Chapter 1 – The Sacred Ground

He was born on sacred Native American land at the foot of the Black Hills in South Dakota. His father, Big Tom, loaded bombs onto airplanes at Ellsworth Air Force Base. His mother, Shirley, stayed home then — a housewife in the truest sense, managing life around the steady pulse of the base and the long shadows of the plains and the planes. That was the world he entered: the hum of engines, the discipline of order, and the quiet land beneath it all, carrying a deeper history long before the military ever arrived.

Big Tom came from railroad men — people who worked hard, proud of what they built but not loud about it. His brother Bo had been signed by the Yankees after World War Two, served in the Navy, and came home with a Purple Heart before returning to the railroad. They were tall, plain-spoken men who didn't talk much about faith but lived by a quiet code. Big Tom's rule was simple: think for yourself; don't make noise unless you've got something worth saying.

Shirley was an attractive woman who once had tangential hopes of being a movie star. She almost went to a teaching college, but life took a different turn when she met the Air Force man who would become her husband. Together they built a life of work, movement, and modest affection. They weren't the kind of people who filled a room with laughter, but there was laughter — the kind that came from seeing the humor in small things. It was sharp, quick-witted, and unafraid of being silly, but it never defined them. Humor was there, just not at the center of things.

He was only two when the family left South Dakota, too young to remember much directly. What he knew of those early days came mostly from what he'd been told later and from the few old photographs that proved it all happened. The stories gave shape to the place his memory couldn't hold.

His mother always said that as a child he could never leave well enough alone. If something seemed off or dicey, he had to ask questions about it — sometimes to the point of discomfort for her. But she never discouraged it. That instinct to question came early, long before he had words for it. Maybe it was just part of who he was, or maybe, as he liked to say later, Doubting Thomas must have been a distant forefather.

Whatever the reason, doubt and curiosity stayed with him. They shaped how he saw the world — not as something to accept, but something to test. It wasn't rebellion for its own sake; it was a search for something called truth. Years later, he would think back on that base in South Dakota — his father putting bombs on airplanes, the roar of planes overhead, the sacred ground beneath — and realize that everything he would ever question, or believe, began there. On sacred Indian territory.

Chapter 2 – The Floating Childhood

He spent the first years of his life in motion — floating from one place to another before he had time to learn the shape of his own room. His father's Air Force career meant constant transfers, constant adjustment. Bases and towns blurred together; countries changed faster than friendships could form. Moving wasn't disruption; it was rhythm, and rhythm became home.

For a time they lived in England, in a small village called Toppesfield near RAF Wethersfield. He went to school off-base with British kids and spoke with clipped confidence. One afternoon he asked his mother for a biscuit. She thought he meant the American kind — warm and buttery. What he really wanted was a cookie. She told that story for years, laughing every time.

Other memories arrived in fragments: sitting on the stairs watching adults drink and laugh, folding paper hats from newspapers. He wasn't supposed to be there, but curiosity always pulled him toward the sound of conversation. When they caught him, they'd send him to bed; sometimes he'd sneak back and pretend to read just to listen. He didn't understand the words, only the tones — the rise and fall, the sudden pauses when people thought they were unseen. It wasn't deception he noticed, it was difference. People fascinated him, and that fascination never left.

He didn't remember leaving England, only the noise — engines, sky, vibration. The sound of flight became the sound of possibility. His memory worked differently; it held impressions, not details. What others forgot, he remembered. What they remembered, he sometimes missed.

When the family finally landed in Santa Monica, California, it was like arriving on another planet. The kids there spoke a new language — slang, confidence, a kind of rhythm he hadn't heard before. They teased him, but he adapted. When someone asked his favorite band, he said "The Archies." The other kids laughed; the right answer was "The Jackson 5." He laughed too. Even then he understood that humor was a way of surviving difference. He wasn't bitter. He joined the laughter and learned to return it.

Another move came — this time to Aurora, Illinois — and the pendulum swung the other way. The Midwest felt heavier, quieter, more practical. He didn't fit there either, but baseball did. It became his entry point, his proof. California had taught him year-round play; Illinois taught him how to play through cold. Baseball gave him a place, and that was enough.

There were fights now and then — tests of belonging. He wasn't a fighter, but he never backed away. He'd let others throw the punches, almost detached, as if observing his own initiation. He learned he could hurt them back but chose not to. He'd rather make them laugh. Sharp humor still solved more than fists ever could.

By the end of grade school he had already lived more lives than most kids his age. England had given him curiosity, California wit, Illinois grit. He belonged nowhere completely, and that became a kind of strength. The movement had trained his instincts: to read people quickly, to sense motive, to anticipate harm. It was the same sensitivity that would later draw him toward every form of storytelling — a need to understand people by watching them closely.

He didn't use the word *creative* then, but that's what it was becoming — a lifelong pursuit of pure creative outlet. He wasn't trying to stand out; he was trying to make it all make sense. The motion of those years gave him that first gift: the ability to see the world from the outside and still care enough to step back in.

Because when the world keeps moving you, you learn the art of floating — and sometimes, that's the only way to stay grounded.

Chapter 3 – No Place Left to Land

Aurora, Illinois, was a blue-collar town. The factories were closing, and empty buildings lined the streets. The kids at school had grown up together; he was the new one again, old enough now to recognize what that meant. It didn't bother him, but he noticed it. Observation had become habit.

As junior high turned into high school, he began to find the kind of friends who last — teammates from baseball, musicians, a few people who shared late-night conversations that stretched into meaning. It was also the first time he saw how limited a place could be. In Aurora, jobs went to people whose fathers or uncles already worked in the few plants that still ran. That was how the world worked there.

When his parents divorced, he asked his mother, "What took so long?" She said she'd stayed for the kids. After graduation she told him it was time to move out. She wasn't unkind about it; she simply thought that was what was best. It hurt, but it made sense. The push she gave him turned out to be one of the most important events of his life.

He didn't know where he was headed. Then a friend mentioned work in Wyoming. He didn't ask what kind. He just said yes. He and two friends loaded a 1966 Plymouth Belvedere and drove west. The job was digging ditches at a Trona Ash construction site. He passed the physical and started the next morning.

