

## Chapter 1: Grandpa's House

Chris and Bobby were getting bored riding in the back seat for the last hour with mom and dad as they began their long trip across country from San Diego to Hampton, Virginia.

At the start of the trip Chris asked, "How far is it to Virginia dad?"

"Around three-thousand miles."

Chris looked at Bobby as his mouth dropped open, "how long will it take?"

"Three days," dad said looking at him in the rearview mirror.

"Three *days*?" Bobby whined.

"Yep," mom said, "and to save money and time, we're not stopping to stay in hotels. Your dad and I will take turns driving all day and all night."

Chris and Bobby looked at each other to see their reaction. But they knew they didn't have any choice in the matter. They both settled back in their seats and stared out their windows as they drove through the mountains then slowly wound their way down into the Arizona desert.

"Get your feet off me," Bobby fussed, "mom!"

Mom turned around and glared at Chris, so he removed his feet.

"Stay on your own side!" Bobby warned.

"There's not enough room back here to stretch out," Chris complained.

"Boys," dad warned, "this is gonna be a long drive, so try to get along."

Eventually the boys fell asleep and all was quiet in the car until they reached the desert in New Mexico.

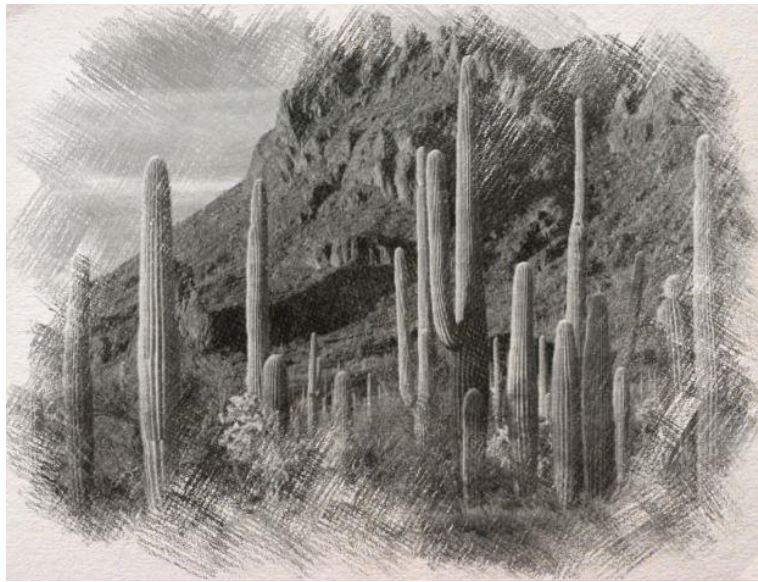
Bobby woke up and looked out the window, "Are we there yet?"

"No," mom said for the umpteenth time, "are you hungry?"

Bobby nodded his head and mom handed him a snack, "We're still in the desert?"

"Yep," dad said, "we will be in the desert until tomorrow afternoon."

Bobby looked out the window at the desert with nothing but cactus and hills for as far as he could see.



"We're in New Mexico," mom said, and Chris woke up.

"New Mexico?" Chris asked as he peered out the window.

Dad announced, "we're gonna stop ahead for a short rest. Won't be another rest stop for about an hour."

"Oh look!" mom said pointing to the billboard, "a Bob's Big Boy! Let's stop there Bob!"

“Sounds good to me!”



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“That was the best burger I’ve had in a long time,” Bob remarked as everyone piled back into the car.

“Yeah,” Lorene agreed while sipping on what was left of her strawberry milkshake, “the way food should taste!”

Back on the road, Chris and Bobby stared out their windows again as they cruised along with nothing but desert for miles and miles.

Their grandpa died a few months back and they flew on a plane to go to the funeral. Now their mom and dad said they must go back and help the family clean out the house and get it ready to sell since no one in the family wanted to buy it.

