came from. Hard as it might be to believe, Wheatie was in at the ground floor of its invention.

He remembers how in those days such a contraption was indeed just a 30 inch hunk of pine cut from a 2x6 board. To this was attached a cut-in-half steel-wheeled skate which was nailed to the bottom.

The development of the skateboard actually began in Garden Grove. The original purpose was to scream through the locker room areas of the local school where the concrete was as slick as a varnished floor at the skating rink. In these applications the steel skate wheels performed marvelously.

When the Wheatie crew moved to Cowan Heights they brought the idea with them. And although the blacktop roads were new and smooth, they ran up and over hill tops. These were a problematic temptation for a skateboarder.

When a kid rode a skateboard in the hills of Cowan Heights he had better know exactly how fast he could run at full top speed. This was known as "terminal speed". From this he would subtract about 5 mph.

The prudent skate boarder applied the concept of "terminal speed" to be the maximum allowable downhill speed. The "maximum allowable downhill speed" was the speed you were going just before jumping off the board and running for your life.

If the boarder applied the theory correctly and kept "maximum allowable downhill speed" below "terminal

speed” he had a reasonable chance of staying on his feet and avoiding massive scabs.

Unfortunately these were steel-wheeled days and there weren’t any trained skate-boarders. There were some who could accurately judge the speed of the board verses their own, and there were some who could not. These are the ones that ended up with massive scabs. Wheatie was one of these people.

Later on, in an attempt to reduce scabbing, Wheatie made one modification to the steel wheeled boards. That was the addition of another plank that came up from the front of the board with handles, turning it into a scooter. A fella with this contraption could get up to a higher speed before it would go into its typical speed wobble. Problem is, at this speed, if you jumped? Exactly! Massive scabs.

Somewhere during the years of the steel wheeled contraptions, along came legitimate skateboard running gear. This consisted of a lighter plywood board with wide-carriage hard rubber wheels with ball-bearings and rubber-grommets. Unlike the skate-wheeled boards, these boards could actually be turned sharp enough to do switchbacks all the way down the hill. It was a quantum leap in skateboarding, turning it into a new sport overnight.

In Cowan Heights these boards could still get you into trouble, especially when you ran into cars going in the opposite direction. When one showed up you had to straighten out and head down the hill. Then it was time to begin calculating “maximum allowable downhill speed” before you went past it, then jump off like old times and run for your life.

It was just before moving on to larger street toys that Wheatie finally learned how to skateboard with total confidence. He’d gotten all these scabs when all along all he needed to do was

just put on gloves, long pants, knee pads, elbow pads, boots, a helmet and leather jacket!!

It's possible that someday Wheatie will be able to explain why he never wore any of these things, and, why he just kept wearing shorts. It obviously had something to do with the post World War II attitudes of the time, and knowing that doctors could always fix ya up. Perhaps he was trying to make up for the fact he would never have to undergo an American Indian "rights to manhood" ceremony in which no screaming was allowed.

As it was, he settled on displaying massive scabs, whenever the opportunity presented itself, as the best way to verify his manliness.

Campouts in the Army Tent

One aspect of Cowan Heights that made the area such a haven for kids growing up was the fact that most of the lots were not only big but still vacant. Some of them had been bull-dozed, but most were in their natural state and remained a part of the open space everyone shared.

And thusly most of the land was still covered in sagebrush and cactus. In Wheatie's day these open spaces were frequented with cottontail rabbits and valley quail. Oh, and yes, some snakes. In fact, at one time the Cowan Reality Co. was paying \$5.00 for each rattler brought into the office, as long as it was dead that is.

Taking advantage of the open space, Wheatie would get out this big green canvas tent his dad had purchased during a post war Army/Navy surplus sale. During the summer they would set it up about 100 yards from the house on a somewhat level section of grass and sagebrush.

It took two or three guys to carry it from the cabinet in the garage to the spot where they staked it down. To stand the massive canvas up and hold it aloft required a gargantuan 2” diameter pole complete with four 3 foot iron spreaders that took two guys to carry. Once erected, all could nestle down in a genuine World War II tent with a feeling as secure as a Chukar in a sagebrush field.

Now why did the Wheatie group set up the grand canvas tent summer after summer? Was it a place to campout at night, sit under flashlight and listen to Irvine Ghost stories? Yes. Was it a base command center from which to run nefarious midnight raids? Indeed yes!

As it was, away from the prying eyes of adults, most of whom were happy just to have their kids out of the house anyway, lucky participants could become a bit more wild under the cover of darkness. In other words, friends who thought they were friends could see people acting completely different than they had under normal circumstances.

For some, when the parental controls came off and the day became dark, their wildness factor was turned up a couple of notches. This caused some of them to be exposed as being nothing more than foolhardy adolescents. Wheatie was one of those people.

When light went to dark, all trespassing laws became null and void. The rationale was simple: under the coverage of total darkness, nobody would be seeing what they were doing. And the rationale worked because they never contemplated getting caught.

Now they only camped out during the summer. This meant that their main targets were neighborhood fruit trees. One particular apricot tree at the bottom of Deerhaven and Rangeview streets seemed to always get singled out first. It

was an easy haul. This was most helpful in getting off to a successful season of fruit stealing.

With no more of a reason than its existence, the hapless apricot tree was snuck up on and given a good shake. Then the group would gather up the apricots to be taken back to the tent where they were devoured in a ceremony that resembled pirates who had just plundered 10 million in gold.

Evidence of a successful raid was displayed the next morning by the deliberate scattering of apricot pits about the tent. This established the fruit-stealing mood into a sure positive. From there the group could move on to lemons and oranges, and later in the season when the fruit ran out, watering cans, hose sprayers and anything else mistakenly left outside for the night became fair game.

There were some other things that went on in that tent. Kids need something more to do under the dim lights of battery powered lamps than just tell Irvine Ghost stories. In fact if you told one of these stores, the gang was definitely going to need something to get their minds off the possibility of being hacked to death by a machete as soon as they slumbered off to sleep.

That distraction was poker, and sometimes it left a few of the privateer pirates in their underwear, or worse. For Wheatie, at his age and stage of development, it was even scarier than facing the farmer from across Peter's Lake.

Wheatie at Onion Valley



What's it like to be sick at 9,000 feet

As I mentioned, I don't have a good recollection of your horsemanship skills other than the fact you roped on weekends with Dad. Now Brother 2 ended up at the pack station, so I figure he is the undisputed livestock expert out of the 3 offspring of the master. But perhaps that is over simplified.

No. 1: "Brother 2 was the man, for sure. That guy packed groups of folks into the high sierras--his first summer he was only in 7th grade and was mostly an assistant, but by his second year he was leading pack trains into the mountains--setting up camps and doing it without help. Amazing."

One must consider in this era and stage of Wheatie's life that getting sick on a camping trip was about the lowliest, kiss-assed thing a person could do. Still, Wheatie found out what it was like to be sick at too high of an altitude because he went there, and at 9,200 feet, barfed there.

As you have read or are about to read, there were some oddities, call them "quirks", in Wheatie's behavior that came on at various ages in his life and during unexpected experiences; and they betrayed him occasionally. One of these odd "quirks" wasn't discovered until the age of nine when his dad took him on another heroic outdoor adventure; this time to Onion Valley.

It was a parking area for hikers on foot and a base camp for people to be packed in using horses, mules and burrows. The use of rented livestock and guides gave people further range into the mountains making for a rare adventure in the Sierras.

It turned out that the 9,200 ft. elevation of Onion Valley was a few thousand feet too high for Wheatie. And as a result, later that night, upon awakening in his own dinner, Wheatie learned that people can actually get sick from being in a higher altitude than they are acclimated for.

"Oh man! How did this happen?", he babbled from his crumbed-up lips as a flashlight was shined on his pale face. It wasn't long before all men within the camper knew what splendid thing had happened in the middle of the sub freezing night!

Without complaint Mr. Wheatie got up, tossed the barfed-in sleeping bag outside the camper for the night, and told Wheatie to get into the same sleeping bag as his older brother.

As you might have guessed, Wheatie's older brother was not too happy with the situation as at his juncture felt about as much sympathy for his younger brother as a bear has for a

fox. Having a stinky little brother crawling in alongside was almost too much of an indignation for him to take.

That was because the two liked to argue. Actually, Wheatie didn't like to argue, he just didn't like hearing things said that weren't true. His brother didn't really like to argue either but Wheatie tended to memorize things like an encyclopedia, becoming the worst pain-in-the-ass imaginable for an older sibling.

There were too many times when Wheatie, feeling like it was his duty to point out factual mistakes, would do so. That was problem One. As for the older brother, it seemed lil' Wheatie was pointing out a mistake in his statements just about every other time he made one, and he tended to be right. That was problem Two.

How to grow a man 101: When two boys don't agree, put them in a situation where they either have to share or freeze! Mr. Wheatie was a genius!



The pack station at Onion Valley where Wheatie's Brother No. 2 later went to work as a full time packer.

Heading for Kearsarge Pass



How did you like the deer hunting trips and riding up into the high country?

No. 1: "I was too young when we first started hunting--I remember being very cold. My feet are still cold to this day. I didn't enjoy the hunting all that much in the beginning--too much walking and sitting, but when I got to be about 12 then I was all in. Loved it after that. Dad was always great to be with, in the rodeo scene or out hunting or camping. He was the kind of guy who could have had a million friends if he'd wanted them--most guys seemed to idolize him and his skills/talents."

The next morning when the campers got up Wheatie was no longer nauseous but had a pounding headache; the secondary symptoms of being in the high elevations. It would have helped Wheatie's situation dramatically if just one of the older brothers had gotten sick too, but no such luck. Wheatie was stuck with being the trip wimp.

He was feeling at the bottom of his game when his pa gave him an aspirin for his headache. That may have been the first miracle Wheatie discovered, when in less than an hour his headache was not only gone, he was fully revived.

Meanwhile Mr. Wheatie and crew had saddled up three horses. Brother Two and Wheatie would ride together with Wheatie at the back in the after-saddle, which was a horse blanket. To remain aboard he had to hold onto the leather rim of the saddle seat. Or he could grab onto his brother seated in the saddle in front of him (maybe once in awhile).

The three horses and four riders left Onion Valley and proceeded up into the high country as planned. Everything was going fine, save the fact that Wheatie could hardly stay awake on the back of the horse. This was not funny as he almost fell off countless times; saving himself from falling. If he'd have gone off the downhill side of the horse he'd have rolled for a half mile without stopping. These slopes were really steep.

The horses took them higher and deeper into the mountain wilderness. Unfortunately, as they got higher Wheatie got hungrier and hungrier. After a few hours his headache had returned so at the next stop he asked his dad for another aspirin. That is when he learned a shocking truth about his predicament; there was only one aspirin left!

You might think that back then everything looked old fashioned and worked old fashioned but when it came to aspirin it was a potent miracle. Just one of those cheap 1960's aspirin and Wheatie was not only fine but maybe even better than fine. Darned! If he just had a couple more aspirin! Now it was looking like another high country "toughen-up trip".

For Wheatie, just braving the cold was enough. He had to hang in there for another night. He took the last aspirin with hot cocoa made with water and got into his sleeping bag

somewhat warm. He even slept for awhile before starting the shivers at around 2 AM in the morning. That was normal at his age. It always made for a long night.

To Build a Fire

It turned out there was a third episode that occurred on this trip. It happened when the group came to a stop for the day and proceeded to build their afternoon camp fire. Here, Mr. Wheatie demonstrated a manly use of his knife by scraping balls of pine sap from the trees. These he would put next to a few dry twigs. Once the twigs started burning they would melt the pitch and it would begin burning just like a ball of tar.

The procedure looked reassuring until Wheatie noticed that Mr. Wheatie only had two paper matches in the beat up paper match book he was carrying! Upon realizing their tenuous situation, vivid thoughts of Jack London's infamous book; To Build a Fire immediately came mind. He remembered how the extreme mountain man had in fact frozen to death during a winter trek because he failed to get a fire going before he **ran out of matches**.

It was a bone-chilling story. The man had done everything by the book until he accidentally broke through some ice and got one foot wet. This caused him to have to stop, build a fire and dry out his boot. He carefully got a fire going with the very last match but the wind blew a snow pack from the tree overtop. It totally snuffed out the last match fire.

After that, the man went a little crazy before he froze to death. Wheatie noticed there was a cold breeze blowing just like it had been blowing in the book. He knew from his own fire-starting experiences that such a breeze could easily deal the group a cold night of shivering. Let's just say that

watching Mr. Wheatie light the sap with the two paper matches was equally as scary as losing your clothes in a midnight card game.

It wasn't until years later that Wheatie discovered his pa carried more than one little pack of paper matches, but by then the trauma had already taken roost. As a result, to this very day, whenever Wheatie heads to the mountains, he carries matches. And yes, he also carries aspirin.

Wheatie managed to make it back down to Onion Valley the next day feeling somewhat ok, and after the horses were loaded they started the truck and headed down into the valley. To Wheatie, the heat and dust of the desert flatland never felt so good.

The footnote to this story: A book of paper matches, pound for pound and dollar for dollar, is the best deal on the planet. And the second best deal just might be aspirin!

Quail and Chukar hunting at Sage Flat



“How dare you ask if I ever shot a Chukar! You're darned right I shot one. I just didn't put enough shot into one to bring 'em all the way down.”

Whereas Onion Valley was a staging area for campers and packers headed into the high sierras to fish, Sage Flat was a staging area for hunters on horseback in search of deer. Over the course of a few trips from Sage Flat up into the mountains to hunt these illusive game, Wheatie came to the conclusion that there was a ton more “hunnable” game back at the base camp.

At Sage Flat the elevation was only around 7,350 feet. This was much more suitable to Wheatie’s particular malady for heights and where he could work on his aspirin addiction. So on Wheatie’s next “deer” hunting trip he decided to stay behind at the base camp and do his hunting there.

Sage Flat immediately became Wheatie’s favorite place to hunt. Here the game was markedly smaller and included birds which needed to be brought down from the air. That meant he got to hunt with a shotgun instead of a rifle.

Let me explain the big deal here with the shot gun verses the rifle. When you point a rifle at a target you have to consider what is behind the target because if you miss, something other than the intended target is going to get a slammin slug of lead. With Wheatie at the trigger, missing a rabbit or bird was about a 10 to 1 odds.

But with the shotgun all of the horrible possibilities disappeared for the fact the shotgun didn’t have much range. Unlike a slug, a bunch of little bb’s wouldn’t go that far if you missed. For Wheatie, the use of a shotgun in place of a rifle probably helped save many lives during his hunting forays.

Understand; it took over five hours riding in the cab of a hot truck alongside three other people just to reach the base camp. So it wasn’t exactly a cake walk to get there and a person could be pretty worn out just from the arduously long ride (for a kid).

Another great reason to hunt at the base camp was that instead of getting up at 4:00 AM in freezing cold and onto a horse headed up into the mountains, Wheatie could remain in a cozy sleeping bag inside a camper until the sun came up. This extreme luxury turned Sage Flat from a hunting trip into a hunting vacation.

Cooking Game; Livin' off the land

"Don't tell me you haven't seen them use that "glide mode" escape maneuver when they're all shot up."

For Wheatie, the positive attributes of Sage Flat just kept getting better. The number of game-attracting features, such as large corrals for horses and mules, made the place a hunter-game crossroads. This was because the horses ate grasses and seeds making their droppings and attraction to Quail and Chukar. Both came down to scratch in the corralled areas.

This happened every day around 10 AM; just in time for lunch! On any given day, Wheatie could just head down near the corrals in the late morning, get in a shot or two, come back to camp and roast a bird.

If his shot missed his lunch there, as it usually did, Wheatie would stalk the succulent tasting birds into the rolling low sage brush. Out there the semi-putrid mustard-smelling sage bushes were spaced apart just enough to allow a person to walk through. However the density of their branches could hide Quail better than NASA hides moon structures!

They could also hide Chukar. These were a larger bird than the Quail and were not nearly as easy to stalk. With the Chukar, once they were scared up into flight they wouldn't touch down until they were long gone.

Thusly, when stalking Chukar, Wheatie only got one chance, and with a single shot 410 it had to be a good one. It usually wasn't and usually Wheatie ate Quail instead. But the fact remained, here on his own at Sage Flats, Wheatie had to tackle the concept of living off the land.

That meant not only sleeping through the night all by himself but feeding himself as well for two whole days! He focused on what was most important. Other than not freezing to death he quickly came to the conclusion it was eating. That conclusion led to some of the best game hunting expeditions of his sub-teenage life.

At this point, Wheatie was nearly as serious about hunting game as he was about spotting rattlesnakes! Now we need to back track a second and take into consideration that Wheatie's dad was not only a keen hunter, he was also a keen cook. This was for the fact he had come from the old school where you had to eat everything you shot.

After years of hunting and eating game, the skills that Mr. Wheatie possessed would have sufficed had Wheatie brought home a squirrel, raccoon or possum to cook. Fortunately, none of those animals looked at all tempting compared to Chukar and Quail.

And so it was that Wheatie, destined to experience true "survival" campfire cooking, created another memorable day when did in fact manage to bring down not only one, but two birds with his single shot gun. To Wheatie, that day became as famous as the day the British were blown out of Charleston Harbor.

Back at camp the birds were quickly plucked and dressed out. Thanks to hunting hapless ruddy ducks along the Salton Sea, Wheatie already had this procedure down as good as the seasoned chicken pluckers at the Saturday market.

The second part was how to cook them. Again, no problem. He had already seen Mr. Wheatie cut a green sort-of-straight branch from a nearby tree, sharpen one end, skewer a game bird and hold it over an open fire. And this is how Quail became more than a lunchtime feast but a beloved animal in Wheatie's life.

The anticipation of roasting a Quail over an open fire made for some of the best cooking experiences imaginable. Actually, they were probably all charred and chewy, but they tasted better than prime rib at the annual round-up!

Wheatie had become more than a camper; now he was a modern Deerslayer; living off the fruits of his hunting skills. With a shotgun and a fire, he could feed himself indefinitely. That knowledge would turn out to be more valuable than a PhD degree from Stanford U. Yep, quail are that tasty!

Quail update.

One day Wheatie was trying to jot down a story about hunting Quail and Chukar at Sage Flat. He went to an illustrated encyclopedia to look them up so he could better describe their colors and distinctive features. At that moment he realized just what a beautiful bird Quail are. Then he looked up Chukar and saw equal beauty and in a larger package. He then realized he had been hunting some of the most beautiful creatures on the planet. Hmm.

Today? What would Wheatie do if given a shotgun and a pasture full of Quail and Chukar? Would he just blast away, like in the past, or might he finally have the heart to not shoot? Perhaps he would rejoice upon seeing such beautiful wild birds again.

Kenneth M. Price, Jr.

Fortunately and thankfully, the world still has Chickens and Turkeys. If the taste of those two birds won't relieve a person's lust for Quail or Chukar, then they have behavioral issues that go way beyond sniveling, bellyaching and crying.

Wheatie at the Salton Sea



Often called the "The Accidental Sea," because it was created when the Colorado River breached a dike in 1905, Salton Sea (AP Photo/Gregory Bull)

By this time you know a good bit about Wheatie but there's more. He not only liked to hunt quail and chucker, he liked to hunt ducks too. He did this in the muddy swamps along the shores of the Salton Sea because it gave him a reason to fire his gun, hear the loud blasts and occasionally bring down a game animal.

It felt darn manly, and in those days you could use that word and not offend the ACLU. So let's just go all the way pre-feminist; Hunting ducks at the Salton Sea felt darned manly because only a fool who liked getting covered in muddy goo and turning his prized gun into a museum piece would have come to such a wretched place in search of "fun".



Mr. Wheatie setting the "bar" as an example of skilled duck hunting at the Salton Sea sometime around 1963.

Wheatie the duck hunter wore an old straw hat that had come back from Jamaica after an excursion in beer drinking at too young of age. More on that story is coming up. But just the same, the straw hat he returned with went on to establish itself as a good luck charm as bona fide as a dyed rabbit's foot.

The hunter concealed beneath its brim enjoyed ultimate camouflage from the wisest of ducks, even the bull sprigs that were so prized. At least Wheatie thought so, and that was really all that mattered.

A Night to Remember

Now as the annual duck season was coming to a close, a spirited group of college school buddies joined the Wheatie group for a hunt. It was a night to remember as many things were learned by Wheatie while he was supposedly asleep during the “men’s” conversations about girls and girlfriends.

These were things Wheatie, being the youngest of three brothers, had never heard before. One guy in particular, who we’ll call SR at this juncture, displayed more than just a fleeting attraction for, let’s say, one particular girl. No, it wasn’t a fleeting attraction at all. In fact, Wheatie was getting the impression that if SR hunted ducks the same way he hunted girls, they didn’t have a chance. As it would later turn out, Wheatie’s concerns were spot on.

After nearly freezing to death during the night, in a trailer built only for serious duck hunters, the camper-with-wheels managed to keep alive four young men plus Wheatie. They emerged before sunup, pulled on their boots and headed out to the swamp.

