

OJAI STORIES

The Cruise Brothers

By Clem Henriksen
Drawings by Anneke Pearse



The Ojai Valley is nestled in the coastal mountains of Southern California eighty-five miles from Los Angeles and fifteen miles from the Pacific Ocean. Ojai maintains agricultural, cultural, athletic, and spiritual traditions in a rural atmosphere. Its diverse citizenry is composed of refugees from such countries as Mexico, Finland, the Philippines, India, Oklahoma, Hollywood, Santa Barbara, and the United States. Fun pig opportunities abound in the nearby ocean, and the adjacent Los Padres National Forest.

Robert Macaulay graduated from Nordhoff High School in 1962 and enlisted in the Navy, where he performed an undistinguished and uneventful tour as a fireman on an oiler. He mustered out with an honorable discharge in 1966, keeping only his mustache as a military memento.

His father, Mac Sr., was a handyman for the school district. Robert, too, had a methodical talent for fixing things he could see and touch. His younger brother Edwin broke the Macaulay mold. A bright and talkative high school senior, he enjoyed playing in the world of ideas and language.

On his return Robert went camping up Padre Juan trail with Edwin. Despite four years difference in age they had always been close, and shared a simple enjoyment of the outdoors. It was late in the year and cold, with clear skies predicted. Good enough weather for an overnigher.

The brothers park at the trailhead on Highway 33, shoulder packs and go steadily up the trail. It is fall, after the first freeze. The buckwheat has turned red, the grass brown. The breeze coming down the canyon is chilly and picking up. Robert stops where the trail threads over the ridge through the knee-high manzanita. “This manzanita is ducking for cover by growing low to the ground like this. When a storm comes down the mountain it must blow like hell across here,” he says. “We’ll be OK at the creek camp tonight.” Robert loves natural history and has learned the native plants on his own. He knows a lot, but is uncomfortable exposing his knowledge. Not with Edwin, though.

“Keep on truckin’, Mac,” says Edwin, “It’s not getting any warmer and this pack isn’t getting any lighter.” Edwin likes learning from his brother—it was usually about stuff that he didn’t get anywhere else. He knows Robert knows this, but it is important not to kiss butt. And Robert knew this too.

They set up camp under the chrome yellow quaking aspen of fall. Edwin clears rocks, twigs and yellow leaves from the soft creekside sand. He does some minor leveling and scoops out depressions for their shoulders and hips. He holds down the corners of a groundcloth with rocks, and uses another rock to pound the tent stakes. In anticipation of the night’s wind, he points the tent up-canyon, puts on the rainfly, and stakes out guy-ropes.

Robert gets busy with the dinner. First he collects firewood and builds a small fire. The fire needs time to make coals for the baked potatoes. As soon as the fire is going he puts a lidded water pot on it. Then he prepares the salad from cucumbers, tomatoes, red onions, feta cheese and Greek olives. A Greek salad packs well for an overnighter. Even the dressing has its little container. When the water gets hot he makes hot buttered rum in enameled cups. “Here’s your drink Win.” By that time Edwin has put the pads and sleeping bags into the tent. Edwin inflates his pack pillow, changes to moccasins and dons gloves, a down vest, and a watch cap.

The brothers sit on a log, look into the fire and sip their drinks. “We sure pack a lot of crap.” “We carry it, so it’s our look-out.” They sip in silence, glad to be resting. “How’s your drink?” “Needs a warm-up.” “Rum or water?” “Both. Screw the butter.”

“My physics teacher was in the Navy,” says Edwin. “The woods are full of ‘em,” says Robert. “So what are you going to do now?” Edwin asks.

“I’ve got an idea for a tree removal business. I know where I can get a stump grinder cheap so I can start it up without much risk. We’ll see how it goes. There’s a lot of fucking trees in Ojai so I figure it’s worth a shot. Warm-up?” “Yeah, screw the water.”

“What are you going to do when you graduate Win?” “We don’t have the money for a four year school, and I’m just draft bait if I don’t go to school. I

figure on joining the Navy, then working the GI Bill for my schooling.”

