

The 4th Quarter



By John V. Saffran

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March 2010

It's a bright sunny day in Colorado. Johnny is standing at the top of the "Woods" ski run in Vail Colorado. Johnny is a man in his seventies with a grey beard and long grey hair worn in a pony-tail. He looks younger than his years. Johnny surveys the landscape and smiles. He says to himself. "I'm the luckiest man on the face of the earth". He starts to ski the run. The top of the run has medium sized moguls and Johnny traverses them carefully. He skis half way down the run and pauses on the side of the run to catch his breath. Johnny again surveys the landscape and smiles. He continues to ski on a part of the ski run that is steeper and has been groomed. Johnny skis at a faster pace making nicely carved turns. He lets out a few loud whoops. A woman skier with a red ski outfit hears Johnny's yells and smiles. Johnny skis to the bottom and gets on the chair lift. The woman in the red ski outfit ends up sitting next to Johnny on the chairlift. They ride for a while and Johnny turns to the lady.

"Beautiful day ma'am" said Johnny smiling.

"Yes it certainly is. You looked pretty good out there" said the woman.

"Not too bad for an old guy" said Johnny with a big grin.

"You aren't that old" said the woman.

"Well I'm sure I'm old enough to be your daddy" said Johnny.

C'mon now. You're not that old" said the woman shaking her head.

I'm in my seventies ma'am" said Johnny.

"I guess you are old enough to be my dad. Well you sure don't look it" said the woman.

"Well it's sort of like a car that still runs and looks okay but has a lot of miles on it" said Johnny with a grin.

They converse along the way and finally approach the top of the run. They get set to disembark the chair lift. Johnny turns to the lady.

“Nice talking to you ma'am. You have a great day” said Johnny.

“You too sir” said the lady smiling.

They both get off the chairlift and ski in different directions. Johnny says to himself “**Sir**... I hate that name”. He remembers telling a friend how one can tell a person is getting old. People call you **Sir**. They open doors for you and you always check your shirt to make sure there is no food on it before going out.

The 4th Quarter

The following April Johnny is sitting in Tommy's family room with three friends from his high school days. The four men have been like brothers and close friends for over fifty-five years. They called themselves “The Four Original Neat Guys”. They all tried to comb their hair like Tony Curtis and had a saying that went like this “May we never part, nor part our hair”. All three men are in their seventies. Tommy is tall, lean and well dressed with blond hair. Davy is tall and muscular with curly blond hair. Andy is of medium height, trim and with a few flecks of grey in his blond hair. Andy is visiting from Arizona. All four men are drinking a beer. They are deciding on a restaurant to spend the evening at.

“Well here's to the Four Original Neat Guys” said Davy as he holds his beer up in a toast.

“Yeah, the Four Original Neat Guys” said Tommy grinning.

“Still crazy after all these years” said Andy smiling.

All four men hold their beers up in a toast and take a swig of beer.

“Hey, how come I’m the only one with grey hair?” said Johnny.

“You worry too much” said Davy grinning.

“Hey Johnny, how was Vail” said Tommy.

“Awesome. I had great weather and lots of snow. Made it back in one piece. By the way, how did your new hip treat you in Florida? Did you get any golf in?” said Johnny.

“The hips is good as long as I keep exercising and moving around. I did manage to get a few birdies in Naples and I shot a few rounds in the mid-eighties. Truth be told, I sure as heck wouldn’t want to go through another operation like that one again. The recovery time was not fun” said Tommy.

“Yeah, I wouldn’t like to go through another shoulder operation either. It wasn’t fun but I can still bench press over 160 pounds” said Davy shaking his head.

Two knee replacements were enough for me but walking four miles a day and the swimming has me back to normal” said Andy.

“Four miles a day! Andy, you are a one tough son of a gun” said Tommy as he raised his beer.

“That’s for sure. Who else do we know that made a College Varsity football team as a 170 pound freshman guard” said Davy as he raised his beer.

Johnny raised his beer and said “I’ll drink to that. You know I’ve got you guys all beat when it comes to operations. The rotator cuff operation from that motorcycle accident and then the prostate operation. Now they tell me I’m gonna need a new hip. It’s funny. Here we all are talking about our operations. Fifty years ago it was women and cars, mostly cars” said Johnny grinning.

“You got that right” said Davy nodding.

“Actually, we are all very lucky to be here after all these years. Better yet, how many guys in their seventies can do what we do? Who is ready for another beer?” said Tommy as he stands up.

“I’ll take one” said Davy. He takes a big swig and hands the empty can to Tommy.

Johnny and Andy and Tommy their empty cans. Tommy returns with three more beers and hands them out.

You know it just dawned on me. We're all playing the game in the **4th quarter**” said Johnny in a serious tone.

“That’s for darn sure. Maybe we’re in overtime” said Andy with a frown.

“Golly, I sure hope not” said Davy as he takes a big swig of beer.

The next morning

The next morning Johnny and his wife Rosa are sitting in their kitchen drinking coffee. Rosa is an attractive woman in her late sixties. She has dark brown hair and looks ten years younger. Johnny would kid Rosa about her dyeing her hair and jokingly suggest she go grey. Rosa would always ignore the suggestion. She would tell Johnny he looks like an old hippy and to go cut his hair.