Of course there was a good fire going. Wheatie had made sure of that. Perhaps the others should have noticed his unique ability to get things burning, and quickly. Perhaps they should have noticed Wheatie’s penchant for always having plenty of shotgun shells, of varying shot sizes and powder loads, stuffed into his extra shoulder clip. And as it turned out, most of them did.

But not SR.

Mud Minefields

In order to reach the hunting grounds at exactly sunup, when the hunters planned to open fire, they left their campfire in pitch black and began walking in the direction of the infamous Salton Sea. It wasn't long afterwards that every hunter would face his first test; getting across the first swamp and up onto the dike that surrounded the sea.

Many a finely-equipped hunter didn't make it there without paying a big price first. That is because they had never practiced standing with both of their feet stuck in wet cement.

You had two choices; remain delicately balanced or take a bath in black wet goo. It was the stickiest concoction of black sludge imaginable. Most fortunately, on this particular morning, all of the hunters made it across still dry. This was because all of the hunters had gone down in this mud at least once on an earlier outing.

They had approached it on this morning as if approaching shore at Normandy Beach on D-Day. If they just made it across without falling, they were privileged to trudge onward without having numb toes for the next three hours.

Along the dike the gang of duck stalkers trudged on, but it was a minefield! They'd walk confidently about 100 yards on crunching diatomaceous shells, then have to ford a twenty yard break in the berm where water and silt flowed back and forth from the sea and the swamplands. With each step in the crossings the hunter had to both wade through knee deep water and dance atop suction-cup mud that could hold a foot firmer than a giant clam.

Wheatie noted that invariably it was the most flashy-equipped hunters who most often took their prized gun, decoy bag, duck call and lucky hat down in one giant disaster. Then their

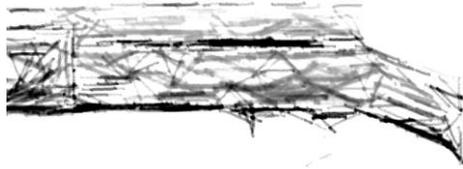
splash and cries would give way to severe expletives as both of the victim's boots became submerged just long enough to make their morning hunt a lesson in extreme cold survival.

Wheatie had discerned many of the possible outcomes by a person's equipment, but he also knew of an even bigger trap for the hunter, and that was their overconfidence. You see, most managed to stay upright through the mud and goo but that was not all that lurked below in the mud. There were hidden willow roots down in that mud.

Now if the hunter was not too belligerent or over-confident, Wheatie would warn them where to step over them. But sometimes they didn't listen so well. Some tried to make up for lost time. Some experienced short term memory loss on their trip back. These were all part of the hunter's attitude and each paid severely for having the wrong one.

The too-slick Apprentice

This SR fella toted a Browning semi-automatic shotgun that was finished in shiny blue with a stock so elegantly carved it looked like it had come out of a cello factory.



Upon first glance Wheatie figured this gun-show masterpiece was a sure fire way to either run out of ammunition too soon or suffer a jam. Once the owner of this engineering contraption just touched some of the infamous desert clay mud that lined the swamps and shorelines, the priceless gun would become slathered with the tenacious, iron-eating yuk. Within a few minutes this extreme hunter would be reduced

to breaking for camp early and munching on cold beans and bologna.

Wheatie was only somewhat correct in his gun analysis but received a shock when SR opened fire, producing a salvo so intense every duck that appeared within 50 yards was unmercifully blasted from the sky.

As you might have guessed, on this particular morning, there weren't many ducks in the air. Now when a true hunter blasts a duck from the skies, normally he knows it was his shot that brought down the hapless bird. So it was generally never a problem to determine clearly who got the first or second shot, and who shot the duck. But for some reason, on this day there was more confusion than the number of shots fired at JFK.

And normally a true hunter would share a blind with one other guy, or they would separate their blinds far enough apart to be able to know who shot what. But this situation was looking to be anything but a true duck-hunter's outing. The swamps more resembled a battlefield.

It was the last week of the season and the pickings were getting slim. A bigger problem was the sheer number of hunters who had showed up to see if they could hit the broad side of a barn with their flashy, factory mint shotguns. The billions of rounds of lead shot sprayed into the air to land back in the swamps were of no concern.

Visions of the last buffalo being killed by cold-blooded hide-snatchers flashed through Wheatie's concerned mind. To him, these over-equipped vigilantes along the shoreline of the Salton Sea represented the "Armageddon" of duck civilization.

He trudged on with horror as the shouts of "my bird!, my bird!, my bird!" came from every corner of the swamps each time another one of these "last ducks on earth" were brought

down in a hail of lead so intense it resembled a Civil War reenactment.

At least Wheatie knew that the continental United States was in safe hands from a Russian ground invasion. That much was made perfectly clear.

The Essence of the True Hunter

"It's not illegal to shoot ducks on the water, but it is generally frowned upon. If you are dispatching a wounded duck that's trying to swim away but can no longer fly, it's both perfectly legal and socially acceptable to shoot it on the water." A. Duck Hunter

Wheatie knew that the proper attitude was as crucial to the hunter as was penetrating oil to a mud-covered shotgun. So after experiencing the raw firepower of the mighty Browning he decided to break from the group. He found his way to a nearby pond where he crouched behind some willow trees. It was sunup. Everyone out there had a wet salty finger on the trigger.

On behalf of this partially-mature young man it is not hard to understand the actions of Wheatie, when, just after he had paused, to his total amazement, a beautiful bull sprig landed in the swamp not more than 20 yards from him.

Now you need to consider this: If a person is hunting a prized elk, he doesn't yell "yahhhaa!!" just before he gets ready to fire so he can flay his clip of bullets into the trees and vegetation as the graceful prize bounds off through the forest. Enough said?

Good sportsmanship and the ultimate shot only get the true provider eventual failure and disgrace. So Wheatie didn't bother to scare the bird into flight before carrying out the

inevitable execution the prized bird faced. With absolute purpose, Wheatie aimed and fired.

The day had turned to success for Wheatie. True to his actions, he hadn't gone "macho", yelling to first scare up the bird into flight where it could face a more dignified death. He had reasoned correctly that his three rounds of fire would possibly wound the bird thus failing to stop the bird, and this would have alerting everyone in the swamp to his failed salvo of pellets. But best of all, none of the other hunters had seen the actual execution.

When Wheatie later showed up with it hanging from his sack, the most finely equipped hunters could only gasp at the obvious success of the young man, so they digressed. "Did you shoot that duck", they asked? "Yes I did" answered Wheatie. "From the air" quipped one man? The bird was only one half submerged at the time it was swimming. "Ya", Wheatie said.

A few hours went by. There were few ducks to be seen. Of those that were, none were spared before they got within a quarter mile from Wheatie. He decided to walk further down the dike where he figured he would catch up to the four hunters he had departed with.

The Shotgun Shirt

When he got to them, the lack of ducks had changed things for the worst. Now the eager Browning was being pointed at whatever target was alive and moving, and it turned out to be tiny flocks of birds that lived in the swamps. Wheatie was again taken aback as he had never seen somebody aim at a target that was so small. He watched as an innocent flock of them came within range followed by a scream that resembled

an Indian war party. In the re-enactment, tiny birds were somehow transformed into killer Kamikazes.

Wheatie had never seen a duck hunter that displayed twenty-bird traumatic stress disorder. His thoughts were that since these birds weighed about half an ounce on a full stomach and sported beaks barely large enough to swallow worms, it seemed a bit of a stretch to associate them with a kamikaze attack bomber. SR appeared to be suffering post traumatic stress disorder and he hadn't been to Viet Nam.

It was inevitable that SR and Wheatie would clash and this occurred when he dared to ask the older hunter how many of the birds he intended to slaughter. Without thinking too clearly, SR immediately pulled Wheatie's hat from his crumpled hair and sent it flying into the air like a clay pigeon at the gun range.

Three shots were fired from the semi-automatic with such speed it was over before the hollering had even begun. All watched as it settled slowly into the swamp. It was clear that only a fraction of its original weight remained, being more holes than hat now. To Wheatie, it was more horrifying than a remake of the Hindenburg disaster.

That's because he knew he'd soon be wearing one of those musty Army-Navy surplus caps, just like the other half-crazed hunters out there in the swamps wore. He got a pungent distaste in his mouth just thinking about such an indignation, not to mention the loss of what he considered had been the ultimate camouflage.

He placed the feather-weight former ultimate camouflage back on his head and sauntered off. But it wasn't over.

Back at camp, Wheatie picked up the shirt that belonged to SR and read the label. PENDLETON. "Whoa ho! Look at what ole SR left behind unguarded!" Wheatie knew if anyone, it'd be SR who would bring a flashy shirt and a gun

to the Salton Sea!”. And so he condemned the fine Pendleton to “be holed by shotgun in similar fashion to the hat”.

It was the obvious solution to an uneven score. Too bad Wheatie grabbed Bob’s fine Pendleton instead of SR’s.

When Bob got back to camp Wheatie was lurking about and soon decided to spill the beans about the shirt. “SR really ticked me off,” he explained, “so when I got back to the boat and found his shirt I hung it in a tree and blasted it!”

Bob’s voice went into slow motion. “YYYoouuuuu dddiiiiidnt!” he said as if speaking to a congressman at a grand jury hearing on defense spending blunders. “Ya, I shot the shirt that he left in the boat,” Wheatie said. “That was my shirt!” Bob replied.

Wheatie felt like a scared idiot at this juncture and could only manage a pathetic expletive. But he never was really in serious danger from Bob because luckily Bob was from a rich family and had lots of Pendletons.

And it should also be mentioned that Bob didn’t relish the thought of blasting holes through any of Wheatie’s clothing, seeing that such action would have redeemed nothing, maybe even have improved things. Wheatie thus dodged the trauma of a broken shotgun, being tossed naked into the swamp, or even worse, the possibility of having all of his ammo taken away!

You know how it was at the siege of Troy when Achilles said, “There’s been enough soldiers killed for the day, so let us rest and prepare for tomorrow.” Now, Bob didn’t say much, but as the key moments passed Wheatie saw in his expression that he had come to terms with the fact that enough clothing had been “killed” for the day. Remember, the true hunter can’t help being chivalrous.

Wheatie destroyed the wrong shirt. As a result, it might first appear that his efforts to avenge the hat fell as flat as the Salton Sea. But consider this: at the very moment SR was throwing Wheatie's hat in the air, Wheatie himself was standing there with a loaded shotgun.

It took a while, maybe even years, but SR got the message; don't destroy a kid's hat when he's holding a loaded shotgun.

On that note, perhaps Wheatie did exactly the right thing. Perhaps nothing could have worked better than a shot-riddled Pendleton to so graphically depict the actual damage inflicted on a human body, if, such a prank was attempted again in the future?

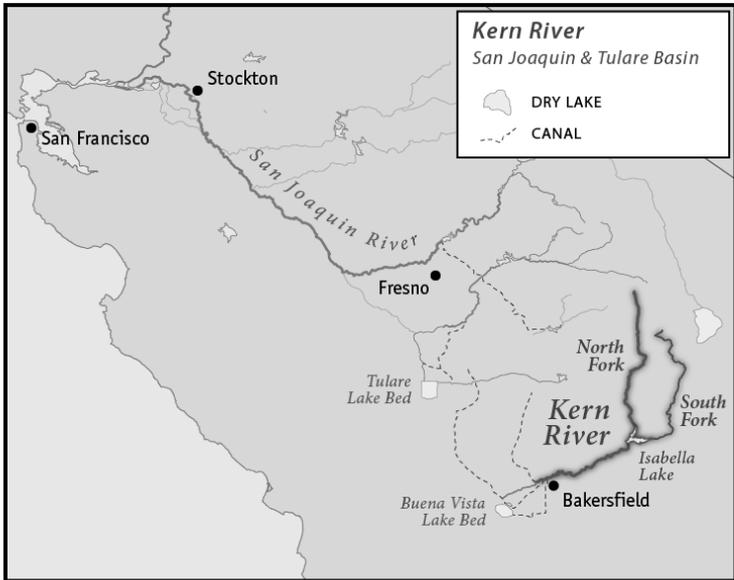


Kenneth M. Price, Jr.

Wheatie at Rattlesnake Creek

No. 1: "Durrwood first, then the forks (and there were no forks) and then on to Rattlesnake--we hiked to the snake from the Forks so it couldn't have been too far. I had to be around 12--that's the age I was when I got the buck---that was a miracle shot."

I think you're correct, Durrwood, Kern, Rattlesnake. I never saw the forks of the Kern either. I just remember Dad always stating it as "Forks of the Kern".



On the way to Durrwood Creek

The trip to Durrwood Creek began at Quaking Aspen Campground which was at the end of route 190 close to Ponderosa, in the Sequoia National Forest. Actually, the trip began 200 miles away from Santa Ana where three horses were loaded into the 3-wide trailer that was hitched to a truck for the 3 hour ride.

It was 1960 and few roads in the Sequoia Forest existed. Nor did National Park rules allow motorcycles on the trails. These two attributes were the reason why Mr. Wheatie had chosen this spot to bring the boys fishing.

It was Wheatie's first long horseback trip and the ride to Durrwood Creek took over 4 hours. It required three horses to get them and their gear 15 or so miles from the trailhead in Quaking Aspen.

The horse-mounted foursome proceeded along the North Fork of the Kern River from Quaking Aspen. They stopped once along the way to let the horses take a drink and to dip their tin cans into the clear creek water.

Then they climbed back aboard their mounts and resumed the ride. But they didn't get far before the lead horse stopped in its tracks, reared back and came down backing up.

The snake encounter

No. 1: "Other horses I remember were: Champion--that's the one Dad took the week-long rides with--he part of the DeAnza Caballeros. There was the black horse--Dynamite---spooked one time when I was riding him when he saw a rattlesnake on the trail--almost threw me. And the last horse Dad had I remember was Mancho---Spanish for speck, I think."

It was a rattlesnake. It was also the first time Wheatie had been near a large one that had been fully set off. It sounded like high pressure air coming out of the end of a pipe full of marbles.

To Wheatie, that sound was more terrifying than being chased by a farmer trying to smash him with huge clods of dirt. Put in simple/stupid; the rattler's sound was a "make-ya-think-yur-gonna-die" sound that sent the message "Run For Your Lives!" in 4 foot neon letters direct to the brain.

Never the less, a calm decision by Mr. Wheatie was made to dispatch the snake to the promised land because in those days it was considered proper to help remove "bad" rattlers from the forests. Mr. Wheatie got off his horse and told his oldest son to take the reins of his horse so he could "get a stick to push the snake out into the open."

The oldest son then got down off his horse and gave the reins to the second oldest son and told him to hold onto both the reins as he was going to assist Mr. Wheatie while he helped "get a stick to push the snake out into the open."

Then the second son got down from the horse and handed the reins of the two horses to Wheatie and told him he was going to "get a stick to help Mr. Wheatie push the snake out into the open." Wheatie then got down and held all three life-critical reins in his hands.

For some inexplicable reason, a few moments later found all three brothers throwing stones at the hapless rattler until it was as dead as a dead snake could get. That's when everyone looked up at Wheatie, wondering what he was doing there throwing rocks at a snake when he was supposed to be holding onto the reins of three horses!

Wheatie didn't remember letting them go! But as each looked off in the distance, they immediately saw all three galloping away through the forest. Now it didn't matter anyway.

Having become spooked over the ear-splitting sound of the rattlers the three horses now gleefully sped away from their inferior two legged masters. The abandoned horsemen got one last look at them just as they went over the top of the mountain and disappeared.

“I’m done for, no, we’re done for!” Wheatie thought, “how are we ever going to get back our horses?” And indeed it looked to be impossible to ever catch them as they were now so far away they looked smaller than a 22 cartridge held at arms length.

Not knowing what else to do, the four horseless packers started out after them. Soon, to everyone’s surprise, the horses had slowed down their running on the other side of the mountain. When they got a little closer one of the horses stopped to nibble some irresistible long green grass.

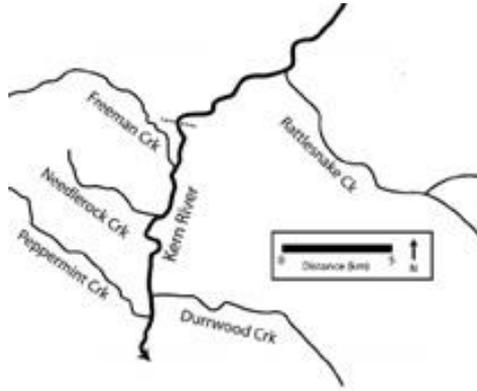
Number Two son played it cool and calmly walked up to her, gently grabbed her reins, petted her neck a few strokes and climbed aboard! Now we had a horse to catch the other horses! Number One and Two sons doubled up on the mare and galloped after the remaining two. We were saved!

Things were looking up for the kid who had just let three horses run wild in the middle of a national forest. Within 15 minutes they were all retrieved, the horsemen were back in the saddle and the group was underway again.

Not to mention there was one less rattle snake they would have to deal with on their way back.

Durrwood Creek

They decided to camp at Durrwood. Considering the shape Wheatie's rear end was in, it was doubtful he would have made it much further anyway.



OK, so he might have made it a bit further, considering the forest at this time of year was an exquisite earthly habitat for insects and animals of innumerable variety. The meadows were covered in purple, blue and yellow flowers. Wheatie had never seen the outdoor high country in full bloom and it was enough to keep him mesmerized during much of the ride.

After the rattler incident, as the day progressed into the afternoon, the horseback ride to the promised river continued. A few more hours went. The three saddle-sore “horsemen” were more than glad to reach Durrwood Creek.

To Wheatie's own consternation, when he dismounted off the back end of the saddle he was encouraged with how fast his numb body parts came back to life. And it wasn't long before he was walking again, although looking like he had gained about 75 years of age and 250 lbs. of weight.

Durrwood Creek itself was just a small 10 foot wide tributary into the Kern River. It was about 10 miles west of Lookout

Mountain, so far from any road it was practically inaccessible to humans without horses. Not a creek a raft-rider would remember, Durrwood was on the small side, but had lots of small fish.

Virtually anyone with a line, hook and worm could catch them, even Wheatie! As for size, well let's just say this fishing outing was the opposite of a "big game" hunt. Oh well, they were more satisfying to the fishermen than what a Blue Whale has to call dinner, having to be satisfied with krill and plankton. Think about that one, next time you eat a steak.

And of course, later that night, the subject had to come up; "have you ever eaten rattlesnake, pa?", Wheatie asked. And of course somebody answered, "Oh it just tastes like chicken." "Have you ever eaten it?", Wheatie asked. Dead silence followed. And this is why, as the years went by, Wheatie continued to slay rattlesnakes without a thought as to ever eating one.

And as a side note it would turn out that the No. Two son, the one who had caught that first horse, would later go on to be the one son who would work at the pack station in Onion Valley! And that pack station would be the same one that Wheatie got sick at and threw up in years before.

That's some good memories!

Trout Fishing

The fish in Durrwood Creek were native Rainbow, Golden and Brook Trout. The Kern River Rainbow most commonly caught were green and pink, covered with dark spots and some shades of yellow thrown in. It always amazed Wheatie how these fish appeared as just a dark green mass underwater

then revealed themselves to be a perfect balance of design and color when pulled from the water and studied.

The trout from the highlands were not only beautiful to look at but were extremely good eating as well. So what if they were a bit small; as long as the fishermen each caught 8 to 10 of them per day they were going to be fine. Anything less meant opening cans of beans and peeled potatoes when supper time rolled around. Actually, they did that anyway.

After just a few minutes of fishing in Durrwood Creek Wheatie knew why riding this far on horseback was worth it, even though he had nearly fallen off a hundred times and was now walking with a stooped over limp. It meant there was zero competition, in other words, no need for the best skill or equipment!

It meant there was no prior “fish training”; in other words the fish would not be familiar with hooks, line and steel lures. For this young hunter it was like being the first man who ever set foot in North America.

Now there were some “tricks of the trade” and the first was that only the lightest of tackle could tempt a bite. Therefore only 2 lb. monofilament line was wound onto any reel. At the end of this line the plan was pretty simple: just tie the tiny golden hook on with the right kind of knot. Problem is, to do so required having fingers the size of a Raccoon. Human ones were about as efficient as using mittens to tie shoe strings.

The goal was to go all day with the same hook. Good luck! Trout have small sharp teeth. Got to watch that leader just below the hook! Wheatie would see the line frayed after catching a fish or two, and he was almost wise enough to know that it was time to re-tie the hook a few inches back.

But he would invariably choose to “chance it” by trying to catch another fish or two before having to do the shoe-string-

mittens-thing. No one liked having to perform microscopic surgery on their leader. And that was why most of the big ones that Wheatie hooked into were never landed.

Pool crashing

Now, all those who were interested in eating trout as a legitimate human meal needed to land a satchel full of fish. In order to do that the hopeful dinner guests needed to fish out of 10 or more good pools. If they did that, they'd not only be able to catch enough fish, but they might even stumble upon a monster. In Durrwood Creek that would be a 9 incher!

