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Everything

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The Last Annual Bar None Benefit Barbecue and Stakes Race

David Racine

All I know is that what came to be called the Last Annual Bar None Benefit Barbecue and Stakes Race was only slightly wilder and more lascivious than the one that proceeded it, which was pretty much the case every year, and that if the governor hadn't happened along just when he did the ranch would probably still be open and there wouldn't be no horse named Baker's Dozen running up in Louisville this year, which is the only reason I even mention it to begin with. See, I read where that horse runs out of this stable down near Ocala, and I can't help but wonder if it don't belong to them boys that used to live over at the Bar None Ranch before it got closed. Either way, I'll probably lay a ten-spot on him, just on account of coincidence.

It's generally agreed that the governor had it in for Kelvin Baker anyway, and it's probably safe to say that Kelvin didn't knock anyone over rushing to the voting booth to check off the governor's name either; so there was what you might call a nice little feud going on. I pretty much glossed over it though, back when I wrote up the history of the county a few years ago for the centennial, but I've since retired so there's not much anyone can do to me for telling it now. And I'd say I probably know more about the Bar None Ranch than anyone, except for Kelvin and Sonny, and maybe a few of the boys that lived out there at one time or another. I talked to all of them just about, and around here you can get told all you need to know, and a lot more usually, just by asking, and sometimes without that even.

How it was with the ranch and all was kind of interesting in a bureaucratic sort of way, and pretty much typical too in regards to officialdom and all that, and if nothing else at least it livened things up over at that end of the county every once in a while. Back about fifteen years ago, see, the state

started up this new program which involved opening several of what it called vocational and rehabilitative sanctuaries for what it termed wayward youths. That's what they called them anyway--sanctuaries and wayward youths. What they were, actually, was half-way houses for boys with a mind toward breaking the law but without much talent for it. The idea was that the boys would get placed under the guidance of a strong male authority figure, which most of them had been lacking it seemed, and learn some sort of useful trade, which most of them were short on as well, with the end part being that they would all grow into useful and productive taxpayers one day. There were three places to start out with; the one down near Boca Raton that was tied in with this seafood restaurant that used its boys sort of as slave labor under the guise of occupational training, and what it bragged on as "hands on instruction." Mostly all of them boys got their hands on though, was mops and dirty dishes. There was another one in the Everglades where the more ornery ones got sent to learn alligator farming a little bit, but fear and respect mainly. And the one they opened up here in the panhandle just the other side of Sopchoppy turned out to be a ranch that raised mostly horses, and the man that got picked to run it was an ex-Florida State Trooper name of Kelvin Baker.

Actually, Sergeant Baker was still an active Florida State Trooper when he was approached about the job, with this unusual habit of enforcing the law impartially, so that the rich and influential passing through to Tallahassee (since none of either persuasion live around here) were just as likely to get run in as anyone else, which naturally didn't sit too well with the rich or with the influential, both of whom made the governor aware of it in no uncertain terms. The governor's aides began calling over asking did Kelvin think he was Wyatt Earp or what, and suggesting that he exercise a little "discretion" in his ticket writing and such, all of which got Kelvin to speculating on the ancestry of those employed in the governor's office before hanging up.

Kelvin refused the job the first time they offered it, claiming that he wasn't no babysitter, and what happened after that is a little sketchy. But there was talk of some

photographs, and some veiled threats, and then some wide open threats about somebody's pension going down the drain, and evidently a good deal of table thumping on Kelvin's part before he finally gave in.

Now the only reason it got called a ranch to begin with was on account of when they drove Kelvin out to see it, he flat out refused to live at a sanctuary, on the grounds that only birds lived in sanctuaries. And truth be told, it wasn't really much of a ranch at first, and never did get greatly improved on later either. It was more like an old farmhouse out at the end of a small road that curved sideways out of Sopchoppy. But there was some clear land, and parts of a fence along the road, so it looked as much like a ranch as anything else around, enough so that the state people said how about calling it the Bar None Ranch, since it was kind of a jail without bars. Then they all started congratulating each other on how clever they were and asking Kelvin did he get it, the Bar None Ranch, and pointing over the driveway where they said they'd put up a sign. Kelvin told me he had to walk away when they commenced to argue over which one of them it was had actually thought up the name, what with there being such a premium on creativity amongst them. And on the way back to town they told him not to worry, that someone else would be sent out to do the actual ranching, which kept Kelvin quiet for most of the trip except to wonder out loud once why they even needed him then anyway, for which he got told to shut up by way of an answer.