“How are the boys doing? You were home rather early last night. I hope you didn’t drink too much” said Rosa.

“Naw, I behaved myself. Two beers at Tommy’s and a glass of Cabernet with my meal. The boys are all doing well. Andy’s still swimming and walking every day. Tommy’s golf game is good. Davy still lifts weights and looks great. We just can’t party like we used to” said Johnny emptying his coffee cup.

“Thank goodness for that” said Rosa as she poured Johnny another cup of coffee.

Johnny gets a serious look on his face. “I made comment last night at Tommy’s that really put the hook in me. I thought about it while driving home. I couldn’t get to sleep last night” said Johnny.

“You were awfully restless last night. What was it that kept you awake?” said Rosa

“I made the comment last night that we are all playing the game in the 4th Quarter. You know we're all in our seventies” said Johnny.

“Well I guess you could say that but why would that bother you?” said Rosa.

“I got to thinking. What happens when the whistle blows!” said Johnny.

“Sometimes you really scare me. By the way, I saw Sonny’s wife at the beauty parlor yesterday. She told me that she and Sonny might be moving to Florida permanently. They are looking for a Condo around where our son Jamie lives. Did you know that?” said Rosa smiling.

“Yup” said Johnny.

Rosa frowns. “Well why didn’t you tell me?. You blab about every other thing Sonny does especially when he gets a new Harley or another gun.

“I don’t want to get into another discussion with you about moving to Florida” said Johnny standing up.

Rosa shakes her finger at Johnny. “Now hold on a minute. I’m getting sick of these nasty Wisconsin winters. Also, we’d be close to Jamie and I love the Florida’s seashore’s” said Rosa.

Johnny sits back down. “First of all there are no ski area’s in Florida. Secondly, it’s dangerous to ride a motorcycle in Florida and thirdly, it’s hot and humid. There are also snakes and bugs in Florida. I hate snakes. Plus, we live on a lake now so what’s the big deal about the seashore? Do you remember

when I worked for that Connecticut company and you went with me to Miami for those board meetings? It was 95 degrees at night!” said Johnny.

“I heard this all before. I bet if it were Vail or Aspen, you would move there in an instant” said Rosa shaking her head,

“I sure would if I were a multi-millionaire. Let’s table this discussion for now. How about if we go out to eat tonight? I could go for a big steak. Arguing with you always makes me hungry” said Johnny with a big grin.

“Well, finally something we agree on” said Rosa.

Rosa leaves the kitchen. Johnny makes a call on his cell phone.

“Hello Steve, how’s the world treating you? That’s great. Do you remember when we talked a while back about Christianity? Well something came up that’s been bothering me. I’d like to talk to you about it. I’m wondering if we could get together sometime to chat a bit. It would be at your convenience. Yes, next Thursday at your place would be great. Thanks Steve. See you then” said Johnny.

Rosa comes back into the kitchen. “What was that all about?” said Rosa.

Johnny takes a sip of coffee. “Oh that remark I made about the whistle blowing in the 4th quarter is bugging me. Steve’s really up on that kind of stuff. I just want to talk to him” said Johnny.

Rosa smiles. “You sure let little things bother you” said Rosa.

“This may not be a little thing” said Johnny.

Steve

It’s Thursday and Johnny’s sitting in his neighbor Steve’s living room. Steve is a handsome man in his late sixties.

“What’s been bothering you Johnny?” said Steve smiling.

Johnny sighs. “The other night I went out with three of my close friends. We’ve been like brothers since we were kids. All of us are in our seventies” said Johnny.

“I’ll be seventy next year” said Steve grinning.

“Well I made the comment that we are all playing the game in the 4th quarter” said Johnny.

Steve puts a hand on his chin. “Well that’s true enough” said Steve.

Johnny talks in a quiet and serious tone. “One of my friends made a comment that we could all be playing the game in overtime” said Johnny.

“That’s also true” said Steve.

“Well on the way home I started wondering what will really happen when the whistle blows and the game ends” said Johnny.

“Why does that bother you?” said Steve.

“Steve, do you remember our conversation a few months ago when you said if we don’t believe that Jesus Christ is the son of GOD, when we die, we will burn in hell for all eternity. I believe in GOD and a hereafter but do have my doubts about Jesus being the son of GOD” said Johnny

Steve nods his head. “I can see where that could bother a person” said Steve.

“Steve, I believe in a Supreme Being, GOD. If this short life we live on earth is all there ever is, then why not do everything in one's power to extract the maximum amount of pleasure, wealth and power during our time here on earth no matter how it will hurt other human beings. If there is no hereafter and no GOD to be accountable to, why be concerned about how we live our lives? Why do we have a conscience and feel guilty when we do something wrong? I don’t believe that a piece of

slime crawled out of the sea and evolved into a human being with a conscience and intelligence. I reasoned this myself a few years ago. I just can't believe that a person like Hitler can do all that evil and not have to answer for it. What a hopeless existence if it all ends in an instant and there is nothing to look forward to? Sometimes I still have doubts about GOD and a hereafter. I'm able to easily dispel these doubts but the doubts about Jesus being the son of GOD are not so easy to dispel. Does any of my reasoning make any sense to you?" said Johnny.

