



CHAPTER 1

Legacy and Lessons

IN 1993, my father had planned and pre-paid for a fishing trip to Alaska. The initial plan was for my Dad and sixteen of his colleagues to travel to a remote-fishing lodge located on the Chuit Creek, which is approximately thirty-five miles west of Anchorage, Alaska. A few days before the departure date, for reasons that were never made clear to me, Dad decided that he did not want to go on the trip, but he suggested that I take his spot. He barely had the words out of his mouth, “Lance, I don’t want to go to Alaska, would you -” before I accepted the offer. A ten-day trip to bush Alaska during the heart of the salmon run is an outdoorsman’s dream. I was not about to let the opportunity pass me by, despite the fact that I did not know a single soul on the trip.

The trip started with an excursion around Lake Hood, the seaplane base located adjacent to the Anchorage International Airport. Lake Hood is the world’s busiest seaplane base, handling an average of 190 flights per day. The base has its own control tower, and during the winter months the frozen surface of the lake is maintained for ski-equipped airplanes.

I was truly intrigued by the concept of landing an airplane on the water, and then taking off from the water. I was really disappointed when they separated us into groups of five passengers, instructing my group to take our gear to a Cessna 207. The Cessna that would be transporting our group was sitting on the dirt airstrip located adjacent to Lake Hood. Oh well, my dream of flying in a float plane would have to wait.

As we departed the Lake Hood airstrip, over flying the Cook Inlet, I marveled at the beauty of majestic Alaska. It was a clear day and we could see all the way to Denali, some 220 miles north of Anchorage, Alaska. We landed on a dirt airstrip located near the power plant in Beluga. After we landed, I turned to the gentlemen sitting next to me and said, “This is one of the most amazing things I have ever done. I am going to go home to California, learn to fly, buy a float plane and bring it back here so that I can explore Alaska.” He smiled, nodded and said, “That’s nice. I’ve been thinking about becoming an astronaut and going to the moon.” Well, that joke was on him. I now have over 5000 flight hours; over 1500 hours flying floats and skies around Alaska. As for the astronaut sitting next to me on the plane that day - maybe he just circled and came home, because, in the past 25 years or so, I haven’t heard of anyone landing on the moon.



We arrived at the Chuit Creek late in the day, but during that time of year there are close to twenty-three hours of daylight which is why Alaska is referred to as the Land of the Midnight Sun. The long days are due to the earth's tilt in relation to its orbit around the sun. The earth's axis between the north and south poles is angled at 23.5 degrees away from the plane of the earth's orbit around the sun. It is bizarre to be outside at midnight under what feels like later afternoon sunshine. By the time we got settled in our bunks it was quite late. Around 10:00 p.m. I made my way down to the Chuit Creek with a young fishing guide. Since he was from Texas, I will call him Tex. Tex and I engaged in the perfunctory exchange of information regarding geography, his professional life, siblings and he shared with me that he had recently become engaged. It followed that we talked about his life in Texas, the places he had

visited in Alaska and stories about fishing. Eventually, Tex used the phrase that I have heard a million times in my career: "Hey Lance, you're a lawyer, right?" The further away I am from my office or a courtroom the more likely it is that this phrase is the precursor to free legal advice. In light of the fact that I was about to spend the following ten days with this young fellow, I answered the question in the affirmative, and offered my best advice, riverside and river wise.

"I sure am", I said. "Tell me about it, Tex." Tex went on to explain that the preceding fall he had worked in southwestern Alaska as a hunting guide, shuttling caribou hunters hither and yawn. Tex was driving a small fishing skiff up the remote Ugashik River, transitioning hunters from one caribou hunting spot to another. That particular river, like most rivers in Alaska, has a multitude of twists and turns. The river is subject to the tidal influence of the ocean so the depth of the river changes twice daily. It is hard to imagine that the tide of the ocean can affect the depth of a river some thirty miles inland, but it is true. The tidal swings in Alaska are second only to the Bay of Fundy in Canada, which holds 'bragging rights' to the highest tides in the world. The largest tides take place in an area that separates New Brunswick from Nova Scotia. At certain times of the year, the difference between high and low tide in this Bay is taller than a three-story building.

Some of the highest tides in the United States are experienced near Anchorage, Alaska. In that area, the tidal flow ranges up to forty feet, or 12.2 meters. Since the shores of the Cook Inlet are flat, the shape and geometry of the coastline contribute to the effects

of the tide. This can play havoc on pilots and fisherman alike. For example, a fisherman can drive his boat from an open inlet in a bay from the ocean all the way up a river in the morning. When the fisherman makes his return trip, heading downstream to the bay that same afternoon, he might find the tide has gone out. His attempt to leave the river for the ocean may be futile, since the ocean water may be as much as a mile away. If he takes the chance, he may find that his boat is sitting in just a few inches of water.