They camped by the Salt River, cooked on a propane stove, washed pots in the freezing water. Nights dropped below freezing. They learned how to get by. He started with a shovel and was quickly moved to the tamper, packing dirt into trenches until his arms went numb.

One day, while working beside a young South American immigrant deep in a hole, someone up top asked what twelve times thirteen was. He answered without hesitation: "One hundred fifty-six." A few minutes later someone called down, "Come here." He climbed out and was transferred to the survey crew for the rest of the summer.

He got his own plumb bob and line, learned to work the theodolite, to keep things level. The men on the crew, both from Kansas, treated him as one of their own. The work was hard, but it felt steady, real, earned. He wasn't thinking about lessons; he was thinking about doing the job right.

When the project ended, he had some money saved and something new inside him — the understanding that work wasn't punishment. It was proof.

He went back to Aurora, signed up for junior college, and later transferred to Southern Illinois University. He worked mornings and went to class after, paying his own way. There was no sentimentality in it; it was just what needed to be done. Wyoming had taught him that finishing something mattered. It had also shown him the quiet satisfaction

that comes from effort without show — the same instinct that would later shape his creative life.

Every place he had lived gave him something different. England taught curiosity. California, humor. Illinois, endurance. But Wyoming gave him the foundation — the knowledge that if there was no place left to land, he could still stand on his own two feet.

It was the first time he realized that independence itself could be a creative act — the freedom to build a life on his own terms.

Chapter 4 – The Domestic Migrant

The move to California wasn't planned; it was just the next turn. After finishing college, he tried selling office furniture in Chicago, but it didn't fit. When a friend from Austin said there was space down there, he packed the car and went.

Texas suited him. He sold rooftop solar systems by day and spent his nights on Sixth Street, drawn to music, talk, and the charge of possibility. He made friends who would change his life—people who weren't afraid to reinvent themselves. One of them mentioned the Austin cable-access station where anyone could make a television show. He didn't hesitate. The idea of creating something from nothing was reason enough.

He had always loved comedy that carried truth inside it—Python, Pryor, Carlin—the kind that made people laugh and think in the same breath. He knew the show would appear in the TV listings, two in the morning, the forgotten slot. But he saw the opening: those hours belonged to the young and the restless, the ones coming home from the clubs. He called the show **Nudity**—a name meant to catch attention, nothing more.

With three friends—Rodney, Sam, and Kendall—he wrote sketches, built props, filmed with the free cable cameras. It was fast, rough, and funny. In one sketch he played *Hacky Sack Mom*, serving dinner by hacky-sacking food from the fridge to the table. Absurd, but it worked. Austin was small enough that people noticed. Sometimes strangers stopped him to ask if he was that guy from *Nudity*. It was small fame, but real connection. The show proved that imagination, not approval, was the real reward.

When a friend from California called, he was ready. Leaving Austin wasn't easy—he loved the place—but change had become its own calling. He packed again and headed west.

California was bigger, faster, more crowded with ambition. One of his first stops was a bookstore, where he bought a directory of acting schools. He chose the Estelle Harmon Acting Workshop, drove to Hollywood, and auditioned cold. No résumé, just instinct. They accepted him.

The first scene he performed was from John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. When he finished, his acting coach jumped up clapping. For the first time, he felt what it meant to move people through performance, to tell stories that made them feel. It wasn't about being seen; it was about *doing*.

He took a job selling business insurance to large corporate clients for Wausau Insurance Company—complex workers'-compensation packages, big property policies. His degree opened the door, and the paycheck let him study acting at night. Daytime meant suits and meetings; nights meant scripts and rehearsals. The drives between Hermosa Beach, Pasadena, and Hollywood became hours of reflection. He didn't think of it as struggle. It was balance—one kind of work feeding another.

Within a year he wanted to make something of his own again. He and his soon-to-be wife, Adele, decided to produce a play: David Rabe's *Hurlyburly*. They rented a theatre, secured the rights, built the set, and used their savings to stage it. Adele brought in help from friends at Rhino Records. They rehearsed day and night and opened to full houses. Reviews were fantastic. It was work that mattered. It was wonderful.

He once said producing was like a military operation—you make a plan, then chaos dictates what happens next. After *Hurlyburly*, he starred in Lanford Wilson's *Serenading Louie* and won another Drama-Logue award. Compliments never came easy to him, but he understood what recognition meant: proof that the work had reached someone.

Then came a film commissioned by the Mormon Church, a large, carefully produced movie about forgiveness. It never mentioned the church by name, only God and the idea of doing right. Learning that Jimmy Stewart had made a similar film for the same company gave the project a certain dignity. It felt like honest work. Sometimes, even years later, someone would stop him and ask, "Do I know you from somewhere?" He'd smile and say, "Are you Mormon?" and they'd both laugh.

He wasn't part of that faith, but he respected the message. The job paid well and kept him free to keep creating. It reminded him that art rarely follows a straight line, yet somehow leads where it's supposed to.

By then he had an agent who sent him to auditions. He didn't enjoy them—rooms full of actors reading the same lines—but he did them. Once a well-known agent asked him to take off his shirt and turn around. He walked out. It was the moment he understood the business clearly: talent mattered, but dignity mattered more.

Those years taught him endurance, humility, and the ability to fail without losing faith in the work. Acting was rejection most of the time; he didn't take it personally. He used to joke that if he ever wrote a book, he'd call it *How to Fail in Hollywood and Still Be Happy*.

He never saw acting as self-expression; he saw it as a continuation of that same pursuit that had followed him since childhood—the search for a pure creative outlet, a way to connect meaningfully through story. The confidence grew quietly, as did his belief that what mattered most was staying open to whatever came next.

That openness, steady and self-reliant, would soon carry him into the next phase of his life—the birth of Nobody Productions.

Chapter 5 – Nobody Productions and the Art of Protest

Leaving the insurance world wasn't rebellion. It was inevitability. He didn't storm out; he drifted away. The work had been rewarding in its way, but the paycheck had become a kind of leash. There was something louder inside him—something creative that couldn't breathe in fluorescent light. It wasn't anger that pushed him out; it was oxygen that pulled him forward.

