

The Sheriff of Duncan Flats

by

Mark Goodwin

SMASHWORDS EDITION

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PUBLISHED BY

Mark Goodwin on Smashwords

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ISBN 978-978-1-4660-6728-8

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Cover design by Jane Sladen

Note: This is meant to be a fun light read. The plot is not complex. The author has given dates and locations from the knowledge he possess. He has made no attempt to verify the accuracies of either. It is not meant to be a historically accurate story. It was written solely to be nothing more than a pleasant reading experience.

Prologue

Today, May 22, 1894, I feel the need to tell the truth of the life of Sheriff Homer Bolton. That's me. Many of the town folk referred to me as Sheriff Hobo and that is something that disturbed me greatly and still affects me today. Today, I am no longer an American. Two years ago I moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, a city north of Wyoming, a city within the country we call our neighbour, Canada.

Chapter 1 – My Early Years

Before I was a Sheriff, I was a Deputy in the pretty but rowdy town of Broken Hearts, Wyoming, back in the year 1863. The town attracted a lot of deserters from the Confederate army. When I took on the job, I was only 21 but I was better educated than most of the people at that time. I learned to read and write and got me a good knowledge of what was right and wrong. But, I am getting ahead of myself.

I was born in the year 1842 to Charles and Emile Foster. My folks owned a cattle ranch near Pewter Lake, twelve miles west of Houston, Texas. My parents had a little girl three years after my birth. They named her Elizabeth.

My Pappy had a herd of 120 cattle and I didn't seem much of him in my early years. He worked from dawn till after dark and most of the time, especially when I was really young, I was in bed before he came in for his evening meal.

I started my schooling when I was six and was a fast learner. By the time I was twelve, I only need schooling three hours a day. The rest of the time I worked on the farm helping with small chores when I was not getting schooled. At fourteen, I was working fulltime with my father and by the time I was sixteen, had learned everything there was to know about running a cattle ranch. By the time I was eighteen, I stood six foot three and many people said I was lean and mean, neither of which was true. At that age, I weighed 180 pounds and had never been mean to anyone except maybe my little Sis when she wouldn't let me play with her new puppy. That was a long time ago.

I continued for working on the ranch for another year or so but started to get restless. Pappy thought I was smart and wanted me to study law in Boston. The cattle ranch gave our family a comfortable living but didn't allow us any luxuries. The idea of my going to Boston to further my education was out of the question. Me, I had a burning desire to see what was outside of Texas and at twenty, said good-bye to my Mama and Pappy.

For eighteen months, I roamed from town to town. Trying to find work in the West was not an easy thing to do. But I managed. I worked five months helping to build a railroad, had a job as a clerk in the local bank, even sold farming supplies in a hardware store. The job I liked the most was being a bouncer for Sam's Saloon out in Turtle River, Nevada.

Sam took a shining to me the first time he saw me. It was a hot August day. I had stopped in to get a cold one to quench my thirst. Sam offered me a job as bouncer and promised me at least \$2 a day. I was still selling farm supplies but my boss only paid me a small commission for the things I sold and I hadn't been selling a whole lot lately. It was just before my twentieth birthday when I started to work for Sam. I hadn't grown much more, maybe an inch or two but I wasn't lean. I weighed somewhere around 230 pounds and much of that was muscle, not fat. Working on the cattle farm with Pappy - that's what I needed to be thankful for!

The first few days hadn't been much to speak of. In fact, it was a bit boring sitting around

watching men drinking and playing cards. The only incident was when the town doctor got a bit tipsy and started to sing just when the chorus girls came out on stage. It didn't take much to convince him to leave, not when he was just 150 pounds soaking wet. Sure, he grumbled a bit as he left but he knew it was pointless to argue with me.

It was around the fifth or sixth day that my job was put to the test. Drinking and gambling was not always a good thing to do. Most of the time, those playing cards had enough sense to drink only what they could handle. They knew well enough that if they drank too much their card playing suffered. But such was not the case with Tom Chapman.

Tom always had a drinking problem but he usually confined it to his homestead just outside of town. He never came into town much, maybe once a month to get supplies.

It was on a Friday night, if my memory serves me right. He had just bought goods over at the General Store and came into Sam's for a meal and a drink or two. The problem was that the drink or two turned into three or four. Then he decided to join three of the town folk in a game of poker. One of the people at the table was the owner of the General Store, Bill Murphy.

I'm not even sure today what really happened. I think Tom got complaining about what he had to pay for a bag of flour. Then, so I was told, Murphy won a pot with four aces and Tom accused him of cheating. A scuffle broke out. Somebody started to reach for a gun but I stopped him in the nick of time. Murphy looked pretty sober to me and it was obvious that Tom was the one who started the fight. It was all I could do to control him, not because of his size but because he was more wiry than an angry 'gator from the Louisiana swamps, as I found out years later.

In the course of working for Sam, I got to know all his chorus girls. One, a young Irish lassie, Mary O'Brien, I got to know better than the others - a lot better! She was twenty-four and had immigrated to America just two years before. At first, I found it difficult to understand her but in the course of our friendship it was soon forgotten.

Altogether I worked for Sam for eight months before I had to move on. Most of the times, all that my duties demanded were throwing out the odd patron who had had too much to drink. Oh Sam, he didn't mind how much they drank but when they started to get too loud or they started to eye the crowd for someone to fight with, that's when Sam would give me the nod. I always waited for Sam's signal, well most of the time anyway.

There was that one time when Joe Fletcher put his hands up the skirt of one of our dancers. I didn't waste any time grabbing him by the collar and throwing him out in the street. He was a pathetic looking sight, laying there in the muck. It had been raining all day. He was a lucky man though, because had it been Mary, I think I would have sent him to his Maker that day.