Adding to tidal woes is wind. As I start with the next explanation, it occurs to me that throughout this book I am going to talk about a village called “King Salmon.” Just so that you don’t confuse the Village of King Salmon with the fish “King Salmon,” I will refer to the fish as a “Chinook” and the village as “King Salmon.” The people that are responsible for giving places a name should not be permitted to consume alcohol while doing so. Back to the tides. One such river, the Naknek River, runs east and west. On rivers like the Naknek in King Salmon, Alaska, if the wind blows out of the west, or “up” the Naknek River concurrent with the arrival of a large tide, the water level will be significantly higher. Not only does the tidal influence push the water up the river, the west wind, pushing in the same direction, will push a monumental amount of water. This increases the effects of the tide. On low tide, a person who lives on such a river will walk from a gangway located on the shoreline some sixteen feet down to the dock. Later that day, when the tide is high, that same person will walk from the shoreline on a level gangway to the same dock. The water will have risen sixteen feet. Mother Nature has moved a mountain of water.

In any event, young Tex was not particularly familiar with the subtleties and contours of the Ugashik River, the effects of the tides and the depth of the water. Earlier in the day, when Tex was transporting a caribou hunter, Tex had traversed the same spot on the Ugashik River when the tide was high. He had plenty of water under his boat, and he had no problem manipulating the boat at high speeds from the Ugashik Lake all the way down to the lower lagoon of the Ugashik River. Unfortunately, when Tex and his fellow guide, Dick, attempted to make the return passage from the lagoon back to the mouth of the lower Ugashik Lake later in the day, Tex struck a shallow spot in the River, a sandbar, and poor old Dick took flight. He landed in the front of the skiff, his shoulder violently

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striking the aluminum bench seat of the skiff, dislocating his shoulder.

Tex went on to tell me that it was his good fortune that there was a doctor on the caribou hunt. In addition to the Doctor, a middle-aged man he called Bill came to Dick's aid. Tex was able to radio the base camp at his lodge, The Bear's Den. The base camp, in turn, radioed the Coast Guard located on Kodiak Island. The Coast Guard dispatched a helicopter. Dick was given a ride to Kodiak Island, Alaska. At that time, the only medical assistance available in Kodiak was a well-trained veterinarian, so Dick was medivacked to Anchorage where a doctor attended to him.

As mentioned, Tex had just popped the question to his fiancé. He was concerned that a lawsuit would be filed, and that he would lose all of his property to Dick. Tex wanted to know if he would be personally liable to Dick or would his employer be obligated to pay? He was genuinely concerned. I gave him my best guess, while reeling in what appeared to be a 35+ pound Chinook.

At the end of the ten-day trip, I made my way back to California. I would return to Alaska at the first possible opportunity. I don't know what it is about Alaska that stirs, yet calms, me. It seems odd to have opposite emotions, stirring versus calm, in the same person. An oxymoron. Well, not really. When you find your place, or your person, in the world, this strange excitement coexists with peace of mind.

With this newfound passion, two things needed to be taken care of immediately. First, I enrolled in flight school. Second, I developed a plan for my immediate return to Alaska that same summer. I began calling various outfitters throughout the state of Alaska. Ironically, the best source of information for lodges inside of Alaska would come from sources outside of Alaska. Go figure. I was referred to a guy in Chicago that booked fishermen in lodges throughout Alaska during the prime fishing seasons. He told me that, historically, a large mass of sockeye salmon would next return to Alaska around July 9. The 'vacation guide' from Chicago suggested that I travel to one of five rivers in early July to catch sockeye salmon. He suggested I select the Nushagak, Alagnak, Eggegik, Naknek or Ugashik Rivers for the best fishing, confusing names to say the least.

As I feverishly made notes of the names of the rivers I thought that he must be joking. This looks like the eye chart for the Department of Motor Vehicles! The travel guide convinced me that the largest number of sockeye salmon would return to the Ugashik

River. At the time, I had no clue where to go and the names all sounded the same to me. After all, Alaska is a huge state. You could fit Texas into Alaska two times! Alaska has more than 50% of the entire U.S. coastline, or 6,640 miles and Texas only has 367 miles of coastline. As children we were shown maps of Hawaii and Alaska adjacent to one another, with the pictures of those two states set off in the lower left-hand corner of a map of the United States. The people who create maps designate a very small area to depict Hawaii and Alaska, so it is misleading for children, and apparently, adults from Texas. Most people have the mistaken impression that Alaska is a small spot in the world. Clearly, it is not.