It wasn't all that easy to get to these pools, however. Every 100 feet or so the fishermen would come to a waterfall that they would have to walk up and around. Often they would have to cross the creek to do this. Often the chosen route would have crossing stones, and they would be covered with moss. You guessed it! Many a fisherman who went up the creek came back having been washed in the creek. In fact, this was how Wheatie took the vast majority of his baths.

Now in Wheatie's day, when a man got wet while he was in the high country, it was a serious "Defcon 5" type situation. But most fortunate to the times and situation, nobody had ever heard of "global warming". Therefore it was acceptable behavior for a person to build a wood-fueled fire out of whatever dried forest debris they could find, and to any size they wanted.

Back in the day when a person's CO₂ footprint was not a concern, a freezing camper had a chance! Now as you already know from a previous experience, having read To Build a Fire, plus nearly being caught without matches, Wheatie had

an intuitive reaction to getting drenched in cold creek water. That was to get a fire going immediately!!

However, since his pants were wet his matches were wet. That meant he had to go Mr. Wheatie for matches, and as you know, that only yielded up a couple of bent-over paper ones.

No joke! Two matches, even though during the summer the temperature could easily drop to freezing in this high-country. Every well-read man knew they needed to get themselves and their clothes dried out before nightfall or shiver and chatter teeth, over and over again while humming the song *All Night Lo-ong All ni-ight All ni-ight*.

To Wheatie, building a fire when he got wet or cold was an involuntary reaction. Perhaps he was also suggesting to Mr. Wheatie how much he liked having a fire and to surely always carry oodles and oodles of matches to get one going!

Sleeping under horse blankets

No. 1: "I think we had two racehorses--Lisa and Blondie Burke--both raced the quarter horse track at Los Alamitos. Blondie was smaller and faster. I saw her run one time---got 4th or something like that. Lisa was sorta my horse and the one that was also shot and killed up in Lone Pine---supposedly by hunters---she was jet black."

Another one of the causes as to why Wheatie was so worried about freezing is because he'd already been informed that when it came time to be turnin in for the night he'd be turnin to a horse blanket for a bedroll.

At the time he'd heard the plan to leave the boy's two bulky sleeping bags behind, he was ok with the idea. The true reality of his proposed mountain bed hit home later,

however, when he discovered their physiological reaction to laboring up mountains loaded with people and gear. He also was reminded of the joy ride the horses had taken during the snake incident.

Wheatie was in fact blown away by how much these loyal horses sweated in order to carry all the weight up the trail. To put it bluntly, the blankets that came off their backs were soaked.

As a result, when Wheatie and the other “bagless” brother crawled under their designated “blankets” he was glad he had a fellow human alongside. Why? Because there was somebody who would die with him if things got too dire during the night. He got additional comfort in reasoning that his pa wouldn’t be so foolhardy as to actually risk freezing two sons to death on the same trip.

Besides, as least in this instance, Wheatie had his own “bedroll”, sort of. That was an improvement over the Onion Valley “double-up incident” when Wheatie’s high altitude stomach malfunction took out his entire sleeping plan.

Sleep with clothes on or off?

Now as the controversy exists today, there was the same controversy regarding sleeping with your clothes on at night back then. Did you sleep warmer with them on or with them off? But that was not the big question on the night of the horse blankets.

Most campers will tell you, “Oh, take your clothes off”. Then there are those who took their clothes off and later, in the middle of the night, had to scramble out of their bag to tend to an over-tea’d bladder, a neglected colon, a food-stuff-grabbing bear, a flash rainstorm, a small flood forming under

your “bedroll”, a raccoon rummaging through your backpack or barfing up from high altitude sickness; the list goes on for things that can and do go wrong during the night.

Given enough experience and time, the argument for sleeping with your clothes on or off swung in favor of ON about 51% of the time. Now, as for the question; clothes on or off while sleeping beneath sweat-soaked horse blankets; that was a 99% bet. Put in stupid/simple: Wheatie figured he could keep his clothes on or he could prepare himself for burial the next morning.

The reader should try not to construe Wheatie’s evaluation for wet horse blankets as a bad thing. Quite the contrary. Pondering how hard their horses had worked that day, going up the mountain for a bunch of yeh-hoo kids with too much gear, he felt it was an honor to sleep under those blankets. Actually, he didn’t feel this way until much later, when the horses had already been dead for decades.

Of further note, and you can judge the significance for yourself, it never got into the freezing range that night. ‘Ole Mr. Wheatie had properly packed the exact amount and type of gear again!

Wheatie was starting to believe his pa was more than just a bold character who had survived WWII. He began to appreciate that he could manage stock animals. But he didn’t fully realize at the time his pa’s ability to teach both the physical and mental connections between man and animal.

At the end of the trip, despite having a major revelation about horses having slept under their blankets, Wheatie still thought such things happened mostly because his dad liked to ride horses and catch fish.

Hobbled horses that hobbled away

We had a cream colored horse? Do you remember its name. The only horse names I remember are Speck and Cutie.

No. 1: "The cream-colored horse was a real stud and a real beauty--El Silencio was his name. I mean that horse was gorgeous---so cut as they would say about a man's body---that horse had muscles and definition, but after he spent the winter in Lone Pine he looked like he had about starved to death---tragic and shocking and the horse was never the same after that. El Silencio was born in the backyard of the covan heights home when I was in the 9th grade---really something.

Few people have any idea what goes on in the horse world after dark when the lanterns are off and men are asleep. By the way? Did you know that horses "sleep" standing up? Ya, they do. That means you don't need to make a bed for them.

Now what do packers on horseback do with their horses at night while in the virgin forests of the high country with no corral to keep them in? They've got at least two choices; tie them to a tree with a 10 foot rope or put hobbles on them.

Mr. Wheatie used a combination. One horse would be tied, the others would wear hobbles. More on this technique is coming up.



For a horse, wearing hobbles was similar to a woman having to go dancing in a mermaid costume. You have probably seen them worn in an old Caribbean bar scene where a slim woman sits attired in a dress so tight she can barely stand much less walk. Such a dress with such a tight leg sleeve allows just enough movement for tiny little baby steps. That's the same idea with the hobbles for a horse!



To Wheatie, it was hard to feel bad for the horses wearing hobbles, as countless human women have endured the speed-limiting design of an overtight dress. Besides, he liked the way girls looked dressed up as mermaids. So when Wheatie saw his pa put the hobbles around the two front ankles of two of the horses, it looked as cool to him as a decorated saddle horn.

Now you'll note there were in fact three horses, but there were only two sets of hobbles, or mermaid dresses. That meant one of the horses would be tied to a lone tree while the hobbled ones would surely hang around their lashed-up friend. That is what was hoped for anyway.

They chose the "grandpa" horse for the tree, as he was used to grazing from a stake. The other two sleek and powerful animals capable of 10 foot strides were reduced to taking little mermaid steps. Just before sundown, everything was looking great as they all were calmly chewing mountain weeds.

The sun went down, the campers ate the last fried trout and "Johnny cake". The plan was working brilliantly, as one by one, they went to their bags (or wet horse blankets) expecting a peaceful night of sleep under clear star lit skies.

Well as you might have guessed the younger horses ditched their tied comrade, as they had a nose for fresh grass as well as having all night to take mermaid steps to get to it. During the course of eight hours, they had taken thousands of them. Thusly when the Wheatie party got up in the morning there were no mermaided horses in sight.

Awe, it was just the second time in two days they had lost their horses! But not to worry as 'Ole Grandpa" was still tied to the tree and able to take a couple riders off in the right

direction. The packers thus had a fairly easy time of getting out of this one since 'Ole Grandpa was easily able to catch them. They were after all, still wearing their mermaid outfits.

And thus Wheatie learned a new lesson about horsemanship. Yes horses "slept" at night standing up, however, at night a horse "standing" didn't necessarily mean the horse was "sleepin". Put in simple stupid terms: if you left horses free to "sleep" during the night, where you could expect to find them was a matter of how tall and in which direction the grass grew.

Losing the best fishing pole

The next season, having had a successful season the year before; after all, no one had gotten bitten by a rattle snake or frozen to death under a wet blanket, Mr. Wheatie took the trio back to the area of the Kern and beyond.

They began their trip as usual from Quaking Aspen in the Sequoia National forest, but this time they went on further up the North Fork. Wow, what a difference there was between the main fork and the prior year's burbling Durrwood Creek!

To Wheatie, the mighty Kern was a gigantic torrent of rapids and rushing cold water. He could hardly imagine a fish being able to survive the current much less being tempted to bite his little golden hook and Salmon egg while swimming in it.

Alongside the river there were large boulders he could get up and stand on. If only he could cast. He thought for a moment and came up with the idea that he might just be mature enough to borrow his pa's favorite casting rig with the new spinner.

So he asked Mr. Wheatie if he could borrow it, and he agreed. Wheatie went off with it headed upstream.

Now, this was not any ordinary pole as it contained a brand new ultra light spinning reel. You've got to understand that such gear was practically unheard of in the Wheatie group! They were supposed to be unspoiled purists, not over-gearred tourists. That meant feeling lucky just to have store-bought hooks.

Just the same, off went Wheatie with the "super" spinning reel and pole to face the rapids of the mighty Kern. He found a good rock to stand on and got ready to make his first attempt at casting. That's when cantankerous Brother Two showed up to change his plans.

What transpired next was another "rattlesnake" moment where Wheatie can't remember just exactly what happened. It went something like this; Brother Two tossed a stone into the water near Wheatie's rock hoping to get him a little wet. Wheatie immediately responded by setting the pole down on the rock and began scrounging for rocks to throw back.

Another couple of exchanged throws resulted in a stone landing a perfect blow to the high tech reel and ultra-light pole. Off the rock and into the rapids it went! Man! Did it go down the river lickity split!

As for retrieval; Wheatie couldn't even get near the high-tech rig before it was swallowed by the rapids of the grumbling river. The only thing certain was the direction it was going, and that was down stream. What was he gonna tell pa?

If it wasn't the way Wheatie slung his head or the fact he was not carrying a fishing pole as he returned to camp, then it was the way the two "screw-ups" had made enough noise squawking about their own stupidity that alerted Mr. Wheatie to the fact they'd pulled off the impossible; total and complete loss of his rig.

It was indeed a test of temperament that Mr. Wheatie had to learn that his ultra rig had been lost because his two youngest sons had treated it with the same respect as a garden hose in a water fight. Did he get angry? No.

Now, Wheatie was pretty much steered away from fishing gear beyond cheap reels and bamboo for another couple of years after that. Still, he continued to hang out in the sporting goods section of Big 5 and Thrifty Mart. That way he'd be ready for that day when he could equip himself with gear that resembled 20th Century technology.

But meanwhile back to this story; There was no attempt to find or retrieve the hapless pole and reel on this trip. With the Kern River at its peak, it was considered as gone as gone could be. And with the fishing part of the trip being over anyway, the group packed up and headed back toward the base camp.

Everyone dealt with the loss in as good of cheer as possible going down the mountain trail. Wheatie was feeling pretty low, as he should have. He didn't know at the time that Mr. Wheatie had on numerous occasions caught tuna trolling a carved lure with telephone cable off the stern of a destroyer, and as a result, never needed a high tech fishing gadget in the first place.

Finding the Remains of a fishing pole

Why put the gist of the story in the header? You wouldn't have believed it otherwise. But one year later, since the pole and reel had been lost, Mr. Wheatie returned to the South Forks of the Kern. This time it was late in August and the mighty rapids were much reduced.

As he was nearing camp within about one mile down stream they stopped to let the horses get some water. Yep, there it was in shallow water alongside the main river just where the horses had stopped to drink! And no, Wheatie ain't lyin' like that time he attempted to talk his way out of a ticket with the Irvine Ranch Park Ranger.

Wheatie's pa not only found the rig, but to everyone's astonishment, brought it home to get it "running" again. Actually, he wanted Wheatie to see first hand how a flashy reel made out of shiny steel could be rendered into a rusted gunked-up hunk of civil war scrap. And thus Wheatie got a lesson in "metals, rust and underwater corrosion".

The pole was worse; the cork was all gone from the base and the eyelets were looking like rusty bailing wire. But to Wheatie's amazement, during the off season, Mr. Wheatie cleaned up and resurrected the stricken fishing combination.

The pole and reel lived on.

Kenneth M. Price, Jr.

Wheatie in Canada

“Grizzly and black bears are found in Canadian parks in the summertime and can be potentially dangerous. When visiting national parks, always ensure no food products are visible to bears. Dispose of garbage, use airtight containers for storage, and cook away from campsites. Get knowledgeable on bear safety too. If visiting Churchill and its polar bears, be extra vigilant as polar bears are the only animals to actively stalk humans.”

Canadian Wild Parks and Recreation

Going to a foreign country?

It was around 1963 when Wheatie began to make noise about travelling far enough north to actually go into a land that he had only seen on a map. And it showed that Canada was a gigantic green landmass of such scope it was like another wild West, and in this case, undiscovered.

After a few years went by Mr. Wheatie finally gave in to his youngest son’s relentless encouragement to drive up there and get in on the action.

As the planning progressed, the sheer size of the Canadian continent came into play. Soon Wheatie realized they weren’t gonna be going as far north as the Hudson. In fact, checking the map he saw that they weren’t even going to make it into the providence of Manitoba much less go the extra 1,000 miles to Churchill.

So you're probably wondering why there is a mention of polar bears in Churchill. Well, would you not agree, after reading the above caption, people need to know that polar bears stalk humans for food?

Building a new camper

At the onset of preparing for the Canada trip, Mr. Wheatie knew they were going to need a bigger camper for the Ford long-bed. And that was because the trip to the foreign land of the North was going to include Mrs. Wheatie.

To Wheatie's delight they began construction of the new one just after he got out of school for summer vacation. Wheatie's pa never did anything foolhardy. Therefore, before construction began he calculated all of the material needed and went out and purchased it. It was all done in his head and took Mr. Wheatie one trip to the lumber yard with a $\frac{3}{4}$ ton pickup truck.

They began construction by laying out the $\frac{1}{2}$ " plywood bottom on sawhorses in the garage. For the sides and roof they used all $\frac{1}{4}$ " to keep it light. In the corners and seams they used $\frac{3}{4}$ " x $1 \frac{1}{2}$ " Douglas fir stringers.

For fasteners, 2 penny flathead nails were fine. Wheatie held a hammer to the spot while his pa hammered them in from the outside. Like workers who were sped up, hammering in tune with old time organ music, within two days the shell of the camper was fully roughed out. As the music dropped in pitch, the scene expanded further, revealing a plywood box ready for windows and interior construction.

Although this was the third pickup truck camper Mr. Wheatie had built, it was the first one to have a bunk that was built out over the top of the cab. Up until this point they had

somehow managed in a bed-top camper; one that was only as long as the truck bed with barely enough head room to crab around inside. The new one was massive compared to the older. It even had a specific space for a portable stove!

Funny how propane had been around for years, but Mr. Wheatie continued to use the pressurized Coleman stove. Back then, they sold a gasoline called “white gas” for outboards, and if you were smart, you could use the same fuel in the Coleman. That was because it didn’t have antiknock additives as they would supposedly build up on the pistons of a two stroke engine. But the best thing about it was that it wouldn’t leave ya dumber than a doornail after breathing lead.

These days everyone pretty much uses propane gas, so don’t go looking for white gas unless you want to sound like some sort of fuel racist. If you still have one of those old fashioned liquid-fueled models you will have to suffer the indignity of buying Coleman Fuel off the shelf. Just remember, it won’t have the brain numbing lead in it, but it will explode just like 100 octane if you spill fuel during filling and light your stove anyway.

But now aside from the stove, the new camper was not only a lot more roomier with the giant extra bed, this one actually had windows large enough to look out. The previous camper had just one 8” window per side. Now they not only had a panoramic view, but could get added ventilation as well. In fact, with the new crank-open roof vent fully deployed, they could now cook gamy smelling fish and birds without loosing their desire to eat in the process.

In keeping with tradition, and the fact that their truck was olive green, they painted the new camper olive green. The two ended up together as sort of a green and off-green; not the best combination. Some called it a cheap clash, but it was

the perfect choice for game hunters and fishermen on the North American continent.

Put in simple/stupid: nobody was sure if they were looking at the most refined or the least refined operation they had ever seen.

Ponderosa Disease

A week later four people in the Wheatie group drove up through three western states and into British Columbia, Canada. After looking around for some places to fish for a few days they arrived on the shores of Lake Premiere. The new camper was doing great and Wheatie was feeling more confident he would soon be landing some big ones.

Now, years later and looking back on the experience, perhaps Wheatie was not yet ready for a trip to Canada. This is because Canada was not yet prepared for a guy like Wheatie. How could they have been prepared for a guy who had been watching lawless television shows on a weekly basis, and didn't know the difference between a stage and a forest?

Even the worst psychologist could have diagnosed Wheatie with some kind of potentially harmful "syndrome". A good name for it would have been "Ponderosa Disease". That's when a person forgets their identity, assumes ultimate ownership of all animals and trees within their domain and lives by a set of laws from the 1850's.

Maybe you haven't heard of "Ponderosa Disease"? Never the less, Wheatie was heavily afflicted as he was living like the original discoverers of Lake Tahoe. For him, that meant the pristine forests of Canada were as much for the taking as was the American continent from the Indians.

Put in simple/stupid: Wheatie failed to read the Canadian Camping Manual BEFORE he went to Canada to camp. Admittedly, had he done that, there would have been nothing to write about except the regular stereo typical over-inflated stories nobody believes anyway.

As you will see, Wheatie's trip to Canada likely had a positive long term effect by the fact it saved future environmental destruction in the United States by an equal or greater amount. Bottom-line, maybe he was lucky just to return to the United States a person with no recorded jail time.

It really rains in Canada!

Now it should be noted the new camper had been built so accurately and nailed so firmly that it was air tight at the corners and seams. All it needed was a good coat of paint to waterproof and protect the wood on the outside. It was getting closer and closer to the departure for Canada.

As you already know, Mr. Wheatie had built surfboards out of plywood and they had proven to be watertight, mostly. He planned to put a coat of fiberglass over the whole outside of the camper at some point in the future, but with the new off-green exterior paint, all looked good for now.

And this strategy for the new voluptuous camper worked out fine all the way up Hwy 95 as they drove through Nevada, Oregon, Idaho and into British Columbia. But when they reached their intended fishing spot they got into a three day downpour. To everyone's shock they found out their new camper had a leaky roof!

There were two options to the leak dilemma. One would be to place a tarp over the top of the camper alerting everyone in the campground that the American dude's homemade

camper leaked. Two would be to place pots and pans inside the camper, underneath the drips, and go on about fishing as if all was fine. They chose option two.

It turned out to be a good bonding experience as all had to work together setting up and stepping around all the pots without soaking somebody's sleeping bag during the night. Little did Wheatie know it was a precursor for future scenes when he would live on an old sailing cutter with a leaky deck.

As for the two builders of the camper, their indignation was ended when the rains turned to sunshine and the drips came to an inglorious halt. Their pride in having such a voluptuous camper with an overhead bunk and a built-in stove returned.

To summarize this section: It is amazing what just $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch of plywood above a person's head does to change their environment into a cozy habitat!

Just build yourself a raft out of park trees!

"The tree as a living part of the ecosystem is irreplaceable. The natural resources in our federally protected lands belong to all of us, and to future generations."

Olympic National Park Service

This episode confirms the importance of obtaining some good background information, including maybe even reading some of the park rules, before one goes camping in a State Park. Because of not doing this Wheatie, was arrested for doing irreparable harm to a plot of Canadian pine trees, resulting in a sentence of 5 years in a foreign prison.

Actually this didn't happen. And thanks to "statute of limitations" laws in effect, if a future Canadian Forestry official happens to stumble onto this story, a read of it won't result in an indictment. This is noteworthy, as at this time there are thousands of indictments floating around in the Congress of the United States. What that has to do with this story, we shall see in the future.

As mentioned before, even before Wheatie got to Canada he was developing a troubling case of "Ponderosa Disease". Its continued development got the better of him in the forests of Canada where the sheer vastness of them made trees seem endlessly abundant. Such a delusion allowed the idea of building a raft to enter his mind.

The idea to get into deeper water had come about because Wheatie had been unable to catch fish casting from shore and reeling in flashy lures. Unfortunately, in the process of reenacting a 200 year old raft-building exercise, Wheatie forgot to have some respect for trees.

Using the math he had learned in school, he calculated that he needed ten logs lashed together with two cross logs, for a total of 12 logs. Using the ideas he had learned from TV, he then walked into the forest with an axe and began chopping down a tree. Yes, you are reading this correctly.

This was in a Canadian campground in the early 60's. Wheatie picked out 4 or 5 six inch diameter trees and proceeded to cut them down one after another. Can you believe that just 56 years ago "small" or "victimless" crimes happened so infrequently that average Canadian citizens would regard this as a small crime hardly noteworthy?

Today it is 2019 or later, meaning people who read this today could be thinking that yes, it is indeed time to lock this Wheatie character up!