"Yes it does" said Steve.

"I want to believe that Jesus is the son of God but not just out of the fear of burning in hell for all eternity. Where do I start?" said Johnny.

"You are what's called a Seeker. Do you read the Bible?" said Steve.

"No I don't. In fact I can't remember ever reading the Bible" said Johnny shaking his head.

"That would be a good start" said Steve smiling.

"Yes, that would be a good start but how can I trust or believe what's in the Bible" said Johnny.

"I'll give you something to read on the validity of the Bible. Lets meet again next week" said Steve.

Johnny's Testimony

In my Journey as a Seeker I searched for reasons why to believe in GOD and His Son Jesus Christ. Here are my reasons. I was raised a Catholic and attended a Catholic Grade school. I believed everything I was taught in Religion Class without question and without giving any thought to what I was being taught. For most of my life I never gave any thought to GOD and a hereafter. I went to church on Sunday's out of habit and sometimes superstition. When I reached my seventies, I started seriously thinking about a hereafter, GOD

and his Son, Jesus Christ. In weekly meetings with my Christian Friend, I have learned to trust the Bible as the word of GOD. About 40 different human authors contributed to the Bible, which was written over a period of about 1500 years. The authors were kings, fishermen, priests, government officials, farmers, shepherds, and doctors. From all this diversity comes an incredible unity, with common themes woven throughout. The Bible's unity is due to the fact that, ultimately, it has one Author—GOD Himself. The Bible is "GOD-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). The human authors wrote exactly what GOD wanted them to write, and the result was the perfect and holy Word of God (Psalm 12:6; 2 Peter 1:21). My Christian Friend gave me the guidance and information to answer many of my questions. I may have been a believer before but my Journey as a Seeker has reconfirmed my belief in GOD and his Son Jesus Christ.

I believe in a Supreme Being, GOD because if this short life we live on earth is all there ever is, then why not do everything in one's power to extract the maximum amount of pleasure, wealth and power during our time here on earth no matter how it will hurt other human beings. If there is no hereafter and no GOD to be accountable to, why be concerned about how we live our lives? Why do we have a conscience and feel guilty when we do something wrong? I cannot believe that a piece of slime crawled out of the sea and evolved into a human being with a conscience and intelligence.

After completing his Journey as a Seeker, Johnny began to feel a peace and calmness that he never experienced before.

June 2012

Johnny is attending a Cowboy Action Shooting match at a local range. The range is set up to look like an old western town with various old west building facades. There is an old time saloon, a barber shop and the OK corral to name a few. Johnny is addressing a group of thirty cowboy action shooters. Everyone is dressed in cowboy clothing. Would it not be for the autos in the parking lot, one might believe they were swept back in time and in the old west.

Johnny takes his hat off. “That concludes our safety meeting. I’d like to say a short prayer before we start the match. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this wonderful sport we participate in and the beautiful weather you have given us today. We thank you for this great country we live in and the men and women in our military who protect us. We ask you to give us a safe shoot. We ask you to protect this great country of ours and the men and women who guard our freedom. We ask this in your son Jesus’ name Amen” said Johnny.

The cowboy shooters respond with a loud and hearty **Amen**.

“You all have a safe and fun shoot. Thanks for coming” said Johnny as he put his hat back on.

The shooters walk over to various sections of the range and the match starts. Sonny, a tall, muscular man in his sixties dressed in black walks up to the firing line and stands next to the Timer Operator.

The Timer Operator looks at Sonny. “Is the shooter ready?” said the Timer Operator.

Sonny nods. “Yes Sir” said Sonny.

The Timer Operator puts the timer close to Sonny’s head. “Standby” said the Time Operator.

A buzzer on the timer sounds. Sonny picks up a Winchester rifle and alternates ten rounds between two steel targets. He lays the Winchester down and draws a Colt revolver from his holster. Sonny alternates five rounds between two smaller steel targets and re-holsters the revolver.

“Clean with a time of 19.7 Seconds. You may proceed to the unloading table” said the Timer Operator.

Sonny picks up the Winchester and walks over to the unloading table. Johnny is standing at the unloading table serving as the unloading officer. Sonny levers the Winchester.

Johnny looks into the Winchester's receiver. "Your rifle's Clear" said Johnny.

Sonny lays the Winchester down on the unloading table and pulls out a Colt revolver from his holster. He empties the spent brass cases and spins the cylinder. Johnny watches the cylinder spin.

"Your Pistol is clear. You are good to go Sonny. Say, I hope you didn't mind me saying a prayer before the match" said Johnny.

"Why do you say that?" said Sonny frowning as he holsters his revolver.

"I saw you walking away during the prayer. Everyone else had their hat off and was listening to the prayer" said Johnny.

"Well, the prayer was okay. We do have a lot to be thankful for but I don't need that son of GOD Jesus stuff. There ain't any such person" said Sonny.

"No GOD either?" said Johnny

Sonny responds in a loud and snotty tone. "Nope and don't start preaching to me either. I don't like listening to bible thumpers" said Sonny.

