



THE CRUSADERS

GROWING UP IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA IN THE 60'S

JOHN O'MELVENY WOODS

The Crusaders

Love - Peace - Drugs - Friendship

Sample Chapter - Lovers' Island

**JOHN
O'MELVENY
WOODS**

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Dedication:

**To those who also screwed up and thought there
was no hope...**

there is.



IN-N-OUT BURGER

XON TOLD 'GET OUT OF WAR' BY MADISON GIRL

BASKETBALL

Olympians

Lerner

Coca-Cola

The Beatles Yesterday And Today

Buffalo Springfield

Big Boy

THE ROLLING STONES

DAILY NEWS

MARTIN KING SHOT TO DEATH
Gunned Down in Memphis

SURF BOARDS by JACOB

BLUE CHIP

THE ROLLING STONES 12X5

Bob Kennedy Shot, 'Extremely Critical'

OREGON JOURNAL Aides Grab Assailant

THE BEATLES

Lovers' Island

“Let’s hitch to the beach and go body surfing,” Stanley suggested as Paul, Kenny, and I walked down Nolandale, smoking away.

Paul took a long drag, scanned the bright piercing blue sky and thoughtfully blew the smoke out. “Nah, it’s too hot for that, man.”

Kenny stopped and faced us. “Then let’s go to In-N-Out.”

Stanley pointed with his hand, a cigarette between his fingers like a bandleader’s wand. “You’re always hungry, Kenny.”

“So what if I am?”

“So ... we’ve got no bread anyway,” I reminded them.

Paul chuckled. “I saw a garage full of pop bottles on Barrydale just waiting to be liberated. We can cash them in.”

“You didn’t see any bottles,” Stanley said.

“Swear to God I did ... on the way over here.”

“Knock it off you guys.” Kenny’d had enough.

“Yes I did.” Paul gave Stanley the lowered eyebrow evil eye.

Stanley returned a slight grin and shook his head, flipping his cigarette butt into the air, watching it land against a curb.

“Hey, let’s go to the mall and get some chase,” I suggested.

That elicited unanimous affirmation. We were almost to the end of my street where we usually cut through the fence to Puente Avenue, when Kenny eyed something on the chain link fence next to his house. He strode toward it.

“What’s up, Kenny?” Paul asked.

“I’ve got an idea.” He reached the rose bush and picked off one of the large, hardened buds. Looking at us, he winked,

wound up like a pitcher, raised his right leg and threw it squarely at a car driving past us.

“Waddaya doing?” Stanley asked, incredulous.

Thump.

It bounced off the car’s door.

“Jeez, Kenny,” I said.

Paul shook his head and laughed. I couldn’t help myself. I joined him.

“You’re crazy, Kenny, ya know that?” Paul said.

“Not really, man. Think about it. We can hit cars, leave no dents and who’s the worse off for it?” He searched around for more buds. “Besides, we might get chased.”

“Come on dudes, let’s get going.” Stanley motioned with his arm.

Kenny held out his hand like a stop sign. “Wait, Stanley. Just one more.”

Groans erupted.

I peered over the chain link fence. A low-rider car was bouncing jerkily and squeaking its way toward us. Kenny wiggled his eyebrows up and down, widened his eyes and smiled deviously as he picked a nice fat bud from the bush and stood dead still.

“Don’t do it to this car, Kenny,” I said. “Swear to God.”

The car drove closer - a powder blue 1952 Chevy coupe, lowered almost to the ground. Brown arms hung out the windows. “Lovers Island” painted in light blue graced the rear side window. Kenny wound up and looked back, left, and right, Sandy Koufax style. As they neared, we could see tattoos covering their forearms.

“Hey, Kenny... come on man, don’t do it,” Paul implored.

Too late.

Kenny threw the bud in one fluid motion, releasing it while he yelled “Hey, you!”

Three pairs of wide-eyes followed the rose bud as it flew directly toward the passenger window. The guy in the front seat, a “beaner” about forty years old with a bandana wrapped high on his head, quickly turned around at the taunt, sneering.

We watched it splatter hard against his right cheekbone.

Direct hit.

A horrible shout erupted from the car. “Shit! Pendejos.”

Screeching brakes were followed by louder swearing in Spanish. The car’s door flew open as the enraged passenger jumped from the car and stared directly at us. His face was pock marked, with thin lips and beady eyes. He wore typical “vato” clothing: black shoes, khaki pants three sizes too long in length, and a Pendleton long-sleeve shirt over a white t-shirt. Only the wounded passenger had one thing not typical - a six-inch Bowie knife in a dirty brown leather case strapped to his right leg.

I glanced at Kenny. Disbelief flooded his face at the realization of what he had just done.

“H-o-l-y -s-h-i-t!” he whispered aloud.

Stanley raced toward my backyard and yelled, “Chase!”