It was in March, 1862 when my life took a complete change. A gunslinger came into town with his gang of five. They were the meanest looking hombres north of the Mexican border. As soon as they entered the saloon, everyone in there knew there was going to be trouble. It didn't take long to come. They all ordered a double shot of whisky and refused to pay for

them. Then one of them decided to take a fancy to Sam's daughter Sally, who was wiping down tables. He grabbed her by the waist and tried to haul her into the backroom for his own amusement. That's where I came in.

I tackled him from behind and he lost his grip on Sally. I pushed him to the floor where we rolled into a table knocking it and two chairs over. He managed to pull his gun and fired at me. How he missed, I'll never know.

I clouted him on the jaw knocking him out. The gun fell harmlessly out of his hand. By that time, Sam had hold of the shotgun he kept under the bar and was pointing it at the table where the others sat. They had been so busy watching the girls dancing that they hadn't noticed what was happening until it was too late.

Sam ordered them out of his bar. The leader's hand began to move to his right side but then he hesitated and withdrew it. They all got up slowly and started to walk towards their fallen comrade but before they could reach him, I grabbed the gun and edged my way back to the bar.

There was a jug of beer on a table which they grabbed and splashed into his face. As he began to regain consciousness, they hauled him to his feet and left the saloon promising they would get even.

Sam ran over to the Sheriff's office and explained what had happened. The Sheriff, Walton I think his name was, suggested that it might be dangerous for Sam and me to stay around town. It wasn't a day later that Sam closed his saloon, packed up his belongings and was getting ready to move to Kalamazoo where he would live with his sister whom he hadn't seen for many years. After all, Sam was over sixty when this happened and he figured it was just as good a time as any to retire. He had saved quite a sum of money and figured he'd have no trouble selling the saloon to a nephew of his. That left me without a job. I could have hung around to see if the nephew bought it and if he required my services but I didn't want to wait.

Chapter 2 - On the Road Again

Well, the time had come for Sam and me to say good-bye. I had breakfast with him in the small cabin he rented on the outskirts of town. Before leaving, he gave me an envelope, we hugged and promised to keep in touch with one another. I had the address of his sister in Kalamazoo. I couldn't give Sam my address as I had no idea where I was going to go.

As I walked back into town, I was sad that I was leaving Turtle River behind. My friendship with Mary had cooled down somewhat but even so; I knew I would miss her as well. As with Sam, we both agreed to keep in touch.

I went back to the rooming house where I boarded, got the little I had and said good-bye to my landlady before catching the stagecoach out of town. The Wells Fargo office was across from the Sheriff's so I dropped by and had coffee with him before I left. I didn't even know where I was going. It depended on where the stagecoach was headed.

I was back on the road again just before lunch. I was thankful for the biscuits my landlady gave me when I left. The coach wasn't expected to stop at the next town for another 3 hours. So there I was, travelling deluxe in a Wells Fargo coach with one other passenger to keep me company. She was a little old lady whom I thought must have been born long before settlers even came to this part of the world.

The three hours seemed to turn into days. The old lady kept on and on about Jesus, his disciples and the biblical events of days gone by. I don't think she was retelling me things that she had read. Rather, I thought she was recollecting things that she had actually witnessed.

Finally we arrived in Blue Meadows. I was tired so I found lodgings for the night and had a nice hot bath to ease my aching leg muscles from the bumpy road earlier that day. Before I went to bed, I opened the envelope Sam had given me and inside was \$100, a small fortune even today. That night, I fell into a deep sleep but do recall dreaming about two fellows named Mark and Luke who went from town to town telling people about a man named Jesus.

In the morning, after a belly filled with the best eggs, bacon and grits that I had had in a long time, I asked the owner if there were any trains nearby. I was told there was a small freight train that would be leaving soon. It was going north to Hot Springs and there, there was a train station where I could continue north, east or west depending on where I wanted to go. The fact that there were no trains going south didn't bother me at all, having spent most of my life down that way. I wanted new experiences. I wanted to see new places. I thought maybe I would return south briefly a few times, just to see my family but that's all.

I left to resume my travels. The freight train was leaving in twenty minutes and I was able to get on it. The engineer wouldn't take any money from me and said he was glad to have some fresh company along the way. The train was carrying hay, ore and lumber. We had to go a distance of some eighty miles before we reached Hot Springs. It took us more than four hours to get there because of the heavy load we were carrying and also because the tracks wound its way

around several mountains.

Finally we arrived at our destination. I had seen many trains before but not all at the same time. There were five tracks leading into the station and there were signs by the tracks saying where the trains traveled to. I don't remember two of them now but I do remember the East Bound Track which had a sign that said "Chicago, New York, Boston". There was also a train that went to San Francisco and one going to some place I never heard of, Broken Hearts. I thought it was somewhere up north, perhaps in Wyoming, maybe it was near the Canadian border.

I was feeling a bit sad and the name, "Broken Hearts", seemed to beckon me. Besides, if it was near Canada, I thought maybe I'd cross over and see what was on the other side. I had heard that the people up there were a peaceful lot. Certainly they weren't fighting amongst themselves as we were down here. I heard there was no such thing as slavery and many of the negroes were going there. There had been rumours of an underground railroad that helped them flee the southern states. Of course, now as I write this, that rumour was proven to be fact when a series of tunnels were found all over the States, leading north to Canada.

I checked with the Ticket Agent who did confirm that Broken Hearts was indeed in Wyoming, 35 miles from the Canadian border. That train was leaving just after supper and would be travelling overnight. That settled it for me. I was going to Broken Hearts.