Meanwhile the logs were lashed together and onto a cross member at both ends using bailing wire and cheap poly rope. Wheatie dragged it down to the water and launched it. He grabbed a long pole, stepped aboard and pushed himself out. It actually floated him! Hey, maybe that means he only chopped down dead trees! (Wheatie can't remember.)

He was now floating on a crystal clear lake where he could see painted aquatic turtles and Kamloops swimming underneath him. He went back for his fishing pole and headed out again. Out in the deep water of the cove he cast and cast and cast, but no Kamloops would take his lure or his salmon eggs.

He tried different times of day and early morning with no luck against a mighty Kamloops. This led to the formation of a new plan to land a Kamloops, which is coming up.

But first, to conclude this section, here is Wheatie, having broken the law again, and having gotten away with it, again. Since he was so young, perhaps the only thing they could really have accused him of was being slow in the head. So he floated off unscathed on a sea of Canadian grace.

A Kamloops or else!

Canadian Freshwater Rules

Hook and line angling only.

A club or dip net may be used to assist landing a legal fish taken by legal gear.

It is unlawful to possess a fish taken from freshwater that was not hooked inside the mouth or on the head.

From what you now know about Wheatie, you would not be guessing if you assumed that he had NOT read the rules for fishing. Not in the U.S. and certainly not in Canada. And so it probably won't come as a shock to learn that Wheatie would employ a fish catching tactic that was in fact against state park regulations.

Again we must ask the reader to prepare themselves for a story that by today's standards will surely bring nausea. Let's just drop the bomb right now: Wheatie's new plan to capture a Kamloops was to drop a sawed off log on top of it as it swam up the rapids in the creek before entering the lake.

And that is exactly what transpired. In this case the targeted fish didn't have a chance at prolonging its life by resisting the flashing lures in the lake. It never reached the lake. That was because in certain areas of the creek the rapids were less than a foot deep.

Wheatie found such an area underneath a fallen tree that went across the river. He then found a log that was about 7" in diameter and cut it down to about a foot in length. Never mind it was going to be a Turkey shoot. Whatever it took to bag a Kamloops remained the only plan.

Wheatie is not sure if it was himself or Brother No. 2 who actually climbed out over the creek on the fallen trunk. Whoever it was took the log and waited for an unsuspecting Kamloops to come up stream. Poor fish. When one came along, the brazen hunters dropped the log bomb with World War II precision.

Whash! The Canadian Kamloops was stunned. Wheatie dashed into the creek and grabbed it. The plan had worked perfectly. They were going to eat a big fresh Canadian-grown trout. Never mind the plan had been ill conceived and the bounty was illegal!

After five days in Canada four trees were down, one Kamloops had been bombed and everything was going great. The Kamloops turned out to be an excellent trout to eat and was the only one taken during the five days of fishing and camping at Lake Premier.

To date: no charges or papers have been filed against Wheatie for damage done to the Canadian forest. He skated probably by looking too stupid to blame for such obvious crimes.

And so ends another testimony to the fact that those were indeed great days to be alive! The raft was left behind and may still be being used to this day by other kids hoping to catch a Kamloops. More good news is that this was the last raft that Wheatie ever built out of trees.

Buying a knife

After leaving Premiere Lake and exploring further south through British Columbia in the truck and camper, the Canada trip was nearing an end. Wheatie still had 8 dollars in his pocket to spend on a memento from this pristine forested paradise, and thus he began browsing every store that sold “local stuff” he could for an interesting souvenir. He got a serious “knife bug” as a result.

In this case, size was everything and so at each stop he checked out the largest blade he could buy for eight bucks. After a few stops and comparisons, he felt ready to make a rational purchase. It was based on a weight/cost fraction that he calculated. And guess what ended up happening? He bought a really big knife for 8 bucks!

The giant blade did make it across the border into the U.S. without being confiscated as a “dangerous weapon”, as would likely happen today. But when it was later put into use

in actual hunting and fishing situations, it was found to be worthless when hunting anything smaller than a rhino.

As the years went by, its best use was as a prop in old fashioned black and white photographs of mountain men. But that was about the extent of its uses. As for rabbit and quail, it was like using a broad axe to butter toast.

Perhaps you thought this story was not that exciting and shouldn't have been included in the Adventures of Wheatie. Well, he wanted to make sure you heard this story so you wouldn't be tempted to buy too large of a knife. If you don't appreciate this advice, Wheatie won't think you are much of a bird hunter.

Mr. Wheatie ill

The trip home from the Canadian border with the new camper and oversized knife went fine except for the day that for some unexplained reason Mr. Wheatie got sick. He felt weak enough to need to recover in the camper for a day or so. It was one of the few times in Wheatie's life that he ever witnessed his pa actually needing to lie down.

Since Brother Two was now 15 or so years old and had driven around on dirt roads enough to know what a clutch was, Mr. Wheatie put him in the driver's seat and crawled into the camper to sleep off his illness. Of course No. 2 was never without a second set of watchful eyes from Mrs. Wheatie, nor was he ever beyond earshot of her many helpful driving "suggestions".

Maybe that's why Brother Two, after two days of driving the highway with the truck and camper, was more than happy to see Mr. Wheatie up and driving again.

Kenneth M. Price, Jr.

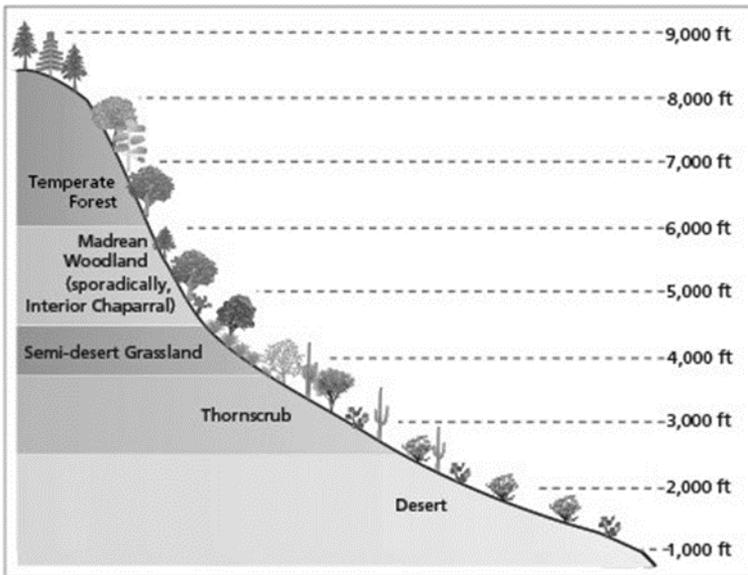
Since they all survived the trip, he must have driven OK.
Well, that's the end of the section on Canada.

Wheatie at Draper Lake

Deserts and Lakes

Colorado Desert: The California portion of the Sonoran Desert west of the Colorado River. Elevation: 2,500 ft.

As pointed out in Chapter 2, there are gobs of deserts out west. They exist in Southeastern California, Southwestern Arizona, Southeastern New Mexico, extreme West Texas and further south in a vast area of Mexico.



Above: Biomes of Sonoran Desert Parks, courtesy of the Integration and Application Network, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science.

Another desert exists to the north. It is known as the Great Basin Desert and is found in Nevada. This desert is, however, labelled as a “cold desert”. And as you might expect from the landscape, Nevada is better known for mining rather than recreation.

The Mohave desert just below the Great Basin Desert was much better in terms of soil, vegetation and game animals. And the topography gets even more fruitful further south in the Sonora Desert. Termed a “hot desert”, the Sonora Desert provided colorful arid regions like Havasu City, Needles and Blythe. These places routinely posted temperatures in the 90’s and 100’s during the summer. Funny how Blythe rhymes with blight.

To confuse the average person who chances to end up looking on a map for the right place to go camping in California, they have labelled the California portion of the Sonora Desert as the Colorado Desert. That should help you sort out much of the confusion. From here on, we’ll focus on the Colorado Desert.

In the Colorado Desert a relentless dry sun posed a serious threat to anyone who was ill prepared. But here, coming to the rescue were the cooling waters of the Colorado River. There in the “hot desert” was the possibility of camping more than a day without dying of thirst! Without being on the river, however, habitation by an animal larger than a horny toad, was almost impossible.

But along the shores of the Colorado River were near endless docks and ramps to accommodate boats and water skiers, and it extended north all the way to Las Vegas. In droves they came to play water games in the dry desert air.

Places like Lakes Havasu and Lake Mojave made for the best natural water parks in the world. And Wheatie just happened to be there at the perfect time to enjoy it!

Falling asleep at 85

To get to Draper Lake from Wheatie's home in Santa Ana they took I-10 to Riverside, then to Indio and then on to Blythe. Just outside of Riverside the road settled on to a simple two lane road, that's one lane in each direction with an occasional passing lane.

The leader of this expedition, Brother One, had the right vehicle for the job of getting across these long stretches of desert highway quickly. It was a '65 GTO with a large gasoline tank and lots of horsepower. People have no idea what young men in a car capable of going over 100 mph got away with out on these open desert roads during the 60's.

The Wheatie group were using this car because on this particular trip there was no plan to go beyond a paved-road turnout. The two older gents had also been out late to some kind of a party. Wheatie suspected there had been girls involved. At any rate, they got a late start toward their duck hunting destination.

The lateness caused them to pick up the speed a bit. Halfway there found Wheatie in the front seat alongside Brother One at the wheel. He looked into the back seat and noticed that the other two were fast asleep. They were tooling along at 85 miles per hour when Wheatie turned back and saw that his brother was fast asleep too!

Well that explained why the GTO was gradually wandering toward the right side of the road toward a ditch and an end-for-end flip. Not knowing exactly what to do Wheatie just blurted out "No 1?".....And oh what a reaction as the driver woke up, corrected his steering, precluded disaster, saved everyone from almost being killed and then released a cynical laugh.

It was just a small laugh, really, meant to diffuse the gravity of the encounter with a touch of humor! And it sure worked for a while. But to those who were still alive, upon further consideration, it could have been regarded as a bit creepy.

The situation had maybe been a little too-serious to be funny. At any rate, Wheatie's eyes were now open so wide they shone through the dark night like two ping pong balls filled with uranium. Across the seat, the driver continued along at 85 miles per hour undeterred.

Finding Draper Lake

Most of the time the Wheatie group was in search of ducks and thusly they were always looking for the ultimate duck lake. It came down to taking an airplane ride plus damaging Mr. Wheatie's work sedan in order for this small gang of hunters to find Draper, and that is no kidding.

In fact they had not found the illusive lake until the aforementioned trip to Davis Lake. On that trip they had invited their neighbor dentist to meet up with them, and that was because he had an airplane. He was happy to have some place to fly to where he could hunt, and that was because in those days it was a way for a flashy dentist who owned guns to appear cool.

So on this day the dentist and his son flew in to the nearby airport in Blythe where they met up with the GTO and the Wheatie group. From there they drove to Davis Lake where they hunted for a day. When that was over the flying hunter/dentist agreed to take Brother One and his friend Bob up in his twin engine Beechcraft to look around.

It was on that trip that while they were flying a bit further south they located where Draper Lake was. It was a flood-

control lake that sat alongside the Colorado River and looked to be accessible via a dirt road. As it was to turn out later, driving to Davis Lake by car was going to be an adventure greater than the duck hunt.

Now there were actually three lakes that were part of the Imperial Wildlife Refuge along the Colorado River south of Blythe. They each got harder to get to by car. Going south, the first lake was Davis. It is today labelled on the map as Cibola Lake.

The highway that took you to Davis Lake severely tested the panic braking attributes of every car as it contained about six sharp right angle turns in an otherwise perfectly straight road. Imagine yourself tooling along at about 60 then suddenly being forced to make a right-angle turn!

The Wheatie group came through with a few shouts, some screeched-off rubber and 8 permanent boot prints in the floor boards. Wheatie further endured flashbacks every time he heard the Beach Boys *Won't Come Back From Deadman's Curve* for years afterwards.

As for Davis Lake, it turned out to be an ok place to hunt, but the men found it to be over populated with mud hens; a white-beaked black bird with chicken type feet. For these attributes, mud hens were shunned by the Wheatie-type hunters, as they were in pursuit of colorful billed and web-footed game fowl.

The First trip to Draper

It is now one week later and the Wheatie group have returned to the Colorado River desert with a plan to reach Draper Lake. This trip took off from the last one where they had encountered the massive flocks of mud hens. It was there

that the asphalt ended and the gravel began. For the serious game seeker, it was where the bird hunting ended and the duck-hunting began.

If you found the old general store called Walter's Camp, you knew you were at the proper starting point to reach the next lake, Walker. With a lust for excitement and unknown adventure you could begin by stocking up on canned food at the General Store. And remember to fill your canteen and every container you had with water because the water you'd be heading for wasn't the least bit drinkable unless you had webbed feet!

The Wheatie group stocked up on some dusty cans of baked beans and tomato sauce and headed south on the conveniently named Walter's Camp Road. Walter's Camp Road led to Walker Lake.

Now it was not unusual for anyone with a decent car to bail out at this juncture. In this case the Wheatie group barreled on forward, and for a couple of good reasons. One, they didn't want to hunt at the mud hen haven again. Two, they had Mr. Wheatie's car instead of the GTO.

It was gonna prove costly to any normal car as Walker Lake was at the end of a near endless gravel road. If getting your flashy paint job dinged and chipped from the flying gravel wasn't enough, along the way you could lose your entire rig over the edge of a turn.

There were dozens of hairpin turns and they could severely test the skills of the best Baja race drivers. And let us not forget FATE. On these roads, while speeding along at 50 plus, the least little thing, like a pesky yellow jacket buzzing around in the driver's face, could lead to a car changing event.

As fate would have it, the Wheatie group encountered such an event when indeed a yellow jacket did buzz the driver in

the face, and this caused a slight hesitation just before the car was going into a turn.

Unfortunately, that's all it took to get the car hurtling off the road where it "jumped" a 6 foot ravine with only a 5 foot jump. In other words, the bumper cleared but the front wheels of the car went slamming into hardened desert earth. To Wheatie's surprise the car continued across after its crash-
dive into the opposing bank.

Everyone got out of the car to see if the wheels were still on. To everyone's surprise, they were! The driver tentatively drove it back onto the gravel road where the men got back in the vehicle and proceeded on with their plan to slay ducks.

It was a great day for Chrysler. Disaster had just been averted using a 1964 stripped down Plymouth Fury 4 door sedan as a hunting car. The incident was soon forgotten.

Lesson learned: Chrysler should have built all their cars like a Fury and kept manufacturing them for another 50 years! This front end design would have saved Americans millions in towing and repair costs.

The "Road"

If this is what it took to get to Walker Lake, Wheatie could hardly imagine what it was going to take to get to the last and final; Draper Lake.

Before starting toward Draper they had heard that the road was narrow. What an understatement that turned out to be! The fact is anyone who proceeded by vehicle had to sacrifice the paint on both sides of their vehicle to the endless willow branches that lined both sides. All this just to qualify for a hunt at Draper Lake.

The road went like this: There were two tire tracks the width of a car in the sand, rocks and mud. Additionally, there were Willow trees just off the road on both sides and their branches hung over to the point where there was hardly enough room for a 50 cc motorcycle. And that was in the wide spots.

It was at this point that the trip to Draper Lake began to garner some controversy, as Mr. Wheatie had not on previous duck hunts ever demonstrated that it was necessary to wreck a good working car for the sake of getting to a new duck hunting spot. However, on this hunt, Mr. Wheatie was not along; oldest brother was in charge.

It was never known if Mr. Wheatie would have allowed his work car to be taken down this road, but it happened innocently enough since once their vehicle ran into the narrowed willow branches it was impossible to go any direction but forward anyway. Wheatie later described the scraping branches as sounding like the Exxon Valdez running aground in Prince William Sound. No he wasn't there, but you get the idea.

And thus Wheatie got to experience the turning of a good working car into a well used dune buggy. Mysteriously this is exactly what had happened to countless toy cars and trucks that he and his brothers had owned while growing up. Clearly, Wheatie had not yet shed the proclivity of often being in the domain of damaged vehicles.

It was too late now for even an Earl Schibe paintjob to mitigate the loss of light brown color from the sides of the Fury, so onward they pushed. A couple of times they had to get out so No. 1 "the driver" could gun it hard thus to climb the rutted dirt hills in places where it looked like a road had been there at one time.

The car would be lurching and bouncing with dirt flying out from behind the rear tires, goaded on by the lead-footed driver as if they were trying to conquer Baja. They didn't know if they were lost or permanently marooned and must've used a quarter tank of gas and a quart of oil getting there. But they did get there.

Draper Lake

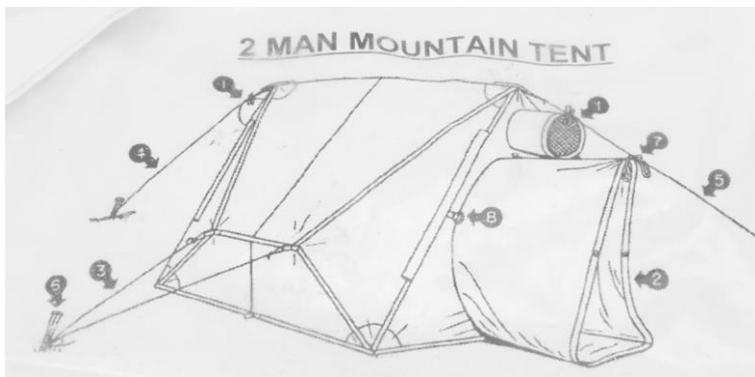
At Draper Lake a person could learn what the creator's true purpose for ducks was when "he" created them. After one demonstration of their high speed landing capabilities the question was answered in a show of brilliant colors, speed, agility and noise. If you listened to them land with a blindfold on you would have thought you were hearing miniaturized F4 Phantom jet fighters.

As you know, Draper Lake was located along the Colorado River where it flowed through the Sonoran Desert. On one hand you could say it was in "the middle of nowhere", since it was located at least 150 miles from San Diego, Los Angeles, Las Vegas and Phoenix. On the other hand it was in the middle of the best sun machine on earth!

So when a person ventured to Draper Lake they were gonna get fried during the day, and they had better have taken their own water. That's because this "lake" was not a lake. It was a giant puddle of mud and reeds, covered over with one foot of green tepid soup. This is what made it both a duck paradise and a hunter's "Death Valley".

But for Wheatie it was all paradise. In fact no hunting place on earth would ever compare to this stagnate puddle full of green water affectionately known as Draper Lake, even if it did extract as its toll the destruction of the family's car.

It needs to be noted that actual fresh water, being that Draper was right up against the Colorado River's sandy shoreline, was within walking distance. A muddy duck hunter could thus wash off and even take a dip. Anyone who's ever hunted ducks knows that's an insane amount of luxury!



The frozen tent

U.S. WWII Tent, Mountain, 2 Man, Reversible 1943. Made with ventilation snorkel at both ends. Inner mosquito net on the tube shape doorway. Canvas floor. Made of aircraft fabric, green on one side and white on the other. Original brochure.

When the hunters took the Fury down the long willow swept road to Draper they knew the only way they could make it was to leave the camping trailer behind. And if they drove there in just the car it would be low enough to the ground to get under a lot of the branches. Luckily, it was also just high enough off the ground to clear the innumerable puddles in the tracks.

Looking back on it, not many other cars would have made the trip. Let's just say if they'd tried to get there in the GTO

and actually made it, the story would have rivalled Hannibal's assault on Rome using elephants to go over the Himalayas.

Now, for the boys setting up a tent for the night, there was one critical period of the operation. That was the time between when they arrived in a heated car and when they had their tent ready for occupancy.

Imagine yourself landing on the moon and only having 3 minutes to get out of the shade or freeze to death. Such a similar fear as this prompted the development of a tent setup protocol that was just as serious as NASA's space program!

A big part of the success was due to the Army Navy Surplus Store that was in their area and stocked all kinds of neat stuff left over from World War II. We're not sure who bought the tent, but there was no doubt where the boy's tent came from; the Army Navy Surplus store!

It was a genuine two man mountain survival abode, with an igloo door and snorkels at each end. Having actually been designed to keep two men warm, it was well made. The whole tent could even be turned inside out to look either white or green.

Perhaps one of the things that best helped Wheatie to believe that he could survive out in the tent overnight was for the fact that his friend was willing to do the same. Freezing to death with a friend was at least a shared experience you could talk about later, right? See ya tomorrow morning, right?.

On this night, after getting inside, slipping halfway down in their sleeping bags and inventorying all of their shells by flashlight and touch, they closed off the igloo door and snuggled down as deep as they could go. And soon, feeling as though just a few hours had gone by, they heard the big guys making wake-up noises. They had survived!

However, it was now time to do the morning “get-out-and-get-to-the-fire!” drill. Again, the key to survival was SPEED. If you could just get dressed before the frost bite set in and your fingers stopped working, there was surely going to be a small inferno of sparkly burning willow branches awaiting your arrival.

