

Eddie, The 25 Year Reunion

Chapter Nine The Reunion

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The day of the long awaited twenty-five-year reunion arrives and, this year, Eddie is looking forward to seeing some of his acquaintances who he hasn't seen in a few years. During the fifteen and twenty-year reunion, the crowd has thinned out a lot, with many in the class moving away or too busy with life to attend. But, this year is expected to be a big event.

As Eddie and Kathy are getting ready to leave, Kathy stands in front of the mirror, and asks Eddie, "does my butt look okay this year?" Eddie laughs and tells Kathy, "trust me, it's just as good as ever." Eddie asks, "are we ready?" Kathy replies, "yeah. But, we have a half hour before we need to leave." Eddie asks, "what can we do in 30 minutes?"

Eddie's question just got answered by the doorbell ringing. Kathy tells Eddie, "let me see who that is." Kathy opens the door, finding her counterpart from the future standing in front of her. Inviting her counterpart in, Kathy quietly exclaims, "ut oh. What's up?" Kathy's counterpart explains, "I just stepped out of the reunion for a moment to let you know what's going to happen." Without yet hearing the news, Kathy yells out, "hey, Eddie! Come here!"

Seeing Kathy's counterpart, Eddie asks, "what's up this year? Did Mr. Crum show up?" Kathy's counterpart replies, "unfortunately, he did. And, so did Goldshit. And, believe it or not, so did Todd McCrutchen." Eddie exclaims, "wow! McCrutchen! What did he show up at our reunion for? He didn't even go to our high school!" Kathy's counterpart replies, "I can't really answer that, but you'll understand in a moment."

Kathy's counterpart tells Eddie and Kathy, "okay, so I have to tell you what is going to happen this year. This is really important." Eddie asks,

“is everyone still alive?” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “fortunately, yes.” Eddie replies, “well, at least, that’s good news.”

Kathy’s counterpart then explains, “Mr. Crum showed up, and Goldshit was with him. But, the officer stationed at the reunion didn’t recognize them. So, they must have hung out, hiding somewhere, because no one saw them. Then, this year, it’s Goldshit that pulls out the gun.” Kathy exclaims, “what? Who was he after?” Kathy’s counterpart explains, “he was yelling something like, ‘where’s that guy who busted up my jaw?’ So, we figured he was after Braden. So, get this. Goldshit fired the gun into the air several times, but then he ran out of bullets. And, after that, everyone left. So, the reunion was pretty much a big flop. They didn’t even bring out all the food yet. It kind of sucked.” Kathy comments, “Paula must have been really disappointed, not getting any pizza.” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “yeah, seriously. Me too.”

Eddie asks, “so, we need to find Crum and Goldshit, and get rid of them before they cause a problem?” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “yeah. But, here’s the problem. No one saw them coming. They came out of nowhere. You’re going to have to figure out a way to find them.” Eddie points out, “Braden would probably have a plan.” Kathy’s counterpart tells Eddie and Kathy, “I agree. We need a plan, since pretty much there was no reunion after Goldshit started firing.”

Eddie asks, “when did Crum and Goldshit show up?” Kathy’s counterpart explains, “the hors d’oeuvres were all out, but the food wasn’t brought out yet. They showed up sometime after the waiters removed the hors d’oeuvres, and started bringing out lunch.” Eddie replies, “got it.” Eddie then asks, “so, do we know how McCrutchen fits in?” Kathy’s counterpart replies, “I don’t know. McCrutchen seems to be the least of our problems. But, we did notice that McCrutchen was hanging out with Jimmy O’Brien. That could be a problem.” Eddie sarcastically replies, “oh, wonderful. O’Brien made it to the reunion. I was hoping that his piece of shit van rusted away to nothing by now, and him with it.”

Kathy’s counterpart gives a few more details, now hopeful that the reunion will go better than it did. Kathy’s counterpart heads out, as Eddie heads straight to the phone, explaining to Braden, Mark, Bobby B., Mitchell, and Johnson what is expected to happen.

On their way out to the reunion, Kathy asks, “which car are we driving?” Eddie replies, “my MGB, of course.” Kathy acts sad, and asks, “hey! Why not the Dune Buggy or the Bus?” Eddie replies, “the Bus is for tomorrow when we all hit the beach.” Kathy reminds Eddie, “Milana is

playing the organ at church tomorrow. And, she's not going to the beach with us. So, we can take the Dune Buggy this year." Eddie replies, "deal."

Eddie and Kathy arrive at the event center hosting the reunion, parking next to Paula's Beach Patrol Jeep CJ. Looking around the parking lot and seeing a lot of high-end cars, Eddie perceives that many of his classmates have moved up in the world. Eddie also sees that his friends in the tribe, although they can afford any car they want, still drive around in Dune Buggies and modified Volkswagen Busses. And, although he did not drive it to the reunion today, Mitchell still has his German Opel 1900. Everyone is totally convinced that Mitchell will never get rid of that vehicle. They are probably right.

Eddie and Kathy walk through the door and into the reception room. Eddie and Kathy are promptly intercepted by Steve Gaucher, the class president. Gaucher greets Eddie, stating, "hi. Welcome to our twenty-five-year reunion. I'm Steve Gaucher." Gaucher looks for a handshake, but Eddie gives him a fist bump, which goes rather awkward for Gaucher. Eddie tells Gaucher, "hey. Good to see you again." Standing alongside Gaucher, also greeting those attending the reunion, is Jim Lynch, the class vice president, Douglas McArdle, the class treasurer, and Laurie Pick, the class secretary. Apparently, twenty-five years later, the class officers are a lot less energetic than when in high school. It seems like Gaucher and Lynch do not even want to be present today.

As they are walking through the door, Eddie tells Kathy, "let me see if I recognize anyone." Pointing to a guy hanging out with Mark, Eddie asks, "who's that guy standing there with Mark?" Kathy replies, "that's Bobby B. Remember him? He threw the shot-put when you guys were in high school." Eddie comically replies, "oh yeah. He works for me now. I knew I recognized him from somewhere. How could I forget?" Kathy replies, "sometimes, it's hard to call what you guys do 'work.'" It's easy to tell that Eddie is in an unusual mood today.

Eddie and Kathy walk in, and mingle with the crowd. Seeing Bobby B. standing with a few other tribe members, Eddie heads in that direction. In no time, Lynn Berson walks toward the tribe's gathering, getting a candid photograph before she is spotted. During the first half hour, the tribe mingles with a few of their friends, including Daniel Gaspari, known to his best friends as Gump, whom the tribe has kept in close contact with over the years.

Running into another acquaintance, Eddie exclaims, "Peter! Great to see you! How have you been?" Peter replies, "great! I'm semi retired now. So, I thought I'd make time to come to the reunion." Eddie asks,

“do you live in the area?” Peter explains, “no. After high school, I moved about 50 miles North of San Diego. It’s great bicycling weather out there.” Eddie asks, “so, you’re still riding?” Peter explains, “yeah. I own a few bicycle shops and bicycle rental facilities near the beaches. I finally got a good general manager who can do my job for me. So, I’m focusing on riding more.”

Peter asks Eddie, “so, what have you been up to?” Eddie explains, “I still ride. I’m semi retired too. I have my own service station, but I only work on county vehicles and my friends’ vehicles.” Peter asks, “what do you ride these days?” Eddie explains, “I have a few bicycles, including my track bike that I had in high school. My latest project is a road bike with a Rohloff Speedhub.” Peter interrupts, and exclaims, “what? You got a Rohloff?” Eddie replies, “yeah. Fourteen speeds, internal gears, no maintenance, other than changing the oil once a year.” Peter confesses, “we’ve sold a few of those hubs over the last couple of years, mostly to guys who ride around the beaches. Believe it or not, the sand blown up from the beach causes the chains, gears, and derailleurs to wear out faster. Not a problem with the Rohloff hubs. The chains still wear out prematurely, but chains are relatively cheap. Derailleurs and cassettes are not.” Eddie replies, “I can see that. All the gears on the Rohloff are internal. It’s kind of immune to its environment.” Eddie, glad to find one of his former classmates followed his passion, has a nice conversation with Peter about bicycling.

A bit later, seeing Lynn with two cameras around her neck today, Eddie asks, “did you get a new camera?” Lynn replies, “yeah. This new one is my Nikon D1X, which is totally digital. I can take a thousand photographs if I want.” Eddie takes a look, and tells Lynn, “wow! That’s pretty cool.” Lynn explains, “it doesn’t have the resolution of film, but I can put the photos on a disc and give them to anyone who wants them.” Eddie replies, “wow! I might just take you up on that.”

As the athletes corner begins to form, Mark points out, “aren’t we in luck. Here comes Jimmy O’Brien.” Gaspari replies, commenting, “he doesn’t look too good.” O’Brien makes a quick stop at the bar before attempting to mingle with the crowd. Gaspari asks, “how about that other clown from our class? What was his name?” Mark smiles, and replies, “you must mean the Chuckie.” Gaspari replies, “yeah. That’s him. The class jerk.” Braden interjects, “you don’t have to worry about his ass this year. His fat ass is locked up in prison.”

Braden comments, “it looks like to me that Jimmy O’Brien got himself a new girlfriend.” Eddie looks over, asking, “she’s really skinny. I don’t recognize her. Who is she?” Lynn Berson informs the group, “that’s Anna Rex, like in anorexic. The joke when we were in high school is that

she can hide out in the food court at the mall. No one would ever expect to find her there.” Mark laughs, commenting, “that’s kind of funny.” Braden comments, “that girl needs to eat something.” Eddie replies, “yeah, seriously.” Lynn then informs the group, “Anna Rex is Ronald Rex’s sister.”

Remembering his encounter with Ronald Rex, Eddie asks, “I wonder what happened to Ronald Rex anyway.” Braden replies, “his ass is probably in jail too, along with the rest of those idiots he hung out with. Now that I’m thinking about it, they ought to have two reunions. One right here, and the other one in the county jail.” Eddie laughs, replying, “seriously, bro. You might have a point.”