So Kelvin moved into the big frame house set back from the road in the pocket of twisted live oaks, and he buzzed around the county in the station wagon with the state seal on the side that they gave him to drive, and when the first group of boys showed up he set things to operating like the only other organization he was familiar with that was a round-the-clock kind of thing, which was the United States Marine Corps. He got them up early, pretty much for nothing, and kept them busy most all day doing generally wasteful things, or things that there was no way in the world they were going to do right, since they were mainly young boys of thirteen or fourteen and they weren't of the accomplishing sort to begin with. So nothing much got fixed or cleaned up or corrected

at first, but instead got broke and dirtied or maligned in another sort of way entirely, so as to appear at least different from how it was to begin with. It wasn't that Kelvin had anything personal against any of the boys, but more like he saw the smirking and mocking of the state in each of their faces, and they just happened to be the most convenient ones upon whom to vent his anger. The atmosphere got generally mutinous on the part of the boys, and just plain contemptuous on the part of Kelvin himself, and within a month the whole place was set to either blow sky high or fall apart completely at the seams.

Sonny Donoher showed up about when things were reaching their most feverish, sent out by the state on a wicked hot morning in June, and got apprised of the situation as Kelvin saw it without even asking, which was that each of the boys was most likely a degenerate thieving little bastard anyway, and probably needed to get acquainted with a little discipline and hard work, so as to recognize it the next time it came around. Which was not to say, Kelvin added, that it was anything personal.

Sonny thought on it a minute or two, and then broached the idea that they might all be victims in a way, and that the real target of their wrath might ought to be the state itself, which was, after all, responsible for them all being there to begin with. Then he talked Kelvin into giving him run of the place, which Kelvin was more than glad to be rid of anyway, and promptly put him in charge of harassing the state for cash and supplies primarily, and cooking on the side.

Sonny hit it off good with the boys too, partly on account of how he was pretty much their size, standing five-foot, four with his boots on, but mainly because he wasn't Kelvin. They worked things out as best they could with the scant supplies that Kelvin was able to get, so that at least all the parts of fences got hooked up to other parts of fences so as to enclose the fields they were meant to enclose, and the barn got patched up and painted and swept clean, and the water troughs got plugged so that they actually held water again, and the wood fence around the barnyard got made sturdy again too and re-named a corral.

There was a colt sent out for each boy, which made for

eight to begin with, and Sonny showed the boys how to brush their coats and check the hooves and legs, and made sure that they kept the horses fed and watered and regular. He even taught them to ride, and eventually a grass track got laid out that measured six furlongs, which came to be the standard distance for the stakes races later on.

Kelvin steered pretty clear of the horses for the most part, on account of he didn't much trust anything that was bigger than he was and wore iron shoes. Mainly he kept up with the bills and the groceries, and cooked up catfish stew and pork chops and the like, and if he was feeling particularly energetic he might sweep or dust or maybe even cut the grass out front. The majority of his time, however, was spent requisitioning feed for the horses, and supplies, and some plain cash to pay for the things they needed just to live on. Kelvin got to be holy terror on the typewriter, firing off salvos in duplicate and triplicate to whoever sounded like they might be official enough or negligent enough, which he eventually came to regard as one in the same. He became a frequent contributor to the Letters to the Editor in the Tallahassee Democrat as well, so that the governor got made aware of his disaffection on a fairly regular basis with his cornflakes, often finding himself the target of it. The money was always slow in coming though, and never quite sufficient to go around, so in spite of the work going on and the energy getting expended, the whole place never really got much above the level of what would generally be classified as ramshackled, which in part led to the beginnings of the barbecues and stakes, which I'm getting to.