These young men weren't Boy Scouts and no one frowned the least on using a half cup of gasoline with several fresh packs of matches to jump start things in the morning. If it helped to save lives, that was all that mattered.

On this white frost covered morning Wheatie and Art managed to get their clothes on and make the trip across the frozen camp area without shivering too much. Still their body's were so cold at this point that it was tempting to sit too close and literally embrace the heat. They backed up only when the smell of burning hair or skin was detected.

Now it was time to put something in their stomachs so they would have the strength to hike through branches and sticky mud bogs with full determination. Whatever they drank had to be hot in order to excoriate their morning chills.

For this an empty 5 lb. MJB coffee can was filled with water brought from home and jammed into a flaming crevice of hot coals and fire. It boiled up quickly. They grabbed the trusted can with plyers and poured the boiling water into their cups containing Instant Coffee or Cocoa. This gave the human body a chance to warm up. No wonder Wheatie had been hooked on fire making for so long!

Aside from a hot cup of hunter's broth was a store-bought plastic wrapped tray of sweet rolls; you know the cake-like pastries that are covered in white frosting and swirled cinnamon. Fifteen cent fruit pies that came in a separate wrapper were another breakfast favorite. You could count

on bitter coffee to make these things taste better than Marie Calendar's finest.

This would definitely get you to the blind and hunting, which was a victory in itself. Now of course later on, when the body's blood sugar crashed leaving one glued in the mud and feeling even lower, it was crucial to have a candy bar in their pack somewhere. For Wheatie, the ultimate in this situation was the Payday, because it was covered in nuts of course.

Contrary to the Payday, Snickers does nothing to help with excretion. The dedicated duck hunter was surely going to face that field drill at some point; usually when they were standing in a swamp 50 yards from shore in the freezing cold. It was moments like these when a man wondered why he had not just been born as a dog or cow.

Now here's an interesting sidenote: Paydays and Snickers were not regarded as junk food in their day, simply for the reason the "junk food" label had not yet been invented. It was called "candy", and believe it or not, "candy" was considered as a treat, a reward, a gift, etc. It was not considered bad. Can you imagine such a day?

Score another for Wheatie! He was around during the golden age of candy bars!

The dive from the platform

"Heat Syncope is a fainting episode that can be experienced in high temperatures. This commonly occurs when someone is standing for long periods of time without movement or sudden rising from a sitting or lying position in the heat."

Draper Lake had a historical past that was arguably every bit as colorful as the history of Waterloo. After all, it had been a duck-hunter's paradise ever since the invention of the shotgun, having provided countless hunters with wild tasty duck and goose meat. It was 100% hormone free, making it a nutritional caviar (although they didn't know it at the time).



Now Draper Lake was a flood plain lake, meaning any seasonal change in rainfall would quickly find its way there. This caused parts of the lake to rise upwards of 6 feet above its muddy bottom. To counteract this, a wooden platform had been constructed out near the edge. Supported by four wispy willow trees it provided a place to house a duck blind above high water.

It should be noted that the question of which was better; shooting from a blind or shooting from a small boat, was a no-brainer. It was like the difference between throwing a spear from your feet verses throwing it from a recliner.

The platform might have looked a little flimsy but it was stable. In its day, serious duck hunters must have slayed the flying meatloaves by the gunnysack.

By a stroke of luck, when the group finally reached the all illusive Draper Lake they found the entire place all to

themselves! That meant the platform was just sitting out on the flats. Thus they would not need to perform a platform “coup” in the morning. Everyone went to sleep smiling.

Sunrise is defined as the point when the leading edge of the sun is first visible even though this is some minutes before the sun actually rises above the horizon.

The plan for Wheatie and his duck-hunting friend the next morning was to leave the frozen tent at 5:30 AM, which they did. They then hiked over to and climbed up onto the platform to watch the sun come up, at which time they could legally open fire.

There was nobody around to make sure they didn't jump the gun and illegally begin shooting before sunrise. So after the first rays of the sun came over the horizon and the rounded ball began to form, they did in fact jump the gun and open fire before it was above the horizon totally. And as you read above, they only thought they had jumped the gun. In actuality they could have legally opened fire upon seeing the first rays appear!

Never the less, the two managed to shoot down a variety of ducks in the early hours of the morning. Wheatie may have even downed a duck-billed bird himself. You can be sure that his friend downed a couple. That guy rarely missed.

The fact that he was only in his second year didn't go unnoticed. Wheatie knew a few more behavioral quirks about ducks gained over years of stalking them than his friend, but was at a disadvantage when it came to aim.

They remained in the blind vigilantly as the hours passed. The morning hunt had gone according to a duck hunter's plan. After things slowed down they pulled out their candy bars and fruit pies and quietly ate them. Shortly after that, the temperatures began to soar.

Luke warm canteen water had now turned into emergency rations. Only the determined hunter would be able to hang in there from this point on. On top of that, having grown weary of being shot at, the ducks had all settled down to feed elsewhere.

Wheatie decided to head back to the camp for a canned Craigmont soda and bologna sandwich. He climbed down from the platform into the puddle of green mud and began wading toward the shore of the lake. Just as he reached shore he looked back at his friend on the platform who sat behind a thin wall of dried reeds.

But then, just before Wheatie looked away, he watched his friend get up out of his chair, lean his shotgun against a limb, look outward over the lake, and just faint! It was like he dropped dead while standing!

Was it a form of heat stroke, we never would know. But at that moment his body seemed to sort of lock up, then to Wheatie's shock, fall straight forward off the edge of the platform.

Amazingly, even in an unconscious state his friend was an amazing athlete. As he fell over the edge, his feet stayed on the platform. This caused his body to do a perfect end-over-flip, which left him flat on his back and uninjured.

Wheatie couldn't believe what he had seen! There his friend now laid in a 1 foot deep pool of watery mud. Then he noticed that his platform-diving friend was still asleep!

Now Brother One had heard the splash from the other side of the lake and was the only person who seemed to know what to do. He yelled out, "Hey Art!" To their surprise, their fallen comrade woke up!

Finding himself flat on his back in a vat of mud surprised him even more than it surprised everyone else! "WTF!, how did

"I get here?" he calmly said. Well, at least he was sounding ok. He pried himself up from the mud and managed to get back on his feet.

Wheatie didn't think to offer him some warm canteen water. He figured he was simply "out" for a few seconds and now he wasn't. Wheatie had been "out" before. Remember?

He did agree to carry Art's gun, and luckily Art was not suffering from severe dehydration. So he made it back to camp alive. Mud-covered, dried out and resembling a desert lake bed, he stripped off his shell of adhesive clay, rinsed the remnants of his clothes and hung them up near the fire to dry out. He put on some backup jeans and shirt, drank some water, grabbed a bologna sandwich and headed back out to bag some more ducks.

The illusive goose

Winchester Waterfowl Shot Guide:

SPECIES	IDEAL RANGE	SHOT SIZE
Geese	10-45 yds.	2's, BB, No.4

We'll take up the story of Wheatie's duck-hunting experiences along the Colorado River, with it now being a week later. The same gang of four returned to continue their assault on the aircraft carrier pilots of Draper Lake, otherwise known as Green Winged Teal. At least that was the plan.

Sometimes God sets you up. In this case it was the two hunters, Wheatie and Art, who had not had one shot at a

goose all year, who got set up. It came in the form of a most unexpected visitor; a white Snow goose!

This sought-after white honker had appeared over the tops of the reeds and then suddenly dropped in for a landing right in front of two hunters with loaded shotguns! Almost by divine providence they now faced the real possibility of bagging a goose.

With the bonafide state-sanctioned hunting fowl now standing in their muddy pond just 45 yards away, it was time to get serious in order to not blow such a rare opportunity. But again, we have to remember, this was all a setup!

Just the fact that a goose had caught the hunters off guard was enough of a shakeup to make all future attempts to slay it destined to fail. To understand this the uneducated hunter needs to know a little about shot loads, because the fact is, success or failure in bringing down a wild goose depended on shot selection.

In those days they used lead shot. And as you saw from the chart (if you were paying attention) the size to use for geese were 2's, BB and No. 4 Buck. But hold on as there was a snag. Wheatie and his friend normally hunted ducks, not geese. And when they hunted ducks they used a duck shot load.



In those days that was Lead 4's or Lead 5's with an ounce of powder. Put in simple/stupid; the shot in their shells was too small to bring down a goose unless they could significantly reduce the distance.

As was mentioned before, the two “duck” hunters didn’t often get a shot at a goose. As a result the heavier “goose” loads were stored in their vests, not the gun’s magazine. Oh sure, the hunters knew just where they were specifically located in their vest, they just didn’t know how to eject the wrong shells that were in the magazine without making a lot of noise. That was to later be an insurmountable problem.

Those who have seen the movie “Terminator” know what a pump shotgun is. They have seen that when a new shell is advanced into the firing position the mechanism makes a very loud and distinctive ku-chunk! That sound scares the hell out of stalkers and burglars, however these hunters had a very alert bird at 45 yards, and it was looking up at them every time they even touched one of their high powered shells.

Another situation Wheatie and his friend had to think through was the range. The darned bird was about 50 feet too far away. They correctly reasoned they had to somehow change the shells that were already in the firing chamber of their guns to the big No. 4 buckshot stored in their vest.

As stated before, it was a setup! Of course this refers to the Cherubs and Angels behind the scenes who we never see and never seem to stop delighting in watching us fail. Normally a single lone goose would not have been flying into these boy’s “duck hunting” area. Normally these two hunters would not have been in the predicament of having the wrong shot load in their magazines at the time they needed it most.

But thanks to the “behind the scenes” nuances of our invisible friends, there the goose was! It stood in a few inches of water occasionally glancing over at the fumbling boys, perhaps a bit suspicious of the clicking sounds going on inside the men’s shambled mass of dead reeds.

Such a dilemma! Wheatie and his friend had the coveted No. 4 Buck shot the chart called for. They had just the night

before counted, cleaned, admired and dreamed over each of their shells by candlelight. They had placed them in their vests and shoulder belts for the morning hunt. And now here they were trying to figure out how to get the wrong dad-gummed shells out of the magazines without making noise!

They knew that without the big load they were not going to be able to slay this rabbit-eared goose. They also knew that they couldn't cock the new shell into the chamber without the goose flying off. They managed to release two of the wimpy duck shells out of the magazine and slide a few of the No. 4 Buckshot back into it, however now the goose had stopped feeding and was looking right at them.

The two hunters could only now hope that their superior human brain with its superior plan would win out over the smaller brained goose. So when the goose looked back down, they put their plan into play.

And what was their "superior" plan? It was stand up unexpectedly, "run-full-speed" toward the goose and close some ground before they fired. Owing to their larger brains they figured by the time it looked up they would have already covered 5 yards of distance. When it took to the air, they would cock the buckshot load into the chamber, aim and fire.

In near perfect unison they both rose up rapidly. The goose was in the air before the two even took one step. Now the goose was rapidly gaining distance. They opened fire ASAP! Both fired duck load and the small-brained goose kept flying.

By the time any rounds of the No. 4 shot were fired off, the ego-crushing migratory master was another 20 yards out of range. The two men counted four, maybe five feathers had been left floating.

The story ended quickly and was rarely retold. When it was, the two would exclaim that, "we scared the sh*t out of that goose, let me tell ya!". Then they finished off with the goose

having been taught a lesson about “landing too close to a designated duck hunting site.”

Footnote to the Colorado Desert:

Today the Colorado River basically “ends” in Yuma, a town just north of the Mexican border. Here it splits into several smaller aqueducts which carry the remaining water to homes and farmlands in the region.

In other words, California has pulled too much water out of the Colorado River such to take all their showers and wash all their flashy cars to still have a river that makes it all the way to the sea as it did originally. What a lousy ending to this chapter!

Kenneth M. Price, Jr.

Wheatie in Mexico

As far back as Wheatie could remember he'd heard legendary stories of his father's fishing trips to Baja California. On one trip his pa had gone all the way to La Paz at the southern tip where he landed a 209 lb. marlin and got his picture taken with it. That was in 1957 when Wheatie was not yet six.

So it was sometime around 1960 that Wheatie got to ride into Mexico in the truck and camper with his two brothers for the first time, and sometime after that when he got to go out on a charter fishing boat from Ensenada.

On these game-seeking trips, Wheatie's mom was not along. She usually stayed at home as guns were as about as valuable to her as knitting needles were to Hercules. She honestly didn't like to clean fish or skin ducks, and so Mr. Wheatie never asked her to.

Maybe it needs to be mentioned that Wheatie's mom was a real looker, not to mention she rarely ran out of energy and even more rarely stopped doing good things. So nobody cared that she didn't clean fish.

Remember, as weird as it sounds, in those days for a young man, having hobbies that most girls wouldn't do in a thousand years, was considered THE "coolest kind of activity". To Wheatie, it simply demonstrated proper behavior for a boy. He accomplished this by demonstrating things in front of girls that were smelly, dirty, sweaty, torturous and best of all, dangerous!

Today, if Wheatie were to conduct similar demonstrations of “showing off obnoxious male attributes”, he would be diagnosed as a narcissistic gynophobe, put on Prozac and lectured for 100 hours by 10 PhD-educated women; thus to be brought up-to-date with the latest approved behavioral relationship with “girls”, who can’t be considered to have “female” attributes; such as an abhorrence to stink, flies, mud and garbage.

As luck would have it, in Wheatie’s time, it was normal-enough behavior such that he was able to stay out of the crosshairs of school psychologists and pre-feminists. As a result he never grew out of his dirty, muddy model of masculinity.

The roads, shops and firecrackers

From Santa Ana it only took about three hours to drive to Tijuana, Mexico. The green camper full of fishermen simply had to pull out onto I-5 and venture south until it reached the end of the United States boundary.

Back then, the Mexican border policia cleared a white-driven car through faster than you could say “Americano”. The process was so easy that if you weren’t paying attention when the car was cleared and crossed into Mexico, you found out shortly thereafter.

There were two things that tipped you off to whether you had actually crossed in or not. One was the smell and the other was the trash. As soon as you crossed over the air began to smell like the inside of an active rodeo rink. As for the trash; it was heaped up alongside the roads and gutters of all the streets in Tijuana.

Although it is not that way now, that was the way it was then. To be fair to the Mexicans, today San Francisco, Los Angeles and Seattle smell even worse.

But from the moment Wheatie got out of the pickup he loved Mexico. Shop after shop was filled with the aroma of leather and carvings of every imaginable shape and function. Along the walls hung wooden guitars for a few bucks. There were rawhide chairs and trinkets of silver, belt buckles with abalone, turquoise rings, combs made from stone and even switch blade knives!!

Outside Wheatie walked the streets of Tijuana with a dollar in his pocket feeling grand. In the warm outdoor air were young men with carts all over the sidewalks peddling flowers, tacos, cigarettes, ice cream, pottery, blankets, hats and paintings. The insides of the shops and markets had unique aromas, produced from the handmade items and foods that were brought in from all over Mexico.

Down the streets were restaurants accompanied by the smell of charcoal, singed meat and fried tortillas. Wheatie had a kindred liking for the Pescadero Taqueria which featured a large flat wood-fired grill in the center of the dining room. There a wispy brown lady was slapping tortillas by hand as she baked them on a curved iron plate heated with raw oak and coal. She flipped them over and pulled them off with her fingers.

By the way, the “Pescadero Taqueria” did exist then, but Wheatie can’t remember the real name. In fact, he’s still trying to remember it to this day.

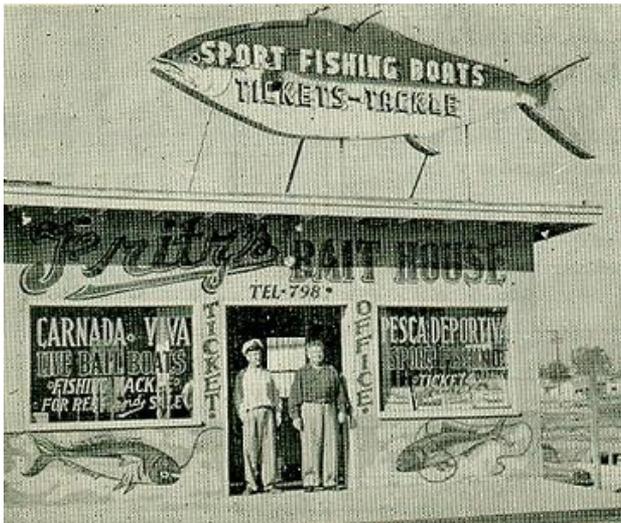
They weren’t in Mexico to explore tourist destinations. Wheatie was escorted around by various brothers as they went inside store after store full of surprises. It wasn’t long before he discovered a glass display case that contained one of the most coveted pyromania props a kid could possibly

find. In normal terms these would be referred to as firecrackers, skyrocketes and cherry bombs. For these to be on sale, for a kid, was akin to a resistance leader meeting an arms dealer to buy hand grenades, smoke bombs and RPG's.

But let's not forget that Mr. Wheatie didn't drive the boys to Mexico to hang out in Tijuana, shop for curios or buy incendiary explosives. Their objective was to explore Mexico's shorelines that were known the world over.

How could they not be with Mexico's depressed Peso, which insured their gamefish and pristine sandy beaches would come at a bargain price for dudes from the states? They finished looking around, got back out on the road headed south. They rode into Ensenada where charter boats sat waiting to take Gringos out for the best fishing of their lives.

Ensenada



One of the experiences that Wheatie missed out on in life was staying in a cheap hotel in Tijuana or Ensenada. Poor Wheatie; the group always drove to Mexico in the truck and camper and stayed in it. So he didn't get to experience head lice either.

It was totally safe in those days to pull off of the main highway and stop at one of the numerous parking areas along the beach going south. On this trip they pulled into the Ensenada fishing harbor and parked in a space near the docks.



After a quick paper-wrapped fruit pie with some luke warm water from the plastic jug, they walked down the street to where all of the charter fishing boat offices were. It was there you made reservations for fishing the next morning.

It was a time to act cool as you meandered amongst the skippers and boat pictures, then trying to make an intelligent decision on which or who to pick. Boat and skipper selection could make or break what kind of fishing success you had.

Finding a boat

One of the standard Gringo methods of selecting a boat was by its name. Ones like Tora 2 and Tora 3, or Senorita 4 and Senorita 5 looked especially good because they had multiple boats! That meant these guys had been around longer than skippers with boats with names like Matador, Pescado, Vaquero or something. This was a no-brainer decision to them.

Other's looked for more "gringo-ized" names like *Sea Wolf* or *Gone with the Wind*. These names, by the way, when translated into Spanish become *Lobo Marino* and *Lo que el Viento se Llevó*. So you can see why they often picked the English version and Wheatie was no doubt enticed by them. Perhaps this is part of the reason why he never learned Spanish well enough to hold a conversation above the level of hand signals.

To really get a handle on which boat to pick the four fishermen took a walk to the docks and looked at the actual vessels. Some were as distinctly painted as a an award-winning model wood duck with colors equally bright. The Mexicans preferred distinct mixtures of red, yellow and green for the hull and cabin top, highlighted with black or white trim.

Most of them had very high bows and utilized 15 or 20 good sized tires as bumpers that were permanently lashed to the bow and stern. The *Mucho Pescado* was one of these boats. The Wheatie group settled on her as she was built rugged enough for fishing in rough seas if necessary. It would later turn out to be a good choice.

They went back to buy tickets on their chosen boat for the next morning departure which was 6:30 AM. They bedded down in the camper around 10:00 PM and at 6:00 AM Mr. Wheatie got up and began boiling a 2 quart saucepan of water for coffee.

Breakfast consisted of a fresh store-bought tray of sweet rolls along with all-the-Cheerios-you-could-eat in a paper cup with milk as fast as you could eat and refill. No time for an egg breakfast on the two burner Coleman stove.

As it was, as they finished breakfast, cleaned off the table and began picking up their gear they could hear the rumble of the big diesels starting up. The air became soured by the smell of sulfurized fuel and black smoke as they made their way down the dock toward the boat.

In such situations as this, with Wheatie's anticipation running on high, it seemed like his pa was in slow motion as he walked down the dock toward the boat. Wheatie went up ahead, then looking back, saw him just poking along and thought to himself "doesn't that guy ever worry about time?"

Of course they all made it and once aboard their chartered vessel, of which name nobody can remember, stored their gear and took up a spot. The lines were cast off and away they went motoring out of the harbor under a tail of black smoke with 100 seagulls in hot pursuit.



Shortly thereafter the mano derecho (deckhand) came around to each person, "eh senior, want to enter jackpot?" You could see all the dollar bills in his hand. Wow, that was like a big bet to Wheatie!

It was a simple bet: "Whoever caught the biggest fish won the dinero," which was really a great way to turn a regular fishing experience into a competitive torneo (tournament)!

Mr. Wheatie indicated he was all "in", giving the man a dollar bill while at

the same time sporting a smile that made you think it was the best investment he ever made. “Firma tu nombre.” spoke the deck hand. He took the clipboard and signed, “Senior Wheatie.”