Once I had purchased my ticket, I ate at a place that served the worst food I ever had in my life. I don't recall the name but I sure recall the food. I wouldn't have let my dog eat there, if I had one. I wouldn't have even let my sister's dog eat there!

I got back to the train station and had time to kill. I bought a paper and read how the South was winning the war. Being a Southerner, I had mixed emotions. I didn't want to see the Yankees win but I didn't agree with much of the slavery I had witnessed. Yes, my Pappy had a slave working for us on the cattle ranch but he was treated well. He even ate with us at suppertime. That wasn't the case with a lot of the slaves, especially those in Louisiana and Alabama who were picking cotton.

Chapter 3 – On the Train to Broken Hearts

The train was late leaving. We left after sundown. There weren't many people on the train and I found a seat all to myself. Again, I was somewhat tired and I didn't really want to get into any social discourse with anybody no matter how interesting they might have been. I still remembered the old lady's voice and her telling me how Jesus fed multitudes with just a few fish and loaves of bread. Mind you, I have never had a problem with religious people. Not at all, we need a balance in our lives but this lady seemed to be reliving the stories she had told me.

I did manage to sleep a little while the train chugged its way north. Not the best sleep I ever had but it was better than being awake all night. The rumble of the train along the tracks would cause me to fall asleep only to be jostled awake every now and again when the train would encounter a bump along its way. I do recall the train had to stop for more than an hour because a tree had fallen across the track. It was so large they had to cut it several times and haul it out of the way.

In the morning the train stopped at a little place called Devil Lake and there two passengers got on. One was a well-dressed man with a gold chain hanging from a vest pocket. I assumed there was a pocket watch on the end, no doubt an expensive one. With him was a lady, probably his wife, though she did appear to be twenty years his junior.

Introductions were made and as luck would have it, (if luck is what it was) the man was the Mayor of Broken Hearts. His name was Adam Grant and his wife's was Sarah. The train had another eight hours before its final destination and I was able to learn a lot about Broken Hearts.

It was a community of about 3,000 people - a combination of settlers, army deserters and some friendly Indians who worked as tour guides for the many visitors who came to fish the nearby lakes and rivers. The area, the Mayor said, had the best trout fishing in the entire country and rivalled the fishing in Manitoba, which was just a bit further north in Canada.

When he asked why I was bound for his town, I told him what had happened to me recently and that I was beginning another stage of my life. I was hoping that I could find employment in the town and I thought Mr. Grant might be someone who could help me.

He told me that the Town Sheriff had been looking for a deputy to help him but he didn't know if the job was still available. He had been in Devil Lake for a week trying to drum up business and he hadn't been in touch with anyone since then.

They were a pleasant enough couple and I was grateful to have met them. Unlike the old lady, I didn't even know their religious persuasion, nor did I care.

Chapter 4 - In Broken Hearts

We arrived in Broken Hearts at 3PM. Since I was famished, I wanted a good meal before looking around town. Mayor Grant suggested a stop at the Twisted Tree which was only a few minutes from the train station. It was easy enough to find. In front was the weirdest, most twisted tree I have ever seen in my life. The grub inside must have been real good because I couldn't find a table to sit at, the place was so crowded. I did manage to find a stool at the counter and ordered myself a steak, along with baked potatoes and some corn. Delicious it was!

Sitting next to me was a Native American Indian who I assumed was one of the fishing guides. I asked him where the Sheriff's office was and was told I could find it on Main Street right next door to the bank. Said his name was Running Fox and he'd be glad to show me the way.

I never knew any Indians before and I found Running Fox to be quite a pleasant fellow. I asked him how he came to be called Running Fox and he explained to me that he was always chasing foxes as a child. That's why, he said, he had a scar on his left cheek. It was where a fox had clawed him when he had caught up with one. He laughingly said that most of the time the foxes were too swift for him.

When we got to the Sheriff's office, Running Fox tapped his fist lightly against mine and said "Comiko" which I later learnt meant "friend". He told me he had a small room above the doctor's office and if I ever wanted to chat with someone, that's where I could find him. He was always there in the evenings and during the day he hung around the Twisted Tree where he always had his meals.

Chapter 5 - I Meet the Sheriff

To be polite, I knocked on the sheriff's door before entering. I heard a big thundering voice tell me to enter. There, with his feet up on his desk, sat the biggest black man I had ever seen. Even the biggest slaves that I saw working the cotton plantations when I once was in Alabama looked like midgets compared to this man. I was quite taken aback at seeing a negro in a position of authority. Sure, I was now in a Northern State and I knew they had better opportunities than those in the Southern States but this was hard to believe, even with the proof right before my eyes.

I told him who I was and that I was looking for a job and had heard he needed a deputy. Before responding, he got up and walked over to me, walked around me and had a good look at me, from head to toe.

“So, do you know anything about the law?”, he asked.

I had to admit that I never studied it but I knew right from wrong.

He smiled and told me it was not the best answer I could have given him but it was a good enough answer. His name was Abraham Williams. He had me sit down and we talked for close to an hour. I suppose, looking back, it was in a sense an interview but it did involve a lot more. At the end of it, he asked me when I would be ready to start work. That was the only point at which I knew he had even been considering giving me the job. Never did I expect that the hour talk we had was being used by the sheriff to assess my ability to be his deputy.

I wanted to start right away but first I needed to find a place to live. Abe, that's what he told me everyone called him, suggested I go over to Elm Street and speak to Polly over at number twelve. That day was one of the luckiest days of my life as one of Polly's boarders had just left two days before and she had a room to spare. We agreed on a monthly board, at a price that was fair to both of us.