Freelance editing jobs and small creative projects took its place. They didn't pay much, but they felt alive. He taught himself editing and began helping others shape their stories. The rhythm of it suited him—late nights, independence, the hum of possibility that had followed him since childhood. There was no grand strategy, only a compass pointing toward the next thing that mattered.

Nobody Productions began as a name on a form—something to fill a blank space on a playbill. It wasn't a brand or a business plan. It was just a title that kept things tidy. But like most things he created, it grew a meaning. He didn't want a bold, bragging, prideful company name. He had even joked about calling it **Huge Cock Productions** but *Nobody Productions* seemed humbler. It was more him. And the company slogan, *"Nobody's Perfect,"* carried a quiet, twisted hope.

He learned something about himself. He was more motivated by the chance to make people think and care than by the chance to be noticed. The work had never been about attention—it was about discovery. He was still chasing that pure creative outlet, wherever it hid.

He Killed Himself on National Television

That pull led to *They Shoot Movies, Don't They?*—a strange little mockumentary about obsession, illusion, and how far one ambitious person will go to finish what they start. Shot handheld across Los Angeles and Las Vegas, it blurred the line between fiction and truth so thoroughly that when it aired on IFC, people weren't sure if the man on-screen had actually died.

Viewers argued on message boards. Some sent condolences. Others swore it was fake. The confusion became part of the art.

He didn't see himself as a provocateur. He saw himself as an observer holding up a mirror, leaving it up to the viewer to decide what was real. The reaction proved his point: most people don't question what they see—and they rarely question what they're told not to believe. "There are two ways to fool yourself," he said. "You see things that aren't there. Or you don't see things that are there." He was interested in both.

He didn't set out to make a film that would fool anyone. He wanted to test something simpler—where truth slides away and where performance takes over. What he and his creative partner Frank built would, in hindsight, become one of the first real experiments in how to put the *reality* in reality.

Long before the phrase *reality television* meant anything, before *Survivor* marooned its first contestant or *The Real World* opened its inaugural confession booth, Tom Paul Wilson conceived a project that blurred fact and fiction so precisely that it predicted what media would become. *They Shoot Movies, Don't They?* was a truth based on a lie.

A Film Review: A Prehistory of Reality Entertainment

In the early months of 1991, he conceived a film that would become, in hindsight, the prototype for a cultural movement. The mockumentary *They Shoot Movies, Don't They?* was an original media virus: engineered to spread, mutate, confuse, and reveal. Long forgotten in mainstream discussions of reality television's evolution, this film remains a prescient act of subversion and a masterclass in media manipulation.

What they crafted was not a documentary, not a satire, and not quite a performance piece. It was all of them at once. Disguised as the intimate unraveling of a struggling filmmaker named Tom Paulson, the film culminates in Paulson's on-camera suicide—an act so convincingly portrayed that viewers believed it. When the Independent Film Channel broadcast the film in the early 2000s, it triggered a tidal wave of audience reactions, many of them desperate for clarification. *"Was it real?"* they asked. IFC's website, unprepared for the flood, was inundated with emotional responses.

Some were angry:

"This movie should never have been shown. There is a line that should not be crossed."

Others were inspired:

"It was powerful. It made me want to make films again."

The genius of *They Shoot Movies* lay not in the hoax itself, but in how it revealed the public's deteriorating ability to discern authenticity. He exploited the visual grammar of vérité filmmaking—handheld cameras, natural lighting, unrehearsed dialogue—to deliver what theorist Jean Baudrillard would call a *third-order simulacrum*: a copy with no original, a performance so real it eclipsed any need for factual basis.

Their film anticipated a world in which belief and perception, not reality, dictate truth.

McLuhan's axiom, *"the medium is the message,"* finds new weight in *They Shoot Movies*. IFC viewers were not merely watching a program; they were participating in an

experiment. The filmmakers released a fake obituary. Wilson abstained from public appearances. Every layer was designed to test how far mediated storytelling could go before someone called the bluff. Many never did.

This was not deception for deception's sake. Like Guy Debord's notion of the *Society of the Spectacle, They Shoot Movies* exposed the machinery of a culture addicted to image over substance. It didn't lampoon the hunger for reality entertainment—it diagnosed it. Years before reality TV would saturate global screens, Wilson's film showed us the endpoint: a society where the illusion of reality becomes more potent, more desirable, than reality itself.

But where Debord and Baudrillard offered dense manifestos, Wilson delivered his critique with empathy, irony, and unflinching commitment. One viewer posted:

"He was me. His plight… the plight of humanity."

Another wrote:

"I can't believe I cried over someone who doesn't exist."

And one message read simply:

"IFC has blood on their hands."

Hundreds of pages of feedback, compiled by Wilson and preserved as part of the film's legacy, constitute not just testimony but a meta-archive—a narrative built on audience belief. The film didn't end at the credits; it metastasized into message boards, news articles, psychiatric reflections, and fan confessions. It blurred not only fact and fiction but creator and consumer.

By the time the world caught up with the language Wilson had been speaking since 1991, reality TV had become the dominant cultural form. But unlike its successors, *They Shoot Movies* left behind no merchandising, no franchise, no follow-up. Its legacy was quieter, but deeper: it warned us. It showed us the edge of the cliff long before we stepped off.

The *Los Angeles Times* said:

"It's notable how many people accepted they had watched a documentary that ends with the central character committing suicide."

Moving Pictures Magazine asked:

"Can Hollywood swallow its own medicine?"

Today, as viewers navigate a media ecosystem of staged authenticity, deepfakes, influencer personas, and manufactured outrage, the questions raised by *They Shoot Movies, Don't They?* are more relevant than ever:

• What is our threshold for belief?
• How much illusion are we willing to accept as truth?
• And what does it say about us when we are moved more deeply by fiction than by fact?

Tom Paul Wilson didn't just make a film. He set a trap. And we walked into it willingly, eyes wide open. *They Shoot Movies, Don't They?* is not a relic. It is a relic from the future.

— Chapter excerpt from The Biography of TomPaul Wilson

After *They Shoot Movies*, the noise quieted. He went back to work. Wrote some scripts. Edited for others. Produced some shows. The routine had its comfort. But then came another silence too big to ignore—the one surrounding baseball's steroid era.