And soon, just about everyone on the boat was aware of senior Wheatie as they only had to take one look at him before being enamored by his presence. It was probably the hat that first got their attention. It was a well worn Stetson Cowboy beaver fur, a premiere hat, now faded and flattened. You could tell it had been worn outdoors, by this man, for a long time.

The second noteworthy item was the heavily worn leather fighting belt that he wore over his levis. The hat, belt and tanned brown face made Senior Wheatie no ordinary gringo.

Sardines and sardine tales

The Wheatie group were fishing back in the days before the fleet of seiners along the west coast of California had decimated the populations of mature females. The main fish in those days that could win the tournament was the Yellow Tail (cola amarilla) and their favorite bait was sardines.

In the early 60's there were still large schools of Yellow Tail as well as sardines. These fifty-pounders and above migrated north from their home waters in Baja to feed for the summer in Northern Baja and Southern California waters. Lucky anglers caught them by the thousands around the nearby islands and kelp beds. Thinking back on it, Wheatie concluded this might have been some of the best seafood ever taken from the sea!

Now back to the Sardines. These remarkable fish can grow up to 12 inches long and have a very interesting history.

Before Wheatie's day they existed in such numbers they were considered as an endless food supply. For years and years they were harvested but their numbers never seemed to dwindle. They are after all, a miracle of nature, for the fact that one female sardine can produce upwards of 200,000 eggs per year!

Such an incredible multiplication ratio gave the species the ability to regenerate huge numbers of them over and over again. And for this reason our idiots in the fish and game department allowed them to be not only be consumed as human food but later to be ground up to fertilize crops.

Sardines were a staple food for man and the sea's predator fish population as well. And now the sad story of the once endless schools of sardines that filled the western seas of the Pacific must be told.

They used fish for fertilizer

The first sardine processing plant opened in San Francisco in 1889. It's what they called a reduction plant. All it was really was a giant meat grinder where god's creations got turned into guts!

This added harvest gave rise to severe over fishing which continued on. By 1944 the populations were dwindling well below 50%. Meantime they kept sending 100's of thousands of tons per year to the reduction plants to be ground up and sold for pennies per pound.

This was the United States Fish and Game Department that allowed this. They even helped set it up. Then they just kept over-fishing as if profits were the only virtue on Earth.

In a bone-chilling admission made years later, **the last major school of sardines were netted from the seas during one night of intensive fishing using airplanes and radios.**

Kenneth M. Price, Jr.

"The sardine fishery continued in southern California until that night in 1968 when the airplanes led the fleet to the last of the sardine schools." Edward Ueber, National Marine Sanctuary and Alec Maccall, National Marine Fisheries

Now jump back on board with the Wheatie group when it was the early 60's. Wheatie didn't know at the time, by having Sardines on board as available bait, he was witnessing a way of fishing that would be gone in just five years. It turned out to be his sole sardine fishing experience of his lifetime.

"I never tried to fish with a sardine as bait, only anchovies. But I distinctly remember them in Mexico and they were about 10" long. I watched Dad cast out the bait that caught the tournament fish and it was such a large bait that I couldn't understand why they used them. It's amazing the number of things we just caught a glimpse of before they were taken away." Wheatie notes.

Back on the charter boat; it was a rough day out on the ocean. Senior Wheatie was in the tournament and he was using the largest sardines in the bait tank.

Catching a Yellow Tail

The coolest place to position yourself on a charter fishing boat was as far back toward the stern as the group could get. In that section of the boat, the heaving and rocking of the hull was much reduced.

If a person was prone to sea sickness, this was the only place for them to have a chance of keeping down their breakfast. Too bad no one person or group could remain in any position for more than 30 minutes before it was time to rotate around. Everyone got to do time up near the bow.

When they got near the fishing grounds and the skipper stopped to allow fishing to commence, the boat began to rock in the large swells. This coupled with the fact that they

were no where near the stern at the time, didn't permit the Wheatie group to avoid losing color in their faces and start to feel a bit too nauseous.

The first one to heave over the side was, of course, Wheatie. However, and most miraculously, after he had fed the fish his sweet roll and coffee he felt much better. He resumed fishing as if nothing had happened.

Down here in Mexico the charter captains carried sardines and anchovies. The anchovies were about 6 inches long and looked like the proper bait size to Wheatie. He went over to the bait tank and attempted to catch one. As usual, it squirted from his hands just as he was about to hook it and he went scampering after it across the deck.

By the time he had caught it and dropped it a few more times the hook hardly made a difference as the bait was pretty much dead. Still, over the side it went and down to the bottom.

At some point between dropping and reeling in his line with some kind of junk fish from the bottom and vomiting over the side, Wheatie noticed that Senior Wheatie had something big on his line and was drawing a lot of attention from the other fishermen!

Senior Wheatie used an extra long pole that allowed him to cast further out from the boat. This was Mexican sport fishing where it was standard practice to look back at your bait as you completed an overhead cast. Anything that didn't catch a human's ear was considered a good cast. Now he was using the extra long pole to work his way around, and up and over other people's poles.

The fish went left and the fisherman had to scramble after it. Wheatie watched his pa work his way to the starboard bow and he went out of sight behind the wheelhouse. He figured that was probably the end of it. Then he saw his pa coming down from the bow on the port side of the boat and the way

he was holding onto his pole reminded him of a bull rider trying to tackle a steer.

He didn't know charter boat fishermen did this all the time. When somebody had a big one on, the fish would invariably swim left or right, but never straight out from the boat. That would be like swimming straight into the frying pan of a waiting shark or barracuda.

Meanwhile Wheatie had managed to get an anchovy on his hook and let it straight down into 100 to 200 feet of water. Down there a beat-up bait would get the interest of Barred Sand Bass, Sheephead, Opaleye, Mackerel, Crab, Octopus and various barbed fish.

Yes there were Halibut down there too and even large Barracuda but with Wheatie's deck-dancing anchovies about all he pulled up were Sculpin and Lionfish. Luckily the deck hands unhooked them and accepted them, since few of the Gringos had ever been hungry enough to be forced to eat one.

In case you don't know, both of these have spines that will ruin your day if you let one stick you in the hand. As it was, Wheatie was sick enough from throwing up about six times to not be wanting more misery.

One more toss of dry heaves over the side and Wheatie caught a glimpse of the great fish with a bright yellow tail go by. It was still on Senior Wheatie's line, and come to think of it, had been for some time. Still, the reality of pa's fish possibly being big enough to be the tournament winner had not yet soaked in.

Senior Wheatie patiently steered the mighty Yellow Tail nearer and nearer to the boat. On the next opportunity the deck hand gaffed it with a pole and pulled it up and over the rail onto the deck.

Wheatie doesn't remember much about the fish after that. They stuck it in a gunny sack somewhere on the opposite side of the boat where he was heaving up the last two dry crackers he had eaten.

After fishing a bit longer and managing to land another sculpin, Wheatie was glad to hear the engines rev up. Once the boat began heading back to Ensenada Harbor it flattened out with the speed. Then the deckhand retrieved the big brass balance scale and called out for people to bring their biggest fish.

Adding a touch of pride to an otherwise non-exemplary day for the three boys, Mr. Wheatie's yellowtail took first prize in the jackpot! This netted Senior Wheatie about \$20.00 in green cash. With today's inflation, that would be about \$40,000 (just kidding, what would you guess?)

The *Mucho Pescado* kept motoring in. A swarm of seagulls followed the boat as the fish were cleaned by the deck hands and the insides washed overboard. When they got into port Wheatie felt good to be on solid ground and walk in the warm afternoon sunshine.

Senior Wheatie led them into town to a restaurant that served lobster, cola, cervesa and the famous fresh hot tortillas. This was a huge deal, since the group rarely got to eat out on fishing trips, much less in Mexico! And here they were going to eat lobster!

That's what winning a jackpot can do! Senior Wheatie had won enough of them to celebrate, and in Mexico there is no better place to enjoy an eating party.

Footnote to the story: Today Pacific schools of Yellowtail still migrate up and down the Baja coast, but in greatly reduced numbers and size. As yellowtail only grow about three pounds a year, a 20-pounder is considered a good catch

while a 30-pounder is rare. In the early 60's a tournament Yellowtail was five feet long and 50 pounds or more.

The balance scales used to compare the weights of the fish only did just that, so a weight measurement of the great Senior Wheatie Yellow Tail is unknown. Senior Wheatie didn't even get a picture of it. He instead left a permanent picture in Wheatie's mind of both fish and fisherman.

Surfing Beaches of Northern Baja

*Northern Baja is the region between Tijuana and Ensenada.
and contains all of these surf spots!*

- Tijuana Sloughs- Playas de Tijuana- San Antonio del Mar
- Baja Malibu- Playa Santa Monica- Rosarito Beach
- René's- Popotla- Calafia Beach- Impossible's- Mushrooms
- Calafia Point- Urchins / Ricky's / Bus Stop / K-36
- El Morro / K-38- K-38 1/2- K-40
- Las Gaviotas- Raul's- Puerto Nuevo / Lobster Village
- K-44 1/2 / New Port Beach- Cantamar- Halfway House
- K-55- K-55 1/2 / Campo Lopez- Alisitos / Plaza del Mar
- La Fonda / K-58- Playa La Mision- La Salina- Salsipuedes
- San Miguel- 3Ms- The Cannery- Stacks
- California Trailer Park- Islas de Todos Santos- Killers
- Rarely's- Thor's Hammer- Estero Beach

Wheatie didn't know it at the time, but the Northern Baja area of Mexico was a surfer's dream. All total, there were 45 unique breaks just in this region alone!

In the mid 60's, with surf boarding just becoming popular in California, imagine how tantalizing it was for tenacious young men to drive down the coast of Northern Baja. If you were in search of the perfect wave and you wanted to ride it yourself, you could find that dreamed-for ride here.

There, and then a tanned gringo surfer could look out and actually view an uncrowded and often deserted peak break, just beckoning for the first person to get out there and ride one! And so as it was these early American surfers with the wherewith (guts and permission from their parents) to travel, got to be part of a golden era. A golden era of surfing.

These uncrowded Pacific waves were there for all who relished taking off from the peak of a curl of blue and having it all to themselves the rest of the way in. There was little competition as the Mexicans who lived there didn't give a burned enchilada for surfing. To them it looked like another American twinkie sport.

In reality few of them had the means to drive out very far from where they lived. Most of them did not possess cars. Actually, few of them did. As a result, the surfing beaches along an 85 kilometer (53 mile) length of highway between Rosarito and Ensenada were so lightly visited, travelers going south could pull off the road, park and surf for free on any given day.

At many of these spots a group could sleep in their car or camper overnight. If you had a truck with a homemade camper that looked home made, you were safe. At least from the Gringos, that is. They associated home built contraptions with people who didn't have enough money to buy a real one. Such people could be "scary", "unpredictable", etc.

Surfers in those days weren't looking for a hotel, nor were they worried about losing a reservation. The time it took them to travel down Baja Route 1 was as irrelevant as the brand name of a tequila. The beach they stopped at, and the waves they rode, and the tubes they crouched down in, and the rocks that their surfboards ran into and got dinged up; these were the memories that were eternal!

K 39 K 38.5



“I found that water temperatures in Baja Norte are not any warmer than southern California. Today wetsuits are commonplace as they not only keep you warm but provide added safety flotation. All you had was an air-bubble in your swimsuit to help keep you afloat. Did you actually use one much?”

No. 1: “Yes we wore crummy wetsuits some of the time-- these crazy top things that folded under the balls--kind of like a diaper--to keep the top down and in place---never comfortable. Ya, the short sleeve top with the ball strap.”

As it was, just four or five known surfing spots along the road south from Tijuana could provide all the wave variation and excitement most surfers needed for years. Still, each spot offered something unique, thus the better surfers explored as many possible places they could to find pristine waves and smooth water.

The first decent surfing spot the Wheatie group usually stopped at was K-38.5 and K-39. It was a dirt road turn off 39 kilometers south of the border from Tijuana.

K-38.5 was merely the same break, but left instead of right. At K-39 the waves broke right in a due south direction. Both breaks would pick up swells out of the southwest, west and northwest; meaning it almost always had surf.

It was best to surf at mid-to-low tide as the waves broke over a cobblestone riverbed. Aside from there being some rocks in the take off zone, the right was one of the most popular along the coast. The lefts could be good but had shallow sections on the inside.

This is where the goofy-footed surfers, like Wheatie's Brother Two, who stood with his right foot forward, liked to surf. That was so his toes were pointed inward toward the waves as he rode the board down their face.

If and when a goofy-footed surfer took off going right his heels would be up against the wave face. Well, you don't have a shock absorber under your heels as does the ball of your foot, with it's extra joint and lever arm. In other words, it's a lot easier to get bounced by wave chop, loose your footing, loose the board and get a cobblestone ding.

In those days surfers didn't wear wetsuits. That meant when they came in from the surf they were darned cold. Warming up came in the form of building a fire, lying in hot sand, or getting back in the truck and turning on the heat while you drove to the next surf spot.

If you go to K-39 today you'll see lots of surfers and they will all have wetsuits. Incidentally, you can't get to K-39 from the toll road. The best thing to do is drive past and make your exit another mile south at Puerto Nuevo. Then drive back north along the free road. You'll actually come to K-42 beforehand so continue further north.

You'll need to pay \$5 to whoever is in the lot but you can use the showers and bathroom. Comes in handy if you stopped and ate any of the food or drank any of the water in Tijuana!

Nothing much more to report about K-39. Remember, this was before Hollywood produced their gruesome axe-wielding movies with masked creatures who snuck into campgrounds and murdered a few folks for fun. It was before everyone had gotten paranoid about sleeping overnight in a tent.

Raul's, K-42

"What do you remember about K-42?"

No. 1: "I remember the break having huge kelp beds protecting it from the winds that usually came up and blew stuff out after 11--so you could surf there almost anytime and get glassy conditions. Nice easy rolling right break---long lines---easy to catch and ride--probably wouldn't be that popular now for young guys with small boards and fast turns---but a guy like you -- with a canoe---a gold mine!"



Rauls, K-42 Courtesy: Rauls Surf Photo by Chris Gallo

As the group traveled down from K-39 south to K-42 they stayed on the surface road, which is now known as the free

road. Since K-42 was located one block south of Rauls they made a right turn down the dirt road just after passing it. That's how it came to be known as Rauls.

Since they always traveled in the truck and plywood camper their sleeping accommodations were a done deal at most any surfing spot. And so over the years the group spent several nights in the K-42 dirt lot parking area. It was a good stopping point to rest at on the way down and back from Ensenada.

As for surfing waves on a board, few people realize that plunging down the face of curled blue water while standing on a wax-covered pontoon took lots of practice. That meant getting up early in the morning to beat the crowds, and that meant getting into the cold water before you even had sunlight on your skin to keep you warm.

To Wheatie, swimming in the Pacific Ocean early in the morning was sheer madness. Why not just become a Navy Seal, go off to Greenland and really experience cold! The ocean and the sun went together like peanut butter and bread according to Wheatie's vision of the beach.

As a result he spent his mornings fishing. That gave him an excuse to keep his clothes on and actually be warm while at the beach. If and when he wanted to surf some waves he used a belly board. Being closer and lower to the water, Wheatie could take off on just about any sized wave he wanted (without having to practice so hard).

Compare this life to the surfer's life who was never warm at the beach. You were just surfing and you had to stand up to cold water better than a deep water crab. Nobody except a scuba diver ever wore a wetsuit. At least not in Mexico or Southern California. That's the way it was. It's a fact that surfers were in extremely good shape as a result of their having to take cold water torture on a routine basis.

And behind many good surfers was a special mom, “Mommy tsunami”, who would fill their shivering frogmen up with hot food every time they came back from the beach tired and cold. Smart moms were happy to do this. Smart moms knew their rambunctious sons would sleep like babies for 12 hours after a good surf and fill-up!

The surfers of the early 60’s not only craved nourishment but prayed even more for hot showers. And they hoped it would be scalding hot, and long lasting and satisfying. And the wise “mommy tsunami” would not run the washing machine and dishwasher while their aquatic offspring experienced the ultimate hot water reincarnation. Never!

Now, just because surfers wear wetsuits today is not to say that surfers are not in great shape today. The skill levels exhibited make the old surfer cut-out-walk-the-nose moves look prehistoric. Plus, you have to give them a lot of credit for making the effort to get a tight wetsuit on and off! Ugh!

What’s the conclusion of today’s surfer vs. the ancestors: Who was tougher? Maybe it just comes down to the number of sharks that were in the water then verses the number of sharks that are in the water now. Maybe it comes down to the number of modern surfers who have seen *Jaws* and yet still continue to surf!

Today, all surfers look damned tough to Wheatie.



San Miquel Courtesy: YouTube, “Surfing at San Miquel.” Brother One knocked the nose off his brand new surf board on these rocks.

San Miquel

“Remember the trip when you drove us down to meet the Mitchel’s, staying at San Miquel, surfing in Mexico with Tom G?”

No. 1: “I remember Tom going at least once---was that the trip when we drove home naked? Do you remember that?”

“How could I forget that?”

About 8 miles before you get to Ensenada you come to San Miquel Campground. Today it’s one of the most crowded spots on Baja Norte, drawing locals, gringos and campers from all over the world practically every weekend.

Wheatie’s oldest brother loved this area of Mexico so much that during his 19th year he went to Mexico 12 weekends in a row. In those days San Miquel was a surfer’s dream. This was for a couple of reasons.

For one; it was a good place to meet up with friends. For two; a surfer could snorkel dive and spear fish. This was all in addition to having great waves to surf. Statistically speaking, it was rumored to rank as the best right break between Rosarito and Ensenada.

But we're not finished. San Miquel was just a few miles north of the hospitable town of Ensenada. This gave the beach campers access to shopping, eating, drinking, watching shows, exploring about the town, etc. So when you camped at San Miquel, Mexican night life became reality.

Another reasons San Miquel was popular with surfers was because it was a campground that met Gringo standards. In other words, it had showers and toilets. That was especially appealing to members of the opposite sex (and to members of any sex actually) who had drank water or eaten any prepared food since entering Mexico!

"San Miquel is a right cobblestone river mouth break with rocks the size of bowling balls. It's fast, hollow, good sized and fun. Note: getting in and out at low tide is no fun with the slippery boulders and urchins. From: The Surfer's Guide to Baja.

Once any decent surfer found this spot they would want to return again. In the early 60's the waves of San Miquel drew them repeatedly from the coast of California. And many a surfer can attest to the rock hazards at San Miquel.

In fact it was here that oldest brother got to watch his brand-new prized board slam headlong into a boulder breaking its nose off! That brings up another interesting point about surfing in the early 60's and the fact that surfers didn't use ankle straps. Thus, there was nothing that kept them attached to their boards when they fell off.

Back then surfers tended to dive away from their boards when they hit the brine, hope it didn't hit them, then surface and try to find it. As a result boards were constantly receiving dings from hitting rocks, pilings, other surfboards and sometimes other surfers.

Because boards often got dinged, just about every surfer had to become experienced in mending fiberglass. Patience was most important, as it took a lot of sanding and the right

technique to do a proper patch job that resembled finished fiberglass. Some surfers were better than others at glasswork. Many ended up looking half-finished at best.

Thanks to cobblestone boulders at the shoreline, San Miquel forced many a promising surfer into the realm of surfboard repair, often ahead of their time. This led to some of the gaudiest fiberglass patch jobs ever attempted on the entire west coast! OK, so this is unproven, but the fact remains; the most highly skilled surfers don't make the best surfboard patchers.

As long as we're on the subject of fiberglass repair, it should be noted that there are two types of resin. One is a laminating type that is used to build up layers. This is what the common surfer would use. The other is casting resin.

The problem is laminating resin never gets hard on the very surface layer and none of the surfers knew that! Unless they put a hardening resin (casting resin) over the last coat of laminating resin it would remain tacky. Thus they could never sand the outer layer.

So what typically ended up happening with a homemade surfboard repair was a good attempt would be made to patch and properly seal the Styrofoam, but the surface would be left rough because the poor surfer dude couldn't sand out any of the roughness.

In Brother One's case, after the repair of the nose of his board it was never as well balanced as it had been when new. Adding further to the misfortune was the nose coming off a few more times during its 5 year lifetime.

One thing they learned was that it didn't matter how many balsa stringers you had in your board; even three of them didn't save the nose of Brother One's new professionally-built surfboard when it took on San Miquel's cobblestones.

3M-s, Cow Pasture



3M's, Cow Pasture. This is what a peak break looks like. Courtesy Surf forecast.com

“Didn’t Steve L see a shark there while you guys were surfing and he was scuba diving?”

No. 1: “Steve went out diving around the cow pasture but I don’t know why he would have been there. I went spear gunning after him on the same trip. I remember taking a shot at a big bass and missing it and suddenly saw a large shark, too. I was so glad I missed that bass. I got out as fast as I could--almost choked on my snorkel!”

Just a mile or so south of San Miquel is another great surf spot known as 3M-s or the Cow Pasture. It was accessible off Highway 1 via a dirt road to the right that led down to the bluff above the beach on a big loop road.