"I ain't a bible thumper Sonny" said Johnny shaking his head.

Later that afternoon Johnny arrives home and goes through the garage entrance into the kitchen. He is carrying his rifle and a pistol case. He is greeted by Rosa. He sets the rifle and case on the kitchen table.

Rosa looks at the table. "Please don't clean your guns on the kitchen table again" said Rosa

Johnny opens the refrigerator. "I just want a beer. I'll clean em' in the basement" said Johnny.

"How did you shoot?" said Rosa.

Johnny opens up a can of beer and takes a swig. “Not too bad. One lousy miss or I’d have had a clean match. I found something out about Sonny today. He doesn’t believe in GOD or a hereafter” said Johnny.

Rosa sits down. “How’d that come up?” said Rosa.

“I asked him how he liked the prayer I said before the match. He got a little hot about it” said Johnny

“What are you going to do about it” said Rosa.

Johnny takes another swig of beer. “Nothing, he’s been a good friend. I’ve known him for years and that’s the first time he ever got snotty with me” said Johnny.

Rosa points a finger at Johnny and shakes it. “Don’t you take any guff from him” said Rosa.

“Naw, it was no big deal. He’s a good guy. By the way Sonny just bought a Condo in Florida” said Johnny.

Rosa’s eyes widen. “Where in Florida?” said Rosa.

“St. Petersburg. He’ll be close to our son Jamie” said Johnny.

Rosa gave Johnny a big smile and said “You don’t say. I love St. Petersburg and their beaches. I’d love to have a Condo in Florida”.

“Are you serious? I’d sure like to downsize. This place is way too much work. It would be great to move into a Condo here in Wisconsin but not in Florida” said Johnny.

“Why not Florida?” said Rosa frowning.

“I plan on skiing when I’m eighty years old. You can’t ski in Florida. Besides riding a motorcycle in Florida can get dangerous” said Johnny.

“What about your hip? You told me the doctor said you're going to need a new hip someday” said Rosa.

“He’s all wet. I’ll make it to the end of the trail without any new parts” said Johnny grinning.

October 2013

Rather suddenly Johnny’s hip started to deteriorate rapidly. After x-rays showed that his hip joint was bone on bone he decided to get a hip replacement. Johnny could tolerate the pain and discomfort but he was concerned that his bad hip would eventually ruin his good hip. He was surprised at how quickly his hip went bad. He made the decision to stop skiing. He told his skiing buddies that he was sure he could ski on a new hip but did not want to risk falling and injuring it. After finishing Physical Therapy, Johnny became discouraged with his recovery progress. Finally, Rosa talked Johnny into going to Water Aerobics classes with her. Johnny was amazed at how well his new hip and old hip felt after doing Water Aerobics. His Surgeon told him that eventually he would need his other hip replaced.

“The Water Aerobics are incredible! You know I’m going to fool that Surgeon and definitely make it to the end of the trail without anymore new parts” said Johnny,

Rosa shook her finger at Johnny. “What have I been telling you for years? Maybe now you will listen to me for a change” said Rosa with a slight frown.

“Yes Sarge. By the way, were you serious about moving to Florida? Let’s talk about it” said Johnny.

Rosa perked up and smiled. “Why yes. I’d love to live in the St. Petersburg area but why your sudden change of heart?” said Rosa.

“I don’t ski anymore and certainly don’t need Wisconsin’s cold weather anymore. I’m also getting a little tired of taking care of this place. Besides we would be close to Jamie and he can take care of you if something happens to me” said Johnny.

“Don’t talk that way. Nothing is going to happen to you” said Rosa with a frown.

“I’m just thinking ahead. By the way, Sonny called me yesterday. He loves Florida. Why don’t we go down to St. Pete’s. We can visit Jamie and look around” said Johnny.

The following December Johnny and Rosa drove down to St. Petersburg to visit their son Jamie and explore the possibilities of moving to Florida. Johnny and Rosa felt comfortable in the St. Petersburg area and decided it was time to downsize. In October of 2014 they sold their home in Wisconsin and purchased a Condominium in a fifty-five plus community near St. Petersburg. Their Condo was within a half hour’s drive of Jamie and Sonny’s homes.

Johnny was a Harley-Davidson enthusiast since he was seventeen years old. When Rosa asked if he would be bringing his Harley down to Florida, he told her that he was going to sell it and buy a new Harley after they were settled in Florida.

Johnny always would scoff at the idea of living in a retirement community. He thought a fifty five plus community was for old people on their last leg. Johnny and Rosa were pleasantly surprised. Yes there were older people living there but Johnny and Rosa did not feel out of place. The people in their community were active and enjoying life. One of Johnny’s big concerns was the hot and humid weather in Florida. Johnny and Rosa made a habit of going to one of the pools early each morning to work out. The early morning weather was pleasant. When they went out later in the day and the weather was very hot and humid Johnny would say “So what, tomorrow morning will be beautiful”. Johnny and Rosa were pleasantly surprised at how easily they adjusted to Florida’s warm weather. Johnny was pleased to find that there was a Cowboy Action Shooting Club at a nearby shooting range. The Gulf of Mexico was fifteen minutes from their Condo. Johnny and Rosa loved to watch the sunsets and explore their new surroundings.