See, what I just told is pretty much how it was out there, except that the boys and the horses changed semi-regularly, but never so as you'd be able to tell right off. What stayed the same was Kelvin, and Sonny, and the lack of money to run the place properly, until after a while it was just compromises and sharing and doing without some things, just like in real families most times. Kelvin spent more and more of his own money on food and the other things they needed, so that after a while he wasn't getting out but one or two nights a week, and then drinking mainly beer when he did. The boys turned out to do just fine with the horses, like

Sonny figured they would, and kept most of their trouble-making amongst themselves, which was a little surprising; and after a while Kelvin stopped swatting them all together, which was a total surprise.

But what was truly strange, and ultimately brought about the Annual Benefit Barbecue and Stakes Race to begin with was that some of the boys started showing back up at the Bar None after they got released, and hanging around the ranch pretty much like they'd never even left, which sort of gave the name a whole new meaning. Sonny explained to Kelvin how it wouldn't be right to just run them off, since working with the horses was about the sum total of what most of them knew anyway, and the state hadn't made any provisions for placing them out, and Kelvin figured that it wouldn't be right either, since thinking otherwise would have meant siding with the state. So the budget got stretched even tighter, seeing as how Kelvin couldn't exactly requisition money for people who weren't supposed to be there in the first place, until eventually there got to be twelve of them out there altogether plus Kelvin and Sonny, and you couldn't have found two spare dimes to rub together.

Finally, after a week straight of pinto beans and canned corn, it was decided that something had to be done to drum up some cash. Someone said auction, but there was nothing to auction off, and then someone else thought raffle, but there was nothing to raffle off either, and then the door to door sales got mentioned. But the Girl Scouts pretty much had the cookie market to themselves, and the high school band had candy covered pretty good, which is just about all that sells door to door around here, so that got scrapped. It was about then that Kelvin suggested a party, maybe like a barbecue, that they could have right there at the ranch and charge for maybe even.

And so commenced the Annual Bar None Benefit Barbecue and Stakes Races, which Kelvin took charge of completely, but which didn't actually include the stakes race part until the next year. Kelvin went around the county calling in favors, so that just about everything they needed was either donated or on loan, and the boys got put to work setting up tables and breeding catfish and mixing up tubs of

slaw. During the festivities they fried up the fish, shucked the oysters, and poured the beer, and generally did whatever they could to semi-legitimately separate their guests from their money. Darien, who'd had a promising career as a snatch and go artist cut short by a Jacksonville city bus, got told how to fix the raffle so that Sonny had the winning ticket, while the rest of them got warned by Kelvin about picking pockets, since they needed the same folks back the next year if it was a success.

The first Barbecue drew around fifty people or so and got started about four o'clock, and consisted mainly of just mingling and listening to Kelvin's favorite band, the Mudcats play, with a little bit of dancing and volleyball thrown in amongst the hellacious amount of eating and drinking, and didn't get over with until near about eleven o'clock when the Mudcats had played every song they knew how to play and some twice, and so quit for the evening. The boys found Kelvin passed out under the porch when they were picking up cups and plates afterwards, and so loosened his shoes for him; and when he crawled out the next morning and counted up the receipts, they found they'd cleared just about nine hundred dollars.

The next year brought a whole slew of new ideas, along with some posterboard advertising roundabout, and the promise of a top notch horse race, all of which swelled attendance to about a hundred people, thanks mainly to the appearance of about twenty members of the Surf Riders, an ornery but not too tough motorcycle club from down around Carabelle. Kelvin grabbed the leader straight off to welcome him, and warned him not to scare anyone off, as they needed all the pockets they could get, and then gave them all twenty ounce plastic cups to show he was sincere about the welcome part. The Surf Riders and their old ladies turned out to be prodigious eaters and drinkers and gamblers, but truly awful softball players, on account of their hands kept getting tied up in the chains that connected their wallets to their beltloops when they tried to pick up grounders. That second year was also when they set precedent for swimming naked in the catfish pond, which became almost obligatory later on, and which was as close

as they got to being offensive, and then it was only the widest and the very whitest of them that was offensive really, and then only to some people. The Riders and their mommas became a fixture at the event, eventually numbering over fifty in all, roaring in about noon each year for a ceremonial lap around the grounds before they parked up next to the house and picked up their extra-size cups.