The place was just a barren sandy knoll 10 feet or so above the beach and waves. It was a bit dusty for tent camping, but

for those equipped with a shelled domicile it made for a comfortable site with plenty of room to park and build a fire.

The luxury of being able to build a fire to warm up and cook hotdogs over was more valued by most surfers more than fresh salmon was to grizzly bears. Best of all, Wheatie could light off skyrockets into the daytime sky and send cans flying in the air with cherry bombs.

For a fire bug future pyro expert like Wheatie, this free and lawless atmosphere became the most preferred camping spot of all. But for most surfers the Cow Pasture attracted them back again and again because of the waves.

From a surfer's perspective the Cow Pasture was an exposed reef break that usually offered dependable waves to surf. Reefs gave rise to a beautiful peak wave that offered both lefts and rights.

Most of the surf came from groundswells. During the summer, the barren inland of Baja Norte would heat up dramatically from the abundant sunlight, such that by 11 PM a steady onshore wind would begin.

A word about winds. An offshore wind tends to help the waves stay up longer, whereas an onshore wind tends to make the wave break too early. In addition, onshore winds bring in an additional chop from the ocean outside the breaks. Here's the reason surfers need to get out into the waves early in Mexico and why siestas are taken in the afternoon.

It was known that while surfing the Cow Pasture you needed to watch out for rocks at low tide and sharks at high tide, but it should also be noted that at no tide were you ever harassed by cows aside from a few patties lying every few steps.

I never saw a shark in all of my spear fishing. Was I just lucky?

Unlike most shorelines in California, the ocean between the shore and the waves was full of kelp. This made it a great place to spear fish just using a mask and snorkel.

Kelp can be spooky though. At least it was for Wheatie as he had seen countless episodes of *Sea Hunt* where some hapless diver got stuck in kelp and nearly drowned before the “undrownable” Lloyd Bridges freed them from certain death.

But seriously, the kelp allowed fish that were uncomfortably large to lurk within a few feet of the hunter before the masked diver noticed their presence. That tended to cause excessive aspiration of the snorkel, resulting in a water-boarding kind of experience.

In some ways Wheatie was ahead of his time, and this was one of them. After all, how many people do you actually know who have had waterboarding practice? Now, divers that retained their nerves however were rewarded with an expansive array of sea life.

Wheatie just needed to put on a mask, fins and snorkel, grab his two-rubber 40” spear gun and swim out a short distance. There he was immediately confronted with the bottom-life of Baja Norte which included octopus, sea urchins, sea anemones, abalone, crab, eels, sculpins and lobster. The easy route Wheatie took toward obtaining dinner was to spear a good sized Calico Bass on the edge of the kelp, then swim to shore with it still on the end of his spear. That went ok, until that day at high tide when he learned first hand about sharks lurking in the same water!

*“I always thought the hammerheads were only in the Caribbean.
Now I know there are three species that frequent Baja!”*

In fact there were 34 different species of sharks that frequented Northern Baja, and they included Mako and Great White Sharks! There were Hammerheads, Leopard, Bull, Tiger, Angel and others which were known to attack

humans on occasion. But perhaps the most noteworthy fact was that Wheatie didn't know these sharks were or could be in the same water he was spearing fish in.

And in reality such knowledge would have been worthless because anyone who ever actually saw a shark swam like hell to get away from it, regardless of whether he recognized the species that was stalking him or not!

My courage may have been deflated had I seen that movie they made in the 70's with Robert Shaw singing "farewell, and adieu, to my fair Spanish maidens.." Now I wonder if I would still have gone spearfishing in the ocean?

Wheatie had two things going for him when he went surfing or diving in Mexico. One was that he had not ever seen a large shark in the water when he was in the water with it. Two; he had not yet seen the movie "Jaws" as thankfully it would not be made until 1975.

The Cannery and Stacks

A surfer leaving the Cow Pasture headed toward Ensenada still had another couple of potential surfing spots along the way. One was located in El Sauzal across the street from "La Stella Pizza". Here the more adventurous boarders would find the "Cannery" also known as "Stacks". There must have been a canning plant there with stacks visible or something like that to give it the names.



“The Cannery actually has two breaks---kind of an inside and outside---one is the stacks and one the cannery---but basically the same spot.” The Cannery; Photo by Daniel Rojano Guido

Traveling with 18 year olds.

When Wheatie was with his pa, there was always a guiding force toward things of a positive nature. When Wheatie was with his brother, there was always a guiding force toward things of a gutsy nature! But for sure, Mexico was an exciting place no matter who he went down there with.

On this trip to San Miquel his pa had trusted them and let em go completely off on their own, all the way to Mexico and into a foreign country. In other words, able to get into some really deep #\$\$%&, and all under the stead of an 18 year old.

This trip to Mexico was an all “man’s” affair. Thanks to a brother who could tolerate him, which meant feel pity for his lack of masculinity, he got to experience the same kind of freedom as living an episode of Rawhide. In the ensuing whirlwind of adolescent growth, Wheatie became a pre-teen vagabond.

The traveling rig they went down in was of course their plywood built camper, and as you already know, it was one

of the best “anti-tourist” disguises a white foreigner could get. In those days there were so few people who constructed their own campers, even the Mexicans were confused with white guys who travelled around in one. This may have been the main reason this trio of renegades avoided jail time in Mexico.

On this trip to Baja, Brother One had a friend his same age along to make the journey to Ensenada. Some of their actions tended to be a bit too spontaneous, and certain things, like an innocent laugh could be both funny and dangerous. It all depended on the timing.

For Wheatie it was constant entertainment and he marveled at the two young men so gifted in the art of vigorous subtlety. Both were clean-cut-brown-bodied surfer dudes who liked to wear shorts, and to girls they probably looked good in them. To the Mexican men in town however, anyone wearing a pair of shorts was a twinkie. They generally didn't like getting laughed at. By a twinkie, never!

And now fast forward to when the trio of Wheatie and the two young men would be walking the streets of Ensenada one fine and innocent evening. For some reason one of them would take to laughing at a man in charge of a decorated donkey, done up a bit too cute, for tourists to sit on and get their picture taken.

“Would ya like to get up there and get your picture taken on that donkey, Wheatie?” one of em said, laughing, ha ha ha, etc. They didn't notice that the owner of the donkey, who looked like he'd been the bouncer in a rough Mexican bar for 10 years minimum, understood exactly what was being said and was NOT amused! Wheatie could see the man was about 2 seconds from beating both of them into refried frijoles!

Fortunately, the two brazen surfers got a look at Wheatie's terrified face and decided to close down the act. By luck and

Kenneth M. Price, Jr.

miracle they managed to walk away, thus leaving the downtown with no broken noses.

They ventured back toward the campground. They got in their olive green pickup truck and headed up Highway One back to San Miquel. The off-color plywood camper never felt so snug.

Further learnings in Ensenada



Now when the unchaperoned group got to Ensenada, the first thing the 18 year olds showed Wheatie was where Hussong's Bar and Cantina was located. They parked and went in and it was there that Wheatie learned how to eat taquitos at a tiny round table, drink a coke, watch a man fall off of a barstool and to look cool while standing around in sawdust with shorts on.

The second thing the 18 year olds showed Wheatie was how to shit his guts out in a Mexican bathroom, and third, how to use newspaper to wipe his butt.

Now in all fairness to white people from the United States; they never really got sick from drinking the water or eating

cooked food in Mexico. Either act produced about the same results because if it was cooked, it was probably cooked in a pot washed with water. And it was this water that gave every white person who came to Mexico a total body flush. But that's not the same as being sick.

A marvelous design; when the human body is accosted by parasites in the water, its self-defense mechanisms are absolutely amazing. And so it's like this: A white person drinks water while in Mexico: A white person flushes out his entire digestive tract within 2-6 hours. No exceptions!

It happens: you eat some tacos at Hussong's at 3 PM and drink a beer. Your stomach handles the food and ale just fine and after an hour or so sends it into the small intestines to be absorbed. Everything is going as planned. You're still sitting in the car totally relaxed as you head down the reddish highway. But a few moments later the small intestines don't like what they have just been inundated with. They are not tolerant of these new invading Mexican parasites at all!

So your amazing body goes into action. It's time to pull over fast! Without you having to even ask, the valve at the top of your colon has opened. This simple involuntary action allows the semi-digested parasitic brew to flow out of the small and into the large intestine. And you can be guaranteed that later, oh around 5 to 9 PM you'll be conducting a "find-a-john-fast" drill.

It is inevitable; like the released water behind a dam, a flood is racing its way down and will want to exit soon. Put in stupid/simple terms: Be prepared!

Today Wheatie recommends that anyone who's going to eat in the restaurant or drink any water should stick some nice soft napkins in your pocket. Or don't. Newspaper rash is not that serious. No gringo has ever died of it, anyway.

Runnin the border with a bottle

Here we are a year later toward the end of the Mexico escapades on a fishing trip to Ensenada with Mr. Wheatie, Wheatie and a friend. On the first day they spent much of it under the sun out near the mouth of Estero Bay. Here they caught sand sharks and rays feeding in the tidal currents.

It was great fun reeling in mysterious critters from the inlet of the bay where the tidal currents ranged at several knots during both a flood and rip tide. These were non-sport fish though. They didn't think to eat them. They just wanted to see what they could catch.

This may sound more crass than the practice of eating cooked dog in Vietnam, but it was not considered that bad to kill sharks and rays just to reduce the populations. Put in short/simple terms: They hacked them up and fed them to the crab. Now, on with the main part of this story.

In case you didn't know a certain thing about most boys, it's time you learned. You see, it is normal for them, as they are growing up, as they reach puberty and onward toward manhood, to do almost anything to get a girl drunk. Of course this is just a vision, and it never happened, but just the possibility that it actually could happen, regardless of the incredibly low odds, made it the most exciting of all dreams.

To put it bluntly, anyone with daughters nearing the age of 14 and above needed to watch out for young men who just made a trip into Mexico where they might have purchased a cheap bottle of booze.

Now flash back to Wheatie and his friend who, by pure coincidence, found themselves searching all the shops in Ensenada, and located where a bottle of girl-numbing Tequila could be had for \$1.50. The best part was, they didn't check your ID.

This was Mexico; if you had money, you got the cheap aphrodisiac.

There was just one problem; Wheatie and his friend were in a foreign country. His bottle would not be allowed to be taken into the United States across the border from Mexico unless he hid it from the border police.

Knowing his pa couldn't approve of the idea of sneaking a bottle of cheap booze over the border, Wheatie figured he'd just keep his plan a secret. As if that was going to be possible!

Since Wheatie's friend was in on the action, he had his own bottle as well. Wheatie decided to place the two of them in his clothes pack where his pa never checked. He wrapped them each in a T-shirt and stuck them in his bag.

By having both bottles in Wheatie's bag, it was reasoned that only one of the boys could be blamed for attempted bootlegging. It also meant that both of the bottles went into the same pack. Wheatie zipped up his canvas bag, stuck it to the back of his bedroll and headed off.

They went out and caught their sharks and rays. In fact they had such a good day and made so many new memories, Wheatie forgot the most important part of the mission. True, the bottles were safely stowed.

All was going according to plan. Darkness fell. It was time for the boys to get into their sleeping bags for the night. As they were doing so, Wheatie decided he needed to pull a T-shirt out of his pack. Oops! A tell-tale "clank" that sounded exactly like two fifths of rum knocking together, broke the still air.

It was curtains for Wheatie and his friend's evil drunk-girl plan! Panic started to set in as Mr. Wheatie had certainly heard the clang. Some anxious moments went by. But nothing came forth! No one said, "Hey, what was that?" No.

They all just kept lying there as if maybe it was just two pint bottles of Coca Cola or something that had smacked into each other. Or maybe it had been jarred peaches or pears? Yeh. Sure.

More key time crept by. Still no questions broke the quiet darkness. The boys went off to sleep thinking they were in the clear.

Morning came. They did some more fishing. Then it was time to leave for home. They packed the truck. They tied the boat to the top. They got into the cab and watched Mr. Wheatie turn the key. It started up ok.

It was always nice to hear the running engine when you were down in Mexico. They wouldn't have to locate a Mexican mechanic and explain their problem with hand signals once taught 500 years ago by the Mayans. Things were looking great! They hadn't experienced any bad omens!

They left for home and prepared to cross the border. So far so good. But once away and on the main highway headed for the border, for some reason Mr. Wheatie began to recall all of the times in the past that the Mexican border agents had made him go through the entire contents of his camper, just because they thought he might be carrying some liquor.

They got to hear a review about the fact that there were two borders they had to cross before being on home ground. The second one was the United States Border agents. "Those'll be the most strict", he said.

Mr. Wheatie went on to discuss which of the agencies were more apt to search their camper; the Mexican federales or the Border Control agents. He started telling past stories about each. On more than one occasion the federales had singled him out because he traveled in a homemade camper. The Wheatie group was travelling in a homemade camper!

Then he talked about the stoic, stuck up U.S. agents who thought they were better trained. He went on to mention they had secret ways of telling whether people were lying. “We might all have to be questioned!”, he explained. “These are folks you don’t want to fool with! Just give them a straight answer and you’ll be fine!” he said in his comforting calm voice.

The air was hot and the seat was getting harder and harder as the group continued on their way to the sure gallows that awaited Wheatie and his friend. That would be when the federales searched their camper. They figured they were done for. Still, neither were willing to give up their bottle of girl-numbing elixir.

The camper full of bootleggers continued toward their final line in the sand” with neither of the boys coughing up the fact they had illegal booze in their pack. Meantime, Mr. Wheatie sat confidently in the driver’s seat, acting more and more ready to answer the penetrating questions that were sure to come flying from the border agents.

Then came the moment when the dyes had been cast; the group was heading into the Mexican border check area in a sea of slow moving cars. It was too late to opt out now. They eased forward. Both tried to change the subject to fishing; anything other than border checks and Mexican alcohol.

And then to their shock and surprise, as they reached the 1st portal smiling meekly, looking innocent as newborns, they were simply waved through! They hardly had paused long enough to say buenos dias! It was almost too anti-climatic.

They still had the United States crossing, however. After murmuring “oh please, god” a couple of times under their breath, came the final check station. The anticipation reached a torrid. Then they learned that since they were

Kenneth M. Price, Jr.

Americans and entering America, they would not even have to come to a stop.

And sure enough, the Border Control “go to jail or not” agents looked in, saw all the “whities” in the car and waved them onward to freedom and the continuing pursuit of drunken girls.

Wheatie in Jamaica

Tootie and Speedball

Before we get too far in the story of Wheatie in Jamaica it needs to be noted that Wheatie was not the only fortuitous soul walking around who sported a nickname so unusual it turned heads when people heard it. There were others along with other crazy nicknames.

The Jamaica group was led by two chaperones; Wheatie's ma and Wheatie's maternal grandma. They were known affectionately and referred to always as "Tootie" and "Speedball", respectfully, by all of their offspring.

"Tootie" had come from a famous child actress from a 1944 movie *Meet Me in St. Louis*. "Speedball" was a fast ball but in this case was meant to infer the opposite of speed. How these names had come about is a story in itself.

Remember, their oldest son and hope for the future just happened to have a certain talent for coming up with comical word-associations, and these ladies loved it! This is the same character who coined "Wheatie"; just because of an unrelenting desire to constantly be gnawing on bread.

It is important to note that when other people heard these names being used to address them they knew immediately

these were no ordinary women. And when they looked at them these initial impressions were reinforced.

“Tootie” was a 5’-2” petite brunette in her 40’s who’s beauty could still draw stares from across the room. She was fast on her feet, quick with her responses, punctual to a T and able to take on whatever task was at hand.

“Speedball” was just the opposite; grey haired, shaped like a wine cask and barely moving if moving at all. She didn’t draw looks, she drew stares. One example that produced them occurred one hot afternoon when the dining area went into sunlight. “Speedball” just sat there with a napkin in her mouth, so that it helped block the sun on her sunburned lips. It worked like a charm.

In those days Noxzema was used as a women’s preferred ointment. It was a white cream that resembled a thin layer of zinc oxide if you applied it thick enough. Either this or a napkin stuck to Speedball’s lips was utilized much of the trip. Speedball was obviously not looking for any boyfriends at this point.

In all fairness, Speedball, whose real name was Ruby, had not led an easy life. She grew up in Greenville, Texas in a huge family with 12 or more kids. She was the youngest. The family moved to Tehachapi sometime in the 1910’s. No one seems to know why the father, Patrick Henry Winston Spencer, moved to such a remote wind swept canyon in a high desert.

At any rate Speedball married late in life and had one child, Tootie, when at the age of 8 her husband went off to strike oil in Texas and ended up dying of pneumonia. That left Speedball and Tootie on their own. That would have been 1929, the same year the stock market crashed.

The reader should not get the idea that these were in any way comical people by the fact they were called comical names.

Let's just say they allowed themselves to be called these names and the reason was because they loved the person who coined them so much. That person was the same person who talked Speedball into taking the entire family on a once in a lifetime vacation to Jamaica.

Now just why did Speedball go along with paying for the whole family to fly to Jamaica? The common explanation was that since she still had lots of money, and, was running out of time to spend it. But this explanation doesn't take into consideration how much she loved her family; especially her three rambunctious grandsons.

And why did they choose Jamaica when they could have gotten a similar tropical experience in Hawaii? It must have been because everyone on the west coast normally went to Hawaii. No other reason makes sense.

Early 60's Air Travel

"The Golden Era of flight, from 1958 to 1968, saw airlines vying, almost begging, for your business, outfitting their planes with festive colors and dressing their stewardesses in provocative uniforms, promising an "experience," not just a trip. Passengers, too, dressed up. No cargo shorts and flip-flops; men wore suits, women dresses, sometimes accessorized with corsages." The Sacramento Bee

Most old-timers remember the term; "The Golden Age of **Flight**". It was an expression coined by advertisers back in the early days of aviation. It spanned from the end of World War 1 into the beginning of World War 2.

Now before you get too excited about Golden Ages and whether or not they really are golden or not, consider that by the late 1950's the United States had already had many "Golden Ages". It started with the "Golden Age of **Steam Locomotives**", from 1765 to 1893, then we had the "Golden

Age of **Steamboats**”, from 1850-1870, and then the “Golden Age of **the Auto**”, from 1920-1950, etc.

It’s no wonder why these aviation folks chose to highlight their sales brochures with a proven winner and that was the word “golden”. Thus, when they brought the same term back to life in the 1950’s they came up with a new term for the younger folks. This time they came up with “The Golden Age of **Flying** instead of **Flight**”. Wow, big difference!

So here we go with the same folks glopping onto the “gold” word again and once again perpetuating the perceived glories of aviation. This time the “golden age” referred to the mid 1950’s and 1960s. It would have been easier to understand it if they had just named it something different, like “The Silver Age of Flight” or even “The Wheatie Age of Flight”.

“The 707 was in every sense a futuristic spacecraft, Tomorrowland today,” he wrote. “The subdued lighting, the ventilation, the individual controls, the Eames-like modernist seats, the relative silence. . . . Every traveler was to be treated as an explorer.”

The Sacramento Bee.

It is hard to fathom what it was like to fly and being served gourmet meals by glamorous air hostesses! And you have to consider that the “Modern Age of Flying”, or “Jet Age”, did not come formally into existence until as late as 1958. That occurred with the introduction of the Boeing 707 and the McDonald Douglas DC-8 passenger aircraft. They were the first two American made turbine powered passenger airliners.

Now it was the mid 60’s and Wheatie was around 13 years of age. They would all be going except Mr. Wheatie who stayed behind to work. He drove the party through Los Angeles to the airport in their big round bodied car with the two foot tail fins. It was just seven years since the birth of the jet age and Wheatie was about to become a member!

The cost of airfare across the US was about \$200 dollars and to get to Jamaica was going to take two flights. The second flight began in New Orleans and went on to Jamaica. That added another \$200 dollars.

That comes to a total of \$400 dollars one way or \$800 dollars round trip which in 2019 with the value of today's dollar, represents \$8,000 dollars. Holy Cow! Wheatie had no idea his rear end was worth this much!

And for this passengers got 1st Class luxury even though you had only paid for 2nd Class. But of course this is not what Wheatie was thinking when he got on the TWA 707 bound for New Orleans and onward to Jamaica. He was checking out the design of the jet-powered wonder.

In those days the first thing you needed to know about flying was that a young man needed to wear a suit on the airplane. Normally this would have been a shock to a kid who beforehand had only worn blue jeans and flannel shirts, but because he had seen John Wayne and *The High and the Mighty*, Wheatie put on the threads as if he'd been flying for years.

Other flying surprises came in the form of unbridled freedoms, like smoking on the plane, and give-away items. It was assumed everyone on the plane was successful. It was equally assumed that everyone had successful behavior. In other words, drinking, smoking and demanding to be waited on was totally acceptable behavior.