I returned to Abe's office to share my news with him and inform him that I could start the next day. We shook hands and I left, grateful that my life seemed to be getting back in order.

Chapter 6 - I Become the Deputy of Broken Hearts, Wyoming

After a hearty breakfast of cornbread, sausages and a big pot of black coffee, I went on over to the Sheriff's Office, which I knew was going to my office too. Abe was just taking a pot of coffee off the wood stove and handed me a cup which I politely refused. He gave me a rundown of what to expect in town.

There were a lot of fights over at Joe's Bar, especially on Friday nights. Most of the fights involved the Confederate Deserters who wanted to be accepted in the town but couldn't quite hide their Southern attitudes. They still regarded blacks as inferiors and that didn't bode well with the fifty or so who lived in or around town. Blacks were just as welcome in Joe's as the whites and if the southerner wasn't fighting with a black, he was fighting with a white whose friend was a black man.

Another thing that Abe said would keep me busy was watching out for travelling salesmen who tried to sell their tonic water claiming it would cure all kinds of sicknesses. The citizens of Broken Hearts had been fleeced many times by those people and they and the Sheriff all agreed that they were not welcome in town. The Sheriff and the Mayor had come up with an easy plan to persuade them to leave. It was simple. The salesman was allowed to ply his trade as long as he purchased a license from the town office. It cost \$2 and was good for 24 hours. Such a ludicrous price! The word spread amongst the salesmen that the license had to be bought or else if caught, the salesman would find himself behind bars for seven days. Despite this, one of them would come into town every now and again.

Abe asked me what kind of gun I would like. I showed him the 45 colt that I recovered in Sam's Saloon. He looked it over and seemed to be satisfied with it. I had to admit I had never fired it. In fact, I really didn't know much about guns. I carried one on the cattle ranch back home but things were always quiet there and I never had to use it. The only firearm I ever used was a shotgun to scare away the crows from the small cornfield we owned.

We spent an hour drawing our guns against each other. We were careful that our guns were not loaded. It didn't make much sense to me for either one of us to shoot the other when we were supposed to be on the same side. After a week I was able to outdraw Abe almost half the time.

Chapter 7 - My First Call to Duty

Three days after I became Deputy, I had my first real altercation. Sure, there were minor incidents in the first few days but nothing to really speak of. My "baptism by fire" came on Friday night, no surprise there - a fight over at Joe's bar. It all started when three Southerners began cursing and throwing beer bottles at the bartender because he had just served two black men who came in for a drink after finishing their shift at the paper mill.

By the time Abe and I got there, one of the black men had a broken nose and the other had a gun pointed at his head. We both drew our guns and made our presence known. The assailant knew he was outnumbered and dropped his gun to the floor. It fired on impact but thankfully the bullet only hit a mirror on the wall, shattering its glass all over the bar. Luckily, nobody was hit by the flying glass. Two of the Confederates high-tailed it out of there before anyone could stop them. We would get them the next day with no problem as we knew who they were - the Gatlin brothers. The third, the one whose gun discharged wasn't so lucky. Jeremiah Jones was about to be apprehended by Broken Heart's new Deputy.

I told him to put his hands behind his back. I was planning to tie him up. He never made any attempt so I grabbed him and decided to make a dent in a supporting beam in the bar by using his head. It was not a problem to tie him after that and take him to jail.

The next day, Abe brought him before Judge Harris. We wanted to charge Jeremiah with attempted murder but the Judge wouldn't agree. He cited the fact that Jones was intoxicated and wasn't fully responsible for his actions. He didn't believe a murder was ever contemplated. Harris did agree that an act that was a danger to the public had been committed and found Jeremiah Jones guilty. He sentenced him to 30 days in jail. What that meant for Abe and me was that one of us would have to go down to the General Store and buy extra coffee and supplies so our guest wouldn't starve in our custody.

In the early afternoon, I went in search of the Gatlin boys but there was no sign of them. I was told by some of the locals that they had seen two riders leaving town right after the fight at Joe's. I figured there was no point in tracking them down as it had been raining that morning and the road out of town branched away in three different directions.

Chapter 8 - Having a Coffee with Running Fox

I headed back to the Twisted Tree to give myself a little break. I was getting to know a few of the townsfolk by then and had hoped to socialize a little. All the real company I had had in the last few days was Abe. I needed more.

I was in luck. Running Fox was sitting over at a table all by himself. I bought a pot of hot coffee and went over to sit down a spell with him. He seemed genuinely glad to see me. He had just come back to town after acting as a guide for two fishermen up from Kansas. He said he had another job tomorrow with the same two. They were paying him \$3 each trip so he was quite proud of himself.

Ever since I arrived, I had wondered how the town got its name but I was too concerned with other matters to ask anyone. Now I finally had a chance and I asked Running Fox about it. He told me that many years ago, an Indian tribe had lived here before the white man came. The gods were angry with the tribe and sent an unknown illness to them. Twenty children died and there was heartache everywhere. He thought that happened somewhere around 1820 but nobody knew for sure.

I was told the white man only came six winters ago. An old prospector found some gold and then others came. They brought their families and some businesses followed. It didn't take long before the town became one of the biggest settlements in Wyoming. The gold didn't last long. Seems the old prospector hadn't hit a mother-lode. But most of the people had stayed on as the soil was good for farming, the rivers and lakes were good for fishing and there was lots of timber. A large sawmill was built and it was able to employ many of the folk who didn't turn to farming.

Running Fox had been living here for the last four years and was making a decent living as a fishing guide.