The boys didn’t remember their grandpa that well because they moved from Virginia Beach to San Diego when Chris was eight and Bobby was five; but they came back for short visits over the years. Their dad, Bob, grew up in San Diego, and their mom, Lorene, grew up in Hampton.



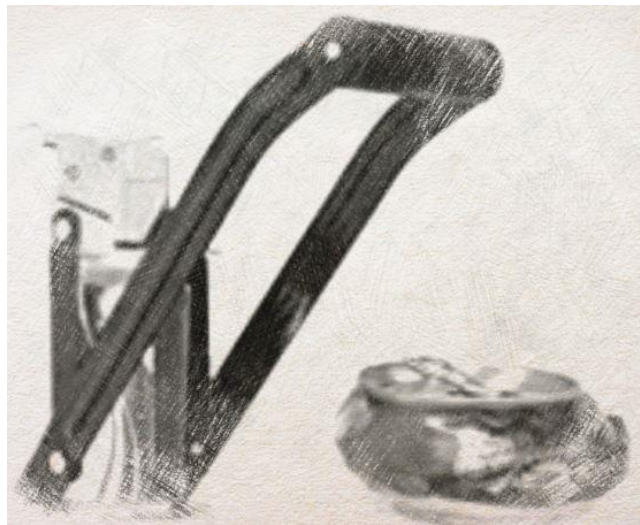
It's 1984, Chris is eleven, blonde, and loved to surf and skate (skateboarding that is). Bobby, also blonde, is eight and likes to surf and skate too, but skating is his favorite.



As they cruised along getting closer to Hampton, Chris remembered things about his grandpa and grandma. He recalled that although grandpa was quiet most of the time, when he said something everyone listened, and jumped, or at least they'd better jump, when he asked for something. During family visits, the men hung out in the garage, watched sports, played darts, or just talked. Grandma called it grandpa's hangout. The women gathered in the kitchen and played cards, watched TV, ate snacks, or would sit and talk about everyone and everything.

Chris remembered with fondness that his grandpa had everything you could think of in that garage: a fridge always full of beer and Cokes, a bathroom that only the guys used because it was not that clean, fishing gear, and lots of cool tools. Chris especially liked smashing things in the vice press on the workbench. Grandpa even had cable TV in the garage.

Chris remembered one instance back when the guys were drinking beer while watching football in the garage. He was drinking a Coke and grandpa said, “Chris,” pointing to the trash can full of empty cans, “get me a couple cans.” Chris handed them to him and one by one, grandpa put them in this thing on the wall he had made, pushed down hard on the can with this long handle, then wham! The can was flat as a pancake. Chris enjoyed smashing those cans. During these gatherings with the guys, his job was waiting for them to finish their beers so he could smash the empty cans.