My new friend from Chicago, whose name I have long forgotten, suggested that I call a gentleman by the name of Ted. Ted lived in Redondo Beach, California, just down the way from me. I had been told he had the inside scoop on a lodge in Southwest Alaska. I called Ted. It's not hard to find the goodness in a person that will spend an hour on telephone telling you everything he knows about Alaska. Ted gushed about Ugashik. If I was not already thrilled with anticipation, I was even more excited about returning to Alaska after talking to Ted. He suggested that I stay at the Bear's Den Lodge on the Ugashik River. Ted informed me that he would be building a cabin immediately adjacent to the Bear's Den. He was anxious for me to meet the people he was working with, Bob and Carol, and for me to fish with him in the evenings. We became fast friends.

So, my much-anticipated trip to Ugashik involves a 'Bob', a 'Carol' and a 'Ted'. Sorry to disappoint... there is no 'Alice'. Ted gave me the telephone number for the Bear's Den, which I promptly dialed. The owner of the Lodge informed me that he sold the lodge to a new group of outfitters. The lodge was now known as the Ugashik River Lodge. I called the number he provided. I was initially informed that the Lodge was not yet accepting guests. Disheartened, I figured that I still had four other rivers to choose from so I started dialing for adventure. Within ten or so minutes a man that identified himself as "Richard" from the Ugashik River Lodge called me back. He told me that, although the Lodge was not accepting guests, they would allow me to visit the Lodge as a solo guest for a "no frills" ten-day trip from July 9 to July 19. I cheerfully accepted the invitation.

On July 8, I boarded an early morning flight from Orange County, California to Seattle; Seattle to Anchorage; Anchorage to King Salmon. It was 6 p.m. and I was still 75 miles north of Ugashik. I had enlisted a local floatplane pilot to take me from King Salmon





to Ugashik, via floatplane, to be dropped off at the foot of the Ugashik River Lodge. I soon learned about the vagaries of flying floatplanes, weather, etc. in southwest Alaska. The float plane operator informed me that he would not be able to take me to Ugashik due to weather and other constraints. He suggested I take a flight with a commercial operator, Penn Air, to the Ugashik Village. After he made the suggestion, I walked out the back door of his small terminal and watched a group of young men load a refrigerator into a Beaver floatplane parked on his dock. I now understood the meaning of the phrase “and other constraints”.

When I informed the Lodge that my efforts to fly from King Salmon directly to the Lodge were abandoned, they said it could be a problem since the Ugashik River Lodge is 27 miles up the Ugashik River from a dirt landing strip in the Village of Ugashik. Nevertheless, they suggested I spend the night in King Salmon, as Rich-

ard would not brave the Ugashik River in a skiff until the following morning. Richard did just that. I won't bore you with the perils of riding in a sixteen-foot skiff in high winds from the Ugashik Village to the Lower Ugashik River, but it's not for the faint of heart.

As we motored up the river, it looked as though the bottom of the River was covered with twenty- to thirty-three-inch stones. Richard would later explain that all those large dark stones were sockeye salmon, swimming from the mouth of the Ugashik River to their spawning grounds of the lower and upper Ugashik Lakes. It was hard to wipe the smile off my face, since that is exactly where we were headed. We did not arrive the Ugashik River Lodge until late in the afternoon.

By the time I checked in, the new owners had emptied a rather large “day bottle” of whiskey and were well into day two of their supply. Richard offered me dinner, and as I ate Richard said “Lance, you have that look in your eyes. I know you saw all those fish as we motored up the river. You must be chomping at the bit to get on the River. He suggested that we go out for an hour or so and make a few casts.

We did just that. At the mouth of the Ugashik River, where the River meets the lower Ugashik Lake, there were so many fish you could, quite literally, walk across them. Richard sat on the bank of the River, watching me catch fish after fish after fish. About twenty fish into the evening, Richard uttered that all too familiar phrase, “Hey Lance, you're a lawyer, right?”

With a knowing smile I replied, “Yes”. I thought to myself that legal advice is a small price to pay for all that Richard had en-

duced in getting me to the Lower Ugashik Lake. Richard started to tell me what sounded like a very familiar story. He explained that he had been guiding caribou hunters on this very river the year before, and that a young guide from Texas was driving a boat. The boat had... “I said, “Richard, stop the story right there. If you don’t mind I would like to finish it for you.” Confused, he asked, “I’m sorry?” I picked it up from there: “So the story continues with the boat hitting a sandbar in the river, you flew from the back of the boat, hitting and dislocating your shoulder on the front seat of the boat. It was your good fortune that there was a doctor on the caribou hunt. He was accompanied by a middle-aged man named Bill. The elderly doctor and Bill came to your aid, and Tex was able to radio the base camp at the Bear’s Den. The base camp, in turn, radioed the Coast Guard in Kodiak Island, and the Coast Guard dispatched a helicopter. You were medivacked to Kodiak and then to Anchorage. Did I miss anything?”