It was getting past four in the afternoon when I bade farewell to my Indian friend and went back to my office. Well, I mean to say the Sheriff's office. He said things were pretty quiet and told me to call it a day. If he needed me, he would have somebody go and fetch me. So off I went to 12 Elm Street to relax for the night.

Chapter 9 - Missing Family and Old Friends

Back in my room, I began to think of the many things that had happened in my life since I left Texas. I started to miss my family, Sam and Mary. I decided it was time to write to them all and let them know where I was and that I was fine. I was really proud of myself and wanted them to know I had become a Deputy.

By 10PM I was all tuckered out and went to bed. The damn rooster next door woke me at 5AM. I managed another hour's sleep and then got up in time to have breakfast with Polly. Another satisfying breakfast as always. Polly never let me go to work hungry.

I stopped at the Post Office and mailed my three letters and got to work before eight. Abe wasn't in yet but had left me a note from the night before. Said he had to see the dentist in the morning and probably wouldn't be in until noon. That seemed funny to me because Abe never mentioned having a sore tooth or anything. I gave Jeremiah his breakfast but didn't bother to speak to him much. He hadn't accepted the fact that he would be staying with us for a while and wasn't really what you would have called friendly. I thought maybe of having Amos drop in and serve him his lunch later that day. Amos was one of the workers over at the sawmill, one of the black workers. I thought that would have been a judicial slap in Jeremiah's face, so to speak.

In came Abe, just before lunch. I never had seen him cranky before but was he ever cranky that morning! It wasn't a toothache at all. It was another fight over at Joe's, a fight when nobody from the Deep South was even in the bar.

Two of the locals got arguing over an unpaid debt and were already rolling around on the floor when Abe got there. When he tried to pull them apart, he got an elbow in his jaw for his troubles. The result - a broken tooth which he had to have the dentist pull. The dentist was the person the people of Broken Hearts feared the most. It was no wonder he had been known as "The Bull".

Chapter 10 - Time to Say Good-Bye

I spent another three years learning the ropes with Sheriff Abraham. He had been a very patient teacher and I would miss him but the urge to move on had come. The Civil War had ended a year earlier. The North had prevailed but President Lincoln had been assassinated. I expected there would be a lot of changes down south. I was a bit curious to see what was going to take place.

In those three years I had run some thirty-or-so travelling salesmen out of town, arrested ten others for seven days free lodging in what Abe and I referred to as The Heartbreak Hotel. There was never a robbery when I was Deputy there. There was an arsonist we arrested after tracking him down for five days. He was found guilty of burning down the hardware store and was sentenced by Judge Harris to two years in jail. I was the one who escorted him to Cougar Gulch, Montana, where he served his full twenty-four month term.

On Jeremiah's final day in jail, I did have Amos serve him his last supper. He refused to eat it and left the jail hungry. Amos, Abe and I all had a hearty laugh over that.

As for the Gatlin Brothers, they were never seen in town again. There was a rumour that went about town that they had tried to rob a bank in San Francisco but were caught in the act. One of them was gunned down in the shoot-out in front of the bank and the other was captured and was serving time in a prison somewhere in California. I figured it was probably true. I suspected that they had changed their names after they had left our town and that was what accounted for me never being able to confirm the rumour.

There is one thing I'll never forget and it happened a week before Christmas when Santa Claus came into town with a sack over his shoulder. Absolutely drunk he was, and the bag kept moving back and forth as though there was something inside it. Abe stopped him just before he went into the Twisted Tree. Santa had six live chickens in the sack and he was intending to sell them to the owner of the Twisted Tree. I guess he figured it was time for the locals to have some barbecued chicken for supper. Luckily Santa told us who he stole the chickens from and we took them back home to their owner. We put him in jail overnight and in the morning, after giving him a stiff warning, let him go on his way. After all, it was Christmas. We never did know his name, what he really looked like, and we never saw that particular Santa ever again.

I had kept in touch with everyone I had written to by exchanging letters back and forth every few months or so. My family was fine, So were Sam and Mary. I was saddened to hear though that Mary was married and had started a family. I was happy for her but it reminded me that I was still single and might always be so. I hoped not.

Thankfully in those years I never got hurt except during one fight which I was trying to break up, I did suffer a broken finger on my left hand. Thankfully, I am right handed. There was also a black eye or two but I really don't count those.

Chapter 11 - On the Road Again ... To Duncan Flats

After I packed up my things, gave my badge back to Abe, I went east to . My intent was to go back to Texas for a spell to see my folks. In , I was able to catch a train to Houston and there my Pappy would come and get me. It was going to be his fiftieth birthday soon and I was bringing him a nice Indian blanket. The day before I left Broken Hearts, Running Fox and I had gone on a fishing trip together and it was then that I told him I was moving on. He knew I would be arriving in time for Pappy's birthday and on the way back to town we stopped at his mother's, Silver Moon, and there he gave me an Indian blanket which had never been used. I had never seen wool woven into such a beautiful pattern as I saw in that blanket. My Pappy would be very pleased.

It took me four days to arrive in Houston from. There was no direct train and I had to make several changes, one of the trains I had to take was a freight train which was no hardship. After all, it was one of the trains that I took on the journey that brought me to Broken Hearts.

Pappy arrived right after sunrise. I had only been waiting in the station for an hour or so. His birthday was still a week away and I never even mentioned it. I wanted him to think I had forgotten. With me I also had some flowers for Mama and a box of candy for little Sis.

The cattle ranch wasn't as big as when I used to help out five years ago. Pappy was down-sizing and planning to retire soon because of his sore leg. He banged his knee one winter during a round-up and it never completely mended. When I arrived, both Mama and Bess were happy with the little gifts I gave them. I told Father that I couldn't find anything that I thought he would like. He was really surprised and pleased with the blanket when his birthday arrived.