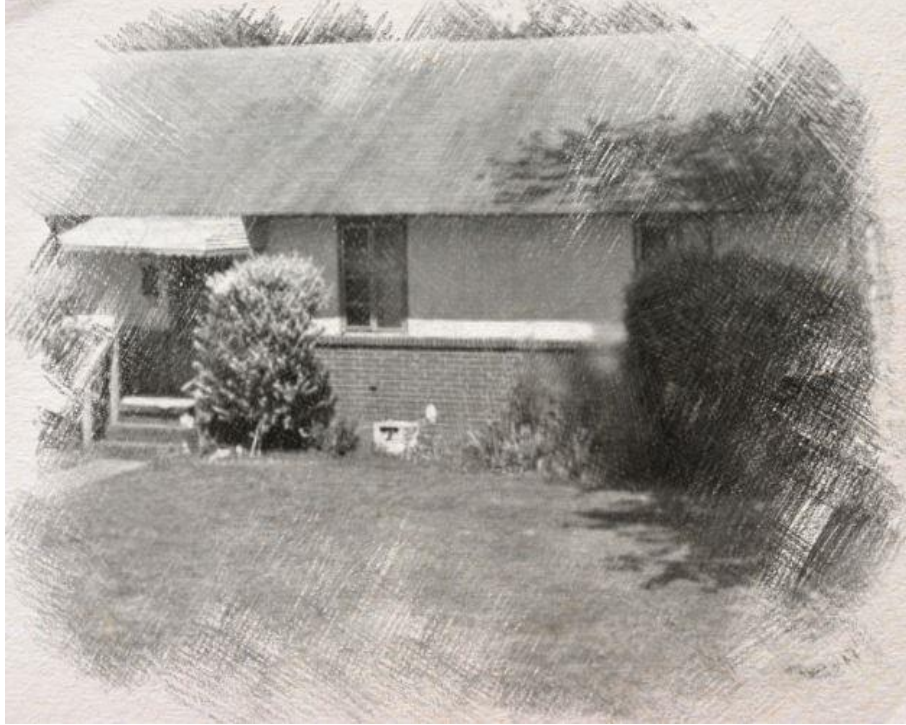


At last they were getting off the freeway in Hampton. Bobby woke up, “Are we there yet?” Mom turned around and smiled, “Yes, a few more minutes.”

Chris looked at the street sign as they turned onto the road, “I remember this street, Patrician Drive. This is where you grew up right mom?”

“That’s right,” and they pulled up in front of the house.





“We’re here,” dad said as he hopped out of the car, “we’ll come back later and get our stuff.” They walked up the long sidewalk towards the front door. As they walked up the steps, they could hear others in the house talking and laughing.

When they walked in, mom noticed a long table full of food, “Chris and Bobby, grab a plate and help yourself.”

They were instantly surrounded by people exchanging hugs and kisses. Mom looked back at Chris when he walked away and said, “Don’t get under foot or get into trouble,” she pointed at Bobby as he ran off to get food, “and watch your brother,” giving him that usual firm look so he knew she meant it.

Their grandma had died just five months before and lots of those same people were there --- friends, family, some they knew, some they didn’t. Chris remembered that grandma’s funeral was very sad because lots of people were upset and crying. He cried too when no one was looking. He missed her. She was always nice to him. He was sad that grandpa was gone,

wishing he'd known him better. There were lots of stories being told about grandpa and grandma; some funny, some sad, some just nice to remember.

"Hey Chris and Bobby!" Aunt Carla and Uncle Kenny came up from behind and gave them a big hug. "Where's your mom and dad?"



Chris hugged his Uncle Kenny and his little cousins Kelly and Curtis, "they're in the kitchen."



"Hey Chris," his cousin Danny said as he gave him a hug. Danny was a little older than him.



"Where's Brad?" Chris asked.

"He's at baseball practice," Aunt B.J. said as she came through the living room to get her purse and diaper bag while holding little Ricky, "I'm gonna pick him up in a little while," she said, and they walked back into the kitchen.



Chris could hear that everyone was having a good time in the kitchen.

"How was the drive out here?" Kenny asked.

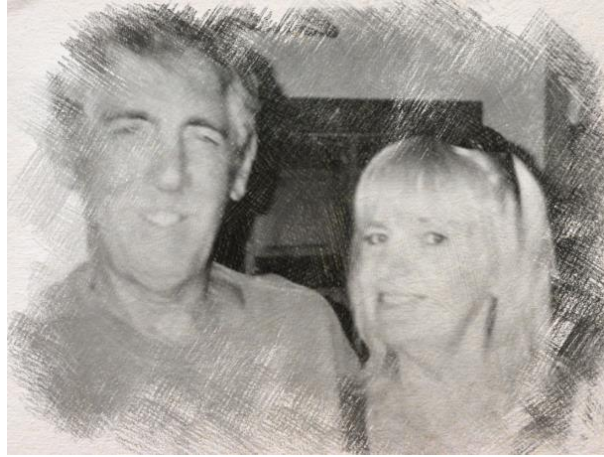
"We drove straight through," Lorene said, "Bob and I took turns driving so we could get here quicker and save money on hotels."

"How did the kids handle *that*?" Carla asked.



“They weren’t too crazy about it,” Bob said, “but they survived.” Everyone laughed.