Johnny & Sonny

Johnny and Sonny were attending a Cowboy Action Shooting match near Johnny’s Condo. The pledge of allegiance was recited then the Match Director read the safety rules. When he

finished, he asked if anyone had any announcements. Johnny asked if he could say a short prayer.

The Match Director smiled and said “That would great”.

Johnny and the other shooters removed their hats.

“Heavenly Father, we thank you for this wonderful sport we participate in and the beautiful weather you have given us today. We thank you for this great country we live in and the men and women in our military who protect us. We ask you to give us a safe shoot. We ask you to protect this great country of ours and the men and women in harm’s way who protect our freedom. We ask this in your son Jesus’ name Amen” said Johnny.

The group of Cowboy shooters again responded with a loud and hearty **Amen**. Johnny noticed that Sonny was smoking a cigar and left his hat back on during the prayer.

Johnny and Sonny walked over to the Stage-1 loading table to load their firearms. Johnny held up his pistol for Sonny to check that the hammer was on an empty chamber.

“Your pistol looks good” said Sonny.

“Thank you, Sir. It looks like you didn’t approve of my prayer again” said Johnny as he holstered his pistol.

“It’s a free country. You can say anything you want. I just don’t believe in that Religious mumbo jumbo” said Sonny as he held up his pistol for Johnny to check that the hammer was on an empty chamber.

“Your pistol looks good. It’s not mumbo jumbo Sonny. You still don’t believe in a Creator and a hereafter, do you?” said Johnny.

“No I don’t” said Sonny in a forceful tone.

“Well let’s concentrate on the match. Some of the stages are rather complicated” said Johnny.

The Stage Marshall calls for the next Shooter. Johnny picks up his Winchester and heads for the firing line.

“Shoot clean” said Sonny.

Johnny and Sonny shoot five of the six stages. At the Stage-6 loading table they again check each other’s pistols to make sure they are unloaded and safe.

“How’s the day going for you?” said Johnny.

“I’ve got a clean match going for me so far” said Sonny smiling.

“Me too” said Johnny smiling.

Johnny and Sonny finish shooting the sixth stage and are at the unloading table checking each other’s firearms.

“How did you do” said Johnny as he removed the empty brass from his Winchester and pistol.

With a huge grin Sonny said “I had a clean match”.

“You looked real good out there today. Congratulations! I had one miss. It was my last rifle shot! It was clearly a lack of focus on my part. Say how about stopping for a beer afterwards?” said Johnny.

“Sounds good. I’m getting hungry too. How about stopping at Fred’s? I like their burgers” said Sonny.

“Yeah, I could use something to eat besides Rosa is visiting Jamie” said Johnny as he put his firearms into Sonny’s pickup truck.

Johnny and Sonny stopped a local bar called Fred’s. Fred’s advertised “The World’s best Burgers”. Both Johnny and Sonny agreed with Fred’s advertising. They each ordered a beer and a burger. Johnny took his hat off.

Sonny notices Johnny's hair is cropped short and his pony tail is gone.

"You look much better with short hair, younger too" said Sonny.

"That what everyone tells me. Rosa likes it too. Well, here's to your clean match" said Johnny as he raised his glass to Sonny.

"Why thank you Sir. By the way, the other day Rosa told my wife how much she likes Florida" said Sonny as he bumped Johnny's glass.

"She likes being close to Jamie and the seashore. Besides Jamie will take care of her if something happens to me" said Johnny.

Sonny smiled and said "Nothing will happen to you. You are Iron Man".

"I'm not so sure of that. I haven't been feeling right lately" said Johnny.

"There's a nasty bug going around. You might have a touch of it. I gotta tell you Johnny. I'm really sorry for getting hot about the prayer thing. It's just that I don't believe in a hereafter" said Sonny in a serious tone.

"Let's enjoy our beers Sonny" said Johnny.

Sonny takes a swig of beer. "How about going to the range tomorrow? I want to try out my new set of pistols" said Sonny.

"I'd like to but I've got a doctor's appointment tomorrow morning" said Johnny.

"I hope it's nothing serious" said Sonny.

"I don't think so. Lately I've had some difficulty swallowing along with my vision being blurred at times. I just want to get it checked out" said Johnny.

Sonny smiled and said “Well there was nothing wrong with your vision today with only one miss. By the way, when are you going to buy another Harley? I sure miss our rides together”.

“I guess I got wrapped up in the move. I still plan on buying one but I’m not in a hurry. I’m thinking of getting another Heritage Softail. I don’t need a bagger anymore cause I don’t plan doing any more long trips” said Johnny as he finished his beer.

The Doctor visit

Johnny is sitting in a Doctor's office. Johnny is wearing a navy-blue, double-breasted blazer with brass buttons along with a pink tab collar shirt and a contrasting Jerry Garcia necktie. Two days ago, Johnny received a call from the Doctor and was told to bring his wife with him. Johnny did not tell Rosa of the phone call and decided to go alone. The Doctor walked in and noticed Johnny is alone. He also notices Johnny’s flashy apparel.

