

the last dunes girl

The Logan Wells Mysteries Book Two

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This book is work of fiction, but its genesis is an actual event: the disappearance of three women from the Indiana Dunes in 1966. Some real locations and events are used in a fictitious manner in the novel to provide context; otherwise, all other locations, events, and characters, are fictitious, and solely a product of the author's imagination.

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To my nephew, Michael, a truly amazing young man.

acknowledgments

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chapter 1

IT WAS A GREY AND CHILLY EARLY SATURDAY MORNING in late May. I stood in the street in front of the Prairie County, Indiana courthouse, at close quarters with five hundred or so other hearty souls. From the fidgeting going on, there was anticipation and some anxiety in the crowd, and plenty of pent-up energy awaiting release. At 7:30 a.m., about ten minutes from now, there would be the blare of an airhorn, a device invented, if not to cause outright hearing loss, then at least serious aural distress. Given our go signal, we would move forward in a human wave toward to the start\finish banner, about fifteen yards and a few hundred people in front of me. Then we were off to run five miles, to the best of our ability, at least on this particular morning.

The courthouse stood amidst the commotion, as it had for nearly one hundred years. The building's opening ceremony had been held on Memorial Day in 1890, and in two days, on Memorial Day 1990, it would reach its centennial of service, and not without a few bumps along the road, either. The four-story structure had survived a major fire back in 1935. Although its Indiana limestone proved mostly impervious to the flames, the blaze had gutted the interior of the building. The fire also destroyed the large ornate clock tower which rose another one hundred fifty feet above the roof. There was speculation that faulty electrical wiring caused the fire, but, in one account of the disaster, the county sheriff at the time suspected "socialist agitators" of arson. It later came out that

the sheriff's brother had been the electrical contractor on some updates to the building. My late father would have cynically described the sheriff's remarks as those made by a 'quick thinker,' but he was part Native American and didn't trust white people, especially ones in authority. Since the fire occurred during the Great Depression, it took a while before the building was repaired. The clock tower was a victim of the economic times and not rebuilt. About ten years ago, a few tall unsightly radio antennas had been mounted on the roof, technology trumping aesthetics. I glanced up at the antennas, hoping to see a break in the clouds, but no such luck.

I would have thought the courthouse's centennial was reason enough for today's run, but that wasn't mentioned on the race entry form. The Indy 500 was, along with the Memorial Day holiday, even though we were two days away from the holiday and the auto spectacular wasn't until tomorrow. I thought the Saturday of a holiday weekend was a good day to have a race, had the organizers caught some good weather. Not sure what the temperature was 150 miles south in Speedway, Indiana, but it was unseasonably cool here in Prairie Stop. The weather in Northwest Indiana was unpredictable in May. On Memorial Day you could either be swatting mosquitos the size of quarters in eighty-degree heat or shivering around a barbecue grill from the chilly breezes off Lake Michigan, a little over ten miles to the north.

Previously the biggest running event in Prairie Stop took place in the fall. A five-mile 'Pumpkin Panic' kicked off the city's annual Pumpkin Festival, held the weekend after Labor Day. A lengthy parade followed. Then the town square was closed off, street vendors would set up booths to sell crafts and novelties, and the downtown restaurants would sell food outside. Later in the day, musical acts would perform on a stage near the courthouse. In nice weather, the festival attracted over 50,000 to the town, almost twice Prairie Stop's population, and the run usually had over a thousand entrants. The city fathers were so pleased by the prosperity thus generated that they decided to try today's inaugural Indy 5 Run\ Memorial Day Festival. Lacking some originality, the race organizers were using the same five-mile course used for the Panic, except, to change it up, they had the loop part of the course, miles two through four, go in the opposite direction from September. Either way was ok by me. Due

to circumstances, I was not able to run last fall, but the year before I had somewhat surprisingly finished fifth in my age division. I had now moved up another age bracket. I had hopes that with the smaller crowd in today's run I might be able to place in my age group.

The all-night showers had stopped just before dawn, but chilly breezes still blew cold rain remnants off the trees and buildings onto the horde below. Most in the crowd seemed focused on their preparation for the run and didn't seem to notice. I was immersed in my own pre-race reverie, wishing I had used the john one more time, when I felt a tap on my shoulder—not a delicate one either. If someone was trying to get me to move out of the way, I wasn't so inclined, and irritated, turned around.

"How's it going, Logan?"