“Could work. But there’s a war on you know.”

“I heard.”

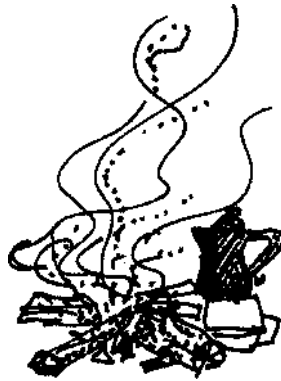
“You’re smart enough to get in some sneaky deal. I got lucky and didn’t get near the guns. You can do a righteous tour, and still not have your ass shot off.”

“That’s the plan. I talked to the recruiter, and if I pass the test, I can go directly into electronics school after boot camp. It’ll cost me an extra two years, but the tour should be stateside.”

Robert pulls two tin-foiled potatoes out of his pack and buries them in the coals. They continue to drink, the sun and temperature continue to fall. “How ya doin’ there, Mac?” “Screw the cup. Pass me that bottle.” By the time the steaks go on the sun is down. They eat bundled in the dark, praising the food and its preparation, consuming it quickly before it cools.

They do a quick cleanup, and discourage critter damage by hanging the food and opening their packs. A last drink of water, a whiz and a quick scramble into their bags. “Night.”

“Night Mac. Nice to have you back”. The wind wakes Robert later in the night. He listens to it beat against the tent. The tent is secure, he is warm in his bag, and he drifts back to sleep. They sleep in as long as the sun allows. Following a quick breakfast of coffee and PopTarts, they pack up efficiently. Robert looks



around the site—only the packs are left. He kicks sand carefully over the remains of the fire and empties his canteen on it. “Let’s hit it.” Still slightly hung over, they start the hike back down the mountain.

They keep their eyes on the trail. It is six inches wide, sprinkled with small stones and grains of decomposed granite, and smoother and paler than the undisturbed soil on each side. Robert, in the lead, constantly adjusts his footsteps to its meandering. Edwin lets Robert find the trail.

To the tune of *Frères Jacques* Edwin sings

*“Father John, Father John
Walking down, walking down
While ‘til we get there
While ‘til we get there
Father John, Father John.”*

“Are you done?”

“Yes.” Edwin smiles to himself. They hike to the car in silence, Edwin walking close behind Robert’s quick steady pace.

By late April of 1972 things have worked out. Robert has a 3/4 ton Dodge pickup with a toolbox and a CB radio, a 2-ton board sided truck with a hitch for the chipper and the stump grinder, assorted power and hand tools, a payroll, and his mother to do the books and answer the phone. His navy uniform hangs in the back of the closet, dust on its shoulders.

Edwin is ending his tour at the Pt. Mugu Pacific Missile Test Center on the southern Ventura County coast. Petty Officer Second Class Macaulay is a Fire Control Technician. He works on highly classified weapon development program—beyond that his family doesn’t know much. He will be a civilian again in August and has already applied to UCSB for the fall quarter. The nice thing about the Pt. Mugu duty is that he can come home on weekends.

“So what’s for dessert, Mom?” says Edwin. The family is in the kitchen, Mrs. Macaulay is cleaning up. “There’s some ice cream in the fridge. Don’t they feed you in that Navy, Win?”

“Only too well, Mom.”

“Never had a problem with not enough food,” says Robert. Mac Sr. retreats to the living room to enjoy the Laker game with Chick Hearn. Mrs. Macaulay hangs up her dishtowel and joins her husband, leaving the boys at the Formica table.

“Mac, you remember that camping trip we took up to the Throne?”

“Yeah, what about it?”

“I hear the higher elevations are starting to bud out.”

“Not as high as the Throne yet, though.”

“You might be right. But I bet if you were to take a trip up there, say next Tuesday around two, you could catch a memorable sight.”

“What kind of sight, Win?”

“Let’s just say your tax dollars at work. And I didn’t say that. What kind of ice cream we got?”

“Only one way to find out.”