Some things got added each year, and what already was got left in and refined, while pretty much nothing ever got scrapped entirely, but only changed around at most, until the Annual Bar None Benefit Barbecue and Stakes Race was not too different from the county fair except that it was a bit bigger, and a lot better attended, and there wasn't any livestock to speak of usually. The betting on the race proved to be a big windfall most years, especially when Sonny's ringer came through, which was most of the time, and the Bingo went so well that Kelvin just said the hell with it and opened up a roulette wheel too about the fourth or fifth year. By the end, the thing was going on from about nine in the morning when the Bloody Mary tent opened until near around four or five the next morning when Kelvin got horizontal under the porch, which signalled the sort of unofficial end of it, and told the last of the three hundred or so people that it was time to go home. And when the receipt got totalled up those last few times they were pushing hard on seven thousand dollars. So like I said, the last one, which of course no one knew was going to be the last one til it was already over with, only got built up a little from the second to last one, and wouldn't have been much different or notable at all really except for the governor showing up and hollering so much, and the ranch getting shut down, and most of the boys going down to Ocala with Mr. Russell Timmons to work for him, which is what got me started on all this in the first place as I recall.

It never rained on the Barbecue in all those years, and I can remember every one, and that last year was no exception. The sun was high and hot and the beer got to flowing like tap water early on, with a good part of it getting poured down the gullets of the Surf Riders, who were still working at their softball playing. Most of them were stripped

down to their boxers by the second inning, including some of their old ladies, but they still didn't pick up too many grounders cleanly even without the chains. The horseshoes got flying and the Bingo started up around two, just before the Port Authority started playing reggae music and tossing out fat joints to anyone who looked like they might want or need one.

The boys were shucking oysters and boiling shrimp and selling Bingo cards and raffle tickets, and checking on the meat and the catfish and the kegs to see that they didn't run out. Everyone else was pretty much getting stuffed or drunk or both, and at first no one noticed the big blue Chevy pick-up with the horse trailer behind it limp up by the gate with a blown out rear tire.

Clayton, one of the boys selling raffle tickets, was the first to see the truck with the flat tire and the man with the cowboy hat standing next to it, and so was the first one to actually meet Mr. Russell Timmons, who was the one with the hat and the anxious look on his face. "Looks like a blow-out," Russell Timmons said, tapping at the shredded rubber with the toe of his boot. Clayton looked from the tire to Russell Timmons and then back again and nodded slowly, as it was too obvious to need further comment. Sonny walked over and then nodded toward Russell Timmons and joined in the staring for a while.

Finally Sonny asked, "Need a hand?" Russell Timmons nodded but he didn't look any less anxious so Sonny threw in, "Hey, it's only a flat. You got a spare, ain't you?"

"Yeah," Russell Timmons said, "uh, sure. I got a spare right here." But he didn't move to get it.

"Well what then," Sonny said.

"It's the horse," Russell Timmons said back. "He's plugged up like a sink. I need to get him back to my ranch and clean him out. This ride isn't doing him any good at all. And now this."

"Well hell, we'll flush him out for you," Sonny said.

"Clayton, unload Mr. ..uh,"

"Timmons. Russell Timmons. But wait just a minute."

"Russell Timmons that owns Southglen Farms?" Sonny asked, and got answered with a nod. "Southglen Farms in

Ocala?" he asked, and got nodded at again. "Owner of Getting Out?" he asked, and this time when Russell Timmons nodded it was in the direction of the trailer. "In there?" Sonny asked, and got answered with a straight nod and a smile this time and so said, "Damn."

"Well go on get him out of there, Clayton," Sonny said when he got fully recovered. "Why, that horse ran in the Derby last year." Clayton got Getting Out all loose from the trailer and circled him around a few times, and generally looked a lot more pleased for the opportunity to work on the back end of Getting Out than deal with the opposite end of most of the people there just then. The horse was sluggish, and its large head and strong neck were bowed low, and it moved all agitated and out of sync, so that Clayton was doing a good amount of the work just to get him to move at all.

"That's a very valuable animal," Russell Timmons said when Clayton started to lead him off.

Clayton shrugged. "They all flush out the same," he said over his shoulder. "He's still a horse, ain't he."

"One of us better go with him," Russell Timmons said, starting to follow after his prize horse, but Sonny shook his head no and called for Clayton to get Derrick to help out.

