

# The Crayon Wars

*ghandi left a colorful message*

by Ray Arthur Monigold II

“DAMN!”

“DAMN! DAMN! DAMN!”

With that Jerry slammed an envelope on the table.

It bounced.

But being flung onto a table by a six foot, six inch, long haired hippie who's in a full blown rage can make an envelope bounce.

“What is it, Jer?” I asked, half frightened, half concerned and really wanting things to be the way they were just before the envelope toss - at the beginnings of getting high.

Jerry, that's Jerry Jay Jones - his real name - Jerry had seen the State of California Seal and return address on the envelope and just couldn't wait to read what he already knew the text would reveal.

Every night we would leave the commune's auto repair shop and head to the big house for some relaxation. If good fortune had smiled upon our lives, we would secretly retrieve the three foot long communal pipe from it's hiding place and ceremoniously put our sacred stash into the hand carved bowl. The smoke would roll all around the feathers and beads that decorated the “piece” as we lit the grass for one another. With deep, deliberate, inhalations, the smoke, cooled from it's journey up the long stem, was taken in and allowed to linger before exhaling. In much the same way wine connoisseurs savor flavor, aroma and buzz. Hippies of the late 60's and early 70's weren't the lay in the alley, needles in the arm freeloaders they were portrayed. Just the opposite. Hippies, those who changed their life styles to follow the creed, lived a hard, minimalist life of peace and giving.

Jerry and I, and others, lived in a Hippie Commune in Colorado. In the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. It wasn't one big house, but rather an old neighborhood that had been purchased over the years by one guy, Rodney, the landlord. I take that back, there was one big house, but there were also other houses, some nearly as big, that all shared a common back yard. A big, tree lined, rolling grassy area, with an alleyway defining it's outer boarder. The auto repair shop was at the alley's end. That's were Jerry and I worked. Mostly on VW Bugs and Busses. But whatever made it up the alley, that had a need, was fixed, or at least assisted. Our clientele were mostly hippies.

Just to make the commune seem even more unusual, although not the original intent, the houses, little outbuildings, garage and anything that wasn't living had been painted baby blue. The paint was military surplus, bought for ten cents a gallon. It was interior grade. But, it seemed, with enough coats, it could withstand the four distinct seasons of the region. Besides, it looked pretty bizarre to the passers by.

Jerry, a true artist, had quartered TWO VW Bugs, into eight sections. Then he cut a foot or so from each of the four pieces that made up the two rear ends and welded only those pieces back together, forming a narrow Push Me - Push Me Bug. With very intricate and ornate paisley patterns, using some bright day-glo colors, he painted the edifice. One Saturday we all worked together building a scaffold and “planting” a 15 foot tall, 12 inch diameter steel pole into the ground, filling the hole with concrete. The next weekend we hoisted the paisley bug onto the petard and welded it in place at the entrance to the alley, leading to the repair garage. No signage, just the BIG BOISTEROUS BUG on a pole.

Life in the commune was a bit different from what I've read over the years, regarding other such Hippie arrangements. And every time I retell any of the stories about the place the listener ALWAYS asks the same question - “...what about the sex?” So, to satisfy the readers here, I'll give the same truthful answer as always - “What sex?” Oh, Free love? Show me sex that costs nothing.

Go ahead, I'll just wait while you answer.

OK, that's what I thought. Now can I get back to the story? Good.

We all worked. Everyone in the commune had a job. Some part-time, others full time and some were artists with income generating products, like belt buckles or pipes. There were also a few free spirited, traveling flower children who would drop in on their way to or from somewhere, but always with stories and usually with something good to smoke. The coin of the realm. The homage of love.

And there was *always* reason to celebrate. Holidays, birthdays, visitors, an unusually large pay day, the winter and summer solstice. You name the event, it was celebrated. And the celebrations always followed a basic pattern that revolved around a meal -

The gathering of the ingredients, preparation, the cooking, arranging the never permanent, continually evolving dinning area. And the myriad of conversations. After the meal came the clean up. Everyone knew what needed to be done and each helped where help was needed. There were no strict job assignments. The gatherers at one event might be the cleaners at the next. The cooks could easily become the collectors of eating utensils another time. And somehow, there were never too many or too few cooks in the kitchen. We always cooked at the big house. But we would eat where the weather and accommodations dictated. When everything was finished, bellies full, dishes washed, chairs and tables returned to their rightful places, we would meet in the living room at the big house where records were played and the large peace pipe would be lovingly passed around the circle of friends.