Tuesday morning Robert gets his crew going on the final cleanup of a job. At noon he says to Mrs. Macaulay, “Thanks for lunch, Mom. I’m gonna take the afternoon off. I’ll take the pickup and leave the CB on.”

“Where are you going?”

“Pine Mountain. First trip this year.”

“All right Robert. You’ll be home for dinner?”

“Yeah, I should be back before dark.”

Robert fills his thermos with coffee and throws it on the seat of the truck along with a jacket. It would be cooler higher up.

The cab is a cluttered functional mess. A spare tire, chainsaw, red fuel tank, coils of rope and an accumulation of trash fill the back. ‘Macaulay Tree Service’ is painted on both doors. A winch is mounted on the front bumper.

Robert drives up winding Highway 33 past Friends, Matilija, the tunnels, Wheelers, the CalTrans sand station, Rose Valley turnoff, Piedras Blancas and the Pine Mountain Inn to the Pine Mountain summit. He turns right on the dirt road. It is still muddy in spots but the truck runs the ridge easily, even with just two-wheel drive. He sees only two other vehicles on the five-mile drive to the Throne, a ranger truck and a camper. Still early in the season to see many folks up here during the week.

Robert parks on pine needles near the Throne. Up here the climax growth is Ponderosa pines over 75 feet high and 4 to 6 feet thick at the base.

The Throne is their private name for a cliff on the edge of the mountain plateau. Its exposed pink sandstone face is the top of a drainage that leads down to the west and south. Down a couple of ledges from the plateau rim is a perfect seat with armrests. From the Throne you could look down across the mountains, the coastal plain, the Ventura Channel all the way to the islands fifty miles away. On a day like today the view is spectacular.

Robert pulls on the jacket, puts the thermos in a pocket, and walks over to the cliff edge, then clambers down to the Throne. He is out of the wind, and the sandstone is warm. He pours a cup of coffee, sets it on the armrest, checks his watch. 1:30. Yeah, there were worse places to be today. Like on the ass end of a chipper for example.

An F-4 Phantom 35 miles to sea in the Pacific Missile Test Range releases the BGM-109C Tomahawk cruise missile from the cradle under its left wing. The pilot announces to Missile Command, "Bird away." As it drops, the Tomahawk flips open its stubby wings, drops its turbofan scoop and ignites its engine. It turns towards land and the F-4 follows.

This mission is a guidance system trial. The Tomahawk is loaded with an inertial guidance

system and a TERCOM digital terrain map that runs from offshore inland 180 miles to the Naval Weapons Center—China Lake. The Tomahawk is now on its own, programmed to follow the drainage that ultimately becomes the Throne, then go over Pine Mountain and Frazier Park, chase the Tehachapis to the northeast and skirt the Southern Sierras past Inyokern to China Lake. It is programmed to follow terrain closely, maintaining an elevation of 30 to 100 feet above the ground. In about half an hour, if the trial goes well, the Tomahawk would engage its DSMAC image matching guidance system for the final leg of the flight to a shed positioned in the center of a large 'X' on the high desert. The Tomahawk lacks a warhead and is fueled only as needed for the flight plan, but the shed's prospects are not promising just the same.



PO2-FT Macaulay sits at his console in Missile Command. At this point in the trial there is little for him to do save monitor the telemetry. I wonder if Mac is at the Throne, he chuckles to himself. If he is, he's about to get a close, if brief, look at an advanced weapons system as it zooms by at 550 miles an hour. Better not blink, Mac. He smiles and keeps his eyes on the screen. There is brass in the room, a couple of captains and the Lockheed program manager. Among the many lessons the Navy had taught him was that you always want to look like you're doing your job even if there is nothing to do.

Mac likes being alone in the wilderness. He stretches his senses into the emptiness and feels close to God. With eyes closed, he listens to the breeze through the pines and smells the air. He opens his eyes and scans the landscape, focusing on nothing. A small motion on the edge of his vision catches his attention. Far down the valley a flash of white goes behind a ridge, then reappears. The flash becomes a white cigar jinking up and down with the terrain. By the time Mac focuses on it, he has about twenty seconds to watch it grow larger second by second, mov-

ing fast and low. He has five seconds to realize it was coming up the drainage right straight at him. A rocket of some kind. Motherfucker! He stands up, realizes he has no time and flops on the ledge. The damn thing was moving!—its engine whines loud as it passes 30 feet overhead. It clears the edge of the cliff and he hears the sound of a ton and a half of high technology impact a mature Ponderosa pine. The noise of missile parts pinwheeling north through the forest dwindles to quiet.

