

# AUBURN

© 2020 By Sue Erickson

## Chapter 14 - Opening Surprises

I told the police. "I don't know the zip code. That's more of an address you can actually find than my saying I camp in the dry river bed which has also been true." I thought of saying the house number of the Sorceress of seven as seven and two-thirds, but decided they weren't in a humorous mood. "The business license office accepted that as my address and I received mail from them through there. Could we go outside? I'm getting hot and sweaty in here."

"Are you going to give us a urine sample? Or do we have to arrest you?"

"I wet recently." I reached down and pulled a little at my skirt hem. "Or do you want my diaper?" I did wet again right then just in case they got official about my body fluids. "By the way, the employees are dependent on my business here. Are you sure you have the authority to arrest me on tribal land?"

A huge tractor trailer truck with a second trailer in tow pulled in.

"I think I'm needed." I walked right past them which scared me to death they would grab my arm. I called out. "Yo. How can we help?"

The truck operator had climbed down from his cab. "Running hot. Can you check it?"

"Sure, but it has to cool down a little. Should I get someone?" Three of the mechanics had joined me. Any of them would do. The police were all watching from inside that hot little office.

Out of the side of an eye I saw one of the policeman going to their cruiser. He must have gone out the back door.

I turned to an Indian mechanic. "Could you get him a soda? He looks hot."

The driver wiped his face with a rag.

Another mechanic went to the hand carried cooler we kept in the VW bus. "Sorry, but we'll buy an air conditioner when we have the money."

The mechanic had handed him an orange crush drippy with melted ice water when there was radio type of static. Policemen's hands went to their ear pieces, and one of them came over. "Your name, sir?"

The driver went stone still.

The police wanted him in Oklahoma.

After they had him handcuffed and in a cruiser, I went to a cluster of police. "My diaper is sagging. I have a fresh one. Do you want the old one or not?"

They didn't answer that question.

By now the police had found all of my prior arrests, detentions, and incident reports. They wanted to know all over again about the shooting at the Love's Truck Stop.

The mechanics found that interesting. They eyed me differently. By standing up to the police I had instantly qualified with the mechanics as an acceptably brave person.

The sun had settled low over the mountains to the west as the police departed with their prisoner. They had opened the trailers, found them full of stolen goods, and called that owner.

I still wore a heavy wet diaper.

The mechanics drove that truck around back out of the way.

That owner of the stolen goods sent two trucks for their stuff, but the owner of that truck wasn't coming. He took a pass on the opportunity to be arrested as an accomplice.

My business license became valuable when Joe called a tribal lawyer at the capital of the Navajo Nation. He told me to go to Court about that truck for debt on parking lot fees.

The local Arizona Justice Court sat only half a mile up the side road. The lawyer said I would do better if I went in there dumb as a dead cactus. The Judge here had a reputation as a good man and would find a way to coach me. He said he would believe me quicker if I did it that way.

I put on my best dress which wasn't all that new anyway. I had my knife at my hip. I walked up there one morning.

Inside was a pleasant woman at a desk.

"Hi. I've got a truck that owes me fees. How do I claim that truck?"

She handed me a form labeled 'Complaint'. "Do you have the address of the person you are suing?"

"It's a truck."

Her fingers danced across the keys of her computer. "Call the Arizona police and ask them for the owner's address."

"Thanks."

Wheelchair Bob took on the task of heckling the State Police for the owner of that truck with the out of state license plates. It was the Arizona tax sticker on the cab

that helped the most.

With that in my notes I trooped in the heat to that Court.

The same woman sat behind the desk. "You can't serve the owner out of state in a case in this Court. But you can serve by mail through the Secretary of State. And you'll have to advertise." She pushed that form at me.

I thought *where in the hell can I advertise in a newspaper?* Wheelchair Bob suggested the Navajo newspaper. He smiled. "Betcha that truck's owner in Texas doesn't read the Navajo newspaper." Bob also found the address for the Arizona Secretary of State, and their fee.

Back at that Court I took in my form filed in with Bob's block printing.

"May I?" She wrote on it and handed it back to me with a clean new form.

The next day I returned back there.

She accepted it, marked on it, and took my filing fee. "You'll need to mail a copy." She made me four copies. She had put a date on it for being back in Court. "When you come back you can't wear that knife in the Courtroom, but see those lock boxes?"

There was a bank of them painted blue along a wall.

She said. "Just put it in there. You take the key and get it back after Court."

By now the Sorceress and her students all knew where I had been. I think from Joe, but I remained too intimidated by her to ask. Her students brought me a dress they thought I should wear to Court as a new khaki tan shirtdress with a button front. It fit, too. I didn't ask how they knew my size. Truth is those young women intimidated me, and I hadn't a clue what to say to them when I saw them. Of course the Sorceress wouldn't use words with me.

I returned early that day at the court.

That woman wasn't at that desk. People were anxiously milling around the lobby. I sat as far off to the side as possible.

A man in a uniform came out a double door.

Everyone else went through that entranceway, so I did too. The back bench had already filled up on both sides so I went to the far right of the one in front of that back one. My sweaty hands were wrecking my papers in my hand.

That woman sat to one side and a little lower of the high central part. She stood up. "Hear ye, hear ye, the Justice Court is now in session. No gum; no talking; no reading. All rise."

The Judge told everyone they could sit down. He used a formal voice, but with a hint of friendliness.