"Don't let him lie down," Russell Timmons called after him, and Clayton looked back and rolled his eyes.

"He knows," Sonny said. "He'll do fine."

Then Clayton let loose of the reins and walked back to hand his unsold raffle tickets to Russell Timmons. "It's ten bucks."

"For the flush?" Russell Timmons asked.

"For the tickets."

Russell Timmons watched his top thoroughbred get led off, and then said, "Sounds like you all are having a party," pretty much as if he'd just noticed. Sonny looked at him like he might be wondering how exactly Russell Timmons had got to be such a rich man making comments such as that, and then took him on into the Barbecue and got him a beer, which Russell Timmons looked like he could use one of, and promised that they'd go check on Getting Out in a little while, but in the meantime why didn't he just try to relax a little.

Sonny left him talking to Kelvin about the ranch, who let on what a fine job Sonny was doing teaching the boys, and how it was a crying shame that there was no one to take them on afterwards, and so benefit from all the practical experience they were getting. Then Kelvin introduced him to Sue Ann Jenkins, who had the creamiest skin of anyone present at the Barbecue, and the least clothes on to cover it as well, and before too long, Sue Ann and Russell Timmons were shagging high flies in centerfield with his ten-gallon hat, and sucking down beer and oysters between innings, and generally having a fine time of it.

The main feeding was at three o'clock, and then again at five, just before the start of the race. In between some raffles got decided and some prizes handed out, and a trophy for winning the horseshoe tournament got awarded to Maynard Holcombe, who wanted to make a speech about it but fell off the chair he was standing on and spilled his beer, and so went off to get a refill instead. It was about when Maynard was taking his dive that Clayton walked up from the barn and told Sonny that Getting Out had just then deposited what looked like four or five days worth of prime fertilizer in the corner of one of the stalls, and so was feeling considerably better. Sonny slapped him on the back and said, "Way to go, boy. Great. Just great. Let's go find Mr. Russell Timmons and give him the news."

They found him down at the pond, but couldn't share the news straight off on account of how Russell Timmons was near about in the center of the pond, half-on and half-off a silvery vinyl raft with Sue Ann Jenkins, who was half-on and half-off herself.

"Buck naked," Clayton observed from behind a clump of sycamores.

"As jaybirds," Sonny agreed, "except for the hat." Russell Timmons and Sue Ann were creating a good bit of friction trying to keep hold of each other and the raft at the same time, and doing a considerable amount of giggling and some ooh-ing too when they got just so, and periodically one or the other would lose their grip and slide under the surface for a while, which served to produce some more giggling and some deeper ooh-ing from the other, and left Russell

Timmons' hat floating like a souffle on a lily pad. And then Sue Ann got part of her up on the raft and Russell Timmons was holding on behind her except not quite up so far but up some anyway, and they got to clucking and gasping and ooh-ing real deep until the raft was more or less jerking half-forward and a quarter-back and heading pretty much straight for the clump of sycamores.

"Sounds like an Evinrude with water in the lines," Sonny noted.

"Looks sort of like it too," Clayton observed through the trees.

When they told Russell Timmons about his horse, and the voluminous amount of fertilizer he'd produced, the rancher lit up even more than he had pushing around the pond with Sue Ann and asked how he could make it up to them. So Sonny thought for a minute and then hit on it and explained some more to Russell Timmons about the ranch, and the money problems, and all that Kelvin tried to do but couldn't really, on account of the state machinery, and about the race and the betting, but most specifically and intently about the ringer he usually lined up for the race but hadn't this year. And Russell Timmons picked it all up right quick and offered his mount to Clayton if he wanted it, which Clayton said he most certainly did.

"Won't have to get much out of a trot to beat this field," Sonny assured him. "It'll just be a workout for Getting Out, even with Clayton up." Then he said, "You didn't mention that this was Getting Out to anyone, did you Mr. Timmons?"

