

Son of The Dog

Like the father whose name he bears, Duane Lee Chapman is a bounty hunter. When he puts on his badge, he does it with the blessing of law the blessing of Jesus.

Although he may lurk in the darkness outside your back door, and although he may pounce on you as you exit, hurl you to the ground and scream in your face as you pee your pants in raw fear, he tries to do it in a compassionate, Christian sort of way.

He is Duane Lee Chapman II, and like the father whose name he bears, he is a bounty hunter. When he puts on his badge, he does it with the blessing of law enforcement. He is confident that he also does it with the blessing of Jesus.

He sees his job as a ministry, albeit a ministry that involves considerably more pepper spray, yelling and threats than your average ministry (unless you include a particularly rambunctious Sunday school class of sixth-grade boys).

Duane Lee says that intimidation is an inherent part of his job. "When you are going for the criminal, you have to be more aggressive than the criminal. You have to put the fear in them. You've got to be stronger than them or you're going to lose," he told New Man in an exclusive interview. "Terrifying the Criminals of Hawaii Since 1989!" could be a Chapman family motto.

Meeting the Chapmans is akin to attending the International Contradiction Festival. One minute they're shouting and lunging and slapping handcuffs on a car thief, and the next minute they're offering him a cigarette and counseling him about his drug habit. You simply have to see it to believe it. And you can.

Tune in Tuesday evenings to A&E's wildly popular reality

program Dog the Bounty Hunter and you will see the Chapman family in action. They unashamedly hold hands and pray in the parking lot before they commence yet another hunt. They employ all manner of deceit to lure perps into the open. ("You've won a Kirby vacuum cleaner! When can we deliver it?")

And the elder Chapman-The Dog-barks excessively nasty commands to drug dealers, such as "Freeze, you [impolite term for a person who commits an unnatural sexual act]!" That term is such a Dog trademark that The Dog has it silk-screened on T-shirts that he sells.

What is UP with these people? An extensive assortment of Chapmans are in on the bounty-hunting gig. Duane Lee didn't join the show until its second season, but he had been bounty hunting with his dad-on and off-since his early teens. In a sense, Duane Lee was The Dog's first bounty-and Duane Lee himself was the prize. After botching his role as a father, The Dog pursued a relationship with his son. He had a lot to make up for. Duane Lee was just 4 years old when his dad went to prison.

"My family told me that my real father was dead. I forgot all about him. I guess I blocked him out," Duane Lee told New Man.

Four years later, the young Chapman was pinned to the ground and being pounded by a neighbor kid when he heard a man calling, "Hit 'em, hit 'em Duane Lee!"

"I just started swinging, and the kid got up, and as I stood up this guy with long hair and all bearded out walked over to me and said, 'Hi, I'm your dad.' I freaked out, ran in the house, locked the doors, and started crying and screaming," he says.

But The Dog was after his son, and The Dog is not one to give up.

Duane Lee remembers being hidden in the closet while his mother lied to the man at the door-the scary, wild looking man

who tracked them even after they made move after move to avoid him.

"The door bell would ring on Christmas day, and there would be a gift at our door from my dad for me and my brother," Duane Lee recalls.

But Duane Lee had no idea who the man was, or why he was after him.

The Dog finally won visitation rights, and Duane Lee's mom broke the news: "That's your father. He went to prison."

Duane Lee was stunned.

"I didn't want anything to do with him," he says.

But his father was back in his life. For good.

When Duane Lee started hanging out with gang members and got kicked out of high school for fighting, his desperate mother sent him to live with his father.

Administering some tough love, The Dog promptly turned Duane Lee over to a real gang member, who took him to a real gang "party" that so terrified the 17-year-old wanna-be gang banger that he made a hasty decision to not go down that road. Instead, he went to work for his dad-working for the law instead of against it.

In a ruse he would repeat many times, Duane Lee would dress up like a pizza delivery guy, a UPS driver-anything to lure the target outside so that his dad could jump him.

He would park his vehicle at a strange angle right next to the perps' car, ring the doorbell and spill out an apology for accidentally hitting the man's car.

"But I have insurance, and it really isn't all that much damage if you want to just come out and look at the ... "

WHAM! The Dog was stuck to the perp like bark on a tree.

It was a teenager's dream job. Early on, Duane Lee became the back-door sentry. In the event the criminal tried to make a run for it, Duane Lee had the exit covered. (He still plays that position today.)

He recalls, vividly, the day that a man who was built with roughly the same dimensions and weight of a Volvo barreled out the back door. Duane Lee and a friend leaped on the man's back, and were carried down the street like rag dolls until The Dog caught up to them and tackled the massive criminal.

Bounty hunting is not a career path that is typically taught at the local community college. Both father and son learned by doing.

