

THE HUNTING PARTY

The “Gang of Five” was a group of middle aged doctors in Grand Rapids, Michigan, still trying to relive their younger days when they were all medical students at Vanderbilt University. When they were off duty they often attended sporting events together, golfed, watched football and partied in one another’s home. Dr. BJ was considered the “gang leader”. The gang owned a large hunting and fishing cabin in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Each of them would take turns taking his family to the cabin on their vacations or long weekends. Hunting and fishing was a real passion for all of them!

Soon after I started my Internship at Butterworth Hospital, I began to hear stories about these doctors. They played tricks on each other, had an endless supply of stories and jokes so were quite popular with the Hospital Staff. They referred patients to one another and were very aggressive in obtaining new patients. They got many of their referrals by wining and dining potential referring doctors!

Surgeon, Dr. BJ, was one of my mentors at Butterworth Hospital, in Grand Rapid, Michigan. He was very intimidating. He would get upset whenever I tied one handed knots. He called them “granny knots” even though they were square knots. In turn, he always tied two handed knots which were true granny knots. I could not convince him otherwise. One day, BJ’s partner, who had tried for several years to stop BJ from tying granny knots, met me grinning from ear to ear. He told me he had assisted BJ doing a gallbladder operation at Ferguson Hospital the previous day. To close the abdomen, BJ had used the latest suture, siliconized silk. It was very slick and was easy to tie. But when the patient was waking up, he coughed several times and all the sutures untied and the patient’s bowels popped out of his abdomen! After that, BJ let me tie one handed knots. To keep him quiet, all I had to do was to mention “siliconized silk”. I also noticed that he had started to tie square knots! He had learned his lesson the hard way!

I was told this story by Dr. BJ. He had done major surgery on a man who had very good medical insurance. But, he never received the check from the Insurance Company. The Insurance Company told him that the check had been sent to the patient. The surgeon’s signature had been forged and the patient had cashed the check! The surgeon tried to call the patient but the phone was disconnected. Finally, with some difficulty, two weeks later, Dr. BJ found his patient had moved to a large new home on the edge of town and had an unlisted phone number. Contacting the patient by mail was not successful so very early one Saturday morning the surgeon drove out to the man’s home. His former patient was in his yard and had his truck all packed ready to go fishing. A brand new boat was on its trailer ready to be hooked up to the truck.

“Gee Doc”, the man said after BJ had inquired about the check; “I was on my way to your office with your check when I saw this lovely boat for sale at a low price. It is just the boat I have always wanted. Your check just covered the price of the boat. Now you will have to wait for your money!” “Don’t touch that boat, it is my boat; I paid for it”, the doctor replied, “I also always wanted one, now I have it.” The man stood there almost in a trance while Dr. BJ backed up his large Buick station wagon and hooked on to the boat trailer and drove off. He looked in his rear view mirror and watched the man’s face get

longer and longer, then, the man started wiping tears from his eyes. The boat was put to good use by each of the doctors as they took their families boating and fishing. It was kept in a shed at their cabin.

BJ also told the story of two brothers who were his patients. They lived across the street from one another. They were tired of having to mow their lawns with a push type of mower. So they pooled their money and bought a power mower. They had a very hard time starting their mower, so decided to carry it across the street while it was still running. Unfortunately their hands slipped too far under the mower, while it was being carried, cutting off all twenty finger tips. Dr. BJ did twenty small skin grafts on the two brothers. The two men had to have their hands wrapped in bulky "boxing glove" dressings on their hands. Their wives had to feed them, dress them and care for them like they were newborn babies. Even more embarrassing, to them, was explaining how they were injured!

Nothing could stop the Gang of Five from being in their cabin on the opening day of hunting season. It was always on a Saturday morning! Deer blinds had been prepared in the woods beforehand. Their woodpile had been filled, and food supplies had been replenished. Cases of their favorite beer were waiting in the storeroom. Far ahead of time, arrangements would be made for younger doctors, in need of extra money, to cover for each of the hunters. On Friday, the day before the opening of the hunting season, the doctors would make their rounds, introduce their patients to the doctors covering for them, finish in their office, then jump into Dr. BJ's station wagon and drive as fast as they could to get to their cabin before dark. They were aware that they might have an unwelcome reception waiting for them in a small remote town a few miles from their cabin. This could cause them unnecessary delay. A tough group of teenagers, in that town, objected to all the "foreigners", from the Lower Peninsula, taking over their town, drinking, clogging traffic, and shattering the tranquility of their woods and meadows with the jarring sounds of gunfire. These kids would think up all kinds of tricks to play on the motorists. Road signs would be changed around, nails would be placed on the road and Impromptu roadblocks would be erected. When the motorists tried to clear the road, kids hiding in the bush, would pelt them with rotten eggs and fruit. The five doctors were aware of most of these tricks.

In the fall of 1963, each of the doctors had spotted numerous well fed deer around their cabin, including several large bucks. They could hardly wait. Nothing was going to delay them that Friday. The only stop in their city was to fill up with gasoline and buy two cases of their favorite beer. Because the beer had a diuretic effect on the doctors, they would need to make several "rest stops" along the way. This would cause more delays. So, instead, a gallon pickle jar was passed around the vehicle to be used as a urinal. The only stop along the way was to buy gas and change drivers just before crossing the Macinac bridge. The doctors drove very fast, drinking beer all the way. They only slowed down at spots where they knew police cars were hiding. When they reached the small town nearest to their destination, both cases of beer were gone and the gallon jar was full. The doctors were feeling very happy, relaxed and adventurous! As expected, there was something in the road. There was a teenage boy looking twisted and lifeless in the middle of the road. A battered bicycle was blocking the other traffic lane! The "victim" appeared to have blood all over him and there appeared to be a pool of blood beside him. Dr. BJ recognized him as one of the main tricksters. He also realized the "blood" was ketchup. Being a surgeon, he knew the true color of blood! He quickly asked for the pickle jar. He pulled up beside the "victim",

rolled down his window, and doused the lad with the contents of the gallon jar. The boy quickly sprang to life! "Now go explain that to your mother;" Dr. BJ shouted as they sped off. This event added to the success of their hunting trip that year! They returned with several coolers full of frozen venison. Additional meat was left in a frozen food locker in the small town for them to enjoy on their trips back to their cabin. After they returned to our hospital we were all entertained by the "Gang's" stories about this most recent escapade!

Paul M. Riley, MD, FACS, Riverside, California. Email:- hlinza@ymail.com