Dick wanted to know “how in hell” I knew about the event. I informed him that I was fishing the Chuit River in June, some 290 miles away, with a young guide by the name of Tex, from Texas, and he told me the same story. Small world?

The next morning, I walked next door to find Bob and Ted working on the roof of Bob and Carol’s place. Carol invited me in for coffee, noting that she was down to her last cup of water. She explained that all their water is pumped from the river to a bladder tank under the Cabin. I noticed aloud as I walked through the yard that there is a cement slab that supports the solar panels with an imprint that reads “B & C Power Company”. Carol laughed and said, “Yes, that stands for the Bob and Carol Power Company. We get all of our electricity from the solar power and wind generators.”

I was naturally curious about Carol’s history. Surely, she was born and raised in Bush Alaska? Not so. Carol was born on April 3, 1946 in Wabasha, Minnesota. She grew up on a farm overlooking the Mississippi River and Kellogg, Minnesota. As a child, she loved “just being outdoors”, and that hasn’t changed. Bob and Carol’s first meeting occurred in the back seat of a friend’s car - get your mind out of the gutter - when Bob and friends gave Carol a ride to church. It so happened there was a keg of beer on the seat between Bob and Carol, which was a glowing indicator of Bob’s lifestyle at the time. Bob was so intimidated by Carol’s beauty that he never got past “hello”, as Bob tells the story, truly believing that Carol was a woman ‘out of his reach.’

Bob was and remains persistent, so they were married in Kellogg, Minnesota six months later on February 12, 1966. Before they

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were married, Carol did worked as a nurse's aide at St Mary's Hospital. Thereafter, she worked evenings at Michael's Steak house in Rochester Minnesota. In early 1970, Bob and Carol moved to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where Carol worked at a nursing home and Dinsmore, a window manufacturing company. In early 1983, Bob and Carol moved to Eagle River, Alaska where Carol started her own cleaning business. During that time, Bob was employed by IBM, which required that he travel the world. So, Carol accompanied Bob to Venezuela, the Philippines and many large, urban quagmires of the United States.

In May of 1986, the first wing of their home in Ugashik went up. From that point in time on, Carol was deeply involved in the never-ending project. Clearly, Bob was blessed with a mate that wanted to take on the challenge of building a home in bush Alaska. What a leap of faith! Carol remained strong in her conviction to live in bush Alaska, even during the periods that frustrated Bob, while he was considering other options. As I stood in front of Bob and Carol's place, I found it difficult to imagine the blood, sweat and tears involved in the years they spent building their home.

In addition to the house, they constructed a twenty- by fifteen-foot solar panel. The solar panel includes a tracking device that causes the panel to rotate as the solar panel follows the sun across the horizon. Bob and Carol poured the foundation which holds the solar panels in place by hand. Since the famous winds of Ugashik would likely take the panels away like a kite in the wind, Bob and Carol poured 3600 pounds of concrete in the base. In true pioneer style, Bob and Carol hand-carried forty bags of concrete, each weighing 90 pounds, to the site of their solar panels. To provide minutiae on building in the bush, each bag of concrete had to be shipped from Anchorage, some 360 miles away, to the Ugashik Village. Once the concrete reached the village, the concrete was off-loaded by hand. When the weather permitted, Bob and/or Carol were required to drive their sixteen-foot boat (more appropriately "skiff") some twenty-seven miles down the river, always potentially treacherous depending on the winds that particular day. When Bob and/or Carol reached the village, depending on the tide, they carried the bags of concrete some 10 to 30 yards down to the skiff to be transported twenty-seven miles back up the river to their home at the lower Ugashik Lakes. Once they arrived home, to use a 'Bobism,' they "humped" the bags of concrete up the 25-foot bank to its new home in Ugashik. A Bobism is a quote, saying, or

words of wisdom from Ugashik Bob, of which I will use many herein. Back to transporting items from the Ugashik Village to Bob and Carol's house. I used the concrete as an example. The process of retrieving, transporting and unloading of goods at Bob and Carol's house applies to everything from a pack of matches to a kitchen table. Everything that comes in and out of Ugashik must make the trip from the Village, some twenty-seven miles, to the Lower Ugashik Lake. Everything. I once had a coach ask me during an intense work out, "Who is more committed, the chicken that lays the egg or the pig that gives the meat?" Bob and Carol definitely "give the meat" - they are 100% committed.

