

Charles Hayes

It Ain't Necessarily So (After(1)"You'll Be Sorry")

THE 1ST TOOK 86 ROUNDS OF 82MM MORTARS THAT NIGHT and many wounded, mostly from the administration section which had taken a couple of hits right next to their hooch. Two people were killed in action. One was a captain who had only been in country two weeks. He was standing up outside his hooch and giving directions when a big piece of shrapnel took out a large chunk of his neck, killing him instantly. The other one, which I refused to believe at first, was my friend. He had been riddled from head to toe. When they removed his radio, along with the worthless flak jacket, one of his arms came off. He had almost made it to the bunker line when he got hit. One of the black grunts jumped out of the trench and drug him in. He later told me that my friend never knew what hit him. A couple of weeks after that the grunt received the bronze star with combat V for valor. My friend got a purple heart and an aluminum box. His war was over.



"You're a dingbat," Archie Bunker said. "Everybody knows that colored people don't eat other fruits if there is watermelon available."

The crowded room of TV watchers burst out laughing. I was already uncomfortable. I pulled into myself even more while at the same time trying to act like I also thought it was funny.

Out of the Marines and back from the war for just a couple of days, I had not heard of "All in the Family." Nor had I been exposed to the hippie culture sweeping the country. While grinning like a fake Cheshire cat and trying to swallow the huge lump in my throat, I looked around at the laughing people in the small apartment living room. Even one of my older friends back from Vietnam before me seemed truly amused. Was I stuck somewhere beyond society at large? In most things I felt that way. Even when it came to dating there was some existential element missing. I knew about the Civil Rights Act and how it had begun to change society. My highschool had participated in some of the first Appalachian school segregations. It had gone smoothly and many of the hill people of my area had started to change. In only the year I had been at war could all that have collapsed so deeply? More than a little confused with the shock of coming home from war, I was in a constant state of anxiety. Maybe when I returned to college in a couple of weeks I could concentrate on my studies and find some niche to really return home. It had to be better than the puppet life I felt I was living. Plus, since the Veterans Administration would pay the cost, it was a way for me to go on. I had no real desire to enter the workforce and I didn't even know about unemployment benefits. My ambition reservoir was empty but that did not make me uncomfortable. I was more than ready for the counterculture.

Having walked into the free love environment of the University, I gradually adjusted to this new way of life. There was support where there had been none earlier and since I could no longer be drafted, I felt kind of privileged. It was time for fun but there was always a lot of insecurity. The drinking and drugs managed to mask that most of the time. The same

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might be said for much of the student body. The University more or less provided a bubble for such behavior. I liked the bubble. Rat races other than the ones in Experimental Psychology Labs were not for me. But with time all things must pass and, having acquired a wife by that time, I was looking at graduation. However my wife, Julie, had radically different perspectives when it came to that.

(2) Julie was a New Jersey girl and a fine artist. Her art work and good looks were what initially drew me to her. Half Italian, she had a fiery temperament that pursued life as a course that must be accomplished, come hell or high water. Ambition was its driving force. She wanted to go to Boston and leap for the golden ring after graduation. While I was attracted to most parts of her personality, I wanted no more war of any kind. Whether it be on the lands of others or on the wheel to the golden ring. Discovering my wife's rapacious ambition and hidden agenda for the big city thoroughly surprised me. I was suddenly faced with a war of the spouses or acquiesce. I wanted neither.

While waiting for the cap and gown ceremony, which I would not attend with Julie, I tried to change her mind.

"Haven't we had fun here in the mountains? Clean air, pretty rivers," I said. "Out there we will not be protected like we are here? My grades are good, I know the faculty, and I can go to graduate school."

"No," Julie replies. "I have a friend in Boston, he can put us up until we get our own place and find work. We need more money."

"I know we don't have much money but I still have educational benefits left and I can put in more hours at the bar. The city is crowded and dirty. Here the air is clean and though West Virginia might be a little backward, it is beautiful."

"I hate West Virginia !!"

Surprised not only by her hatred but also by her avarice, I rolled over. Despite my successes at school and getting through an unwinnable tour of duty, I needed Julie perhaps a bit too much. And she needed me to take her where she wanted to go. For me that was enough. I could never rescue enough. I began to load the VW.