It was an unspoken rule that the pipe could only be handled if it were being used at a gathering or decorated with some new found trinket, bead or feather. This is where Jerry and I could have gotten into serious trouble some afternoons when we would use the pipe for our own purposes. It is what we were doing when the envelope hit the table. It is what had me frightened - not just breaking that rule, but GETTING CAUGHT!

Even now, writing it down I get the shivers of apprehension knowing we ruined that sacred trust. We used the pipe, just the two of us, without sharing. But it was SOOO COOOL! To hold it afforded something beyond power. It was to feel all those others who had shared in the communal joy. The stories, the experiences, the feeling of belonging and the connection with something greater than self. More than memory flogging, there was something spiritual about the experience.

It was not the first time we had done it, either. Yes, we all had small pipes we usually used when there were just a few people. And most of the time when Jerry and I were “tipped” with some weed for a job well done, that's what we would do - smoke the reward between ourselves. Using our personal pieces. But when there was enough for the entire community, or when the gift was so stipulated - “...here's something for the stash bag.” - we would somehow feel justified in sampling a pinch using the big pipe. And that's what we were doing when the envelope hit the table.

OK, so there we were, Jerry and I, smoking a little taste of a large gift in the peace pipe after we closed the shop, but before everyone else had returned for the day. Apprehensive, but joyous over the “haul” that had been given the commune. And Jerry gets really mad, slams the envelope then opens the letter.

The letter, to Jerry, from the State of California, where he was born and raised, Jerry Jay Jones, was about mistaken identity. Jerry had had a few run ins with the law while driving cars, but that was it. Except once, when the cops “ran him in” because of his name. Back then there were no computers or bar codes or laminated licenses with your picture affixed. No, there was a thin piece of card stock whose printed blanks for name and all was filled in by a typewriter. So when a cop pulled you over, you got out of the car and reached into your wallet while telling the officer your name. Like -

“... Jerry Jones, sir.”

“And I suppose your middle initial is J.”

“No sir, but my middle name is JAY!”

“Alright wise guy, into the patrol car! We're takin' a ride downtown” And off they went.

Now if you didn't have a dime back then, you couldn't make your one call. And there were NO cell phones either. Nope. No call telling someone who cared where you were meant you stayed in jail until you saw a judge. And the law had about as much faith in drivers' licenses in the 1960's as we have today in the spam e-mails telling us we've won a million dollars. So Jerry waited all weekend, from Friday evening when he was picked up, 'til Monday afternoon when he saw the judge.

Jerry was a veteran of war. He'd recently returned from house to house fighting in the Dominican Republic. Shooting at rebels who shot back at him and his comrades. But jail seemed to him a worse fate than being pinned down on a roof top for six days with no resupplies of ammo, food or water. Again waiting for someone who cared to “... either blow up the ass holes shooting at us or get us off that damn roof and out of the line of fire!” as Jerry put it.

So Jones had no love lost on the LAPD. He was exonerated by the judge who was presented with public records proving Jerry was in fact Jerry with a middle name of Jay. But it left a craw in his gullet for the experience. It wasn't until he'd been gone from California for a time that the U.S. Postal service finally tracked him down. It seems that a Jerry J. Jones had skipped bail and had a warrant out for his arrest. Initially, before he moved to the commune, he took it as a reason to visit friends in California and clear up the mistake. And, after a time, it seemed that all was in deed in order, thanks to “J - J's” voluntary fingerprint checks. But then, when he changed his address to the commune, the letters started up again. That was the 'bounced envelope'.

I was just pissed enough at how California had ruined a perfectly good buzz that I decided to help. Well, there was another motivation. A diversionary tactic was suddenly required as some of our fellow hippies began coming home to roost for the evening. Jerry and I had been caught by both law enforcement and hippies! What a dichotomy!