PO2 Macaulay says to the Mission Commander, “Sir, I’m getting no signal from the bird.” “What do you mean, Macaulay?” “Telemetry is not being received, sir.” “Let me see. What is its last known location?” “119 degrees, 16 minutes, 8 seconds West longitude, 34 degrees, 41 minutes, 52 seconds North latitude, sir.” “And just where is that?” “Just a second, sir. 55 miles NNE of Command. About 30 miles inland. North Ventura County, sir.” In rapid order, this information is confirmed at another console, the F-4 is directed to investigate, and the Lockheed man begins quietly shitting bricks.

Edwin’s controlled professional face conceals his inner turmoil. That sounds like Pine Mountain. Mac, I hope you’re all right. Edwin pushes the thought away.

The clatter stops. Win, you fuckin’ idiot. Robert gets up and climbs up the cliff to peek over the edge. It’s easy to see where the missile hit—a large fresh scar is plainly visible twenty feet up a pine previously shortened by lightning. Wreckage is strewn to the north in a path over his truck. The truck looks like it has been sideswiped. A fire is blazing along the wreckage trail that leads over the truck. Oh shit, fuck me. Robert runs to his truck, pulls the small fire extinguisher out of the truckbox and sprays the fire on and around his truck until he runs out of retardant. A Navy jet screams overhead at low altitude, guided in by the smoke. Time to get the hell out of here.

He puts the truck in gear and is able to move—luckily it is just body damage. He picks up the CB mic, “Mac to base.” Mrs. Macaulay keys her mic, “Come in Mac.” CB still working then. “Mom, some kinda rocket just crashed up here. We got a forest fire.” “A rocket? Mac, are you all right?” “Yeah, I’m fine. Call the Sheriff and the Forest Service and let them know they have a problem. The Navy already seems to know.” “What?” “Never mind, just call the Sheriff. My twenty is five miles west of Highway 33 on Pine Mountain road. Near Reyes Peak.” “10-4.” “I’m driving down to the office now. ETA forty-five minutes. 10-7.”

On the way out Robert stops to tell the ranger about the fire. The ranger drives east to investigate. The other camper agrees that a forest fire is not where they should be and follows him out. He drives slowly, keeping a major shimmy under control. Forest Service fire trucks and Sheriff four-bys howl uphill. Twenty minutes later, at Friends, he passes two gray Navy panel trucks speeding up the highway.

The next day the Ventura *Star-Free Press* has an inch and a half of copy on page 11,

Missile Mishap on Pine Mountain
Ojai—Officials at the Pacific Missile Test Center—Pt. Mugu confirmed that a missile test ended in a crash on Pine Mountain yesterday. The crash started a small forest fire which was put out by the Forest Service. The Navy is investigating the cause of the incident.

Lt. j.g. C.D. Burner is tired. He and his team spent the last two days securing the crash site and picking up the pieces. With metal detectors. What a freakin’ mess. It was hard enough to keep security squared away on a top secret program when you were on base—try doing it when the secrets were spread over a few acres of public land. Luckily the crash site was in the boonies on a dead end road. They had been able to limit access immediately, and account for and inter-

view the limited number of civilian personnel who had been at the site. Fire fighters and Sheriff's deputies mainly. Now he is following up on a call received by the Ventura County Sheriff's Department just after the crash. Someone named Macaulay was apparently up there when it happened and had called in the crash and the forest fire.

Lt. Burner pulls into the Macaulay Tree Service yard on Rice Road. A burly man in blue coveralls is working on a wrecked truck. "Good afternoon, sir," Lt. Burner says as he approaches. The man turns from his work, wipes his hands. Robert eyes the officer, "What can I do for you?" "I'm Lieutenant Burner from the Pt. Mugu Security office," says Burner and shows his ID. "I'm here to talk to Robert Macaulay."