Changing the subject, Gaspari asks, “are we still on for the beach tomorrow?” Eddie replies, “we’re in.” The tribe echoes the sentiment, preferring to go to the beach rather than the dance tomorrow. Gaspari’s wife, Jan, asks, “is Tessa going to be there tomorrow?” Kathy replies, “yeah. Tessa is going to race Eddie in the ocean.” Jan informs those around, “I’d like to join in, if no one minds.” Eddie replies, “sure. No problem.” Jan, who was highly competitive in ocean swimming and triathlons years ago, is really looking forward to the beach tomorrow. Jan still participates in triathlons, giving those twenty years younger than her a run for their money.

Bobby B. laughs, and mentions to Eddie, “check out O’Brien. He’s pigging out on the hors d’oeuvres.” Eddie replies, “that’s because he doesn’t have a job. I wouldn’t put it past him to load up his van with food before he leaves.” Remembering how Mr. O’Brien had his own definition of “fair”, Bobby B. sighs, and replies, “life’s just not fair.”

A while later, seeing the tribe together, Lynn Berson and Penny Hart walk up to Eddie and Bobby B., asking, “hey! Can we get a picture of the track stars and their wives?” Eddie replies, “sure,” and calls the tribe together for a photograph. Knowing that Lynn detests Jimmy O’Brien, Eddie asks Lynn, “are you sure you don’t want O’Brien in the photograph?” Lynn laughs, and firmly replies, “Jimmy O’Brien is not going to be in any of my photos if I can help it. You can be sure of that.” Penny also informs Eddie, “and, he ain’t going to be in any of mine either, unless he trips over himself and lands on the floor.” The tribe poses as Lynn and Penny get a photo of the former track stars.

A bit later in the morning, Kathy notices the wait staff as they enter the ballroom to remove the hors d’oeuvres. Discreetly calling the tribe together in multiple small groups, Kathy informs the tribe that it’s time to search for Mr. Crum and Andrew Goldstein. Eddie pairs up with Mark, Johnson with Braden, and Mitchell with Bobby B., quietly searching the

room for Mr. Crum. The women station themselves at the entrances to the ballroom, with the exception of Erika, who is armed and ready to move in wherever the action develops.

Kathy, stationed with Paula at the entrance to the kitchen, whispers to Paula, "trouble at twelve o'clock. Crum is in the kitchen with Goldshit. I saw him when the door swung open." Paula whispers back, "is he barefoot and pregnant?" Kathy laughs, and replies, "that would be funny, but he was in jail for fifteen years. I can only imagine how that went." Paula tells Kathy, "you get Braden, and I'll tell Erika." Kathy replies, "got it." Identifying the target, Kathy and Paula move out, calling in the reinforcements.

As Paula rushes to inform Erika of Mr. Crum's whereabouts, Kathy informs Braden and Johnson, "we found them. That old Crum is in the kitchen, and Goldshit is with him." Braden tells Johnson, "run over and get Officer Clark. He's stationed at the main entrance." Johnson replies, "got it," and walks swiftly to get Officer Clark. Braden asks Kathy, "has Erika been informed?" Kathy replies, "yeah. Paula is telling her now." Braden replies, "good. Now, we put the plan into action, and bust their dumb shit asses."

Erika, Braden, and Officer Clark quickly assemble to discuss the strategy. Braden, who has been analyzing the floor plan of the room all morning, informs Erika and Officer Clark, "there's two main entrances to the kitchen from this room. Most of the traffic comes in and out of the door on the right. There's another entrance to the kitchen along the hallway to the restrooms. I don't think there's any other access to this room from the kitchen." Officer Clark asks Braden and Erika, "so, you guys can ID this Mr. Crum and Goldstein?" Braden replies, "yes, sir. We know who they are." At a slight disadvantage, Officer Clark has never seen either Mr. Crum or Andrew Goldstein.

Erika gets into position among the crowd. Officer Clark gets into position, against the wall between the two doors leading to the kitchen, giving the impression that he is just observing the activity. Braden is positioned on the other side of the door that Mr. Crum is most likely to emerge from. And, over near the corridor leading to the rest rooms, Bobby B. and Johnson stake out the area in the unlikely event Mr. Crum comes out of that entrance.

As the food is brought out, no one else in the reunion suspects that there is a clandestine sting operation underway. Kathy and Paula, seeing the pizza being brought out by the wait staff, quickly grab a slice. Barbara, Amber, and Wendy also grab a slice, all secretly looking

out for Mr. Crum and Goldstein. As more food is brought out by the wait staff, many eyes are glued to the doors to the ballroom.

Crum emerges behind a waiter walking through the right doorway, prompting Kathy to yell out, “yo, Paula!” Braden hears the signal, promptly intercepting and detaining Mr. Crum. Quickly identifying Goldstein, Erika draws her gun, exclaiming, “freeze! Hands over your head! Now!” Officer Clark carefully approaches Goldstein, placing him in handcuffs. Goldstein exclaims, “this is a set up! Yeah, yeah. Someone must have tipped them off! This is a set up!” Erika tells Goldstein, “yeah. This was a set up. You really should have been more careful about who you talk to. Apparently, you don’t know who you can trust.” Erika’s response will leave Goldstein wondering which one of his acquaintances tipped off the police. Goldstein and Mr. Crum are then escorted out by Erika and Officer Clark.

Braden walks up to the microphone, announcing, “may I have your attention, please.” Braden pauses, waiting for the room to become silent. Braden announces, “in case you’re wondering what just happened, the county police department got word that Mr. Crum and Goldshit. Oops. Excuse me.” Braden laughs, then continues, “let me try this again. The county police department got word that Mr. Crum and Andrew Goldstein might attend today’s event. Crum and Goldshit broke out of prison a few months ago. Today, they were apprehended, and will return to prison where they belong. That problem is now behind us, so please, everyone, enjoy the rest of your day. And, it looks like to me that some pretty good food has just been brought out. So, go ahead and dig in.” Braden steps down, followed by the attendees all cheering.

Eddie grabs a slice of pizza, joining Kathy. In no time, the tribe is together, celebrating a victory off the track. Braden is asked by Gaspari, “how did you guys know that Mr. Crum was going to appear today?” Not revealing the real reason he knows, Braden explains, “the department had information that Mr. Crum and Goldshit were in the area. They picked up the Chuckie a while ago. They were all in the same prison, and broke out together. Now, they’re all going back.” Gaspari replies, “that was a pretty slick operation. It looks like it worked really well.” Braden boasts, “it did! Now, we all can enjoy the rest of the afternoon.”

Taking a seat at three adjacent tables, the tribe sits and has lunch together. During lunch, Kathy points out to Eddie, “it looks like O’Brien has a new friend.” Glancing across the room, Eddie, seeing O’Brien sitting with McCutchen, replies, “they’re up to something.” Paula also replies, adding, “and, whatever it is, it ain’t good.” Kathy asks Paula, “superpowers?” Paula replies, “yeah, girl. They’re up to no good.” Kathy laughs, telling Paula, “when are they not?”

Thinking back to this morning, Kathy whispers to Paula, “when I came from the future to warn me and Eddie about Mr. Crum, my future self told us that McCrutchen was at the reunion. But, we didn’t know why. In the alternative future that we just changed, after Goldshit started shooting, everyone left the reunion. Now, in this future, that never happened. So, we really have no idea why McCrutchen is here today. He probably left with everyone else.” Paula suggests to Kathy, “why don’t we just get the guys to kick him out?” Kathy tells Paula, “if the guys are kicking him out, he’s going to Hawaii. Or, maybe Siberia.” Paula replies, “you got that right, girl.”

Over lunch, Bobby B., seeing Steve Gaucher, the class president, consuming vast quantities of alcohol, asks Johnson, “do you think Gaucher will be sober enough to give the address this year?” Johnson replies, “no. So far, for the last three reunions, he’s one for three. It doesn’t look too good for him this year.” Bobby B. predicts, “maybe one of those other officers will give the address.” Johnson replies, “they’ll have to. I’m not doing it again this year. That guy seriously needs to get a life.” Bobby B. asks, “how’s he going to do that? He can’t even run his own mind. He has to be able to think before he gets a life.” Johnson replies, “if he hasn’t figured that out by now, he probably never will. And, I’m tired of doing his thinking for him during reunions.” Johnson has a point. Gaucher, a textbook alcoholic, will probably die long before he is able to retire.

Kathy and Paula aren’t the only two who have noticed McCutchen and O’Brien hanging out together. Braden has also noticed, and has caught O’Brien pointing to the area where the tribe is seated a few times during lunch. Braden mentions to Eddie and Mark, “I think we got a little problem.” Eddie asks, “really, bro? What’s that?” Braden replies, “O’Brien just left with McCrutchen. Their asses were pointing over here at us all during lunch. Now, I’m wondering if they’re gonna try to mess with our vehicles again.” Eddie replies, “they do seem to have a history of messing with our vehicles.” Mark tells Braden, “and, Paula’s Jeep is out there. That’s an expensive target.” Perceiving a potential problem, Braden tells Mark and Eddie, “we’d better roll.” Braden, Eddie, and Mark abruptly get up, heading out for a moment to make sure McCutchen and O’Brien are not messing with anyone’s vehicles.

Briskly walking out of the venue, Braden spies McCutchen and O’Brien heading to the parking lot. Braden whispers to Eddie and Mark, “there they are. And, I don’t think they’re leaving early.” Mark asks, “how do you know, bro?” Braden replies, “because their fat asses aren’t drunk yet. They can still walk a straight line.” Mark laughs, recalling that, during his wedding, McCutchen was arrested for public drunkenness and disorderly conduct, and could not walk a straight line.

Peering from behind Bobby B's. Volkswagen Bus, Braden whispers to Eddie and Mark, "they're coming up on Paula's Jeep. And, O'Brien's got a key out." With a whisper, Mark exclaims, "shit!" Braden instructs Eddie and Mark, "you guys go to the right. I'll go the left. Okay, let's go." Braden, Eddie, and Mark rush O'Brien and McCutchen, striving to get there before O'Brien does any damage.

McCutchen exclaims, "shit," seeing Braden, Eddie, and Mark approach. O'Brien, caught in the act of scraping his key along the rear fender of Paula's Jeep, makes a run for it. Mark swiftly chases down O'Brien, quickly and easily apprehending the slower-than-ever overweight class moron. Putting O'Brien into an arm lock, Mark angrily tells O'Brien, "you can't afford what you just did, junior. Your ass is writing checks that you can't cover. This is going to cost you big time." O'Brien replies, crying out, "I'm sorry!" I'll pay for it! Let me go!" Mark replies, "you don't even have a job, junior! You'd have to sell your piece of shit van to pay for what you just did." O'Brien struggles to get loose, but to no avail.