I became bored with the parade of cases on family troubles.

Out of the blue they called my name.

I almost missed it, and stood up. "Yes, sir."

"Come forward."

I did, and went to that thing they had standing in the middle that everyone else seemed to have gone to.

"Let's see here." He explained my case as he read aloud much to my relief. "Do you have proof of mailing and advertising?"

Oh my Gawd. "No, sir. I didn't know."

He didn't smile, but he wasn't angry either. "Do you have those?"

"I think so. I'll have to check, sir."

His voice was fatherly. "It's customary to say 'your honor'."

"Yes, your honor." My back blossomed with anxieties.

"Can you return in two weeks?"

"Yes, your honor." I had no idea, but figured I had better find a way.

"Continued for two weeks." He said a date.

That woman keyed that date into a computer in front of her.

For once I felt I had done something right. "Thank you, your honor."

He nodded.

I did have those things he wanted.

He granted a thing called a Judgment, but then told me I had to file again to seize the property to satisfy that Judgment thing.

I waited in the lobby. That woman came out, saw me, talked to other people first, and signaled me to come to her desk. The Judge came around a corner of the hall. Between her form and his coaching that lawyer had been right. All I needed to do was package this right so he could rule for me.

Two visits later to that Court I walked out with an Order giving me that truck. I sent off to the state Department of Transportation for a title and tags with the filing fee seen on their website. They wrote back I had sent the wrong amount. That seemed a pain to return that money order and get a new one.

Finally the title and tags arrived in the mail.

We had to call the State Police for temporary permission to drive it to an inspection. It flunked. The mechanics repaired it, and with a new permission we drove it back again for that inspection.

I called a meeting of the mechanics, only some of whom came, the Chapter Chief, and Uncle Joe. I asked do we sell that truck or operate it?

They hemmed and hawed and finally decide to operate it.

We had money from that truck. I fought myself to resist lowering the haulage charges out of feeling loyal to the mechanics. I'd have lowered the charges if this was just for myself. The first thing everyone wanted became air conditioning. Bob got a new computer for the office, and a printer that worked nearly every time. I bought a dog basket for Ginger.

Not too much later we heard a weird combination of yipping and whimpering from somewhere. We followed the sound to Ginger dancing on her hind legs in the repair bays. She had found and cornered a rattlesnake in there. The mechanics were impressed with her antics. I fetched my heavy walking stick, but one of the mechanics took it from me with that grin of 'let me'. He deftly pinned the snake down with the blunt fork in the stick. Another bashed its head in.

Ginger had a whole flock of new friends.

They said to buy the parts and the wire for a security system of cameras and computer feeds which they installed.

The Judge visited us with the Chapter Chief. After my initial fright at seeing them, they were kindly friendly people. The Judge scratched Ginger behind an ear. He told me how to write a repair order form that would work if a customer sued us. From then our reports and estimates went by e-mail, or the customer had to come in for a written one. They told me I had better visit the Tax Service in town.

The man at the tax service was about as difficult as the police until I figured out to tell him about me. Talking about profit with me wasn't working. I explained all those mean bosses, and then he got it. He called Uncle Joe and the Chapter Chief. Among the four of us we figured out the answer had to be for the Chapter to form some funny thing called an L-L-C which baffled me. It rented me the building and the equipment. I did know the way to the business license office at the Courthouse. My having the license allowed me to go to Court without hiring a lawyer who would have to drive from far way.

First I called a Council meeting of the business. Would it remain OK for me to have the business license? I didn't want anyone getting mad at me.

The snake, the revolver, the Love truck story, and the way I had stood up to the police all had a place in their masculine hearts. They were OK with me.

The next day I borrowed a car and drove myself to the County Courthouse. Ginger stayed in her doggie basket at the repair shop. When I returned she had her front paws on my chest as she licked me across my face. Now we had two business licenses.

The first time we had a fight in Court with a customer that Judge had to be the most patient man I could remember having ever seen. He let the customer say everything he wanted to. I pushed Wheelchair Bob to the front of the courtroom. He had the stack of the order form and our report complete with the signature of the customer.

After Bob spoke the Judge asked the customer if he wanted to cross examine Bob. When that degenerated into the customer's real anger coming out the Judge helped with the cross examination. Bob was magnificent, and then I got it. The Judge used questions to bring Bob along on what needed to be said.

Bless his heart as by the time the Judge had finished the customer understood it a whole lot better.

This became big bucks to us when a truck repair went all wrong. For that all the mechanics came to Court with Bob and I. The Judge did it again bringing the customer along. He also let the customer pay us over time so there wasn't a judgment of record wrecking the customer's credit report. We kept the truck until we had been paid.

I went to Court every time one of our people got caught speeding or drinking or fighting or something. Privately I had been told that if I told that woman at the court which case I was interested in it would be held to the end. The real punishment became having to anxiously sit through everything else. Then the Judge would find our person guilty of whatever they had done, but would suspend sentencing for awhile usually six months or a year. That way if they stayed clean there would be no conviction of record. Almost all stayed clean.

I learned to sit there, enjoy my diaper as needed, and bring a note pad. I wrote down explanations of the law as the Judge talked to the other people in Court.

I occasionally e-mailed that trucker Gary Gordon who became thrilled hearing of my successes. He encouraged me.

It is nice to have a Native American friend or two at the Court half a mile away on the side road next to the Interstate.