The voice asking that question was familiar, but the face was covered by a bushy salt-and-pepper beard, sunglasses, and a battered Chicago Cubs ballcap, so I did a double take. There was no mistaking the giant of a man now facing me.

"Chief?" I asked, recognizing William "Big Bill" Hanlen, until recently the long-time sheriff of Prairie County. "It's not Halloween is it?"

"No," he replied. "Just don't want to shake hands a dozen times every time I turn around."

I could understand that, although I doubted that the beard, cap and shades were an adequate disguise. Standing near 6'5" and solidly build, Hanlen would stand out in a crowd anytime, but he had been county sheriff for almost three decades and was well-known, and by most, well-liked and respected. Although the population of the county had increased exponentially during that time, Hanlen somehow managed to keep his persona of a folksy, unsophisticated, small-town sheriff remarkably intact. It was a pretense. Anyone who knew him more than casually recognized he had an acute understanding of both modern law enforcement practices, and the political process that went along with the job.

I noticed he had also lost some weight. He had never been overweight, but he appeared leaner and more muscular than I could recall. I knew he was in his early sixties but could easily pass for ten years younger. Along with the Cubs hat, he was wearing baggy grey sweatpants, and a black and gold hooded sweatshirt, with "Purdue Football" emblazoned on it. He had a white gym towel wrapped around his neck and tucked into the

sweatshirt. If it hadn't been for the beard and sunglasses, he could have just stepped out of one of those 1950s phys-ed films.

"Looks like you've been working out," I said. "Get a tryout with the Bears?"

I knew Hanlen had been an offensive lineman at Purdue University, doubled as the punter, and had been named to a couple all Big Ten teams.

"Did that forty years ago," he replied. "Might have made it, too, except the Marines had other ideas. Figured since I don't got a regular job anymore, I should get in shape."

"You sure succeeded. Try not to run into me. It would be like getting mugged by a train."

"Don't worry," he replied. "I run like a three-legged tortoise. I shouldn't be up here, but I saw you and figured I'd say hello."

It might be said that Hanlen was no longer sheriff due to a series of events that I was part of, or instigated, about six months ago, shortly before Christmas. The events also led to me getting shot, and my best friend since childhood, Buzz Wildrick, being killed. Buzz had been tight with Hanlen too, and consequently it would be fair to say that events had not ended well for any of us. Still, on the occasions I'd bumped into him since, he didn't seem to blame me for what happened. He even seemed glad to see me sometimes. In fact, we got along better now than when I first met him, years ago, when I was an investigator for the Prairie County Prosecutor's Office. I didn't take the enmity he displayed back then personally. I think he viewed the prosecutor's office as an impediment to his enforcement of law and order in Prairie County.

"I see you out running a lot," he said. "Must take a lot of dedication."

"More of an obsessive personality," I said, truthfully.

"How fast you figure you're going to run today?" He seemed genuinely interested.

"I'm hoping I can duck under 36 minutes. That might be good enough for me to place in my age group. Not as many people here as in the fall." Although as I said that I noticed more and more people sifting into the crowd. In my imagination, they were all my age.

"That's quick," he said.

Despite what I told him, I was hoping to go well under 36 minutes, maybe close to 35. I thought the latter time doable today, as I had been

putting some extra miles in, and I usually ran well in damp conditions. A coach I had in college claimed when there was light rain you could run faster, his reason being there was more oxygen in the air. I'm not sure what science he had to back that up, but it sounded good to me.

Hanlen glanced at his watch. "I'm moving to the back of the pack."

He turned to go, then stopped. "Hey, this is my first race," he said. "Got any suggestions?"

"Go home. Get back in bed."

"I considered that." He paused, seemed to be making up his mind about something.

"Glad I bumped into you," he added. "Saved me a phone call. I've been wanting to talk to you about something. It's sort of important. How about meeting me over at the VFW for a beer after the run?"

The Prairie Stop VFW was just south of the town square. I knew firsthand that they opened early during the fall festival, hoping to entice thirsty runners with a post-race beer. Still, the idea of a cold beer on a wet chilly morning didn't do much for me. I was also wary when he said had been wanting to talk to me, given the events of six months ago.

"What's the something important?" I asked.

"A case I worked a long time ago. There's been a new development, but it'll take some time to explain. I'll see you at the VFW."

"Think they'll be open this early?" I asked.