Almost next to the Boston Red Sox's Fenway Park and a short walk to Kenmore Square, Peterborough Street, with its affordable apartments, became a quick home for me and Julie. We both found jobs and began to enjoy the nice places of the city like The Commons and the summer concerts that were held there. In that Spring and Summer of 1972 Boston was a welcoming place for young people. Sunny days along the Charles River with its nice bicycle path for bike rides to work in Waltham, enhanced our young years. It began a time of liberalism for me except for the failure of my vote against my old Commander and Chief. However, McGovern did carry the State of Massachusetts but it was the only one. For me that was really hard to believe. How could all those people vote for Nixon? Most of Boston liked McGovern and the peace movement. I was standing at the main transit station in Harvard Square when John Wayne came through there riding a tank in support of the war. The people, though surely curious, didn't appreciate it. Neither did I. I only saw the killing.

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At home, as summer turned to fall, life with Julie was becoming strained. My resistance to the status quo and getting ahead while you can made me an alien to Julie. With bigoted and superstitious opinions she would target me for my lack of ambition. And equate that with my worth. In my defense, I tried to give it back but I didn't have the talent nor the stamina for it. After so long a time and with absolutely no thought to it, almost like Pavlov's dog that would salivate when presented with a certain object, I would lash out. And suddenly, I would be wrong...a loser.

I left.

The third floor apartment over the bar where I was again employed had burned out. The windows were gone and the snow blew through the charred interior almost covering the blankets that covered me and my mattress. Pat, my upper floor neighbor popped out of an adjoining doorway and invited me over for a little pot gathering. I crawled out from my nest and followed him over to his place. It was just him, Amy, his girlfriend, and me. They had a repaired room, electricity and a little space heater to go with their mattress and blankets. To me it seemed like a big step up. It was warm. For a little while we smoked and talked and the abject poverty that we all shared was irrelevant.

As I returned to my nest so Pat and Amy could get naked I knew my life could be worse. There could be no neighbors. Or neighbors who were Julie's Bostonian friends that had me pegged for a hillbilly miscreant.

I had not gotten through even a semester of graduate school before withdrawing. My life was just serving up tons of beer and cooking short orders during the afternoon and evenings. Of course the rent was free which provided cheap labor for the bar. Noone complained. It was just sort of a hand to mouth existence where I and the others lived day to day.

Jobs came easy for me. By spring I had a better place to live and was delivering flowers for a local florist. I never completely cut my ties to the bar. By helping repair one of the burned out apartments I was able to make a cheap home of it.

The bar was the center of my life. It was where my social skills and philosophical leanings were most relevant. I only worked to eat. I admired Thoreau and, like him, I didn't let my life become my work. It was to be my sport. I had always taken that seriously and had even paid homage to the remains of his cabin at Walden Pond. Maybe Julie had known this all along and had only used me for in-state tuition. But I had loved her. Maybe I still did.

One day when I returned from a long flower run and entered the shop the manager stopped me with an uncharacteristic smile while at the same time seeming to appraise me and my impending reaction.

"There was a pretty girl with a black and white beagle in here looking for you," she said.

My heart seemed to drop to my stomach. I only knew one person like that.

"Was she dark haired and kinda short?"

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“Uh huh, I told her you were on a run. She just thanked me and left.”

I didn't know how but somehow Julie had found me. I must find her?

I couldn't. Waiting at the bar, for I knew that that was where she might look, I drank too much and started a fight. In short, I made a bad mistake and got my ass kicked good. I stumbled home and looked in the mirror at my swollen face and black eyes. That's when Julie walked in.

It was just a matter of minutes before we were in bed. Passions were high, particularly with Julie and her passionate crescendos. Like several other times during such situations she burst out with words that completely surprised me.

“Oh my God! Your face!! You really are a redneck, aren't you!?”

I knew she didn't expect an answer, that she was just emoting, but I never forgot it. Her Bostonian elites had thoroughly indoctrinated her about me. However, I knew that her words were about as far from the truth as one could get. Still I loved her. That had to somehow be more powerful than the influence of the ignorant natives she had fallen in with. In love's afterglow the happiness of being together ruled all including Julie's ambition and my lack of anger control. We decided that in two weeks I would return to Boston. That was it. Life was like today's Nike check mark. I would do it. Promptly, she was gone, back to Boston.

My job enticed me to stay but it was useless. In a week I tied some things to the sissy bar of my motorcycle and took the back roads north toward Boston.

I spent a couple of days camping and while going through the New York Catskills I stopped to have a look at Rip Van Winkle Mountain. When I stopped for gas I listened for the sounds of a bowling alley. Hearing none, I asked a gas station worker if I was in the right place. He assured me that I was and said that Rip had already awoken and was wandering about. His friendly chatter and jovial words welcomed me back to the North. It felt good.