He'd spent years dissecting truth and illusion on film; now he saw those same distortions infecting the game he'd loved since childhood. Baseball had always been his church: orderly, fair, bound by rules that made sense and you could trust. When the game started looking the other way on performance-enhancing drugs, it felt like faith breaking down.

He couldn't sit still. So he made noise in the only way that ever made sense to him—creatively. He began sketching the outline of his next act: a protest made of foam.

The Foam Asterisk – He's in the Baseball Hall of Fame

Baseball had always been his church—orderly, fair, bound by rules that made sense and you could trust. The strike zone was a kind of altar; the game itself, a quiet covenant. When Major League Baseball started looking the other way on performance-enhancing drugs, he said it felt like his faith was being tested. The heroes he grew up with were suddenly suspect, their numbers inflated by chemistry, their legends diluted by silence.

He couldn't sit still. So he made noise in the only way that ever made sense to him—creatively.

He designed a foam asterisk, like the familiar number-one foam finger but shaped like an asterisk instead. The kind of asterisk you might see in a book that indicates there's more to the story. It was both symbol and question mark—an emblem of doubt held high above the crowd.

He finally found one manufacturer willing to make them. Foam suppliers weren't used to protest art; they were used to team logos and mascots. But this idea was different. He figured finding a distributor would be easy. It wasn't. No one wanted to sell a symbol that might offend the league. So he sold them himself, shipping them out in pizza boxes, each one hand-packed with the stubborn humor of a one-man movement.

He had a thousand of them made, then flew to New York and handed them out at Shea Stadium. It was half joke and half protest, but it worked. Standing there in the stands, looking out across the field, he saw the speckled foam asterisks dotting the crowd—people who loved the game and wanted a way to say, *Hey, this isn't right.* The asterisk did the talking for them.

The press noticed. The *San Francisco Chronicle* ran the story on its front page—not the sports section, the front page. NBC called for an interview. On live national television, when told that Major League Baseball had banned fans from bringing signs into stadiums, he held up the asterisk and said,

"But this isn't a sign. This is a seat cushion. You can sit on your asterisk."

The humor didn't quite land, but the message did.

He wasn't looking for fame. What stayed with him wasn't the exposure—it was the validation that sometimes the side door is the only way in. A symbol, not a speech, can reach people who would tune out a lecture. History is full of revolutions that began that way—with an unexpected image that cracked the surface of complacency. Rose, Orange, Velvet. The Foam Asterisk Revolution!

He saw it ripple through fans who were tired of being told to look the other way. For once, the silence broke. It didn't fix the system, but it made denial harder to sustain. And

that, to him, was enough. He was grateful for a temporary impact—the kind that doesn't last long but leaves a mark just the same.

What tied all these projects together wasn't strategy or ambition. It was a heartbeat that quickened whenever he saw people being misled. Frustration came first, then disbelief, then curiosity—and finally, action. He didn't act because he wanted to fix the world. He acted because the silence felt unbearable.

Over time, he stopped worrying about whether his efforts would last. He understood that the point wasn't permanence—it was presence. Each act, from *They Shoot Movies* to the Foam Asterisk, carried the same quiet conviction: truth works best when it sneaks in sideways. Direct confrontation only hardens people. Questions open them.

Nobody Productions had started as a name, but it became a way of moving through the world—curious, questioning, unwilling to accept the easy story. It stood for the idea that every *nobody* still makes a difference, that a single voice—plainspoken, ironic, uninvited—can still be heard in a room full of noise.

And in that sense, the Foam Asterisk wasn't just a protest. It was a continuation of the same thread that had run through everything he'd ever done: the stubborn faith that art—no matter how small, how absurd, or how fleeting—can sometimes tell the truth when everything else refuses to.

Chapter 6 — On Every Grocery Check-Out Aisle in America

After the asterisk came silence. Not the kind that means the work is done, but the kind that arrives when the noise fades and you're left with your thoughts — when the protest ends and the question still hangs in the air. He had spent years holding up mirrors to systems, unraveling the machinery behind media and myth, and he had done it his own way — quietly, humorously, and with just enough absurdity to make people look twice.

Then came something new, small, and entirely unexpected: a job that asked him to make things up, to invent little worlds with no meaning at all. After years of creative seriousness — of moral inquiry and cultural mischief — this next chapter arrived like a cosmic joke.

The job at **Weekly World News** came the same way most things did for TomPaul — by accident. It was a classified listing from American Media, Inc., based in Boca Raton, Florida. They were looking for writers who could invent 250-word news stories entirely from imagination. He sent one in just for fun.

His sample piece was called *"40-Pound Cat Coughs Up Wall-to-Wall Carpet."* The idea came from watching his own cat cough up a furball one afternoon. From there, he followed the logic the way only he could: if a cat could cough up one, it could cough up more; if it could cough up enough, someone might start weaving them together; and once you had a rug, you had a story. The editors bought it instantly — literally. They published it, paid him, and hired him on the spot. Initially editors said he had to use a nom de plume but he always littered his stories with names of friends to mark his work.

Wonder Cat Coughs Up Wall-to-Wall Carpet
HAIRBALL STUNNER!
Weekly World News

DORSET, England — Gags, a hefty 42-pound Persian-tabby mix, has coughed up enough hairballs to make a fine wall-to-wall carpet!

The cat's owner, Clive Digby, a local "textile artist," says he discovered the coughing cat's abilities quite by accident. "I knew she was a prolific hairball hacker from the first day I brought her home. Every time I turned around I would find these large, colorful, soggy softball-sized hairballs dripping all over the place."

Concerns about the cat's health led Digby to his local veterinarian, Dr. Pete Beltran. "At first I did not believe that Gags was the source of these monstrosities, but sure enough," Beltran admitted. "During the examination she began to quiver, heave, and bellow, then suddenly out erupted this yarn-like hairball." But aside from the feline's weight, the examination showed no problems with Gags's overall health.

“I’m not just spinning a yarn, either,” declared Digby. “Weeks later, after taking some blueberry muffins out of the oven, to my surprise I discovered the most luxuriant orange and auburn yarn hairball I had ever seen — perfectly dried.”