As Mark interrogates O'Brien, Eddie chases down McCutchen, also apprehending his target rather quickly. Putting McCutchen in an arm bar, Eddie exclaims, "wow! Todd McCutchen! How have you been? What brings you to our reunion? What? Wasn't your high school reunion any good?" McCutchen exclaims, "let me go!" Eddie authoritatively tells McCutchen, "not today, junior." McCutchen informs Eddie, "I'll have you arrested!" Eddie tells McCutchen, "go ahead, junior. There's Officer Braden, right over there. Tell him to arrest me." McCutchen struggles, trying to escape, but to no avail. Eddie asks McCutchen, "what's the matter? Didn't you learn anything about self defense from Akinmola's sermon?" McCutchen again exclaims, "shut up, and let me go," but his pleas land on deaf ears.

Braden approaches, asking McCutchen, "didn't I arrest your puny little ass enough, junior? You came back for more? And, now that I'm thinking about it, what's your ass doing at our reunion, anyway?" Answering for McCutchen, Eddie informs Braden, "the IRS fired McCutchen and Brad Evans. I guess he thought he'd get a little daring, and pay us back, along with this moronic moron, O'Brien, here." O'Brien exclaims, "let me go! You're hurting me!" Mark tells O'Brien, "shut up, junior. I'll let you know when I start to hurt you."

Once the two perpetrators are apprehended, Mark laughs, and mentions to Eddie, "O'Brien said he'd pay for the damage. He'd have to sell that piece of shit van of his to do it." Eddie replies, "forget it, bro. Selling that rust bucket won't even cover it. The scrap yard won't even give him fifty bucks for it." But, Mark doesn't care. With millions of

dollars, the inconvenience of getting Paula's Jeep repainted is nothing compared to the amusement O'Brien brings to the tribe.

Eddie whispers to Mark, "I think it's time to give O'Brien, here, and McCutchen, a trip in our time machine." Eddie then whispers the same to Braden. Braden nods his head, ready for some free entertainment. Stepping aside, Braden makes a temporary portal, ready to transport the two perpetrators to who knows where.

Mark sternly informs O'Brien, "I'm going to inject you with some psycho Chubin, junior. It acts very quickly. And, when it wears off, your memory of today will be all jumbled up. You won't know what's real and what's not real." O'Brien exclaims, "no! Let me go!" Mark takes out his pocket knife and, lightly jabbing the blade into the back of O'Brien's arm, tells O'Brien, "psycho Chubin. Remember that, junior. Psycho Chubin." Eddie tells Mark, "give some psycho Chubin to McCutchen, too." Mark smiles, and replies, "you got it, bro." Mark then pricks the back of McCutchen's arm with his pocket knife as Eddie whispers into McCutchen's ear, "psycho Chubin. Remember that name, McCutchen. Psycho Chubin."

Eddie tells Mark, "maybe you shouldn't have injected McCutchen with psycho Chubin. Who knows how he's going to react since he's had a Prickly Sea Spider bite." Mark replies, "oh, yeah. I forgot about that. That's just too bad. I'm glad it's not my problem." McCutchen is quick to point out, "nothing's happening. You didn't inject us with anything." Mark reminds McCutchen, "as I told you guys, it acts very quickly. Just wait a few minutes. You'll see."

Just to add fuel to the party, Mark asks Eddie, "do you have your gyrophone?" Eddie replies, "yeah. We'll definitely need it for this trip." Somewhat angered, McCutchen asks, "what is this gyrophone you keep talking about?" Eddie explains, "my gyrophone is how you got to watch the track meet, junior. It implants memories in your brain. If I want it to, it can erase memories too. But, don't forget. You being at the track meet never happened. That's how the gyrophone works." McCutchen exclaims, "you people are crazy!" Just to confuse the issue, Mark informs McCutchen, "hey, junior! Don't you remember? I knocked you out, and Eddie beamed the track meet into your head using his gyrophone." Eddie reminds McCutchen, "that's why I keep my gyrophone locked up in my filing cabinet. It's classified technology."

Eddie and Mark escort McCutchen and O'Brien towards Braden's portal. On the way, McCutchen whispers to O'Brien, "I thought you said they were going to sit there and eat for at least an hour?" O'Brien replies, "how was I supposed to know they were going to follow us out?"

With a sound of disgust in his voice, McCutchen tells O'Brien, "a lot of good that does us now." O'Brien reassures McCutchen, telling him, "we'll get out of this somehow." Overhearing O'Brien and McCutchen's conversation, Mark informs them, "yeah. You'll get out of this, once the psycho Chubin wears off. That should be in a few days." Mark looks at Eddie and grins, knowing that a O'Brien and McCutchen will have a really rough time ahead of them today.

Approaching Braden's portal, just to confuse McCutchen, Eddie asks Mark, "didn't we inject McCutchen with psycho Chubin that day when he made that big scene at church?" Mark reminds Eddie, "I knocked him out that time. Maybe we gave him some psycho Chubin, maybe we didn't. I forget." Eddie replies, "I wonder if McCutchen remembers. Braden is quick to point out, "McCrutchen can't remember shit. His dumb shit ass remembers what didn't happen, and he doesn't remember what did happen. What good is that?" Recalling the incident at church, McCutchen begins to look very worried.

Eddie and Mark direct McCutchen and O'Brien into Braden's portal. Braden joins them, and Mark commands the portal, whispering, "Key West, at Straw Hat Beach." Braden, Eddie, and Mark, along with McCutchen and O'Brien, are immediately transported to Straw Hat Beach in Key West.

In a panic, McCutchen exclaims, "what happened? Where are we?" Mark immediately tells McCutchen, "see? What did I tell you, junior? The psycho Chubin is fast acting. I don't know where you guys think you are, but we're still in the parking lot at the reunion." Pointing to a Jeep in the parking lot at the beach, Eddie replies, "yeah. And, there's Paula's Jeep, right over there." McCutchen exclaims, "that's not her Jeep!" Eddie calmly replies, "sure it is. Do you have a better explanation?" Hearing no immediate answer, Mark tells McCutchen, "waiting." McCutchen does not answer, and the expression on his face suggests that he is very fearful.

Also not making any sense of what is happening, O'Brien exclaims, "what was that you injected me with? Where am I?" Mark assures O'Brien, "you're in the parking lot, at the reunion, junior. I injected you with psycho Chubin. I told you. You won't know what's real and what's not real." O'Brien exclaims, "you're in a lot of trouble now!" Braden replies to O'Brien, "junior! Your ass is the one that's in trouble! You don't even know where you are! How can we be in trouble if your fat ass brain is the one that's all messed up?" Mark is quick to point out, "their brains have always been messed up." Braden comments, "you guys are making this way too complicated. They ain't got no brains. That's how their fat asses got where they are."

Eddie, Mark, and Braden all make a mental note of the location of the portal. Braden leads, as Mark and Eddie escort O'Brien and McCutchen down the beach, far from the portal. On the way, O'Brien tells Mark, "hey! Be careful! That's my bad arm!" Quick to respond, Mark informs O'Brien, "you don't have any good arms, junior! They're both bad!" Hearing the exchange, Eddie tells Mark, "it's kind of funny. When people are in their teens, they have a left arm and a right arm. When they get older, it's a good arm and a bad arm."

Mark laughs, pointing out to Eddie, "McCrutchen has no good legs either. It's the Prickly Sea Spider bite, I tell you! His brain has turned to nothing but mush! And now, it's even more mush! Liquified mush!" Eddie asks Mark, "does psycho Chubin damage the brain more if someone had a Prickly Sea Spider bite?" Leaving McCutchen with some uncertainty regarding his future, Mark brilliantly replies, "I'm not sure. I guess we'll find out soon enough."

A quarter mile away from the portal, Braden announces, "we have arrived at our destination." Addressing McCutchen and O'Brien, Braden instructs them, "you're gonna sit your asses down on the sand. If you move, we're gonna try your asses out as a hammer. And, you better pay attention to those rocks over there in the water when you come in for a landing. This ain't like your beach back home. I'd hate for your asses to land on those rocks." McCutchen exclaims, "you said we're still at the reunion!" Braden laughs, telling McCutchen, "you are at the reunion! Your ass is just a little further away than it was ten minutes ago!"

Insisting for an answer and realizing that Braden might just be messing with McCutchen, in a panic, O'Brien asks again, "where are we? What have you guys done to us?" Mark replies, "nothing. We're all still at the reunion, junior. The punch was spiked with psycho Chubin. You must have got a double dose." O'Brien, referring to Braden, tells Mark, "but, he said we're at the beach!" Mark tells O'Brien, "really? That's not what I heard. I told you. You won't know what's real and what's not real. You must be hallucinating or something." O'Brien exclaims, "what have you done to me? I'm going to report you!" Mark replies, "nothing, junior. You're the one who took the psycho Chubin, not me. And, who are you going to report us to? Mr. Crum?" Eddie laughs, telling Mark, "Crum might suspend us."

Catching Mark's earlier cue, McCutchen whispers to O'Brien, "the punch must have been spiked." In response, O'Brien exclaims, "they did something! I'm getting scared!" Mark again tells O'Brien, "it's the psycho Chubin, junior. And, the scary part is that you won't even know when it wears off. Think about that for a minute." Threatening Mark, O'Brien exclaims, "you are going to be in big trouble!" Mark tells

O'Brien, "you'd better shut up, junior, or I'm going to hit you so hard, I'll knock you into next week."

Coming to his senses, McCutchen tells O'Brien, "we'll just call the police." In a panic, O'Brien replies, "call the police? We don't even know where we are or how we got here!" Settling the issue, Braden exclaims, "didn't you hear Mark? It's the psycho Chubin! We're still at the reunion, and there's the beach, right over there!" Trying to act logical, O'Brien exclaims, "there's no beach at the reunion!" Braden laughs, and replies, "see that? Your dumb shit ass don't know what's real and what's not real, just like Mark told you."