“I see you decided to come alone today. You are looking pretty good sir. Unfortunately, my news for you is not good. All of the tests reveal that you have CJD also known as Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease” said the Doctor in a quiet and serious tone.

Johnny bit his lower lip and looked down at the floor for a few seconds. He took a deep breath then looked up at the Doctor.

“I never heard of that one. What’s the prognosis and please don’t beat around the bush?” said Johnny quietly.

The Doctor puts his hand on Johnny’s shoulder.

“It’s not good. I’m going to give it to you straight Johnny. Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease is a very rare, irreversible brain disorder that is ultimately terminal” said the Doctor.

Johnny winced and said “How much time do I have left?”.

“It’s hard to tell. A year, maybe less” said the Doctor.

“What will I be able to do?” said Johnny.

“Just about anything you want for a while but eventually you will become bed ridden. I want you to call me every week” said the Doctor.

“Thank you for giving it to me straight” said Johnny as he and the Doctor shook hands.

Johnny drove to a local Harley-Davidson dealer and arranged to rent a motorcycle. He selected a Heritage Softail and told the dealer he would be by tomorrow to pick it up.

The Last Ride

Rosa was still sleeping when Johnny woke up and went for a short walk. When he returned from the walk Rosa was awake. Johnny was wearing a pair of jeans, a long sleeve Harley-Davidson shirt and a pair of snake skin boots. The shirt read “Live to Ride-Ride to Live” on the front. It was the same exact saying that was tattooed on Johnny’s left arm.

Rosa looked at Johnny with a puzzled look and said “Why are you dressed that way? I thought we were going to the pool this morning?”.

Johnny smiled and said “I’m going to take a break today. It’s Sonny’s birthday and I’m going to the Harley dealer to buy him a gift”.

“Wait I’ll go with you” said Rosa.

“That’s okay. I’m going to meet him for a beer and some lunch. We may do some shooting” said Johnny.

Rosa shook her finger at Johnny and said “Well don’t drink too much”.

“Don’t worry Sarge. I’ll be a good boy. I’ll be back this afternoon” said Johnny as he started to leave.

Rosa stopped Johnny and said “Say you never told me how your Doctor visit went yesterday.

Johnny gave Rosa a small forced smile and said “It went just fine”.

On the drive over to the Harley dealer Johnny was unhappy with himself for not telling Rosa the truth about the results from his Doctor visit. He went over in his mind how he was going to tell Rosa that the game whistle was going blow sooner than later and end the 4th Quarter for him.

Johnny arrived at the Harley dealer and purchased a one-day rental. He was given a full-face helmet to wear. Johnny asked if he could have a half helmet and was given one. The dealer’s rental agent asked Johnny how much experience he had driving a motorcycle. He told them almost sixty years. Johnny was asked to demonstrate his motorcycle driving skills by driving around the dealer’s parking lot through some widely placed orange cones. Johnny had not driven a motorcycle for six months and was a bit nervous. He mounted the Black Heritage Softail and thumbed the starter. The engine roared to life and Johnny carefully navigated the course. His riding skills and many years of experience came back to him at once. The rental agent gave Johnny a thumbs-up and said he looked pretty good on the Heritage. Johnny took off and headed for the Gulf of Mexico.

Johnny drove to Pasa Grill Beach and parked the Harley. He walks over to a park bench and sits down. Johnny pulls out an Ashton cigar and lights it. A tear briefly appears in his eye.

Johnny says to himself “Well LORD, it looks like I’ll be meeting you soon. I’ve never asked you for anything and I’m not asking you for anything now. You have been good to me. I just want to thank you for the good life you have given me”.

Johnny watches the surf roll in the Gulf of Mexico. He walks down to the water’s edge. Johnny stands there for a few minutes then returns to the park bench.

A Police Officer walks up to Johnny. "Excuse me sir but tobacco products are not allowed on this beach. Please put it out" said the Officer.

"No problem Officer. Gee, I hope you don't give me a ticket. I didn't know that smoking was not allowed here" said Johnny .

"No ticket today. They just passed the "no tobacco" ordinance and not too many people are aware of it yet. Say, it that your Harley over there?" said the Officer with a smile.

"No. I'm just renting it for the day. Golly, I hope they don't pass a law against Harley's" said Johnny grinning.

"I sure hope not. I've just bought a new Electra-Glide. Are you a new rider?" said the Officer.

"Nope. I've been riding for almost sixty years. Back in Wisconsin, I used to have three Harley's in my garage at all times" said Johnny.

"Wow. I had trouble convincing the wife to let me have just one. Are you planning on buying another one here in Florida?" said the Officer.

"Not right now. I've got slight health issue I'm dealing with" said /Johnny with a slight smile.

"Well I hope it's nothing serious. You have a nice day Sir and keep the shiny side up" said the Officer.

"Thank you. It's nothing I can't handle. You have a good day too Officer" said Johnny standing up.

They shake hands and the Officer walks away. Johnny sits back down on the park bench. He looks at the bay. An elderly Nun with a cane slowly walks past the Harley. She stops and studies the Harley for a minute and then walks up to the park bench. She taps on the bench with her cane.

"Excuse me young man. Is that your motorcycle?" said the Nun.