“Y’all must be so tired,” Lynn chimed in as she and Larry hugged them.



“Yeah,” Lorene said, “but we’ll be OK, I’m just glad we got here in one piece.”

“Yeah,” Bob said jokingly, “I didn’t get much sleep last night with her driving.”

Lorene came back with, “You seemed to be sleeping just fine to me with all that snoring!” Everyone laughed.

There was a knock on the back door, it opened, “Anyone here?”

It was a few of the neighbors Lorene grew up with, “hey Lorene!” Davey said as he pushed his way over to her to give her a big hug.



Georgie and Marilyn were right behind him, who lived next door. They all hugged each other.



"Davey?" Lorene said with surprise, "what are you doing here?"

"I moved back from Georgia a few months ago," he said, "so sorry about your mama and daddy," he shook hands with Larry and Gary.



"Thanks, so where are you living now?"

"Mom and dad's old house across the street. We bought it from my brother Stevie."

"Ya don't say," Gary said, "how about that."

Larry asked, "Got any kids Davey?"

"Yeah, Maggie and I have two boys, Davey is almost twelve, and Billy is seven, she would have come over, but she's making dinner. We have company coming over soon, so I can't stay long."

"Wow, they're about the same age as our boys, Chris and Bobby," Lorene said.

"*Davey*? He's also called Davey?"

"Yeah, but most folks now call me Dave."

"And they now call me George," Georgie emphasized to Lorene.

"Oh Georgie," Lorene said, "Not sure if I can get used to calling you George after all these years."

"That's OK," Georgie said and laughed, "I kind of enjoy hearing it once in a while."

“Where are your boys? Marilyn and I have a boy about Bobby’s age, George Junior, but we call him Junior.”

“He’s at piano lessons right now,” Marilyn explained, “but I gotta go pick him up soon.”

“Oh, they’re around here somewhere,” Lorene said looking around, “Danny,” who was sitting at the table with them, “go see if you can find Chris and Bobby.”

“So good to see you,” Lorene said, “hey everyone, Davey was one of my best friends growing up here along with Georgie and Marty,” she said, “Davey lived across the street and Marty lived next door to Georgie.”

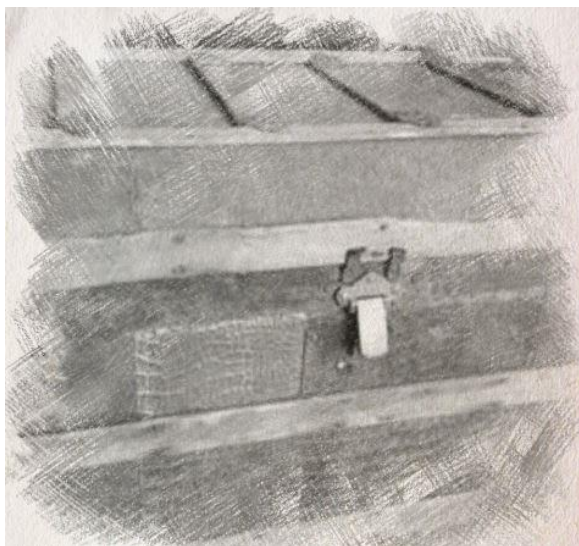
All the adults crowded into the kitchen to talk about old memories and good times in the neighborhood growing up.

Chris had tried out most of the food on the table and was now getting bored, so he walked around the house. He walked in and out of various rooms remembering many of the same things in the house and noticed that most things were still in their usual places. Many things he was never allowed to touch, like grandma’s ceramic frog band, grandpa’s albums, the cookie jars at the top of the cabinet (although he did when no one was looking), and oh yeah, the blue crystal birds on the room divider. He remembered getting his little hand slapped the first time he picked one up. Never did that again.

When Chris walked into the utility room, the attic stairs were down and the light was on, so he climbed up and Bobby was right behind him.



