

DUTCH

By Richard Tornello

The ranger tower was there on top of the hill overlooking the wooded valley to the shoreline 30 or so miles distant and 7 miles south of New Brunswick, New Jersey. Fire roads ran through the wooded and briared acres to the Pine Barrens. They were called highways, they were paved, but that's what they amounted to, fire roads. This tower survived the initial influx of starter families fleeing the city. These post warriors, looking for the dream they had been promised, their liberated wives now back in the shackles of propagandized benefits of motherhood and restraint, bred like sows on a farm.

And as the flood of immigrants from the city swelled and eventually crested some 20 years later, the wooded area withdrew under the blade of the bulldozer-tank, minus its gun turrets, the requirement for the tower eventually vanished.

They were different, tall, Albino white not afraid of the sun, and elegant in stride. The locals, those that were there before the urban fright influx, all stood aside, as these folk, these ancient families there long before the locals, would stride by, defiant, laws unto themselves. The police would wait out a gun fight, wait it out until the ammunition ran out and one to the other would holler, "Next time, I'll get you next time." I never remember, hearing that anyone was ever wounded or killed in those incidents.

Police would then emerge from the cover of steel and rubber only to chastise and warn "that times were changing and you and your families will have to be more careful of how you behave HERE. Now go home and you all can go kill yourselves back there."

I know. I was there, pushed down behind a police vehicle and told to wait it out. "You can get the milk and bread your mother needs then. Wait until they run out of ammo. They're Dutch." The police took no sides in those matters. That was my first encounter.

New Brunswick was a normal small city with a doctors and lawyers row on Livingston Avenue. It even held a small airport up toward the end of the avenue. Small and national businesses parked themselves on George Street. New Brunswick held four theaters, and one of those theaters was euphemistically called an "Art House". The city was owned by a few more stakeholders then.

The ghetto was located in the lower elevations closer to the Raritan River just below the bridge that led to Highland Park. Effluent flows down hill I was told. The drunks would be sitting on the stoops watching the traffic; the occasional fight would erupt and settle down just as quickly, no one was able to stand very straight and for any extended period of time. It was the only place to hitch a ride back home from the movies where a car could or would stop, but make

it quickly. The driver would always be wary, and the same question asked, "Kid, what are you doing out of school?"

I always had an answer. Usually I just told them, "Skipping school."

Today, New Brunswick, New Jersey is owned by two pillars of polite corporate society. Rutgers University and J&J. The J&J headquarters are planted across the street from the main campus gate. Anyone or any other entity, other than the Hospital is a vassal to these ruling elite.

The ghetto was bulldozed, low income housing raised and the poor were relocated to where, is anyone's guess. The slower safe pull-off areas have been eliminated and replaced by intertwined ribbons of concrete supported by steel trusses.

Schools are monitored with closed circuit TV and student ID cards. Hitchhiking, always prohibited, is now enforced. Skipping school is all but eliminated.

The location of the gun fight that I mentioned earlier, took place near a wooded section in the vicinity of a local small strip mall, which held a sweet shop, a pharmacy, a dry cleaner and a laundry mat. The laundry mat and associated building was owned by a local builder a very big, burly guy. Hank was his name. It was a cash business he told me. As a kid the adults told me lots. The dry cleaner was held by a very nice person, Mel, who eventually, like the mad hatter, was affected by the chemicals he used in the dry cleaning process. The sweet shop went through a number of owners. I don't remember their names. Each one made it a successful enterprise. It's hard to argue with a good paying cash business.

The pharmacy was owned by two brothers, I'll call K, both of whom had been pilots in the war. They went through a large number of packs of cigarettes a day. They would take a drag or two, place the cigarette in the ash tray, go about whatever business it was they had to attend to, arrive back at the location where there had once been a cigarette, which was now a stub, and lighting up a fresh one, repeat this dance. Their finger tips and nails were stained brown from the tobacco smoke. One brother smoked filtered Marlboros the other brother smoked unfiltered Camels.

They were the local drug store, toy store, gift shop, card store and it would be my future place of employment, for a while anyway.

I began working at that pharmacy as did; I couldn't say how many, but, over the years, a good number of the local boys. We stocked shelves, dusted, cleaned, assisted customer purchases, learned how to wrap because they had a small gift shop as part of their full service and last but not least and the most important to us, we were the delivery service. Driving was the only time I would wear glasses, sanity coming before vanity. I didn't have to. I passed the eye exam even though I couldn't read the first single letter. "Hey goombah. You can see. You pass." Yep, that was New Jersey.