"That's me."

"Would you mind answering a few questions?"

"I suppose not. What about?"

"The Sheriff's Department tells us you called in an incident on Pine Mountain last Tuesday."

"That I did. Your rocket started a forest fire. We report those things around here."

"What were you doing on Pine Mountain, Mr. Maccaulay?"

"I thought I was enjoying the outdoors until I was played target for the Navy."

"The Navy regrets any inconvenience this may have caused you, sir." Hardass. "Do you have a brother, Edwin Macaulay, presently stationed at Pt. Mugu?"

"Yes sir, I do."

"Did Petty Officer Macaulay communicate any information to you regarding this mission?"

"No sir, he did not. Edwin takes his duties seriously and never talks about his work."

"Now, Mr. Macaulay, I know you are a veteran, and your brother has a clean record. But don't

you think it's highly coincidental that you would be at the exact site of a classified missile test of which your brother was an integral part?" Robert thinks about this. "Yeah, I'd call it a coincidence. I've been visiting these mountains going on fifteen years now, and I think its damned coincidental that the Navy tries to kill me up there. That sure never happened before."

"Take it easy Mr. Macaulay. The crash was an accident. It's my job to ask questions. The Navy has security issues that need to be resolved. Don't brothers sometimes share information they wouldn't share with others?"

"Like I said, Edwin don't talk about his job."

"So you're saying you were just up there on your own?"

"Yes, sir, that about sums it up."

"And you witnessed the accident?"

"I didn't see it hit, no. I busy trying to disappear into a rock. After the crash I saw the wreckage but I left right away."

"Thank you, Mr. Macaulay. We'll need a written statement for the record—we'll be in touch."

"Now, sir, I have a question for you. How do I make my claim to the Navy for the damage to this truck?"

Lt. Bender looks at the truck. "Are you saying this damage was sustained in the incident?"

"Yes, sir. And damned near burned it up too."

Bender groans inwardly. Oh shit, this was a complication he hadn't counted on. The paperwork would keep him up for a week. "Mr. Macaulay, in the interests of national security, I'm going to have to ask you not to move this truck from the yard. It is evidence in this investigation." I sure hope Macaulay hasn't contacted a lawyer yet. The Navy's ass was waving in the breeze on this one. "I reckon I can not move it all right," says Robert, "What kind of insurance does the Navy carry anyway?"

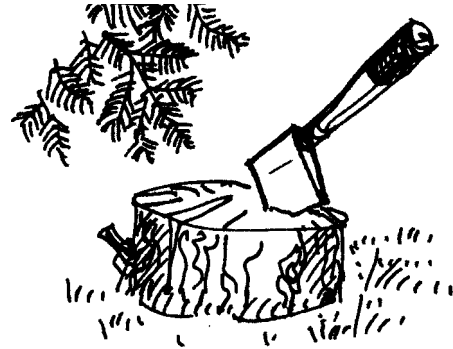
"What kind of insurance does the Navy carry anyway?"

At Christmas, the Macaulays sit drinking brandy eggnogs and opening their presents. A new Dodge ¾ ton 4-by-4 is in the driveway, ‘Macaulay Tree Service’ painted on its doors, a chromed truckbox in the bed. Robert opens Edwin’s present, an authentic reproduction Plains Indian buckskin rifle scabbard. “Win, it’s beautiful. Thanks. Here, I got one for you,” says Robert and hands a clumsily wrapped present to Edwin, “Made it myself from some scrap that ended up in my truck. My old truck.” Edwin unwraps a polished teak plaque mounted with a home made scrap aluminum model of a Tomahawk missile. The brass plate reads

Welcome Home Win
A Miss is as Good as a Mile

The Macaulays break into laughter. “Nice work on the rocket there, Mac”, says Mac Sr. “Thanks, I didn’t have much time to study on it.” Edwin grins, “Aw c’mon, gimme a break.” 🐷

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View from the Throne