They enjoyed exploring in the attic. So much stuff! Chris looked around remembering some of the things his mom showed him before --- clothes hanging in bags, furniture, and lots of books. As he walked deeper into the attic, he saw an old trunk in a dark corner he'd not seen before and rushed over to see what treasures might be inside the chest.





Something smelled old and musty when he opened the lid. It was dark inside, but he remembered seeing a camping lantern nearby, so he turned it on and was a little surprised that it still worked.

“Wow,” Bobby said as he rummaged through the trunk. “What’s this?” he held up a pair of old wooden shoes.



“I remember seeing those before,” Chris said. “Mom said they’re wooden shoes that grandpa brought back from Holland during the war.”

“Wow, they must be old,” Bobby said as he tried them on and walked around making loud clonking sounds on the wooden floor --- clonk, clonk, clonk.

“Take those off and put ‘em back,” Chris said and continued rummaging through the old trunk. He removed an old box of pictures, that Bobby grabbed and began looking through. There were some army things, an old quilts that looked similar to the ones he remembered seeing at great granny’s house in North Carolina.



Underneath all the stuff he felt something hard. “What’s this?” showing it to Bobby, a small clay vase-like thing with a lid on it that looked *really* old.



“Open it!” Bobby said and Chris worked hard to pry off the lid as it was stuck. He struggled for a bit, and suddenly it popped off – *whoosh!* “What’s that?” Chris jumped when a pale green light rushed out and past him, giving him the chills.



Bobby was sitting there going through the box of pictures and looked up when the thing rushed by Chris. Then, it looked as though it went over to Bobby and disappeared.

“What was that?” Bobby asked a little startled as he caught a glimpse of it whooshing past. He had a strange look on his face for a moment as he glared at Chris in a little afraid, and then suddenly he seemed OK and went back to rummaging through the box of pictures. Chris put the lid back on the vase and buried it into the trunk where he found it.

“Oh, I forgot,” Chris said when he saw Bobby still going through the box of pictures. “Gimme those Bobby so I can put ‘em back.”

“Wait, look, here’s grandpa and Uncle Bill, great-granny, and great-great granny.” He said as he passed him the pictures. “They *sure* look old.”

Chris looked at the pictures and realized that there was *no way Bobby knew who those people were!* He barely remembered Uncle Bill and great-granny, let alone great-great granny.

“How do ya know who they are?” Chris asked, “you were too young to remember them. We only visited great-granny’s house in North Carolina one time when you were around three-years-old.

He shrugged and handed him the box, then headed towards the attic stairs.

*Weird*, Chris thought.

Danny heard them up in the attic, “they’re in the attic,” Danny yelled out to his Uncle Bob, who was in the kitchen.

“You boys come down from there,” their dad yelled up the stairs. “Help me get our stuff outta the car.” Dad continued, “We’re staying here tonight.”

*Oh boy!* Chris thought, *gonna have fun tomorrow going through more old stuff.*

They came down the stairs and met everyone at the car to unpack.

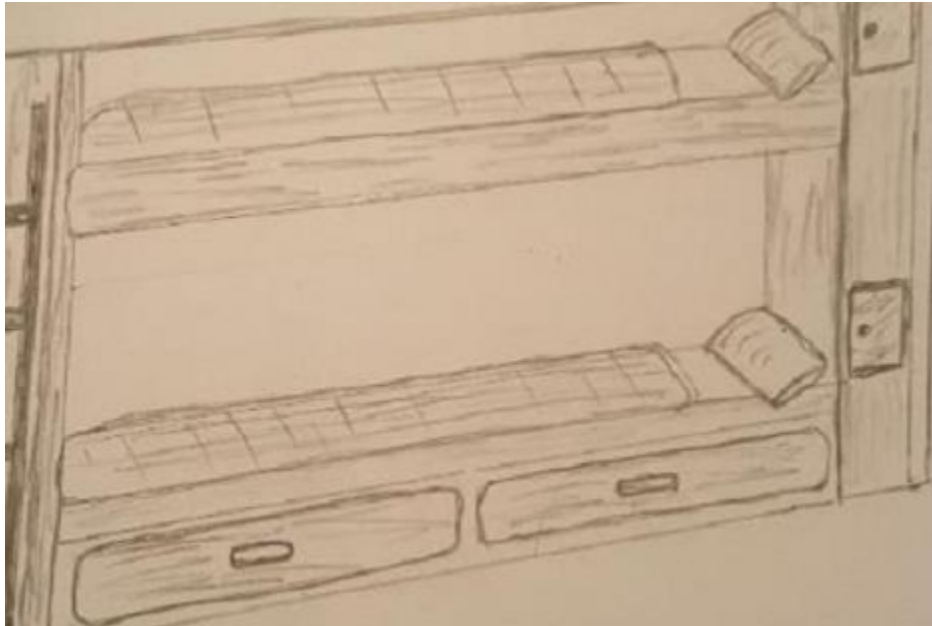
Aunt B.J. drove up with Brad, their cousin, who was a year younger than Chris. “Hey Chris and Bobby!” he was glad to see them.