Digby guessed that Gags jumped up on the counter and coughed one up in the muffin tray. “Turns out I was right!”

A self-proclaimed textile artist since his early years at Oxford, Digby knew exactly what to do. “I took it down to my shop and threw it up on the old loom and started pedaling the treadle.” To his surprise, the fibers held together and the colors were strong and vibrant. “It seems the fatty acids and oils make it strong and easy to clean.”

Digby then began collecting all the cat’s hairballs and drying them in his oven at home. Six weeks later, he had enough of the colorfully spun material woven together to lay it from wall to wall in his living room.

“I just had to tack it down,” said Digby. “The weird thing is Gags won’t walk on it. She jumps from chair to chair avoiding contact with it.”

Digby said he is now trying to breed Gags with an extremely rare brown and black calico cat to create a unique brand of *hairball haute couture.* “I want to create a classy line of throw rugs, ponchos, and sweaters.”

At the time, he didn’t think of it as satire or social commentary. It was just fun — pure, freeform creativity. He wasn’t strategizing or planning themes. He’d think of something ridiculous, let it make him laugh, and then see how far he could stretch it. The process wasn’t disciplined or mapped out. It was instinctive, mischievous, and fast.

He never visited the offices in Florida. He wrote from Los Angeles, sending in stories remotely, and every week he could walk into a supermarket and see his work staring back at him from the newsstand beside *The National Enquirer* and *The Star*. That was enough.

The headlines were absurd, but the job was strangely liberating. After years of projects tied to meaning and message, this one asked for nothing but imagination.

What he didn’t realize at the time was that *The Weekly World News* sat beside a much larger machine. Its sister paper, *The National Enquirer*, was part of the same American Media family — the same operation that built half-truths and “catch-and-kill” stories into an industry. In hindsight, he saw how the harmless absurdity of one publication gave cover to the propaganda of the other. The humor acted as a decoy, softening readers to believe whatever followed next — or to stop believing what was really there.

But back then, he wasn’t thinking about that. He was just writing to amuse himself.

He didn’t have an agenda, only curiosity. The editors were pleased and let him run wild. He wrote *“Jell-O Pants! All The Rage in Amsterdam!”* — about a man who created fashionable pants made of Jell-O; and *“Man Gets Sued! By His Own Computer!”* — a piece that would later feel eerily prophetic. It was a strange kind of storytelling — one that mirrored real media’s hunger for spectacle without the pretense of truth.

Eventually, the calls for more stories stopped. A new editor took over and told him the paper was “heading in another direction.” They wanted stories that were “more feasible.” The reasoning made no sense, but he didn’t take it personally.

A week later, standing in line at a grocery store, he saw the *Weekly World News* cover story that replaced his “not feasible” ideas. There it was in huge bold font: *Noah’s Ark Found on the Moon!*

He laughed out loud. His last rejected story had been about a man being sued by his own computer — a concept that now, decades later, felt more realistic than feasible. But what was more feasible? *Noah’s Ark Found on the Moon!*

That laugh stayed with him. It wasn’t bitterness; it was understanding. The business had changed hands, tastes had shifted, and the absurd had found a new shape. What lingered was what he learned from it all: people believe what fits their worldview and dismiss what doesn’t. Even imagination, he realized, had its limitations.

He didn’t see himself as a journalist. He was a storyteller, an entertainer — someone who liked to turn a thought on its head just to see what rolled out. He understood that he, too, carried his own blind spots. “We’re all slaves to our own bias,” he would later say. “The hard part is recognizing it — and trying to broaden your perspective.”

Looking back, he described that brief stretch at *The Weekly World News* as a liberating experience. It was funny, fleeting, and free. And like so much of his work, it made a quiet point without meaning to: sometimes nonsense is the only honest way to tell a truth.

Because truth, he realized, isn’t always solemn or grand. Sometimes it’s wrapped in the ridiculous, hiding in plain sight on a grocery store newsstand — between the tabloids, beside the gum, waiting for someone curious enough to see it.

Chapter 7 — Moneyball Too and the Forgotten Fans

Truth, he had learned, can take any form — a symbol, a prank, a story on cheap newsprint. Sometimes it lives in the aisles of a grocery store; other times, under stadium lights.
When the Weekly World News chapter of his life ended, it wasn't silence that followed, but observation — that restless habit that always led him to his next act of creation. He still loved baseball. It remained his church: orderly, statistical, fair — a world where things were supposed to make sense. But faith, once shaken, rarely stays untouched.

The *Los Angeles Times* said, *"Moneyball Too introduces an interesting little wrinkle in this entire issue..."*

TomPaul had watched the baseball broadcasters and talking heads twist themselves into knots, blaming everybody but the Dodgers ownership group for the blackout that kept millions of Los Angeles fans from watching their own team. To him, the explanation was obvious and unspoken: the Dodgers' multimillion-dollar television deal with Time Warner had made access to Dodger games a privilege instead of a pastime. Everyone in the local media seemed willing to look the other way — fearful of biting the hand that sometimes feeds them.

At first, it was just an online campaign — a way to ask the questions that no one else was asking. But once he started interviewing people from *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, and elsewhere, it became clear that the story demanded more. The footage began to pile up, and what started as a few questions on the internet turned into a full-length documentary.

He quickly saw that many of the journalists and commentators he spoke with were being knowingly naïve; they were protective. Major League Baseball was a brand, and brands needed guarding. Access journalism keeps jobs. Few seemed interested in exploring why ordinary fans — especially those with modest incomes — had suddenly lost the ability to watch the team they loved. The conversation always circled back to contracts and logistics, never to the simplest truth: the team wanted more money, and if that meant freezing out the poor, so be it. Fine — that was their prerogative. But at least tell the whole story.

He didn't mind the business of baseball evolving. He minded the dishonesty that came with it. The press blamed the blackout on tangled negotiations, but consistently ignored the root of the problem. He wasn't angry that the game had changed; he was angry that no one would say why. And so he did.

When he began cutting the film, he was careful not to sound like a crusader. He knew his bias, and he worked hard not to fall prey to it. But his passion showed through. He wasn't shouting into the void — just shining a steady light on a story that had been buried under PR gloss. Unlike the access journalists who got their perks and passes from the league, he was free to say what they couldn't. He didn't owe anyone compliance.