"Oh, yeah. It's Memorial Day weekend. If it's not, I'll open it." Hanlen was a decorated Korean war veteran, and active in the local posts of both the VFW and American Legion.

"All right," I said. "I'll see you later."

He gave me a nod and turned to make his way through the crowd.

"Hey, chief," I called out, and he turned back.

"Don't go out too fast," I said. "Go slow and pace yourself. Five miles is a long way."

He touched his cap in acknowledgment. "Will do. See you later."

chapter 2

HEEDING YOUR OWN ADVICE ISN'T ALWAYS a good decision. In my case, it seldom was. Most of the first mile in this race was up a long gradual hill. My observation was that casual runners, doing an infrequent race, were keyed up at the start and went out too fast. That's why I told Hanlen to go out slow. Expending too much energy early on was problematic in any run but going fast uphill at the start could be perilous. There wasn't much worse than being gassed out at the one-mile mark of a five-mile run. The last mile here was mainly downhill, obviously, since you can't start uphill and finish uphill on a loop course, but at that point there was limited ground you could make up.

My problem was I went out too slow. I was too far in the middle of pack at the start and had to work my way through the crowd before I could generate a rhythmic pace. I was weaving and zigzagging around people like Gale Sayers returning a punt, except I wasn't near as agile as the Kansas Comet. When I finally got some daylight and began to pick up the pace, I began straining, my breathing labored and my stride tight. I chided myself for not warming up more, but I had never been one to like stretching exercises.

They were calling out times at the mile marks, and when I heard 7:45 at the first mile, I knew I was already well behind my target pace, even allowing for the uphill and the crowd. I settled in after that and made up some time, but when I heard 29 minutes plus at the four-mile, I knew 35

minutes was out of reach. I had the brief optimistic thought that if I ran the last mile downhill in seven minutes flat, I would get close to 36. That was immediately superseded by the more likely thought that I would be fortunate to go under 37.

They had one water station on the course, logically situated at the one mile and four-mile marks. I didn't want water, but at the four-mile, a guy who grabbed a cup came careening back into the middle of the street towards me. I broke stride and reached out to nudge the back of his shoulder to let him know someone was there. Maybe it was a little too firm of a nudge, but the guy turned his head and gave me an angry glare. I glared back.

He said loudly, to no one in particular, "guy thinks this is the Chicago Marathon!"

"Just watch what you're doing," I replied, irritated.

He came right back with a "watch yourself!"

"Clever," I muttered.

I turned the final corner and headed up the straightaway to the finish. This was downtown's main street and cheering spectators lined both sides. Being a small town, many were calling out the names of family and friends as they ran by. I recalled how one year I puked about a hundred yards from the finish, and I slowed in an anxious reaction to that memory. Several people passed me. I watched in fatigued frustration as I crossed under the finish banner while the race clock ticked to 36:30.

To make matters worse, the guy who told me off at the water stop sprinted by me just before I finished. I was both surprised and pissed-off. In what can only be described as an odd act of sportsmanship considering our recent exchange, he turned, stuck his hand out, and said, "good job." The words were sincere but sounded condescending. Taken aback, I could only shake his hand limply and reply "nice race." I regretted then that I didn't tackle him back at the water stop, but that would have probably gotten me a lifetime ban from area running events. The only consolation I had was he looked at least five years younger than I, so I doubt if he displaced me from an award.

I chalked up my effort to a nice try that fell short and walked back to my car for a dry shirt and sweats. I jogged around a while in a likely futile attempt to avoid tightening up. While I was cooling down, the clouds

started to break, and by the time I was done, the sun was starting to peek through. The breeze had also subsided. With the early morning chill and clouds disappearing it was beginning to warm up quickly. Despite the gray start it looked like we were going to have a nice day. A beer or two with Hanlen didn't seem like a bad idea.

The Prairie Stop VFW was a two-story white brick building located two blocks south of the courthouse. The small yard in front of the structure was trimmed short and they had miniature American flags lining the walkways. Hanlen was standing by a World War II era howitzer which was permanently moored in front of the place, and talking to a couple of portly white-haired gentlemen. When I was a boy, I remember asking my dad when we drove by the VFW, if he thought the cannon still worked. That was during the Cold War, when we were doing missile drills in elementary school, and I wondered if the weapon could be used to repel Russian hordes. My dad laughed and remarked that if there was a nuclear war, an old cannon wouldn't be of much use.