Hearing O'Brien and McCutchen getting restless, Eddie whispers to his group, "we'd better get out of here." Braden sternly warns O'Brien and McCutchen, "you two morons just sit your asses right where you are. If you move, we're trying your asses out as hammers. And, we're gonna wait until the sun goes down, when it's shark feeding time." With McCutchen and O'Brien sitting in the sand, Braden, Eddie, and Mark bolt toward the portal.

Arriving at the location of the portal, Eddie looks down the beach, not seeing any hint of McCutchen or O'Brien attempting to follow. Eddie, Mark, and Braden walk into the portal, arriving back at the reunion. Meanwhile, back in Key West, McCutchen and O'Brien cannot make any sense of what just happened.

On the way back to the venue, Braden informs Eddie and Mark, "we got a little problem here." Eddie asks, "what's that, bro?" Braden explains, "both of their vehicles are in the parking lot. And now both their asses are in Key West. How are we gonna explain that?" Eddie assures Braden, "that's not a problem. It's a golden opportunity, bro." Braden asks Eddie, "what are you talking about?" Eddie informs Braden, "I'll just come back here later tonight with my tow truck, and tow O'Brien's van to the airport." Braden laughs, telling Eddie, "I wanna hear how O'Brien and McCutchen are gonna explain their asses out of that one!" Eddie confidently replies, "don't worry, bro. I'll hear about it from Richard sooner or later."

Arriving inside, Mark, Eddie, and Braden pull Paula and Kathy aside to explain to Paula what happened to her Jeep. Braden opens the discussion, announcing, "well, we got some bad news and some good news. I'm gonna give you the bad news first." Paula replies, "ut oh. This can't be good." Braden replies, "it ain't. We caught O'Brien and McCutchen messing with your Jeep. O'Brien keyed your Jeep." Paula exclaims, "shit! That asshole!" Mark assures Paula, "it's not too bad."

Vinnie can repaint it. The good news is that he didn't key the Beach Patrol logo or the beach scene. We caught him before he could do that."

Hearing that not much damage was done to Paula's Jeep, Kathy asks, "is that the good news?" Eddie replies, "no. The good news is we took O'Brien and McCutchen on a free vacation to Key West." Kathy and Paula laugh hysterically, now wanting to hear the rest of the story. Mark explains how they pretended to inject O'Brien and McCutchen with psycho Chubin, and subsequently transported them to Key West and left them there.

Wondering about the guy's chosen destination, Paula asks, "why Key West? Why not Bolivia or something?" Mark explains, "I wanted them to get home sooner, so I can hear how this goes down." Braden comments, "with any luck, both their asses will end up at that crazy house over there on Central Avenue." Kathy laughs, commenting, "the good old sanitarium. That's where they both belong anyway." Never liking McCutchen from the day she met him, Paula replies, "ain't that the truth."

Paula tells Mark, "I'm going to go outside and take a look at my Jeep." Mark replies, "I'll come with you." Paula heads out with Mark for a moment, wanting to assess the damage to her Jeep. Eddie and Braden get back to the party, where they head straight for Lynn, carefully documenting their whereabouts in a photograph.

While dessert is being brought out, Steve Gaucher steps up to the microphone, giving today's welcome address. Oddly, no one pays much attention to Gaucher, whose words literally make no sense at all. Braden asks, "what's he saying, anyway?" Mark replies, "let me translate for you. He said, 'blah. Blah, Blah. Blah. Blah, Blah, Blah.'" Braden laughs, telling Mark, "that's making more sense than what his ass is saying!" Gaucher interrupts his presentation, and informs everyone that dessert has been brought out. Everyone, however, has already figured that out. Gaucher then continues with his nonsensical presentation which is ignored by most everyone.

Airing the same sentiment as Braden, Eddie mentions to Kathy, "nothing Gaucher is saying is making any sense." Eddie whispers to Kathy, "the bad news is his brain is shot from all that alcohol he drank today. And, they don't make spare parts for his brain." Kathy asks, "are you sure it's not his Johnson Rod?" Eddie laughs, replying, "someone ought to shove a barbed-wire Johnson Rod up Gaucher's ass. He's up there wasting everyone's time." Kathy laughs, remembering once promising Mr. Crum a barbed-wire fence enema.

Now that all the dessert has been brought out, not surprisingly, Kathy has found the chocolate mousse, and has brought a mound of it back to the table. As Kathy digs in, Paula tells Kathy, "I thought we were all going to split that plate of mousse, girl! Look at the size of that! Are you going to eat all that yourself?" Kathy smiles, and replies, "it's only one serving. I might go back for seconds." Paula asks, "are you pregnant?" Kathy replies, "no. Do you have heatstroke again?" Paula replies, "no, girl! It's only seventy degrees in here!" Kathy smiles, and replies, "then, it should be obvious to everyone that this is only one serving of chocolate mousse."

Interrupting dessert, Anna Rex, who has been going from table to table, asks those at Kathy's table, "I hate to interrupt, but have any of you guys seen Jimmy O'Brien?" Braden replies, "I ain't seen him recently." Mark tells Anna, "I think I saw him walk outside with someone else about a half hour ago."

Anna then asks the group, "by the way, would any of you guys know if Charles Black is going to make it to the reunion?" Braden replies, "unfortunately, I got some bad news. The Chuckie ain't gonna make it today. He got detained." Anna replies, "that's sad. I was hoping to see him here. We made some really good memories back in high school."

Hoping to hear some potential comedy, Mark asks Anna, "really? What kind of memories did you and the Chuckie make?" Anna takes a seat, and explains, "okay. So this was kind of weird, but I love it! Do you guys know how Charles used to shoot squirrels with his pellet gun back when we were in high school?" Mark replies, "no. I never knew he did that." Braden comments, "neither did I." Paula whispers to Kathy, "this is going to be seriously sick. I just know it." Bobby B. grins, absolutely sure that a convoluted story is on the horizon.

Anna continues, explaining, "so, Charles shot a squirrel in his yard, put it in a food storage bag, and stored it in his freezer. Later that week, Charles came over to my house for dinner. And, he brought the squirrel that he killed, which was still half frozen in the bag. When he came over and knocked on the door, he hid it behind his back. When I opened the door, he held the squirrel in front of me, and said, 'surprise!' I think he tried to gross me out or something. I took the squirrel, and yelled out to my parents, 'hey! Look what Charles brought us!' My dad saw the squirrel, and said, 'awesome! He looks like a juicy one. We'll clean it up and put it on the grill.'" Kathy whispers to Paula, "you've got to be kidding me. That girl is cracked." Paula whispers back, "you mean, on crack, girl. That girl is sick."

Anna describes in detail, telling the group who is trying to enjoy dessert, "Charles didn't know we ate squirrel. I think he was kind of weirded out when my mom put it in hot water to thaw it out, and skinned it. Then, my dad put it on the grill, along with a few other squirrels. When Charles told me that he didn't think he could eat a squirrel, I told him that's what he had last time he was over. I mean, like, if you put Teriyaki sauce on squirrel, it tastes just like Teriyaki chicken. So, I told him that, after dinner, we can go smoke a joint together. So, he was fine after that." Braden sarcastically comments, "I'm sure he was." Anna replies, "I'm so glad you understand. Not a whole lot of people do, you know." Anna then sighs, and comments, "you know, I really like squirrel. But, I just can't eat a whole one myself."

Anna then concludes, telling the group, "those memories were so awesome. There's a few more, if you want to hear them." Wanting to get rid of Anna as fast as possible, Paula reminds Anna, "we'd love to but, if you're looking for Jimmy O'Brien, you'd better hurry. He might be heading out early." Anna replies, "that's right! I almost forgot about that." Anna stands up, telling Mark, "thanks for the info on Jimmy. I think I'll go look outside for him now." Anna heads outside, in search of Jimmy O'Brien who, at the moment, is 1,500 miles away.

Once Anna is gone, Mitchell asks Mark, "who was that skinny girl? I don't remember her from our class." Repeating Lynn's earlier explanation, Mark informs Mitchell, "that's Anna Rex. Like in anorexic. Her brother, Ronald Rex was in our class. But, he was supposed to graduate a year or two before us." Mitchell replies, "I remember that now! Ronald Rex is that guy who we caught giving John a hazing that day! We belted them all to the fence when all that went down! And, if I remember correctly, Braden got a free knife out of that one." Mark replies, "that's the guy. Hopefully, he's not here today." Braden interjects, commenting, "his ass is probably in jail. That's where all those clowns probably ended up anyway." Braden then informs Mark, "you haven't heard, bro? There's another class reunion going on right now. It's being held over in the county jail." Mark laughs, and replies, "yeah, really. I can probably guess exactly who's at that reunion!"

Once the entire group is made aware of who Anna Rex is, Kathy blurts out, "did I really hear what I just heard?" Paula replies, "you did, girl. And, I can't believe you sat there and ate chocolate mousse through that whole thing!" Kathy tells Paula, "at least I'm not eating squirrel." Paula exclaims, "stop it, girl! I've had enough squirrel for one day." Kathy smiles, and tells Paula, "I didn't know you like squirrel, too." Realizing she walked right into that one, Paula exclaims, "stop it! I don't even want to hear it! I don't eat squirrels, and you know it!" Kathy calmly replies, "well, aren't you glad you had pizza, then?" Paula

exclaims, “yes! And, there ain’t no such thing as squirrel pizza. So, don’t even go there!” Kathy smiles, knowing she found another button on Paula that will undoubtedly be pushed again in the future.

After lunch, the tribe mingles with the crowd, noticing that everyone is now grown up according to a worldly definition. Most of the chit chat involves climbing the corporate ladder, purchasing a better home or expensive car, or other meaningless successes in life. After all, the tribe has learned well from Mr. Frazier that success, according to worldly standards, is meaningless if one does not follow their passion.

Later in the afternoon, as the reunion winds down, Jan asks Eddie, “when is the race with Tessa tomorrow?” Eddie replies, “probably once we all get to the beach. Tessa likes to get these races over with as soon as possible. If we don’t get the race over with, it will consume her mind all day. And, she’s been training all Summer for this race.” Jan confesses, “I haven’t been training too much this Summer.” Eddie replies, “neither have I.” Eddie and Kathy head out along with the rest of the tribe, looking forward to a day at the beach.

Later that night, Eddie gets in his MGB, and heads over to his service station. Mark, who wanted to come along on the trip, is already there waiting when Eddie arrives. Eddie and Mark remove the magnetic signs from Eddie’s tow truck, placing them in the trunk of Eddie’s MGB. The guys are now ready to get down to business.