“For today it is. Boy, I can’t remember when someone called me young man. I might be older than you are ma’am” said Johnny with a slightly startled look.

“I’m ninety five Sonny. Do you mind if I sit for a minute. Say, you wouldn’t a cigarette on you, would you?” said the Nun.

“The city passed an ordinance banning all tobacco products on this beach. I almost got a ticket for smoking a cigar here. Besides, don’t you know cigarette smoking is hazardous to your health?” said Johnny smiling.

The Nun laughs. “At ninety five I should worry? Do have anything to drink? I’m getting rather thirsty” said the Nun.

“I’ve got a couple of cans of beer in my saddle bags. They might be a bit on the warm side” said Johnny.

“A beer would be just fine Sonny, provided you have one with me” said the Nun with a big grin.

Johnny gets up and gets two cans of beer out of the saddle bags. He sits down and opens each can, He hands a can to the Nun.

“Here you go ma’am. Keep em’ sort of hidden. I’m sure they don’t allow alcohol on this beach either. To whom shall we toast to? Said Johnny as he raises his can for a toast.

“Lets toast to Jesus. I’m going to be meeting him real soon” said the Nun as she touches Johnny’s can.

Johnny gets a startled look on his can then returns the Nun’s toast,

“Excuse me Sonny. Did I say something to offend you” said the Nun.

“No you didn’t. It’s just that I never thought of toasting Jesus. Truth be told, I’m going to be meeting him real soon also” said Johnny looking out at the bay.

“Oh, I didn’t know. How do you feel about that? I’ve lived way beyond my years but you are much younger than me” said the Nun.

Johnny looks at the Nun, I’m seventy three ma’am and I’m really at peace with myself. The man upstairs has been very good to me. I have absolutely no regrets. I’m married to a wonderful lady for over fifty years, have three wonderful children, been successful in business and had a pain free life. You might say I’ve led a charmed life. A person couldn’t ask for anything more. How about you ma’am” said Johnny.

The Nun gets big grin. “Well, I always wanted a ride on a Harley” said the Nun,

Johnny points to the Harley. “Well, Hop on Sister. Lets go go a ride” said Johnny.

“I’d like to. One more beer and I just might take you up on that. No, really I don’t think I could swing these old bones over the seat. Maybe I could of ten years ago. But thanks for your very kind offer. Say, what’s your name? Mine is Sister Maria” said the Nun.

“Mine’s Johnny. Sister Maria, just like the lady in the Sound of Music. What was her name, Baroness Von Trap?” said Johnny.

The Nun smiles. “Yes, just like the lady in the Sound of Music except I never met a Baron. Just kidding. Say, how did you manage to stay married for fifty years?” said the Nun.

Johnny takes a big swig of beer. “We always took separate vacations. My wife has traveled all over the world. I’ve never been out of the country” said Johnny.

“What did you do? Why did you take separate vacations?” said the Nun.

“I’d go skiing in Aspen or Vail for a few weeks each year, go fishing in Canada for another week and have been to the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally twenty two years in a row. We were

in business together and we were around each other twenty four hours a day. Also we trusted each other. She is the finest woman I've ever met" said Johnny.

The Nun smiles and looks at her watch. "That's just so wonderful. Well, I have to go now. It was so nice to meet you Johnny" said the Nun.

"Me too Sister Maria. Can I call Uber for you?" said Johnny.

"No thank you. My car is right over there" said the Nun.

"At least let me walk you over to your car" said Johnny as he offers the Nun his arm.

They walk over to a Red 1959 Corvette with the top down. Johnny gets a startled look on his face then smiles.

"This is your Corvette?" said Johnny.

"Yes sirree Bob, I only drive it when it's nice out and I can put the top down. I can't get in it with the top up. It's an automatic. I wish it was a four speed" said the Nun as she patted the front fender.

"How does a Nun get a car like that? I thought you ladies of the cloth swore a vow of poverty" said Johnny laughing.

The Nun smiles. "My younger brother willed it to me. I've willed it to our Convent with the condition that I can drive it once in a while. Mother Superior wasn't thrilled about that but When I go, this buggy will pay for a new addition to our Convent and then some. You wouldn't believe what this thing is worth. Well, Good luck to you Johnny. I know we will meet again someday" said the Nun.

The Nun gives Johnny a hug. She gets in the Corvette and takes off. Johnny hears the tires squeal and smiles.

Johnny arrived back at the Harley dealer to return the motorcycle. The dealer's rental agent asked him how he liked the Heritage Softail and if he was thinking a buying a Harley

in the future. Johnny smiled and told the rental agent maybe sometime down the road.

When Johnny arrived back home, he promptly told Rosa about his Doctor visit.

Eleven months later

The illness weakened Johnny considerably and he could no longer walk. Johnny's illness eventually caused him to become bed ridden. After becoming bed ridden Johnny was visited by Sonny several times a week. Their conversations were light hearted and they did a lot of reminiscing. As the weeks passed Johnny grew weaker and weaker physically but he remained alert and lucid.

It was Christmas Eve and a sunny day in Florida with temperatures in the seventies when Sonny stopped in to visit Johnny.

"How are you feeling today Pardner?" said Sonny as he sat down next to Johnny.