The men Hanlen were talking to were both wearing khaki shorts and long sleeve olive sweatshirts with the Marine Corps emblem emblazoned on the front. Each had on garrison or forage caps, decorated with various campaign ribbons. When Hanlen saw me, he motioned me over. He didn't look like he had just run five miles.

"Nice going, Logan," he said, reaching out to shake my hand.

"What for?" I asked, puzzled.

"I was just talking with one of the race guys. He says you were third in your group. Billy Mills would be proud of you."

When Hanlen referenced Mills, the Oglala Sioux who scored a stunning upset by winning the 10,000 meters at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, I figured he was pulling my leg.

"You're kidding me," I said, then, "And how do you know who Mills was?" Other than track aficionados and Native Americans, I doubt that there were many people who had ever heard of him.

"He was a jarhead, that's how," Hanlen said, reminding me that Mills served as a Marine. He shook his head. "If I told you I finished dead last, would that make you happy?"

"I could use a beer," I said, now feeling pleased with myself.

Hanlen turned to one of the elderly gentlemen.

"Colonel, this man just took third place and needs a beer. Might as well bring me one too. Put it on my tab."

The colonel gave Hanlen a mock salute and quick timed it over to the beer tent.

"He was a corporal, really. But we don't stand on ceremony here." Hanlen said. "Have a seat."

"How about you?" I asked, sitting down on one of the folding chairs that had been placed by some card tables covered by red, white, and blue vinyl tablecloths. Hanlen did the same, but tentatively, probably wondering, as I did, if the small chair would handle his bulk.

He gave me an odd look.

"Oh, better than I thought. Just under fifty minutes. If I could always shoot under fifty for nine holes of golf, I would be in hog heaven." Hanlen was an avid golfer, although from what I'd heard, he wouldn't be getting his Senior PGA card anytime soon.

The colonel, or corporal, brought two beers back and put them in front of us. He put his hand lightly on my shoulder and said, "nice going, son" and walked away.

"How's retirement going?" I asked, after we each took a sip of beer. It looked flat and tasted a little skunky.

"I stay busy. I'm up early. After forty years, that's a hard habit to break. Usually at the Y to work out. I'm benching within 60 pounds of what I could do in college."

"Guessing the Y will need some more weights soon," I said.

"If the weather is good, I might get in some golf," he continued. "Not much improvement there, sorry to say. Most afternoons I've been helping my oldest out. He's got a construction business. Not sure you noticed, but new homes are going up like weeds in Prairie County. Big and expensive ones."

"Yeah," I said. "Wonder where all the money is coming from."

"Chicago, I imagine. The steel business is in the crapper."

"Is that your son who worked at Burns Harbor?" I asked, vaguely recalling his son was an engineer and worked at Bethlehem's Steel's massive Burns Harbor plant.

"Yeah. He saw the handwriting on the wall and went into business for himself."

“How’s that going?”

“Ok,” Hanlen said. “Construction can be feast or famine, but right now he’s got more jobs than he can handle.”

We each took a pull on our beer.

“Memorial Day is one of my favorite holidays,” Hanlen said, contentedly. “It’s the start of summer, and it’s low key. Usually you get a nice day, and if not, there are plenty of war movies on TV.”

“I watched some of *The Longest Day* last night,” I said.

“That’s a good one. Course I’ll watch just about any movie with Robert Mitchum in it.”

“Don’t forget Richard Burton,” I said. They didn’t have any scenes together in *The Longest Day*, but I thought Mitchum and Burton would have made an odd pair hanging around the set. I would have liked to hear a conversation between those two.

“Last night I was watching *Battleground* with Van Johnson,” Hanlen said. “I like the black and white ones. They seem more realistic for some reason. Ever serve your country, Logan?”

“Sort of, I guess,” I said.

“I would have thought that would have been a simple yes or no.”

“It’s a long story, but the short one is I needed money for college, so I signed up for the ROTC. But they didn’t have it where I went, so I had to drive up to Purdue for the classes and meetings. I did it for a couple years, then Uncle Sam and I parted ways.”

“When you signed up, you weren’t worried about Vietnam?”

“No,” I said. “The war was winding down then.”

“Did you have to go through basic training?”

“Sort of a mini version,” I said. “We had to attend camp two weeks in the summer.”

“How was that?” Hanlen asked.

“Well, I was in decent shape, and my dad used to yell at me a lot.”

Hanlen smiled. “So, an obstacle course and someone in your face didn’t rattle you much.”