Well, maybe if you were white, that is. White people have to be honest about those "times". Everyone brown and darker were dressed better, and acted better, otherwise they would automatically be looked down on as being poor or uneducated. Put in simple/stupid terms: It's easier to be accepted as a slob if you're white.

Flying and Smoking

Let's be Frank; the day Wheatie got on board the TWA flight was the day he got introduced to Winston and Salem cigarettes. The seats on the marvelous 707 were arranged in rows of 3. As the new passengers took their seats, on each seat sat two brands of cute little 4-pack cigarettes.

It was ok to smoke then, yes, right on the plane! Remember? This was the "Golden age of Flying" and you didn't have to give up smoking cigarettes in order to gain status. Of course Wheatie didn't dare do this on the plane in front of his mother, but he did manage to collect up everybody's unwanted 4-packs and stuff them in his bag for further consideration.

The plan was to barter them for something else even further from the normal acquisition range of a 13 year old. At this stage he had little idea the destination itself would produce a setting that was so high-class it would stir some of the hillbilly foolishness out of him. And as it turned out, Wheatie did not need further bartering materials in order to fulfil even greater aspirations.

Red Stripe Beer

"Jamaican Style Lager" embodies the "spirit, rhythm and pulse of Jamaica and its people." The company uses these phrases and the short, brown, squat bottle associated with Jamaican beer bottles to distract consumers from the fact that the beer is "Brewed & Bottled by Red Strip Beer Company, Latrobe, PA."

When a boy is 13 years of age and traveling in a foreign country where the legal age to drink beer is 12, does he care where the beer was manufactured? Answer: "Manufactured? I thought beer came from a type of cow."

Wheatie had never seen a Red Stripe Beer commercial back in the states, so the idea of any beer was all Jamaican to him. And thus when the waiter at the entrance to the show where the young Jamaican girls would be dancing asked, “would you like something to drink”, he listened in with the ears of a NASA moon probe. He heard Brother Two respond with something like, “beer?”

And that prompted the waiter to say, “Red Stripe?” Answer: “Yes!” And then asked the waiter to Brother One, “Red Stripe?” This question received another “Yes!” And then to Wheatie, “Red Stripe?”



He couldn’t believe his ears! No question had ever sounded sweeter in his entire life. The union between Wheatie and Red Stripe was made complete with an immediate, “Yes!”

Now just one last question from the waiter: “Your room number?” Brother One answered, “83.” When Wheatie heard that he knew for sure Jamaica was a paradise, no question about it. After all, anytime he wanted a beer all he had to say was “Red Stripe” and “83”.

The trip to Jamaica was shaping up to be an even more lawless existence than Cowan Heights, Sage Flats and Draper Lake.

Livin high at the hotel

The Wheatie group was soon to find the difference between vacationing in a country that had been colonized by Britain verses vacationing in one colonized by the United States. Put in simple/stupid terms; it was a lot more expensive to vacation in Jamaica.

The fact is: Jamaica is a British Crown Colony. Thusly the hotels were run in strict British fashion. That meant everybody at the hotel dressed impeccably, spoke with a thick English accent and maintained the utmost gracious behavior. As a result, rooms, meals and drinks were expensive.

Wheatie devised a standard by comparing the price of hamburgers. He found that a \$.50 hamburger in the states cost \$4.50 at the Jamaica Hilton. You know, nobody from the Wheatie group ever went back to Jamaica. This could be one of the reasons!

When you went to dinner you put on your best suit, and in Wheatie's case it was his only suit. Once attired he then stepped out of the room and into an elevator, got off at the ground floor and proceeded into the grand hall decorated with bright Victorian decorum. To Wheatie it was cooler than having an acting roll in *Gone With the Wind*.

The group of surf-loving Californians made their way to their designated table by finding their cursive name settings on the table tops. Then, over to their table came this tall very dark "bus boy", actually a full grown slender man dressed in perfectly pressed pants and shirt, and he says in this deep British voice "good evening, my name is Derek, can I get you some water?"

Upon hearing this black man's very deep and thick British accent Wheatie was so taken aback as to just about fall out of his chair. He had never seen a black man in such a role much less been treated with such professionalism.

In the process of adjusting to the setting, the Wheatie group had to quickly undergo a transformation from the backwards clan who rarely ate a meal out to one descended directly from the British Monarchy. It had all happened in one amazing moment, and they hadn't even met the waiter yet.

Now to be precise, the Wheatie group consisted of three young surfer dudes from California, their mother, who had supported surfing for years, and their grandmother, who was as you know paying for the entire trip.

So what did this surfer-mom-gramma group look like to their spotless white-jacketed waiter, who spoke concise English when he introduced himself as the person who would be taking care of their every eating whim for the next four days? They knew what Derrick looked like to them, but what did they look like to Derrick?

There they were sitting at this impeccable table within this impeccable ballroom and the key to the door was more than money. It was a manner of being in the right place at the right time. The Wheatie group had come from America. The waiter had survived a total recolonization of the Jamaican population.

Wheatie thus experienced how economic differences rated above higher culture and race unity. This would in fact help him in his later years to realize how lucky he had been to be served in a British Crown Colony hotel in 1965. “The Golden Age of Colonialism in Jamaica”, it will someday be called, no doubt. And once again, Wheatie was there!

Spear fishing for a barracuda

“The barracuda is a ray-finned fish known for its large size, fearsome appearance and ferocious behavior. They are snake-like in appearance with prominent, sharp-edged, fang-like teeth, much like piranha, set in large jaws.” Wiki



He was gonna be the big man. Wheatie had tangled with many barracuda off the West Coast of California and Mexico from the deck of a charter boat and felt he was prepared to spear a barracuda in Jamaica.

From the stories he'd heard from the Jamaican divers who worked at the hotel, a Barracuda was the largest fish to be found inside the reefs. They only came into the bay overtop the reefs at high tide and then went foraging around inside for anything that swam.

Now how Wheatie had come to that conclusion; that he could handle a big fish, had been in no small way influenced by big movies he'd already seen. Ones such as *Beneath the Twelve Mile Reef* with Robert Wagner and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* with Kirk Douglas had filled his mind with images of men going up against giant squid and octopus with knives and spears. Surely Wheatie could conquer a Caribbean Barracuda with a modern two-rubber spear gun.

So the hunt began, and it began with a determined Wheatie, who waited late into the afternoon sun for high tide. Sorry to give part of the story away, but the fact is Wheatie's deep sea diving visions were about to be shattered like an old mirror thrown into a dumpster full of bricks.

At around 4:00 PM he put on his fins, mask and snorkel, grabbed his spear gun (which he had brought over in the plane and kept in his hotel room), entered the water and confidently began kicking his way toward the reef at a moderate pace.

His duck feet flippers kept him moving along. He was swimming out into the middle of a giant lagoon that surrounded Montego Bay, which itself was located on an island in the middle of a much larger lagoon.

From the windward side of the island the reef was in the windward direction. He kept plugging and soon was in the middle between the shore and the windward reef. At this point, Wheatie still had about 500 ft. left to reach the reef.

As you know, Wheatie had begun his swim breathing through his snorkel with total confidence. One thing that bothered him, however, was that the water was murky and he couldn't see more than about 20 feet. In other words, he'd have to be right on top of a sea creature before he would be able to identify it.

Apprehensively he flipped onward, somewhat blind but breathing through his snorkel with just a light strain for air. He maintained a steady pace thus to expend his energy at a conservative rate. However, some moments later, his snorkel went into overload, his pace tripled and his energy expenditure skyrocketed.

What had happened? Wheatie had seen the tail end of a "barracuda" and it delivered an even worse "scared-shitless" feeling than the clod-throwing farmer of the orange groves had. Even more, his predicament was amplified by the fact he hadn't seen exactly what kind of fish it was.

Wheatie was getting in "deeper" fast. His brain began to process the known data into scenarios that only an NSA super computer could match. He wasn't used to being in the

same water as a creature that was as large as him. The water was murky. He had completely lost track of where “the fish” had gone.

But these problems paled in comparison to the worst of Wheatie’s problems, which was his own movie-filled mind. He began to imagine all kinds of predators lurking, unseen, just yards from him. Images of giant octopus, leg-sucking clams and schools of man-eating piranha began to appear in the silty water of his aroused mind.

He wasn’t sure how to handle the situation without being able to see further. He swam along looking around for the great fish coming out of the murk toward him from an unknown direction. A few more draws on his snorkel and Wheatie’s emergency engine started automatically. His navigation went onto auto pilot. A “get-the-hell-out-of-here” flashed through his mind.

Delirium went into hysteria. He fixed his direction on the shortest distance to shore by sighting through his mask. Like a torpedo, Wheatie’s body propelled itself toward shore at top speed, leaving a wake of small waves behind.

If something was following him, it could mean barracuda bites to his feet and legs would have to be endured. Still, he figured his main torso would probably make it. That’s when he passed Brother One who was just heading out to do the same thing Wheatie had just attempted. “What an idiot!”, Wheatie thought to himself as he went by.

Brother One swam after him and managed to get him to slow down to about 10 knots. At that point Wheatie took the snorkel from his mouth and exclaimed, “there’s six footers out there!” He put the snorkel back in his mouth and continued directly toward shore, kicking like a mud skipper fish practically all the way to sand where the water was less

than a foot deep. He stood up and turned around and backed the rest of the way to shore with his flippers still on.

“Sheewww!” But Wheatie was safe from giant fish, squid and octopus. How giant were “they”. He’d only seen the tail. He decided not to mention that part to his older brother.

Scared by a giant manta

Every diver wears a scuba mask which puts a glass lens between their eyes and the water. They have to factor in the magnification of the object by the different refractions of water and glass. Wheatie didn’t know exactly how it worked but whenever he speared a fish underwater, when he got it above water, it was only about half the size of what he’d thought.

For example, while in Mexico he had speared a Calico Bass swimming among the kelp that looked to be about 3 feet long underwater, making it one of the biggest fish he’d ever speared. However, when he got it to shore and raised it up into dry air, instead of a 3 foot feast fish it turned out to be an 18” pan fish!

Now that the proper stage has been set, the most pertinent detail involved in the following harrowing encounter with a giant sea creature was not so much the fact of how large the specimen was, but the sequence of events that led up to it.

Considering the speed at which Wheatie swam toward shore in order to create a wake that resembled a PT boat, one has to assume that he was pretty scared. That’s why it’s so hard to believe that just after the encounter with the “barracuda” he even went back in the water. Nevertheless, before Wheatie had even had time to calm down, he let himself get enticed to go back out and try again.

I should mention that Brother One was not in the same league as Wheatie as a fisherman. He might have been athletically superior in the water, as a surfer. However, as a hunter, he lacked technological information about the spear gun. As if that would matter.

What the heck, thought Wheatie, they had two spear guns between themselves. What could go wrong?

After Wheatie took Brother One's offer they headed out again into the spooky tide-filled lagoon. And it wasn't long before Wheatie was cursing the water and chop again, "dad-gummed-silty-water!" He didn't know it at the time, but he had set himself up for another bout with his mind!

Oh well! The two armed snorkelers continued on side by side, their silver spear guns pointing forward as if they were headed into a school of sharks. Further and further out from the sanctuary of solid ground they swam.

Wheatie had thought they were swimming up to where a part of the rock bottom was visible above the sand. Just as they were right over it he noticed that it was not a rocky section of the bottom. Then he realized they were directly on top of a twenty foot long ray!

It was too late! Too bad Wheatie was still spooked about the encounter with the barracuda. Now he was directly over creature 2, which was even larger than creature 1.

Wheatie was literally unable to move, so fearful was he his kicking would alarm the creature. They both just froze and floated away using the available wind and ripples on the lagoon. After about 10 minutes of playing dead, the two spear gunners were able to begin kicking and talking again.

"Do you think we should spear it?" Brother One asked? Wheatie replied, "Would you like to be towed out to sea for 10 miles?"

The two swimmers continued on for a bit, but Wheatie's wits were as frayed as a bad wiring job. He headed in. The shoreline was getting closer. Soon he was walking on the beach. In no time he was seated near the pool drinking another free Red Stripe charged to his room feeling like he actually disserved it.

The "creature" this time was actually a Southern Stingray but Wheatie had recently been reading about unusually large fish such as the Whale Shark and the Giant Manta. For some reason he forgot to remember that they were both plankton eaters and thus posed no threat to humans.

As for the creature being 20 feet long; the fact, is the species Wheatie later positively identified was a brown ray that only grows to a size of 5 feet across. Now is that starting to sound puny? Not when swimming in the water with a mask on it isn't!



Wheatie went on to realize that his experience with the large lagoon monsters had been even more scary than trying to talk to girls at the hotel shuffle-board court. Having survived this

on two occasions; he felt encouraged that his future attempts with the girls might prove more fruitful.

Learning from the older brother

There wasn't always strife between Wheatie and his older "middle" brother, just 90% of the time. Wheatie was a full 3 years below his age resulting in unjust discrimination, such as being ridiculed for watching science cartoons when he was still eleven. But once and awhile he actually received encouragement for joining in things his older brother did.

In Jamaica, this encouragement came in the form of drinking beer in the downstairs bar. However, we should point out that on this occasion, Wheatie learned what NOT to do rather than what to do. That something was drinking too much Red Stripe beer in public, no matter how gracious the Jamaican bartenders were toward their vacationers.

It is a known fact that people can, in certain instances, perform ridiculous acts in order to cover for their own screw-ups. It's also a known fact that when a young person overdrinks, they get sick. The standard modus operandi at this point was typically: attempt to confuse everyone, leave for your room before anyone knew why, and throw up without anyone knowing.

Now on this particular evening Wheatie was not drinking in the bar with his brother as his brother had picked up a more mature "older" friend to hang out with. As a result, it was several hours later when he found them. By then it was obvious that Brother Two's friend had been "over-served." Put in simple/stupid; he was as gonna need a miracle to make it back to his room as the same man he was when he left.

Sure enough, the over-served man staggered to his feet. He shouldn't have. He rotated his body toward the exit of the bar as if to be still able to walk. He'd have had an easier time attempting a tightrope blindfolded.

The tenders at the bar had their fingers crossed. Brother Two was afraid to watch. Wheatie just stared at the over-servee.

All had their highest hopes that he would make it out of the tourist-friendly abode. They were to be sadly disappointed.

The young "man" took a short detour over to a small round table, grabbed it with both hands and ceremoniously up-chucked two six packs of charged-to-the-room Red Stripe.

Wheatie had never seen such a waste of beer! To this day he has not forgotten this example of what NOT to do when drinking Red Stripe, especially at the Hilton!

Jamaican Memories

The proper Jamaican mind memory wouldn't be complete without an acknowledgment of the professionalism and graciousness of the Jamaican people who worked at the hotels Wheatie stayed in. For a surfer dude coming from such an unrestrained lifestyle, as was the general rule there, it was both eye opening and unforgettable.

The hotels would become infamous as time went by giving birth to the dumbing down of America, and with that would come the slobbing down of America. But be of good cheer and don't take this wrong. Our school systems will soon come back to the standards they maintained during the 1950's and we will all breathe a sigh of relief when they do.

People today mostly laugh when they see the old layout marks of a former shuffleboard court in these Jamaican resorts.

Most have been shut down for decades now. But in Wheatie's day the smoothed polished surface and pucks dazzled everyone who had at least one good arm and could still walk.

Outside in the cool night air it was exciting to send those 4" weighted pucks hurtling down the narrow courts with a good push of the cue stick. Certainly it was better than playing the modern Olympic event known as "scrubbing".

Inside you could keep yourself and a couple others entertained playing ping pong. It was fun. It was physical. Or you could go sit in a theatre after dinner to watch a show with singers and dancers. They often would hold raffles and give away bouquets of flowers, wood carvings, jewelry and garments.

Today we can't help but contrast the differences between these activities and those that are going on in hotels today and notice the extent our former human interactions have been replaced with electronic isolation.

To this end this chapter pays a well deserved tribute to the Jamaican people. Their graciousness and expertise served in no small part to make these some of the most enjoyable hotel vacation spots in the World.

It was the "Golden Age of the Colonial Hotel", and Wheatie was there!

Epilog

The memoirs of Wheatie are meant to be a thought-provoking reminder of the great days in which some of the more fortunate people lived, and to produce heartfelt memories of the great people we lived alongside. Everyone who reads this will feel grateful to have been a part of it.

Oh, and by the way, if you're related to Wheatie in any way, you're welcome! Yes, that's because you're thankful 'ole Wheatie didn't leave these treasures behind in a file box full of handwritten notes!

This book has not been written just for kids. In fact, if any kid tries to read it and can read it, bravo for them! Nevertheless, it is not a children's book. There are a lot of big words and there are near-endless metaphors. And they were all conjured up by an aging prophesier who possesses no psychic ability.

I'm guessing that younger fellas will have a harder time reading this, however don't blame Wheatie. The schools have gotten worse, not better, so if you can't get it, blame them. Will Wheatie have to write a dumbed down version of it in the future? We shall see.

And most importantly of all, remember; sarcasm was an affliction that Wheatie possessed from day one. Please consider that such an attitude has had a positive effect on people when dealing with the more mundane things in life. For others, if you can tolerate it, it's a chance to move up on the "tolerance scale".

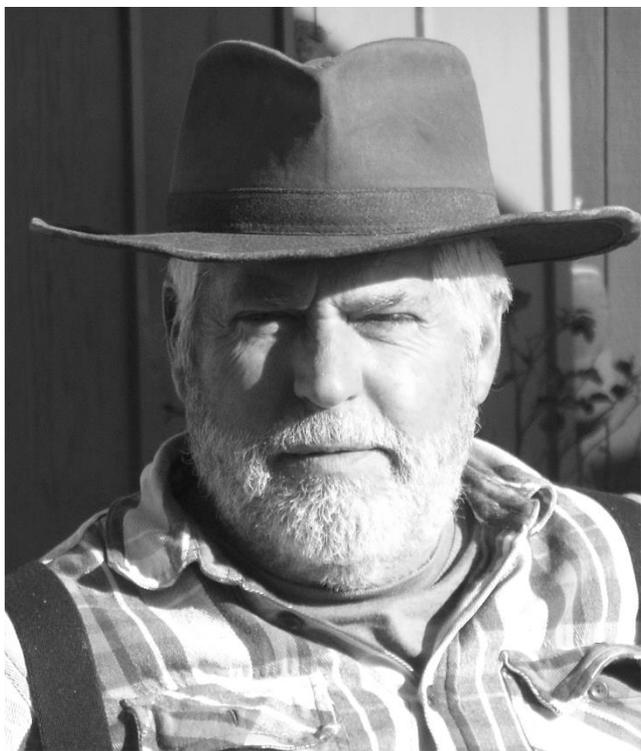
All of the stories have been nuanced to lend some extra humor. None of the stories have been made up. All of the characters referenced existed. Only a few actual names were used.

We have applied the necessary research to insure that all of the facts as stated have been checked for accuracy and that none is misleading or just a figment of Wheatie's imagination.

And so ends the story of Quail and Rattlers; the first book in the Adventures of Wheatie. And although it has strained Wheatie's brain to the max to attempt to remember all of these episodes, it has been a blast reliving them!

Cheers!

Kenneth M. Price, Jr.
Wheatie



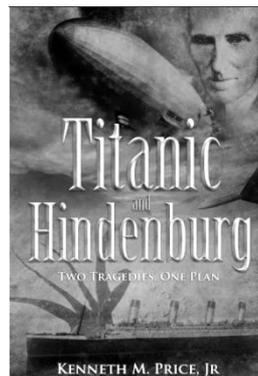
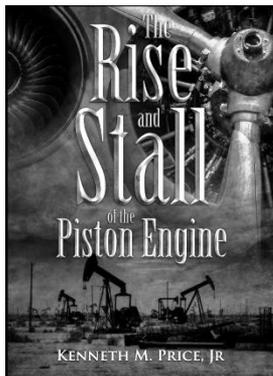
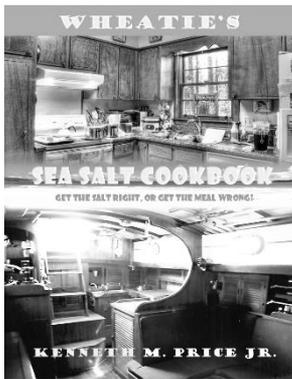
Additional books by Kenneth M. Price, Jr.

Wheatie's Sea Salt Cookbook

Wheatie's Songs of Fiji

The Rise and Stall of the Piston Engine

Titanic and Hindenburg; Two Tragedies, One Plan



For more information:
kennethmpricejr.com

"Wheatie" grew up on the outskirts of a giant private ranch in Southern California. It was 1960 and there was open land, lakes, endless trails and rolling shrub-covered hilltops for endless exploration.

As if living in the countryside wasn't enough, thanks to cheap gas, a plywood camper and a reliable truck, Wheatie also got to explore hundreds of beaches, coves, mountains and valleys in California, Mexico and Canada.

Here is a real-life depiction of hunting, fishing, surfing and camping during Wheatie's upbringing. These recollections confirm that these times were a part of a "Golden Era in California", when the outdoors were so rich, few people stopped to notice.



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