

Chapter 1

It was to be a simple profile of Pensacola's favorite son. Everyone loved him. He was a local hero and iconic figure of what made Pensacola great. People curried his favor. His smile made everyone feel that all was right in the world. If he chaired a charity event, the donations poured in. Yes, everyone loved him.

And I had him arrested and put on trial.

The trouble with being a newspaper publisher and part-time investigative reporter for my alt-weekly, Pensacola Insider, is that you can't control the facts or where they may lead you. The path upon which they take you can surprise and appall you. They can also destroy lives and shatter dreams forever. But the facts remain the facts, immutable and damning.

I didn't want to write the story. I spent days agonizing over what I had uncovered. People don't like to see their heroes disgraced, not ones that they've known all their lives. The easiest thing to have done would have been to walk away and hope the daily newspaper might pick up the story.

What made the story even harder to write was the man was my friend. Miserably, I went through all the stages of grief—denial, anger and finally acceptance. The man I thought I knew, that Pensacola loved, was a fake. I had no choice but to write the article.

The public reaction was, as I predicted, not to defrock its hero, but to attack me. The Pensacola Herald, the daily rag, jumped strongly to his defense and gave me, the accuser, a severe beating. At downtown restaurants and bars, where I regularly ate and drank, long-time acquaintances turned their backs. Love, support and comfort poured out towards the favorite son.

I, Walker Holmes, became the target for Pensacola's hatred. It would pass, I knew, once the trial began, but until then, all I could do was simply endure the scorn and wait.

Unfortunately the trial was still four weeks away.

I met Bowman Hines when he asked for my help with the Surfer's Ball, a fundraiser for domestic violence victims. Bo stood 6 ft. 4, tanned, lean with a dazzling smile. He wanted to tap the young professionals for his fundraiser. Though he and I were only a year apart in age—he 54, me 52, the road contractor wanted the Insider and me to help make the event cool enough to bring fresh dollars into the kitty.

A hundred and sixty thousand dollars later we became friends...as much of friends that an alt-weekly publisher can have. Beers, wings and brainstorming sessions on how to pull Pensacola into the 21st century. Not too deep, but deep enough conversations to put him on my very short Christmas card list.

Bo Hines grew up in Pensacola. He was raised by his grandparents, Dr. Louis Bowman and his wife Sarah. Bo's parents had died in a car accident on Interstate 10 when they were driving back from a Florida State University football game. Bo, age 7, was in the car, but survived unharmed. A miracle....that's how Dr. Lou described it on the front page of the Pensacola Herald.

Young Bo became Pensacola's adopted son. The city watched him grow up, become an Eagle Scout, win the Optimist Speech contests and quarterback the state champion Booker T. Washington High Wildcats. Bobby Bowden switched him to linebacker at FSU and he made second team All American. The Pensacola Sports Association honored Bo as its college athlete of the year in 1979.

Bo passed on the NFL and came home to Pensacola. He married Sue Eaton, his high school sweetheart. Bishop Roberto Garcia presided over the wedding that rivaled Prince Charles and Diana's. The Pensacola Herald ran a special insert, with ads (of course), on the celebration.

Hines bought a dump truck and began his road contracting company—hauling just gravel at first, but eventually building his own asphalt plant. Twenty years later, he dominated all government road bidding in Northwest Florida and South Alabama. He was truly Pensacola's golden boy. He could do nothing wrong.

Bo also chaired for years the Arts Council of the Florida Panhandle, a non-profit organization that supported the many cultural organizations in the area—Pensacola Opera, Pensacola Little Theatre, Pensacola Symphony and dozens of art galleries. He put on huge galas and auctions at the Saenger Theatre that raised thousands for the arts. The governor of Florida put him on the state arts commission. Bo was awarded the coveted “Patron of Florida Culture” award, which got his handsome, smiling face on Florida Trend magazine.

I decided to write a personal profile of my friend Bo—tease him a little but really show how much his efforts have meant to arts and culture in Pensacola. However, there was a problem. The art directors weren't giving me glowing quotes on my friend. The answers to my questions were stilted. Some of the board members didn't return my phone calls.

Finally I ran down a former director of one of the groups who had moved to St. Louis. There was a reason why few wanted to talk about Bo Hines and the Arts Council of the Florida Panhandle. It was sham.

Little of the money ever made it to the opera, symphony or theatre. When checks were received by those groups, they were dated months before. The amounts were often much less than promised. But this was Bo Hines, millionaire road contractor. Surely there was some mistake.

When called, Bo always had a story for the executive directors of the various organizations. And besides, the checks did keep coming, even if they were late. Then six

months ago, the checks stopped all together. The arts organizations had to hold their payroll checks. Rents and utility bills fell behind. My source still had paychecks that she couldn't cash.

Bo tried to bluff his way through my questions, not smart. My affable friend became guarded and evasive. Then he quit taking my calls. It was as if he was daring me to write the article.

I did.

I reported the financial woes of the Arts Council. The City of Pensacola and Escambia County, who each gave the Arts Council \$100,000 annually, called for an audit. Nearly half a million was missing, so suddenly was the paid director of the Arts Council. I wrote about how my friend had bought a fleet of new trucks for his Streets Paving, Inc. Total cost was coincidentally about half a million.

Bowman Hines was indicted and pleaded innocent. He was still the hero.

I became the pariah.

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