“We can’t stay long now,” B.J. told him, and he helped Chris and Bobby with their stuff.

“You and Bobby are sleeping in your Uncle Larry and Gary’s old room,” mom said “so, go unpack.”

Danny and Brad helped the boys put their stuff in their uncles' old bedroom that still had the custom bunk beds grandpa had built into the wall.



"Can't believe the old bunk beds are still here," Danny said, "dad had the top bunk."

"Yeah," Brad said, "my dad had the bottom bunk."

"The younger brother *always* gets the bottom bunk," Danny said.

"I know," Bobby agreed.

"What are you guys doing tomorrow?" Brad asked.

"Not sure yet," Chris said, "mom and dad are pretty tired after driving straight here for the last three days."

"Y'all come on!" Aunt B.J. yelled out to them, "we gotta go Brad."

"We'll come over later," Danny said and they both left.

As they were unpacking their things, Bobby said, "wanna light off some firecrackers?" as he climbed up on the top bunk and reached into the cubby hole.



"There's no firecrack..." Chris began to say but stopped when Bobby pulled them out of the cubby hole.

"What's that?" Chris said surprised and took some from him, "how d'you know those were in there? These are really old," Chris said as he examined them. "They may not be safe to light off." He gave Bobby a funny look.



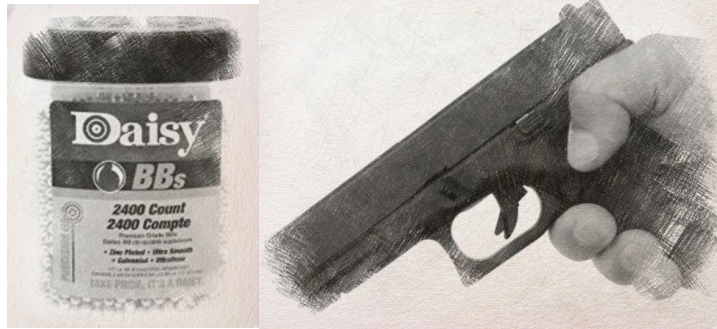
Bobby shrugged his shoulders and continued to peer into the cubby hole looking for more interesting stuff. "What's this?" he gave it to Chris.

"That's a doggone cherry bomb! any more in there?"

"Don't think so," Bobby said, as he reached his arm in as far as it would go, hoping to find more, then pulled out a container of BBs.

"Move outta the way!" and he pushed Bobby aside, "let me try."

Chris reached all the way to the back of the cubby hole and pulled out more cherry bombs and even some M-80s! "Wow look at these!" he handed them to Bobby and continued feeling around until he reached back as far as he could and felt what he was looking for and pulled it out --- a BB pistol.



“Wow,” they both said together marveling at the treasures they’d found.

“You’d *better not* tell anyone about this Bobby,” Chris warned.

“I won’t,” Bobby said.

Chris hid them in a drawer under the bunk bed for later.