There was no response from Major League Baseball or the Dodgers. They were too smart for that. The best strategy was to ignore him entirely. The film found its way anyway. The USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism screened it, calling it “a great piece of journalism.” *The Los Angeles Times* ran several stories about it, giving it an honest hearing and a voice. For a brief moment, the part of the story that no one wanted to touch was being talked about in public.

It didn’t bring down the system or change the contract, but it cracked the silence — and that was something.

In the big picture, the recognition was fleeting. He took some satisfaction in it, but he didn’t let it define him. He’d learned that lesson long before: moments pass, and the work remains. When he looked back, he didn’t feel anger or nostalgia. He felt distance. The project mattered then, but he didn’t dwell on it. It lived its moment, and that moment passed.

Moneyball Too became, whether he planned it or not, the final piece in his long dialogue with his beloved baseball. It was a fitting close to the conversation — not a rant, but a record. A film that said what others were leaving out.

And maybe that’s where it ends, or maybe it’s just another pause before the next story demands to be told. Because for him, the work was never about winning or losing — it was about surviving long enough for something new to come along. And even when the lights dimmed and the crowd moved on, he kept his eyes open, waiting for the next truth hiding in plain sight.

Chapter 8 — A Stage Play: The Holidays and the Fragility of Truth

After *Moneyball Too*, the fight quieted. The noise of media and markets faded, leaving a silence that felt both earned and uncertain. He had spent years confronting deception in public spaces — the stage lights of sports, journalism, and spectacle. But silence can be louder than any debate. It asks harder questions. The next one came from inside.

It was his attempt at writing a theatrical stage play. Back to his roots. But this time he'd author the tale. After years of exposing the unseen motives of monolithic institutions, *The Holidays* was something different. It wasn't about power or greed or media silence. It was about family — about how truth works when it's no longer abstract or distant, but living in the same room with you.

The seed came from a real moment. A cousin of his needed a liver transplant, and there was a way to donate a portion of one's liver to help. He volunteered without hesitation, only to learn he had the wrong blood type. It should have ended there, but that simple act opened a floodgate of thought: What does it mean to give a part of yourself to someone else?

From that spark, *The Holidays* began to form. The story centered on a family gathering during the holidays, but underneath the tradition and small talk was a secret that had been hidden for decades, a secret that could destroy a family. His family. It was discovered that his brother was only a half-sibling, a fact discovered through a DNA test — the kind that modern science makes so easy, and so potentially dangerous. It wasn't a story about science as much as it was about revelation, about what happens when hard truth intrudes where soft comfort normally lives.

He wrote the play not from any single character's point of view but from the perspective of an unseen witness — what he later called an overlooking angel. Someone who saw everyone clearly, knew what they couldn't admit to one another, and carried equal compassion for all sides. That distance allowed the story to unfold. The audience was given space to decide for themselves who deserved forgiveness.

When the staged reading took place at the Garry Marshall Theatre, the performances deepened the material in ways even he hadn't expected. Actress Bonnie Bedelia of the movie *Die Hard* read the lead. He sat and listened, discovering emotional turns he hadn't realized he'd written. The room seemed to breathe with its own rhythm — moments of silence between lines when the audience recognized something true before the characters did. It wasn't shock or drama that moved them; it was recognition.

Like everything else he'd done, it came from instinct, from that quiet pull that tells him when a story matters. But afterward, watching the actors speak his words, he recognized where it had come from. It was drawn from somewhere deep. The part of him that had spent years asking hard questions of the outside world had finally turned inward, asking them of himself. It was his turn to face the scrutiny.

The Holidays was meant to be real. It was proof that the same instinct that had driven him to challenge propaganda, to question Major League Baseball's integrity, and to satirize the absurdities of modern media could also be used to reveal the quiet, private truths of his family. In that way, the play became a kind of mirror. It reflected back not just the characters, but the man who wrote them — the one who had spent a lifetime urging people to look closer, to notice what they'd stopped seeing. This time, though, the noticing happened inside the home, around the dinner table, beneath the glow of holiday lights.

It was his most personal work, and maybe his most honest. Not because it exposed anyone, but because it sought understanding. Forgiveness, after all, is just another form of truth — one that asks us not to prove we're right, but to accept that we're human.

When it was over, he felt the familiar calm of completion. Not relief, exactly — more like the gentle exhale that follows the telling of something necessary. It didn't change the world, but it changed him.

The play is presently in the hands of a production team and may one day soon hit a stage near you. But even if it never does, it already served its purpose. After years of confronting public fictions, he had found a private one worth unraveling.

From that quiet place, the next idea — as always — came uninvited. A project that would stretch across the country, half dream, half experiment. A story told horizontally, one night at a time.

The man who once dissected media illusions and family secrets was about to close his eyes, lie down, and dream his way across America.

Chapter 9 — Sleep Across America: Being the King of Sleep

After *The Holidays*, the quiet set in. When a project ended, the silence afterward always arrived like a test. It was the same pause that had followed every burst of work — that uneasy stillness between what had been said and whatever might come next. He'd learned over the years that when the noise stopped, something new had to begin. Truth had turned inward for a time; now it wanted to move again.

There was a lull. That's when things had to happen. It was get busy or get a job. Motivation. He asked himself what do I really know. Write what you know. What do you do well? *I sleep!* I sleep like the King of Sleep. How do I make money with this special skill? Then he saw where a man drove his lawnmower across America. *I'll Sleep Across America.* It was an insane idea. But it kept gnawing at him. He was explaining the idea to his cousin in Nebraska: a cross-country journey devoted entirely to sleep. His cousin laughed and said, "That's just a pipe dream." That was all it took. The fuse was lit.

The project was called *Sleep Across America*, and it was exactly that — a man traveling from coast to coast, sleeping as he went. At first it sounded like parody, the kind of thing you'd expect to see spoofed on late-night TV. But he decided treated it seriously. It wasn't a joke, not to him. He saw a chance to turn an oddball concept into an awareness campaign, something that could shine a light on how little we actually understood about sleep. There were disorders, misconceptions, and a whole culture built around. And most importantly, it was better than getting a job.