“It was easier for me than some.”

“I’m of the mind that all young people be required to do military service,” Hanlen said. “No long commitment, just basic training, and time in the reserves. Other countries have that.”

“How about if you got a problem with killing people?”

“Well, they could do non-combat stuff. It would be a common bond if everyone has served their country. God knows we could use one today. You know I was in Korea, right?”

“The Forgotten War,” I said.

“Yeah, well, I didn’t forget it,” Hanlen said, “and neither did anybody who was there. Especially the ones at the Chosin Reservoir.”

“You were at Chosin?”

“I was. Matter of fact, parts of my toes are still over there. Frostbite. It got to thirty below that winter. Course having a hundred-thousand Chinese trying to kill us kept us moving. They would have if it hadn’t been for General O.P. Smith.”

“We aren’t retreating, we’re just advancing in a different direction,” I said, recalling the celebrated Marine general’s assertion during the Chosin fighting.

Hanlen raised his beer in salute. “I didn’t know you were a student of military history. Most Marines today haven’t even heard of the Professor,” he said, using Smith’s nickname.

“Used to be,” I said. “Not so much anymore. I started feeling uncomfortable reading about wars and battles. The violence and killing and all.”

“You don’t have to look at a book on war for that,” Hanlen said. “Pick up the paper and read about how many people got shot or stabbed in Gary and Chicago the night before.”

“True,” I agreed, “but I think most of that is done on impulse by criminals, drug addicts or hotheads. War is institutionalized killing, done just because some guy in charge says so. That seems worse.”

“Sounds like you’re a pacifist,” Hanlen said. “How come you were watching a war movie last night?”

“You got me there. From now on, no more war movies,” I said. “Although most war movies don’t show violence in the same casual way a lot of the stuff out today does.”

“Yeah. Senseless violence passes for your high-quality family entertainment these days,” Hanlen said. “The folks making those movies might have a different viewpoint if they’d seen frozen bodies stacked up like cordwood, like I did in Korea. And people wonder why the homicide rate has doubled since the fifties.”

A far-away look came over his face. "What I remember the most is the smell when the bodies thawed out."

"What did you want to talk to me about?" I said, thinking it best to change the subject.

He leaned forward and looked directly at me.

"You ever hear of the Dunes Girls?"

I knew immediately what he was referring to.

"Not sure there is anyone in law enforcement in Northwest Indiana who hasn't," I replied. "I take that back. At least anyone who has been on the job over 20 years."

"Tell me what you know, then."

I took a pull of beer as I collected my thoughts.

"It was summer, 1966," I began. "Three young women, friends from the Chicago area, decide to take in a day at the beach. They drive over in one car to the Indiana Dunes State Park. It's a nice Saturday afternoon on a holiday weekend, Fourth of July, and thousands of other people are doing the same thing. The girls are seen by people on the beach and then getting on a boat. Then maybe back on the beach again. There is some question about that, I think. Anyhow, at the end of the day, when everyone is getting ready to leave, a couple sitting near the girls sees their stuff is still there. Towels, sandals, even purses. They mention this to a park ranger. He picks the stuff up, figuring the girls will eventually be back for it. But they don't come back that day or the next. The ranger later checks the purses and finds ID, money, and keys, all inside, which he notes as peculiar." I paused.

"What woman leaves her purse with personal stuff in it behind on a crowded beach?" Hanlen said.

"Right," I continued. "Meanwhile, the girls' families get worried, and file a missing person's report. Eventually someone contacts the ranger's office, and they begin a search. But it doesn't turn up anything, except the car of the girl who drove, which they find in the parking lot. The girls, on the other hand, were never seen again. A lot of theories have been proposed over the years as to what happened to them, but since the girls were never seen or heard from again, I'd say none of them have been proved correct."

I paused, and then added, "how'd I do?" I knew quite a bit more of the details of the case but kept to the main facts. From my years working in

law enforcement as a detective, I took great pride in being able to provide concise summaries.

"You got a good memory," Hanlen said.

"My firsthand knowledge isn't much." In truth, I was a self-absorbed teenager back then, and only vaguely remember my mom talking about the incident with one of the neighbors. I remember her using the word "appalling," which wasn't a word she used a lot.

"I looked at the case a few times when I was in the PA's office," I added. "If there was a gold standard for cold cases, that's it."

"What was your take on it?" Hanlen asked.

"Not sure I had one," I replied.