Getting into his tow truck with Mark, Eddie comments, “I can’t wait to hear how this one goes down.” Mark asks, “what’s the plan, bro?” Eddie replies, “we just head over to the reunion venue, hook up O’Brien’s van, take it over to the airport, and dump it somewhere.” Mark asks, “what about McCrutchin’s car?” Eddie replies, “I don’t know which one is his. If I did, I’d tow it into the city, and leave it illegally parked. But, anyway, it will look like O’Brien and McCrutchin left together, headed to the airport, and took a plane to Key West.” Mark grins, knowing that there is interesting entertainment coming down in the future.

Arriving at the reunion venue and pointing to O’Brien’s van, Mark informs Eddie, “there it is, over there.” Eddie drives over, aligning his tow truck with O’Brien’s van. Coming properly prepared, Eddie puts on a pair of gloves, handing a second pair to Mark. Eddie quickly opens O’Brien’s fifteen-year old van using a Slim Jim, puts the transmission in neutral, and loads it onto the flatbed using the winch. Eddie then secures the vehicle, and they are ready to do business.

Eddie tells Mark, “okay, bro. We’re ready to roll.” Mark asks, “Kennedy or LaGuardia?” Eddie replies, “neither. I’m dumping it off at

MacArthur Airport.” Mark asks, “where is that? I’ve never heard of it.” Eddie replies, “it’s out in Islip. It’s a small airport. It will be a little easier to get in and out of there.” Mark replies, “got it.” Mark then comments, “I never knew there was an airport in Islip.” Eddie explains, “my uncle is an airplane mechanic at Kennedy. He’s done some side work out at MacArthur. When I was a kid, sometimes he took me with him on a job.”

Arriving at MacArthur Airport, Eddie drives his tow truck to the short-term parking lot. Getting a ticket to get out of the lot, Eddie drives in, finding a somewhat vacant area to dump off O’Brien’s van. Eddie and Mark quickly unload O’Brien’s van, being careful to lock it before they leave. Seeing O’Brien’s vehicle taking up four parking places, Mark comments to Eddie, “look at that. That’s a perfect parking job for someone who has been taking way too much of that psycho Chubin!” Eddie laughs, and replies, “yeah, bro. Alcohol and psycho Chubin don’t mix.” Eddie then explains, “I dropped it off like that so they impound it. Taking up four parking spaces will definitely attract a lot of attention.” Mark replies, “good thinking.”

As Eddie and Mark head out, Eddie comments, “I wonder where O’Brien and McCrutchen are spending the night.” Mark replies, “I’m guessing they’re either on a plane home right now, or in a hotel. Or, they could be sleeping on the beach. But, either way, with any luck, they’ll be on their way home tomorrow.” Eddie mentions, “it’s too bad we couldn’t send the Chuckie down there with them.” Mark replies, “ain’t that the truth.” But, fortunately for Chuckie, he is in prison at the moment.

Arriving back at Eddie’s Service Station, Eddie tells Mark, “before I leave, I have to put my magnetic signs back on.” Mark replies, “why did you get magnetic signs? Why didn’t you just have Vinnie paint it?” Eddie explains, “when I bought this tow truck last year, I wanted to try it out for a while before I decided whether to keep it or sell it. Since I’m keeping it, I need to get it over to Vinnie’s sometime and get it painted.” Eddie and Mark reattach the magnetic signs, and head back home for the evening, only to meet up again tomorrow at the beach.

The next day, after lunch at the pizzeria, the group heads to the beach. This year, since Eddie, Jr. and Milana are a lot older now and have their own day planned, Eddie and Kathy take their Dune Buggy. Likewise, the rest of the tribe who have Dune Buggies, take them to the beach as well.

Arriving at the beach and getting out of the Dune Buggy, Eddie tells Kathy, “the good news this year is that O’Brien and McCrutchen won’t show up.” Kathy asks, “how is that good news? You guys really like

messing with them.” Eddie replies, “good point. But, it’s not over. I can’t wait to see what happens when O’Brien and McCutchen get back from Key West. They’re probably going to file a complaint against me.” Kathy laughs, exclaiming, “I can’t hear what Richard is going to say!”

Realizing they are among the last to arrive, Eddie asks, “I wonder where the rest of the guys are.” Kathy replies, “do you have to ask? They’re laying out in front of the sand dunes. After all, that’s our little part of the beach.” Walking a little farther, Eddie replies, “there they are. You were right.” Kathy laughs, informing Eddie, “I’m always right. But, you already knew that.”

Looking around, Eddie sees the entire tribe is present, but a few others, such as Gump and Jan, have not arrived yet. Putting out his towel, Eddie smiles, unexpectedly announcing to the group, “guess what?” Johnson quickly replies, “tell us.” Barbara also replies, telling Eddie, “out with it.” Eddie announces, “me and Kathy are buying another house.” Already aware of Eddie and Kathy’s plans, Bobby B. smiles and asks, “really? Where?” Eddie replies, “in Ormond Beach, Florida.”

Hearing the news, Barbara exclaims, “what? Are you guys moving?” Eddie replies, “no. We’re just buying a little place on the beach.” Before Eddie can finish explaining, Barbara asks, “wait! Why there?” Knowing that no one outside the tribe is present at the moment, Eddie explains, “we miss the beach in the Winter. So, we’ll just go through the portal, and go to our beach house down there for a few hours, then come home.”

Mark comments, “that sounds like a really good idea. Maybe me and Paula can buy a place down there too.” Paula exclaims, “why didn’t we think of that?” Kathy suggests, “maybe we all can go down there next weekend and check it out.” Barbara is quick to reply, “count me in.” Likewise, Erika replies, “us too!” But, Erika, hearing about Eddie’s plans from Bobby B. earlier this week, already had the idea in the back of her head.

While they are laying out in the sun, Mark asks anyone who may know, “why does the salt you buy in the store expire?” Kathy replies, asking, “how do you mean?” Mark explains, “I bought a container of salt at the grocery store, and it expires ten years from now. I mean, like, the salt in the container has been around for thousands of years. It’s not like salt expires sitting on a salt flat or in a cave somewhere. So, when they put it in a container, why does it now have an expiration date?” Kathy replies, “you got me on that one.” Mitchell volunteers, stating, “I know why.” A few seconds of silence go by, and Mark asks Mitchell, “well?” Amber interjects, “you’ll have to pry it out of him. It’s not like he

will answer a straightforward question without making you ask another question.” Mark comments, “he must be hanging around with Akinmola way too much.” Finally answering the question, Mitchell replies, “it’s not the salt that expires, it’s the container that expires.” Mark looks at Mitchell, and replies, “that makes a lot of sense. I just don’t see how salt can expire.” Mitchell explains, “it can’t. Salt is Sodium chloride. It breaks down into Sodium and Chloride ions. But, it doesn’t break down in a bottle. I would just ignore the expiration date. And, if you want to keep it longer than ten years, put it in a glass container.”

Arriving next is Daniel Gaspari and his wife, Jan. Also joining the group this year are Adekunle Akinmola and his wife, Tammy, followed by Hoffer and Tessa. Once everyone gets settled, a few of the guys hit the waves, quickly joined by the women.

Out in the deep water, Eddie asks Mark, “what did you think of the reunion this year, bro?” Mark replies, “it was a waste of time. Everyone I wanted to see I see all the time. But, it was worth going because I got to mess with McCrutchen and O’Brien.” Eddie laughs, replying, “they’re probably at the airport right now, buying a ticket to get home.” Mark replies, “either that, or they’re in the psycho ward. The doctors can give them some anti psycho Chubin. Then, they’ll be all back to normal.” Eddie comments, “those guys have never been normal. They’re not about to start now.”

Quickly interrupting Eddie and Mark’s conversation, Tessa yells out to Eddie, “when are we going to race?” Knowing that Tessa wants to get the race over as soon as possible, Eddie replies, “how about right before we leave?” Tessa exclaims, “no! Let’s get this over with! You’re just afraid of losing!” Eddie relents, telling Tessa, “okay. Get Jan. Let’s get this over with.” Trying to break Eddie’s confidence, Tessa confidently exclaims, “I’m beating you this year, buddy! You don’t even stand a chance!” Tessa, who has been training hard, does not know how much training Eddie has put in this year. And, as usual, Eddie is not about to reveal anything to Tessa.

Hearing the race is about to begin, Hoffer yells out in every direction, “race in the ocean in ten minutes! Eddie, Tessa, and Jan! Everyone else, head to the shore!” The group heads to the shore, with the exception of the three competitors, who all converse with each other about what poor shape they are in this year. It’s not hard to figure out that there is a little psychological warfare going on before the race.

Out in the ocean, Tessa asks Eddie and Jan, “what distance are we swimming?” Eddie replies, “how about the usual 200 yards?” Jan, however, tells Tessa and Eddie, “it doesn’t matter. Barbara and Paula are

already marking the finish line in the sand.” Looking down the beach, Eddie comments, “it looks like the usual 200 yards to me.” Tessa informs Eddie, “that’s longer than 200 yards.” Eddie laughs, reminding Tessa, “it only looks longer to you because you’re getting older. In a few years, 200 yards will look like a mile to you.” Now full of adrenaline, Tessa exclaims, “you’re going down, buddy!” Eddie, perhaps, should have kept quiet. By riling Tessa and getting her adrenaline levels up, she is now more prepared for the race.

From the shore, Kathy yells out, “take your mark!” The three swimmers get into position, waiting for the signal. Sensing that the competitors are ready, Kathy yells out, “go!” Taking no time to get started, the three swimmers sprint toward the finish line at about one quarter the speed of Kathy’s leisurely stroll down the beach to meet the others.

A crowd develops at the shoreline, as many passers by stop to watch the race. One athletic-looking woman, strolling down the beach with her husband, asks Paula, “what’s up out there?” Paula replies, “they’re just racing out in the ocean. From the looks of things, Jan is going to win. No doubt about that.” Now curious, the woman asks, “which one is she?” Paula replies, “she’s the one out in front. It looks like Eddie is in second place. And, poor Tessa, she’s in third place right now. But, I wouldn’t count her out just yet.”