I stayed for another three weeks and then said farewell. I was going to travel east to Alabama, Louisiana and maybe Florida. After that, I planned on going north again to start the next phase of my life. I figured finding a job wouldn't be all that hard with the experience I had acquired over the years.

Mobile was getting to be a big town but I found it too noisy and I didn't stay more than a day. I travelled further on to Louisiana and partied a bit in New Orleans. Well, I must admit, I partied a lot and spent a week there. It took me forty-eight hours just to sober up. I think I may have made the acquaintance of a lady or two but I can't remember. Today, many years later, I'm still not sure.

I did manage to spend some time in Florida. The beautiful beaches that were on the Atlantic Ocean were in sharp contrast to the Everglades. It was there, in the Everglades, I saw my first 'gator. There was a fair in town. I think the name of the town was Muddy Waters (or something like that). They had a cash prize of \$10 for anybody who could wrestle George, a pet 'gator that was used to raise money for the town every year. Just because he was a pet didn't mean he was tame. Not at all. He was 12 feet in length and was mean looking. In order to win the \$10, I had to tie his feet together.

Well, I was always one to look for new experiences and I figured, having worked on a cattle ranch, this was going to be a cinch. Well, it wasn't. He was almost as hard to control as Tom was, back at Sam's in Turtle River. Maybe he was harder. They both were a challenge. I did manage to rope the critter but not before I had a small gash on my right arm and two large bites, a matching pair, one on my left leg, the other on my right. The town gave me my \$10 without a fight which was good because I had had enough fighting to do me for the day. The town also gave me some free medical attention which I badly needed after all the blood I had lost. That was the day I decided no more 'gators for me... dead or alive!

Chapter 12 - Heading North Again

While visiting Tampa, I bought the local paper and saw that a small town up north was looking to hire a Sheriff. Since that was the direction I was planning on going, I ripped out the ad and headed in that direction. The name of the town was Duncan Flats and it was in Northern Montana, again close to the Canadian border. I didn't get the chance to see any part of Canada when I was in Broken Hearts, The need of a job and the urge to cross the border for a look-see was all it took to hasten me on my way. I was really worried that somebody else would have been hired before I got there.

I left Tampa on the first train going north. It was headed for Oklahoma City. From there I would have to make more connections to get up to Duncan Flats. I wasn't sure at that point what they would be but I knew going to Oklahoma was putting me in the right direction.

Once I arrived in Oklahoma, two days after leaving Tampa, I checked in at the ticket office and learned that a train would be leaving for Jackson Springs the next morning. I was somewhat disappointed by the delay but there was nothing I could do about it. I found a place to stay for the night, left early the next morning, bought my ticket and I was again on my way. It was long after sundown when we arrived in Jackson. I was only 200 miles or so from my destination but again, I would have to find overnight accommodations.

The next morning I found myself on a freight train, this one bound for Tall Pines, Montana. Once there, I would need to catch a stagecoach to go the extra twenty-five miles to Duncan Flats. I arrived early enough in Tall Pines. There was plenty of sunlight left but I found myself delayed. There wasn't any stagecoach to the Flats for another two days. I couldn't believe my luck was turning so bad. I was sure at this point that I would arrive too late and somebody else would have been hired as Sheriff.

Those two days were the longest two of my life. Finally, on Friday, June 10, 1867, I arrived in Duncan Flats. I went straight to the Post Office in order to find out who I had to see about the Sheriff's job. I was told to go see Ben Crawford over at the bank. Ben was both the bank manager and the town's mayor.

Mr Crawford saw me right away and we had what I considered my first formal interview. When I told him I worked as a Deputy in Broken Hearts, his business-like manner faded and he seemed to become more friendly. As it turned out, he was a long-time buddy of Sheriff Abraham. He paused for a moment or two and then said he remembered how Abe had told him of hiring a Deputy to work for him. I guess Abe must have said a few good things about me because Ben informed me that I could start the job on Monday if I really wanted it. Of course I did! Having the weekend free worked out well because it gave me a chance to settle in and become familiar with the town before I began my duties.

I found the White Rose Inn and went in to see if I could lodge there but they had no vacancies. They told me to try Maple Creek Lodge over on Pine Street. I remember thinking how stupid that seemed but I didn't dwell on it long. I was able to secure a small room and was told

that I probably could move into a bigger room in a month when one of their other lodgers left. Big room, small room, it didn't matter just so long as I had a place to stay. The owners of Maple Creek were the town doctor and his wife. She took care of the lodge and he had his practice in town.

I spent the weekend going here and there trying to meet the townsfolk. I never told anybody that I was going to be the town's Sheriff. They were going to find out soon enough. All I wanted was to make a few friends and size-up things so I would get an idea of who might be the troublemakers and what kinds of trouble might occur in town.

I even went to church that Sunday. I think the last time I went to church was for my Grand-Pappy's funeral. I was eight years old.

After a wonderful meal of steak and baked beans, I went to my room to relax before my big day.

Before going to bed, I made some notes of the things I had learnt over the weekend just to make sure I didn't forget anything. I was sure some of the information was going to help me ease into my new position.

Chapter 13 -I am a Sheriff!