I got to Boston a little early and found Julie living with an older woman and her brother in a large house just off Commonwealth Avenue. It was a little further out and more refined than the Peterborough/Fenway section of the city. Julie was a little standoffish and subdued about my arriving early. That warning sign was not lost on me but I was committed and doing my best. It was many bridges and a long way back to the South. I tried to be nice to everybody but I could tell that the older woman was one of the new generation of man haters. She pushed constantly for a match in tennis which I had not really played since long before the war. When finally she beat me she puffed around like she was some sort of Billie Jean King. I absolutely didn't care about the match. Actually, I was glad that I had lost. I had known that my visit there would get worse otherwise.

Right away I got another job at the research center where I had previously worked. However this time they hired me in my field.

The Behavioral Sciences Unit of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver Research Center For Mental Retardation was located on the grounds of the Fernald State School for the Mentally Retarded in Waltham, Massachusetts. It was a

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nice place to work and some of the people I worked with were renowned in the new and expanding philosophies of mental health. It was a really good break. There had been no interview, introduction, or anything else. They knew me and simply hired me on the spot. I stepped into some of the most forward mental health research in the nation. There were no hillbilly miscreants located there. The idea of having one would have been laughable. My slight lilt and clipped words were only what they were..... an accent. The pay was decent and it allowed me to approach Julie about starting over with our own place. I figured that the people we lived with wanted me gone but wanted Julie to stay. When everybody found out about my quick new job dark smirks disappeared and the private chumminess with Julie increased. I was not paranoid about what was going on. I wanted my wife back and I knew that paranoids also have real enemies. Quickly I got a large bottle of "the people's" wine to celebrate my job and took Julie outside on a nice day for the occasion. She had to leave some sort of private conversation with the older woman to accompany me outside and seemed not that happy with my employment luck. Just surprised, almost to the point of being shocked. She quickly put on a judgemental, somewhat removed demeanor when I spoke of getting back together. I had come back to Boston to be with her. Surely this was what had been intended.

"Julie, we can get our own place and be together again. You don't have to worry about any of the bills. I will take care of everything." I said. "Just please don't fight me so hard about how I do things."

Already negatively fired up, Julie almost screamed, "What?! I am not your slave!!! There are too many things you just can not do properly!! Your attitude is all wrong and it brings me down!! Your sign is water and mine is fire. Your water always puts out my fire!! You're not right for me! You're not right for anybody!! You always mess everything up!! You..you're....not good.....!!!"

I had to interrupt, "That's crazy! You're not being fair about this! What do you want from me? What do you want me to do?..... Hit you?"

"Yes!!!!"

I shook my head and stared at the grass beneath our feet. It was over.

The next day the older woman said that she was acquainted with someone in Newton who needed a housemate. She indicated that, to her, he was a little strange. Coming from her, that meant nothing to me. I left immediately.

The house was big and my housemate was strange to Julie's housemate because he was a smart, divorced M.I.T. graduate pioneering the evolution of the computer age. He mostly traveled on business and was gone a lot. We got along well and never had a cross word between us. The neighborhood was a secluded, quite Jewish area with easy access to work and the other parts of the Boston area. I liked it there. It was a good place to come home to, sit at the kitchen table, look out the window that overlooked a nice quiet park, and drink cocktails or straight up and chasers until bedtime. For a couple of years I did little else. Julie stopped by a couple of times early on. One time to be serviced and one time for moral support after a lost love. For the lost love visit we went to the sea. I fished and she

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sun bathed. It was mostly a quiet time but when we talked I gave her moral support because she was hurt. However I kept it out of the erotic realm. I didn't want to be used as a pick me up again. That was the last time I saw her. Except for motorcycle rides to the Berkshire Mountains most of my recreation came from the work place during breaks and after work with the people that worked there. That was until I met the sister of one of my co-workers at an after work softball game. Her name was Mandy Black.

(3)Mandy Black was a 20 year old art student and I was kind of like an Appalachian artifact to her. One that she was interested in. She plainly made this known in a way that captured my heart right off. She was intelligent, talented, and beautiful. After two years of a boring, loveless life I was prime for her arrival. I suppose I owe her a lot. She was between homes, as well as loves, and moved-in with me immediately. She taught me how to love again. For a young woman just out of her teens it was fascinating to experience her expertise at doing this. She was a native Bostonian and all of New England was her turf. She enjoyed giving me a close-up view of New England and I learned a lot about the people and their own brand of resourcefulness. From camping in the Green Mountains of Vermont to sailing the waters off the coast of Portland Maine we moved as an intimate pair. No doubt I was in love with her but artifacts lack the ability to appropriately bond with most people. And a Vietnam Veteran artifact is at an even greater deficit. Seems I failed to wholly grasp her youth by putting her on a pedestal built for someone older. In the end I squeezed too hard and she was gone.