At 100 yards, surprising Eddie and Tessa, Jan has developed a notable lead. Totally unaware of their competition and realizing they are outclassed, Eddie and Tessa step up their pace. The race is now serious business.

Paula casually mentions to the woman and her husband, “it looks like Eddie is catching up. Eddie really hates to lose.” An athlete herself and realizing the level of competition she is witnessing, the woman asks Paula, “am I supposed to know those three?” Paula replies, “you might know them as Eddie Bogenskaya, Tessa Klement, and Jan Lucida.” The woman screams out, “what? Are you like serious? That’s Jan Lucida and Tessa Klement out there?” Paula replies, “I’m not ‘like serious.’ I am serious.” The woman takes another look, not believing that she is watching Jan Lucida and Tessa Klement race. The woman, on the other hand, has never heard of Eddie Bogenskaya.

Quickly realizing the woman may have been a swimmer at one time, Paula asks, “do you know them?” The woman replies, “I sure do! I heard all about Tessa and Jan when I was in college. It seemed like Tessa held all the divisional short-distance records, and Jan held all the long-distance records. Those records stood for a really long time. And, I’ve

heard about Jan when she was tops in the triathlon circuit. I was quite surprised when her picture showed up on the cover of a magazine. They were both really, really good.”

Wondering about the woman’s athletic background, Paula asks her, “what’s your name?” The woman replies, “back then, I was known as Nena Dotsenrod. Today, I’m Nena Schmidt. And, this is my husband, Steve.” Paula calmly replies, “wow! It’s a small world. Tessa’s mentioned you a few times.” At that time, Tessa was painfully aware that Nena was on track to beat all Tessa’s divisional records. Nena quickly tells her husband, “I want to wait around for the end of this race. I really need to meet these two.” Seeing his wife’s excitement, Steve, replies, “sure. No problem. We got the time.”

Back in the ocean, 100 yards into the race, Eddie is closing in on Jan. Walking over to join Paula and Nena, Kathy announces her entrance, boasting, “Eddie’s going to win.” Paula asks, “how do you know, girl? I mean, like Jan looks pretty good out there.” Kathy replies, “Eddie thought this was going to be an easy race. He was telling me that he’ll just sleep through it. It looks like Jan is a little faster than he expected.” Paula replies, “yeah, girl. I see that! He’s catching her.” As they watch Eddie close in on Jan, Paula introduces Nena and Steve to Kathy and a few others spectators from the tribe.

Meanwhile, standing with the guys, Jan’s husband, Gump, mentions, “I didn’t think this would be too easy for Jan. Eddie’s really making her work.” Mark asks Gump, “is Jan still competing?” Gump replies, “yeah. But, it’s tough for her now. Twenty years ago, she was at the top of her game. No one could beat her. Now, when she competes in a triathlon, people say, ‘that’s Jan Lucida. She’s old and all washed up now.’ But, she manages to beat 99 percent of the twenty-five year olds anyway.” Mark comments, “imagine that. They should just keep their mouths shut.” Gump replies, “yeah, seriously. We’ll see what those twenty-five year old kids look like when they’re in their mid forties.” Mark laughs, replying, “some of them will probably look like the Chuckie.”

With 50 yards to go, Eddie overtakes Jan, with Tessa not too far behind. Paula quickly tells Kathy, “you were right! Eddie’s going to win.” Kathy smiles, and replies, “I’m always right.” Paula tells Kathy, “I don’t even want to hear it, girl.” Kathy again smiles, still knowing how to push Paula’s buttons.

As they approach the finish line, Eddie has a distinct, but not so distant, lead over Jan. Eddie crosses first, followed by Jan in a mere few seconds. Tessa, finishing in a respectable third place, swam better than

she expected, but placing not exactly where she wanted. Swimming toward shore, the three swimmers congratulate each other.

Getting out of the ocean, Eddie, Jan, and Tessa are greeted with high-fives and fist bumps. Wasting no time, Tessa tells Eddie, “you’ve been training!” Eddie casually replies, “some.” Jan informs Tessa, “I need to train more before the Spring. The swimming is my best event in the Fall but, by Spring, it seems to be my worst event. There’s just nowhere to swim around here in the Winter.” Jan, of course, was referring to ocean swimming. Swimming in a pool is not quite the workout one would get swimming in the ocean.

Heading back to the towels, Nena catches up to Jan and Tessa. After introducing herself, Nena tells Jan and Tessa, “it’s so good to finally meet you guys! I’ve heard so much about both of you!” Tessa replies, telling Nena, “I’ve heard a lot about you, too. Don’t worry. It’s all good.” Tessa, still to this day, wonders why Nena suddenly and unexpectedly dropped out of the college swimming circuit. Jan informs Nena, “we’ve competed in a few tri’s together. I saw your name on the roster a few times. But, I never got the chance to meet you.” Nena, of course, knew that Jan was in the competition. It’s always good to know who your real competition is before the race begins.

Walking toward the water together, Jan, Tessa, and Nena have a private conversation among themselves, mostly regarding swimming. Wanting to satisfy her curiosity, Tessa gets around to asking Nena, “by the way, I heard that, when you were a junior in college, you were coming close to breaking some of my records. What ever happened?” Jan, hoping that Nena will spill the beans, is also curious as to what happened with Nena back then.

Taking a seat in the sand with Tessa and Jan, Nena explains, “oh, that. The coach realized that I could break a lot of records that year, and give him an awesome season. But, he just pushed me way too hard. I swam because I enjoyed it. After a while, my times were getting worse, not better. During my senior year, before the season began, I didn’t show up to practice one day, and never went back.” Learning something from Mr. Frazier, Tessa tells Nena, “the two most common signs of overtraining are lack of making forward progress and frequent injuries that don’t heal.” Nena replies, “well, that was me. Both of them. My times were getting worse, and I had shoulder injuries. And, the coach’s solution was for me to train even more. So, I got a medical, and never swam during my senior year.”

Nena then informs Tessa, “by the way, I did unofficially break your records.” Quite surprised, Tessa asks, “really? I really got to hear this.”

Nena explains, “near the end of my senior year, I went back to swimming practice. The coach asked me, ‘what are you doing here?’ I kind of got in the coach’s face and told him, ‘I’m here for you to time me. I got one year of eligibility left, and I want to see where I stand.’ He suddenly got really nice to me once I reminded him that I have one more year of eligibility left. So, he arranged a few time trials, and I broke a few of your records.” Tessa replies, “wow! I never knew that.” If her records were officially broken, Tessa would have certainly heard about it.

Jan asks Nena, “did you go to graduate school, and swim for another year?” Nena replies, “yeah. I did. But, not here. I went to graduate school in Germany, and swam there. I came back with a master’s degree, and Steve. Steve was on the swimming team there. That’s how we met.” Tessa informs Nena, “a lot of the swimmers were wondering what happened to you back then.” Nena replies, “what happened to me is I was pushed past my limit by a coach who didn’t know how to train. If I competed during my senior year, I would have lost every race.” Tessa replies, “I totally get that. Barbara Hamilton would have never put up with that.”

Thinking for a moment about Tessa’s response, Nena asks, “wait a second! Do you mean ‘the’ Barbara Hamilton?” Tessa replies, “yeah, her. She was my swimming coach in high school. She also taught gym class.” Nena exclaims, asking Tessa, “where in the world did you go to high school?” Tessa replies, “at Northside. We had some pretty good coaches there. Barbara Hamilton was a nationally ranked swimmer for years. But, I’m guessing you already knew that. And, Mr. Frazier, my track coach, was the first alternate in the 100-meter dash his the Olympics. And, Mr. Cruz, our soccer coach, was a professional soccer player.”

Recalling some of the other coaches at Northside High, Jan adds, “and, don’t forget about Mr. Chubin. In his day, he consistently placed in the top ten in the National Marathon competitions.” Tessa replies, “that’s right! I forgot about Mr. Chubin.” Jan reminds Tessa, “and, don’t forget about Miss Paterno either. She really tore up that pool when she swam the butterfly. Dang. That woman could churn up so much water that she’d drown the person in the lane next to her. She coached our middle school swimming team. I was wondering why I never saw her around the middle school during the day. Then, when I went to high school, she was my gym teacher.” Tessa reminds Jan, “my parents moved there in the Summer before I was in ninth grade. I never went to your middle school.” Jan then informs Nena, “Miss Paterno and Miss Hamilton would always race each other in the pool. Sometimes Miss Paterno would win and sometimes Miss Hamilton would win.” Nena replies, “you guys must have had an awesome high school experience!” Tessa replies, “not quite. We haven’t told you about our principal yet.”

While Tessa, Jan, and Nena talk swimming, most of the group either lay out in the sun or hit the waves. Walking around, documenting the second day of the reunion with her camera, Lynn gets a few photographs of the group. Fortunate for Eddie, Mark, and Braden, Lynn is carefully, but unknowingly, documenting their alibi should O'Brien and McCutchen somehow claim they were in Key West over this weekend.

Walking toward the beach with Paula, Kathy asks, "guess what?" Paula comically replies, "if this has something to do with the boogie man, girl, I don't want to hear it." Kathy smiles, and asks, "what makes you think it has something to do with the boogie man?" Paula replies, "because every time we go to the beach, you bring up the boogie man or how I'm having heatstroke. Yesterday, you brought up heatstroke. So, today, it must be the boogie man." Kathy thinks, and replies, "well, I did hear there's a haunted house in our town. It could be that the boogie man moved from Second Street." Paula exclaims, "stop it, girl! There ain't no boogie man in our town." Kathy replies, "well, something's haunting that house. If it ain't the boogie man, I can't imagine what else it could be."

Now curious, Paula asks Kathy, "so, where is this non-existent haunted house?" Kathy replies, "it's on Post Road." Paula exclaims, "stop it, girl! That's near where I live." Kathy replies, "okay, I'll stop. But, it still won't change the fact that there's a haunted house around the corner from you and that the boogie man is lurking around."

Paula asks, "okay, so how did we get on the subject of the boogie man, anyway?" Kathy explains, "I asked you, 'guess what?' Then, you brought up the boogie man." Paula sighs, replying, "so, I did, didn't I? That was really stupid of me." Kathy smiles, and replies, "yeah. It was. Something about heatstroke yesterday, boogie man today."