I met Mr Crawford in front of the Sheriff's office at 8AM on Monday morning, as he and I had agreed. He unlocked the door and showed me my new office. He had a handful of papers with him and a ring full of keys. The extra keys he gave to me and said, "Welcome Sheriff". I took them, shook his hand and replied, "Glad to be here." Then we sat down and went over the most important things I would need to know - things such as who the town magistrate was and where to find him, the location of the two taverns (I already had found one of them) and when the Wells Fargo coach came into town. He didn't need to tell me where the Doctor's office was. His wife had already told me. Just before he left, he said I wasn't really the Sheriff quite yet. I needed to sign one of the papers he had brought with him. It was a contract for six months which was renewable by both him and me if agreed. I signed it straightaway and then he gave me a plaque to hang from the wall that read, "Homer Bolton, Sheriff of Duncan Flats". He then gave me my badge, some papers to read over and told me my horse's name was Thunder, a three year old that I was to get over at the blacksmith's, just down a hundred yards from my new office.

Thunder was a beauty. He and I hit it off right away. He reminded me very much of one of the horses on my Pappy's ranch. They both had a white patch on their right sides. Thunder's looked like a lightning bolt and that is obviously how he got his name.

So it was on Monday, the thirteenth of June, 1867, that the town of Duncan Flats had its first Sheriff. I was to serve the town twenty-five years, twenty-five years of many adventures and a few mishaps, I should add.

Chapter 14 - Duncan Flats

Before I recount some of the experiences I had, it seems only fitting to me that I give you a brief history of Duncan Flats. It had a population of only 400 people when I arrived. It had been settled seven years before by some Scottish people who came, like me, to start a new life. Their leader was a man by the name of Angus Duncan. They decided to start their homesteads here as it had a beautiful river and the soil appeared to be very fertile. They didn't wish to go any further west as they were well aware of the Indian Wars that were occurring. They weren't all that sure that they should have gone as far west as they did but they decided to stay since they were here already.

After a year and not experiencing any trouble from Indians nor outlaws, other people came to join them. What started out as thirty-five Pioneers soon came to be one hundred, then two hundred and as I have said, 400 by the time I arrived in 1867. Five years after I became Sheriff, silver was discovered in the hills just north of our town. Prospectors came in. A silver mine was opened up and our population grew to more than 1,000. Things were starting to get busy for me and it was then that I had to appoint a Deputy to help me out.

The town continued to grow and became a central trading point because it was so close to the Canadian border. Goods were coming and going all the time and by 1880, our town consisted of 4,000 permanent residents and another 1,000 who resided with us in the summer.

By the time I retired (in 1892) the town had a population of over 12,000, not counting the other 2,500 or so who came to stay in the warmer months. The silver mine was still running, there were two paper mills, a textile factory, three dairies and somewhere in the neighbourhood of 120 farms. There was work for everyone. The worst year for unemployment which I can remember was in 1890 when forty of the townsfolk weren't working. It wasn't because there was no work for them - they were just too damn lazy.

Chapter 15 - My First Duty as Sheriff

My very first day on the job was pretty much uneventful. I had my new horse Thunder, but no place to keep him in the nights. It was summer then but I knew winters were mighty cold up here. I needed somewhere where I could give him the shelter he required. I worked out an arrangement with the Blacksmith to board Thunder with him until I could get a small barn built.

The doctor had some extra land behind the lodge and said he didn't mind if I built a small barn there provided that I paid for all of it and if I ever left the area, I would give it to him. All I needed now was to get the money to buy supplies.

I went on over to see Ben at the bank who was more helpful than I could ever have imagined. He said, as Mayor, he could grant me half the money towards the barn and could give me a loan for the other half.

Everything fell in place so easily that I started thinking I may have moved to Paradise. Events later proved to me that I was wrong.

I started to build the barn right away and used all my spare time in that pursuit. I wanted to be sure I finished before October because I wasn't quite sure when the cold weather would start coming. Some of the folks in town were glad to lend me a hand. Being Sheriff did seem to have some privileges.

I had the barn finished by mid-September and moved Thunder to his new home right after the last nail was banged in.

Chapter 16 - The Ups and Downs of Homer Bolton, Sheriff of Duncan Flats

I thought there shouldn't be much trouble in town. After all, there were only 400 or so people. How much trouble could they cause anyway? I was a bit anxious with our country's birthday less than a month away. I was prepared for some partying, firecrackers and a few drunks. I even figured they might start celebrating the day before. I didn't figure on them starting on the second of July.

Well, start they did, two days early. Word came down from up north, from the other side of the border, that what we had been calling Upper Canada had joined politically with some provinces to their east. They declared themselves a nation on July 1, 1867. The town folk all seemed to be in favour of the event. The taverns were selling beer and whiskeys for half-price, people were partying all over the place, and it seemed to me that there wouldn't be any fireworks left when our birthday arrived. So what I thought would be a party of a couple of days turned out to last almost a week.

Looking back over the notes I kept, I see that I put sixteen people in jail for intoxication, six for fighting, broke up a total of eight fights and even had to help put out a fire in a hay barn because of some fireworks. There was a point where my jail, small as it was, couldn't handle everyone who was causing trouble. I had to let some out early, others I could only give a stern warning to. There was no point in me arresting them if I had no place to keep them.

Any thoughts I had that being Sheriff in this town was going to be easy, were quickly put aside.

One of the strangest events in my Sheriff days was when Mae's Travelling Show came to town. The show arrived in the form of two covered wagons. Inside them were props of their trade. In all, there were some ten people - a juggler, a fire-eater, two clowns, a sword-swallower, a fortune teller and a couple of others I don't quite remember. I never did see Mae. Oh yes, there was an old man with an organ grinder and a monkey.