"I hadn't been sheriff long when it happened," he said. "Plus, even though it was in the county, it wasn't my jurisdiction. The state police and park rangers were in charge and did most of the initial stuff. That wouldn't be how it is today. Command and control, communications, is light years ahead of where it was. There would have been a multi-jurisdictional task force set up immediately. You know better than me that the first 24-48 hours is critical for finding a missing person. Nobody here knew those girls were gone until almost three days later."

"I don't think there was much in the way of leads," I said.

"You're right," Hanlen said. "There were all kinds of theories, from they staged their own disappearance, for whatever reason, to white slavers took them."

I suppressed a grin when Hanlen said 'white slavers.' I hadn't heard that expression in a while but did remember someone using it in the case file.

"Or maybe they got on a boat and it was in an accident," Hanlen said. "At first, the thought was maybe they drowned. They had divers out in the lake a couple days later."

"I remember," I said. "But they found out one of the girls could swim like a fish."

"I don't think they drowned," Hanlen replied, "but not just cause one, or all of them, were good swimmers. More than a few good swimmers have drowned up at the Dunes over the years. People think of the lake as always calm. Then they'll be standing on a sandbar up to their waist, a sudden breeze picks up, and a rip current is pulling them 300 feet into the lake. Or five-foot waves will kick up, which doesn't sound like much,

except they're coming at you every 30 seconds. And there are plenty of people who drown trying to save a friend from drowning."

He was right. The lake could change from placid to turbulent in minutes. It was rare that a summer season passed without several people drowning at the Indiana Lake Michigan beaches. I also knew that in an average year, more people drowned in Lake Michigan than in all the other Great Lakes combined. Of course, the area around Lake Michigan was more populated than the other lakes, but as Hanlen said, people underestimated its potential for danger.

"There are problems with the drowning theory," Hanlen continued. "By all accounts, it was nice weather that day and the lake was calm. Plus, there were a lot of people on the beach. You would think someone would have seen someone in trouble in the water."

"I don't know about that," I said. "I bet a lifeguard would tell you their job is hardest when the beach is the most crowded."

"Maybe. The problem is that no bodies were ever found. Like I said, they had divers off the beach shortly after we knew the girls were missing. But even if they didn't find them then, why didn't the bodies surface later? Kind of the same logic for a boat wreck."

Hanlen was referring to the principal that a drowned body would initially sink, as water in the lungs displaced oxygen. The body would eventually decompose in the water, depending on water temperature, depth, and other factors. As it decomposed, gases were created which would make the body buoyant again and it eventually would float to the surface. Back in the Roaring Twenties, when gangs battled for control of bootlegging in Chicago, a macabre rite of spring occurred after the first big thaw when the bodies that were deposited in Lake Michigan over the winter surfaced and drifted onto the beaches.

Thinking of that, I said, "Cement overshoes?"

He frowned. "Ok, so somebody kills them and disposes of the bodies, in the lake or otherwise, and in such a way that they are never found. That raises a bunch of other questions, the big one being motive."

"I got to ask, Chief, why the interest in this, after twenty some years?"

He raised his cup and slowly drank the last of his beer. "I was wondering when you were going to get around to asking me that. Let's grab another beer, and I'll tell you."

chapter 3

A FEW OTHER RUNNERS HAD WANDERED OVER from the finish area to quench their thirst. One of them, a tall young guy in good shape, recognized Hanlen, and came over to greet him. Hanlen introduced him as his nephew. The young man was holding a surprisingly large plaque that proclaimed a second-place age group finish. I congratulated him and asked where he got it. He pointed back to the courthouse.

After we got refills, Hanlen guided us to a different table, furthest removed from everyone else. He obviously didn't want anyone overhearing him.

"I've not told anyone else what I'm going to tell you," Hanlen said. "And it may be hard to swallow."

"Hope it's not as hard as this," I said, raising my beer cup slightly and frowning. "This tastes like the keg sat out in the sun too long."

"I'll pass that on to the refreshment committee," Hanlen said. "Now pay attention. After I announced my recent, and somewhat unexpected, retirement, I got plenty of calls, and letters, cards, what have you, from folks wishing me well. Most from people who I had worked with, others from folks who I had done something for over the years. I'm still surprised when someone who I did a small favor for comes up to me years later and tells me how much it meant."

"That's not surprising," I said. "You helped out a lot of people over the years." Despite Hanlen's gruff exterior and blunt manner, I didn't know