Hoping that Kathy does not bring up the boogie man again, Paula asks, "so, what's really up, girl?" Kathy replies, "Dr. Gregory has ordered copies of my master's and doctorate theses. Crumpler, and a few other of the losers in the division, heard about it, so they've ordered them too." Paula exclaims, "what? What for, girl?" Kathy replies, "Mr. Frazier and Athena think they're tired of losing all the time. So, they've ordered copies of mine and a few other theses." Paula laughs, replying, "they should have done that years ago!"

Paula asks, "how did you find out about this?" Kathy replies, "Athena found out about it. Nothing gets by her." Paula confesses, "I wouldn't even know how to order a thesis." Kathy replies, "I wouldn't have either. But, Athena said you can order them through a thesis repository." Paula

asks, “so, do you think it’s going to help them?” Kathy replies, “no. Well, yeah. Maybe. But, here’s the problem. My Ph.D. thesis has to do with interval training and how it results in angiogenesis and neuroplasticity. That takes years to occur. So, yeah, it will help. But, no. They need to start the training program in middle school or high school. The clock is not on their side.” Paula replies, “the clock is never on their side. That’s why they never win.”

Paula asks, “how about your master’s thesis?” Kathy explains, “that had to deal with performance increases from working out in adverse conditions. Again, the associated performance increases take time. It might help the freshman by the time they’re seniors. But, still, it’s really best to start that a lot earlier in life. They probably think that, if they change their training protocol overnight, they’ll start winning tomorrow.” Paula replies, “it’s not only the runners that need to train. Someone needs to train the other team’s coaches too.”

Paula asks, “do you think they’ll make another feeble attempt at starting their own dual enrollment classes?” Kathy laughs, and replies, “they’ve already failed a few times. What’s one more failure?” Paula replies, “seriously. Their problem, from what Mark tells me, is that, for the next two years, the University’s team might bring home all the medals again during the divisional meets. Then, Dr. Gregory and everyone else will conclude that the training protocols don’t work.” Kathy comments, “I can’t wait until next year’s annual coaches’ meeting.” Paula replies, “Mark really seemed to enjoy the last one.”

At the shoreline, Kathy walks right into the water. Looking back at Paula, Kathy asks, “well? What’s the problem? Are you getting old or something?” Paula, who dares not let anyone accuse her of being old, replies, “not me, girl. I was just testing the water.” Paula walks right into the ocean but, unlike Kathy, prefers to slowly acclimate to the cold water.

As they are heading out to the deeper water to ride the waves, Paula asks Kathy, “is Milana and her band still together?” Kathy explains, “they sure are. They want to do another concert together but, this time, they’re hoping to get paid for it. Darryl is trying to get something worked out for them, but it’s a hard industry to break into, especially if your entire group are freshman in high school.” Paula asks, “does Darryl see anything on the horizon?” Kathy replies, “I haven’t heard anything yet. But, please keep this quiet. Lana doesn’t know that Darryl is working on this. I’d hate for her to get disappointed.” Paula replies, “my lips are sealed.”

Swimming out to join Kathy and Paula is Tessa, accompanied by Jan, Nena, and a few others, who were onshore having an extensive discussion about the superior coaching at Northside High School. After all, this is a reunion weekend, and reminiscing about the past is part of the game plan.

As she is approaching, Tessa announces, “hey! Tell Nena about Mr. Crum!” Paula yells back, “he’s headed back to jail!” Wanting to hear one or two of the stories from Kathy and Paula’s high school years, Nena yells out, “tell me a good Mr. Crum story!” Kathy looks at Paula, telling her, “where do we even begin?” Paula replies, “how about the one where we got caught stripping in the lunchroom? Or, when we wedged Mr. Crum’s Beetle between two trees?” Kathy replies, “wait a second! I know! How about the time that old Crum came to cause trouble at one of our 4-way track meets, and started yelling at us? And, Mr. Zunde told us to get rid of him.” Between two wave crests, Paula walks over, giving Kathy a high-five, telling her, “that’s the one!”

Kathy begins explaining, “so, Mr. Zunde, as we called him back then, was always at odds with Mr. Crum. Nena exclaims, “hold on a minute! Are you guys talking about Gerhard Zunde, the discus thrower?” Paula replies, “yeah. That’s the guy. He’s actually Dr. Zunde but, back when we went to high school, we called him Mr. Zunde.” Nena exclaims, “stop! Seriously! What kind of high school did you guys go to?” Paula replies, “the weirdest one on the planet. And, from what I learned when Mark, Jr. and Dawn went there, it’s still that way.”

Kathy continues, “so, during our junior year, my dad found out that the regional rules allowed for girls to participate on the boys’ teams, as long as there wasn’t a girls’ team in the same sport, and that the sport wasn’t a contact sport. So, me, Paula, Barbara, and Tessa all tried out for Winter track, and we all made the team. But, Mr. Crum tried everything he could to keep us off the team. That year, Mr. Zunde must have put up dozens of roadblocks in Mr. Crum’s way. If you ask me, Mr. Zunde made sport out of annoying Mr. Crum.” Paula interjects, “you got that right, girl. Mr. Zunde hammered Crum’s ass every chance he got!” Kathy continues, stating, “right before the second 4-way meet of the year, Mr. Crum.” Recalling the altercation, Tessa interrupts, and exclaims, “I remember that! This one is really good!”

Kathy continues, explaining, “yeah. The second 4-way meet of our junior year. This is seriously funny. Before the meet began, Mr. Crum hobbled down the stairway, yelling out, ‘Katarina Karakova, Paula Giovani, Barbara Wyngate, and Tessa Klement, I want to see you in my office immediately!’ So, Mr. Zunde turns around, and yells out, ‘Crum, get out of my arena, or I’ll personally have you removed.’ Mr. Crum yells

back, 'you can't talk to me that way!' Mr. Zunde told Mr. Crum, 'go ahead and stop me. From my perspective, it looks like you're outnumbered, roughly forty to one.'"

Tessa laughs, recalling, "I still can't believe what Mr. Zunde told us to do!" Paula yells out, "yeah! I thought we were like going to get suspended forever!" From a high school student's perspective, Paula's conclusion would make a lot of sense. But, looking back, the whole situation was more along the lines of a comedy show.

Kathy laughs, and continues, "so, Mr. Zunde calls us all over to find out what Mr. Crum's problem is. Mr. Frazier ran over and, boy, was he ever mad. So, Mr. Zunde asks Mr. Crum, 'what flavor of bullshit have you brought to my arena today, Crum?' Mr. Zunde was really ticked off. Mr. Crum yells out, 'I don't want these girls running track! I did some research. Handing off that stick makes track a contact sport!' So, Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Crum, 'first of all, Crum, it's called a baton, not a stick. If you did any research whatsoever, you would have known that. And, secondly, I'll show you exactly what a contact sport is.'" Paula and Tessa start laughing hysterically, giving a hint that the good stuff is coming.

Kathy explains, "so, then Mr. Zunde tells me, Paula, Barbara, and Tessa, 'carry him out of here.' We all look at each other, and can't believe what Mr. Zunde told us to do. So, I grab one of his arms, Paula grabbed the other, and Barbara and Tessa grabbed his legs. Then, Mr. Zunde tells us, 'follow me. I'll get the door,' and walks ahead of us. So, we carry that old Crum up the stairs, and followed Mr. Zunde to Mr. Crum's office. That old Crum was screaming the whole way! When we got outside Mr. Crum's office, Mr. Zunde told us, 'drop him off here.' So, we dropped him on the ground. Then, Mr. Zunde told us to go back to the track. But, we stood around the corner so we can hear what Mr. Zunde was telling him. So, Mr. Zunde told Crum, 'if you so much as call those women to your office, you can be sure Noreen will be sitting in on the meeting.'"

Nena asks, "who's Noreen?" Paula replies, "Dr. Noreen Brooks. She was the superintendent of schools. And, she's Mr. Zunde's cousin. Oh! And, get this. Mr. Zunde didn't report to Mr. Crum. He reported to the school board, so there's nothing that Mr. Crum could do about it." Kathy adds, "yeah. Mr. Zunde was hired to keep Mr. Crum in check. And, looking back, he did a really good job of it if you ask me."

Kathy then continues, "we never did get called to Crum's office for that one. But, during my senior year, he was after me and Paula the whole year. Believe me. We worked Crum over so good, that, the next year, he was after Eddie, Mark, and Braden with a vengeance. But again,

in the end, Crum lost, and lost big time.” Paula tells Nena, “you should ask the guys about their senior prank sometime.”

After an hour riding the waves, Kathy announces, “I’m headed in. You guys can hang out if you want.” Paula replies, “I’m done out here too.” Kathy tells Paula, “yeah. You better get back on shore, where you can get heatstroke.” Paula exclaims, “I ain’t getting heatstroke girl!” Kathy swims toward shore, as Paula chases her down.

Onshore, once the group is together laying in the sun, Nena asks Mark, “Paula said something about your senior prank. What was that all about?” Mark smiles and laughs, replying, “it was Eddie’s idea.” Eddie tells Mark, “well, Braden planned it all out. He was the mastermind.” Johnson, the quiet one in the group back then, announces, “I claim only partial responsibility!” Meanwhile, Paula whispers to Nena, “this is really good. You really got to hear this.”

Eddie explains, “so, Mr. Crum drove this dilapidated Volkswagen Beetle, and he had his special parking place near the tennis courts. None of the other teachers had an assigned parking space, but he thought he was so special. Actually, come to think of it, he probably assigned himself that space so he didn’t have to waddle as far to his office. Anyway, I’ll let Braden explain it. Like Mark said, he planned it all out.”

Braden jumps in, explaining, “after Eddie came up with the idea, I spent the whole rest of the day planning this shit out. So, the next day, before school started, Mark went over to where his father was building a storage building for the baseball team near the baseball field. Mark got four concrete blocks, and put them along the fence by the tennis courts. Ain’t nobody gonna question four concrete blocks just laying there.” Mark interjects, “at that point, the materials for the building were delivered, but my father hadn’t started working on it yet. I helped him build it over the Summer that year.”