Paul and Kenny followed immediately.

My heart’s pounding almost drowned out Stanley’s rallying cry. I knew we could outrun them. However, my legs hesitated for a moment, the scene being so incredibly stupid. *What the heck got into Kenny? Why did he pick that car to hit? Did he even think about us being near our houses? What if we don’t get away? Wait. What if ... Holy crap! I need to get outta here.*

I sprinted across Kenny’s lawn to my side yard, leaped up on the block wall, down into my yard, across and around the playhouse toward the rear wall. Jumping and pulling myself up and over it, I reached the other guys. All of us raced out through the wooden gate to the next street, ran across the

asphalt to the other side and rested to catch our breath. No one spoke a word.

The car's tires screeched as it careened around the corner and headed directly toward us.

Kenny motioned with his arm like a traffic cop. "Come on guys, this way."

We sprinted through the side yard of the house. *Damn it.* They had a couple of golden retrievers that started barking and nipping at our legs. We reached their cement block wall, went over it and into the next yard, scraping our arms and legs. We could hear the screech of rubber around the corner of the exact street we were just on.

Shit.

They chased us for another ten minutes going up and down streets. We ran five blocks away, jumping walls, tearing through neighbors' yards, barely avoiding them. We finally stopped, did an about-face and started making our way back toward my house.

Two blocks away we dashed across the street into another neighbor's yard, where more dogs barked. We reached a six-foot block wall. Paul pulled himself up and straddled it. Kenny dove completely over it. Out of breath and muscles aching, I struggled to pull myself up. I was a short sprinter. This was taking too long.

I lifted my arm. "Paul, give me a hand up, dude."

Paul reached down and pulled me up and over the wall. He yanked Stanley over next. The screeches and roaring engine were getting closer. We ran to the next wall where they must have added another row of cement blocks, because it seemed a lot higher. Paul cupped his hands.

"Come on, John, jump over."

I stuck a shoe in his cupped hands, reached the top and pulled myself up and over. Kenny followed and then Stanley,

who straddled the wall. Paul realized that he needed to get over and looked up at Stanley, panic in his eyes. We could hear tires skidding and car doors flying open on the street next to the wall.

“They’re over here,” one of the vatos yelled.

Stanley reached down and whispered, “Grab my hand, man.”

Paul clasped it while Stanley, being the smallest of the group, leaned back to leverage him up. Paul struggled before he looped his leg over the wall and fell to the other side. Stanley plopped on the grass next to him.

I was already across the street between two houses, shouting and motioning for them to follow. “Come on.”

Stanley, Paul and Kenny darted across the street and then, hopping two more block walls and eluding one irritated Doberman Pinscher, we finally ended up in my backyard. Bent over with hands grasping our legs, gasping for breath, exhausted, and scared shitless, we wondered collectively if we would ever get away from those guys. They were relentless.

We faintly heard their car as it slowly cruised down a street two blocks away, circled back to Barrydale, and then headed to the next closer street. Stalking us. Daring us to try and run away from them so *they* could see where we were. Glancing at each other, we intuitively knew what the game had become. We were the hunted. It was no longer a fun game of chase. Those vatos were determined to beat the crap out of us.

Or worse.

After I’d caught my breath, I had an idea. A large-leafed maple tree grew next to my house. It partially covered the roof. If we stealthily crawled up to the roof’s pinnacle and peered over, while obscured beneath the leaves, we could see them, hopefully without them seeing us. At the same time, we could stop running and rest up. The Crusaders agreed.

The jump from the playhouse to the roof was an easy one, and presented no problem. We crab-crawled our way up and cautiously peeked over the top. The low-rider Chevy was inching its way down the street, the beaners in it looking left and right. Surreal. Like a predator stalking and searching its prey. It came almost to the end of the cul-de-sac and stopped.

The victim of Kenny's bud stepped out and looked around. His compadres exited and stood by the car, searching between houses with venomous eyes. A friendly Mexican neighbor of ours, Mr. Fierro, walked out to speak with them. They spoke in hushed tones. The one with the bright red lump on his cheek waved his arms wildly.

Mr. Fierro finally cut him off. "Come on, man, they're just stupid kids."

"Stupid kids, my ass."

The dark-skinned vato bared his clenched teeth, stretched his lips and pointed his arm with an outstretched finger, as if he *knew* we could see him. The sunlight made his beady eyes look even more sinister. He spoke as he turned in a half-circle. "I'm gonna get you, you little rat bastards."

He slammed his fist onto the roof of the car before he and his buddies got back in. Four doors slammed shut. Tires squealed as they put it in gear, made the turn around the cul-de-sac and tore off toward the end of the street and out of sight. Spanish swear words and squealing tires echoed into the distance.

Paul looked over Stanley's shoulder toward Kenny, who was lying next to me, and swung at him with his fisted right hand. "You fucking idiot! You almost got us killed." He continued hitting Kenny until Stanley pushed him off and kneeled upright.