Russell Timmons shook his head no and Sonny nodded. He gave Clayton some instructions concerning mud and burrs and things, and then went off to announce a late entry at the betting table. The wagering had been favoring a horse named Sonny's Boy, and since most of the bettors had seen Getting Out's rather anemic disposition earlier, without, of course, knowing that it was Getting Out, the trend held up. Sonny simply added him as Number Six, and did it precisely as Mort Wainwright was fixing to place his bet, which momentarily confused Mort entirely, so that he stood at the table folding and unfolding his two dollars and eyeing Number Six up on the chart at 20:1 until someone back in

line yelled up, "This ain't Hialeah you asshole, just bet," and then panicked and put his money on Sonny's Boy, which caused Sonny himself to smile.

No one had much cause to change his mind when Clayton led Getting Out from the corral toward the starting line. Getting Out had mud splattered up and down his legs and clear onto his haunches, and there were bits of straw and some burrs hanging in his tail, which wasn't even tied up either. And what with the way Clayton had him moseying on over, he looked more like a plow horse than the number four finisher in Louisville and at Belmont the year before.

There was no mistaking the bloodlines when the bell went off though, as Getting Out bolted so quick from the line that Clayton didn't get fully upright again til the first turn, by which time they had three lengths on the rest of the field. Clayton just let him stretch it out from there, to six lengths around the far turn, and ten at the half-mile pole, which wasn't a pole really but just a stick off of an old campaign poster that was painted red with a 1/2 on it in white, to a full fourteen lengths at the finish. Clayton let him trot another lap and then took Getting Out back to the corral to hose the mud off his flanks and pick the burrs out of his tail. Russell Timmons remarked to Sonny how the boys had really done the job that time and that he was always on the lookout for good horse people at his place, to which Sonny replied, "Well now, there's a thought," and led him over to collect their winnings.

So while the sun was getting low and taking the edge off the heat some, most everybody was milling around talking about that horse Number Six and saying, "Did you see him go!" and, "Ain't never seen nothing like it around here before." And as the softball and the volleyball and the horseshoes got called on account of dimness, there wasn't much left except for the drinking and the dancing and the eating, all of which got revived considerably.

It was closing in on midnight when the Mudcats took the stage amidst wild cheering and shouted requests, and the first of several bottles of tequila began circulating through the moon-drenched crowd. Kelvin stood under one of the Japanese lanterns and took a long pull from a bottle of Pepe

Two Fingers and then said, "Lemons," and handed the keys to the station wagon to Sonny, who grabbed the bottle instead and then passed the keys on to Russell Timmons who was standing there too, who gave them to Clayton and said, "Let's go."

It was coming back from the Jr. Food Mart with the half dozen lemons that they first saw the disabled Lincoln town car and so swerved wide into the other lane and buzzed past the governor, and the governor's aide, and his driver too, who were all standing next to the car and so saw the state seal on the station wagon, and began yelling and waving wildly at first and then swearing after. "Wonder what that's all about?" Clayton said, easing the station wagon in behind Russell Timmons' trailer a quarter mile up the road.

"Huh, what?" Russell Timmons said, and then slumped back against the door half passed out.

Clayton was just getting him out of the car when the governor, with his aide and driver just behind, part-ran, part-walked up and demanded to know what was going on and why hadn't they stopped and about six other things right off, and got asked back by Clayton who in the fuck he was, which caused the governor to sputter and turn about the color of an eggplant. Clayton helped Russell Timmons stumble to his truck and stretched him out across the seat and laid his hat across his face and then took the lemons inside.

"Whose car is this?" the governor demanded, mostly to his aide, since the driver was the only other one left by then, and the aide seemed a more likely choice to know. The governor's aide pointed at the sign over the driveway and explained what he knew about Bar None Ranch, and the horses, and wrapped it all up by speculating that the car probably belonged to the Ranch.

The governor walked in amidst the revelry just shaking his head and wondering where he'd seen the Bar None Ranch before, and then got flashed by Sue Ann who happened to be dancing by, and more or less exposed to a few of the Surf Riders, who were dancing naked off to the side, on account of the heat had not quite dissipated fully enough to suit them. His honor then approached a group

circled near the stage and got handed a bottle of tequila with just the worm left mainly, and a lemon quarter. The governor looked to his aide and asked did he have any idea just what exactly the hell was going on here, and then threw down the bottle and the lemon quarter and asked it again, only louder this time and to the group as a whole, and got asked back by Sonny who in the fuck he was.