“Look!” I said as the shrinking kitchen where we had been hiding began to fill with more people than it could hold. “Look, Jerry is in a jam and WE are going to help him get out of it. So EVERYONE - into the living room. Oh, and we have some GOOD NEWS TOO! We got some stash laid on us at the garage today and we were just getting the pipe ready. Now GO!”

I glanced at Jerry, noticing a rather bewildered look on his face and gave him a wink. From there on out it became a paramilitary operation. Operation 'Get Jerry Off The Hook For Good'.

Once in the living room I reminded everyone that there would be ample reason to accomplish the mission - Panama Red! Then I began assigning tasks. Here was the list -

1. A Denver Colorado newspaper and Phone Book
2. A large manila envelope
3. A piece of cardboard the size of the envelope
4. A box of Crayons
5. As many postage stamps as we could find
6. A favorite picture from each of us (that could be cut up)

Off they went. Jerry and I moved back to the kitchen and “waited” for their return. By “waited” I mean we took a couple of hits off the pipe. Then here they came.

“OK, everybody CUT your pictures or photos down to just a favorite face or item. Keep it small. Tear the newspaper into letter sized pieces - not too neatly. Get the cardboard to fit into the envelope with some room to spare. I'll write the letter...” -

“LETTER?” Jerry queried.

“Trust me on this Jones.” I retorted.

“Everyone - while I write you paste or tape your pictures on the BACK of the envelope. Remember, NOT TOO NEAT!”

And so I wrote -

DEAR CALIFORNIA

HELP ME ! I'M STUCK IN THIS NUT HOUSE AND ALL THEY WILL GIVE ME ARE CRAYONS AND NO PAPER ! YOU KNOW I SHOWED YOU MY FINGER PRINTS BEFORE TO PROVE I WAS ME AND NOT THE OTHER GUY. BUT THANK GOD YOU FORGOT OR SOMETHING AND FOUND ME ANYWAYS. SO HERE IS MY PLAN - YOU TELL THESE PEOPLE THAT I AM THAT OTHER GUY AND GET ME OUT. I WANT OUT. THEN I WILL COME BACK TO WHERE YOU ARE AND YOU CAN FIND OUT I AM ME AGAIN. THEN I CAN COME BACK HERE. WELL NOT HERE BUT BACK WHERE I WAS LIVING BEFORE THEY GOT ME. AND THAT WAY I WON'T EVER HAVE TO THINK ABOUT USING A KNIFE AGAIN CAUSE I WILL BE HERE. I MEAN THERE. I MEAN NOT THERE BUT WERE I WAS BEFORE HERE AND AFTER THERE.

SO I WILL LEAVE MY LIGHT ON EVERY NIGHT UNLESS THEY PUT ME IN THAT SHIRT WITH THE LONG SLEEVES THEY TIE BEHIND MY BACK. BUT YOU CAN JUST WAIT OUTSIDE EVERY NIGHT UNTIL YOU SEE MY LIGHT. OK?

SOME OF MY FRIENDS ARE HELPING ME GET THIS LETTER MAILED AND I TOLD THEM THEY COULD PUT THEIR PICTURES ON THE OUTSIDE TO HELP YOU FIND ME.

THANK YOU CALIFORNIA,

YOUR FRIEND JERRY JAY JONES

(IT'S ME - NOT THE OTHER ONE WHO AIN'T ME)

With the letter finished, we carefully put it flat, inside the large envelope with the pictures adorning the outside. I then addressed it, with crayons, included a return address from the then infamous Denver institution for the mentally unstable and stuck way too many stamps on - in disarray. The project was completed. We all had a grand laugh. AND, as promised, we all sat around in a circle on the living room floor with the envelope in the center while we passed the peace pipe, and stories and the evening.

Jerry never heard from the State of California again.

I still remember the commune, the good times, and some of the bad ones too. So many wonderful, talented, sharing people. Positive things happened because of the place. Peace and Love were a way of life then, as they should be now. Perhaps it's the excesses that are problematic. Perhaps there were too many Jerry J. Joneses to keep in check, and THAT caused the computerization of our world.

But somewhere between the slam of an envelope on a kitchen table in a Colorado Hippie commune, in the foothills of the Rockies, and here - a lot has changed!