If you get the feeling that Ugashik Bob and Carol are two tenacious individuals, go with the feeling. Ugashik Bob joined the Navy in June of 1961. Bob would politely say that he joined the Navy to escape a small town in Southwest Minnesota. If you're lucky enough to spend eleven minutes with Bob, you come away with the impression that Bob was more than mischievous as a teenager. Hence, the keg of beer on the back seat of the car when he met Carol. Clearly, the Navy was the better of two options for a young man with his intellect and energy. During my visit, I volunteered to help Bob carry a stack of 2 x 4's from the river's edge, up the bank to the back of his property. I grabbed a couple of 2 x 4's. Bob grabbed four. We repeated the back and forth process of unloading wood for an hour but on one trip, as Bob made his way up the bank of the river, he stumbled and fell. Before he hit the ground, Bob shouted in an odd voice, presumably that of his father, "Get up! You're not hurt!"

There is only one attribute about Bob that exceeds his tenacity and toughness, and that's his intelligence. After being tested extensively by the Navy, he was among a select few to serve as an Aviation Electricians Mate. Bob tells some great stories about flying on and off aircraft carriers. Bob began his career with IBM, in Rochester, Minnesota, as a Senior Large Systems Engineer. Yes, he is, and definitely remains, a "brainiac." In February of 1983, Bob was transferred to Anchorage. Mind you, this was not an involuntary transfer. Bob spent most of his adult life hunting and fishing. Alaska is the dream of any outdoorsman, especially a man like Bob, and he has the trophies to prove it. In September of 1985, Bob went on a fishing trip to the Ugashik Narrows. It was love at first bite - I totally understand. Bob absolutely had to find a plot of land upon which to build he and Carol a Home. It is difficult to find private





land for sale in the area in and around the Ugashik Lake. The majority of the land is National Park Land or land that is controlled by the Bureau of Land Management. Also, several refuges surround Bob and Carol's place. Bob persevered and found, one of the few patches of public land available for purchase in the immediate area. Six months later, in May of 1986, he and Carol started building their home.

Sometime around 1989, Ted was visiting the Bear's Den Lodge and he met Bob and Carol. Like most people, he fell in love with them. For the following five years, Ted was active in helping Bob and Carol build their home. Bob and Carol moved to Ugashik as full-time residents in May of 1996. With the exception of a couple of winters in Costa Rica, they have been full time residents through the winter of

2016/2017. The concept of living as the only full-time residents in Ugashik, Alaska is daunting. A discussion for another day.

The balance of my time in Ugashik was spent fishing by day and trading stories with Bob, Carol and Ted at night. I guess I had become Alice. You might have a vision of four of us eating out of a can of Spam. but this is not a scene from "A man, a can and a microwave." Truth be known, Carol would put Martha Stewart to shame. Despite the fact that the Ugashik River Lodge included meals with my stay at the Lodge, I would drop in first thing in the morning. Carol would place a stack of French toast, stuffed with cream cheese on the table. I, in turn, would proclaim "No thank you, I've already eaten." Bob retorted, "I dare you, Lance. I'll bet you can't eat just one. They're like Lay's potato chips. Good luck." With each passing day I had become more impressed with Bob and Carol's accomplishments. From home construction, electronics, wind generators, solar panels, computers, radio phones, satellite Internet service, to smoked salmon, baking and food fit for a five-star restaurant. You name it, they cooked or engineered it, and did it inexplicably well.

The following is an expression of my early impressions of Bob and Carol. I hope you will keep an open mind to a different form of expression, a poem. Each chapter of the Back Story – Alaska will culminate in a poem summarizing the Chapter. 🐾

LEGACY AND LESSONS

*My father yelled— “come on squirt”
“Get up —you’re not hurt”
I was born— in a different age,
No soft landings — to assuage*

*My generation— failed to create
A legacy—make your own fate
Desperate for solutions— running out of time
So many lessons— as the bell chimes*

*Words of wisdom— before I go
Don’t be a victim- a patsy-scarecrow
Sing for your dinner — never be late
Take care of your family—Control your own fate*

*You’re the man—take the lead,
Never let love—be driven by need
Work real hard — imagine more
In your relationships— don’t keep score*

*Legacy is built —on the slow
Over generations — like glacial snow
It’s all just — a matter of pride
You have legacy— on your side*

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