Braden continues, “so, after we ate lunch, Eddie went over to his car, and got the lug wrench while we were checking out the area, making sure it was safe. Then, we all went over to Mr. Crum’s piece of shit car, and I couldn’t believe it! Eddie loosened all sixteen of those lug nuts in under a minute! And, while he was doing that, the rest of us were removing the nuts.” Bobby B. interjects, “one nut was already loosened, and came undone a long time ago.” Eddie laughs, informing everyone, “he’s talking about Mr. Crum.” The group laughs, clearly understanding the innuendo.

Braden continues, “then, Mitchell, Johnson, Mark, and Bobby B. lifted the back end of Crum’s Beetle. I was on one side, Eddie was on the other. So, we pull off the wheels, and put the rear end on cement blocks. Then, we did the same to the front. Since the front was a little lighter, the plan was to have Mitchell go and hide the wheels while we worked on the front.” Braden laughs, commenting, “Mitchell hid those wheels so good, it must have took Crum’s ass a half hour to find them!” Nena asks, “where did Mitchell hide them?” Mitchell replies, “I stood the wheels up against a driver’s education car parked on the far side of the lot, so they were hidden in plain sight. From a distance, the wheels looked like they belonged to that car.” Nena asks, “who thought to hide them there?” Johnson replies, “I claim full responsibility for that one.”

Finishing the description of the lunchtime activities, Eddie tells Nena, “then, I went over to my MGB, put my lug wrench in the trunk, and met the guys back in the cafeteria. Braden had it planned out really well. The whole operation took about five minutes.” Wendy, who was the lookout at the front door, comments, “six minutes and fifteen seconds, but who’s counting.” Wendy, who was one of Mr. Frazier’s team assistants back then, had the guys on the clock.

Mark takes over, explaining, “here’s where it gets really funny. After school, we were at track practice, running a few drills. Since the last regular-season meet was coming up in two days, we were practicing our relay handoffs. Paula and Kathy were in college back then, and were our team assistants. So, Crum starts walking out to the track, yelling all sorts of shit.” Eddie corrects Mark, informing the group, “Crum was waddling, not walking, bro.” Mark replies, “well, you got to give him some credit. He can waddle and yell at the same time.”

Mark continues, telling the group, “so, Crum comes up to Mr. Frazier and starts yelling, telling him that one of us took the wheels off his car. By this time, Mr. Frazier no longer reported to Mr. Crum, so Mr. Frazier told Mr. Crum, ‘Crum, get your pencil-pushing piece of shit ass out of here! I got a meet coming up, and you’re in the way!’ After Crum yelled some more shit, I heard Mr. Frazier say, ‘that would be your problem, not mine.’ He sounded just like Mr. Zunde. I was laughing so hard that I messed up a relay handoff. I never heard Mr. Frazier talk to Mr. Crum that way before.”

Braden interjects, “this is where shit really gets weird.” Mark continues, explaining, “yeah. I’d say. Crum started making a huge scene, and Mr. Frazier finally got ticked off. So, Mr. Frazier called the team together, and asked everyone, ‘which one of you took the wheels off Mr. Crum’s car?’ No one ‘fessed up, so Mr. Frazier told Crum, ‘you’re out of luck. No one here seems to know anything about it. It must have

been one of the baseball players or someone on the tennis team. Or, it could have been one of the cheerleaders. Maybe you should question them.’ Braden interrupts, energetically mentioning, “then, Mr. Crum started chasing Mark’s ass down, because Mark said, ‘it sounds like Mr. Crum has been taking way too much of that psycho Chubin.’ We all took a break, watching that idiot chase down Mark!” Mark tells the group, “I’ve never ran so slow in my life.”

Mark continues, explaining, “that was really funny. Then, after Crum’s five-minute temper tantrum, Mr. Zunde finally told him, ‘if you calm down, Crum, perhaps some of the guys will be nice enough to reinstall your wheels for you.’ So, Crum yells out, ‘my wheels are all gone!’ So, Mr. Zunde tells Crum, ‘then, you have only two choices. Either look for your wheels yourself, or call the police. Perhaps they can send out a detective who can find your wheels.’ But, calling the police was always the last thing on Crum’s list, because he probably had illegal drugs stashed away in his car, but we didn’t know that back then.’ Nena exclaims, “what? The school principal had drugs hidden in his car?” Mark replies, “he could have. As it turned out, Crum was the school’s drug dealer.” Nena laughs, exclaiming, “wow! The school principal was the school’s drug dealer!” Kathy informs Nena, “Mr. Crum got arrested for drug dealing a year and a half later. But, that’s another story.”

Braden steps in, continuing the story, telling Nena, “so, after track practice, we all headed back to the locker room. Mr. Crum finally found his wheels, but his flimsy ass couldn’t get them back on his car. So, Mr. Zunde walked over to him, and asked, ‘is there a problem?’ Mr. Crum yelled out, ‘of course there’s a problem! I can’t get my wheels back on!’ Then, Mr. Zunde told him, ‘that would only be a problem if you let it be a problem. Perhaps you should reevaluate your perspective.’ Did that ever make Crum’s ass mad! So, Mr. Zunde asked us to put Mr. Crum’s wheels back on.” Bobby B. exclaims, “I remember that! The whole team stood around and watched!” Eddie comments, “free entertainment.”

Braden continues, explaining, “so, we all reinstall Mr. Crum’s wheels for him, but the nuts were only finger tight. Then, Eddie tells Mr. Crum to get his lug wrench. Mr. Crum looks in his trunk, his back seat, under his front seat, and his dumb ass can’t find a lug wrench anywhere. Now, who’s gonna drive around with a spare tire and no lug wrench to put it on? So, Eddie tells everyone, ‘I’ll be right back,’ and goes to get his car. When Eddie returned with his car, I’ll never forget this! There was a whole shit load of tools in his trunk, including a few lug wrenches! So, Eddie tightened the nuts, then we all lifted Mr. Crum’s car off the blocks. Then, Mr. Zunde tells Mr. Crum, ‘have a nice day,’ and we all headed inside to the locker room.”

Nena laughs, asking, “did you guys ever get caught?” Braden replies, “no. But, get this. The next day, Mr. Crum called a meeting during second period with the whole track team. He tried to find out who put his car up on blocks. But, no one seemed to know anything. Then, Mr. Crum tried to give Eddie a three-day suspension for parking in the faculty lot. Mr. Zunde put a stop to that! I’ll never forget what Mr. Zunde told him! Mr. Zunde told Mr. Crum, ‘Crum, if you suspend Eddie, I’ll put out the word that, whoever put your car up on blocks, to feel free to disassemble your whole car, and leave it all over the parking lot in pieces. Unless you are capable of reassembling your car yourself, you are not suspending Eddie.’ So, Mr. Crum backed down. But, his ass knew it was one of us. He just didn’t know which ones.”

Nena asks, “did Mr. Zunde or Mr. Frazier ever find out what you guys did?” Eddie replies, “yeah. We told them. But, they suspected it was us.” Nena exclaims, “what? Did you guys get in trouble?” Eddie replies, “no. Mr. Zunde told us, ‘good job,’ and Mr. Frazier just laughed.” Nena laughs, telling Eddie, “that’s really funny.”

Knowing now that Nena is a swimmer, Mitchell tells her, “there’s a really funny story about Mr. Crum and our pool, if you want to hear it.” Nena replies, “sure. I’d love to hear it.” Not exactly recalling the story Mitchell is about to tell, a few of the guys wonder what is ahead.

Mitchell explains, “gym class just started, and Mr. Crum bursts into the gym, yelling out to Mr. Zunde, “I need to see you right now!” But, Mr. Zunde really didn’t want to be bothered by Mr. Crum. So, Mr. Zunde yelled back at him, ‘it will have to wait! The water in the pool is on fire!’ We all thought that was kind of funny.” Nena comments, “that is funny. The water in the pool is on fire. Can’t say I’ve ever heard that one before.”

Mitchell continues, explaining, “but, wait. Here’s the funny part. Mr. Crum rushes out of the gym, and pulls the fire alarm! Then, Mr. Zunde tells us, ‘okay! No sense staying in here. Let’s head out to the football field, and get a game in.’ And, on the way out to the field, we heard Mr. Frazier tell Mr. Zunde, ‘I can’t believe Crum pulled the fire alarm. I didn’t think anyone can be that stupid.’ Mr. Zunde told him, “guess again, George. It’s Crum we’re talking about here.’ So, we got in a game of football, and the rest of the school stood around and watched us for a while.”

Nena asks, “what was Mr. Crum’s problem this time? Do you know?” Mitchell replies, “yeah. Since it was Fall semester, Mr. Crum was after the football players, this time one in particular.” Daniel Gaspari pipes up, exclaiming, “yeah! He was after me that time! And, for the whole

rest of the season!" Jan tells her husband, "yeah. I remember you telling me about that. They really should have put you in jail."

Nena turns toward Gaspari, asking, "wow! What did you do that was so bad?" Gaspari explains, "the first game of the year, we crushed our arch rival, Centerville, by a score of like seventy something to zero. It was the last play of the game, and I recovered a fumble. I ran it in for a touchdown, not that we really needed the points. Instead of spiking the ball in the end zone, I threw the ball up into the stands. Someone in the stands caught the ball, and kept it. So, Mr. Crum called me into his office the next day, and tried to suspend me for throwing the ball into the stands. He said the football was the property of the school, and I had no right to dispose of it in the way that I did."

Anticipating more drama, Nena asks, "how did that one end?" Gaspari explains, "Mr. Zunde came to my rescue. He told Mr. Crum that, what he saw from his perspective, is that I threw the ball to the bench, but I was overly energetic and overthrew my target. Then, he told Mr. Crum that, if you suspend Gaspari, you'll have to suspend every baseball player who hits a home run or accidentally throws a ball over the fence. And, you'll have to suspend all the golfers who hit a ball into the water trap, and so on. But, what got Mr. Crum to back down is when Mr. Zunde told him, 'if we look at this from a legal standpoint, removing school property from school grounds is usually called theft. Perhaps we should get the police involved and find out who caught the football and removed it from school grounds.' Mr. Crum really backed down when he heard that." Eddie interjects, "Mr. Crum was really afraid of the police." Nena replies, "I can see that. Dealing drugs, and all that."

As the sun begins to go down, everyone heads out. With a few new additions to the group this year, everyone agrees to get together at the beach more often, and not wait for the next reunion. This year, Tessa invites Nena to the yearly reunion at the county pool, hoping that Nena will join in the race between her and Eddie.