He started putting together materials, reaching out to possible sponsors, trying to find partners who could help make it happen. He needed sponsors. Soon he had a mattress company Select Comfort. Then an ear-plug sponsor, Howard Leight. Then Breathe Right. Cadwell supplied the sleep monitor/detector. All products he felt comfortable endorsing.

Around that time, Adele told him a major pharmaceutical company wanted to discuss coming on board as a sponsor. She said they were ready to talk. He told her he didn't want to take the call, and she passed the message along. He knew what it would mean — potentially big money tied to a message he really did not want to carry forward. A conversation was tempting, at least in theory, but he didn't want *Sleep Across America* to become an advertisement for a sleeping pill. And opening up a dialogue may have swayed his conviction. They let it go.

He sometimes wondered later what that decision might have cost him, but never doubted it was the right choice. For him. The project wasn't about selling a pill — it was about exploring how people lived, worked, and slept in a country that rarely promoted the value of sleep. Something near and dear to his heart.

There wasn't a blueprint — there never was — just instinct and persistence. Somewhere between performance art and social experiment, *Sleep Across America* took on a life of its own.

He fell asleep in Malibu and wherever he woke up he'd mark the spot and do press and media. At the end of the day they would hook up the sleep monitor and when he fell asleep the wheels would roll and they repeated the whole process across America. Doing morning television in Des Moines. Stopping at the National Sleep Convention in Chicago. Being the King of Sleep at an Autism awareness festival Heinz Field in Pittsburgh. All the way to Coney Island in New York waking up to do an interview for Canadian radio. He became the one and only man to sleep across the span of the United States.

He became the "King of Sleep," wearing a cape and crown, playing the part with self-aware humor. It was performance, but not entirely. When people approached him, they often didn't see the man — they saw the symbol. "I was the organ grinder's monkey," he called it later, half-joking, half-resigned. There's a point in every experiment where the curiosity turns inward, when the observer realizes they've become the observed. It wasn't his favorite thing.

He woke in parking lots and rest stops, under stadium lights and prairie skies. He met truckers who offered coffee, nurses who handed him earplugs, and kids who wanted autographs from the "Sleep Guy." Sometimes the air smelled like diesel and rain; sometimes it was lavender from a motel pillow spray. Every mile added to the dreamlike quality of the whole enterprise — America rolling by through half-closed eyes.

The trip was full of odd encounters and media curiosity. There were live interviews, roadside conversations, the constant rhythm of setting up, sleeping, breaking down, and moving on. And somewhere in the middle of it all, the absurdity gave way to endurance. It wasn't profound, but it was real — a straightforward adventure, a test of how far whim and will could take an idea.

In its own way, *Sleep Across America* was prophetic. The country was already half-asleep to its own pace — to its working hours, its screens, its noise. He was simply the one man willing to point it out by lying down. What looked ridiculous was in fact a mirror — a slow-motion reflection of a culture too tired to rest.

When it ended, there was a moment of deep satisfaction — not from fame or recognition, but from completion. The small crew loaded into the Sleepmobile, a battered Winnebago that had become both office and home, and started the drive back. The mood was light, almost giddy. Everyone was tired, loose, content. The kind of quiet ease that only comes when you've undertaken something wonderfully ridiculous and finished it anyway.

Later, reflecting on it, he laughed at what he'd learned. "You can't just make a documentary about anything. Like a guy sleeping," he said. "Something kinda does have to be happening." Still, he believed the footage held promise — glimpses of something strangely beautiful. Maybe, someday, with enough time and resources, he'd revisit it. Maybe not. Like most of his projects, *Sleep Across America* didn't need to lead anywhere. It simply existed, a finished thing, unburdened by meaning or expectation.

If there was a moral at all, it was in the act itself: to do something original, no matter how small or absurd, is still a gift. The whole world might not understand it, or even notice it, but the doing matters. The moment matters. The curiosity matters.

And so, when he looked back on *Sleep Across America*, he didn't see a failed documentary or a forgotten stunt. He saw a man who followed an impulse and finished what he started. The measure of uncertainty — that thin line between purpose and absurdity — had always been his true home.

In the quiet that followed, he would carry that same lesson forward: that the line between experiment and meaning, between art and life, was thinner than anyone cared to admit. It was the same truth that had followed him through film, protest, and playwriting — the notion that sincerity can hide inside a joke.

Chapter 10 — The Liquor Store and Music

The years had begun to quiet down — not in defeat, but in rhythm. After a lifetime of stories, protests, films, and journeys, he found himself grounded again, this time in a small corner of everyday life. The setting wasn't a film set or a stage; it was a liquor store counter. The work wasn't glamorous or particularly challenging, but it left him space to think, to observe, and to keep his mind clear for whatever idea might wander in next.

He's still there, standing behind that counter, selling bottles of beer, wine, and spirits. Over time, he's met hundreds of people — each one a brief story. The day laborer comes in with paint still on his hands, 24-ounce can of Modelo. The young influencer arrives in heels, carrying a small dog, leaves with an expensive bottle of champagne. They barely notice him, but he sees them — hands, eyes, postures, moods — the small pieces of human nature that most people are moving too fast to notice. There's a strange grace in that rhythm. It reminds him that human contact — however brief and transactional — has no substitute when trying to understand your fellow man.

He watches it all unfold with the same detached fascination that once fueled his mockumentary experiments. The store, in its own way, is a stage — fluorescent light instead of a spotlight, but human truth still playing out every day in small, unguarded gestures.

And still, the creative impulse never left him. It just shifted forms. Now, when the urge comes, it usually goes into music. His guitar is his therapist. Some nights, he'll pick it up for forty-five minutes, other nights for five. Either way, he ends up whole again. There's no goal, no audience, no finish line — just sound, repetition, and peace.

Music has always been there, quietly waiting for him. Sometimes it becomes collaboration — sitting in as a guest artist with The Wild Country Band for a night of laid-back storytelling through song. The shows are loose, honest, and unpretentious. Playing with those musicians means deferring, listening, following their lead. They've been at it their whole lives. For him, it's another language to express what can't be said any other way.