The delivery service got us out of the store. We could charge around the subdivisions and what would take a normal person ten minutes could take us a half hour. We stopped and talked to friends on the street, went home to get a bite to eat, or just moseyed along. The vehicle was a piece of work. It was an International Harvester, rear wheel drive, double straddled gas tanked, four speed death trap. It had no traction. It slid and hopped on anything but glass smooth pavement. And we, all the drivers, and I mean every one of us, felt it was our sworn duty and obligation to destroy it. I was the one who snapped the shift lever. I got fired for that and for taking too many condoms.

Just a short note on condom sales back then. They were never ever displayed. They resided in a drawer just under the cash register. Trojans were the brand. Red were not lubricated, blue came with lube, and lambskin for those who could afford them and understood the quality difference, had it all. The only trouble with the lambskin is that they came in a little sealed plastic container that took an incredible amount of strength to twist off. Or, in my case, I would give the cap a karate chop, with the container braced on my knee. It wasn't a classy way to open it but that would break the seal.

A customer would come in and if a female cashier was at the register he would walk around and look at things here and there until he caught the pharmacist's attention. There upon the pharmacist or older male cashier would get the female employee to undertake a task. She understood the protocol. The patron would then whisper his desires to the cashier. A small white bag, close to the drawer that held the prize would be extracted, the drawer opened, the item placed in the bag, the bag folded, and like a secret handshake, the bag would be placed into the customer's hand, accompanied with a nod from the pharmacist, if he were the person handling the order. Senior male cashiers did not have the right to make any comments, secret nods or hand shakes for such an adult activity. And that's how those transactions took place.

As I mentioned we delivered prescriptions and all sorts of items to our customers. We got to know who was getting placebos, who was pregnant, who had what disease and all matters of personal data. Those things of personal information, we were instructed, were to be kept to ourselves. And we did except to talk about it among the drivers. We all knew who, what, and where.

Back to the albino pigmented, white haired individuals. They lived in a back section not too far from our subdivision. Hidden for years in the wooded back until the encroachments by the city fleeing, the infested swarmed in. Unlike the animals, the originals fought back, initially beating up outsiders, and the new arrivals. But that didn't last. The police had to change their tactics. Where previous activities like that were given a blind eye, they now became prosecutable.

Like the animals, surrendering up their territory, the machines of state were too great; so too did these people surrender, either by moving away, or withdrawing ever so much into their own little wooded world. WE all stayed away from that area. No one ever wanted to deliver there. It was claimed they were Dutch. I had my doubts confirmed one November evening.

We were delivering prescriptions to anyone anywhere in the local area, free, a service all but unknown today. It was common place yesterday. I was on driver duty and was told that I had a delivery back there. "THEY have a little sick one," I was told. "And Richard, with them, Please BE NOT SO BOLD!" That was a scold.

I had had a run in with a two of them five years earlier when playing in the wooded expanses mentioned earlier. I drifted too close to the low lying areas and stumbled across a number of them.

I stopped.

They stopped doing whatever it was they were doing.

I looked; it was dark because of the tree cover. I was really half blind, 20/400 vision, because I refused to wear glasses then, so I really couldn't make out anything too clearly. Having sex, or about to, or making out is what they appeared to be doing or about to do. I was threatened with death. A gun is a gun. I ran like all the devils of hell were behind me. No shots were fired. I never said anything. You didn't squeal. My second encounter.

On this rarely traveled, rarely requested location, I went about my task. Pond ice was beginning to skin as planet revolved away from the winter's evening sun, and was now reflecting the dark. The address on the mailbox on the street stood before a deep and thick tree lined fortress surrounding the home which was set a good distance back. On the walk to the house, I had an escort of tall evergreens leading to the door. I left the notorious International Harvester on the street, running. No one stole, not there and especially not that vehicle. As I was strolling under the umbrella of trees, suddenly, from behind me, a bear of an animal came charging. From out of nowhere, it was hell and death on four legs. There was no escape. The closest trees held no low hanging limbs and the truck was not only too distant, that devil animal blocked my route to safety.

Then she steps out of the house, just a bit in front of me, and to my side, commands a freeze. I did not thaw. A hand weapon is raised, a snap, three times, a smell of electric burning ozone past my head. It's not a thing I've since known. I am a competition shooter.

I remember as if I were there today. She looks at me, smiles, it's warm but slight. And as she brushes her long white hair away from her face, she gives me a, "Thank you son. She's very sick. Are you okay?"

A nod, I affirmed I was. No more needed to be said. I never have.

They've been there for centuries. Dutch it's said.

The End