The Dog served hard time in a Texas prison for his conviction as an accessory to first-degree murder. He says that he did not, in fact, commit the crime for which he was imprisoned. But he is not bitter about his sentence. With 18 prior arrests for armed robbery, he admits he was not exactly a Boy Scout. And it was in prison that he finally got real with himself.

"I figured each one of the bricks on the wall of my cell stood for something I did do wrong that I didn't get caught for when I was riding with my motorcycle gang, Devil's Disciples. In those jailhouse bricks I saw the light; I deserved to be locked up," The Dog notes in his bio.

While serving his time, The Dog saw an inmate make a run for it. A guard aimed his rifle at the fleeing figure. The Dog begged the guard not to shoot and to give him a chance to tackle the escapee. The Dog sprinted, took the man down and surely saved his life. And thus began his new career and his new mission in life: Take 'em down, save their life, give 'em another chance.

The Dog is convinced that God gave him another chance at life

and gave him “a gift” for bounty hunting. He is a deeply religious man who is committed to the idea that God wants to give people—including addicts and criminals—the opportunity to change. The Dog often prays in Jesus’ name, but does not consider Christ to be an exclusive route to God. He believes that God will accept anyone, from any religion, who sincerely seeks the Lord.

“I don’t know if I want to be called a Christian,” he told New Man. “I don’t want to be labeled a Christian if that means ‘believe in Jesus, and if you don’t believe in Jesus you’re going to hell.’”

His son, who regularly attends New Life Church in Colorado Springs, differs with his dad on this point.

Introduced to Jesus by his grandmother, Duane Lee is firm in asserting that Jesus died for our sins, rose again and is coming back to judge the world. He agrees with his dad that people can choose to change their lives. But he sees Jesus as central to eternal change and to eternal life. He has a message he wants to communicate to the men and women he busts.

“The message is that God will forgive. God loves them. God does not want them to be poor. They are here for a reason. The devil is always out there trying to get them to do the bad things. It is easy to do the bad things. It is hard to stay straight and do the good things. We live in a negative world, and it is hard to find something worth living for. We are with people who want to kill themselves right there [when they are arrested]. We have that little bit of time to make an impact. My dad will tell them a couple of Bible verses about the disciples, how they were and how they changed their lives.”

In episode after episode of the mesmerizing show, a similar scene plays out. The chase is on, the yelling fills the air, the adrenaline flows, the criminal is caught and then the perp is summarily ... treated with respect. Given a cigarette.

Allowed to make a phone call. Offered help if he wants to kick his "demon" drug habit.

"Once you get them in the cuffs, if you are still the exact same way [aggressive], we don't agree with that at all," Duane Lee explains. "They're caught, the game's over. We have an hour with the person before we take them to jail. Hopefully, we can make an impact in their life. We can't change them-only they can change their lives, but at least we can make an impact."

The Chapman family doesn't just talk about second chances. They create them. "We have people we have arrested who now work for us-cleaning, mowing the lawns, doing office-manager work," Duane Lee says, laughing at the wonderful craziness of transformation.

One group even showed up at city hall to honor The Dog for his personal crusade against "ice," the street name for a crystal form of the devastatingly addictive drug methamphetamine. The city and county of Honolulu issued a proclamation honoring The Dog's anti-drug efforts. The festivities were attended by a Dog fan club-a fan club of people he once busted. The cameras clearly captured his tears, although he tried to hide behind his jet-black sunglasses.

Duane Lee says that his dad's empathy and commitment to offenders is not the norm for bounty hunters, who are often from law-enforcement backgrounds and in many cases view their bounty targets as human trash.

"My dad was on the other side; he went to prison; he knows how it is. Sometimes we argue with the other bounty hunters. They carry guns, put guns in people's mouths, pistol-whip them. That's ridiculous. When you got 'em, you got 'em. The game is over."

"The game" ends for Duane Lee, temporarily, when he wraps up a multi-week film shoot, and flies home to be with his family

and attend to his financial-consulting business. He lives in two worlds. In one world he looks like a banker, in the other world he looks like a biker.

“In that world, you are dealing with criminals every day. You deal with the drugs. Especially down in Hawaii, the ‘ice’ is so bad. You have 12- and 13-year-old kids so hopped up on dope it is ridiculous. One thing that really upsets me is drug dealers. I can’t stand them. I am going to do all I can to put an end to them.”

Duane Lee is committed to giving his kids a stability and a foundation that he did not have growing up. He is also passionate about using bounty hunting as a tool to break the cycle of drug use that fathers too often pass on to their children.

He has reconciled with his own father, whom he clearly loves, and he chooses his words slowly and deliberately when discussing their differences.

“I am doing things different than my dad did.”

Well, not everything.

“Bounty hunting is the ultimate rush,” he laughs, sounding just like The Dog.

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