My developing bond with New England was shattered and my work no longer seemed as it had been. Try as hard as I might, I could only limp by. No doubt, I was broken. I simply put in my time, drank even more, and slogged through a depression that had me again looking to far pastures for any kind of resolution.

An old college friend referred me to a vacant job position at a hospital for miners where he worked. It was in my old hometown and right in the loveless middle of coal country. Wounded, weary, and alone again, I flew down, interviewed, and signed up. I had a few weeks to get back to Boston and wrap things up. One of the last things I did before leaving was to call Julie and more or less let her know that I still couldn't hold a love. The funny thing about that last time I ever spoke with her was that for the first time ever she sounded like a stranger. All the fire was absent. I guess she was fully assimilated. Not me. I was backslidden and again ready for Appalachia. I ended the conversation angrily. Pity.

Ironically, since I was such a mess, this job of doing research and reporting for the alcoholism and drug abuse unit of the hospital was a professional fully funded position. The work was quite broad in that I also spent hours in the E.R. with crisis patients and their doctors. The environment was completely different from up north. Being in the middle of coal country where hard drinking had a certain history, some of the staff, including me, were as hard drinking as our clients. Many times I felt that I was an imposter or an actor on the TV show, Dr. Kildare. That feeling developed a cutting edge with me. I resented it when the director told me to stop wearing my farm boots, an old worn pair from the Corps, and use shoes instead. The boots had been my only declaration that I was not

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really a part of Dr. Kildare. However, I obliged and that snag was quickly forgotten.--- "Action!"

I suppose that most of my idiosyncrasies were forgiven, in part, because I anchored the softball team, made most of the parties, and held my liquor as good as any miner.... or those that treated them. The main difference for me was that I had experienced and worked in another medical culture in New England. But that was hardly visible other than on my resume. Having come from West Virginia, I fit in effortlessly.

In a couple of years, however, my demons of the coal fields began to get the better of me. One of the things about my work that appealed to me was that with research, better ways of treatment might be found. And I just happened to presently head the office that could do that. Normally I was supposed to assist someone but that position had been empty almost since I arrived. So I stopped waiting and pulled out the records. I gathered all the data we had on a certain behavior and how that responded to outpatient treatment. Controlling the best I could for different variables, I found a behavior that seemed to respond better. Whether it was significant or not I didn't know. Only that it correlated. I knew correlation was not causation but at least some data had been worked. Research had actually happened. Not just reported data. I had not been doing much of anything. Plus, the counselors that had to file the outpatient reports had been complaining about the paperwork. I thought that it was at least something to show for their efforts. The head psychiatrist of the whole four county area, a young import from the Caribbean, thought so too. He had me present it at a combined meeting of the programs.

The counselors completely disrespected it, sloughed it off, and labeled the whole thing too unrealistic for those that did the real work. I didn't mind that much but it increased my suspicion that we were just a bunch of people milking federal monies and fluffing around in our importance. The scene reminded me of the older woman at Julie's house in Boston. Her, the Billie Jean King of tennis. I just went back to marking time and looking to the hills and streams of my country crib for relevance. That was ok until the person I was supposed to assist got hired and became my boss.

I didn't like him. I had trouble with authority to start with. But not always. The captain of our sloop off the coast of Maine, though he probably thought of me as a hillbilly, I liked. He was gruff and no bull shit. This new guy over my office struck me as more plastic than most. A bull-shiter. Many of us drank too much but we were clean when we worked. My new middle aged boss arrived one day smelling of alcohol and intimated to me how the drive-in girl at the local Wendys had asked him to wait for her after closing. He commented on her youth and enthusiasm while smilingly telling me he was a bit tired that morning.

I stayed away from him and since he did nothing but talk about what he had done he didn't need me. I was able to do my reports and slid. However, my attitude was becoming known which wasn't all that bad as long as the behavior didn't match. But I knew that my work didn't cut it in the medical field at large. That I did little to hide and knowing I was on the way out my behavior began to match. I broke rules. First there were reprimands. I survived.

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One day my boss, the supposed research specialist, entered my office and told me to review a stack of questionnaires that he had come with when he was hired the year before. He had been talking about them ever since. I knew that he just wanted to use me to validate his time there. That there was no real purpose for the review. I also knew it was time for me to go. Like Julie had said to me, except I didn't raise my voice or get carried away, I told him that I was not his slave, to review them himself.