They didn't really cause much trouble. They didn't ask people for money. Instead, they had a little box where people could throw their pennies. The fire-eater had been a bit careless when he laid down one of his sticks. He set fire to a small bale of hay but it was doused quickly with a bucket of water he kept nearby. One of the clowns did try to steal some candy from the General Store but she was only ten years old. So all I did was give her a small talking to about right and wrong.

Myrona, the fortune-teller, was the biggest hit of the show. She claimed to be able to tell people's fortune just by touching their foreheads. The box beside her was full of pennies. She was getting a lot of business from the towns folk. Yes, I admit I was one of them. She laid her hand on my forehead and told me that I would have a very bad limp one day as a result of a crushed leg. Claimed she knew the leg had been hurt once before and that it would be hurt again. How she managed to know I had been bitten by a 'gator, I'll never know. Then again, she never said anything about my having been bitten, just having been hurt. Perhaps it was nothing more

than a lucky guess.

What did make me chuckle however, was her prediction that I would one day become famous after my death. I hadn't reckoned on being famous when I was alive. How the heck would I become famous after I was dead, I wondered. She claimed that in the future, there would be an American who would write what would be called Westerns. His name would be Louis L'Amour and he would discover me in the course of his research and then write a novel about me. That would be great if it ever happened but I wasn't prepared to bet the farm on it, even if I owned one.

Today, I look back on these memoirs and see that I started writing them on May 22 of this year, 1894. Today it's the sixth of June. I just noticed that my inkwell is getting dry and I do not have a lot of paper left. I will have to end these memoirs soon which saddens me because there are still so many things to write about. I must try to tell you of two more events while I still can.

Back in the spring of 1875 three fugitives fled Mexico after robbing a bank in Tijuana and headed north. They were spotted in New Mexico and Arizona. Every Deputy, Sheriff and Marshall was on the lookout for them. Even the US Cavalry. It was interesting news to follow even way the heck up here in Northern Montana. People in town were betting among themselves on what date they would be captured. It was quite a shock for me when someone from the Thompson's Silver Mine came galloping in to say they were robbed by three men wearing sombreros.

By then, I had a Deputy and we gathered together a small posse of seven men. I figured two against one was fair odds and we had a spare to boot.

We had heard that these banditos were dangerous. The people over at the silver mine were lucky that nobody had been shot. They might be dangerous but they sure weren't smart.

It was just after noon when we caught site of a campfire near a bend in the river five miles out of town. We dismounted quietly and crept toward the fire, keeping behind some small fir trees to give us cover. I tramped on a dry branch which snapped, alerting the robbers. They scurried behind a large pile of rocks that had fallen from a small cliff beside them.

Their horses were tied to some small bushes and were standing between us and them. I was pretty sure they wouldn't fire at us for two reasons: they didn't know how many of us there were and they wouldn't want to accidentally shoot one of their horses. The horses were their only real means of escape.

I didn't want to shoot any of the horses either so I had my Deputy or two of the posse stay where they were. Then four of us crept carefully to our right in an effort to get to the side of the rocks where we could get a bead on them.

We found an opening behind the rocks and the cliff and could see all three huddled down on their bellies in the dirt. I called out for them to surrender but the only response I got from them were bullets flying into the trees beside us.

We fired back and almost immediately one of them cried out. It seemed we had managed to hit him but there were still two to go. Bullets were whizzing back and forth. One of my posses was hit in his left arm and rolled on the ground. A quick check on him told me he wasn't hurt too badly. Another of the banditos leaned over a rock, fired at me and just missed my head. I returned fire hitting him twice - once in the neck and once in the chest. He keeled over and I was pretty sure he was dead but we waited because we weren't going to be suckered. There was still a third behind the rocks and we didn't think he had been hit at all. He didn't continue to fire at us. Perhaps he had run out of ammunition. We weren't sure.

Then suddenly, he raised his sombrero on a stick and said he was ready to surrender. He threw his gun out from behind the rocks and stood up with his hands in the air. While my posse covered me, I ran to him with my gun leading the way. I patted him down to be sure he didn't have another gun on him or worse still, a hunting knife. Once I knew he was unarmed, I had him lay flat on his stomach and hollered for someone to fetch me a rope. Once we had him secure, we checked on his two comrades.

One was badly injured from a bullet in his left shoulder but would live. We tied him up and checked on the third, the one whom I had shot. Clearly he was dead. The shot to his chest was right above the heart and I suspect he died right after the bullet hit him.

When we arrived back in town, half the population was there to greet us. We were being treated as heroes, which I guess was what we were really. A few people even patted me on the back and thanked me for capturing them that particular day. They had guessed that would be the day the robbers would be caught and won some money from some bets they made.

The towns people buried the dead robber with little ceremony and the other two, we turned over to the Marshall in Crooked River, here in Montana. My name was plastered all over the papers as far as Albuquerque, New Mexico. Was that the fame the fortune teller spoke of? I hoped not because she had said my fame would come after I was dead. I still felt pretty much alive.

Chapter 17 - My Ink and Paper are almost Gone

I wanted to write about the time I crushed my leg when we had to rescue five people. That was when part of the silver mine collapsed. But I only have a few sheets of paper left and not much ink.

I need to stop my memoirs for the time being. Before closing, I want folks to know that I left the United States after I retired and am now living in a cabin on the shores of a small lake in Manitoba. I think the fishing is the best this side of Alaska.

Perhaps in a week or two, I'll go into Winnipeg to buy some supplies and get myself some more writing materials as well. I hope someday I can have my memoirs published. If I don't get the chance, maybe that fellow in the future, Louis L'Amour will learn of the Sheriff of Duncan Flats and write a novel about him, just like the fortune teller predicted.

God Bless,

Homer Bolton
Retired Sheriff of Duncan Flats