It was right then that the governor fully exploded and screamed out exactly who in the fuck he was, and what exactly that meant, and as they were all on state property and breaking state laws and corrupting the very boys that they were supposed to be guiding, they were all generally up shit creek. "Now," he ordered after he got his breath again, "I want to see the person in charge, and I want to see him right now."

"That'd be Sergeant Baker," someone said.

It all came into focus for the governor at the sound of Kelvin's name, as he recalled just where he'd seen the name Bar None Ranch before, which was beneath Kelvin's name on all those letters in the Democrat and to his office, and he grew fairly livid. "Where is he?" he demanded.

"Check the porch," one of the boys said.

The governor stalked over to the porch and stalked back a minute later. "There's nobody on the porch."

"Under it," the boy clarified.

So the governor re-stalked to the porch and this time noticed a pair of boots sticking out from under it that looked to be filled with somebody's feet anyway, and got nodded at that they probably belonged to just the man he was looking for, and so reared back and kicked the bottoms hard and got a muffled "Huh" for a response. "Get out from there, Sergeant," the governor said. "You got a lot of explaining to do, mister," and got asked back from under the porch who in the fuck he was.

The governor banged on the porch with his fist, all the while yelling that he was the governor, goddamnit, and he was in charge and what the hell did Kelvin think of that, and got told back, "Yeah, right," in the same muffled tone, and then heard the snoring start up again, as Kelvin was sleeping full on his back. Then the governor and his aide and his

driver got asked by a couple of Surf Riders wasn't it time they all got their asses on over to Tallahassee where they belonged, and escorted out by the collar without any offers of assistance for their car.

And that was pretty effectively it for the Bar None Ranch, and all the other rehabilitative sanctuaries too for that matter, which all got closed within the month by executive order, but without any kind of explanation. The governor tried to bring charges against Kelvin and Sonny but couldn't get anything in the way of cooperation around here and so couldn't make nothing stick. So then he went after Kelvin's job, and as Kelvin had enough years put in by then to retire anyway, he told the governor he could have it, which turned out not to be enough for the governor, who wanted his pension too, and so wanted him fired and not retired.

Now firing a state employee in Florida is about as difficult and drawn out a procedure as bringing one back from the dead, but the governor kept at it on account of he was especially incensed about things, and thought he had Kelvin on a corruption and moral turpitude charge because of the gambling and the drinking and the naked flesh that he saw his own self at the Barbecue. But Kelvin was well-represented by Russell Timmons' own personal lawyer, who argued pretty successfully that as the boys were already ne'er do wells when they got there, and so probably corrupted too, and by all sorts of vices besides those previously mentioned, that it'd be awful hard to show a direct corrupting effect on the part of Kelvin, or the ranch or the Barbecue even. And so Kelvin was allowed to retire with his full pension and benefits and move to Russell Timmons' ranch in Ocala to head up security, but mostly to check the gates at night and doze on the porch.

The boys were a little more complicated. The four that were already out but just living at the Bar None anyway moved down to Ocala directly, with Sonny and Kelvin, and the three that were due for release in August got sprung early and went down too, which left five. Two of them were scheduled to get let go in December, and another the following March, and Russell Timmons arranged with their

families to have them come live with him when they got out, which the families all said was fine, take them. Kelvin pulled the three aside right before they left to finish out their time and promised to kick their butts if they went bad before they got out, and told them about their share of the cash from the last Barbecue, which Kelvin and Sonny had decided to take and divvy up amongst the boys, since there wasn't a ranch to spend it on anymore, and how if they fucked up or didn't show in Ocala, then they wouldn't get their cut.

The last two, the youngest ones as it turned out, had to stay locked up until eighteen because they had no parents to get released to, and no relatives who'd take them. And when Kelvin told Russell Timmons about it, and how they'd probably go back to their old ways in youth detention, Russell Timmons just figured the hell with it and adopted them straight out, to the disbelief of the juvenile court.

So anyway, how it ended was they all got back together again by the next March, which wasn't even a year, and generally did the same things in Ocala as they'd been doing at the Bar None, except for the barbecue. And that's what makes me think this horse Baker's Dozen out of Ocala that's running in the Derby next week is theirs, and has me itching to put a few bucks on it, which like I said is the only reason I even mention it at all.