I was fired.

For the most part that was the end of my time in the field that the government had educated me for. I shrugged it off and got a blue collar job in a machine shop that built and repaired mine pumps. I operated technical machines that I had learned while making prototype hardware for research at Eunice Kennedy Shriver. There were no boss problems. I did my work well. The switch to blue collar was easy. And fluffing did not exist.

After more than a couple of years, it was not a boss problem. It was a self-respect/union/management problem. And I was longer in the tooth with more appreciation for actualization experiences.

It was a union workshop but I was hired outside the union. Since I was a non union worker I was able to do other non union work when my main more skilled work was completed. Union workers couldn't. Being good and fast, my work load climbed. But even so, I maintained a speed that increased production while at the same time saved the customer money. So much so that I was, with permission, able to clock out and go to the nearby fields and streams for recreation. Thoreau's "Let not thy life be thy work but thy sport" was important to me. Everyone seemed ok with this even though it was an unusual practice. Sport paid nothing, consequently it cost management nothing. However, its value had to come from places that were not common. There, in part, was some of its value to me. The path of the loner I suppose. The problem came when a union worker quit. A lot of my finished work preceded directly to his radial drill press and I guess management saw a way to increase profits and stiff the union. Instead of hiring another worker to replace the union guy they just gave it to me and hired another non union worker for some of the "outside" work. Immediately the time for the work on that machine dove and I still was able to use the nearby fields and streams. However, they couldn't keep anybody for the "outside" work so one day the manager stopped by my area.

"Charlie." he said. "I got a large unbalanced impeller. How about you grind it down and get it balanced?"

I knew the piece was taking too long on the huge computer operated lathe but it wasn't like I didn't have skilled work processing. There was more to it than that as well. I also knew that the machine where the work was being processed was specifically designed for that kind of work to protect workers from the health hazards of doing it the old way. I resisted and my body language made it clear that I was unwilling.

"Is there something wrong with the lathe?" I said.

The boss just shook his head and said, "I can't tie that machine up for the time needed to do it. Is there a reason you don't want to do it."

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For two years on and off I had done it. Enough that the heavy red metal mist that had coated any mask and all my exposed skin had brought me to feel like those kinds of dues were amply paid already.

"I don't want to breathe that stuff," I said.

"I can give you a respirator."

I slowly shook my head.

Sadly it seemed, the boss also slowly shook his head and studied the floor for a moment.

"Then you can walk," he said.

I packed the few tools I had--I always borrowed the company's-- and dropped out.



Living in one of the most isolated places thereabouts that I could find and afford, I did without. I had my shack with no running water but a good spring from a shale cliff next to the shack, wood heat, and electricity. A couple of guns and a family of hunting dogs allowed me to keep my fields and streams but the harvest there was meager at best. Yet, for me, I didn't roll over. For 12 years I learned about the people I had often been accused of being a part of. In fact, on its face, I became one of them. But always, the gut stuff, the existential qualities of getting on with a "damned if I do" philosophy and a taste of nihilism, remained. I achieved little but learned much and every blue moon or so I managed to actualize with good and interesting people.

I starved, I froze, broke bones, and had no medical care. It was almost always just me. Though (5)married once with step kids, it took only a few months to drive them away. Amazingly, as a result of some of the aforementioned interactions, I got "brought out" and acted some. Even got a few moments on the big screen. But I guess it was much like Thoreau's beat. It was hard and you had to pound the hell out of it for a few pleasures. But I did it and it was mine. Though I didn't know it then, 12 years in the woods of Powleys Creek solidified my brand. I survived but it was time. Merle Haggard's Mama's Hungry Eyes probably says it best: "Just a little loss of courage as their age began to show. And more sadness in my mama's hungry eyes."

(4)I left Appalachia. I was 44.

All that was ages ago and the regrets are many. Some say that if you have no regrets you didn't try hard enough. I tried little that wasn't hard enough. Maybe I also just plain tried little. That's ok. I think perhaps that allowed me to avoid a myriad of meat grinders and at least be able to accept, even appreciate, where I am today though I be rather worn. It was my way but I could have been a better person. Some things just are. And with those many other things and their common beliefs, I think, "it ain't necessarily so."

Author's Note: I limited and pushed this writing. Because of that I fear that some might consider parts of it shallow. In hopes of quelling that potential criticism I have provided foot notes that will hopefully lead to a more in-depth reading of that particular part.

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