"Not too bad. They have me doped up pretty much" said Johnny in soft voice.

"Anything I can do for you?" said Sonny.

"Naw. There's nothing I need anymore. It won't be much longer now. By the way, are you going golfing tomorrow? I know that's a big tradition with you, golfing on Christmas day" said Johnny.

"I don't think so. I'm not in the mood this year" said Sonny.

"Sonny, there is something you can do for me. Go golfing tomorrow for me. I saw the weather report and it's supposed to be in the mid-seventies again. Another thing, try to at least start **thinking** about **GOD** and a hereafter. I'll be meeting him soon" said Johnny.

Sonny stood up and walked towards the window. He stood there for a few seconds gazing out the window and then walked back and sat down again next to Johnny.

“I’ll go golfing tomorrow for you. Johnny, we have been friends for a long time and we have always been straight with each other. I have to be honest with you. I can’t believe there is a GOD or hereafter. There’s a much a chance of a hereafter as it is snowing in Florida on Christmas day. You believe what you want. I’m sorry but I have to be honest with you. That’s just me. Your GOD dealt you a bad break” said Sonny.

“Sonny, You have seen the movie “Pride of the Yankee’s” with Gary Cooper. Remember the last scene when Lou Gehrig is giving his farewell speech at Yankee stadium? He knows his time is limited and he says “I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of this earth”. Well that’s me. The luckiest man on the face of the earth. I’ve had a good life” said Johnny as he tried to smile.

“Well I’m glad you feel that way. I hope I can feel that way someday” said Sonny.

“Sonny, I wrote my own epitaph. Would you read it for me someday? I’d like to get the last word in. One more thing, here is a copy of my Testimony. Please read it sometime, for me **please**” said Johnny.

“Yes. I will” said Sonny as he shook Johnny’s hand and put the paper in his pocket.

“I’ll see you tomorrow after golf. I’ve got a Christmas gift for you” said Sonny as he stood up.

“I forgot to get you a Christmas gift but I’ll surprise you with something” said Johnny.

That evening Johnny passed away peacefully with Rosa and Jamie at his side. Jamie called Sonny to let him know about Johnny. After hearing the news of Johnny’s passing, Sonny went out on his patio. He sat there for hours. He pondered his

last conversation with Johnny and then read Johnny's Testimony. Sonny fell asleep in a big easy chair,

Christmas morning

Sonny woke up at 5:00 AM. He walked over to his patio doors and drew open the drapes. It was snowing and there was snow cover on the ground, a total of three inches!

Tears welled up in Sonny's eyes.

"Oh Johnny!" said Sonny in a loud voice as he fell to his knees.

That morning Sonny drove his Harley to a nearby church. He entered the church and knelt in the first pew. He put his hands together in prayer and looked up at the Crucifix.

"Dear GOD....." said Sonny.

Pasa Grill Beach

It was a beautiful sunny afternoon in Florida. Rosa held a celebration on life for Johnny at Pasa Grill Beach. She invited the Four Original Neat Guys from Wisconsin and everyone else Johnny had met in Florida. Sister Maria drove up in her Corvette. Everyone was chatting and telling their favorite stories about Johnny,

"Hey everyone, I have something to say. Johnny wrote his own eulogy and asked me to read it. He said he wanted to get the last word in." said Sonny as he pulled out several sheets of paper.

"That sounds like Johnny" said Andy smiling. Tommy and Davy smile and raise their beer cans in a toast.

Sonny starts to speak. "Here goes folks. These are Johnny's own words". **I have been to several of these affairs throughout the years and sometimes someone gets up and gives a little speech about the person and their life. Sometimes the comments are very appropriate and**

sometimes not. Sometimes the speech giver does not even know the person but pretends to. While the speech giver may have the best of intentions, I'm not so sure that what they say sometimes is what the person would want to have said. So I'm not taking any chances. First of all, if there ever was a person who was blessed with a good life, it was me. The lord has been exceptionally good to me. Simply stated, I wouldn't change a thing. I have been..... Sonny stops reading.

The sound of a Harley is heard up in the sky. It gets louder and louder then stops. Johnny walks in. He is wearing a white motorcycle outfit and carrying a gold motorcycle helmet. Everyone is dumbfounded. Johnny walks up to Rosa and gives her a big hug.

“Are you behaving yourself my dear?” said Johnny smiling. Rosa is speechless.

Sonny walks up to Johnny and has a puzzled look on his face.

“Johnny, how can this be? Am I dreaming or what?” said Sonny.

Johnny smiles. “St. Peter looked at my records and I had to do a little bit of penance first. When I was done, he said I could have one wish. Every wish I asked for was against the rules and was denied. He finally agreed to let me go to this party and say hi to everyone but only for a few minutes. So here I am.

Nice to see you all. Hope to see you all again someday but not too soon” said Johnny.

Tommy, Andy and Davy walk up to Johnny and shake his hand. Sister Maria gives Johnny a hug. Johnny gives Rosa a big hug and kiss. The sound of a Harley is heard again.

“Well that's my call. Goodbye everyone” said Johnny as he waves and walks off.

The sound of a Harley gets louder for a few seconds then slowly fades away.

THE END