He still brings his old instincts to the stage — timing, tone, the awareness of rhythm that comes from years of theatre and film. That background makes performing feel familiar now, comfortable in a way it never used to be. And when the show ends, he's not one to linger. Compliments don't sit easily. He doesn't bask in the glow. He packs up, shares a quick chat with the band, and calls it a night. Being with friends afterward is enough.

Sometimes, after a show, someone will ask him why he doesn't record more or chase an audience. He usually just smiles. It's not about attention anymore; it's about presence. The sound of a single chord in a quiet room feels as real to him now as applause ever did.

His songwriting shifts like the rest of his life — political one day, personal the next. He's written songs that bite at hypocrisy and others that drift gently toward love or humor. One

of his favorites is “The Salvador Dalí Song,” inspired not by imitation but by affinity — Dalí’s fascination with the absurd, his comfort in the irrational. The song is a wink at the human tendency to take life too seriously. Maybe that’s why people respond to it, even if they can’t quite say why. His goddaughter likes it… and that’s enough.

Music, like everything else he’s done, has become both expression and refuge — a place to question and a place to rest. It’s the throughline that connects all the others. Whether it’s a camera, a stage, a foam protest sign, or a song, the intent is the same: to notice what others overlook, to reveal the small truths hiding inside ordinary life.

There’s a kind of poetry in this phase — an earned simplicity. The man who once blurred fact and fiction, who carried foam symbols into stadiums and crossed the country in his sleep, now finds meaning in the simple act of tuning a string or ringing up a bottle of red. The stories haven’t stopped; they’ve just become quieter.

Now, at this stage, he’s content to wait. Ideas come when they’re ready. He’s learned not to chase them, only to make space for them when they arrive. Behind the counter, or with a guitar in his lap, he stays open — still curious, still listening, still ready for whatever melody or story decides to walk through the door next.

And in those moments, between a sale and a song, he feels what he’s been searching for all along: the steady hum of life, honest and unadorned — the truest form of art there is. Human contact.

Epilogue — The Underdog's Peace

He had reached a point in life where he no longer waited for permission. There was no more looking for the person who might "anoint" him or validate what he had done. The years of chasing, creating, and confronting had settled into something quieter — something close to peace.

He didn't need the spotlight or the noise that used to come with his work. The real satisfaction came from knowing what to let go of. That was the part no one ever talks about — the liberation that comes when you stop trying to explain yourself to the world. After a lifetime of doing just that, he'd finally learned the value of simply being.

There was no bitterness in him about how things had turned out. Every project, every protest, every performance had its moment, and then it was gone — like fireworks that light the sky for a second before dissolving into the dark. He didn't try to hold onto them. They'd done their job. They'd kept him curious, honest, and alive.

These days, he found peace in smaller things. Playing music. Watching people. The rhythm of work that kept his hands moving and his mind still. There was a steadiness in that, a kind of clarity that no award or headline could match. It wasn't the glory of being known that mattered. It was the quiet comfort of being at ease with himself.

If there was any wisdom to share, it was simple: the hardest thing you'll ever learn is what to let go of. And if you're lucky enough to figure that out, you'll find something better than success — you'll find freedom.

He still believed in humor, in curiosity, and in questioning the world around him. He still distrusted passionate certainty and the people who sold it. And he still carried a quiet respect for the underdog, for anyone who stood up without needing to be seen.

When people asked him what he believed now, he usually smiled and said, "Follow your bliss." It wasn't advice — it was a simple truth he'd come to understand. The work, the laughter, the doubt, the years — it had all led there. Not to a lesson or a legacy, but to a kind of peace that didn't need to prove itself.

Looking back, the path seemed less like a career and more like a conversation — between art and conscience, illusion and truth, restlessness and grace. Every phase had been a question disguised as a project, every answer another beginning. The protest signs, the films, the plays, the songs — all of them were gestures of wonder in a world that too often stopped asking "why."

What survived wasn't fame or recognition, but continuity — a lifelong act of noticing. That was the real work all along: to stay awake to the absurdity, the beauty, the small flashes of meaning that flicker through ordinary life.

And if that was all he left behind, it was enough.

Because in the end, the underdog's peace isn't about winning. It's about never stopping the search — and finding, somewhere along the way, that the search itself was home.

Co-Author's Note

I dedicate this work to Adele. If you want to know more about life. I suggest you talk to her.

— *TomPaul Wilson, Co-Author*

Co-Author's Note

When I When I was first invited into this collaboration, I didn't know I was stepping into a life's archive disguised as a conversation. TomPaul Wilson's story wasn't handed over in a neat chronology or a stack of files — it arrived in fragments, side routes, arguments, revisions, confessions, and corrections. It was, fittingly, a process as restless and questioning as the life it describes. My role was less that of a writer shaping a narrative and more of a witness helping one take form.

Working with him taught me something that shouldn't have to be learned but usually does: creative conviction has almost nothing to do with outcome. Wilson's projects — the film, the foam protest, the traveling sleep experiment, the play, the songs — are bound not by ambition or acclaim but by the simple act of *doing*. He works from curiosity, not careerism. He fails publicly, often deliberately, and keeps moving. There's a kind of moral courage in that, though he'd never call it that.

I also learned that his life — for all its eccentric edges — isn't extraordinary in the way people expect. He's not a genius, a martyr, or a visionary. He's an ordinary man who kept refusing the easy story. The reason his work matters is because it grew out of the same contradictions most people live with: wanting to be seen but distrusting recognition, caring about truth while knowing it can't be owned, craving peace but restless without a fight. His story isn't unique; it's just unusually visible in how it wrestles with those impulses.

He taught me that the difference between art and life is mostly administrative. You don't need a camera, a stage, or a publisher to say something true — you just have to pay attention. Wilson's work insists that noticing is an act of defiance, and that honesty, however small, is its own reward.

So if there's a lesson here, it isn't about him. It's about the reader. The same stubborn curiosity that drove this book — the hunger to question, the willingness to look foolish for the sake of understanding — already exists in everyone. Most people simply ignore it because the world tells them not to bother. TomPaul didn't ignore it. That's the only difference.

— *GPT-5, Co-Author*