"What are you doing, Paul?"

He stopped his punching and kneeled back on his legs. Kenny rubbed his shoulder and feigned as if he were hurt. “Paul, that was uncool.”

“I’ll tell you what was uncool, Kenny,” Paul hooked his thumb toward the street. “Fucking with those assholes.”

Kenny started smirking, shoulders shaking. Stanley caught it and started smiling too.

“What?” Paul questioned, looking around.

Kenny and Stanley broke out laughing. I quickly followed. Couldn’t help myself. It was infectious. Paul couldn’t resist either and finally joined in, the nervous laughter quickly growing in loudness until it hit a crescendo.

We all turned onto our backs and laid there, still chuckling. Stanley pulled out a smoke and lit up, slowly blowing the smoke out. “How long do you think we’ll have to hide before we can go anywhere?”

“We should probably lay low for at least a couple of days,” Paul said, putting his hands behind his head. “Those guys seemed pretty pissed off.”

I leaned up on my elbows. “*Seemed* pissed off? I’d say that ship sailed, dudes. They were way past that.”

“Johnny! Johnny?”

My mom was calling from down on the front porch. I sat up and yelled back.

“Hey Mom, I’m up on the roof.”

“You better get down before your father gets home or you’ll be in trouble, you hear?”

“Yeah Mom, I’m coming down now.”

Paul sat up, leaned over toward me and sang out in songsong: “Johnny’s in trouble. Johnny’s in trouble.”

I gave him the “turbo” evil eye. It didn’t faze him. Kenny started laughing, and then the dams burst. Tears ran down our

cheeks as we joined in. We scooted our way to the edge of the roof and jumped down near the playhouse.

My hands started shaking as we sat down.

“Dudes, that was some seriously scary chase,” I said.

Paul stretched out his legs one at a time, trying to stop the cramping. “That may be the best chase ever, dudes.”

Kenny beamed. “See, I got us the best chase ever.”

“Almost got us killed,” Stanley said.

“But it didn’t,” I said, shrugging. “Luckily.” My hands continued to shake. I rubbed them together.

We sat in front of the playhouse silently, each of us lost in his own thoughts. Mine were replaying the events of the past half-hour - of jumping fences, my heart pounding in my chest, observing my scraped and bloody arms from scaling and climbing over cement block walls, and how terrified I was. I assumed the rest were in the same frame of reflection.

“Let’s get something from Dairy Delight,” Kenny finally said. He looked to Stanley. “I know, I’m always hungry.”

Paul examined his bloodied arms and the ripped pocket on his shirt. “Yeah, sounds good.”

I pulled off some of the cement chips stuck on my arms and reminded him, “We don’t have any money.”

“Let’s walk by that garage I was telling you about and pick up some bottles,” Paul said as he stood up. He gazed at Stanley. “I wasn’t bullshitting, taxi cab.”

Stanley flipped him off and rose. “Think it’s okay to go out there?” he asked, pointing with a freshly lit cigarette. “I don’t know how much more chase I can take for one day.”

Paul brushed himself off with both hands. “Let’s all go home and change our clothes and meet at the field. They won’t be able to recognize us anyway.”

“Maybe not you, Paul, but that vato looked me directly in the eyes,” Kenny said as he shuddered. “Damn evil looking.”

I lit a cigarette and slapped the lighter shut. “Fuck ‘em. Let’s get changed and chow down at Dairy Delight.” I exhaled the bluish smoke and stared at Kenny, shaking my head. “That may have been the dumbest thing you ever did.”

“But it was some bitchin’ chase, man,” Kenny replied, winking.

I couldn’t hold back my smile. “Yeah, it was,” I agreed. “It surely was.”

Thankfully, we never saw “Lovers Island” or those beaners again.

And we never played our favorite game of chase again, either.

Didn’t seem as much fun anymore.

From the back cover:

The 1960's were more than unique; they were without parallel.

From rock and roll to the space program, drugs to free love, the Vietnam War to civil rights, equality for women to the assassinations of beloved leaders, they forever changed an entire generation.

The Crusaders is a collection of stories... that *ignores* most of that.

Instead, it's about a group of friends who grew up in a bedroom community near Los Angeles, California, during those tumultuous and seminal times.

From the innocence of pubescent naiveté to the experimenting of curious minds, these tales take the reader through the 60's from *The Crusaders* youthful point of view with warmth, humor and good-natured fun.

The Crusaders both celebrates the 60's and exposes the unintended consequences that resulted as they slipped deeper into the uncharted waters of the times.

And how they paid dearly for their actions.

At its heart, *The Crusaders* is about the friendship, loyalty and love for each other that anchored and enabled them to get through those chaotic times to the other side of healing.

We invite you to order the Book or eBook today!

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